

Series: John

Title: The Answer to Disputes

Text: John 3: 22-36

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John 3: 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.

The Lord Jesus and his disciples were baptizing near John the Baptist was baptizing. Christ himself never baptized but his disciples did in his name and so Christ did (Jn 4: 1-2). That is an important principle to understand this passage. What Christ's servants do by his Spirit, by faith in his name, Christ is doing it. Those Christ sends preach Christ who sent them by Christ's grace and power. So it is Christ speaking. He told those he sent out that he that rejects you, rejects me; he that hears and receives you, hears and receives me. So it is when his servants baptize, it is Christ doing it. John declares that he is merely Christ's servant, Christ is doing the works.

John 3: 25: Then there arose a question between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.

John's disciples were true believers born of the Spirit; the Jews were disciples of the Pharisee's, natural born. The Jews were for old covenant ceremonial washings: their understanding was according to the traditions of men. They did not see Christ in the washings. They thought they purified themselves from defilement by washing themselves. So the Jews tried to put John and Christ against each other.

John 3: 26: And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all *men* come to him."

The words "world" and "all" rarely mean all without exception unless speaking of all who Christ came to save. Here is an example where it does not mean all without exception; they exaggerated saying, "*All men come to him.*" But John was not envious. He wanted the focus on Christ. That is the goal of Christ's true servants.

John 3: 27: John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

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John did not address their question and their dispute. Instead, he turned them to Christ. He took the glory away from man and gave it to God where it belongs—"A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven."

Proposition: John the Baptist turned them to Christ alone and that is the way to answer all disputes.

There is no point disputing with sinners over the gospel. The Jews could have no spiritual understanding of Christ, except it be given them from above. Nor can any sinner. So there is no point disputing with a sinner, especially a religious sinner.

It is only God who draws sinners and gives them ears to hear and a heart to believe on Christ. *A man can receive nothing except it be given him from above.* God gives life and knowledge and faith and repentance through the gospel of Christ. So this is the answer to all disputes. John tells his disciples that everything he had—every spiritual blessing, every temporal blessing, every sinner who came and heard his preaching, every sinner given spiritual life and faith in Christ—all was the gift of God freely given by God’s grace.

Therefore, John nor any child of God has room to glory or be envious of one ministry over another. When Christ’s disciples baptized, it was Christ baptizing them. When John preached it was Christ preaching through him. When sinners rejected John’s gospel, it was Christ they rejected. When they believed, it was Christ who gave them the grace to believe—*a man can receive nothing except it be given him from above.*

John 3: 28: Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

This is the way to answer disputes, turn the hearer straight to Christ away from self and everyone else. John declares that he had received nothing, including his commission to go before Christ and preach, except it was given from Christ who sent him. He gives an illustration to show what the purpose of true preaching really is.

John 3: 29: He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

God’s minister is like the best man at a wedding. In those days, the best man brought the bride to the bridegroom. The groomsman rejoiced greatly in the bridegroom’s voice when the bridegroom beheld his bride. John says, “This my joy therefore is fulfilled.”

Christ is the Bridegroom. His bride is God’s elect that make up his church. John the Baptist, as well as all Christ’s true preachers, are merely the groomsman sent to bring the bride to Christ through the preaching of the gospel.

Therefore, hearing that many were coming to Christ and confessing Christ in water-baptism, John said, “What you are telling me, does not make me envious, it fulfills my joy! That is my goal!” John wanted ALL his disciples to leave him and go to Christ. That is mission accomplished!

By this illustration, also John declares the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, the Husband of God’s elect bride. Throughout the old testament Jehovah is declared to be the Redeemer and Husband of his bride. (Is 54) Christ redeemed his bride by his blood—all his elect. He calls each one, gives us life by the Spirit of God. He robes us in his righteousness through faith in him. So when we see one local church growing more than another, it is not reason to envy but to rejoice! When Christ adds to a local church, Christ is adding to the whole church. This fulfills our joy because Christ is getting the glory!

John 3: 30: He must increase, but I *must* decrease.

There are four *musts* in John 3. One, the sinner's must: *you must be born again (John 3:7)*; two, the Substitute's must: *so must the Son of Man be lifted up (John 3:14)*; in our text is the must in the believer's heart: *He must increase, I must decrease*.

The Lord Jesus Christ grows his child in grace and knowledge of him. He increasingly becomes all and in all his people. As Christ increases, we decrease. This is true growth in grace and knowledge of Christ.

In the hearts of his people Christ must become our sole focus. Our one constraint and purpose in all we do in our lives increasingly becomes Christ and his glory. As Christ increases, we must decrease so as to see ourselves as only sinners. We cannot boast in our good works when we behold Christ is all our Righteousness and Holiness; Christ produces all fruit in his people. We must decrease in our dealing with one another and Christ must increase. As Christ increases we are more apt to point one another to Christ, trust one another to Christ, and thus glorify Christ as the only one able to make our brethren stand. John the Baptist shows us the true humility produced by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God made Christ increase in his heart and made John decrease in his own estimation of himself. We hear it in John's next word.

John 3: 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;...34: For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.

This was John's gospel. The Lord Jesus that cometh from heaven is above all. The Lord Jesus is God. He came from God, from heaven, from above. He is God above all.

Indeed, John declared the truth by the Spirit of God, as do all those sent of God, but John was of the earth, earthly, and speaketh of the earth. We are but dust. We are so attached to the earth. We only see heavenly things by the Spirit of God but we see through a glass darkly. And none of us sees our brother's heart.

But "*What [Christ] hath seen and heard, that he testifieth....For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.*" Christ is God who has seen and heard God the Father. Every word spoken by Christ bears witness that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man comes to the Father but by Christ. That is God the Father's will and purpose.

God sent Christ and Christ spoke the words of God because God gave the Spirit to him without measure. It is by Christ that the Holy Spirit is given to his people. He makes us be born of his Spirit and he testifies in our hearts the Word of God.

If we want information about a town we have never been to then we need to speak to someone who comes from that town. If we want to know God, hear the Son of God. Christ is the revelation of how God saves. Christ is the whole counsel of God.

John 3: 32...and no man receiveth his testimony.

Compared to the great number of sinners in this world, very, very few receive his testimony. In any given generation, only a remnant believes on Christ, compared to the general population. But every sinner is dead in sins. So "*no man*"—absolutely none—"*receive his testimony.*" We must be born-again of the Spirit and taught of God. Christ said, 'Ye search

the scriptures for in them ye think you have life. And they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me that ye might have life.” Among all sinners born of Adam there is none righteous, none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God. We must be born-again of the Spirit of God and taught of God.

But here is something amazing. By God’s grace and power, some *do* receive Christ’s gospel. And what do those say who believe him?

John 3: 33: He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.

Who receives Christ’s testimony? As many as God has ordained to eternal life, believe. Those born-again of the Spirit of God. All God’s elect shall be all taught of God and made to willing receive Christ’s testimony. When we believe Christ, it is because we have the witness within us. And we certify before all that God is true. But to reject Christ’s gospel is to call God a liar.

1 John 5:10: He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

By the Spirit of God we know that God is true and so we speak that we do know and testify that we have seen. Sinner believe our testimony! We certify this gospel is true.

John 3: 35: The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

The Father loveth the Son—and the Father loves those sinners God chose to save in his Son. God the Father gave all things into his hand. All God’s elect are given to Christ to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given him. All spiritual blessings are Christ’s to give to his people. If you would know God and believe God and be saved by God then come to Christ, believe on Christ.

John 3: 36: He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

The Lord Jesus is the one Savior of sinners. All who reject the Son, the wrath of God abideth on them. To reject the Lord Jesus is to reject the one sacrifice for sin that God accepted. There remains no more sacrifice for sin but a fearful looking for of the judgment of God which shall devour the adversaries. Without a perfect payment to God’s justice accomplished by Christ, there remains a debt no sinner can pay to God; the wrath of God abides for eternity.

May God make that become serious to all without faith in Christ. But hear this word of God’s grace, “*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.*” It is not faith in Christ plus anything. Believing on the Son we have everlasting life.

May God give us grace to answer all disputes and questions as the Spirit gave John the Baptist wisdom to do, by shutting sinners up to Christ. And may God give us grace to rest all in Christ’s hands!

Amen!