

Having finished our Savior's dialogue with Nicodemus—John next records a discussion between John the Baptist and his disciples—though this discussion runs through the end of the chapter—I want to divide it into two parts (vv22-30 and vv31-36)—we will consider the first part (vv22-30) this morning, and the second part (vv31-36) next week...

Now—before we come to our text—let me remind you of John's overall purpose and goal in writing this book—Jn.20:31—"these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name..."

- I. A Dispute—vv22-25
- II. A Complaint—v26
- III. A Response—vv27-30

I. A Dispute—vv22-25

1. John tells us that Jesus' and His disciples and John the Baptist and his disciples were baptizing in the same region...
2. With all of this water baptism taking place—it seemed inevitable that the subject of purification would arise...
3. The Jews were interested in purification—as the OC included numerous water purifications for various reasons...
4. Throughout the OT—water was sprinkled upon people—to symbolize a moral and spiritual cleansing or purification...
5. Now—strictly speaking—water baptism is a NC ordinance and in this sense—it has no OT (OC) counterpart...
6. But—that there exists certain similarities between NC water baptism and OC water purifications—is admitted...
7. They both were symbolic and intended to illustrate a moral and spiritual cleansing by the washing of God's word...
8. Now—some commentators make much of this similarity—for the purpose of equating the one with the other...
9. And oftentimes, depending on who the commentator is—this comparison is made to prove baptism by sprinkling...
10. For it is admitted—that the water purifications within the OC, were performed by sprinkling water on the person...
11. But—it must be noticed—that this passage in no way connects—OC water purification and NC water baptism...
12. But—this simply ignores the basic meaning of the word "Baptize"—*baptidzo*—literally means—to immerse or submerge...
13. Furthermore—it seems evident from v23—that John was baptizing in Aenon near Salim—"because there was much water there..."
14. In other words—John set up his baptizing ministry there—because he needed much water to baptize his converts...
15. Thus—our Confession uses John 3:23 as a proof text to for baptism by immersion—"Immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance" (29:4)...
16. A.W. Pink—"This is one of the many verses in the NT which plainly intimates the mode of baptism. If baptism were by sprinkling or by pouring, much water' would not be required. The fact that John baptized in Aenon 'because there was much water there' strongly implies that the scriptural form of baptism is immersion..."
17. Thus—there arose a dispute between the disciples of John the Baptist and the Jews about purification (v25)...

18. What exactly the dispute entailed we are not told—it seems likely the debate concerned the Jews relation to baptism...
19. The Jews would have known that John baptism was a baptism of repentance—a confession of inward guilt...
20. If we were to compare Jesus' and John's ministry and baptisms—we would find they were exact and identical...
21. The rite of water baptism—was and is—a confession that we are by nature filthy and find cleansing in Christ...
22. Thus—the Jews were likely debating whether or not they needed baptism—just as the Gentiles needed baptism...
23. It's speculation—but it seems probable that the Jews apposed baptism for them but not for the filthy Gentiles...
24. They had OC water purification—they unlike the Gentles had no need to confess their sins openly and publically...
25. Thus—whatever the specific point of contention—it's likely the Jews saw no need for themselves to be baptized...
26. What possible need would they have of baptism—given the fact that they had the externals of OC purification...

## II. A Complaint—v26

1. It seems the dispute with the Jews reminded John's disciples that Jesus' ministry was outgrowing their ministry...
2. The Jews may even have used this fact—as leverage to wine the debate about purification with John's disciples...
3. V26—"And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him..."
4. In other words—it concerned them that more people were being baptized by Jesus (His disciples) than themselves...
5. Prior to Jesus formal ministry—John the Baptist and his disciples—were no doubt—the sole talk of the town...
6. Now—it seems that at least some of John's disciples—were unclear about his primmer purpose of ministry...
7. They even admit—"he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified"—that is—Jesus Christ...
8. From the beginning of John's ministry—he had made very clear—that he was not the focus of his ministry...
9. He again and again testified that Christ, the Lamb of God, was the Messiah—He was the focus of John's ministry...
10. Thus—it appears—John's disciples had an unhealthy attachment and loyalty to him as their rabbi and leader...
11. Now—in once sense this loyal attachment is understandable—John was used mightily by God in their lives...
12. But—the tragedy is—they really were rather poor disciples of John—given the fact they failed to learn his primary lesson...
13. Thus—the disciples bring a complaint to John—a complaint about Christ's ministry exceeding that of John's...
14. John Calvin—"The expression which they use—all men come to Christ—is the language of envious persons, and proceeds from sinful ambition; for they are afraid that the crowd will immediately forsake their master..."
15. [1] The dangers of a misguided attachment—here I refer to the attachment of John's disciples to John himself...
16. There is no doubt that these disciples were assisted by John the baptist—and thus had a strong affection for him...

17. And let me simply say byway of clarification—that a loving and loyal attachment to men is not in itself wrong...
18. The resurrected Christ has given various gifts to His church—for the purpose of its edification and prosperity...
19. Thus—when people are edified and prospered by a specific minister or author—it's right that you appreciate them...
20. But—the problem is—when our attachment to them becomes misguided or unhealthy—as did John's disciples...
21. Mk.9:38—"Now John answered Him, saying, Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us. But Jesus said, Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side..."
22. 1Cor.1:12—"Now I say this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ..."
23. [a] When Chris is no longer central—John's disciples had lost sight of what the ultimate goal of ministry is...
24. There is always the subtle danger that—our personal ministry becomes more important than the person of Christ..
25. [b] When other ministries are despised—let me clarify—we live in a day when many ministries should be despised...
26. There are several men and women, who are simply leading multitudes of people into deception and destruction...
27. J.C. Ryle—"There is a generation which can see no good doing except in the ranks of its own congregations; and which seems ready to shut men out of heaven, if they will not enter therein under its banner..."

### III. A Response—vv27-30

#### A. An acknowledged sovereignty—v27

1. John provides his disciples with a fourfold response—each part of his answer reflects a thoughtful humility...
2. V27—"John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven'..."
3. Now—it seems likely, John refers to the ministry of Christ as well as his own ministry—John's large following is shrinking and Christ's following is growing...
4. Everything we have—we have from heaven (God)—God blessed John's ministry and now He's blessing Christ's ministry...
5. In other words—John understood that every good gift comes from above—and is ultimately given by grace...
6. Thus—if people were leaving him and following Christ—this is obviously the work and sovereign choice of God...
7. [1] A remedy for ministerial jealousy—I once confessed to you that the greatest sin I ever committed—was ministerial jealousy...
8. That is—being jealous for the seemingly blessed and thriving ministry of other ministers in other churches...
9. John's following was dwindling—many of his disciples had left—the large crowds have largely disappeared...
10. And how did he respond—by reminding himself—that a man can only receive what was given him from God...
11. Thus—if our church shrinks and other churches grow—we must remember that God determines these things...
12. I have a pastor friend—who often calls to ask how things are going—and it's very evident he's truly concerned...

13. And you know—the church he pastors is rather small—it really hasn't grown much in the past twenty years...
14. But—every time I tell him about something good that's happened—he manifests so much joy on our behalf...
15. Why?—because he understands this principle—"A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven..."
16. [2] A remedy for personal jealousy—that is—the principle given in v27—has broad and far reaching implications...
17. It's very easy to look upon others with jealousy and envy—to grow discontent with what we presently have...
18. We wish we had THAT husband or THAT wife—or THOSE children—or THAT house—or THOSE looks...
19. Thus—we must remember—who gave those things to that person—and—who hasn't given them to you—GOD...
20. [3] A remedy against ministerial and personal pride—here I intend to apply this truth to those who have much...
21. A.W. Pink—"We are fully satisfied that the contents of this 27th verse contains the key to much that is puzzling. There are some brethren, beloved of the Lord, who do not see the truth of believers' baptism; there are others who stumble over the subject of predestination. What may be as clear as sunlight to us, is dark to them. But let us not be puffed up by our superior knowledge. Let us remember the admonition of the apostle Paul, 'For who makes thee to differ from another? and what has thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why doest thou boast, as it thou hadst not received it'..."
22. Now—before I leaven this point—let me make a necessary clarification—concerning the blessed principle...
23. That fact that a man can receive nothing but that which is given from heaven—in no way elevates our responsibility...

B. A confessed identity—v28

1. V28—"You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but, I have been sent before Him..."
2. Here John recalls what he testified at the beginning of his ministry—he was not the Christ, but His forerunner...
3. Jn.1:23—"He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the LORD, as the prophet Isaiah said..."
4. This of course is in fulfillment to Isaiah 40:3—where the LORD promised to send a forerunner before the Messiah...
5. The imagery is that of ancient kings who would send heralds before them—to prepare the people for them...
6. The herald was the king's ambassador—commissioned with his authority and pointed the people to the king...
7. The ambassador was not the king—his task was merely to go before the king—preparing a path for the king...
8. That is—he was to ensure that no obstacle hindered the king's entrance into the many small towns and villages...
9. Thus—John the Baptist went before Christ—to prepare the people, not for any king, but for the King of kings...
10. And—he was not to remove any physical obstacle—but told the people to make way for Christ into their hearts...
11. This was fundamentally what the phrase—"Make straight the way of the LORD" means—remove all obstacles between Christ and your heart...
12. Thus—what obstacles natively exist between a sinner's heart and King Jesus?—[1] there is his own disinterest...

13. That is—he is interested in everything else but his soul—he's mind and heart are preoccupied with this world...
14. [2] There is his own self-righteousness—that is—he's unwilling to abandon his own supposed merit and worth...
15. [3] There is his own unbelief—that is—he simply refuses to believe what God says about Christ in His word...

C. An analogy—v29

1. V29—"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled..."
2. Here—John uses common imagery of the marriage ceremony—that every first century Jew would have known...
3. In every ceremony—there would have been three key people—the bride, the bridegroom, and the friend of the bridegroom...
4. [1] The bride—here the BRIDE refers to the people of God, the church, the elect—those believing on Christ...
5. [2] The bridegroom—this of course refers to Christ Himself—"He who has the bride is the BRIDEGROOM..."
6. The bride belongs to Him and no one else—"He has the bride"—that is—she is his byway of gift and promise...
7. [3] The bridegroom's friend—"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the FRIEND of the bridegroom..."
8. The friend of the bridegroom was similar to what we call—the best man—that is—the close friend of the bridegroom...
9. But—there were rather important differences between the FRIEND of the bridegroom and our BEST MAN...
10. In Jewish weddings the FRIEND of the bridegroom was responsible to bring the bride and groom together...
11. Thus—the bridegroom's friend "rejoices because of the bridegroom's voice"—that is—his voice to his bride...
12. The friend of the bridegroom rejoices when the bridegroom and bride are brought together—this was his task...
13. Thus—far from being sad because of Christ's popularity—John rejoiced—this was the purpose for which he came...
14. "Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled"—bringing the bridegroom and bride together was his fundamental goal...

D. A conclusion—v30

1. V30—"He must increase, but I must decrease"—this is really a summary that includes all that went before...
2. Verse 30 really summarizes John's philosophy of ministry—IT'S ALL ABOUT CHRIST and not about me...
3. [1] Dispensationally—John the Baptist was a very unique individual—he in some sense bridged the two covenants...
4. Jn.1:29—"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"—the fulfillment of the Old Covenant...
5. [2] Ministerially—that is—the entire goal of his ministry—was to point poor, guilty, and needy sinners to Christ...
6. [3] Personally—that is—John understood, as a saved sinner, that he needed Christ just as much as his hearers...
7. This is really the greatest lesson about John the Baptist—he understood it wasn't about John but it's about Jesus...

8. In fact—it's very possible that verses 31-36 are not the words of John the Baptist but the words of John the apostle...
9. And if that's true—then v30 are actually the final words of John the Baptist as recorded within this fourth gospel...
10. For, as John the apostle tells us in v24—"For John had not yet been thrown into prison"—because he would right after this...
11. In fact—he would be thrown into prison and beheaded because of his faithfulness to the truth and his Master...