

***“Friend of the Bridegroom”***

May 5, 2013  
John 3:22-30

**Why do we divide the Bible into an Old Testament (w/ its 39 books) and a New Testament (w/ 27)?**

Why not just have 1 large volume of 66 books called

*The Bible* that isn't divided into an OT and a NT?

It's because of the meaning of the word *Testament* itself, which is the English translation of the Gk word *diatheke*.

*Diatheke* was used of a binding agreement—a covenant—between 2 parties.

So the 2 halves of the Bible are named for 2 covenant-agreements.

**The OT records the binding covenant between God/Israel based on the Law; the NT is the covenant based on a living relationship w/ X.**

In our study of Exodus in the adult SS class, we saw that God appeared to Israel on Mt. Sinai, & formed a covenant w/ them, saying=>

*“If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine.”*

To that the people responded=> *“All that the Lord has spoken we will do!”*

This was the initial act of agreement.

Then we read=> *“And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord”* (Ex 19:5, 8).

This covenant contract was repeated 2 more times, each of these repetitions including more specific details/conditions added to the general covenant agreement.

And each time the people agreed to the covenant.

Just before the 3<sup>rd</sup> repetition, Moses sacrificed a number of young bulls as a peace offering to ratify the covenant in blood.

The central purpose of this Old Covenant was 1<sup>st</sup>, to show God's people how to live perfectly holy lives in which they loved God wholeheartedly, & loved others as they loved themselves.

Then secondly, it was designed to show them how to obtain God's gracious forgiveness of their sinful deeds, which violated the covenant.

This would require blood sacrifices, which looked forward prophetically to the sacrifice of God's own Son, the ultimate offering for sin.

**The Old Covenant was just a precursor to God's New Covenant—a far superior covenant, foretold by the prophet Jeremiah, in Jer 31=>**

*“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, / not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the*

*Lord. [God viewed His covenant w/ Israel as the equivalent of a marriage contract w/ them] / ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the Lord, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. / They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying “Know the Lord,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’”*

(Jer 31:31-34).

The Old Covenant was ratified by the blood of sacrificed bulls.

The New Covenant would be ratified by the blood of Jesus, who told His disciples in the Upper Room, as He passed around the cup of wine=> “*This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood*” (Lk 22:20).

That cup of wine symbolizing Jesus’ blood (which ratified the New Covenant) is what we commemorate around the Lord’s Table.

**So the reason we have both an OT & a NT, is that we have two very different covenants.**

The New Covenant is far superior to the Old Covenant, a truth that is verified in both the OT and the NT.

\*E.g. Jer 31 prophesied that this New Covenant would result in God’s once-for-all forgiving His people’s iniquity & also His writing His Law on their hearts, rather than stone tablets (31:33f), as w/ the Old Covenant.

\*II Cor 3:6 points out that the Old Covenant killed, based (as it was) on the letter of the Law, & crippled by man's inability to obey the Law—but the New Covenant produces victory & a new life, energized (as it is) by Spirit's power.

\*II Cor 3:9 takes this a step further, referring to the Old Covenant as a “*ministry of condemnation*” (since failure to obey the Law perfectly always/inevitably resulted in condemnation); while the New Covenant is a “*ministry of righteousness*” (since it results in the righteousness of God Himself being imputed to Xns).

\*Heb 7:27 teaches that, while OT priests (under the Old Covenant) had to offer sacrifices for sins every day, Jesus' death was a once/for-all sacrifice for sin w/i the New Covenant.

\*Heb 8:6 says that X, the Mediator of the New Covenant=>  
“*has obtained a more excellent ministry* [than the high priests of the Old Covenant], *by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.*”

So any way you look at it, the New Covenant is far superior to the Old Covenant.

**Today's text represents the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, as the last OT prophet is superceded by Jesus, the Messiah, the great Moses-like prophet promised in Deut 18:15.**

John the Baptist's ministry decreased, as X's ministry increased.

John 3:22-30 (our text) describes this transition, in terms of=>

the setting (where it occurred), the dispute, John's answer,  
John's analogy, and John's application of the analogy to  
himself.

### \* The Setting

[**John 3:22**]=> "*After these things [Jesus' cleansing of the Temple and His discussion with Nicodemus] Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing.*"

**Ever since Jesus' cleansing of the Temple He had been in Jerusalem; but now He left.**

He & His disciples remained in Judea (the southern region of Israel, where Jerusalem was located), but now they moved out of the city, into the surrounding countryside.

Here Jesus preached and baptized converts to His message.

He also spent time w/ His disciples, prob. teaching them as  
He involved them in His ministry, by having them  
perform the actual baptisms for Jesus.

John 4:2 says that Jesus Himself did not baptize, but that  
His disciples were doing so on His behalf.

In Mt 4:18 we learn that at a later time, Jesus' preaching centered on the same theme John the Baptist preached=>

*"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

So it's likely Jesus' earlier preaching here in Judea focused on repentance as He baptized, preparing people's hearts for the Kingdom.

During this time, Jesus/John had parallel ministries, in that they both were baptizing, and both were preaching repentance. Not only had the Messiah's herald announced His arrival, he had also provided a preview of His ministry, so the people would know what to look for, in order to recognize the Messiah.

**John himself was now conducting his ministry in Samaria, just north of Judea.**

**[Verses 23-24]=>** *"John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized—/for John had not yet been thrown into prison."*

Scholars cannot be sure where Aenon & Salim were located, but the most likely sites seem to have been in Samaria. In chapter 1 we read that, earlier on, John the Baptist had been baptizing/preaching east of the Jordan River.

Now he seems to have moved to Samaria, west of the river, and close enough to the place where Jesus was, so that John's disciples got word of X's ministry.

Part of John's reason for coming to this area was the ample supply of water available for baptisms.

The fact that he sought “much water” for baptizing prob. indicates he didn’t baptize by sprinkling, but by immersion.

For the sake of clarification, the writer drops in a parenthetical note about John not yet having been thrown into prison. This Gospel was written decades after the other 3 Gospels, which most of John’s readers had prob. already read. They might have scratched their heads, because John’s account of Jesus’ ministry didn’t match that of the other Gospel writers, at this point.

The other 3 all started from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, after John the Baptist had been arrested.

John’s account of Jesus’ ministry doesn’t start in Galilee, but in Jerusalem, with John the Baptist being free still, & involved in ministry.

To avoid confusion, the Apostle John explained in his Gospel that he was describing Jesus’ earlier ministry, in/around Judea, before He migrated north to Galilee.

During that period (about which Matthew/Mark/Luke say nothing), John the Baptist was still free, ministering in Samaria—even as X ministered in nearby Judea.

Though John had fulfilled his calling when he announced to Israel that Jesus was the Lamb of God, he faithfully

continued to preach/baptize, as long as people were willing to come/listen-to him.

All the while, he was undoubtedly pointing them to Jesus, encouraging them to leave his own ministry, and to follow their true Savior/Messiah instead.

I Cor 4:2 says that it is required of stewards that they be found faithful, and John was a very faithful steward.

### \* The Dispute

[Verse 25]=> “*Therefore [because the 2 “baptism ministries” were in such close proximity] there arose a discussion on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purification.* ”

**Who this “Jew” was, what his loyalties were (whether to Jesus or to traditional Judaism), and why John’s disciples made a connection between him and Jesus’ ministry, we have no way of knowing.**

We do know that “*purification*” was a Jewish ceremonial rite.

And this was the original issue, that sparked the dispute.

Somehow, his comments about such purification led to

John’s followers taking a defensive stance on John’s behalf, w/ regard to the value of his versus Jesus’ baptisms.

[Verse 26]=> “*And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.’ ”*

**John’s disciples had developed a very partisan attitude out of their loyalty to John himself.**

For some time, he had been the star attraction whom people had come from miles around, to see/hear.

Jn 4 says that now, “*Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John*” (Jn 4:1).

John’s followers felt that Jesus had become an interloper, horning in on John’s message (repentance) & method (baptism), & unfairly gaining a following for Himself by stealing John’s people.

From their near-sighted/resentful p.o.v., John’s originally aiding Jesus in this effort, by introducing Him to Israel, was a mistake, leading to his own downfall as a popular/famous teacher.

They considered themselves to be in competition w/ Jesus, & they were beginning to feel like the losers.

In their resentment, they exaggerated the situation, saying that “*all are coming to Him*,” even though John still seems to have had a substantial following himself.

They prob. wanted John to take sides w/ them against Jesus.

**This is a prime example of jealousy w/i the ministry, a curse that has always plagued the Church.**

You still see it today, when one preacher becomes more popular than others, and people start shifting over to his church.

Those whose churches are losing members may disparage the more popular pastor, out of ill will towards him.

If he has gained his popularity by compromising with the world, tickling people's ears with messages that vary from biblical truth, or which water it down to make it more acceptable, those who leave to attend his church are the kind of people who deserve him, just as he deserves them.

The only thing you know for sure about such people, is that they've left someone else's church to come to his, & they'll prob. do the same to him at the least provocation.

On the other hand, if that pastor is faithfully feeding God's Word to God's people w/ depth, we should thank God for him.

We should say w/ Paul=> "*In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. / Yes, and I will rejoice*" (Phil 1:18).

#### \* John's Answer

[Verse 27]=> "*John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.'*"

**John answered his disciples' discontentment with a axiomatic truth=> Whatever good thing a person has, he has received it as a gift from God in heaven.**

In this context, John is saying specifically that true ministers receive their ministries as gifts from God.

John understood that his relationship w/ God (as His servant) & w/ Jesus X (as His forerunner) left no room for jealousy.

His being Messiah's herald was a wonderful/gracious gift from God.

One of the problems a herald had to face was that, having announced the king's arrival, his job was finished. So trying to hold onto any honor/importance for himself just kept him from doing his duty, to bring honor to his king.

His main responsibility now, was simply to get out of the way.

John accepted this truth, and thanked God for having entrusted him w/ the privilege of proclaiming X's arrival. His disciples should have done the same. God had not chosen him to be Israel's Messiah, but instead to be the Messiah's herald, which was all he ever wanted to do.

No one has a right to claim any honor for himself not granted to him by God in heaven.

Murmuring discontentment w/ one's own situation is an arrogant protest against God's supremacy/sovereignty.

Every faithful minister—in fact, any faithful Xn—can find contentment in whatever circumstance he's in, by viewing that as God's gift, and as God's benevolent will, for his life.

Paul wrote=> "*We have received grace & apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake*" (Rom 1:5).

That was God's gift to Paul, he loved it, and he thrived on it as his life's work.

But even when that work was taken away from him, when he was arrested and confined to a jail cell, Paul could still write=> "*I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am*" (Phil 4:11).

He also learned to minister from a prison cell by writing letters, for which we are indebted to him for much of our NT canon.

Rather than looking over the fence w/ envy at someone else's ministry, we are to strive to be faithful wherever God has placed us, thanking Him for the privilege.

**John called upon his disciples to witness to the fact that he had never pretended to be, nor sought the honor of being, the Messiah.**

[Verse 28] (John)=> "*You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.'*"

John had always made it clear to anyone who asked, that he was not the Messiah, but merely the Messiah's forerunner, a voice crying in the wilderness for God's people to repent in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

Nothing he had ever said could be used as justification for his disciples' bitter jealousy toward Jesus.

In fact, Jesus' increasing popularity was evidence that John had successfully fulfilled his own God-given role as the forerunner of Messiah; & that's how he saw it.

By his life, John illustrated the 1<sup>st</sup> principle of faithful ministry,  
which is humility.

That's why Jesus said there was no one greater than John.  
The measure of any preacher's success is not how many  
people follow him, but how closely they follow X,  
because of him, & his ministry to them.

If they have become his followers rather than X's, he is a  
rank failure, who is usurping the faith/love/honor of  
believers, which rightfully belongs to Jesus alone.

God says=> "*I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another*" (Isa 42:8).

This should place the recent, excessive pomp/grandeur  
surrounding the election of the new pope into proper  
perspective for us.

#### \* John's Analogy

**John now used a wedding analogy that was common in his day, to illustrate his own subservience to the Messiah.**

He portrayed himself as the friend of a bridegroom, a role that  
seems to have included the responsibilities of a modern day  
match-maker, wedding-coordinator, and best-man.

[Verse 29] (John)=> "*He who has the bride [has won her heart & now has gone to her house to fetch her] is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.*"

**According to expositor J.C. Ryle, the friend of the groom was  
the means of communication between him & the  
prospective bride during the period of their courtship.**

His job was to promote the bridegroom's interests by explaining his feelings to her, & trying to remove any obstacles that might interfere w/ a marriage between the two of them. In the process, this "friend" might come to know the lady well enough to become her confidant, & there was at times the risk of a romance developing between them.

But the friend's allowing this happen, was considered an ultimate betrayal of the bridegroom's friendship, even as far back as Samson's time (Judg 14:20), whose "friend"/companion married his fiancé.

John was a faithful friend to Jesus, the Bridegroom, who sought only to promote the spiritual union of X w/ believers.

Paul's words to Xns in II Cor 11 could well have been the words of John the Baptist too=> "*For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin*" (II Cor 11:2).

These words are instructive for every minister, reminding us that the Church, as a Bride, belongs to X, not to us.

We have no right to take Jesus' place in the affections, honor, or loyalty of God's people, even though we are to form close/shepherding relationships w/ them, as their pastors.

Please love us, but don't ever let us take your eyes off X to focus them on ourselves.

The words of the 19<sup>th</sup> century English pastor J.C. Ryle still hold true today, & ought to be heeded by the church today=>

"As churches decay and fall away, they think less of Christ and more of ministers. As churches revive and receive spiritual life, they think less of ministers and more of Christ. To a decaying church the sun is going down, and the [Xn] stars are beginning to appear. To a reviving church the stars are waning, and the sun appearing."

**We can't be absolutely sure of the "friend's" exact role in the wedding, but on the wedding day when a bridegroom went to get his bride, the friend seems to have waited back at the groom's house, getting everything ready for the wedding feast that would take place there.**

When he heard the bridegroom's voice, he knew the official ceremony had already taken place at the bride's house & he could now rejoice that the 2 people were coming back to the groom's house together/united, for the feast that would follow.

John the Baptist said, "That's how I feel, when I hear that large crowds are following Jesus like a bride following her

bridegroom, & they include many people I have taught/baptized myself.

“I’ve successfully finished my task as a friend of the Bridegroom, & that fills me w/ joy.”

He could say what Paul said, & what every pastor should be able to say to his people=> “*We really live, if you stand firm in the Lord*” (I Thes 3:8).

This left no room for jealousy in the hearts of John’s disciples.

It leaves no room for pride of any sort in any minister’s heart.

### \* John’s Application

**John takes this principle of humility & applies it to himself.**

[Verse 30]=> “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*”

John the Baptist knew he must decrease because that was God’s plan, as His only begotten Son increased in favor/notoriety among the faithful remnant w/i Israel.

John was humble enough to consider himself expendable for the sake of the New Covenant, & Messiah’s glory.

What was happening around John was far bigger than himself=>  
His “decreasing” was simply part of the end of the old dispensation, in which he was a prophet, the final hours of the Old Covenant.

But John rejoiced in the knowledge that the New Covenant was about to come into its own.

The Sun was about to rise, the Morningstar who had come to bear witness of the Sun's Light was about to fade away in the brightness of its glory, & John rejoiced over what God was about to do through His Son.

Ultimately, John would disappear altogether from the scene, as Herod, pressed by an angry/vengeful woman, took John's life, & facilitated his promotion into the glories of heaven.

**God can use you/me as He did John, if we will humble ourselves before Him, & adopt John's selfless attitude, that we must decrease, & that Jesus must increase, in our lives.**

- \* If we will recognize that our lives are ultimately not about us, but about how we can live them to the Bridegroom's glory;
- \* If we will live in the constant awareness that, because X died to redeem our souls, we belong to Him, not to ourselves;
- \* If the pride that fuels our jealousy can be swallowed up in a humble/grateful understanding that we really deserve nothing from our Savior, & yet He has given us everything;

Then we too can be useful friends of our beloved Bridegroom.

John had apparently grown up a humble man, living in the wilderness, clothed in a camel's hair garment, & feeding himself w/ poor-people's food (locusts & wild honey). But at some point, even John must have had to commit himself to serving his Lord, rather than himself.

A person doesn't become willing to "decrease" for the sake of X's "increase" w/o repenting of his pride or surrendering to his Master's will.

Those who will humbly cast their crowns at X's feet someday, will have reached that point in their lives thru the humble, grateful awareness that X sacrificed Himself, for them, on the cross.

If we can say w/ John, "Because of who Jesus is & what He has done for me, I am not even worthy to untie my Master's shoelaces, or even to be His slave," then we too can become useful in teaching others to follow Him, & we too will rejoice seeing Him do His saving work w/i them.

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May 5, 2013

John 3:22-30

1. The OT records the binding covenant based on the Law; the NT is the covenant based on a [14 living] relationship with Christ.

Ex 19:5, 8

2. The Old Covenant was just a precursor to God’s New Covenant—a far [18 superior] covenant foretold by the prophet Jeremiah.

Jer 31:31-34; Lk 22:20; Jer 31:33-34; II Cor 3:6; 3:9; Heb 7:27; 8:6

**Today’s text represents the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant; John 3:22-30 describes this transition in terms of...**

**\* The Setting**

**[John 3:22]**

3. Jesus and His disciples remained in Judea but moved out of the city into the surrounding countryside; here Jesus preached and [18 baptized] converts to His message.

Mt 4:18

4. During this time Jesus and John had parallel ministries in that they both were baptizing, and both were preaching [22 repentance].

**[Verses 23-24]**

I Cor 4:2

**\* The Dispute**

**[Verse 25]**

5. Comments about purification led to John’s followers taking a defensive stance on John’s behalf with regard to the value of his versus [14 Jesus’] baptism.

**[Verse 26]**

Jn 4:1

6. This is a prime example of [18 jealousy] within the ministry.

Phil 1:18

**\* John’s Answer**

**[Verse 27]**

7. John answered his disciples' discontentment with an axiomatic truth: Whatever good thing a person has, he has received it as a [10 gift] from God in heaven.

Rom 1:5; Phil 4:11

**[Verse 28]**

8. John had always made it clear that he was not the Messiah but merely the Messiah's [24 forerunner].

Isa 42:8

**\* John's Analogy**

**[Verse 29]**

Judg 14:20

9. John was a faithful friend to Jesus the Bridegroom, who sought only to promote the spiritual [12 union] of Christ with believers.

II Cor 11:2; I Thes 3:8

**\* John's Application**

**[Verse 30]**

10. John the Baptist knew he must decrease because that was God's plan, as His only begotten Son increased in favor and notoriety among the faithful [16 remnant] within Israel.

11. If we can say with John, "Because of who He is and what He has done for me, I am not even worthy even to untie my Master's shoelaces," then we too can become useful in teaching others to [14 follow] Him.