

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter we have,

I. Christ's discourse with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, concerning the great mysteries of the gospel, in which he here privately instructs him (v. 1-21).

II. John Baptist's discourse with his disciples concerning Christ, upon occasion of his coming into the neighbourhood where John was (v. 22-36), in which he fairly and faithfully resigns all his honour and interest to him.

◀ JOHN 3:1-21

CHRIST'S INTERVIEW WITH NICODEMUS

We found, in the close of the foregoing chapter, that few were brought to Christ at Jerusalem; yet here was *one*, a considerable one. It is worth while to go a great way for the salvation though but of *one soul*. Observe,

I. Who this Nicodemus was. Not many mighty and noble are called; yet some are, and here was one. *Not many of the rulers, or of the Pharisees;* yet.

1. This was a *man of the Pharisees*, bred to learning, a scholar. Let it not be said that all Christ's followers are *unlearned and ignorant men*. The principles of the Pharisees, and the peculiarities of their sect, were directly contrary to the spirit of Christianity; yet there were some in whom even those high thoughts were cast down and brought into obedience to Christ. The grace of Christ is able to subdue the greatest opposition.

2. He was a *ruler of the Jews*, a member of the great sanhedrim, a senator, a privy-counsellor, a man of authority in Jerusalem. Bad as things were, there were some rulers *well inclined*, who yet could do little good because the stream was so strong against them; they were over-ruled by the majority, and yoked with those that were corrupt, so that the good which they wished to do they could not do; yet Nicodemus continued in his place, and did what he *could*, when he could not do what he *would*.

II. His solemn address to our Lord Jesus Christ, v. 2. See here,

1. When he came: *He came to Jesus by night.* Observe,

(1.) He made a private and particular address to Christ, and did not think it enough to hear his public discourses. He resolved to talk with him by himself, where he might be free with him. Personal converse with skilful faithful ministers about the affairs of our souls would be of great use to us, <sup>³⁰⁰⁰Malachi 2:7.

(2.) He made this address *by night*, which may be considered,

[1.] As an act of *prudence* and *discretion*. Christ was engaged all day in *public* work, and he would not interrupt him then, nor expect his attendance then, but observed *Christ's hour*, and waited on him when he was *at leisure*. Note, Private advantages to ourselves and our own families must give way to those that are public. The greater good must be preferred before the less. Christ had many enemies, and therefore Nicodemus came to him *incognito*, lest being known to the chief priests they should be the more enraged against Christ.

[2.] As an act of *zeal* and *forwardness*. Nicodemus was a man of business, and could not spare time all day to make Christ a visit, and therefore he would rather take time from the diversions of the *evening*, or the rest of the *night*, than not converse with Christ. When others were sleeping, he was getting knowledge, as David by meditation, <sup>³⁰⁰⁰Psalm 63:6, and 119:148. Probably it was the very next night after he saw Christ's miracles, and he would not neglect the first opportunity of pursuing his convictions. He knew not how soon Christ might leave the town, nor what might happen betwixt that and another feast, and therefore would lose no time. In the night his converse with Christ would be more free, and less liable to disturbance. These were *Noctes Christianae* — *Christian nights*, much more instructive than the *Noctes Atticae* — *Attic nights*. Or,

[3.] As an act of *fear* and *cowardice*. He was afraid, or ashamed, to be *seen* with Christ, and therefore came *in the night*. When religion is out of *fashion*, there are many Nicodemites, especially among the rulers, who have a better affection to Christ and his religion than they would be known to have. But observe, *First*, Though he came by night, Christ bade him welcome, accepted his integrity, and pardoned his infirmity; he considered his *temper*, which perhaps was *timorous*, and the *temptation* he was in

from his place and office; and hereby taught his ministers to become all things to all men, and to encourage good beginnings, though weak. *Paul preached privately to those of reputation,* ^{<REF>}Galatians 2:2. *Secondly,* Though now he came *by night*, yet afterwards, when there was occasion, he owned Christ *publicly,* ^{<REF>}John 7:50; 19:39. The grace which is at first but a grain of mustard-seed may grow to be a great tree.

2. What he said. He did not come to talk with Christ about politics and state-affairs (though he was a ruler), but about the concerns of his own soul and its salvation, and, without circumlocution, comes immediately to the business; he calls Christ *Rabbi*, which signifies a *great man*; see ^{<REF>}Isaiah 19:20. *He shall send them a Saviour, and a great one; a Saviour and a rabbi*, so the word is. There are hopes of those who have a respect for Christ, and think and speak honourably of him. He tells Christ how far *he had attained*: *We know that thou art a teacher*. Observe,

(1.) His *assertion* concerning Christ: *Thou art a teacher come from God*; not educated nor ordained by men, as other teachers, but supported with divine inspiration and divine authority. He that was to be the sovereign Ruler came first to be a *teacher*; for he would rule with reason, not with rigour, by the power of truth, not of the sword. The world lay in ignorance and mistake; the Jewish teachers were corrupt, and caused them to err: *It is time for the Lord to work*. He came a *teacher from God*, from God as the *Father of mercies*, in pity to a dark deceived world; from God as the *Father of lights* and *fountain of truth*, all the light and truth upon which we may venture our souls.

(2.) His *assurance* of it: *We know*, not only *I*, but *others*; so he took it for granted, the thing being so plain and self-evident. Perhaps he knew that there were divers of the Pharisees and rulers with whom he conversed that were under the same convictions, but had not the grace to own it. Or, we may suppose that he speaks in the plural number (*We know*) because he brought with him one or more of his friends and pupils, to receive instructions from Christ, knowing them to be of common concern. “Master,” saith he, “we come with a desire to be taught, to be thy scholars, for we are fully satisfied thou art a divine teacher.”

(3.) The ground of this assurance: *No man can do those miracles that thou doest, except God be with him*. Here,

[1.] We are assured of the truth of Christ's miracles, and that they were not counterfeit. Here was Nicodemus, a judicious, sensible, inquisitive man, one that had all the *reason* and *opportunity* imaginable to examine them, so fully satisfied that they were real miracles that he was wrought upon by them to go contrary to his interest, and to the stream of those of his own rank, who were prejudiced against Christ.

[2.] We are directed what inference to draw from Christ's miracles: Therefore we are to receive him as a *teacher come from God*. His miracles were his credentials. The course of nature could not be altered but by the power of the God of nature, who, we are sure, is the God of truth and goodness, and would never set his seal to a lie or a cheat.

III. The discourse between Christ and Nicodemus hereupon, or, rather, the sermon Christ preached to him; the contents of it, and that perhaps an abstract of Christ's public preaching; see v. 11, 12. Four things our Saviour here discourses of: —

1. Concerning the *necessity and nature of regeneration* or the *new birth*, v. 3-8. Now we must consider this,

(1.) As *pertinently answered* to Nicodemus's address. Jesus *answered*, v. 3. This answer was wither,

[1.] A *rebuke* of what he saw *defective* in the address of Nicodemus. It was not enough for him to admire Christ's miracles, and acknowledge his mission, but he must be *born again*. It is plain that he expected the *kingdom of heaven*, the kingdom of the Messiah now shortly to appear. He is betimes aware of the dawning of that day; and, according to the common notion of the Jews, he expects it to appear in external pomp and power. He doubts not but this Jesus, who works these miracles, is either the Messiah or his prophet, and therefore makes his court to him, compliments him, and so hopes to secure a share to himself of the advantages of that kingdom. But Christ tells him that he can have no benefit by that *change of the state*, unless there be a *change of the spirit*, of the principles and dispositions, equivalent to a new birth. Nicodemus came *by night*: "But this will not do," saith Christ. His religion must be owned before men; so Dr. Hammond. Or,

[2.] A *reply* to what he saw *designed* in his address. When Nicodemus owned Christ a *teacher come from God*, one entrusted with an

extraordinary revelation from heaven, he plainly intimated a desire to know what this revelation was and a readiness to receive it; and Christ declares it.

(2.) As *positively* and *vehemently* asserted by our Lord Jesus: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee. I the Amen, the Amen, say it*; so it may be read: “I the faithful and true witness.” The matter is settled irreversibly that *except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*. “I say it to thee, though a Pharisee, though a master in Israel.” Observe,

[1.] What it is that is required: to be *born again*; that is, *First*, We must *live a new life*. Birth is the beginning of life; to be *born again* is to begin anew, as those that have hitherto lived either much amiss or to little purpose. We must not think to patch up the old building, but begin from the foundation. *Secondly*, We must *have a new nature*, new principles, new affections, new aims. We must be born *anowen*, which signifies both *denuo* — *again*, and *desuper* — *from above*.

1. We must be born *anew*; so the word is taken, ^{<400>}Galatians 4:9, and *ab initio* — *from the beginning*, ^{<400>}Luke 1:3. By our *first birth* we are corrupt, shapen in sin and iniquity; we must therefore undergo a second birth; our souls must be *fashioned* and *enlivened* anew.

2. We must be born *from above*, so the word is used by the evangelist, ^{<400>}John 3:31; 19:11, and I take this to be especially intended here, not excluding the other; for to be born *from above* supposes being *born again*. But this new birth has its rise *from heaven* (^{<400>}John 1:13) and its tendency *to heaven*: it is to be born to a *divine* and *heavenly* life, a life of communion with God and the upper world, and, in order to this, it is to partake of a *divine nature* and bear the *image of the heavenly*.

[2.] The indispensable necessity of this: “Except *a man* (Any one that partakes of the human nature, and consequently of its corruptions) *be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*, the kingdom of the Messiah begun in *grace* and perfected in *glory*.” Except we be *born from above*, we cannot *see* this. That is, *First*, We cannot *understand* the *nature* of it. Such is the nature of things pertaining to the kingdom of God (in which Nicodemus desired to be instructed) that the soul must be re-modelled and moulded, the natural man must become a spiritual man, before he is capable of receiving and understanding them, ^{<401>}1 Corinthians 2:14. *Secondly*, We cannot *receive the comfort* of it, cannot expect any benefit

by Christ and his gospel, nor have any part or lot in the matter. Note, Regeneration is absolutely necessary to our happiness here and hereafter. Considering what we are by nature, how corrupt and sinful, — what *God* is, in whom alone we can be happy, — and *what heaven* is, to which the perfection of our happiness is reserved, — it will appear, in the nature of the thing, that we must be *born again*, because it is impossible that we should be *happy* if we be not *holy*; see ^{<441>}1 Corinthians 6:11, 12.

This great truth of the necessity of regeneration being thus solemnly laid down,

a. It is objected against by Nicodemus (v. 4): *How can a man be born when he is old, old as I am: *geron on* — being an old man? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?* Herein appears,

(a.) His weakness in knowledge; what Christ spoke spiritually he seems to have understood after a corporal and carnal manner, as if there were no other way of regenerating and new-moulding an immortal soul than by new-framing the body, and bringing that back to the *rock out of which it was hewn*, as if there was such a connection between the soul and the body that there could be no fashioning the *heart anew* but by forming the *bones anew*. Nicodemus, as others of the Jews, valued himself, no doubt, very much on his *first birth* and its dignities and privileges, — the *place* of it, the Holy Land, perhaps the holy city, — his *parentage*, such as that which Paul could have gloried in, ^{<308>}Philippians 3:5. And therefore it is a great surprise to him to hear of being *born again*. Could he be better bred and born than bred and born an Israelite, or by any other birth stand fairer for a place in the kingdom of the Messiah? Indeed they looked upon a proselyted Gentile to be as one *born again* or *born anew*, but could not imagine how a Jew, a Pharisee, could ever *better himself* by being *born again*; he therefore thinks, if he must be *born again*, it must be of *her* that *bore him first*. They that are proud of their *first birth* are hardly brought to a *new birth*.

(b.) His willingness to be taught. He does not turn his back upon Christ because of his hard saying, but ingenuously acknowledges his ignorance, which implies a desire to be better informed; and so I take this, rather than that he had such gross notions of the new birth Christ spoke of: “Lord, make me to understand this, for it is a riddle to me; I am such a fool as to know no other way for a man to be born than of

his mother.” When we meet with that in the things of God which is *dark, and hard to be understood*, we must with humility and industry continue our attendance upon the means of knowledge, till God *shall reveal even that unto us*.

b. It is opened and further explained by our Lord Jesus, v. 5-8. From the objection he takes occasion,

(a.) To repeat and confirm what he had said (v. 5): “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee*, the very same that I said before.” Note, The word of God is not yea and nay, but yea and amen; what he hath said he will abide by, whoever saith against it; nor will he retract any of his sayings for the ignorance and mistakes of men. Though Nicodemus understood not the mystery of regeneration, yet Christ asserts the necessity of it as positively as before. Note, It is folly to think of evading the obligation of evangelical precepts, by pleading that they are unintelligible, ~~xxx~~Romans 3:3, 4.

(b.) To expound and clear what he had said concerning regeneration; for the explication of which he further shows,

[a.] The *author* of this blessed change, and who it is that works it. To be born again is to be *born of the Spirit*, v. 5-8. The change is not wrought by any wisdom or power of our own, but by the power and influence of the blessed Spirit of grace. It is the *sanctification of the Spirit* (~~xxx~~1 Peter 1:2) and *renewing of the Holy Ghost*, ~~xxx~~Titus 3:5. The word he works by is his inspiration, and the heart to be wrought on he has access to.

[b.] The *nature* of this change, and what that is which is wrought; it is *spirit*, v. 6. Those that are regenerated are made *spiritual*, and refined from the dross and dregs of sensuality. The dictates and interests of the rational and immortal soul have retrieved the dominion they ought to have over the flesh. The Pharisees placed their religion in external purity and external performances; and it would be a mighty change indeed with them, no less than a new birth, to become *spiritual*.

[c.] The *necessity* of this change. *First*, Christ here shows that it is necessary in the *nature of the thing*, for we are not fit to enter into the kingdom of God till we are born again: *That which is born of the flesh*

if flesh, v. 6. Here is our malady, with the causes of it, which are such that it is plain there is no remedy but we must be *born again*.

1. We are here told *what we are*: We are *flesh*, not only *corporeal* but *corrupt*, ^(~~xxx~~)Genesis 6:3. The soul is still a spiritual substance, but so wedded to the flesh, so captivated by the will of the flesh, so in love with the delights of the flesh, so employed in making provision for the flesh, that it is mostly called *flesh*; it is carnal. And what communion can there be between God, who is a *spirit*, and a soul in this condition?

2. How we *came to be so*; by being *born of the flesh*. It is a corruption that is bred *in the bone* with us, and therefore we cannot have a new nature, but we must be *born again*. The corrupt nature, which is *flesh*, takes rise from our *first birth*; and therefore the new nature, which is *spirit*, must take rise from a second birth. Nicodemus spoke of entering again into his mother's womb, and being born; but, if he could do so, to what purpose? If he were born of his mother a hundred times, that would not mend the matter, for still that *which is born of the flesh if flesh*; a clean thing cannot be brought out of an unclean. He must seek for another original, must be born of the Spirit, or he cannot become spiritual. The case is, in short, this: though man is made to consist of body and soul, yet his spiritual part had then so much the dominion over his corporeal part that he was denominated a *living soul* (^(~~xxx~~)Genesis 2:7), but by indulging the appetite of the flesh, in eating forbidden fruit, he prostituted the just dominion of the soul to the tyranny of sensual lust, and became no longer a *living soul*, but *flesh*: *Dust thou art*. The living soul became dead and inactive; thus in *the day* he sinned he *surely died*, and so he became *earthly*. In this degenerate state, he begat a son *in his own likeness*; he transmitted the human nature, which had been entirely deposited in his hands, thus corrupted and depraved; and in the same plight it is still propagated. Corruption and sin are woven into our nature; we are *shapen in iniquity*, which makes it necessary that the nature be changed. It is not enough to put on a new coat or a new face, but we must put on the *new man*, we must be new creatures.

Secondly, Christ makes it further necessary, by his own word: *Marvel not that I said unto thee, You must be born again*, v. 7.

1. Christ hath said it, and as he himself never did, nor ever will, unsay it, so all the world cannot gainsay it, that we *must be born again*. He

who is the great *Lawgiver*, whose will is a law, — he who is the great Mediator of the new covenant, and has full power to settle the terms of our reconciliation to God and happiness in him, — he who is the great Physician of souls, knows their case, and what is necessary to their cure, — he hath said, *You must be born again*. “I said unto *thee* that which all are concerned in, You must, you all, one as well as another, *you must be born again*: not only the common people, but the rulers, the *masters in Israel*.”

2. We are not to *marvel* at it; for when we consider the holiness of the God with whom we have to do, the great design of our redemption, the depravity of our nature, and the constitution of the happiness set before us, we shall not think it strange that so much stress is laid upon this as the one thing needful, that *we must be born again*.

[d.] This change is illustrated by two comparisons. *First*, The regenerating work of the Spirit is compared to *water*, v. 5. To be born again is to be *born of water* and of the Spirit, that is, of the Spirit working like water, as (^{<4081>}Matthew 3:11) *with the Holy Ghost and with fire* means with the Holy Ghost *as* with fire.

1. That which is primarily intended here is to show that the Spirit, in sanctifying a soul,

(1.) *Cleanses* and purifies it as water, takes away its filth, by which it was unfit for the kingdom of God. It is the *washing of regeneration*, ^{<4085>}Titus 3:5. *You are washed*, ^{<4081>}1 Corinthians 6:11. See ^{<4085>}Ezekiel 36:25.

(2.) Cools and refreshes it, as water does the hunted hart and the weary traveller. The Spirit is compared to water, ^{<4085>}John 7:38, 39; ^{<4085>}Isaiah 44:3. In the first creation, the fruits of heaven were *born of water* (^{<4085>}Genesis 1:20), in allusion to which, perhaps, they that are born from above are said to be born of water.

2. It is probable that Christ had an eye to the ordinance of baptism, which John had used and he himself had begun to use, “You must be born again of the Spirit,” which regeneration by the Spirit should be signified by washing with water, as the visible sign of that spiritual grace: not that all they, and they only, that are baptized, are saved; but without that new birth which is wrought by the Spirit, and signified by

baptism, none shall be looked upon as the *protected privileged* subjects of the *kingdom of heaven*. The Jews cannot partake of the benefits of the Messiah's kingdom, they have so long looked for, unless they quit all expectations of being justified by the works of the law, and submit to the *baptism of repentance*, the great gospel duty, *for the remission of sins*, the great gospel privilege.

Secondly, It is compared to *wind*: *The wind bloweth where it listeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit*, v. 8. The same word (*pneuma*) signifies both the wind and the Spirit. The Spirit came upon the apostles in a *rushing mighty wind* (~~400~~ Acts 2:2), his *strong* influences on the hearts of sinners are compared to the *breathing of the wind* (~~370~~ Ezekiel 37:9), and his *sweet* influences on the souls of saints to the north and south wind, ~~2146~~ Song of Solomon 4:16. This comparison is here used to show,

1. That the Spirit, in regeneration, works *arbitrarily*, and as a free agent. The *wind bloweth where it listeth* for us, and does not attend our order, nor is subject to our command. God *directs* it; it *fulfils his word*, ~~4088~~ Psalm 148:8. The Spirit dispenses his influences where, and when, on whom, and in what measure and degree, he pleases, *dividing to every man severally as he will*, ~~4321~~ 1 Corinthians 12:11.

2. That he works *powerfully*, and with evident effects: *Thou hearest the sound thereof*; though its causes are hidden, its effects are manifest. When the soul is brought to mourn for sin, to groan under the burden of corruption, to breathe after Christ, to cry *Abba — Father*, then we *hear the sound of the Spirit*, we find he is at work, as ~~401~~ Acts 9:11, *Behold he prayeth*.

3. That he works *mysteriously*, and in secret hidden ways: *Thou canst not tell whence it comes, nor whither it goes*. How it gathers and how it spends its strength is a riddle to us; so the manner and methods of the Spirit's working are a mystery. *Which way went the Spirit?* ~~1224~~ 1 Kings 22:24. See ~~2115~~ Ecclesiastes 11:5, and compare it with ~~4304~~ Psalm 139:14.

2. Here is a discourse concerning the *certainty and sublimity of gospel truths*, which Christ takes occasion for from the weakness of Nicodemus. Here is,

(1.) The objection which Nicodemus still made (v. 9): *How can these things be?* Christ's explication of the doctrine of the necessity of regeneration, it should seem, made it never the clearer to him. The corruption of nature which makes it *necessary*, and the way of the Spirit which makes it *practicable*, are as much mysteries to him as the thing itself; though he had in general owned Christ a divine teacher, yet he was unwilling to receive his teachings when they did not agree with the notions he had imbibed. Thus many profess to admit the doctrine of Christ in general, and yet will neither believe the truths of Christianity nor submit to the laws of it further than *they please*. Christ shall be their teacher, provided they may choose their lesson. Now here,

[1.] Nicodemus owns himself ignorant of Christ's meaning, after all: "*How can these things be?* They are things I do not understand, my capacity will not reach them." Thus the *things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man*. He is not only estranged from them, and therefore they are dark to him, but prejudiced against them, and therefore they are foolishness to him.

[2.] Because this doctrine was *unintelligible* to him (so he was pleased to make it), he questions the truth of it; as if, because it was a *paradox* to him, it was a *chimera* in itself. Many have such an opinion of their own capacity as to think that that cannot be *proved* which they cannot *believe*; by *wisdom* they *knew not* Christ.

(2.) The reproof which Christ gave him for his dulness and ignorance: "*Art thou a master in Israel, Didaskalos* — a teacher, a tutor, one who sits in Moses's chair, and yet not only unacquainted with the doctrine of regeneration, but incapable of understanding it?" This word is a reproof,

[1.] To those who undertake to teach others and yet are ignorant and unskilful in the word of righteousness themselves.

[2.] To those that spend their time in learning and teaching notions and ceremonies in religion, niceties and criticisms in the scripture, and neglect that which is practical and tends to reform the heart and life. Two words in the reproof are very emphatic: — *First*, The place where his lot was cast: in *Israel*, where there was such great plenty of the means of knowledge, where divine revelation was. He might have learned this out of the Old Testament. *Secondly*, The things he was thus ignorant in: *these* things,

these *necessary* things, there *great* things, these *divine* things; had he never read ^{<B1B>}Psalm 50:5, 10; ^{<B1B>}Ezekiel 18:31; 36:25, 26?

(3.) Christ's discourse, hereupon, of the certainty and sublimity of gospel truths (v. 11-13), to show the folly of those who make strange of these things, and to recommend them to our search. Observe here,

[1.] That the truths Christ taught were very *certain* and what we may venture upon (v. 11): *We speak that we do know*. *We*; whom does he mean besides himself? Some understand it of those that bore witness to him and with him on earth, the prophets and John Baptist; they *spoke* what they *knew*, and had seen, and were themselves abundantly satisfied in: divine revelation carries its own proof along with it. Others of those that bore witness from heaven, the Father and the Holy Ghost; the Father was with him, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him; therefore he speaks in the plural number, as ^{<B1B>}John 14:23: *We will come unto him*. Observe, *First*, That the truths of Christ are of undoubted certainty. We have all the reason in the world to be assured that the sayings of Christ are *faithful sayings*, and such as we may venture our souls upon; for he is not only a *credible* witness, who would not go about to deceive us, but a *competent* witness, who could not himself be deceived: *We testify that we have seen*. He spoke not upon hear-say, but upon the clearest evidence, and therefore with the greatest assurance. What he spoke of God, of the invisible world, of heaven and hell, of the divine will concerning us, and the counsels of peace, was what he *knew*, and *had seen*, for he was *by him as one brought up with him*, ^{<B1B>}Proverbs 8:30. Whatever Christ spoke, he spoke *of his own knowledge*. *Secondly*, That the unbelief of sinners is greatly aggravated by the infallible certainty of the truths of Christ. The things are thus sure, thus clear; and yet *you receive not our witness*. Multitudes to be *unbelievers* of that which yet (so cogent are the motives of credibility) they cannot *disbelieve*!

[2.] The truths Christ taught, though communicated in language and expressions borrowed from common and earthly things, yet in their own nature were most sublime and heavenly; this is intimated, v. 12: *"If I have told them earthly things, that is, have told them the great things of God in similitudes taken from earthly things, to make them the more easy and intelligible, as that of the new birth and the wind, — if I have thus accommodated myself to your capacities, and lisped to you in your own language, and cannot make you to understand my doctrine, — what would*

you do if I should accommodate myself to the nature of the things, and speak with the tongue of angels, that language which mortals cannot utter? If such *familiar expressions* be stumbling-blocks, what would *abstract ideas* be, and spiritual things painted *proper*?" Now we may learn hence, *First*, To admire the height and depth of the doctrine of Christ; it is a great mystery of godliness. The things of the gospel are *heavenly* things, out of the road of the enquiries of human reason, and much more out of the reach of its discoveries. *Secondly*, To acknowledge with thankfulness the condescension of Christ, that he is pleased to suit the manner of the gospel revelation to our capacities, *to speak to us as to children*. He considers our *frame*, that we are *of* the earth, and our *place*, that we are *on* the earth, and therefore speaks to us earthly things, and makes things sensible the vehicle of things spiritual, to make them the more easy and familiar to us. Thus he has done both in parables and in sacraments. *Thirdly*, To lament the corruption of our nature, and our great unaptness to receive and entertain the truths of Christ. Earthly things are despised because they are *vulgar*, and heavenly things because they are *abstruse*; and so, whatever method is taken, still some fault or other is found with it (⁴¹¹⁷Matthew 11:17), but Wisdom is, and will be, *justified of her children*, notwithstanding.

[3.] Our Lord Jesus, and he alone, was fit to reveal to us a doctrine thus certain, thus sublime: *No man hath ascended up into heaven but he*, v. 13.

First, None but Christ was able to reveal to us the will of God for our salvation. Nicodemus addressed Christ as a prophet; but he must know that he is greater than all the Old-Testament prophets, for none of them *had ascended into heaven*. They wrote by divine inspiration, and not of their own knowledge; see ⁴¹¹⁸John 1:18. Moses ascended into the mount, but not into heaven. No man hath attained to the certain knowledge of God and heavenly things as Christ has; see ⁴¹¹⁷Matthew 11:27. It is not for us to send to heaven for instructions; we must wait to receive what instructions Heaven will send to us; see ⁴¹¹⁹Proverbs 30:4; ⁴¹²⁰Deuteronomy 30:12.

Secondly, Jesus Christ is able, and fit, and every way qualified, to reveal the will of God to us; for it is *he that came down from heaven and is in heaven*. He had said (v. 12), *How shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?* Now here,

1. He gives them an instance of those *heavenly things* which he could tell them of, when he tells them of one that *came down from heaven*, and yet is the *Son of man*; is the *Son of man*, and yet is *in heaven*. If

the regeneration of the *soul of man* is such a mystery, what then is the incarnation of the *Son of God*? These are divine and heavenly things indeed. We have here an intimation of Christ's two distinct natures in one person: his divine nature, in which he *came down from heaven*; his human nature, in which he is the *Son of man*; and that union of those two, in that while he is the Son of man yet he is *in heaven*.

2. He gives them a proof of his ability to speak to them *heavenly things*, and to lead them into the arcana of the kingdom of heaven, by telling them,

(1.) That *he came down from heaven*. The intercourse settled between God and man began *above*; the first motion towards it did not arise from this earth, but *came down from heaven*. We love him, and send to him, because he first loved us, and sent to us. Now this intimates,

[1.] Christ's divine nature. He that came down from heaven is certainly more than a mere man; he is the *Lord from heaven*, ^{<4157>}1 Corinthians 15:47.

[2.] His intimate acquaintance with the divine counsels; for, coming from the court of heaven, he had been from eternity conversant with them.

[3.] The *manifestation of God*. Under the Old Testament God's favours to his people are expressed by his *hearing from heaven* (^{<4174>}2 Chronicles 7:14), *looking from heaven* (^{<1814>}Psalm 80:14), *speaking from heaven* (^{<493>}Nehemiah 9:13), sending from heaven, ^{<1578>}Psalm 57:3. But the New Testament shows us God *coming down* from heaven, to teach and save us. That he thus *descended* is an admirable *mystery*, for the Godhead cannot change places, nor did he bring his body from heaven; but that he thus *condescended* for our redemption is a more admirable *mercy*; herein he commended his love.

(2.) That *he is the Son of man*, that Son of man spoken of by Daniel (7:13), by which the Jews always understand to be meant the Messiah. Christ, in calling himself the *Son of man*, shows that he is the *second Adam*, for the first Adam was the *father of man*. And of all the Old-Testament titles of the Messiah he chose to make use of *this*, because it was most expressive of his *humility*, and most agreeable to his present state of *humiliation*.

(3.) That he *is in heaven*. Now at this time, when he is talking with Nicodemus on earth, yet, as God, he is *in heaven*. The *Son of man*, as such, was not in heaven till his ascension; but he that was the Son of man was now, by his divine nature, every where present, and particularly in heaven. Thus the Lord of glory, as such, could not be crucified, nor could God, as such, shed his blood; yet that person who was the Lord of glory was crucified (^{<418>}1 Corinthians 2:8), and God purchased the church with *his own blood*, ^{<428>}Acts 20:28. So close is the union of the two natures in one person that there is a communication of properties. He doth not say *hos esti*. GOD is the *ho on to ourano* — *he that is*, and heaven is the habitation of *his holiness*.

3. Christ here discourses of the *great design of his own coming into the world, and the happiness of those that believe in him*, v. 14-18. Here we have the very marrow and quintessence of the whole gospel, that *faithful saying* (^{<5115>}1 Timothy 1:15), that Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the children of men from death, and recover them to life. Now sinners are *dead men* upon a twofold account: —

(1.) As one that is mortally wounded, or sick of an incurable disease, is said to be a *dead man*, for he is dying; and so Christ came to save us, by *healing* us, as the brazen serpent healed the Israelites, v. 14, 15.

(2.) As one that is justly condemned to die for an unpardonable crime is a *dead man*, he is *dead in law*; and, in reference to this part of our danger, Christ came to save as a prince or judge, publishing an act of indemnity, or general pardon, under certain provisos; this saving here is opposed to condemning, v. 16-18.

[1.] Jesus Christ came to save us by *healing* us, as the children of Israel that were stung with fiery serpents were cured and *lived* by looking up to the brazen serpent; we have the story of it, ^{<0216>}Numbers 21:6-9. It was the *last* miracle that passed through the hand of Moses before his death. Now in this type of Christ we may observe,

First, The *deadly* and *destructive* nature of *sin*, which is implied here. The guilt of sin is like the *pain* of the biting of a fiery serpent; the power of corruption is like the *venom* diffused thereby. The devil is the old serpent, subtle at first (^{<008>}Genesis 3:1), but ever since *fiery*, and his temptations *fiery darts*, his assaults terrifying, his victories destroying. Ask awakened consciences, ask damned sinners, and they will tell you, how charming

soever the allurements of sin are, *at the last it bites like a serpent*, ^{<4230>}Proverbs 23:30-32. God's wrath against us for sin is as those fiery serpents which God sent among the people, to punish them for their murmurings. The curses of the law are as fiery serpents, so are all the tokens of divine wrath.

Secondly, The powerful remedy provided against this fatal malady. The case of poor sinners is deplorable; but is it desperate? Thanks be to God, it is not; there is balm in Gilead. The *Son of man is lifted up*, as the *serpent of brass* was by Moses, which cured the stung Israelites.

1. It was a *serpent of brass* that cured them. Brass is *bright*; we read of Christ's feet *shining like brass*, ^{<6115>}Revelation 1:15. It is *durable*; Christ is the same. It was made in the shape of a *fiery serpent*, and yet had no poison, no sting, fitly representing Christ, who was *made sin for us* and yet knew no sin; was *made in the likeness of sinful flesh* and yet not sinful; as harmless as a serpent of brass. The serpent was a cursed creature; Christ was made a *curse*. That which cured them reminded them of their plague; so in Christ sin is set before us most fiery and formidable.

2It was lifted up upon a pole, and so *must* the Son of man be lifted up; thus it *behoved him*, ^{<4226>}Luke 24:26, 46. No remedy now. Christ is lifted up,

(1.) In his *crucifixion*. He was lifted up upon the cross. His death is called his being *lifted up*, ^{<4232>}John 12:32, 33. He was lifted up as a spectacle, as a mark, lifted up between heaven and earth, as if he had been unworthy of either and abandoned by both.

(2.) In his *exaltation*. He was lifted up to the Father's right hand, to give repentance and remission; he was lifted up to the cross, to be further lifted up to the crown.

(3.) In the *publishing* and *preaching* of his everlasting gospel, ^{<646>}Revelation 14:6. The serpent was lifted up that all the thousands of Israel might see it. Christ in the gospel is exhibited to us, evidently set forth; Christ is *lifted up* as an *ensign*, ^{<2311>}Isaiah 11:10.

3. It was lifted up by Moses. Christ was made under the law of Moses, and Moses testified of him.

4. Being thus lifted up, it was appointed for the cure of those that were bitten by fiery serpents. He that sent the plague provided the remedy. None could redeem and save us but he whose justice had condemned us. It was God himself that *found the ransom*, and the efficacy of it depends upon his appointment. The *fiery serpents* were sent to punish them for their *tempting Christ* (so the apostle saith, ⁶⁰⁰1 Corinthians 10:9), and yet they were healed by virtue derived from him. He whom we have offended is *our peace*.

Thirdly, The way of *applying* this remedy, and that is by *believing*, which plainly alludes to the Israelites' *looking up* to the brazen serpent, in order to their being healed by it. If any stung Israelite was either so little sensible of his pain and peril, or had so little confidence in the word of Moses as not to look up to the brazen serpent, justly did he die of his wound; but every one that *looked up to it* did well, ⁶⁰¹Numbers 21:9. If any so far slight either their disease by sin or the method of cure by Christ as not to embrace Christ upon his own terms, their blood is upon their own head. He hath said, *Look, and be saved* (⁶⁰²Isaiah 45:22), look and live. We must take a complacency in and give consent to the methods which Infinite Wisdom has taken is saving a guilty world, by the mediation of Jesus Christ, as the great sacrifice and intercessor.

Fourthly, The great encouragements given us by faith to look up to him.

1. It was for this end that he was *lifted up*, that his followers might be saved; and he will pursue his end.

2. The offer that is made of salvation by him is general, that *whosoever believes* in him, without exception, might have benefit by him.

3. The salvation offered is complete.

(1.) They *shall not perish*, shall not die of their wounds; though they may be pained and ill frightened, iniquity shall not be their ruin. But that is not all.

(2.) They shall *have eternal life*. They shall not only not die of their wounds in the wilderness, but they shall reach Canaan (which they were then just ready to enter into); they shall enjoy the promised rest.

[2.] Jesus Christ came to save us by *pardoning us*, that we might not die by the sentence of the law, v. 16, 17. Here is *gospel* indeed, good

news, the best that ever came from heaven to earth. Here is *much*, here is *all* in a little, the word of reconciliation in miniature.

First, Here is God's *love* in *giving his Son for the world* (v. 16), where we have three things: —

1. The great *gospel mystery* revealed: *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son*. The love of God the Father is the original of our regeneration by the Spirit and our reconciliation by the lifting up of the Son. Note,

(1.) Jesus Christ is the *only-begotten Son of God*. This magnifies his love in giving him for us, in giving him to us; now know we that he loves us, when he has given his *only-begotten Son for us*, which expresses not only his dignity in himself, but his dearness to his Father; he was *always his delight*.

(2.) In order to the redemption and salvation of man, it pleased God to *give his only-begotten Son*. He not only sent him into the world with full and ample power to negotiate a peace between heaven and earth, but he *gave him*, that is, he gave him up to suffer and die for us, as the great propitiation or expiatory sacrifice. It comes in here as a reason why he *must be lifted up*; for so it was determined and designed by the Father, who gave him for this purpose, and *prepared him a body* in order to it. His enemies could not have *taken him* if his Father had not *given him*. Though he was not yet crucified, yet in the determinate counsel of God he was *given up*, ^{<402>}Acts 2:23. Nay, further, God has *given him*, that is, he has made an offer of him, to all, and given him to all true believers, to all the intents and purposes of the new covenant. He has given him to be our *prophet*, a *witness to the people*, the high priest of our profession, to be our peace, to be head of the church and head over all things to the church, to be to us all we need.

(3.) Herein God has commended his *love to the world*: *God so loved the world*, so really, so richly. Now his creatures shall see that he loves them, and wishes them well. He so loved the world of fallen man as he did not love that of fallen angels; see ^{<403>}Romans 5:8; ^{<404>}1 John 4:10. Behold, and wonder, that the *great God* should love such a *worthless* world! That the *holy God* should love such a *wicked* world with a love of good will, when he could not look upon it with any complacency. This was a *time of love indeed*, ^{<405>}Ezekiel 16:6, 8. The Jews vainly

conceited that the Messiah should be sent only in love to *their nation*, and to advance them upon the ruins of their neighbours; but Christ tells them that he came in love to the *whole world*, Gentiles as well as Jews, ^{AMP}1 John 2:2. Though many of the world of mankind perish, yet God's giving his only-begotten Son was an instance of his love to the whole world, because through him there is a *general offer* of life and salvation made to all. It is love to the revolted rebellious province to issue out a proclamation of pardon and indemnity to all that will come in, plead it upon their knees, and return to their allegiance. So far God loved the apostate lapsed world that he sent his Son with this fair proposal, that *whosoever believes in him*, one or other, *shall not perish*. Salvation has been of the Jews, but now Christ is known as *salvation to the ends of the earth*, a common salvation.

2. Here is the great *gospel duty*, and that is to *believe in Jesus Christ* (Whom God has thus given, given *for us*, given *to us*), to accept the gift, and answer the intention of the giver. We must yield an unfeigned assent and consent to the record God hath given in his word concerning his Son. God having given him to us to be our prophet, priest, and king, we must give up ourselves to be ruled, and taught, and saved by him.

3. Here is the great *gospel benefit*: *That whosoever believes in Christ shall not perish*. This he had said before, and here repeats it. It is the unspeakable happiness of all true believers, for which they are eternally indebted to Christ,

(1.) That they are saved from the miseries of hell, delivered from *going down to the pit*; they *shall not perish*. God has taken away their sin, they shall not die; a pardon is purchased, and so the attainder is reversed.

(2.) They are entitled to the joys of heaven: they shall *have everlasting life*. The convicted traitor is not only pardoned, but preferred, and made a favourite, and treated as one whom the King of kings *delights to honour*. *Out of prison he comes to reign*, ^{AMP}Ecclesiastes 4:14. If believers, then children; and, if *children, then heirs*.

Secondly, Here is God's design in sending his Son into the world: it was *that the world through him might be saved*. He came into the world with salvation in *his eye*, with salvation *in his hand*. Therefore the

aforementioned offer of live and salvation is sincere, and shall be made good to all that by faith accept it (v. 17): *God sent his Son into the world*, this guilty, rebellious, apostate world; sent him as his agent or ambassador, not as sometimes he had sent angels into the world as visitants, but as resident. Ever since man sinned, he has dreaded the approach and appearance of any special messenger from heaven, as being conscious of guilt and looking for judgment: *We shall surely die, for we have seen God*. If therefore the Son of God himself come, we are concerned to enquire on what errand he comes: *Is it peace?* Or, as they asked Samuel trembling, *Comest thou peaceably?* And this scripture returns the answer, *Peaceably*.

1. He did not come to *condemn the world*. We had reason enough to expect that he should, for it is a guilty world; it is *convicted*, and what cause can be shown why judgment should not be given, and execution awarded, according to law? That *one blood* of which all *nations* of men are made (^{<44726>}Acts 17:26) is not only *tainted* with an hereditary *disease*, like Gehazi's leprosy, but it is *tainted* with an hereditary *guilt*, like that of the Amalekites, with whom God had war *from generation to generation*; and justly may such a world as this be *condemned*; and if God would have sent to condemn it he had angels at command, to pour out the vials of his wrath, a cherub with a flaming sword ready to do execution. *If the Lord had been pleased to kill us*, he would not have sent his Son amongst us. He came with full powers indeed to *execute judgment* (^{<4352>}John 5:22, 27), but did not begin with a judgment of condemnation, did not proceed upon the outlawry, nor take advantage against us for the breach of the *covenant of innocency*, but put us upon a new trial before a *throne of grace*.

2. He came *that the world through him might be saved*, that a door of salvation might be opened to the world, and whoever would might enter in by it. God was in Christ *reconciling the world to himself*, and so *saving* it. An act of indemnity is passed and published, through Christ a remedial law made, and the world of mankind dealt with, not according to the rigours of the first covenant, but according to the riches of the second; *that the world through him might be saved*, for it could never be saved but *through him*; *there is not salvation in any other*. This is good news to a convinced conscience, healing to broken bones and bleeding wounds, that Christ, our judge, came not to *condemn*, but to *save*.

[3.] From all this is inferred the happiness of true believers: *He that believeth on him is not condemned*, v. 18. Though he has been a sinner, a great sinner, and *stands convicted (habes confitentem reum — by his own confession)*, yet, upon his believing, process is stayed, judgment is arrested, and he is *not condemned*. This denotes more than a reprieve; he *is not condemned*, that is, he is acquitted; he *stand upon his deliverance* (as we say), and if he be not condemned he is discharged; *ou krinetai* — *he is not judged*, not dealt with in strict justice, according to the desert of his sins. He is *accused*, and he cannot plead *not guilty* to the indictment, but he can plead *in bar*, can plead a *noli prosecute* upon the indictment, as blessed Paul does, *Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died*. He is *afflicted*, chastened of God, persecuted by the world; but he is *not condemned*. The cross perhaps lies heavy upon him, but he is saved from the curse: *condemned by the world*, it may be, but *not condemned with the world*, ~~¶~~Romans 8:1; ~~¶~~1 Corinthians 11:32.

4. Christ, in the close, discourses concerning the *deplorable condition of those that persist in unbelief and wilful ignorance*, v. 18-21.

(1.) Read here the doom of those that will not *believe in Christ*: they are *condemned already*. Observe,

[1.] How great the *sin* of unbelievers is; it is aggravated from the dignity of the person they slight; they *believe not in the name of the only-begotten Son of God*, who is infinitely *true*, and deserves to be believed, *infinitely good*, and deserves to be embraced. God sent one to save us that was *dearest* to himself; and shall not he be *dearest to us*? Shall we not believe on his name who has a name above every name?

[2.] How great the *misery* of unbelievers is: they are *condemned already*; which bespeaks, *First*, A *certain* condemnation. They are as sure to be condemned in the judgment of the great day as if they were condemned already. *Secondly*, A *present* condemnation. The curse has already taken hold of them; the wrath of God now fastens upon them. They are condemned already, for their own hearts condemn them. *Thirdly*, A *condemnation grounded upon their former guilt*: He is *condemned already*, for he lies open to the law for all his sins; the obligation of the law is in full force, power, and virtue, against him, because he is not by faith interested in the gospel defeasance; *he is condemned already, because he has not believed*. Unbelief may truly be called *the great*

damning sin, because it leaves us under the guilt of all our other sins; it is a sin against the *remedy*, against our *appeal*.

(2.) Read also the doom of those that would not so much as *know him*, v. 19. Many *inquisitive* people had knowledge of Christ and his doctrine and miracles, but they were prejudiced against him, and would not believe in him, while the generality were sottishly careless and stupid, and would not *know him*. And *this is the condemnation*, the sin that ruined them, *that light is come into the world, and they loved darkness rather*. Now here observe,

[1.] That the gospel is light, and, when the gospel came, *light came into the world*, Light is *self-evidencing*, so is the gospel; it proves its own divine origin. Light is *discovering*, and *truly the light is sweet*, and rejoices the heart. It is a light shining in a dark place, and a dark place indeed the world would be without it. It is *come into all the world* (~~Colossians~~ Colossians 1:6), and not confined to one corner of it, as the Old-Testament light was.

[2.] It is the unspeakable folly of the most of men that they loved darkness rather than light, rather than *this* light. The Jews loved the dark shadows of their law, and the instructions of their *blind guides*, rather than the doctrine of Christ. The Gentiles loved their superstitious services of an *unknown God*, whom they *ignorantly worshipped*, rather than the *reasonable service* which the gospel enjoins. Sinners that were wedded to their lusts loved their ignorance and mistakes, which supported them in their sins, rather than the truths of Christ, which would have parted them from their sins. Man's apostasy began in an affectation of forbidden knowledge, but is kept up by an affectation of forbidden ignorance. Wretched man is in love with his sickness, in love with his slavery, and will not be made *free*, will not be *made whole*.

[3.] The true reason why men love darkness rather than light is *because their deeds are evil*. They love darkness because they think it is an excuse for their evil deeds, and they hate the light because it robs them of the good opinion they had of themselves, by showing them their sinfulness and misery. Their case is sad, and, because they are resolved that they will not *mend* it, they are resolved that they will not *see it*.

[4.] Wilful ignorance is so far from excusing sin that it will be found, at the great day, to aggravate the condemnation: *This is the condemnation*, this is what ruins souls, that they shut their eyes against the light, and will

not so much as admit a parley with Christ and his gospel; they set God so much at defiance that they desire not the knowledge of his ways, ^{<K214>}Job 21:14. We must account in the judgment, not only for the knowledge we *had*, and *used not*, but for the knowledge we *might have had*, and *would not*; not only for the knowledge we *sinned against*, but for the knowledge we *sinned away*. For the further illustration of this he shows (v. 20, 21) that according as men's hearts and lives are good or bad, so they stand affected to the light Christ has brought into the world.

First, It is not strange if those that do evil, and resolve to persist in it, hate the light of Christ's gospel; for it is a common observation that *every one that doeth evil hateth the light*, v. 20. Evil-doers seek concealment, out of a sense of shame and fear of punishment; see ^{<K213>}Job 24:13, etc. Sinful works are *works of darkness*; sin from the first affected concealment, ^{<K213>}Job 31:33. The *light shakes* the wicked, ^{<K212>}Job 38:12, 13. Thus the gospel is a terror to the wicked world: *They come not to this light*, but keep as far off it as they can, *lest their deeds should be reprov'd*. Note,

1. The light of the gospel is sent into the world to *reprove the evil deeds* of sinners; to make them manifest (^{<K213>}Ephesians 5:13), to *show* people *their transgressions*, to show that to be sin which was not thought to be so, and to show them the evil of their transgressions, *that sin by the new commandment might appear exceeding sinful*. The gospel has its convictions, to make way for its consolations.
2. It is for this reason that evil-doers *hate the light* of the gospel. There were those who *had done evil* and were sorry for it, who bade this light welcome, as the *publicans and harlots*. But he that *does evil*, that does it and resolves to go on in it, *hateth the light*, cannot bear to be told of his faults. All that opposition which the gospel of Christ has met with in the world comes from the *wicked heart*, influenced by the *wicked one*. Christ is hated because sin is loved.
3. They who do not *come to the light* thereby evidence a secret *hatred* of the light. If they had not an antipathy to *saving knowledge*, they would not sit down so contentedly in *damning ignorance*.

Secondly, On the other hand, upright hearts, that approve themselves to God in their integrity, bid this light welcome (v. 21): *He that doeth truth cometh to the light*. It seems, then, that though the gospel had many enemies it had some friends. It is a common observation that *truth seeks*

no corners. Those who mean and act honestly dread not a scrutiny, but desire it rather. Now this is applicable to the gospel light; as it *convinces* and *terrifies* evil-doers, so it *confirms* and *comforts* those that walk in their integrity. Observe here,

1. The character of a *good man*.

(1.) He is one that *doeth truth*; that is, he acts truly and sincerely in all he does. Though sometimes he comes short of *doing good*, the good he would do, yet he *doeth truth*, he aims honestly; he has his infirmities, but holds fast his integrity; as Gaius, that *did faithfully* (^{<6015>}3 John 1:5), as Paul (^{<4012>}2 Corinthians 1:12), as Nathanael (^{<4014>}John 1:47), as Asa, ^{<40154>}1 Kings 15:14.

(2.) He is one that *cometh to the light*. He is ready to receive and entertain divine revelation as far as it appears to him to be so, what uneasiness soever it may create him. He that *doeth truth* is willing to know the *truth* by himself, and to *have his deeds made manifest*. A good man is much employed in trying himself, and is desirous that God would try him, ^{<4022>}Psalm 26:2. He is solicitous to *know* what the will of God is, and resolves to *do* it, though ever so contrary to his own will and interest.

2. Here is the character of a *good work*: it is *wrought in God*, in union with him by a covenanting faith, and in communion with him by devout affections. Our works are *then* good, and will bear the test, when the will of God is the rule of them and the glory of God the end of them; when they are done in his strength, and for his sake, to him, and not to men; and if, by the light of the gospel, it be manifest to us that our works are thus wrought, *then shall we have rejoicing*, ^{<4064>}Galatians 6:4; ^{<4012>}2 Corinthians 1:12.

Thus far we have Christ's discourse with *Nicodemus*; it is probable that much more passed between them, and it had a good effect, for we find (^{<4039>}John 19:39) that *Nicodemus*, though he was puzzled at first, yet afterwards became a faithful disciple of Christ.

JOHN 3:22-36

JOHN'S TESTIMONY TO CHRIST

In these verses we have,

I. Christ's removal into the land of Judea (v. 22), and there he tarried with his disciples. Observe,

1. Our Lord Jesus, after he entered upon his public work, travelled much, and removed often, as the patriarchs in their sojournings. As it was a good part of his humiliation that he had no certain dwelling-place, but was, as Paul, *in journeyings often*, so it was an instance of his unwearied industry, in the work for which he came into the world, that he went about in prosecution of it; many a weary step he took to do good to souls. The *Sun of righteousness* took a large circuit to diffuse his light and heat, ³⁹¹⁶Psalm 19:6.

2. He was not wont to stay long at Jerusalem. Though he went frequently thither, yet he soon returned into the country; as here. *After these things*, after he had had this discourse with Nicodemus, he came into the land of Judea; not so much for *greater privacy* (though mean and obscure places best suited the humble Jesus in his humble state) as for *greater usefulness*. His preaching and miracles, perhaps, made *most noise* at Jerusalem, the fountain-head of news, but did *least good* there, where the most considerable men of the Jewish church had so much the ascendant.

3. When he came into the land of Judea his *disciples came with him*; for these were *they that continued with him in his temptations*. Many that flocked to him at Jerusalem could not follow his motions into the country, they had no business there; but his disciples attended him. If the ark remove, it is better to *remove and go after it* (as those did, ⁴⁰⁰³Joshua 3:3) than sit still without it, though it be in Jerusalem itself.

4. There he *tarried with them, dietribe* — *He conversed* with them, *discoursed* with them. He did not retire into the country for his ease and pleasure, but for more free conversation with his disciples and followers. See ⁴²¹¹Song of Solomon 7:11, 12. Note, Those that are ready to *go with Christ* shall find him as ready to *stay with them*. It is supposed that he now staid five or six months in this country.

5. There *he baptized*; he admitted disciples, such as believed in him, and had more honesty and courage than those had at Jerusalem, ^{<42>}John 2:24. John began to baptize in the land of Judea (^{<41>}Matthew 3:1), therefore Christ began there, for John had said, *There comes one after me*. He himself *baptized* not, with his own hand, but his disciples by his orders and directions, as appears, ^{<40>}John 4:2. But his disciples' baptizing was his baptizing. Holy ordinances are Christ's, though administered by weak men.

II. John's continuance in his work, as long as his opportunities lasted, v. 23, 24. Here we are told,

1. That *John was baptizing*. Christ's baptism was, for substance, the same with John's, for John bore witness to Christ, and therefore they did not at all clash or interfere with one another. But,

(1.) Christ began the work of preaching and baptizing before *John laid it down*, that he might be ready to receive John's disciples when he should be taken off, and so the wheels might be kept going. It is a comfort to useful men, when they are going off the stage, to see those rising up who are likely to fill up their place.

(2.) John continued the work of preaching and baptizing though Christ had *taken it up*; for he would still, according to the *measure given to him*, advance the interests of God's kingdom. There was still work for John to do, for Christ was not yet *generally known*, nor were the minds of people *thoroughly prepared* for him by repentance. From heaven John had received his *command*, and he would go on in his work till he thence received his *countermand*, and would have his dismissal from the same hand that gave him his commission. He does not *come in* to Christ, lest what had formerly passed should look like a combination between them; but *he goes on* with his work, till Providence lays him aside. The greater gifts of some do not *render* the labours of others, that come short of them, *needless* and *useless*; there is work enough for all hands. They are sullen that will sit down and do nothing when they see themselves out-shone. Though we have but one talent, we must account for that: and, when we see ourselves *going off*, must yet *go on* to the last.

2. That he baptized in Enon near Salim, places we find nowhere else mentioned, and therefore the learned are altogether at a loss where to find them. Wherever it was, it seems that John removed from *place to place*;

he did not think that there was any virtue in Jordan, because Jesus was baptized there, which should engage him to stay there, but as he saw cause he removed to other waters. Ministers must follow their opportunities. He chose a place where there was much water, *hydata polla* — *many waters*, that is, many *streams* of water; so that wherever he met with any that were willing to submit to his baptism water was at hand to baptize them with, *shallow* perhaps, as is usual where there are *many* brooks, but such as would serve his purpose. And in that country plenty of water was a valuable thing.

3. That thither people *came to him* and *were baptized*. Though they did not come in such vast crowds as they did when he first appeared, yet now he was not without encouragement, but there were still those that attended and owned him. Some refer this both to John and to Jesus: *They came and were baptized*; that is, some came to John, and were baptized by him, some to Jesus, and were baptized by him, and, as their baptism was one, so were their hearts.

4. It is noted (v. 24) that *John was not yet cast into prison*, to clear the order of the story, and to show that these passages are to come in before ~~¶~~ Matthew 6:12. John never desisted from his work as long as he had his liberty; nay, he seems to have been the more industrious, because he foresaw his time was short; he was not *yet cast into prison*, but he expected it ere long, ~~¶~~ John 9:4.

III. A contest between *John's disciples and the Jews about purifying*, v. 25. See how the gospel of Christ came not to *send peace upon earth*, but *division*. Observe,

1. Who were the disputants: *some of John's disciples, and the Jews* who had not submitted to his baptism of repentance. Penitents and impenitents divide this sinful world. In this contest, it should seem, John's disciples were the *aggressors*, and gave the *challenge*; and it is a sign that they were novices, who had more zeal than discretion. The truths of God have often suffered by the rashness of those that have undertaken to defend them before they were able to do it.

2. What was the matter in dispute: *about purifying*, about *religious washing*.

(1.) We may suppose that John's disciples cried up his baptism, his purifying, as *instar omnium* — *superior to all others*, and gave the preference to that as perfecting and superseding all the purifications of the Jews, and they were in the right; but *young* converts are too apt to boast of their attainments, whereas he that finds the *treasure* should *hide it* till he is sure that he has it, and not talk of it too much at first.

(2.) No doubt the Jews with as much assurance applauded the *purifyings* that were in use among them, both those that were instituted by the law of Moses and those that were imposed by the tradition of the elders; for the former they had a divine warrant, and for the latter the usage of the church. Now it is very likely that the Jews in this dispute, when they could not *deny* the excellent nature and design of John's baptism, raised an objection against it from Christ's baptism, which gave occasion for the complaint that follows here (v. 26): “Here is John baptizing in one place.” say they, “and Jesus at the same time baptizing in another place; and therefore John's baptism, which his disciples so much applaud, is either,”

[1.] “*Dangerous*, and of *ill consequence* to the peace of the church and state, for you see it opens a door to endless parties. Now that John has begun, we shall have every little teacher set up for a baptist presently. Or,”

[2.] “At the best it is *defective* and *imperfect*. If John's baptism, which you cry up thus, have any good in it, yonder the baptism of Jesus goes beyond it, so that for your parts you are shaded already by a greater light, and your baptism is soon gone out of request.” Thus objections are made against the gospel from the advancement and improvement of gospel light, as if childhood and manhood were contrary to each other, and the superstructure were against the foundation. There was no reason to object Christ's baptism against John's, for they consisted very well together.

IV. A complaint which John's disciples made to their master concerning Christ and his baptizing, v. 26. They, being *nonplussed* by the fore-mentioned objection, and probably *ruffled* and put into a heat by it, come to their master, and tell him, “*Rabbi*, he that was with thee, and was baptized of thee, is now set up for himself; he *baptizeth*, and all men come to him; and wilt thou suffer it?” Their itch for disputing occasioned this. It is common for men, when they find themselves run aground in the heat of disputation, to fall foul upon those that do them no harm. If these disciples of John had not undertaken to dispute about *purifying*, before they

understood the *doctrine of baptism*, they might have answered the objection without being put into a passion. In their complaint, they speak respectfully to their own master, *Rabbit*; but speak very slightly of our Saviour, though they do not name him.

1. They suggest that Christ's setting up a baptism of his own was a piece of presumption, very unaccountable; as if John, having first set up this rite of baptizing, must have the monopoly of it, and, as it were, a patent for the invention: "*He that was with thee beyond Jordan, as a disciple of thine, behold, and wonder, the same, the very same, baptizes, and takes thy work out of thy hand.*" Thus the voluntary condescensions of the Lord Jesus, as that of his being baptized by John, are often unjustly and very unkindly turned to his reproach.

2. They suggest that it was a piece of ingratitude to John. He *to whom thou barest witness* baptizes; as if Jesus owed all his reputation to the honourable character John gave of him, and yet had very unworthily improved it to the prejudice of John. But Christ needed not John's testimony, ⁴⁸⁵John 5:36. He reflected more honour upon John than he received from him, yet thus it is incident to us to think that others are more indebted to us than really they are. And besides, Christ's baptism was not in the least an *impeachment*, but indeed the greatest *improvement*, of John's baptism, which was but to lead the way to Christ's. John was *just* to Christ, in bearing witness to him; and Christ's answering his testimony did rather enrich than impoverish John's ministry.

3. They conclude that it would be a total eclipse to John's baptism: "*All men come to him; they that used to follow with us now flock after him, it is therefore time for us to look about us.*" It was not indeed strange that *all men came to him*. As far as Christ is *manifested* he will be *magnified*; but why should John's disciples grieve at this? Note, Aiming at the monopoly of honour and respect has been in all ages the bane of the church, and the shame of its members and ministers; as also a vying of interests, and a jealousy of rivalry and competition. We mistake if we think that the excelling gifts and graces, and labours and usefulness, of one, are a diminution and disparagement to another that has obtained mercy to be faithful; for the Spirit is a free agent, *dispensing to every one severally as he will*. Paul rejoiced in the usefulness even of those that *opposed him*, ⁴⁸⁸Philippians 1:18. We must leave it to God to choose, employ, and

honour his own instruments as he pleaseth, and not covet to be *placed alone*.

V. Here is John's answer to this complaint which his disciples made, v. 27, etc. His disciples expected that he would have resented this matter as they did; but Christ's *manifestation to Israel* was no *surprise* to John, but what he looked for; it was not *disturbance* to him, but what he wished for. He therefore checked the complaint, as Moses, *Enviest thou for my sake?* and took this occasion to confirm the testimonies he had formerly borne to Christ as superior to him, cheerfully consigning and turning over to him all the interest he had in Israel. In this discourse here, the first minister of the gospel (for so John was) is an excellent pattern to all ministers to *humble* themselves and to *exalt* the Lord Jesus.

1. John here *abases himself in comparison with Christ*, v. 27-30. The more others magnify us, the more we must humble ourselves, and fortify ourselves against the temptation of flattery and applause, and the jealousy of our friends for our honour, by remembering our place, and what we are, ^{<488>}1 Corinthians 3:5.

(1.) *John acquiesces* in the divine disposal, and satisfies himself with that (v. 27): *A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven, whence every good gift comes* (^{<3017>}James 1:17), a general truth very applicable in this case. Different employments are according to the direction of divine Providence, different endowments according to the distribution of the divine grace. *No man can take any true honour to himself*, ^{<3804>}Hebrews 5:4. We have as necessary and constant a dependence upon the grace of God in all the motions and actions of the spiritual life as we have upon the providence of God in all the motions and actions of the natural life: now this comes in here as a reason,

[1.] Why we should not *envy* those that have a larger share of gifts than we have, or move in a larger sphere of usefulness. John reminds his disciples that Jesus would not have thus excelled him *except he had received it from heaven*, for, as *man* and *Mediator*, he *received gifts*; and, if God gave him *the Spirit without measure* (v. 34), shall they grudge at it? The same reason will hold as to others. If God is *pleased* to give to others more ability and success than to us, shall we be displeased at it, and reflect upon him as unjust, unwise, and partial? See ^{<4815>}Matthew 20:15.

[2.] Why we should not be *discontented*, though we be inferior to others in gifts and usefulness, and be eclipsed by their excellencies. John was ready to own that it was the gift, the free gift, of heaven, that made him a preacher, a prophet, a baptist: it was God that gave him the interest he had in the love and esteem of the people; and, if now his interest decline, God's will be done! He that *gives* may *take*. What we *receive* from heaven we must take as it is *given*. Now John never received a commission for a standing *perpetual* office, but only for a *temporary* one, which must soon expire; and therefore, when he has fulfilled his ministry, he can contentedly see it go out of date. Some give quite another sense of these words: John had taken pains with his disciples, to teach them the reference which his baptism had to Christ, who should come after him, and yet be preferred before him, and do that for them which he could not do; and yet, after all, they dote upon John, and grudge this preference of Christ above him: Well saith John, I see *a man can receive* (that is, perceive) *nothing, except it be given him from heaven*. The labour of ministers if all lost labour, unless the grace of God make it effectual. Men do not understand that which is made most *plain*, nor believe that which is made most *evident*, unless it be given them from heaven to understand and believe it.

(2.) John appeals to the testimony he had formerly given concerning Christ (v. 28): You can bear me witness that I said, again and again, *I am not the Christ, but I am sent before him*. See how steady and constant John was in his testimony to Christ, and not as a *reed shaken with the wind*; neither the frowns of the chief priests, nor the flatteries of his own disciples, could make him change his note. Now this serves here,

[1.] As a *conviction* to his disciples of the unreasonableness of their complaint. They had spoken of the witness which their master bore to Jesus (v. 26): “Now,” saith John, “do you not remember what the testimony was that I did bear? Call that to mind, and you will see your own cavil answered. Did I not say, *I am not the Christ*? Why then do you set me up as a rival with him that is? Did I not say, *I am sent before him*? Why then does it seem strange to you that I should stand by and give way to him?”

[2.] It is a *comfort* to himself that he had never *given* his disciples *any occasion* thus to set him up in competition with Christ; but, on the contrary, had particularly *cautioned* them against this mistake, though he might have made a hand of it for himself. It is a satisfaction to faithful

ministers when they have done what they could in their places to prevent any extravagances that their people ran into. John had not only not encouraged them to hope that he was the Messiah, but had plainly told them the contrary, which was now a satisfaction to him. It is a common excuse for those who have undue honour paid them, *Si populus vult decipi, decipiatur* — *If the people will be deceived, let them;* but that is an ill maxim for those to go by whose business it is to *undeceive* people. *The lip of truth shall be established.*

(3.) John professes the great satisfaction he had in the advancement of Christ and his interest. He was so far from *regretting* it, as his disciples did, that he *rejoiced* in it. This he expresses (v. 29) by an elegant similitude.

[1.] He compares our Saviour to the *bridegroom*: “*He that hath the bride is the bridegroom. Do all men come to him?* It is well, whither else should they go? Has he got the throne in men's affections? Who else should have it? It is his right; to whom should the bride be brought but to the bridegroom?” Christ was prophesied of in the Old Testament as a bridegroom, Psalm 45. *The Word was made flesh*, that the disparity of nature might not be a *bar to the match*. Provision is made for the purifying of the church, that the defilement of sin might be no bar. Christ espouses his church to himself; he *has* the bride, for he has her love, he has her promise; *the church is subject to Christ*. As far as particular souls are devoted to him in faith and love, so far the bridegroom has the bride.

[2.] He compares himself to the *friend of the bridegroom*, who attends upon him, to do him honour and service, assists him in prosecuting the match, speaks a good word for him, uses his interest on his behalf, rejoices when the match goes on, and most of all when the point is gained, and he *has the bride*. All that John had done in preaching and baptizing was to introduce him; and, now that he was come, he had what he wished for: *The friend of the bridegroom stands, and hears him;* stands expecting him, and waiting for him; *rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice*, because he is come to the marriage after he had been long expected. Note, *First*, Faithful ministers are friends of the bridegroom, to recommend him to the affections and choice of the children of men; to bring letters and messages from him, for he courts by proxy; and herein they must be faithful to him. *Secondly*, The friends of the bridegroom must *stand, and hear the bridegroom's voice;* must receive instructions from him, and

attend his orders; must desire to have proofs of Christ speaking in them, and with them (^{473B}2 Corinthians 13:3); that is the *bridegroom's voice*. *Thirdly*, The espousing of souls to Jesus Christ, in faith and love, is the fulfilling of the joy of every good minister. If the day of Christ's espousals be the day of the gladness of his heart (^{271B}Song of Solomon 3:11), it cannot but be of their too who love him and wish well to his honour and kingdom. Surely they have *no greater joy*.

(4.) He owns it highly fit and necessary that the reputation and interest of Christ should be advanced, and his own diminished (v. 30): *He must increase, but I must decrease*. If they grieve at the growing greatness of the Lord Jesus, they will have more and more occasion to grieve, as those have that indulge themselves in envy and emulation. John speaks of Christ's increase and his own decrease, not only as *necessary* and *unavoidable*, which could not be *helped* and therefore must be *borne*, but as highly *just* and *agreeable*, and affording him entire satisfaction.

[1.] He was *well pleased* to see the kingdom of Christ getting ground: "*He must increase*. You think he has gained a great deal, but it is nothing to what he will gain." Note, The kingdom of Christ is, and will be, a growing kingdom, like the light of the morning, like the grain of mustard-seed.

[2.] He was not at all *displeased* that the effect of this was the diminishing of his own interest: *I must decrease*. Created excellencies are under this law, they *must decrease*. *I have seen an end of all perfection*. Note, *First*, The shining forth of the glory of Christ eclipses the lustre of all other glory. The glory that stands in *competition* with Christ, that of the world and the flesh, decreases and loses ground in the soul as the knowledge and love of Christ increase and get ground; but it is here spoken of that which is *subservient* to him. As the light of the morning increases, that of the morning star decreases. *Secondly*, If our diminution or abasement may but in the least contribute to the advancement of Christ's name, we must cheerfully submit to it, and be content to be *any thing*, to be *nothing*, so that Christ may be *all*.

2. John Baptist here *advances* Christ, and instructs his disciples concerning him, that, instead of grieving that so many come to him, they might come to him themselves.

(1.) He instructs them concerning the *dignity of Christ's person* (v. 31): *He that cometh from above, that cometh from heaven, is above all*. Here,

[1.] He supposes his divine origin, that he came *from above*, from *heaven*, which bespeaks not only his divine extraction, but his divine nature. He had a being before his conception, a heavenly being. None but he that came from heaven was fit to show us the will of heaven, or the way to heaven. When God would save man, he *sent from above*.

[2.] Hence he infers his sovereign authority: he is *above all*, above all things and all persons, *God over all, blessed for evermore*. It is daring presumption to dispute precedency with him. When we come to speak of the honours of the Lord Jesus, we find they transcend all conception and expression, and we can say but this, *He is above all*. It was said of John Baptist, *There is not a greater among them that are born of women*. But the descent of Christ from heaven put such a dignity upon him as he was not divested of by his being made flesh; still he was *above all*. This he further illustrates by the meanness of those who stood in competition with him: *He that is of the earth, is earthly, ho on ek tes ges, ek tes ges esti* — *He that is of the earth is of the earth*; he that has his origin of the earth has his food out of the earth, has his converse with earthly things, and his concern is for them. Note, *First*, Man has his rise out of the earth; not only Adam at first, but we also still are *formed out of the clay*, ^{<3316>}Job 33:6. Look to the rock whence we were hewn. *Secondly*, Man's constitution is therefore *earthly*; not only his body frail and mortal, but his soul corrupt and carnal, and its bent and bias strong towards earthly things. The prophets and apostles were of the same mould with other men; they were but *earthen vessels*, though they had a rich treasure lodged in them; and shall these be set up as rivals with Christ? *Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth*; but let them not cope with him that *came from heaven*.

(2.) Concerning the *excellency and certainty of his doctrine*. His disciples were displeased that Christ's preaching was admired, and attended upon, more than his; but he tells them that there was reason enough for it. For,

[1.] He, for his part, *spoke of the earth*, and so do all those that are *of the earth*. The prophets were men and spoke like men; *of themselves* they could not speak but *of the earth*, ^{<4015>}2 Corinthians 3:5. The preaching of the prophets and of John was but low and flat compared with Christ's preaching; as heaven is high above the earth, so were his thoughts above theirs. By them God spoke *on earth*, but in Christ he speaketh *from heaven*.

[2.] But he that cometh from heaven is not only in his person, but in his doctrine, above all the prophets that ever lived on earth; none teacheth like him. The doctrine of Christ is here recommended to us,

First, As infallibly *sure* and *certain*, and to be entertained accordingly (v. 32): *What he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth*. See here,

1. Christ's divine knowledge; he testified nothing but *what he had seen and heard*, what he was perfectly apprized of and thoroughly acquainted with. What he discovered of the divine nature and of the invisible world was what he had *seen*; what he revealed of the mind of God was what he had *heard* immediately from him, and not at second hand. The prophets testified what was made known to them in dreams and visions by the mediation of angels, but not what they had seen and heard. John was the crier's *voice*, that said, "*Make room for the witness, and keep silence while the charge is given,*" but then leaves it to the witness to give in his testimony himself, and the judge to give the charge himself. The gospel of Christ is not a doubtful opinion, like an hypothesis or new notion in philosophy, which every one is at liberty to believe or not; but it is a revelation of the mind of God, which is of *eternal truth* in itself, and of *infinite concern* to us.

2. His divine grace and goodness: that which he had *seen* and *heard* he was pleased to make known to us, because he knew it nearly concerned us. What Paul had seen and heard in the third heavens he could not testify (⁴⁷⁰⁴2 Corinthians 12:4), but Christ knew how to utter what he had *seen* and *heard*. Christ's preaching is here called his *testifying*, to denote,

(1.) The *convincing evidence* of it; it was not *reported* as news by hearsay, but it was *testified* as evidence given in court, with great caution and assurance.

(2.) The affectionate earnestness of the delivery of it: it was testified with concern and importunity, as ⁴⁸⁸⁵Acts 18:5.

From the *certainty* of Christ's doctrine, John takes occasion,

[1.] To lament the infidelity of the most of men: though he testifies what is infallibly true, yet *no man* receiveth his testimony, that is, very few, next to none, none in comparison with those that refuse it. They receive it not, they will not hear it, they do not heed it, or give credit to

it. This he speaks of not only as a matter of *wonder*, that such a testimony should not be received (Who hath believed our report? How stupid and foolish are the greatest part of mankind, what enemies to themselves!) but as matter of *grief*; John's disciples grieved that *all men came to Christ* (v. 26); they thought his followers too many. But John grieves that *no man came to him*; he thought them too few. Note, The unbelief of sinners is the grief of saints. It was for this that St. Paul had *great heaviness*, ^{<609>}Romans 9:2.

[2.] He takes occasion to commend the faith of the chosen remnant (v. 33): *He that hath received his testimony* (and some such there were, though very few) hath *set to his seal that God is true*. God is true, though we do not *set our seal to it*; let God be true, and every man a liar; his truth needs not our faith to support it, but by faith we do ourselves the honour and justice to subscribe to his truth, and hereby God reckons himself honoured. God's promises are all *yea and amen*; by faith we put our *amen* to them, as ^{<621>}Revelation 22:20. Observe, He that receives the testimony of Christ subscribes not only to the truth of Christ, but to the truth of *God*, for his name is the *Word of God*; the commandments of God and the testimony of Christ are put together, ^{<627>}Revelation 12:17. By believing in Christ we set to our seal, *First*, That God is true to all the promises which he has made *concerning Christ*, that which he spoke by the mouth of *all his holy prophets*; what he *swore to our fathers* is all accomplished, and not one iota or tittle of it fallen to the ground, ^{<610>}Luke 1:70, etc. ^{<613>}Acts 13:32, 33. *Secondly*, That he is true to all the promises he has made *in Christ*; we venture our souls upon God's veracity, being satisfied that he is *true*; we are willing to deal with him *upon trust*, and to quit all in this world for a happiness in reversion and out of sight. By this we greatly honour God's faithfulness. Whom we *give credit* to we *give honour* to.

Secondly, It is recommended to us as a *divine* doctrine; not his own, but *his that sent him* (v. 34): *For he whom God hath sent speaketh the word of God*, which he was sent to speak, and enabled to speak; *for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him*. The prophets were as messengers that brought letters from heaven; but Christ came under the character of an *ambassador*, and treats with us as such; for,

1. He spoke the *words of God*, and nothing he said savoured of human infirmity; both substance and language were divine. He proved himself

sent of God (^{<481D>}John 3:2), and therefore his words are to be received as the words of God. By this rule we may try the spirits: those that speak *as the oracles of God*, and prophesy *according to the proportion of faith*, are to be received as *sent of God*.

2. He spoke as no other prophet did; for *God giveth not the Spirit by measure to him*. None can speak the *words of God* without the *Spirit of God*, ^{<482D>}1 Corinthians 2:10, 11. The Old-Testament prophets had the Spirit, and in different degrees, ^{<483D>}2 Kings 2:9, 10. But, whereas God gave them the Spirit by *measure* (^{<484D>}1 Corinthians 12:4), he gave him to Christ *without measure*; all fulness dwelt in him, the fulness of the Godhead, an immeasurable fulness. The Spirit was not in Christ as in a vessel, but as in a fountain, as in a bottomless ocean. “The prophets that had the Spirit in a limited manner, only with respect to some particular revelation, sometimes spoke of *themselves*; but he that had the Spirit always residing in him, without stint, always spoke *the words of God*.” So Dr. Whitby.

(3.) Concerning *the power and authority he is invested with*, which gives him the pre-eminence above all others, and a more excellent name than they.

[1.] He is the *beloved Son of the Father* (v. 35): *The Father loveth the Son*. The prophets were faithful as servants, but Christ as a Son; they were employed as servants, but Christ *beloved* as a son, always *his delight*, ^{<485D>}Proverbs 8:30. The Father was well pleased in him; not only he *did* love him, but he *doth* love him; he continued his love to him even in his estate of humiliation, loved him never the less for his poverty and sufferings.

[2.] He is *Lord of all*. The Father, as an evidence of his love for him, *hath given all things into his hand*. Love is generous. The Father took such a complacency and had such a confidence in him that he constituted him the great *feoffee in trust* for mankind. Having given *him the Spirit without measure*, he gave him *all things*; for he was hereby qualified to be master and manager of all. Note, It is the honour of Christ, and the unspeakable comfort of all Christians, that the Father *hath given all things* into the hands of the Mediator. *First, All power*; so it is explained, ^{<486D>}Matthew 28:18. All the works of creation being put under his feet, all the affairs of redemption are put into his hand; he is Lord of all. Angels are his servants; devils are his captives. He has *power over all flesh*, the *heathen given him*

for his inheritance. The kingdom of providence is committed to his administration. He has power to settle the terms of the covenant of peace as the great *plenipotentiary*, to govern his church as the great *lawgiver*, to dispense divine favours as the great *almoner*, and to call all to account as the great *Judge*. Both the golden sceptre and the iron rod are given into his hand. *Secondly*, All *grace* is given into his hand as the channel of conveyance; *all things*, all those good things which God intended to give to the children of men; *eternal life*, and all its preliminaries. We are unworthy that the Father should give those things *into our hands*, for we have made ourselves the *children of his wrath*; he hath therefore appointed the *Son of his love* to be trustee for us, and the things he intended for us he gives *into his hands*, who is worthy, and has merited both honours for himself and favours for us. They are given *into his hands*, by him to be given into ours. This is a great encouragement to faith, that the riches of the new covenant are deposited in so sure, so kind, so good a hand, the hand of him that purchased them for us, and us for himself, who is able to keep all that which both God and believers have agreed to *commit to him*.

[3.] He is the object of that faith which is made the great condition of eternal happiness, and herein he has the pre-eminence above all others: *He that believeth on the Son, hath life*, v. 36. We have here the application of what he had said concerning Christ and his doctrine; and it is the *conclusion of the whole matter*. If God has put this honour upon the Son, we must by faith give honour to him. As God offers and conveys good things to us by the *testimony* of Jesus Christ, whose word is the vehicle of divine favours, so we receive and partake of those favours by *believing* the testimony, and entertaining that word as *true* and *good*; this way of *receiving* fitly answers that way of *giving*. We have here the sum of that gospel which is to be preached to every creature, ⁴¹⁶⁶Mark 16:16. Here is,

First, The blessed state of all true Christians: *He that believes on the Son hath everlasting life*. Note,

1. It is the character of every true Christian that he believes on *the Son of God*; not only *believes him*, that what he saith is true, but believes *on him*, consents to him, and confides in him. The benefit of true Christianity is no less than *everlasting life*; this is what Christ came to purchase for us and confer upon us; it can be no less than the happiness of an immortal soul *in* an immortal God.

2. True believers, even now, *have* everlasting life; not only they shall have it hereafter, but they have it now. For,

(1.) They *have* very good security for it. The deed by which it passeth is sealed and delivered to them, and so they *have* it; it is put into the hands of their guardian for them, and so they have it, though the use be not yet transferred into possession. They have the Son of God, and in him *they have life*; and the Spirit of God, the earnest of this life.

(2.) They have the comfortable *foretastes* of it, in present communion with God and the tokens of his love. Grace is glory begun.

Secondly, The wretched and miserable condition of unbelievers: *He that believeth not the Son* is undone, *ho apeithon*. The word includes both *incredulity* and *disobedience*. An unbeliever is one that gives not credit to the doctrine of Christ, nor is in subjection to the government of Christ. Now those that will neither be *taught* nor *ruled* by Christ,

1. They *cannot be happy* in this world, nor that to come: *He shall not see life*, that life which Christ came to bestow. He shall not enjoy it, he shall not have any comfortable *prospect* of it, shall never come within ken of it, except to aggravate his loss of it.

2. They *cannot but be miserable*: *The wrath of God abides upon* an unbeliever. He is not only under the *wrath of God*, which is as surely *the soul's death* as his favour is *its life*, but it *abides upon him*. All the wrath he has made himself liable to by the violation of the law, if not removed by the grace of the gospel, is bound upon him. God's wrath for his daily actual transgressions lights and lies upon him. Old scores lie undischarged, and new ones are added: something is done every day to fill the measure, and nothing to empty it. Thus the wrath of God *abides*, for it is *treasured up against the day of wrath*.