

John 3:31-36

Introduction: The question that immediately comes to mind when one reads this passage in the flow of John 3 is, “Who is the speaker in these final six verses of the chapter?” There are only three who are given voice thus far in John 3 – Jesus, John the Baptist or John the Apostle, who is the narrator in chapter 3 and the author of this gospel. Without going into the details of the discussion we can immediately rule out Jesus. That leaves us with John the Baptist and the Apostle John, the gospel writer. It is my opinion that in this passage, the Apostle John, the gospel writer, is providing a summary or exposition, of chapter 3 – perhaps a sort of epilogue. He is certainly presenting the foundation for John’s statement that Jesus must increase and he must decrease 3:27-30 (esp. vv.27-28, 30). However, he interacts extensively with some of the key truths taught in Jesus’ exchange with Nicodemus “from above” (vs. 31; cf. vss. 3, 7), “comes from heaven” (vs. 31b; cf. vs. 13), “is of the earth/speaks of the earth” (vs. 31; cf. vss. 6, 12), “bears witness to what he has seen and heard” (vs. 32; cf. vs. 11), “(not) receive his testimony” (vss. 32f.; cf. vs. 11), “the gift of the Spirit” (vs. 34; cf. vss. 15f).¹ This exposition is provided by the Apostle John for the purpose of lifting up the glory of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of God” so that his readers - to include you and me - “may believe in Him...and that by believing you may have life in His name” (cf. 20:31).

In order to identify my purpose I want to start in the final verse – 3:36 – and then return to it at the end of our study. John will conclude his exposition in summary with a gospel application, which declares that there is a fundamental and clear divide in humanity – there are essentially two kinds of people in this world – those who believe in Jesus and have eternal life and those who reject Him and have the wrath of God “remaining” on them. John is building the case that Jesus alone speaks with the authority of God and bears the heart of God as He does the work of God. *Because I believe that to be a clear biblical truth, it is my goal to follow along with John in these verses, as he exalts Jesus, so that when you “see” the glory of Jesus – who is God – you might believe and receive eternal life in His name.* It is true that some of you have already believed and have eternal life – I hope you will be a little bit more “enthralled” with His majesty/glory and be motivated to look into it more and more. While for others – you are still reserving judgment – you’re not yet “all in.” For you, I would ask that you work with me to see what John sees and then I would challenge you with the words of D.L. Moody – the founder of the Moody Bible Institute – the school where I went to prepare for ministry – “Let God have your life; He can do more with it than you can.” I might add – “He cares more for your life than you do.”

The thought – from John the Baptist which leads into these verses is found in 3:27-28, 30. These six verses tell us why it is absolutely necessary that Jesus increase and we decrease.

¹ Ridderbos, “The Gospel of John; A Theological Commentary,” page 148.

Jesus is Greater than John Because John is From the Earth and Jesus is From Above and is Above All Things – 3:31

- Jesus is referred to as “the one who comes from above” whereas John/humanity is “one who is from the earth” and thus “belongs to the earth”. The language referring to John/humanity as “from the earth” is similar to the language used to refer to Jesus. However, it is in distinct in essential ways.

1. Jesus is said to one who “comes from above.” It has the idea of proceeding from a place. There is not the implication of origin here, as in beginning or essential source. Jesus is from above (Ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος ἐπάνω πάντων ἐστίν - John 3:31) – This is fundamental Incarnational and Trinitarian theology.

*There is an intended sense of pre-existence in this text which carries over from Jesus’ exchange with Nicodemus (cf. 3:9-13).

*There is the implication of the Incarnation here (cf. 3:31) as introduced in 3:13. Jesus didn’t simply exist before creation – Jesus is God incarnate!! Gerrit Scott Dawson, writing in summary of the thought of Thomas Torrance, wrote, “*He (Thomas) argues that **the incarnation** represents a coming of God from the place where God is to the place where humanity is. **The ascension, then, marks the return of the incarnate Son from ‘our place’ to ‘God’s place.’**”² He clarifies a bit when says that he is thinking in relational terms rather than spatial terms. (I will later make the point that 3:35 has with it the implication of ascension.)*

This means that Jesus is “**over/above all things**” because He is supreme. Which is to say that the One who “comes from above” is God – not “a god” but “**the God**” – the one and only God. This “procession” from the Divine Son to Jesus the Incarnate God – the “God-Man” - is implied in John 1:1-4, 14.

Note: This One whom John introduced as the Lamb of God, the Son of God – He walked among them as a man. He ate with them, spoke with them, worked with them – He squinted in the bright sun, perspired in the heat of the day, His muscles ached, He became hungry and ate to satisfy His hunger, He became thirsty and drank water to quench His thirst. This One who was obviously and fully human – He walked among them as fully God!! **Which means;**

*He is over all things (supreme) because He is before all things and the Creator of all things (cf. John 1:1-4, 14; Hebrews 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-20; Philippians 2:5-11).

2. John/humanity is from the earth (both origin and kind) – which emphasizes temporality, with both mortality and perspective implied in the language. Humanity cannot transcend the limits of who we are – either in understanding or existence (cf. 3:3, 5-6, 11-13; cf. also 1 Corinthians 15).

² Dawson, “Jesus Ascended; The Meaning of Christ’s Continuing Incarnation,” page 49.

One Who is From the Earth Can Only Speak “From the Earth” Whereas Jesus Speaks With the Authority of God – 3:31-34

- John is from the earth (both origin and kind) and consequently speaks “from” the earth – temporal perspective. Humanity cannot transcend the limits of their being and “speak” authoritatively – cf. 3:31b.

*This means the wisdom of man cannot reach beyond the scope of man’s limits as a creature. This pertains to life’s most important questions – human origins, as well as the origins of all that exists; the nature and identity of mankind; the nature of God and relationship with Him; destiny etc. (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17-25, 30-31; also Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:17-19; Colossians 2:8).

Note: All of the combined/collective intelligence, education, wisdom, genius etc. of humanity – through the ages, cannot begin to pierce the veil that separates the mystery of the unseen God from the mind/heart of man.

*This explains the innate tendency of humanity to reject the revealed truth of God – (John 3:31-32, which repeats the negative or “pessimistic” evaluation Jesus offered in 3:11) – Consider that this alludes to the fact that there is a “blindness” to the truth of the Gospel which is innate to the human condition – Jesus points to this throughout the gospel – John 8:31-59; 9:35-41; 12:37-40; 15:18-25.

- Jesus, who is Himself God, speaks as the One who came from heaven (cf. 3:11-13, 18-19). He comes from the very the council of the Triune God.

Note: There is both the sense of the authoritative witness to what took place and the witness of an ongoing word of love from the Father based in His anointing by the Spirit (cf. 3:34).

*He testifies to what He has seen and heard with respect to the mystery of God (cf. 3:3, 14-17; also 1:14-18; 1 John 3:16; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Revelation 13:8).

Note: I truly believe that the teaching of the NT – in places like Ephesians 1:3-14 and Romans 8:28-30 – that it was in the council of the Triune God that the perfect love, inexhaustible and shared love of Father and Son and Spirit willed to create mankind in love and for intimacy with Him and included the plan to redeem in the same love – poured out on us by the Spirit. It was in that council of God and by the will of God that I was called by name – if you are His or you come to know Him – you were called by name. That is the implication John 10:27-30; 17:1-2, 6-10ff.

*He bears witness by His very life, which is the outworking of the mystery of God in the gospel (cf. John 10:14-18; 11:25-26; 12:23-33; 13:1-5; 14:30-31; 15:9-11)

*Hence, He is the repository of all of the wisdom of God – the final word from God (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17-25, 30-31; Colossians 2:8-9; Hebrews 1:1-3)

This is specifically put into contrast with Jesus (cf. 3:31b-32a). Jesus alone was in the council of God before the foundations of the earth (cf. 3:13). He planned creation and redemption – and He came to finally, authoritatively and fully speak the heart of God (cf. Hebrews 1:1-3).

Note: This makes sense of the final verses of this epilogue.

Jesus Is Loved by the Father and the Father Gives All Things Into His Hand(s) – cf. 3:35-36

- This implies a supremacy to which Jesus was called and to which He ascended in exaltation – this is a gospel supremacy as the victorious Savior. This is the implication of Jesus’ words and work on the night before His surrender to be crucified (cf. John 13:1-5; 14:1-6; 15-23 etc.) Paul gives us a peek behind the veil to declare what took place in His cross – crucifixion, resurrection and exaltation (cf. Ephesians 1:15-23).

- We who believe are exalted with Him and share in His triumph in glory (cf. Ephesians 2:1-7; Colossians 3:1-4) – Listen to a few of the chapter titles as Gerritt Dawson progresses through his teaching on the ascension of Jesus and the continuation of His incarnation – “The Triumph of Jesus,” “The Ascension and the Person of Christ,” “Union with Christ: The Head and Firstfruits,” “The Priesthood of Christ in the Power of the Holy Spirit.” I would like to quote him again,

“God in Christ crosses the divide to enter our existence, our way of being. Then through this union, Jesus returns, still bearing his humanity, to the place of relation described as the Father’s right hand, the ‘place’ of honour, glory, power and dominion. Thus, heaven as a relational place is where God has ‘room’ for His divine life and activity in ever-deepening communion with humanity. And humanity (now present in Jesus our ascended head, but one day as His whole ascended body) has ‘room’ in heaven for an eternal life of relational union with the Triune God.”³

- We who reject remain under His wrath (cf. 3:36; Romans 1:18-25)

³ Dawson, page 49