

# ***“Follow the Leader”***

John 3:22-36

February 16, 2014

**VIDEO:** “John 3:1-21 (Jesus with Nic)

## **Series Review...**

1. Theological
2. Christological
3. Evangelical
4. Supernatural
5. Confrontational
6. Universal
- 7. *Relational***

**VIDEO:** John 3:22-36 (John the Baptist & his disciples)

Today we will zoom in: **5, 3, 1...**

**5 RELATIONSHIPS**

**3 SECTIONS**

**1 ETERNAL TRUTH (Big Idea)**

## Five Relationships in Focus

1. The disciple's relationship to "**Junk**" (vv.22-23)
2. The disciple's relationship to "**Judaism**" (v.24)
3. The disciple's relationship to "**John the Baptist**"
4. The disciple's relationship to "**Jeff**"
5. The disciple's relationship to **Jesus.**

### 3 Sections:

- a. **Context:** vv.22-23
- b. **Conversations:** vv.24-30
- c. **Commentary:** vv.31-36

### 1 Big Idea:

**Make sure you're following THE Leader!**

## **CONTEXT:** (Jesus, John, & both sets of disciples are baptizing)

**22** After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. **23** John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized **24** (for John had not yet been put in prison).

### # 1    Relationship to Junk (sin)

REPENT!!!

## **CONVERSATIONS:** (Religion, Rejection, Reaction)

### A. *Religion*       v.25

*25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.*

### # 2    Relationship to Judaism (rituals/religion)

## **VIDEO: TobyMac: “Speak Life”**

### B. *Rejection* v.26

***26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."***

Children vs. church-go-ers...

Ambassadors vs. Announcers...

### **#3 Relationship to John (“rock star”)**

- In Judea... (John “went & made disciples”)
- NOT in Jail... (John revealed his humanity)
  - *Even our “BEST” are broken!* - JDP
  - Luke 7 = John doubting from prison...

\*\*\* Take a close look at John’s last days... As sure as he was that he must shrink and Jesus must increase, John had a moment of weakness (sending his disciples to re-

confirm with Jesus that He was in fact the Messiah), because he was having a hard time accepting that the Lord would allow him (John) to be treated (killed) this way... given the fact that he (John) had been such a faithful witness.

NOTE: Not only does this passage today (John 3:22-36) affirm that Jesus alone is to be exalted, it also underscores and drives home the point that NO human being is to be seen as anything more than COMPLETELY expendable in the service of our King.

NOTE: In our flesh, we all need to be reminded and refined here... Think about it... Jesus said JB was the best of the best. Moreover, JB taught this truth and even rebuked his own disciples for missing the point and putting him up on a pedestal... Yet, he himself was shocked to realize that he really wasn't treated any differently when push came to shove...Let us all pray consistently and continuously that God will keep us humble – TRULY humble! - JDP

### C. Reaction      vv.27-30

**27** John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

## #4    Relationship to Jeff ("regular" & responsible)

- Under-shepherds are called to:
  - Warn & Equip vs. **Judas'**
  - Warn & Equip vs. **Jezebels**
  - Warn & Equip vs. **Jihads**
  - Warn & Equip vs. **Jive** (all deceptive talk)
  - Warn & Equip vs. **Job(s)** ("joy > job")
  - Warn & Equip vs. **Joining** (false teachers)
  - Warn & Equip vs. **Jokers** (i.e. Youth seats)
  - Warn & Equip vs. "**Juggling Jesus**"
  - Warn & Equip vs. **Justifying oneself...**
- Not to be confused with "**Jurisdiction**"
- Nor "**Jury-Duty**"

**VIDEO:**    OBB: "Come On Home"

**28** You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'

**29** The **one who has the bride is the bridegroom.** The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

**Qt: William Barclay:**

The "friend of the bridegroom," had a unique place at a Jewish wedding. He acted as the liaison between the bride and the bridegroom; he arranged the wedding; he took out the invitations; he presided at the wedding feast. He brought the bride and the bridegroom together. And he had one special duty. It was his duty to guard the bridal chamber and to let no false lover in. He would only open the door when in the dark he heard the bridegroom's voice and recognized it. When he heard the bridegroom's voice he was glad and he let him in, and he went away rejoicing, for his task was completed. John the Baptist said he found his fullness of joy in his Master's voice. We too are to find joy in Christ, but it has a double joy for us, because as members of the church we are the bride of Christ!

**#5      Relationship to Jesus    (Redeemer)**

**\*\*\* (Passage Theme!) \*\*\***

**30 He must increase, but I must decrease."**

**\*\*\* (Passage Theme!) \*\*\***

NOTE: The Apostle Paul expressed exactly the same thing when, in the first chapter of the epistle to the Philippians, he said that his great joy was that "Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. for me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Quote:

As William Carey lay dying, he turned to a friend and said, "When I am gone, don't talk about William Carey; talk about William Carey's Savior.

v.31 = Jesus is LORD... ABOVE ALL!!!

**31** *He who comes from above **is above all**. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven **is above all**.*

v.32 = Jesus has first hand knowledge...

**32** *He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.*

v.33 = To trust Jesus is to trust God

**33** *Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.*

v.34 = Jesus is/was:

**34** *For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.*

- Sent by God
- Speaks for God
- Shares the Spirit of God

## **VIDEO:     Crabb Family: “Come Down to Me”**

v.35 = Jesus has God's love & authority

**35** The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

v.36 = Believe, obey, live, & love!

**v.36** Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life;  
whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life  
but the wrath of God remains on him.

v.36a = Whoever “believes” (active) in Jesus:

- Has (present tense) eternal life
- Whoever “believes” obeys (v.36b)

v.36b = Whoever does NOT OBEY Jesus:

- Does not “believe” (v.36a)
- Shall NOT see eternal life
- “Lips lie, lives tell the truth.” - JDP.

Like Moses ([Deut. 11:26-28; 30:15-20](#)), Joshua ([Josh. 24:15](#)), Elijah ([1 Kings 18:21](#)), and Jesus ([John 3:18](#)) before him, he set forth the only two choices available to lost sinners: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

v.36c = Whoever disobeys gets God's wrath!

- Unbelief = disobedience = wrath.
- “wrath remains” = default position!!!
- The wrath is “**God's** wrath”

Just as eternal life is the present possession of believers,  
so also is condemnation the present condition of  
unbelievers.

### **CLOSING Quote:**

“In this way, John the Baptist clearly declared the sovereignty and supremacy of Jesus Christ, emphasizing that He alone is able to save sinful men from the consequences of their disobedience. And what John proclaimed with his lips, he exemplified with his life, actively promoting Jesus' ministry even at the expense of his own. Thus, the weight of John's witness can still be felt today—as a warning to unbelievers, that they must repent and follow Christ, and as an example to believers, that they should seek the Savior's glory rather than their own.”

- John MacArthur

**VIDEO: Kari Jobe: “We Are”**

# Let's Pray!

Nic taught us that its not about the mis-guided, religious experts, complete with their exaggerated resumes...

John's disciples teach us... its not about coming under the ministry umbrella of a legitimate giant in the faith.

Remember: Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world!

**Key:** "It's never been, nor will it ever be, about whose around you (or even over you)... Its ALL about whose IN you and shining thru you!" - JDP

"The moon does not require another moon to be seen at night... Its only necessity for being seen is the Son." - JDP

John 3:22-36. Jesus and John knew each other well. They worked together. Their disciples knew each other. And in the turmoil of John's arrest and death, some of those disciples were deeply conflicted about their commitments. - NIV Application Commentary

See the flow...

22-24 = "Context"

Jesus & John both have a baptizing ministry...

Even the disciples of Jesus were not as generous as we might think. At one point in Galilee they discover someone working in Jesus' name, and they eagerly report it to him, "Master ... we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us" (Luke 9:49). Jesus refuses to act and gives them a gentle rebuke. **The same thing happened in the early churches founded by Paul. At Corinth Christians were quarreling about allegiances to Paul, Apollos, and Cephas/Peter (1 Cor. 1:10-17).**

- NIV Application Commentary

#### CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT:

(1) John the evangelist certainly finds a universal lesson in this story—a lesson no less pertinent for us today. **The followers of John the Baptist were not able to see that their affection for and devotion to the prophet made them unable to follow Jesus.** I am sure that they would not oppose Jesus, for that would have put them at odds with their master. Nor did they deny that Jesus was in some respect unique, fulfilling the work of God in the world.... **(CAUSE vs. KINGDOM)... Has their**

investment in John become so all-consuming that they have promoted him to a place John would never accept himself? These are important questions and need to be explored today if we create commitments and investments that may impede genuine devotion to Jesus.

2) A second lesson is imbedded in John's unqualified affirmation of Jesus. **The theological uniqueness of Christ is not centered on the effectiveness or persuasiveness of his ministry.** It is not that Jesus provides wisdom or insight that resonates with us and is confirmed by us. **Theological certainty is not awarded by earthly degrees.** Simply put, Jesus is "from above." He bears God's Spirit without limit ([3:34](#)).

\*\*\* Two things result from this realization. (a) It should come as no surprise that the world cannot understand or recognize this revelation ([3:32](#)). The world is steeped in darkness, blinded by its own fallenness, and without God's Word, it is a helpless, pitiful, lifeless thing ([3:36](#)). As this Gospel unfolds, we will hear a great deal more about the incapacities of this darkened world, its anger toward the light, and its desire to destroy those who respond to God's light.

\*\*\* (b) John is making a statement about authority. **If it is true that this is revelation "from above," revelation from God, then Christian revelation is not on a par with any other religious system in the world. Noble attempts to domesticate Jesus by making him one more sage along with many other religious teachers fall short here. The Christian theological affirmation is that in Christ something unparalleled has been disclosed, something the world has never seen. The implications of this affirmation fan out like ripples in a pond: Our understanding of salvation, Scripture, and revelation (among others) is permanently affected.**

(3) Finally, John began the chapter with the Nicodemus story and now ends by making us wonder about the fate not only of Nicodemus, but also of John's followers. Nicodemus is pointed to "water and Spirit" as a means of renewal. The followers of John the Baptist are locked in debate about ceremonial washing. Both parties need to discover that the only

one who can truly transform and cleanse is Jesus because he bears the eschatological Spirit from God.

The first half of the chapter ([3:1-21](#)) pointed to an *experience* that is necessary for entry into the kingdom of God—a powerful, transforming encounter with the Holy Spirit. The second half of the chapter ([3:22-36](#)) now underscores a *commitment of belief*, a challenge to embrace the true identity, origin, and mission of Jesus. This is not simply a commitment to some small truth, but to an idea of Truth, a system of understanding reality, God, and ourselves. - NIV App. Comm.

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION:

**John the Baptist and charismatic leadership.** The impulse to follow a charismatic religious leader is with us today as much as it was with the first disciples in the first century. We have simply replaced those ancient names (e.g., Apollos, Paul, John, Peter) with contemporary names of spiritual heroism and theological insight. It is not as if we are less committed to God because we elevate these leaders. All of this is taking place indeed in a spiritual context! It is simply that these leaders' view of the religious life, their formulation of community and conviction, and their ability to captivate our imaginations and emotions make them models worthy of a following.

In some cases these are nationally known names, men and women whose writing and speaking become the model against which a pastor's sermons and skills are compared. In other cases, these are local leaders, people who have found great influence in the parish and who truly have a "following."

The easiest thing to do at this point is to compare such modern leaders with John the Baptist in [John 3](#) and point out that the problem is not

necessarily with their contributions, but with their followers, who have a personal interest in elevating them to levels that the leaders would not accept for themselves. John the Baptist was doing exactly what God had gifted and called him to do; contemporary leaders are often doing the same. But their followers exploit the leader's stature as a means of leveraging their own power or position in the kingdom of God.

It does not take the average pastor much imagination to recall times when laypersons have argued, "But John Stott sees it differently." Or, "The pastor of the Vineyard Fellowship is really in touch with God." These pastors and theologians are not in error. But in some cases their admirers employ their names in order to discredit those whom God has called into local leadership. By pointing to their hero John, the Baptist's followers could effectively eliminate their obligation to shift their efforts to Jesus and support his work for the kingdom.

My local community recently provided me with a perfect example. I know a charismatic, influential teacher who joined a growing local church, gained a strong following, and then after two years found himself at odds with the pastoral leadership. He left, discrediting the church's leadership as he departed. This month I learned that over a hundred people are "leaving" with him and that now he is going to launch his own church. All of this behavior is disguised in religious language; but in this case, this leader needs to take a lesson from John the Baptist: He must become less while Jesus becomes greater. Make no mistake, of course; he would quickly say that Jesus is "increasing" thanks to his independent, groundbreaking work. Perhaps this is the root of the problem: Religious allegiances are so deceptive they trick those who cherish them dearly.

[John 3:22-36](#) is all about the fragmentation that results in the kingdom of God when Jesus is made to compete with human vessels in this world. No one will admit that they are competing with Jesus. No one will say that they are impeding the kingdom's growth. Words like envy, jealousy, and rivalry are never admitted. But just as the Baptist's followers were

interested in making him into an institution, so too the Christian church can become a human institution built on the foundation of human enterprise and personality.

At the core of the Baptist's argument against his followers' views is an understanding of Jesus that sets him apart from every other human being. Jesus Christ is superior to any other person on earth. He has "come from above," he has been sent by God, and God has given him the Spirit without limit. The Baptist cannot rival these credentials. Therefore every form of human wisdom, every form of religious expression, must be seen as secondary to the revelation that we possess in Jesus Christ. Indeed, every charismatic teacher and every gifted leader must decrease so that Jesus alone is seen as preeminent.

Last month I was flying home alone from the Middle East on the Israeli airline, El Al. My seat companion for eleven hours was an articulate orthodox Jewish woman whose husband was completing a Ph.D. in psychology at Northwestern University in Chicago. She was headed back to Chicago to join him. She asked what I did for a living almost before the pilot pulled up the wheels above Tel Aviv. By the time we were over Greece, we had locked into a dense theological discussion about Jesus and his relationship with Jewish religious thinkers through the ages. I knew better than to begin a debate about Jesus' messianic credentials; this was a theme that the synagogues in Israel speak about regularly. Instead, I framed the "question of Jesus" around the nature of rabbinic authority. I could see she was intrigued.

Jesus was not, I argued, simply about the fulfillment of prophecy. I agreed to set that subject aside (whereupon she noticeably relaxed). With the theologies of Nicea and Chalcedon as my targets, I argued that Jesus was a mystery, a self-revelation of God that had not happened before in human history. Jesus was more than a rabbi, even more than a prophet. To her objection that my Christology was idolatry, violating the second commandment, I reached for an analogy that fit her frame of reference. God can occupy holy space, I argued, and this is what defined the sanctity of the Most Holy Place in the temple, where stone and wood

took on properties that were beyond human touch and comprehension but which nevertheless retained their original form in the world. What if God did this same thing in human flesh? What if God disclosed himself dramatically, descending from heaven, assuming the form of humanity in order to communicate with us and deliver us? If God was in Christ like this, I urged, then we have an utterly new model of revelation surpassing anything found in Moses' words in Torah or in the ongoing insights of *Mishnah* and *Talmud*.

I recall that at this moment she raised her finger to make us pause. "And here is precisely where Judaism and Christianity truly take separate paths," she noted. I agreed. As the hours flew by, we discussed the importance of finding common ground where the synagogue and church might meet. Monotheism, ethics, justice—these were all common themes. But she knew now with certainty that there is a pivotal theological issue that will forever keep us apart. I cannot say that Jesus was just a rabbi or sage or prophet. Jesus was not like John the Baptist. Jesus is God in descent. Jesus is God incarnate. This is the starting point of every Christology—not the wisdom of Jesus, his perfection, or his fulfillment of prophecy.

It is this starting point that John the Baptist is driving home to his followers. "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" ([3:31](#)). Jesus is above all. His words are above every human word. When we speak about Jesus today, the same theme must resonate from every pulpit and lectern. Jesus is God in descent. Jesus is important and glorified not because his teaching is winsome, but because has come from the very heart of the Father. Indeed, he and the Father are one.

- NIV Application Commentary

v.22:

Following his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus and his followers move into the regions east of Jerusalem, where he conducts a ministry

much like that of John the Baptist ([3:22](#)). This is an interesting note since it is our only record that Jesus had a baptizing ministry. But we must remain clear that at this point Jesus is conducting a baptism of repentance, no doubt like that of John, since, as [7:37-39](#) says, the Spirit (a feature of *Christian* baptism) has not yet been given. However, John goes on to make clear that Jesus' disciples, not Jesus himself, baptized people ([4:2](#)). Imagine the sort of elitism that could have developed in the ancient church between those baptized by Jesus and those baptized by anyone else. - NIV Application Commentary

vv.23-24:

Jesus and the Baptist worked simultaneously for some time before Jesus moved north.

The first three Gospels imply that Jesus moves to Galilee because in some fashion he might be in jeopardy in light of John the Baptist's arrest ([Matt. 4:12](#)). If Jesus had not been recognized as yet publicly, why would he worry about an association with the Baptist? The Fourth Gospel completes the picture. Jesus and the Baptist worked together, and when the one was arrested, the other had to move north out of the region. - NIV Application Commentary

25-30 = “Conversation” (Christ is above ALL Christians)

1. vv.25-26 = a reported “dispute”
2. vv.27-28 = proper Philosophy
3. v.29 = proper Attitude
4. v.30 = proper Conduct

**NOTE:** When John's disciples refer to Jesus as "that man" vs. "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" – we know there's a problem!

**Ditto:** "...and everyone is going to Him" (vs. coming to "our" baptism service)

**KEY:** see the toxic hyperbole!

vv.25-26:

The dispute described in [3:25-26](#) is the root of the problem that the Baptist's subsequent speech ([3:27-30](#)) will address.

[John 3:26](#) suggests that it was about baptism and if we are right, then someone in Jewish leadership may be debating the theological correctness of ceremonial purity and how it relates to John's baptism. **Baptism such as this was commonplace for converted Gentiles entering Judaism since it represented a spiritual threshold the convert was crossing. Ceremonial washings were also common among Jews who cleansed themselves for service or prayer. But baptism for Jews did not make sense.**

- NIV Application Commentary

vv.27:

**The Apostle Paul says in [1 Cor. 4:7](#) (*Living Bible*):**

**What are you so puffed up about? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why act as though you are so great, and as though you have accomplished something on your own?**

**So whether we are looking at ourselves or others regarding success, the proper philosophy is, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven."**" - Preaching the Word

v.28:

John's philosophy, seen vertically, was grounded in an overwhelming desire for God's glory. **Numbers 11:26-29 gives us a perfect example from the life of Moses.** In the camp of Israel there were two men on whom the spirit of prophecy had come—Eldad and Medad—and they were prophesying in the camp, not at the Tent of Meeting.

A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!"

Even Joshua, with all of his wisdom, was shaken by jealousy! But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

**"Do you know what I wish? I wish everyone was prophesying for the Lord! How wonderful that would be!" Moses had seen God's glory, and it gave him great joy to see others catch a glimpse of that glory and exercise their spiritual gifts! I think it is no wonder that we read just a few verses later in [Numbers 12:3](#):**

*Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.*

The spirit of John the Baptist and the spirit of Moses were very much the same. They were two of the greatest men who ever lived. We can easily see that John applied this philosophy to his own life.

"You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.'" (John 3:28)

So in John's life there was no tinge of rivalry, no jealousy, no insecurity, no bitterness. Beautiful! Moreover, John kept on ministering. Although John and Jesus were only a few miles apart, and Jesus was having much larger crowds come to him, and greater things were being said about Jesus and his ministry, John stuck to his appointed task.

- Preaching the Word

#### v.29: The Proper Attitude (V. 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."

John portrayed his feelings toward the ministry of Christ in a superbly rich illustration—the Hebrew wedding. He said he was like the best man, like "the friend who attends the bridegroom." According to

#### \*\*\* Side-bar application:

We are supposed to rejoice in the successes of our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is rooted in one of the great metaphors of Scripture—the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul says in [1 Cor. 12:26](#), "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

[Matthew 11:11](#), "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist." His humility was the key to his greatness, just as it was with Moses, and it is the key to any greatness of ours, whether we serve in a great or small place. We should rejoice in the success of others, for we are bound together in Christ.

- Preaching the Word

v.30:

### **The Proper Conduct ([V. 30](#))**

**"He must become greater; I must become less."**

There is no other way to live for Christ! This is an operational imperative! **It is a *must*, not an option.**

One of the most beautiful jewels in the treasury of the Old Testament is the story of Jonathan and David. After David's victory over Goliath, according to [1 Samuel 18:1](#), "Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself." That commitment grew with time, and Jonathan set himself to make David king, although as the oldest son of Saul, King of Israel, Jonathan was heir apparent to the throne. Rather than pursuing his own interests and advantage, Jonathan acted as a reconciler between his father and David and literally saved David's life. On the day David finally became king, Jonathan was not there, for he had died in battle along with his father. No one who has ever read David's mourning cry for his friend Jonathan can forget it.

"I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women."  
[\(2 Samuel 1:26\)](#)

Jonathan was a dramatic illustration of the selfless spirit of John the Baptist—a man who, seeing another who is anointed for a greater task, joyfully accepts God's appointed design. - Preaching the Word

v.30:

John took a subordinate place and rejoiced because of the Bridegroom's joy, and again he declared, as on a previous occasion, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

I wonder if we, as children of God, today can enter into this? Are we content to serve without personal recognition, or are we ambitious to be counted somebody or something in a world that has rejected our Lord

Jesus Christ? Are we seeking places of power and authority, or recognition even in the Church of God itself? That is to deny the spirit that was seen in John the Baptist and in the Apostle Paul. Their one earnest desire was to make much of Christ, and they themselves were willing to be lost sight of. - H.A. Ironside Expository Commentary

## 31-36 = “Commentary” (5 proof statements)

v.31 = Christ's heavenly origin

v.32 = First hand knowledge (cf. 8:26) & 15:15

Tragically, John lamented, despite Jesus' powerful, authoritative proclamation of the truth, **no one receives His testimony**. Echoing Jesus' words to that same effect ([3:11](#); cf. [5:43](#); [12:37](#)), the Baptist's hyperbolic statement emphasized that the world in general rejects Jesus and His teaching. **The apostle John noted that rejection in the prologue to his gospel:** "[Jesus] was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" ([1:9-11](#)). "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God," Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" ([1 Cor. 2:14](#)). It is because they are dead in their trespasses and sins ([Eph. 2:1](#)) and blinded by Satan ([2 Cor. 4:4](#)) that unbelievers willfully reject Jesus' testimony to the truth. - MacArthur New Testament Commentary

**Qt:** Truth, then, is something that *descends*, not something discovered through human labor. It is foreign. It comes from outside and thus runs the risk of rejection. - NIV Application Commentary

v.33 = Christ's message always aligns with God's message

Having stated the general rule, John gave the exception. Although the majority of people reject Jesus' message, not everyone does. There are those who accept **His testimony**, believing in Him for eternal life. In the ancient world, people **set** their **seal** to something (often with a signet ring; [Gen. 41:42](#); [Est. 3:10, 12](#); [8:2, 8, 10](#); [Dan. 6:17](#)) as a sign of complete acceptance and approval. In today's jargon, they signed off on it. Those who have **received** Christ's **testimony** thereby certify their belief that **God is true** when He speaks through His Son, as always (cf. [John 17:17](#); [Rom. 3:4](#); [Titus 1:2](#)).

Unlike human teachers, whose words sometimes agree with divine truth and sometimes do not, Jesus always spoke in complete harmony with the Father. Thus, those who profess to believe in God yet reject Jesus Christ are deceived.

Father said of Him "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" ([Matt. 17:5](#)).

**To reject Jesus is to call God a liar ([1 John 5:10](#)), and to perish eternally ([John 8:24](#)).** - MacArthur N.T. Commentary

The two Greek verbs at the center of [3:33](#) are in the aorist tense ("the man who *has accepted* it *has certified* that God is truthful," italics added). This describes men and women who have made a firm decision once and for all. They have acknowledged Jesus, accepted him and his witness, and made a theological deduction about God... To affirm the divine sonship of Jesus drives one immediately to affirmations about God and revelation and truth. John's imagery is graphic. In antiquity wax seals were used to give authentication and ownership to letters and possessions. Even illiterate people could recognize the official seals of important

persons. Hence, to embrace Jesus is to set a seal, to confirm, and to defend an entire constellation of beliefs central to Christian faith.

- NIV Application Commentary

v.34 = Christ shares/gives the Spirit's limitless power

The prophets of old who spoke for God were led, empowered, and inspired by the Holy Spirit; John the Baptist himself was "filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb" ([Luke 1:15](#)). Yet the Spirit's ability to empower them was limited by their sinful, fallen human natures.

Since "in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" ([Col. 2:9](#)), there were no limits to the Spirit's power working through Him.

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary

v. 35 = Christ received ALL authority from the Father

This last point explicitly states what the first four imply. Because of His love for **the Son** (cf. [5:20](#); [15:9](#); [17:23, 26](#); [Matt. 3:17](#)), **the Father has given** Him supreme authority over **all things** on earth and in heaven ([Matt. 11:27](#); [28:18](#); [1 Cor. 15:27](#); [Eph. 1:22](#); [Phil. 2:9-11](#); [Heb. 1:2](#); [1 Peter 3:22](#)). That supremacy is a clear indicator of the Son's deity. John's affirmation of Jesus' absolute authority demonstrated his humble attitude, even as his heralding ministry faded into the background. Having fulfilled his mission on this earth, John realized that his work would soon be finished. In fact, not long after this, he was arrested and beheaded by Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee ([Matt. 14:3-11](#)).

**v. 36 = Belief in Him = eternal life**

**Disobedience of Him = eternal death**

## **Reject “worship” = Receive Wrath**

But before he faded from the scene, John the Baptist gave an invitation and a warning that form a fitting climax, not only to this chapter, but also to his entire ministry.

The blessed truth of salvation is that the one **who believes in the Son has eternal life** as a present possession, not merely as a future hope. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" cf. 1:12; 3:15-16 John 5:10-13).

But on the other hand, the one **who does not obey the Son will not see life.** The juxtaposition of belief and disobedience is a reminder that the New Testament portrays belief in the gospel as obedience to God, an essential element of saving faith (cf. Acts 6:7; Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 5:9; 1 Peter 1:2; 4:17).

**The idea here is not that God will one day condemn sinners for their disobedient unbelief; they are already in a state of condemnation (3:18; 2 Peter 2:9) from which only saving faith in Jesus Christ can deliver them.** The ultimate consequence of refusing to believe will be to experience God's wrath for eternity in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10-15).

But it was to save helpless, doomed sinners from that terrifying fate that God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world (1:29; 3:17; 4:42; Matt. 1:21; Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 John 4:14).

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And now comes the greatest testimony of this section. And what a tremendous testimony it is!

We noticed that verse 18 divided all mankind who have heard the gospel into two groups. This does not take in the heathen who have never heard the gospel; they will be dealt with according to the light they have, and will be judged for their own sins. Here again we have two classes. It says first, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." That is one group. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." That is the other.

**Qt: To die without Christ! See how this one verse cuts out by the roots the twin errors of the annihilation of the wicked and the universal salvation of all men sometime, somewhere. – H.A. Ironside**

\*\*\* Contrast “obeying” Christ vs. obeying the “church”

- Catholics
- Liberals
- Baptists
- Heretics

**Qt:** “Do you live in open, odd, obvious obedience to Jesus Christ?” (as opposed to the old question: “Are you a Christian?” or even: “Are you a follower of Christ?” - JDP

[\*\*3:36b\*\*](#) John then looks at salvation from the other point of view. Those who reject the Son will not see life; instead, God's wrath rests on them. This verse does not indicate that God is angry in light of their rejection of him. Rather, it means that **the world of darkness and unbelief stands under the judgment of God ([Rom. 1:18ff.](#)), and those who refuse the light, who reject Jesus, remain in the darkness and thus continue to live under divine judgment.**

- NIV Application Commentary

Above all, the Father has provided the Son with the Holy Spirit ([\*\*3:34\*\*](#)). Even though the subject of the final clause in [\*\*3:34\*\*](#) is ambiguous (lit., "for he gives the Spirit without limit") and some have speculated that the verse describes how the Son gives the Spirit to believers, it seems clear that these verses are about what God has given to Jesus, equipping him for his mission in the world. **This verse does not refer to Jesus' giving the Spirit to us, but to God's giving the Spirit to his Son, underscoring the remarkable interconnectedness of Father and Son once more.**