

It's important to remember that verses 1-21 are closely and intimately related—in verses 1-10 our Savior has taught Nicodemus of his need for a new birth—a second and spiritual birth—the sovereign work of God's Spirit—in verses 11-17 our Savior teaches Nicodemus higher or heavenly doctrine—and verses 18-21 our Savior describes the tragic results of rejecting this heavenly teaching—thus the entire passage is a single discourse...

Thus—having told Nicodemus of his need for a new birth (what our Savior refers to as 'earthly things')—He now tells Nicodemus of His person and work (or what He calls 'heavenly things')—He was more than a mere teacher sent from God—He is the Son of Man—come from heaven—to die on a cross—for the healing of a sick world...

I. Unbelief Rebuked—vv11-13

II. Unbelief Remedied—vv14-15

I. Unbelief Rebuked—vv11-13

1. Now—it's important to remember—that verses 11-15 are in response to Nicodemus' final question in verse 9...
2. V9—"Nicodemus answered and said to Him, How can these things be?"—that is—How can this great change occur...
3. Obviously—Nicodemus was still ignorant of what our Savior was teaching—How can a man be born again...
4. Our Savior responds to his question with a subtle rebuke—"Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things..."
5. That is—because Nicodemus had the OT Scripture and had studied it extensively—he should have understood...
6. For as I attempted to show last week—very likely our Savior had Ezek.36:25-26 in mind where both water and the Spirit are mentioned in relation to a new birth...
7. It's as if He said—Nicodemus who have no excuse for your ignorance—for I'm teaching old truth and nothing new...
8. But then in v11-13 our Savior provides three reasons why His unbelief and ignorance is without any excuse...
9. That is—He rebukes his unbelief by underscoring the certainty, simplicity, and accessibility of His teaching or witness...
10. [1] The CERTAINTY of His teaching, v11—"Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness..."
11. It seems rather obvious—that our Savior is here contrasting Himself with Nicodemus—"Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things..."
12. In other words—you have a very privileged position within Israel and don't even know the basics of true religion...
13. Thus—in contrast to the ignorance of Nicodemus our Savior says—"Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know..."
14. Now—within v11 our Savior speaks with plural pronouns—"WE speak what WE know and testify what WE have seen, and you do not receive OUR witness..."
15. The question then becomes—who is He referring to—He's obviously referring to Himself but who else is meant?...
16. Well the options are basically four—[a] the OT prophets, [b] John the Baptist, [c] the apostles, or [d] the Trinity...
17. Now—if it refers to men (prophets, John the Baptist, or the apostles)—it applies to them in a qualified sense...
18. I suggest to you—that our Savior is likely here speaking on behalf of the entire Trinity—"We speak what WE know..."

19. Thus, what our Savior is here affirming is this—His testimony is sure because He has heard it discussed from eternity past...
20. That is—our Savior's referring to what's commonly called the eternal decree—the eternal plan and counsel of God...
21. Christ has teaching—what we might call—"first hand information"—this was no mere "hearsay" or "rumours"...
22. Our Savior was telling Nicodemus things He personally heard and saw from the Father—from eternity past...
23. Thus—by "see" and "hear" our Savior refers to His know knowledge of the things He came to bear witness to...
24. What are these things—well the things He's already said—and the things He will say in the following verses...
25. But—in the most broad sense—He's referring to everything He says throughout the totality of His earthly ministry...
26. In other words—our Savior is affirming that what He sees is trustworthy because—He's received it from a reliable source...
27. Jn.3:31-32—"He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony..."
28. Jn.8:38—"I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father (Satan)..."
29. Thus—our Savior rebukes Nicodemus unbelief because—His teaching was most reliable, certain, and trustworthy...
30. For example—think of a police officer at the scene of a accident—he's going to trust those people who witnessed the accident...
31. They were eye-witnesses—their knowledge of what happened is more reliable than those who never saw it...
32. So too—Christ SAW and HEARD everything that was going to happen—He was an eye-witness of what He said...
33. [2] The SIMPLICITY of His teaching, v12—"If I have told you earthy things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things..."
34. [a] Earthly things, v12—"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe"—this refers to the preceding verses...
35. I think it's best to understand "earthly things" as Jesus' description of the new birth—which is earthly in a few ways...
36. Primarily—I think it simply refers to the foundational nature of the new birth—it's earthly in the sense that it's basic...
37. Furthermore—it's earthly in that our Savior used simply analogies to illustrate the nature and need for a new birth...
38. F.F. Bruce—"It may seem strange to classify the new birth as an earthly subject, since it is in its very nature a birth from above; but it is earthly in the sense that it takes place on earth and can be illustrated from earthly analogies..."
39. [b] Heavenly things, v12—"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things..."
40. That is—if Nicodemus was unable and unwilling to receive simpler things—how could he receive loftier things...
41. In other words—He's saying this—Nicodemus, if you are unable to understand the beginning things—how can you understand the deeper and more profound things...
42. Thus—by "heavenly things" is meant that teaching that goes beyond the new birth as found in the following verses...
43. The teaching that includes His eternal divinity, the eternal decree, His incarnation, and His substitutionary death...
44. Perhaps I can put it like this—because Nicodemus failed to believe the truth about his heart—he would never understand the truth about the gospel...

45. Thus—here's my point—Nicodemus was without excuse because Christ taught him earthly or basic things...
46. Because he was unwilling to believe the first things—how could he believe the more lofty and elevated things...
47. [3] The ACCESSIBILITY of His teaching, v13—"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven..."
48. Now—let me summarize this verse by saying—fundamentally, our Savior is speaking about the accessibility of the truth...
49. Nobody had to go up to heaven to get it—but the Son of Man, who is from heaven, He Himself brought it down...
50. [a] No one has ascended to heaven—this simply means—no mere man has every gone to heaven to receive these things...
51. Deut.30:11-14—"For this commandment which I command you today *is not too* mysterious for you, nor *is* it far off. It *is* not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor *is* it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word *is* very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it..."
52. The point being—God has brought His word near us—and does expect us to go up into heaven to receive it...
53. Now—you may know that Paul quotes this passage in Romans 10—and applies to the glories of the gospel...
54. [b] But He who came down from heaven—that is—He came down from heaven to communicate these heavenly things...
55. Jn.1:18—"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him..."
56. [c] The Son of Man who is in heaven—there's a textual variant—so that some of your translations have omitted this last phrase...
57. It simply means this—Christ, because He is God, in some sense remained in heaven even while on the earth...
58. Now—our Savior refers to Himself as "the Son of Man"—which goes behind merely referring to His incarnation...
59. It does that—Christ is the Son of God because He is God—and—He is the Son of Man—because He is Man...
60. But—the primary reason why Jesus uses this title so often—is because it was a Messianic title found the OT...
61. Dan.7:13—"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, *One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him..."
62. Obs.1—Unbelief is criminal—that is—Nicodemus' ignorance and unbelief—was willful and thus criminal...
63. V11—"You do not receive our witness...If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things..."
64. In other words—our Savior is putting the blame for his unbelief squarely upon his own shoulders—it was willful...
65. Now—here we have to wed two concepts that are clearly taught us within this single exchange with Nicodemus...
66. On one hand—our Savior tells Nicodemus that—Unless he's born of the Spirit—he will never see the kingdom...
67. That is—unless he's born again he will never believe—but—his unbelief is no one's fault but his very own...
68. Oh my friends—to disbelieve the truth of the gospel is a very serious offense for which you will be judged...
69. Jn.3:18—"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God..."
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71. Obs.2—Unbelief is irrational—that is—illogical, unreasonable, foolish, ridiculous, crazy, absurd, and senseless...
72. The primary reason why I say this is because—the testimony of the gospel is based upon the character of Christ...
73. And the message of God has been brought down to heaven and has been put in our ears by the word of the gospel...
74. The message of the gospel is not—Go and make yourself better—but—as we shall see—it's believe in Christ...
75. The message is simply this—believe that Christ is the eternal Son of God come to earth—to die for our sins [Jn.8:23-26]...

II. Unbelief Remedied—vv14-15

1. Having mentioned the fact of His incarnation in v13—our Savior now provides the primary reason why He came...
2. In other words—our Savior now directly answers Nicodemus' question in v9—"How can these things be..."
3. Now—before we come to examine these amazing words—I want to first point out how gracious our Savior is...
4. Although Nicodemus has failed to understand and believe what our Savior is saying—He graciously forebears with him...
5. And—in these verses before us—provides Nicodemus with the sole remedy for all his ignorance and unbelief...
6. In short what our Savior is saying is this—Nicodemus your unbelief is the result of your fleshly and evil heart...
7. You are sick with a spiritual disease called sin—your predicament is similar to that of the Hebrews in the OT...
8. And yet—just as God was gracious in providing the remedy—so He has provided in Me the remedy for your sickness...
9. To be more specific—Nicodemus—you are sick with the sin of unbelief—I am now going to show you the remedy...
10. [1] The remedy TYPIFIED, v14—"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness"—that is—this event typified Christ and salvation...
11. Now—as you turn back to Numbers 21—let me again point out—Christ's gracious dealings with Nicodemus...
12. He again draws from the OT in order to instruct Nicodemus of gospel truth—just as He alluded to Ezek.36 with regards to being born of water and the Spirit...
13. This was in a sense a further rebuke, as Nicodemus was a teacher of the OT—but it was also a gracious help...
14. Num.21:7-9—"Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived..."
15. [a] Sin, v7—"Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you..."
16. The people grew discontent with God's gracious provision of manna—and began to complain against God and Moses...
17. [b] Salvation, v8—"Then the LORD said to Moses, Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live..."
18. Moses was commanded to construct a serpent from bronze, set it upon a pole, and lift it up in front of the people...

19. Those who looked at it were healed and lived—not that there was any healing powers within the brazen serpent...
20. They were healed by faith in God's word and provision—they merely had to believe God and trust His provision...
21. [2] The remedy FULFILLED, v14—"even so must the Son of Man be lifted up"—"even so" indicates a similarity between the type and antitype...
22. Just as Moses lifted up the brazen serpent on a pole—"even so"—Christ must be lifted up on an old rugged cross...
23. Now—I want to briefly point out an important little word—"must"—"even so MUST the Son of Man be lifted up..."
24. In other words—it was an absolute necessity for Christ to be crucified—if sinners would be saved from sin...
25. Now—I suggest that the necessity of the atonement was also illustrated in the brazen serpent in Numbers 21...
26. Have you ever wondered why God had Moses raise up a serpent on the pole as the symbol of God's salvation...
27. Well—think about it—What was the source of their sickness—serpents—it was the poison from the serpents...
28. Thus—God raised up a serpent to make the connection between their sickness and God's gracious solution...
29. How does this relate to Christ and our sin—like this—sin which made us sick—is being dealt with on the cross...
30. J.C. Ryle—"The thing that Israel saw on the pole, and from which they got health, was an image of the very serpent that bit them. The object that Christians should see on the cross, is a Divine Person, made sin and a curse for them, and allowing that very sin that has poisoned the world to be imputed to Him, and laid upon His head..."
31. In other words—it shadowed the fact that Christ would heal us—because sin would be dealt with by His death...
32. He was made sin for us—now just like the serpent lifted up had no poison in it—Christ had no sin in Himself...
33. But—He was treated as if He committed our sins—the punishment for sin was satisfied in Him on the cross...
34. Oh brethren—here we are brought into the very heart of the gospel message—Christ bearing our sins on the cross...
35. This must be the primary focus of the sinner in coming to Christ—he must look to Christ as his SIN – BEARER...
36. J.C. Ryle—"The thing which we should specially see in Christ crucified, is our sin laid upon Him, and Him counted as a sinner, and treated as a sinner, and punished as a sinner, for our redemption..."
37. Notice how our Savior again uses the phrase—"the Son of Man"—even so must the Son of Man be lifted up..."
38. Christ—the Son of Man—who bore our nature also bore our sins—"He who knew no sin became sin for us..."
39. [3] The remedy APPLIED, v15—"that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"—Christ's death must be applied to the soul by faith...
40. Now—this of course is very important—the fact of the atonement MUST be appropriated to oneself by faith...
41. Notice—Christ must be lifted up on the cross—He must die—"that whoever believes in Him should not perish..."
42. Why will they NOT perish—but because Christ perished for them—He bore their sins and thus took their shame...
43. Now—it must be remembered—that with regards to the type—many Israelites failed to look to the serpent and live...
44. That is—while the remedy was provided for the nation—it only healed those who believed—who applied it by faith...

45. So too—while Christ has been provided as the Savior of the world—only those who look to Him will be saved...
46. It is this way—that Christ is referred to as "the Savior of the world"—He is the world's only official Savior...
47. 1Tim.4:10—"We trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men (officially), especially of those who believe (actually)..."
48. Let me illustrate—think of a little Haitian village where every person has been infected with a deadly disease...
49. Let's say—a doctor is sent to the village with a remedy for the disease—that will cure everyone who takes it...
50. So too—Christ has come into this sick world—He has been lifted up—so that all who look to Him will be healed...
51. [a] Sinners must know their sickness—oh friends—no one will ever look to Christ until they know their need...
52. Mk.2:17—"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance..."
53. [b] Sinners must know their only remedy—that is—they must be told the good news—about Christ's cross work...
54. He must be lifted up before them in the gospel—thus Paul summarized the gospel he preached as—Christ crucified...
55. [c] Sinners must only look to Christ to live—you don't have to do anything—know your sin and look to Christ...
56. Think again of the sick Israelites—they were not told to look to their sickness, local doctors, or even to Moses...
57. Furthermore—notice that "everyone" who looked was saved—regardless how far the poison had progressed...
58. Notice again—nothing is said about the clarity of vision—perhaps someone was at a distance and could barely see...
59. Regardless if someone saw the brazen serpent up close or from a distance—with clarity or with difficulty—they were saved...
60. My friends—no one is saved by their looking—it is not your faith that saves—it is the object of faith that saves...