

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
XXIII. Christ's Exposition Of God's Grace To The Religious
(John 3:1-21)

I. Introduction

- A. John 1:18 KJV states that Jesus, the Son of God Who was in the bosom of the Father, "declared" God the Father in His earthly ministry, that He had literally "exegeted" Him. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 273)
- B. Christ's exegesis of God's abundant grace to even the most religious people in Israel is epitomized in His meeting with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21. We view that passage for our insight, application, and edification:

II. Christ's Exposition Of God's Grace To The Religious, John 3:1-21.

- A. When Christ cleansed the temple and performed miracles at His first Passover in Jerusalem, He gained the attention of the aristocratic religious rulers in Israel seen in their question on what authority He did these things, John 2:18 with 2:23. (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 122)
- B. Thus, "Christ's claim, accompanied by such miraculous signs, demanded a comment from the Sanhedrin," for it was "the responsibility of this ruling body to investigate such signs and claims and make an official pronouncement to the people as to their authenticity," Ibid.
- C. One member of the Sanhedrin, a theologically conservative Pharisee named Nicodemus, came to Jesus by night to avoid criticism from others in the Sanhedrin since he unlike most of them considered Jesus to be a teacher from God due to the miracles He did, John 3:1-2; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to John 3:1.
- D. Nicodemus' address of Jesus as "Rabbi" was a "title of great respect that the Jews used for their religious teachers," Ibid., Pentecost, p. 123. Nicodemus was genuinely seeking the truth, but he was "a scholar hedged about by custom and social barriers, seeking truth through the maze of a ceremonial system," Ibid.
- E. Jesus quickly cut through all the legalistic trappings of Nicodemus' theology by declaring that except a man be born "from above, anew, again" (*anōthen*, Abbott-Smith, A Man. Grk. Lex. of the N. T., 1968, p. 43), he could not see the kingdom of God, John 3:3. This was a shocking statement for Nicodemus, for as a Pharisee, "he constantly considered how a man could be righteous before the law," Ibid., Pentecost, p. 124.
- F. Nicodemus knew that a man could not be born when he was old or enter his mother's womb to be reborn, but his questions on these issues displayed his misunderstanding of Jesus' claim on the new birth, Ibid.; John 3:4.
- G. Jesus replied that except a man was born of "water and of the Spirit," he could not enter into the kingdom of God, John 3:5. Since Jesus spoke to a scholar of the Old Testament, He was alluding to Ezekiel 36:25-27 where God promised figuratively to sprinkle clean water on sinful Israel, clarifying this remark by adding that He would cleanse her from sin, put a new heart and new spirit within His people, and cause them to walk in His statutes. Paul refers to this event as the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" where "(n)ot by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" in Titus 3:5.
- H. Jesus clarified that the spiritual birth is a work of God in contrast to the natural birth, using a play on the Greek word *pneuma* that can mean either "spirit" or "wind". Like the unseen "wind" that gives evidence of its reality by what it does, so is one who is born of the "spirit," John 3:6-8; U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 329.
- I. Nicodemus said that he did not understand how this could occur (John 3:9), so Jesus, using plurals (Ibid.), explained that if He and God's other messengers (like Ezekiel) had told Israel of earthly things, but Israel did not believe, they would not believe if He and the prophets told them of heavenly things, John 3:10-12.
- J. Also, no man could ascend up to heaven to learn there of heavenly things, but they were confined to believe in Him Who had come down from heaven to tell them of heavenly things, John 3:13.
- K. Those heavenly things include the truth that as Israel in Moses' day was physically saved from death due to sin by looking in faith on the serpent lifted up on a stick as a curse, so the Son of man must be lifted up that men might be saved from eternal condemnation by faith in Him who was made a substitutionary curse for them, John 3:14-15. This was all a gracious salvation offer due to God's love for the lost world, John 3:16-17.
- L. All men stand condemned if they have not believed on God's Son, for salvation is only by faith in Him and His death for sin, John 3:18. However, many people love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, and the light of God's truth exposes it, John 3:19-20. Yet, those who do the truth of believing in the Son of God come to the light that their deeds might be made manifest that they are wrought in God, John 3:21.

Lesson: *Jesus taught that even Israel's aristocratic religious rulers needed to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ.*

Application: *May we exalt God for the unmerited favor of His salvation to all men and preach His Gospel of grace.*