

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN  
3:9-21

9. Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things be? 10. Jesus answered and said to him, Are you a master of Israel, and do not know these things? 11. Verily, verily, I say to you, we speak what we know and testify what we have seen, and ye do not receive our witness. 12. If I have told you earthly things and ye do not believe, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? 13. And no man has ascended up to heaven but he who 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 believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. 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. 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 does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21. But he who does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they have been done in God.

9.--[*Nicodemus answered...How...these things be?*] This is the third and last time that Nicodemus speaks during his visit to Christ, as far as it is reported to us. His question here is a striking and instructive instance of the deep spiritual ignorance which may be found in the mind of a learned man. In four different ways our Lord had brought before him one and the same lesson. First, He had laid down the great principle that every man must be "born again." Second, He had repeated the same thing in fuller words and brought in the idea of "water," to illustrate the work of the Spirit. Third, He had shown the necessity of the new birth, from the natural corruption of man. Fourth, He had illustrated the work of the Spirit a second time by the instance of the "wind." And yet now, after all that our Lord has said, this learned Pharisee seems utterly in the dark and asks the pitiable question, "How can these things be?" We have no right to be surprised at the vast ignorance of saving religion which we see on all sides when we consider the history of Nicodemus. We should make up our minds to expect to find spiritual darkness the rule and spiritual light the exception. Few things in the long run give so much trouble to ministers, missionaries, teachers, and district-visitors, as beginning work with extravagant and unscriptural expectations.

10.--[*Jesus answered and said.*] It will be observed that our Lord does not answer the question of Nicodemus directly, but rebukes him sharply for his ignorance. Yet it ought to be carefully noted, as Melancthon remarks, that before He concludes what He now beings to say, He supplies a complete answer to His inquirer. He shows him the true root and spring of regeneration, namely, faith in Himself. He answers his groping inquiry, "How can these things be?" by showing him the first step in saving religion, viz., to believe in the Son of God. Let Nicodemus begin like a little child by simply believing on Him who was to be lifted up on the cross, and he would soon understand "how" a man could be born again, even in his old age.

[*Are you a master of Israel.*] The English version of this question hardly gives the full force of the original. It should be literally rendered, "Are you *the* master of Israel?" *i.e.*, "Are you the famous teacher and instructor of the Jews?" "Do you profess to be a light of them that sit in darkness and an instructor of others?" The expression certainly seems to indicate that Nicodemus was a man of established reputation as a teacher among the Pharisees. When the teachers were so ignorant, what must have been the state of the taught?

[*Not know these things.*] These words unquestionably imply rebuke. The things which our Lord had just mentioned, Nicodemus ought to have known and understood. He professed to be a religious teacher. He professed to know the Old Testament Scriptures. The doctrine, therefore, of the necessity of a new birth ought not to have appeared strange to him. "A clean heart, circumcision of the heart, a new heart, a heart of stone instead of a heart of flesh," were expressions and ideas which he must have read in the Prophets, and which all pointed towards the new birth. (Psalm li.10; Jer. iv.4; Ezek. xviii.31; xxxvi.26.) His ignorance consequently was deserving of blame.

The verse before us appears to me to supply a strong argument against the idea that the expression "born of water and the Spirit" means baptism. I do not see how Nicodemus could possibly have known this doctrine, as it is nowhere revealed in the Old Testament, and even its own advocates confine it to New Testament times. To blame a man for not knowing "things" which he could not possibly know would be obviously most unjust, and entirely at variance with the general tenor of our Lord's dealings.

11.--[*We speak what we know, etc.*] Whom does our Lord mean here when He says, "We?" The answers to this question are various.

(a) Some think, as Luther, Brentius, Bucer, Gualter, Aretius, Hutcheson, Musculus, Gomarus, Piscator, and Cartwright, that "We" means, "I, and John the Baptist."

(b) Some think, as Calvin, Beza, and Scott, that it means, "I, and the Old Testament Prophets."

(c) Some think, as Alcuin (according to Maldonatus), and Wesley, that it

means, "I, and all who are born of the Spirit."

(d) Some think, as Chrysostom, Cyril, Rupertus, Calovius, Glassius, Chemnitius, Lampe, Leigh, Nifanius, Cornelius á Lapide, Cocceius, Stier, and Bengel, that it means either, "I, and the Father," or "I, and the Holy Ghost," or "I, and both the Father and the Spirit."

(e) Some think, as Theophylact, Zwingle, Poole, and Doddridge, that our Lord only means Himself when He says "We," and that He uses the plural number in order to give weight and dignity to what He says, as kings do. So also He says, "Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?" (Mark, iv.30.) "We," in that text, evidently stands for "I." In St. John's First Epistle, the first person plural is used instead of the singular repeatedly in the first five verses of the first chapter.

The last of these five opinions appears to me by far the most probable and satisfactory. The first three seem to me to be entirely overthrown by John the Baptist's words in this chapter (verse 32), where he mentions it as a peculiar mark of our Lord's superiority to all other teachers that "He testifies what He has seen and heard." The fourth opinion appears to me untenable. The fear of Socinianism must not make us wrest texts in order to apply them to the Trinity. There is a fitness in our Lord's saying, during His earthly ministry after his Incarnation, "I speak and testify what I have known and seen from all eternity with my Father." But there is no apparent fitness in saying that He and the two other Persons in the Trinity "speak what they have seen."

The meaning of the sentence appears to be this: "I declare with authority and bear witness to truths which from all eternity I have known and seen, as God in union with the Father and the Holy Ghost. I do not speak (as all merely human ministers must) what I have been taught by others. I do not testify things which I have received as God's servant, as ordinary Prophets have, and which I should not have known without God's inspiration. I testify what I have seen with my Father and knew before the world began." It is like the expression, "I speak that which I have seen with my Father." (John viii.38.)

Melancthon thinks that our Lord, in this verse, contrasts the uncertain traditions and human inventions which the Pharisees taught with the sure, certain, and irrefragable truths of God which He came to preach.

Bucer remarks that the verse contains a practical lesson for all religious teachers. No man has a right to teach unless he is thoroughly persuaded of the truth of what he teaches.

[*Ye do not receive our witness.*] This sentence corresponds so exactly with John the Baptist's words at verse 32, that it confirms me in the opinion that our Lord, in this verse, only speaks of Himself. The words before us, as well as those of John the Baptist, must be taken with some qualification: "The greater part of you receive not our testimony." The

object of the verse is to rebuke the unbelief of Nicodemus and all who were like-minded with him among the Jews. The use of the plural number "Ye" makes it probable that our Lord in this verse refers not merely to what He had just been saying to Nicodemus, but to all His public teaching at Jerusalem from the time of His casting out the buyers and sellers in the temple. If we do not adopt this theory, we must suppose Him to mean, "What I have spoken and testified to you about regeneration, is what I continually say to all who come, like you, to inquire of Me; and yet neither you nor they believe what I say. You all alike stumble at this stumbling-stone, the new birth."

Calvin remarks on this expression that we ought never to be surprised at unbelief. If men would not receive Christ's testimony, it is no wonder if they will not receive ours.

12.--[*If I have told...earthly...heavenly things?*] To see the full force of this verse, we should paraphrase it thus: "If ye do not believe what I say when I tell you, as I have done, things that are earthly, how will ye believe if I go on, as I shall do, to tell you of things that are heavenly? If ye will not believe when ye hear my first lesson, what will ye do when ye hear my second? If ye are stumbled at the very alphabet of my Gospel, what will ye do when I proceed to show you higher and deeper truths?"

The difficulty of the verse lies in the two expressions, "earthly things" and "heavenly things." Our Lord does not explain them, and we are therefore left to conjecture their true meaning. I offer the following explanation with some diffidence, as the most satisfactory one.

By "earthly things" I believe our Lord means the doctrine of the "new birth," which He had just been expounding to Nicodemus. By "heavenly things" I believe He means the great and solemn truths which He was about immediately to declare, and which He does declare in rapid succession from this verse down to the end of the conversation. These truths were His own divinity, the plan of redemption by His own death on the cross, the love of God to the whole world and His consequent provision of salvation, faith in the Son of God as the only way to escape hell, and man's willful rejection of light, the only cause of man's condemnation.

But why does our Lord call the new birth an "earthly thing"? I reply, that He does so because it is an "earthly" thing compared with His own divinity and atonement. Regeneration is a thing that takes place in man here upon earth. The atonement is a transaction that was done for man, and of which the special effect is on man's position before God in heaven. In regeneration God comes down to man and dwells in him upon earth. In the atonement Christ takes up man's nature as man's representative, and as man's forerunner goes up into heaven. Regeneration is a change of which even the men of this world have some faint inkling, and which can be illustrated by such earthly figures as water and wind. Almost everyone allows, as Bucer remarks, that he is not so good as he should be, and that he needs some change to fit him for heaven. Christ's divinity, and the incarnation, and the atonement, and justification by faith, are such high

and heavenly things, that man has no natural conception of them. Regeneration is so far an "earthly" idea that even irreligious men borrow the word, and talk of regenerating nations and society. Salvation by faith in Christ's blood is so entirely a "heavenly thing," that it is constantly misunderstood, hated, and sneered at by unconverted men. When therefore our Lord calls the new birth an "earthly thing," we must understand that He does so comparatively. In itself the new birth is a high, holy, and "heavenly thing." But compared with the doctrine of the incarnation and the atonement, it is an "earthly thing."

13.--[*And no man has ascended, etc.*] This verse, according to my view, contains the first "heavenly thing" which our Lord displays to Nicodemus. But the sentence is undeniably a difficult one, and commentators differ widely as to its meaning.

Some think, as Calvin, Musculus, Bullinger, Hutcheson, Poole, Quesnel, Schottgen, Dyke, Lightfoot, Leigh, Doddridge, A. Clark, and Stier, that our Lord here shows to Nicodemus, in highly figurative language, the necessity of divine teaching in order to understand spiritual truth. "No child of Adam has ever reached the lofty mysteries of heaven, and made himself acquainted with its high and holy truth, by his own natural understanding. Such knowledge is only possessed by the incarnate Saviour, the Son of man, who has come down from heaven. If you would know spiritual truth, you must sit at His feet and learn of Him." This view of the text is supported by Prov. xxx.34. According to this view, the verse must be taken in close connection with the preceding one, where the ignorance of Nicodemus is exposed.

Some think, as Zwingle, Melancthon, Brentius, Aretius, Flacius, and Ferus, that our Lord here shows to Nicodemus (and again in highly figurative language), the impossibility of human merit, and the utter inability of man justifying himself and obtaining an entrance into heaven by his own righteousness. "No one can possibly ascend into God's presence in heaven and stand perfect and complete before Him, except the incarnate Saviour who has come down from heaven to fulfill all righteousness. I am the way to heaven. If you would enter heaven, you must believe on the Son of man, and become a member of His body by faith." This view of the text appeals for support to Rom. x.6-9. According to this view, the verse must be taken in close connection with the following verse, in which the way of justification is explained.

The true view of the text, I venture to think, is as follows. The words of the text are to be taken literally. Our Lord begins His list of "heavenly things" by declaring to Nicodemus His own divine nature and dignity. He reminds him that no one has ever ascended literally into that heaven where God dwells. Enoch, Eljah, and David, for instance, were doubtless in a place of bliss when they left this world, but they had not "ascended into heaven." (Acts ii.34.) But that which no man, not even the holiest saint, had attained, was the right and prerogative of Him in whose company Nicodemus was. The Son of man had dwelt from all eternity in heaven, had come down from heaven, would one day ascend again into heaven, and in His

divine nature was actually in heaven, one with God the Father, at that very moment. "Know who it is to whom you are speaking. I am not merely a teacher come from God, as you. I am the Messiah, the Son of man foretold by Daniel. I have come down from heaven according to promise, to save sinners. I shall one day ascend again into heaven as the victorious forerunner of a saved people. Above all, I am as God in heaven at this moment. I am He who fills heaven and earth." I prefer this view of the verse to any other, for two reasons. For one thing, it gives a literal meaning to every word in the text. For another, it seems a fitting answer to the first idea which Nicodemus had put forward in the conversation, viz., that our Lord was only "a teacher come from God." It is the view which is in the main held by Rollock, Calovius, and Gomarus, and expounded by them with much ability.

The Greek word which we render "but," I am inclined to think ought to be taken in an *adversative* rather than in an *exceptive* sense. Instances of this usage will be found in Matt. xii.4; Mark xiii.32; Luke iv.26,27; John xvii.12; Rev. ix.4; xxi.27. The thought appears to be, "Man has not, and cannot ascend into heaven. But that which man cannot do, I the Son of man can do."

"Heaven" throughout this verse must be taken in the sense of that immediate and peculiar presence of God, which we can conceive of and express in no other form than by the word "heaven."

The expression "who is in heaven" deserves particular notice. It is one of those many expressions in the New Testament which can be explained in no other way than by the doctrine of Christ's divinity. It would be utterly absurd and untrue to say of any mere man, that at the very time he was speaking to another on earth he was in heaven! But it can be said of Christ with perfect truth and propriety. He never ceased to be very God when He became incarnate. He was "with God and was God." As God, He was in heaven while He was speaking to Nicodemus.

The expression is one which no Socinian can explain away. If Christ was only a very holy man and nothing more, He could not have used these words. The Socinian explanation of the former part of the verse, viz., that Christ was caught up into heaven after His baptism and there instructed about the Gospel He was to teach, would be of itself utterly absurd, and a mere theory invented to get over a difficulty. But the conclusion of the verse is a blow at the very root of the Socinian system. It is written not only that Christ "came down from heaven," but that "He is in heaven."

It admits of a question whether the Greek words which we translate "who is," do not, both here and in chap. i.18, point to that peculiar name of Jehovah, which was doubtless familiar to Nicodemus, "The Ever-existing One; the Living One." It is the same phrase which forms part of Christ's name in Revelation, "Him who is." (Rev. i.4.)

Much of the difficulty of the verse is removed by remembering that the past tense, "has ascended," admits of being rendered with equal grammatical

correctness, "does ascend, can ascend, or will ascend." Pearce takes this view and quotes in support of it John i.26; iii.18; v.24; vi.69; xi.27; xx.29.

Whitby thinks that throughout this verse our Lord has in view a Rabbinical tradition--that Moses had been into heaven to receive the law--and that He declares the falsehood of this tradition by saying, "No man, not even Moses, had ascended into heaven."

14.--[*As Moses lifted...serpent...so must, etc.*] In this verse our Lord proceeds to show Nicodemus another "heavenly thing," viz., the necessity of His own crucifixion. Nicodemus probably thought, like most Jews, that when Messiah appeared He would come with power and glory, to be exalted and honored by men. Jesus tells him that so far from this being the case, Messiah must be "cut off" at His first advent, and put to an open shame by being hanged on a tree. He illustrates this by a well-known event in the history of Israel's wanderings--the story of the brazen serpent. (Num. xxi.9.) "Are you expecting Me to take to myself power and to restore the kingdom of Israel? Cast away such a vain expectation. I have come to do very different work. I have come to suffer, and to offer up myself as a sacrifice for sin."

The mention of Moses, of whom the Pharisees thought so much, was eminently calculated to arrest the attention of Nicodemus. "Even Moses, in whom ye trust, has supplied a most vivid type of my great work on earth--the crucifixion."

[*The Son of Man must be lifted up.*] The expression "Son of Man," was doubtless intended to remind Nicodemus of Daniel's prophecy of the Messiah. The Greek word rendered "must" signifies "it behooves that," "it is necessary that." It is necessary in order that God's promises of a Redeemer may be fulfilled, the type of the Old Testament sacrifices be accomplished, the law of God be satisfied, and a way for God's mercy be provided. In order to all this, Messiah must suffer in our stead. The phrase "lifted up," appears to me most decidedly to mean "lifted up on the cross." For one thing, we find it so explained in this Gospel. (John xii.32,33.) For another, the illustration of the brazen serpent makes it absolutely necessary to explain it so. To apply the phrase, as Calvin and others do, to the "necessity of lifting up and exalting Christ's atonement in Christian teaching," seems to me a mistake. It is needlessly dragging in an idea which the words were not intended to convey. It is truth no doubt, and truth abundantly taught in Scripture, but not the truth of this text.

The main points of resemblance in the comparison "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," form a subject which requires careful handling. The lifting up of the serpent of brass for the relief of Israel when bitten by serpents is evidently selected by our Lord as an apt illustration of His own crucifixion for sinners. But how far may we press this illustration? Where are we to stop? What are the exact points at which the type and antitype meet? These questions require consideration.

Some see a meaning in the "brass" of which the serpent was made, as a shining metal, a strong metal, etc. I cannot see it. Our Lord does not even mention the brass.

Some see in the "serpent" hanging on the pole a type of the devil, the old serpent, bruised by Christ's death on the cross and openly triumphed over on it. (Col. ii.15.) I cannot see this at all. It appears to me to confound and mingle up two Scriptural truths which ought to be kept distinct. Moreover, there is something revolting in the idea that in order to be healed the Israelite had to look at a figure of the devil.

Some see in "Moses" lifting up the serpent a type of the law of God requiring payment of its demands, and becoming the cause of Christ dying on the cross. On this I will content myself with saying that I am not satisfied that this idea was in Christ's mind.

The points of resemblance appear to me to be these:

(a) As the Israelites were in sore distress and dying from the bites of poisonous serpents, so is man in great spiritual danger and dying from the poisonous effects of sin.

(b) As the serpent of brass was lifted up on a pole in the sight of the camp of Israel, so Christ was to be lifted up on the cross publicly, and in the sight of the whole nation, at the Passover.

(c) As the serpent, lifted up on the pole, was an image of the very thing which had poisoned the Israelites, even so Christ had in Himself no sin, and yet was made and crucified "in the likeness of sinful flesh," and counted sin. (Rom. viii.3.) The brazen serpent was a serpent without poison, and Christ was a man without sin. 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. In fact, we see on the cross our sins punished, crucified, borne, and carried by our Redeemer.

(d) Finally, as the one way by which Israelites obtained relief from the brazen serpent was by looking at it, so the one way to get benefit from Christ is to look at Him by faith. The feeblest look brought cure to an Israelite, and the weakest faith, if true and sincere, brings salvation to sinners.

It should be carefully noted that it seems impossible to reconcile this verse with that modern divinity which can see nothing in Christ's death but a great act of self-sacrifice, and which denies Christ's substitution for us on the cross and the imputation of our sins to Him. Such divinity withers up such a verse as this entirely, and cuts out the life, heart, and marrow of its meaning. Unless words are most violently wrested from their ordinary signification, the illustration before us points directly towards two great truths of the Gospel. One of them is that Christ's death upon

the cross was meant to have a medicinal, health-conferring effect upon our souls, and that there was something in it far above a mere martyr's example. The other truth is that when Christ died upon the cross, He was dealt with as our Substitute and Representative, and punished through the imputation of our sins, in our place. 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. It is easy work to sneer at the *words* "vicarious sacrifice," and "imputed merit," as nowhere to be found in Scripture. But it is not so easy to disprove the fact that the *ideas* are constantly to be met with in the Bible.

The use of the brazen serpent in this verse, as an illustration of Christ's death and its purpose, must not be abused and made an excuse for turning every incident of the history of Israel in the wilderness into an allegory. It is very important not to attach an allegorical meaning to Bible facts without authority. Such things as the manna, the smitten rock, and the brazen serpent, are allegorized for us by the Holy Ghost. But where the Holy Ghost has not pointed out any allegory, we ought to be very cautious in our assertions that allegory exists. Bucer's remarks on this subject deserve reading.

15.--[*That whosoever believes...not perish...life.*] In this verse our Lord declares to Nicodemus the great end and purpose for which the Son of man was to be "lifted up" on the cross, and the way in which the benefits of His crucifixion become our own. In interpreting the verse, we should carefully remember that the comparison of the serpent lifted up in the wilderness must be carried through to the end of the sentence. The Son of man must be lifted up on the cross, that whosoever believes on Him, or looks to Him by faith, as the Israelite looked to the brazen serpent, should not perish in hell.

The expression "whosoever" deserves special notice. It might have been equally well translated "every one." It is intended to show us the width and breadth of Christ's offers of salvation. They are for "every one," without exception, who "believes."

The expression, "believes in Him," is deeply important. It describes that one act of man's soul which is needful to give him an interest in Jesus Christ. It is not a mere belief of the head that there is such a Person as Jesus Christ, and that He is a Savior. It is a belief of the heart and will. When a person--feeling his desperate need by reason of sin--flees to Jesus Christ and trusts in Him, leans on Him, and commits his soul entirely to Him as his Saviour and Redeemer, he is said (in the language of the text) to "believe on Him." The simpler our views of faith are, the better. The more steadily we keep in view the Israelites looking at the brazen serpent, the more we shall understand the words before us. "Believing" is neither more nor less than heart looking. Whosoever looked at the brazen serpent was made well, however ill he was, and however feeble his look. Just so, whosoever looks to Jesus by faith is pardoned, however great his

sins may have been, and however feeble his faith. Did the Israelite *look*? That was the only question in the matter of being healed from the serpent's bite. Does the sinner *believe*? That is the only question in the matter of being justified and pardoned. Looking to Moses or looking to the tabernacle or looking even to the pole on which the serpent hung, or looking to anything except the brazen serpent, the bitten Israelite would not have been cured. Just so, looking to anything but Christ crucified, however holy the object looked at may be, the sinner cannot be saved.

The expression "should not perish but have eternal life," is peculiarly strong. As the Israelite who looked to the brazen serpent not only did not die of his wound, but recovered complete health, so the sinner who looks to Jesus not only escapes hell and condemnation, but has a seed of eternal life at once put in his heart, receives a complete title to an eternal life of glory and blessedness in heaven, and enters into that life after death. The salvation of the Gospel is exceedingly full. It is not merely being pardoned. It is being counted completely righteous and made a citizen of heaven. It is not merely an escape from hell, but the reception of a title to heaven. It has been well remarked that the Old Testament generally promised only "length of days," but the Gospel promises "everlasting life."

16.--[*For God so loved the world, etc.*] Our Lord, in this verse, shows Nicodemus another "heavenly thing." Nicodemus probably thought, like many Jews, that God's purposes of mercy were entirely confined to His chosen people Israel, and that when Messiah appeared He would appear only for the special benefit of the Jewish nation. Our Lord here declares to him that God loves all the world, without any exception; that the Messiah, the only-begotten Son of God, is the Father's gift to the whole family of Adam; and that every one, whether Jew or Gentile, who believes on Him for salvation, may have eternal life. A more startling declaration to the ears of a rigid Pharisee it is impossible to conceive! A more wonderful verse is not to be found in the Bible! That God should love such a wicked world as this and not hate it,--that He should love it so as to provide salvation,--that in order to provide salvation He should give, not an angel, or any created being, but such a priceless gift as His only-begotten Son,--that this great salvation should be freely offered to every one that believes,--all, all this is wonderful indeed! This was indeed a "heavenly thing."

The words, "God loved the world," have received two very different interpretations. The importance of the subject in the present day makes it desirable to state both views fully.

Some think, as Hutcheson, Lampe, and Gill, that the "world" here means God's elect out of every nation, whether Jews or Gentiles, and that the "love" with which God is said to love them is that eternal love with which the elect were loved before the creation began, and by which their calling, justification, preservation, and final salvation are completely secured. This view, though supported by many and great divines, does not appear to me to be our Lord's meaning. For one thing, it seems to me a violent straining of language to confine the word "world" to the elect. "The world" is undoubtedly a name sometimes given to the "wicked" exclusively.

But I cannot see that it is a name ever given to the saints. For another thing, to interpret the word "world" of the elect only is to ignore the distinction which, to my eyes, is plainly drawn in the text between the whole of mankind and those out of mankind who "believe." If the "world" means only the believing portion of mankind, it would have been quite enough to say, "God so loved the world, that he gave His only-begotten Son, that the world should not perish." But our Lord does not say so. He says, "that whosoever believes, *i.e.*, that whosoever out of the world believes." Lastly, to confine God's love to the elect is taking a harsh and narrow view of God's character, and fairly lays Christianity open to the modern charges brought against it as cruel and unjust to the ungodly. If God takes no thought for any but His elect, and cares for none beside, how shall God judge the world? I believe in the electing love of God the Father as strongly as anyone. I regard the special love with which God loves the sheep whom He has given to Christ from all eternity as a most blessed and comfortable truth, and one most cheering and profitable to believers. I only say that it is not the truth of this text.

The true view of the words, "God loved the world," I believe to be this. The "world" means the whole race of mankind, both saints and sinners, without any exception. The word, in my opinion, is so used in John i.10,29; vi.33,51; viii.12; Rom. iii.19; 2 Cor. v.19; 1 John ii.2; iv.14. The "love" spoken of is that love of pity and compassion with which God regards all his Creatures, and specially regards mankind. It is the same feeling of "love" which appears in Psalm cxlv.9, Ezek. xxxiii.11, John vi.32, Titus iii.4, 1 John iv.10, 2 Pet. iii.9, 1 Tim. ii.4. It is a love unquestionably distinct and separate from the special love with which God regards His saints. It is a love of pity and not of approbation or complaisance. But it is not the less a real love. It is a love which clears God of injustice in judging the world.

I am quite familiar with the objections commonly brought against the theory I have just propounded. I find no weight in them, and am not careful to answer them. Those who confine God's love exclusively to the elect appear to me to take a narrow and contracted view of God's character and attributes. They refuse to God that attribute of compassion with which even an earthly father can regard a profligate son, and can offer to him pardon even though his compassion is despised and his offers refused. I have long come to the conclusion that men may be more systematic in their statements than the Bible, and may be led into grave error by idolatrous veneration of a system. The following quotations from one whom for convenience sake I must call a thorough Calvinist, I mean Bishop Davenant, will show that the view I advocate is not new.

"The general love of God toward mankind is so clearly testified in Holy Scripture, and so demonstrated by the manifold effects of God's goodness and mercy extended to every particular man in this world, that to doubt thereof were infidelity, and to deny it plain blasphemy." *-Davenant's Answer to Hoard, p.1.*

"God hates nothing which Himself created. And yet it is most true that He

hates sin in any creature, and hates the creature infected with sin, in such manner as hatred may be attributed to God. But for all this, He so generally loved mankind, fallen in Adam, that He has given His only begotten Son, that what sinner soever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. And this everlasting life is so provided for man by God, that no decrees of His can bring any man thither without faith and repentance; and no decrees of His can keep any man out who repents and believes. As for the measure of God's love exhibited in the external effect unto man, it must not be denied that God pours out His grace more abundantly on some men than on others, and works more powerfully and effectually in the hearts of some men than of others, and that out of His alone will and pleasure. But yet, when this more special love is not extended, His less special love is not restrained to outward and temporal mercies, but reaches to internal and spiritual blessings, even such as will bring men to an eternal blessedness, if their voluntary wickedness hinders not."--*Davenant's Answer to Hoard*, p. 469.

"No divine of the Reformed Church, of sound judgment, will deny a general intention or appointment concerning the salvation of all men individually by the death of Christ, on the condition if they should believe. For the intention or appointment of God is general, and is plainly revealed in holy Scripture, although the absolute and not to be frustrated intention of God concerning the gift of faith and eternal life to some persons, is special, and limited to the elect alone. So I have maintained and do maintain."--*Davenant's Opinion on the Gallican Controversy*.

Calvin observes on this text, "Christ brought life, because the heavenly Father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish." Again he says, "Christ employed the universal term *whosoever*, both to invite indiscriminately all to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such also is the import of the term *world*. Though there is nothing in the world that is worthy of God's favor, yet He shows Himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when He invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ."

The same view of God's "love" and the "world," in this text, is taken by Brentius, Bucer, Calovius, Glassius, Chemnitius, Musculus, Bullinger, Bengel, Nifanius, Dyke, Scott, Henry, and Manton.

The little word "so," in this verse, has called forth many remarks, on account of its depth of meaning. It doubtless signifies "so greatly, so much, so dearly." Bishop Sanderson, quoted by Ford, observes, "How much that 'so' contains, no tongue or wit of man can reach: nothing expresses it better to the life, than the work itself does."

[*That He gave His only-begotten Son.*] The gift of Christ, be it here noted, is the result of God's love to the world, and not the cause. To say that God loves us because Christ died for us is wretched theology indeed. But to say that Christ came into the world in consequence of the love of God is scriptural truth.

The expression, "He gave," is a remarkable one. Christ is God the Father's gift to a lost and sinful world. He was given generally to be the Saviour, the Redeemer, the Friend of sinners,--to make an atonement sufficient for all--and to provide a redemption large enough for all. To effect this, the Father freely gave Him up to be despised, rejected, mocked, crucified, and counted guilty and accursed for our sakes. It is written that He was "delivered for our offenses," and that "God spared Him not, but delivered Him up for us all." (Rom. iv.25; viii.32.) Christ is the "gift of God," spoken of to the Samaritan woman (John iv.10), and the "unspeakable gift" spoken of by St. Paul. (2 Cor. ix.15.) He Himself says to the wicked Jews, "My Father *gives you* the true bread from heaven." (John vi.32.) This last text, be it noted, was one with which Erskine silenced the General Assembly in Scotland, when he was accused of offering Christ too freely to sinners.

It should be observed that our Lord calls Himself "the only-begotten Son of God" in this verse. In the verse but one before this, He called Himself the "Son of man." Both the names were used in order to impress upon the mind of Nicodemus the two natures of Messiah. He was not only the Son of man but the Son of God. But it is striking to remark that precisely the same words are used in both places about faith in Christ. If we would be saved, we must believe in Him both as the Son of man and the Son of God.

[*That whosoever believes...life.*] These words are exactly the same as those in the preceding verse. Why our translators should have rendered the same Greek word by "everlasting" in one place and "eternal" in the other, it is hard to say. In Matt. xxv.46, they did just the same.

The repetition of this glorious saying "whosoever believes" is very instructive. For one thing, it serves to show that mighty and broad as is the love of God, it will prove useless to every one who does not believe in Christ. God loves all the world, but God will save none in the world who refuse to believe in His only-begotten Son. For another thing, it shows us the great point to which every Christian should direct his attention. He must see to it that he believes on Christ. It is mere waste of time to be constantly asking ourselves whether God loves us, and whether Christ died for us; and it argues gross ignorance of Scripture to trouble ourselves with such questions. The Bible never tells men to look at these questions, but commands them to believe. Salvation, it always teaches, does not turn on the point, "Did Christ die for me?" but on the point, "Do I believe on Christ." If men do not "have eternal life," it is never because God did not love them, or because Christ was not given for them, but because they do not believe on Christ.

In leaving this verse, I may remark that the idea maintained by Erasmus, Olshausen, Wetstein, Rosenmuller, and others, that it does not contain our Lord's words, and that from this verse down to the 21st we have St. John's comments or observations, appears to me utterly destitute of foundation and unsupported by a single argument worth noticing. That our Lord would not have used the third person in speaking of Himself is no argument. We find Him frequently speaking of Himself in the third person. See for instance John v.19,29. There is literally nothing to be gained by adopting the

theory, while it contradicts the common belief of nearly all believers in every age of the world.

Flacius observes that this verse and the two preceding ones comprise all the causes of justification: (1) the remote and efficient cause, God's love; (2) the approximate efficient cause, the gift of God's Son; (3) the material cause, Christ's exaltation on the cross; (4) the instrumental cause, faith; (5) the final cause, eternal life.

17.--[*God did not send...condemn the world.*] In this verse our Lord shows Nicodemus another "heavenly thing." He shows him the main object of Messiah coming into the world. It was not to judge men, but to die for them; not to condemn, but to save.

I have a strong impression that when our Lord spoke these words, He had in view the prophecy of David about Messiah bruising the nations with a rod of iron, and Daniel's prophecy about the judgment, where he speaks of the thrones being cast down, and the Ancient of Days judging the world. (Ps. ii.6-9; Dan. vii.9-22.) I think that Nicodemus, like most Jews, was filled with the expectation that when Messiah came He would come with power and great glory, and *judge* all men. Our Lord corrects this notion in this verse. He declares that Messiah's first advent was not to judge, but to save people from their sins. He says in another place, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." (John xii.47.) The Greek word for judging and condemning, it must be remembered, is one and the same. Judgment and the condemnation of the ungodly, our Lord would have us know, are not the work of the first advent, but of the second. The special work of the first advent was to seek and save that which was lost.

[*That the world...saved.*] This sentence must clearly be interpreted with some qualification. It would contradict other plain texts of Scripture if we took it to mean, "God sent His Son into the world, that all the world might finally be saved through Him, and none be lost." In fact, our Lord Himself declares in the very next verse, that "He that believes not is *condemned* already."

The meaning of the sentence evidently is, that "all the world might have a door of salvation opened through Christ, that salvation might be provided for all the world, and that so anyone in the world believing on Christ might be saved." In this view, it is like the expression of St. John, "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." (1 John iv.14.)

The expression, "God has sent," in this verse, ought not to be overlooked. It is very frequently applied, in St. John's Gospel, to our Lord. At least thirty-eight times we find Him speaking of Himself as Him "whom God has sent." It is probably from this expression that St. Paul derives the peculiar name which he gives to our Lord, "The Apostle of our profession." (Heb. iii.1.) The Apostle means simply, "The sent one."

The readiness of natural man everywhere to regard Christ as a Judge much more than as a Saviour is a curious fact. The whole system of the Roman

Catholic Church is full of the idea. People are taught to be afraid of Christ, and to flee to the Virgin Mary! Ignorant Protestants are not much better. They often regard Christ as a kind of Judge, whose demands they will have to satisfy at the last day, much more than as a present personal Saviour and Friend. Our Lord seems to foresee this error, and to correct it in the words of this text.

Calvin observes on this verse: "Whenever our sins press us, whenever Satan would drive us to despair, we ought to hold out this shield--that God is unwilling that we should be overwhelmed with everlasting destruction, because He has appointed His Son to be the salvation of the world."

18.--[*He who believes in Him is not condemned.*] In this verse our Lord shows Nicodemus another "heavenly thing." He declares the privileges of believing, and the peril of not believing in the Son of God. Nicodemus had addressed Him as a "teacher come from God." He would have Nicodemus know that He was that high and holy One, to believe on whom was life eternal, and not to believe on whom was everlasting destruction. Life or death was before men. If they believed and received Him as the Messiah, they would be saved. If they believed not, they would die in their sins.

The expression, "He that believes," deserves special notice. It is the third time that our Lord speaks of "believing" on Himself, and the consequence of believing, within four verses. It shows the immense importance of faith in the sinner's justification. It is that one thing, without which eternal life cannot be had. It shows the amazing graciousness of the Gospel, and its admirable suitability to the wants of human nature. A man may have been the worst of sinners, but if he will only "believe," he is at once pardoned. Last, but not least, it shows the need of clear, distinct views of the nature of saving faith, and the importance of keeping it entirely distinct from works of any kind, in the matter of justification. Faith, and faith only, gives an interest in Christ. The old sentence of Luther's days is perfectly true, paradoxical and startling as it may sound: "The faith which justifies is not the faith which includes charity, but the faith which lays hold on Christ."

The expression, "is not condemned," is equivalent to saying, "he is pardoned, acquitted, justified, cleared from all guilt, delivered from the curse of a broken law, no longer counted a sinner, but reckoned perfectly righteous in the sight of God." The *presentness* of the phrase, if one may coin a word, should be specially noticed. It is not said that the believer "shall not be condemned at the last day," but that "he is not condemned." The very moment a sinner believes on Christ, his iniquities are taken away, and he is counted righteous. "All that believe are justified from all things." (Acts xiii.39.)

[*He who does not...already.*] This sentence means that the man who refuses to believe on Christ is in a state of condemnation before God, even while he lives. The curse of a broken law, which we all deserve, is upon him. His sins are upon his head. He is reckoned guilty and dead before God, and there is but a step between him and hell. Faith takes all a man's sins

away. Unbelief keeps them all on him. Through faith a man is made an heir of heaven, though kept outside till he dies. Through unbelief a man is already a subject of the devil, though not yet entirely in his power and within hell. The moment a man believes, all charges are completely wiped away from his name. So long as a man does not believe, his sins cover him over and make him abominable before God, and the just wrath of God abides upon him.

Melancthon remarks that the sentence of God's condemnation, which was passed at the beginning--"Thou shalt surely die"--remains in full force and unrepealed against every one who does not believe on Christ. No new condemnation is needful. Every man or woman who does not believe is under the curse and condemned already.

[*Because...not believed...name...Son of God.*] This sentence is justly thought to prove that no sin is so great, and so damning and ruinous to the soul, as unbelief. In one sense it is the only unpardonable sin. All other sins may be forgiven, however many and great, and a man may stand complete before God. But if a man will not believe on Christ, there is no hope for him; and if he persists in his unbelief, he cannot be saved. Nothing is so provoking and offensive to God as to refuse the glorious salvation He has provided at so mighty a cost, by the death of His only begotten Son. Nothing is so suicidal on the part of man as to turn away from the only remedy which can heal his soul. Other sins may be scarlet, filthy, and abominable. But not to believe on Christ is to bar the door in our own way, and to cut off ourselves entirely from heaven. It has been truly remarked that it was a greater sin in Judas Iscariot not to believe on Christ for pardon, after he had betrayed Him, than to betray Him into the hands of His enemies. To betray Him no doubt was an act of enormous covetousness, wickedness, and ingratitude. But not to seek Him afterwards by faith for pardon, was to disbelieve His mercy, love, and power to save.

The expression, "the name," as the object of faith, is explained in chap. i.12. Here, as frequently, it stands for the attributes, character, and office of the Son of God.

Luther, quoted by Brown, remarks: "Henceforward, he who is condemned must not complain of Adam and his inborn sin. The seed of the woman, promised by God to bruise the head of the serpent, is now come, and has atoned for sin and taken away condemnation. But he must cry out against himself for not having accepted and believed in the Christ, the devil's head-bruiser and sin-strangler. If I do not believe the same, sin and condemnation must continue."

19.--[*This is the condemnation, etc.*] In this verse our Lord shows Nicodemus one more "heavenly thing." He unfolds to him the true cause of the ruin of those who are lost. Primarily, I think, our Lord had in view the unbelieving Jews of His own day, and the real reason of their rejection of Himself. It was not that there was any lack of evidence of His Messiahship. They had evidence enough and to spare. The real reason was that they had no mind to give up their sins. Secondarily, I think, our

Lord had in view the future history of all Christians, and the true cause of the ruin of all who are not saved in every age. It is not because there is any lack of light to guide men to heaven. It is not because God is lacking in love and unwilling to save. The real reason is that men in every age love their own sins, and will not come to Christ that they may be delivered from them.

The expression, "this is the condemnation," is evidently very elliptical, and the full meaning must be supplied. It is probably equivalent to saying "this is the cause of the condemnation, this is the true account of it." The following elliptical expressions are somewhat similar, and all found in St. John's 1st Epistle. "This is the promise," "This is the love of God," "This is the victory," "This is the confidence." (1 John ii.25; v.4-14.)

[*That light is come into the world.*] It is a question in this sentence whether "light" means Christ Himself or the light of Christ's Gospel. I am inclined to think that our Lord meant to include both ideas. He has come as a light into the world, and the Gospel that He has brought with Him is, like its author, a strong contrast to the ignorance and wickedness of the earth.

[*Men loved darkness rather than light.*] The darkness in this sentence means moral darkness and mental darkness--sin, ignorance, superstition, and irreligion. Men cannot come to Christ and receive His Gospel without parting with all this, and they love it too well to part with it.

[*Because their deeds were evil.*] This sentence means that their habits of life were wicked, and any doctrine which necessitated a change of these habits they naturally hated.

Throughout this verse I am inclined to think that the past tense, "loved," ought to be taken in a present sense (proleptically, to use a grammarian's phrase), as is frequently the case in the New Testament. (See John xv.8, and Rom. viii.30.) The meaning will then be, "Men have loved, do love, and always will love darkness, on consequence of the corruption of human nature, as long as the world stands." The sentence then becomes a solemn description of a state of things which was not only to be seen among the Jews while our Lord was on earth, but would be seen everywhere to the end of time.

The verse is one which deserves special notice because of the deep mystery it unfolds. It tells us the true reason why men miss heaven and are lost in hell. The origin of evil we are not told. The reason why evil men are lost, we are told plainly. There is not a word about any decree of God predestinating men to destruction. There is not a syllable about anything deficient or lacking either in God's love or in Christ's atonement. On the contrary, our Lord tell us that "light has come into the world," that God has revealed enough of the way of salvation to make men inexcusable if they are not saved. But the real account of the matter is that men have naturally no will or inclination to use the light. They love their own dark and corrupt ways more than the ways which God proposes to them. They

therefore reap the fruit of their own ways, and will have at last what they loved. They loved darkness, and they will be cast into outer darkness. They did not like the light, and so they will be shut out from light eternally. In short, lost souls will be what they willed to be, and will have what they loved.

The words, "because their deeds were evil," are very instructive. They teach us that where men have no love to Christ and His Gospel, and will not receive them, their lives and their works will prove at last to have been evil. Their habits of life may not be gross and immoral. They may be even comparatively decent and pure. But the last day will prove them to have been in reality "evil." Pride of intellect, or selfishness, or love of man's applause, or dislike to submission of will, or self-righteousness, or some other false principle will be found to have run through all their conduct. In one way or another, when men refuse to come to Christ, their deeds will always prove to be "evil." Rejection of the Gospel will always be found to be connected with some moral obliquity. When Christ is refused, we may be quite sure that there is something or other in life or heart which is not right. If a man does not love light, his "deeds are evil." Human eyes may not detect the flaw; but the eyes of an all-seeing God do.

The whole verse is a deeply humbling one. It shows the folly of all excuses for not receiving the Gospel, drawn from intellectual difficulties, from God's predestination, from our own inability to change ourselves, or to see things with the eyes of others. All such excuses are scattered to the winds by this solemn verse. People do not come to Christ and do continue unconverted just because they do not wish and want to come to Christ. They love something else better than the light. The elect of God prove themselves to be elect by "choosing" the things which are according to God's mind. The wicked prove themselves to be only fit for destruction by "choosing, loving, and following" the things which must lead to destruction.

Quesnel says on this verse, "The greatest misfortune of men does not consist in their being subject to sin, corruption, and blindness; but in their rejecting the Deliverer, the Physician, and the Light itself."

20.--[*Everyone that does evil, etc.*] This verse and the following one form a practical application of all that our Lord has been saying to Nicodemus, and are also a logical consequence of the preceding verse. Like the preceding verse, these two verses apply primarily to the Jews in our Lord's day, and secondarily to every nation to which the light of the Gospel comes. They are a most remarkable appeal to an inquirer's conscience, and supply a most searching test of the sincerity of a man in Nicodemus' state of mind.

The words "everyone that does evil," mean every unconverted person, everyone whose heart is not right and honest in God's sight, and whose actions are consequently evil, and ungodly. Every such person "hates the light, neither comes to the light." He cannot really love Christ and the

Gospel, and will not honestly and with his whole heart seek Christ by faith and embrace His Gospel, until he is renewed. The reason of this is that every unconverted person shrinks from having his ungodliness exposed. He does not wish his wicked ways to be discovered and his utter lack of true righteousness and true preparedness for death, judgment, and eternity to be put to shame. He does not like "his deeds to be reprov'd," and therefore he shrinks from the light and keeps away from Christ.

The application of this verse must doubtless be made with caution. In the case of many unconverted persons, its truth is plain as noonday. They love sin and hate true religion, and get away from the Gospel, the Bible, and religious people as much as they possibly can. In the case of others, its truth is not so apparent at first sight. There are many unconverted persons who profess to like the Gospel, and seem to have no prejudice against it and to hear it with pleasure, and yet remain unconverted. Yet even in the case of those persons the text would be found perfectly true if their hearts were really known. With all their seeming love to the light, they do not really love it with all their heart. There is something or other which they love better and which keeps them back from Christ. There is something or other which they do not want to give up and do not like to be discovered and reprov'd. Man's eyes may not detect it, but the eyes of God can. The general principle of the text will be found true at last of every hearer of the Gospel who dies unconverted. He did not thoroughly love the light. He did not really want to be changed. He did not truly and honestly seek salvation. All this was true of the Jews in the time of Nicodemus, and it is no less true of all mankind to whom the Gospel comes in the present day. Right hearts will always come to Christ. If a man keeps away from the light, his heart is wrong. He is one who "does evil."

There is a curious difference between the Greek word translated "does" in this verse and the one translated "does" in the next verse. Stier and Alford think the difference instructive and meaningful. They say that the Greek word used for "does evil," means the habit of action without fruit or result. On the contrary, the Greek word for "doing truth," signifies the true doing of good: good fruit, good that remains.

21.--[*He that does truth, etc.*] This verse, it is needless to say, is closely connected with the preceding one. The preceding verse describes the unconverted man. The verse before us describes the converted man.

The expression, "He that does truth," signifies the person whose heart is honest, the man who is truly converted, however weak and ignorant, and whose heart and actions are consequently true and right in the sight of God. The phrase is frequently found in St. John's writings. (See John xviii.37; 1 John i.6-8; ii.4; iii.19; 2 John i.; 3 John iii.4.) Every such person will always come to Christ and embrace His Gospel, when it is brought near him. He will have an honest desire that "his deeds may be made manifest," and that his real character may be discovered to himself and to others. He will have an honest wish to know whether his habits of life are really godly, or "wrought in God."

The principle here laid down is of great importance, and experience shows that the assertion of the text is always confirmed by facts. I believe there was not a truly good man among the Jews in our Lord's day who did not at once receive Christ and welcome Christ's Gospel as soon as it was brought before him. Nathanael was an example. He was a man "who did truth" under the obscure light of the law of Moses, as ministered by Scribes and Pharisees. But the moment the Messiah was brought before him, he received Him and believed. So also I believe, when the Gospel comes into a Church, a parish, or a congregation, it is always gladly received and embraced by any whose hearts are true. To be a truly godly man and yet to refuse to come to Christ is an impossibility. He that hears of Christ and does not come to Him and believe on Him as God's appointed way of salvation, has something fatally wrong about him. He is not really "doing truth." He is not a converted man. Gospel light is a mighty magnet. If there is anyone that has true religion within its sphere, it will attract to itself that person. To be truly religious and not to gravitate towards Him who is the great center of all light and truth is impossible. If a man refuses Christ, he cannot be a godly man.

The application of the last two verses to the case of Nicodemus and those Jews who were in the same state of mind as Nicodemus, is plain and obvious. Our Lord leaves on the Pharisee's mind a solemn and heart-searching conclusion. "Think not that you can stay away from Me after hearing this discourse and be saved. If you are a really earnest inquirer after truth, and your heart is honest and sincere, you must go on; you must come to the light and embrace the light, and you will do so, however great your present ignorance. If, on the other hand, you are not really desirous to serve God, you will prove it by keeping away from my Gospel and by not confessing Me as the Messiah." It is a pleasant reflection that after-events proved that Nicodemus was one who "did truth." He used the light our Lord graciously imparted to him. He came forward and spoke for Christ in the Council. And at last, when he boldly helped to bury Christ, he made it manifest to all Israel that "his deeds were wrought in God."

Let it be noted that the two verses which conclude our Lord's address to Nicodemus are a most instructive test of the sincerity and reality of persons who appear anxious inquirers in religion. If they are honest and true, they will go on and come to the full light of Christ. If they are not honest and sincere but only influenced by temporary excitement, they will probably go back from the light and will certainly not close with Christ and become His disciples. This should be pressed by ministers on all inquirers. "If you are true, you will come to the light. If you are not true, you will go back or stand still; you will not draw near and close with Christ." The test will never be found to fail. Those who wish to see how exceedingly weak the beginnings of grace may be in a heart and yet be true, as is proved in the case of Nicodemus, will find the matter most skilfully treated in a small work of Perkins, little known, called, "A Grain of Mustard Seed." A man may have the beginning of regeneration in his heart and yet be so ignorant as not to know what regeneration is.

In concluding these long notes, for the length of which the immense

importance of the passage must be my apology, I think we should remark that we never hear a word about Nicodemus being baptized! This fact is a strong incidental evidence to my mind that the baptism of water was not the subject which our Lord had in view when he told Nicodemus that he must be born of water and the Spirit.

One other thing ought to be remarked in leaving this subject of our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus. That thing is the singular fullness of matter by which the whole of our Lord's address is characterized. Within the space of twenty verses, we read of the work of all three Persons in the Trinity--the Father's love, the Son's death on the cross, and the Spirit's operation in the new birth of man--the corruption of man's nature, the nature of regeneration, and the efficacy of faith in Christ--the way to escape perishing in hell, the true cause of man's condemnation if he is lost, and the true marks of sincerity in an inquirer. A fuller sermon was never delivered than that which was here preached to Nicodemus in one evening! There is hardly a single important point in divinity which is left untouched!