

HE MUST INCREASE, I MUST DECREASE

John 3:22–4:3 (ESV)

DISCUSSION:

1. What is the *real* issue that John's disciples have with Jesus baptizing in verse 26?

They're losing numbers!

2. Tell about a time when someone you knew was doing much better than you in their career, their marriage, their finances, etc. How did that make you feel? Did you have a desire to compete with that person?

Insufficient, constantly unsatisfied, incomplete. Think "if I could just achieve X..." but then you achieve "X" and realize that's not enough, you're still empty.

3. Have you ever witnessed Christians who are jealous of the work that God is doing through others? Is it hard to see God working through other people, and not through you? What is it about our human nature that compels us to try and outperform others?

Unfortunately our fallen nature shines through even in church world, we snipe about the more successful congregations, or preachers, or we wonder why God doesn't reward *our* efforts. Why aren't my kids faithful? Why don't people follow me to the gospel? (Notice all the me and my in those statements?).

4. Is competition always good or always bad? How can we know the difference between healthy good competition and unhealthy competition?

GOOD: Challenges us, avoids complacency, drives us to be our best. BAD: dissatisfaction, self-centered, life-destroying anger, competition, bitterness. [interestingly sports can go from a healthy vigorous competition to something ugly pretty fast].

5. In your own words, summarize John the Baptist's response to this controversy.
6. If John is the friend of the groom, and Jesus is the bridegroom, who is the bride?
7. What is the role of the friend (best man) in the wedding ceremony? What does this say about the role of John the Baptist?
8. In verse 30, John the Baptist makes a powerful statement about his position in relationship to Jesus. Who must increase and who must decrease?
9. Are we most interested in building God's kingdom or our own kingdom? What are some ways that shows through in our lives?

Answers will vary. If we realized how complete fragile and artificial our money and national financial system where we wouldn't mind pouring it into something more "blue chip" like God's kingdom.

10. In what ways is Jesus superior to John the Baptist? What is John the Apostle encouraging the readers of this gospel to do with Jesus?

Gospel of John
Westgate Church of Christ
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Every way. Recognize who He is and believe on Him. He's the best...you don't have to keep competing, He has already won, Let Him Increase, You can Decrease.

11. What is the result of believing in Jesus?

Eternal Life. Becoming Second. A life of obedience (v. 36).

12. How many times does the Apostle John use the words "eternal life" in chapter 3 alone?
What is the key to gaining eternal life? Is this important?

3. Belief in (on) the Son. Yes!

13. What is the opposite of believing in Jesus from verse 36? What does this verse tell about the result of not believing?

Persist in the Natural State of condemnation. Truly, all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God.

14. Notice from v. 36: What is the default state of mankind? (cf. John 3:18)

Notice all people are headed to judgment along with the Devil. God's not actively sending them there; it's where we are all headed. Why does this matter? Harkening back to Tozer quote from Chris' sermon last week: What we think about God matters, how we view Him affects how we respond to Him.

(3) John the Baptist and Another Discourse on Salvation (3:22–36)

²² After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. ²³ Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. ²⁴ (This was before John was put in prison.) ²⁵ An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. ²⁶ They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

²⁷ To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' ²⁹ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. ³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.

³¹ "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. ³³ The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. ³⁴ For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

John the Baptizer and Witness of chap. 1 is introduced here for his last testimony in this Gospel.¹¹² It is almost as though the evangelist wanted another confirming word from the Witness before he allowed him to fade from the scene.

Scholars have debated the historical order of events in this chapter, especially

¹¹² For a helpful analysis of John the Baptist in the NT see W. Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968); as related to the present text, see pp. 93–99.

since the Synoptic Gospels leave the reader with the sense that the Baptizer was arrested before Jesus even initiated his Galilean ministry.¹¹³ But in the Fourth Gospel Jesus has already been to Cana of Galilee (2:1–11) and is scheduled to return there at 4:43. In the Synoptics Jesus seems to have spent a long time in Galilee before making an appearance in Judea, but in John he seems to have popped in and out of Galilee and Perea, the domain of Herod Antipas,¹¹⁴ with regularity (e.g., chaps. 2; 4; 6; 11) and then to have returned to the south land of Judea between those experiences (e.g., 1; 2:13–4:42; 5; 7:14–10:39; 11:17ff.). This feature of the Johannine Gospel has caused many scholars like Bultmann to posit displacements within the text.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ In contrast to the typical harmony of the Gospels a helpful insight into the order of events in John as compared to the Synoptic Gospels can be gained from the *Index of Gospel Parallels in Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, Greek-English Edition, ed. K. Aland, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: UBS, 1979), 341–55.

¹¹⁴ For a perspective on the domain of Herod Antipas see H. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972).

¹¹⁵ A brief glance at the table of contents in Bultmann, *John*, vii–xii, will provide readers

Indeed, Schnackenburg in his major commentary places 3:31–36 before 3:13–30.¹¹⁶

For the newspaper-type readers the situation in this chapter could be quite confusing not only because it does not seem to fit the sequence here, but also because the discourse at 3:31–36 seems to cover a set of themes similar to those included in the series of discourses related to the earlier Nicodemus event. Let me reassure the reader, however, that the sequence of events in chap. 3 makes extremely good sense theologically. Yet if one is looking for a pedantic chronological report of the events of Jesus' ministry, that is not the nature of the Johannine story of Jesus. This Gospel is one of the most profound statements on the significance of the coming of Jesus found anywhere in Christian literature. Moreover, it conforms perfectly to what the evangelist informs us in his purpose statement he intended to do with this book (20:30–31).

3:22–23 This section on the Baptizer begins with a familiar Greek introductory phrase, *meta tauta*, which means some-

with a sense of his reconstruction.

¹¹⁶ Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1.380–92.

thing like “after this” or “next.” In the same manner as was indicated in chap. 1 concerning “the next day,” we should not understand the primary focus of this phrase to be chronological because in its lack of specificity it can easily be used for introducing a logical sequence rather than a temporal one. In any case Jesus and his disciples entered “the region [gē] of Judea” (a more literal rendering). But since they were already in Judea proper, having been in Jerusalem, the NIV is correct in conveying that here they entered the countryside of Judea in distinction from the city of Jerusalem.¹¹⁷

The surprising fact that strikes us immediately is that Jesus is said to have “spent some time” (*diatriben*, “remained”)¹¹⁸ in that place and that he (singular) was baptizing (*ebaptizen*; 3:22). The implication of the singular here might seem to be that Jesus was doing the

¹¹⁷ W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California, 1974), 322–30.

¹¹⁸ The normal Lukan word for “remain” (cf. Acts 12:19; 14:3, 28; 15:35) appears only here in John except for a variant reading at 11:54. The normal Johannine word is μένειν as used in 3:36.

baptizing, but the evangelist clarifies the issue in 4:2 by saying that Jesus did not (*ouk*) personally do the baptizing. It was only his disciples who were engaged in this task. There is an intriguing question, however, that still remains: Did Jesus and his disciples copy the pattern of John the Baptist? This reference and the one at 4:1–2 are the only places in any of the Gospels where Jesus and his disciples are associated with baptism prior to the formalization of Christian baptism after the resurrection.¹¹⁹ Was baptism at this stage thought to be an act of repentance and a renewal of one’s covenant relationship with God? And why did the evangelist put this story here? These are important questions.

To answer these questions we must not

¹¹⁹ A number of scholars think 4:1–2 is another disjointed editorial addition aimed at a harmonization that denies any possibility of Jesus engaging in baptism after the manner of John the Baptist. For a discussion concerning these issues see, e.g., S. Legasse, “Le Baptême administré par Jesus (Jn 3, 3:22–26; 4, 1–3) et origine du baptême chrétien,” in *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 78 (1977): 3–20; M. Boismard, “Les traditions johanniques concernant le Bapiste,” *RB* 70 (1963): esp. pp. 4–6.

forget that the evangelist had just finished relating the Nicodemus encounter and that the discussion there was centered on birth by water and the Spirit (3:5). Whatever else may be suggested by these verses, it seems quite clear at this point that he wanted the reader to understand precisely that baptism was affirmed by Jesus. But as this story unfolds, it is certainly not the baptism of John the Baptist that seems to be advocated. Yet the interweaving of the lives of Jesus and the Baptizer is how the evangelist clarified for his readers important theological distinctions between the two.

Although we may like to make clarifications through logical discourse patterns and tightly argued syllogisms after the manner of the Greek philosophers, the Semites, like many other ancients, loved to make their distinctions by stories that illustrated the realities of truth. In this Gospel, therefore, the Baptizer is treated not merely as a historical person, but he is also employed as a character symbol who is to be contrasted directly with Jesus. He is witness; Jesus is the Light (1:7–8). He is voice; Jesus is the Word (1:14, 23). He baptizes with water; Jesus baptizes with the Spirit (1:33).¹²⁰ To miss this contrast is to miss the Johannine

theology of “position” enunciated through vivid contrasts. So in organizing his Gospel in this way the evangelist was interested in helping those who believed and would believe to see various theological dimensions in the coming of Jesus. ✎

Almost as a window into the witness’s motives, he introduced the Baptizer by way of contrast and called the reader to pay particular attention to that contrast. Jesus was said to be baptizing in Judea while John was baptizing at Aenon near Salim.¹²¹ Aenon means “the place of springs,” and it apparently was near a town that bore the name for “peace” (Greek *Saleim*, as in the Hebrew *shalom* or the Arabic *salam*). Although we are not certain where this Aenon was, three possibilities have come down through tradition (two of these places are even noted on the ancient mosaic map at Medaba). The first of the three is at the northeastern end of the Dead Sea and is the least likely. Another is in the Jordan

¹²⁰ For another helpful approach to distinctions see R. Brown, *John*, 1.154.

¹²¹ See M. Boismard, “Aenon, près de Salem (Jean, III, 23),” *Revista Biblica* 80 (1973): 218–29, and W. D. Davies, *Gospel and Land*, 323–29.

Valley of Samaria south of the ancient city of Beth Shan (Scythopolis), a site advocated by Schnackenburg.¹²² The third, preferred by W. F. Albright, is near Shechem in Samaria.¹²³ The need to note in 3:23 that there was plenty of water for baptizing makes some sense if it was in the hill country of Samaria, but it could also apply to the Jordan Valley. This notation on John's location may suggest that Jesus had taken over the Judean countryside and that John had moved north.

3:24 The evangelist's editorial note that John had not yet been thrown into prison reminds the reader that the evangelist was fully aware of the historical sequences in his use of this pericope. If the reader perceives that the sequence here is other than that in the Synoptics when Jesus apparently did little ministry (certainly not in Galilee) before the imprisonment of John (cf. [Matt 4:12](#); [Mark 1:14](#)), then the reader is forewarned that the Johannine evangelist knew what he was doing with his stories, and the

reader should not try to squeeze the writer into a preconception of what his Gospel has to be. The statement may also suggest that the reader should be familiar with some basic facts in the story. Whether it also implies that the reader was expected to know the Synoptic stories is less certain.

3:25–26 The contrast between Jesus and John the Baptizer is brought into focus by John's disciples, who apparently had been engaged in a dispute or "argument" (*zētēsis*) with a Jew over purification or "ceremonial washing" (*katharismou*; cf. [2:6](#)). The mention of an unnamed Jew (or Jews in some manuscripts) has led some scholars to speculate about the original text. Some have suggested that the dispute was between the disciples of John and "of Jesus."¹²⁴ Such a suggestion would mean a change from *Ioudaiou* to *Iēsou* and is not totally impossible. If such a change took place, then it could fit a later context by contrasting the devotees of both as suggested in [Acts 11:16](#); [19:1–5](#). But there is no textual evidence to support such a theory. Moreover, the probable distance

¹²² Schnackenburg (*St. John*, 1.412–13) follows the earlier view of Eusebius, *Onimasticon*, 40.

¹²³ W. F. Albright, "Some Observations Favoring the Palestinian Origin of the Gospel of John," *HTR* 17 (1924): 193–94.

¹²⁴ Cf. A. Loisy, *Le quatrième évangile* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1921), 171.

between both groups makes the suggestion less likely.¹²⁵ The mention of water and purification together, however, does remind the reader of the first Cana story, where Jesus transformed the water of the Jewish purification pots into wine (2:6–9).

The designation of the Baptizer by his disciples as “Rabbi” (Lord, Master, or Teacher) is unquestionably intended by the evangelist to pinpoint the contrast between John and Jesus because 3:26 is the only place in the Gospel where the title “Rabbi” refers to someone other than Jesus (cf. 1:38; 6:25; 9:22; 11:8; as well as 20:16, where the heightened form “Rabboni” is used after the resurrection). The disciples of John the Baptist were obviously concerned to protect the popularity and prestige of their teacher, and they wanted the Baptizer to counter Jesus’ growing popularity by taking some affirmative action on his own behalf. Disciples of teachers are often more zealous for their teachers’ perspectives than the teachers themselves, and thus history is replete with many examples of the excesses of disciples, as in the case of the Arminians and Calvinists. ❏

3:27–28 The Baptizer’s answer, how-

¹²⁵ Cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 52.

Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).

ever, could hardly have pleased his zealous followers. The very fact that a number continued to promote his teachings after his death and did not join the Christians is proof enough that they did not accept either his advice or his witness.¹²⁶ Whether or not the Mesopotamian Mandeans, however, are in fact descendants of the disciples of John, as suggested by Bultmann and others, is quite a different historical question.¹²⁷

The response in v. 27 is typical of the Baptizer in this Gospel, who in the first chapter was pictured as a self-effacing, authentic witness. His opening reply here, “only what is given him from heaven,” is significant for the evangelist. But the Baptizer’s statement must not be misunderstood to be an assertion of whimsical determinism. The Baptizer considered himself to be a “sent” person

¹²⁶ Some writers may suggest the thought here is a construct of the evangelist and has little relationship to historical reality, but I am not of that opinion.

¹²⁷ For an insight into Bultmann’s view of the relationship of the disciples of John to the later Mandeans, see his *John* at n. 1, but note that he resists identifying Aeon in this text with Aina in the Mandaean baptismal liturgy (see *John*, 170, n. 9).


or agent (*shaliach*),¹²⁸ and his task as a sent one was clearly understood as bearing witness not to himself but to Christ (3:28; cf. 1:23–27, 32–34). The principle he enunciated is that a “God-sent” one is not self-oriented or self-serving but is one who acknowledges the “givenness” of life from “heaven” (note that heaven is a typical Jewish circumlocution for God; cf. Luke 15:18, 21).

If one is an authentic witness, therefore, matters of power, possessions, and calling ought not to be viewed in terms of one’s self-made, human achievements (cf. Pilate in 19:10) but rather in terms of one’s grateful and responsible use of what God has given, as exemplified by the Baptizer (3:27–28; cf. also Jesus’ words to Pilate at 19:11).¹²⁹ Having a true *understanding of who one is* became for the evangelist a critical issue. As an authentic witness, the Baptizer modeled such a perspective by repackaging here his earlier assertion (1:28), namely, “I am not the Christ” (*ouk eimi ego hō christos*) in a

¹²⁸ For a discussion of agency see my earlier statement on *Shaliach* as it pertains to Jesus at John 1:14, n. 78.

¹²⁹ Beasley-Murray has made some seminal suggestions in this direction also (*John*, 52).

Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).

slightly different Greek word order (3:28). The popularity of Jesus observed by John’s worried disciples (3:26) did not perturb John (3:27). In fact, his reaction stands in vivid contrast to the usual pattern of the world, illustrated so well by the attitude of the Pharisees at the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (12:19). The Pharisees there were worried by their loss of prestige; John here was not! 

3:29 To clarify for his disciples what he meant, therefore, the Baptizer used a typical Jewish type of parable, drawn from Jewish marriage customs. At that time the bridegroom normally selected one or two close friends to escort the bride to the bridegroom’s marriage chamber and to wait outside the room or tent for the bridegroom’s shout and often for receipt of tokens that the marriage had been consummated with his virgin bride.¹³⁰ Such friends of the bridegroom were thus able to certify to the wedding guests that

¹³⁰ For references to marriage customs see Str-B 1.45–46, 500–502. Cf. Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1.416–17. For a helpful discussion see R. Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), esp. at pp. 46–50. Cf. W. Brownlee, “Messianic Motifs of Qumran and the New Testament,” *NTS* 3 (1957): 205–6.

the consummation of the marriage had taken place and the joyous festivities could continue (cf. 3:29). John gladly accepted his role as a friend of the bridegroom. Just as he had earlier willingly turned over his disciples to Jesus in a self-giving act (1:35–37), here he expressed his genuine joy that Jesus was being accepted by the people. This brief parable, therefore, serves as a powerful illustration.

The symbol of marriage, of course, has been employed as a striking picture of the relationship between Christ and his church and as Schnackenburg correctly observed has given rise to “the allegory of the Church as the bride of Christ”¹³¹ (e.g., Eph 5:23–33; Rev 19:7–8). The Gnostics pressed this imagery much further and were charged by the heresiologists like Irenaeus with immoral activity in the name of spiritual experiences.¹³² How wide-

¹³¹ Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 1.417.

¹³² For the heresiologists’ view of Gnostic morality see, e.g., Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.6. See also S. Gero, “With Walter Bauer on the Tigris: Encratite Orthodoxy and Libertine Heresy in Syro Mesopotamian Christianity,” in *Nag Hammadi Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. C. Hedrick and R. Hodgson, Jr. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986),

spread the immorality was among the Gnostics is debated today. But in the Gospel of Philip the highest sacrament was known as the bridal chamber, clearly confirming the view that in Gnostic spirituality marriage language was found to be very important in describing the intimacy and power of the experience.¹³³

3:30 The final testimony of John is a brief but climactic assertion concerning his own diminution and the ascendance of Jesus. It is in fact an affirmation of the crossing point of history because the old era of Israel’s prophetic voices was giving way to the new era of the Messiah with the proclamation of Jesus as the agent of eternal life (cf. the evaluation of John by Jesus in Matt 11:11–14).¹³⁴

287–307.

¹³³ For a discussion of the bridal chamber in the *Gospel of Philip* see my commentary “An Analysis of the Literary Arrangement and Theological Views in the Coptic Gnostic Gospel of Philip” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1967), 491–97, 500–501. See also H. Gaffron, *Studien zum Koptischen Philippusevangelium unter ... der Sakramente* (Bonn: Friedrich-Wilhelms, 1969).

¹³⁴ In a related idea Brown notes that the church set the birthday festival of Jesus near the winter solstice, when the daytime was

3:31–33 Having thus concluded the final testimony of the Baptizer, the evangelist turned to summarize the implications of chap. 3 by drawing together the messages in both the Nicodemus and John the Baptist stories.¹³⁵ Earth and heaven are vastly different realities, and those whose origins are linked with each of these realities are themselves very different. The message is that those who are from the earth can hardly be considered in the same realm of discourse as the one who came from heaven. The authentic messenger or agent from heaven is utterly superior to any and all (*pantōn*) earth-oriented persons (3:31), for he has seen and heard the realities of heaven and bears witness to those realities (3:32).

But the Johannine evangelist was fully aware that the presence of the divine messenger on earth did not guarantee acceptance of the divine message by

expected to become longer, and the birthday celebration of John the Baptist at the summer solstice (June 24), when the daylight was expected to become shorter. Cf. Brown, *John*, 1.153.

¹³⁵ Schnackenburg puts 3:31–36 before 3:13, which, I believe, fails to sense the force of the Johannine summation here (*St. John*, 1.380–90).

Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).

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earth-oriented people. Indeed, receptivity of the heavenly messenger and his message was extremely limited. The use of *oudeis* (“no one”) at 3:32 is to be understood as a literary hyperbole to emphasize the world’s tragic rejection of the messenger. It must not be pressed literally to suggest that no one responded. From the Johannine perspective, however, it could be said that at the crucial point of history, the cross, no one was accepting of Jesus. It took the resurrection to change the picture. But here in the next breath following the statement of universal rejection, there is the typical Johannine contrast with those who receive the divine messenger’s testimony (3:33). This contrast is clearly a mirror image of the initial one made in the Prologue, where the Logos came to his own place and his people did not receive him; yet in the next breath he also refers to those who do receive him (1:11–12). The Johannine postresurrection perspective thus gives meaning to the failure of humanity.

The radicalness of Johannine theology spawned statements such as these ideas concerning acceptance and nonacceptance. It must have been hard for the evangelist to understand why the Jews

did not in wholesale fashion recognize and accept their Messiah. Like Paul, John must have found it extremely difficult to integrate such a reality into his thinking. As Paul worked through this problem in [Romans 9–11](#), he became willing to be condemned himself if he could have been assured of Israel’s acceptance of Christ ([Rom 9:3](#)). But self-sacrifice does not guarantee grateful acceptance of the divine way. John the Baptist and Paul both experienced this reality of nonacceptance, to say nothing of Jesus himself ([John 3:32](#)).

Fortunately, however, there were some who received the witness ([3:32](#)), and by their acceptance they “certified” or sealed (*esphragisen*) the testimony (*martyria*) to the authenticity or truthfulness (*alēthēs*) of God ([3:33](#)). For the evangelist those who accept this witness are clearly the genuine members of the church who in receiving the testimony of Jesus are said to have eternal life (cf. [3:36](#); cf. [1 John 5:11–12](#)).

[3:34–35](#) Not only was the Baptizer “sent” by God but in a much more profound way the ultimate “sent one,” Jesus, was given the climactic mission to the world because into his hand God has given or “placed” (a timeless perfect

tense) “everything” (*panta*, [3:35](#)). The continual affirmation of the Johannine Gospel is the unity of the Son with the Father, which was expressed first by the equating of the *logos* (Word) with *theos* (God) in the Prologue ([1:1](#)). That unity was repeatedly rejected by the Jews as blasphemy (e.g., the Feast of Dedication at [10:33](#)) and was difficult even for the disciples to comprehend (e.g., the farewell discussions at [14:6–26](#)). But this idea of Jesus being one with God finally began to make sense after the resurrection with the key confession of Thomas ([20:28](#)). Because the Son is the epitome of the Father, the Johannine Gospel insists that the reality of salvation is actually in the “hands” of Jesus ([3:35](#)).

Such a statement does not mean that the Father has abdicated his role in salvation because such an idea would be a complete misunderstanding of the Johannine view of the unity of the Father and the Son. Indeed, the Spirit is also part of that unity, and here it said that there was no partial giving of the Spirit to Jesus ([3:34](#)). The Jewish rabbis considered that the various prophets had received the Spirit in differing proportions or measures.¹³⁶ But that idea could hardly be confessed of Jesus, who was for John the

incarnation (1:14) of the fullness (*plērōma*) of God (1:16), the one who existed in the bosom (*kolpon*) of the Father (1:18).

The coming of Jesus was, according to Johannine thinking, the close of an era when only partial insight into the message of God had been available. With the coming of Jesus and the giving of the Paraclete, not only Jesus but even the believer has a much more intimate relationship with the Spirit than was possible in the old era. The Spirit, who was to represent Jesus as “another” Counselor (Paraclete), was to be *in the believer in the most intimate sense* (cf. 14:15–17). The idea that the Spirit was not given in a limited or measured way (*ek metrou*, 3:34) is here applied particularly to Jesus because of his unique relationship within the Godhead. But that idea of the unlimited Spirit is applicable to believers in a derivative sense by the act of Jesus in passing on the Holy Spirit (cf. 20:22).¹³⁶

The idea sometimes promoted that a Christian could be given a part of the Spirit and later receive the fullness of the Spirit is foreign to Johannine thinking since human obedience to the Spirit is the question and not the amount of the Spirit

given. The concept of being filled with the Spirit is a distinctive Lukan way of expressing deep feelings or involvement. It is used with various experiences and emotions such as wrath, anger, and joy, to name only a few (e.g., Luke 4:28; 5:26; 6:11; Acts 3:10; 5:17; 13:45; 19:29).¹³⁷ Luke, like John, did not mean that the Spirit was given to some Christians in a measured or limited sense.

3:36 This third chapter ends with an emphatic restatement of the Johannine thesis of 3:18. Believing in the Son issues in life eternal (*zōēn aiōnion*), which contains a present element but, as indicated earlier, does not exclude a future dimension. This sense of the present reality of salvation provides the reader with a wonderful sense of assurance (cf. 1 John 5:9–12). But for the one who disobeys or refuses to believe (*apeithōn*) the Son, the result is that such a person will not see (*opsetai*) life or experience God’s gift of salvation. Instead, the anger or wrath (*orgē*) of God continues or remains (*menei*) upon that person.

In interpreting this verse there is a cru-

¹³⁷ See my discussion of being filled with the Spirit in “The Spirit and Salvation,” *CTR* 3 (1988): 70–71.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Str-B* 2.431.

cial perspective that must be enunciated. For John people cannot straddle the fence with God. Indeed, without a positive decision of believing the Son, humans do not stand a chance of comprehending or experiencing eternal life. They are and continue to be under the anger or condemnation of God.¹³⁸ It is this text that led Jonathan Edwards to preach about “sinners in the hands of an angry God.” By making such a statement Christians like Edwards do not mean that God is like some ferocious beast prowling around ready to devour a helpless prey. That is the picture of the devil in [1 Pet 5:8](#).

The anger or wrath of God is the way the biblical writers expressed God’s intolerance of evil or sin (cf. [Rom 1:18](#)). The kingdom of God will not tolerate within it any form of sin (cf. [Rev 21:7–8, 27; 22:15](#)). Sin must be dealt with or else a sinner has no chance of entering God’s domain of heaven. Although some would like to think that we are in a fairly satisfactory relationship with God unless we do something “very” wrong and are thereby

excluded, the biblical writers knew better. People without Christ are by their basic commitments oriented actively to sin. Accordingly, the Johannine term “reject” or disobey (*apeithō*) here is operative for the whole human race. Something positive therefore needed to be done to reverse the sinful way of humanity. The means God provided to overcome the existing state of condemnation is for people to believe the Son. Failure to do so is not to become condemned; it is to continue in condemnation. 🖋

¹³⁸ For a discussion of the anger or wrath of God see H. Schonweiss and H. C. Hahn, “Anger, Wrath,” *DNTT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1.105–13.