

Christ Above All (John 3:22–4:3)

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Introduction

John continues with his discussion of believing and salvation. As we have noted, not all “believers” are saved; believing unto salvation requires the new birth or regeneration. This truth was set forth in the Prologue (John 1:11–13).

Those who received Him did so because they were born of God through His Holy Spirit. These were granted the right to be called “*sons* (or children) *of God*.” This privilege puts them in the category of those who inhabit the spiritual realm—the *sons of God*, because of God’s direct creative process. The only humans in the Old Testament to bear that designation were Adam and Eve, being created directly by God.

No wonder John exclaimed, “*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are*” (1 John 3:1). The term translated *children* is used of *natural generation*. This is phenomenal—true believers are *children of God*. He is literally their Father through regeneration! Believers are born of God. Think about that! When the Jews argued with Jesus that God was their Father (John 8:41), Jesus responded that if God were their Father, they would love Him, the Son (v. 42). Here is a good test: do you *love* Jesus? Do you love Him enough to fully trust Him, leaving all to follow Him exclusively? (John 12:25, 26).

For those who would argue for the need of free choice, the passage also contains an echo of the Prologue concerning darkness and light. This explains why the new birth is essential to salvation. All of Adam’s race exists in spiritual darkness because of sin. Although they have free choice, that choice always leads them to remain in the darkness *because their deeds are evil* (v. 19). They refuse to come to the light; indeed, they hate the light because it reveals the true nature of their deeds (v. 20).

There is a strong contrast with those who live in the light, described as *walking in the truth*. Their purpose is entirely different, for they want all to see that what they do is God’s work in them. They choose to glorify God by obedience. Verse 21 may be understood as expressing the content of what is seen in the light, or it may be understood as the reason why anyone comes to the light. The former is the best understanding within the context. This section encourages faith in Christ.

I. The Baptist’s Testimony

1. The circumstances of John the Baptist’s testimony (vv. 23–25)

Jesus and His disciples were ministering in the same region as John the Baptist. It is assumed that Jesus was still in Judea following the Passover (2:13). At this time, a discussion with an unidentified Jew occurred over purification. John the Baptist demanded repentance before baptism; the Jewish rites of purification did not. Ritual washings prescribed in the OT were required of those who came in contact with what was deemed *unclean* (Leviticus 14:8, 9). We are not given the substance of the deliberation, but it might be assumed that the Jew pointed out that Jesus was being more successful in reaching people than the Baptist. This provoked some jealousy on the part of John’s disciples (v. 26).

2. The humble response of a true servant of God

- a. The following principal of truth governed the Baptist and his place in God’s service: “*A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven*” (v. 27). People can only receive, not manufacture, the truth.
- b. The example that the Baptist lived before his disciples pointed to the reality of his service to God: “*You yourselves bear me witness*” (v. 28).

- c. The contentment and joy that John the Baptist experienced in his obedience to God's will was in being the friend of the bridegroom (v. 29). The friend of the bridegroom corresponds to the modern "best man" in a wedding.

An amazing amount of wedding imagery in the New Testament points to Christ and His bride, the church. John the Baptist represents the last of the old covenant prophets (Luke 16:16).

- d. There was no reason for jealousy. The Christ that John was sent to prepare for was now come, and "*He must increase, but [John] must decrease*" (v. 30). John the Baptist repeated here the superiority of Jesus that he had previously advanced (1:26, 27).

II. John's Commentary

1. Christ's origin demands His being viewed as superior. He is witness to what no human has ever imagined. Humans are limited to what is earthly (v. 32). No one receives His testimony for two reasons: (1) he has no experience with the heavenly realm, and (2) he is blind to the spiritual because of his sin.
2. Christ's testimony, although true, was refused by those who chose to walk in darkness (1:10, 11).
3. However, Christ's testimony was received by some whose eyes were opened by regeneration. These received the witness and set their seal to God's truth about the Christ. This truth is seen in two things:
 - a. The Christ whom God has sent utters God's words, truth, because God gave the Spirit to Him without measure.
 - b. The full confidence that the Father had in His Son is shown in the Father's love for the Son in His giving all things with respect to salvation and His kingdom into His hand (5:22, 27; 12:49; 17:2, 24).
4. John closes the chapter by summarizing its teaching (v. 36). The crucial test is *faith*, which is here contrasted with *rejection*. *God's wrath* is not impersonal but an active principle of God's holiness.

Conclusion

The gospel is often presented as if the hearers were in a *neutral condition*, needing to decide whether they will receive Christ and life and thus avoid some future judgment. In fact, sinners are treated as if they are victims of something over which God Himself has no control, pleading with them to let Him rescue them if they will let Him.

John rather informs sinners that they are now under God's wrath. It is God whom sinners must fear because of their sin and evil. Jesus was sent to rescue some of this condemned race from the darkness of sin and judgment and transfer them into the glorious light of His truth and eternal life. The evidence of their deliverance is their believing in the Son, whom they will now serve in true obedience.