

For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little.

Isaiah 28:10

First Love Ministries, Inc.

PRAYER STUDY #191

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

PART 5: CHAPTER 3

1. Nicodemus: You must be born again.
2. John the Baptist: The friend of the bridegroom
3. John's Declaration: Jesus is the Son whom God has given the Spirit without measure.

PART ONE

1. There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
2. The same came to Jesus by night and said unto him, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."
3. Jesus answered and said unto him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."
4. Nicodemus saith unto Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?"
5. Jesus answered, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
7. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.
8. The wind bloweth where it willeth, and thou hearest the sound of it, but canst not tell from where it cometh and where it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."
9. Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, "How can these things be?"
10. Jesus answered and said unto him, "Art thou a teacher of Israel and knoweth not these things?
11. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that *which* we do know and testify *to* that *which* have seen; and ye receive not our witness.
12. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?
13. And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven.
14. And, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up,

15. That whoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.
16. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
17. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.
18. He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but He that believeth not is condemned already, because He hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
19. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.
20. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.
21. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

1-2. These first two verses tell us so much about Nicodemus. First, we learn that he is a Pharisee. We have been taught to hate the term *Pharisee*, because of their legalism, which eventually crucified the Lord. However, *Pharisee* means *the separated ones*. These believers were what we all strive to be: extremely committed and even fanatical in service to God. Furthermore, unlike the Sadducces, the Pharisees believed in miracles, in the inspiration of the Old Testament, in the Resurrection, and in the afterlife. They were the most respected religious leaders in Israel, and they longed to see the Messiah come. Pharisees in the Bible included Gamaliel, the great teacher who taught Paul, and Paul before he was converted. Josephus, the great Jewish historian who wrote the *Antiquities of the Jews* was also a Pharisee. What do you think happened to the Pharisees to make them become mean-spirited, close-minded, legalistic, and blind, totally missing the One they said they wanted so much to see?

According to Rick Renner in *Sparkling Gems from the Greek*, ruler in this first verse is from *archon*, “which means *the chief one, ruler, or prince*. This word was used to *denote the rulers of local synagogues and members of the Sanhedrin* who were the *highest authorities* in the land.” All of this indicates that Nicodemus was prominent, wealthy, and influential. All of this could be why Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. He did not want the people in Jerusalem to see him talking with Jesus, who was considered a rebel out from under the control of the Sanhedrin. Others believe it was just

a more convenient time for Jesus, who had been out all day in His itinerate ministry, and Nicodemus, who had been teaching all day.

Nicodemus' use of the term "Rabbi", which means *great*, was used in that culture only for the greatest theologians in Israel. Thus, Nicodemus' use of the word indicates that he had heard Jesus preach and teach and seen his miracles and judged for himself that these miracles were legitimate and from God.

All of this is interesting, because, up to this point, John has not recorded any of Jesus' miracles specifically except the miracle of changing the water into wine, although he did note that Jesus had done miracles-he just did not tell us what they were- while they were in Jerusalem causing many, apparently including Nicodemus, to believe.

3-18. This might well be the most important passage of scripture in the whole Bible. It certainly contains some of the most well-known parts of the scripture. Truly unless a person be born again, he cannot understand the kingdom of God, which most likely was why Nicodemus came to Jesus in the first place, i.e. to find out about the kingdom of God.

Jesus answers that we must be born of water and of the Spirit. There are many views of what this means. I believe that Jesus is telling us that we must be converted by the Word of God, which is often symbolized by water in the scriptures; used by the Spirit of God, which is the Holy Spirit; and given usually through a man of God.

J. Vernon McGee says of verse 6 in John 3, "*God does not intend to change the flesh, meaning this old nature which you and I have. The fact of the manner is that it can't be changed. The Word of God has much to say about this. The old nature is at war with God. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Romans 8:7-8). *God has not program for our old nature to retrieve it, or improve it, or develop it, or save it. That old nature is to go down into the grave with us. And, if the Lord comes before we go down into the grave, we are to be changed in the twinkling of an eye, which means we will get rid of that old nature. It can never be made obedient to God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."* *That is an axiom, God does not intend to save the flesh at all. This old nature must be replaced by the new nature. The spiritual birth is necessary so that you and I may be given a new nature...."*

There is no verse more known than John 3:16. God so loved. That is why He did and does and will do all things. There are four kinds of love in the Greek language which the New Testament was written in: *eros*, which is a

sensual love that seeks to fulfill its own desires through sexual love, is not once used in the New Testament, not even in the context of sex in marriage; *phileo* is a word that refers to close friendship; *stergo* is the love that is between parents and children or love that exists between family members or even the love of a dog for its master. It is rarely used in scripture but is used in 2nd Timothy where Paul tells us that one of the principle signs of the Last Days will be the lack of this kind of love in families. Finally, the final term for love in Greek is *agape*. This is what Rick Renner says about this word, "This is what I call high-level love, for there is no higher, finer, or more excellent love than *agape* love. In fact, the word *agape* is filled with deep emotion and meaning that it is one of the most difficult words to translate in the New Testament. Trying to explain the word has baffled translators for centuries; nevertheless, I will now add my attempt to clarify the meaning of this powerful word. *Agape* occurs when an individual sees, recognizes, understands, or appreciates the value of an object or a person, causing the viewer to behold this object or person in great esteem, awe, admiration, wonder, and sincere appreciation. Such great respect is awakened in the heart of the observer for the object or person he is beholding that he is compelled to love it. In fact, his love for that person or object is so strong that it is irresistible. In the phrase, 'For God so loved the world,' the word 'love' is *agape*. This means when God looked upon the human race, He stood in awe of mankind, even though man was lost in sin. God admired man; He wondered at man; He held mankind in the highest appreciation. Even though mankind was held captive by Satan at that moment, God looked upon the world and saw His own image in man. The human race was so precious to God and He loved man so deeply that His heart was stirred to reach out and do something to save him. In other words, God's love drove Him to action.

You see, *agape* is a love that loves so profoundly that it knows no limits or boundaries in how far, wide, high, and deep it will go to show that love to its recipient. If necessary, *agape* love will even sacrifice itself for the sake of that object or person it so deeply cherishes. *Agape* is the highest form of love—a self-sacrificial type love that moves the lover to action...*Agape* is a love that has no strings attached. It isn't looking for what it can get, but for what it can give. Its awe of the one who is loved is so deep that it is compelled to shower love upon the object or person regardless of the response. This is the profound love God has for the human race, for He loved man when he was still lost in sin with no ability to love Him back. God simply loved mankind without any thought or expectation of receiving love in return.

When you love with such a pure love that you expect nothing in return, it is impossible for you to feel hurt or let down by the response of the recipients of your love. You don't love them for the purpose of getting something in return; you shower them with love simply because you love them.

You may ask, 'But how can I possess such love? Is it really possible for me to regularly exhibit such love in my life for other people? If you were seeking to walk in the kind of love that originates in the power of your flesh, it would be impossible, for flesh is selfish and self-focused and therefore cannot love that highly. But because the seed of God's Word has been sown into your own human spirit, the potential for this divine love is within you all the time. Now it is up to you to shove the flesh aside and release the love of God from down deep inside. If you will let the Spirit of God release it from your heart, you will discover and enjoy the fruit of the Spirit called "love." This high-level love is already inside you. Now it's time for you to free that love and allow the Holy Spirit to manifest it in your life!"

Rick Renner

19-21: Jesus ends His interview with Nicodemus contrasting light and darkness. We know that people are set free when they are willing to confess in the light the deeds of darkness.

PART TWO

22. After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them and baptized.
23. And John also was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim, because there was much water there, and they came and were baptized,
24. For John was not yet cast into prison.
25. Then there arose a question between *some* of John's disciples, and the Jews about purifying.
26. And they came unto John and said unto him, "Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all *men* come to Him."
27. John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.
28. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ but that I was sent before Him.'
29. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice; this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled.

30.He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Verse 22: John clarifies this in Chapter 4 saying that Jesus Himself did not baptize but His disciples did.

23-30: As I have studied these first three chapters of the Gospel of John, I have become an even greater fan of John the Baptist. He was such a humble and yet plain spoken man who called a spade a spade. In this passage it seems that the disciples of John were jealous of Jesus’ ministry and saw him as taking away their “church members.” But there is no jealousy in John at all. He speaks this powerful statement that EVERYONE in ministry needs to pray everyday: *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

PART THREE

31.He that cometh from above is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly and speaketh of the earth; he that cometh from heaven is above all.

32.And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth, and no man received his testimony.

33.He that hath received his testimony hath set his seal to this, that God is true.

34.For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God; for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.

35.The Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into His hand.

36.He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

31-36: Who is speaking here? Is it John the Apostle’s declaration, as C.I. Scofield says, or is it a continuation of John the Baptist’s message to his jealous disciples? I believe it is the latter but don’t know. This is the way the New Living Bible puts this passage: *He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. I am of the earth, and my understanding is limited to the things of earth, but he has come from heaven. He tells what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! Those who believe him discover that God is true. For he is sent by God. He speaks God’s words, for God’s Spirit is upon him without measure or limit. The Father loves his Son, and he has given him authority over everything. And all who believe in God’s Son have eternal life. Those who don’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life, but the wrath of God remains upon them.*