

HERMENEUTICS EXEGESIS PAPER

2/13/96

NAME: **Douglas E. Woolley**

ASSIGNED PASSAGE: **JOHN 3:1-21**

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In examining historical background answer these questions: To whom was this passage addressed and where did they live? What was their *sitz im leben* ("life situation"), i.e., what were the social, economic, and political circumstances of this time? Are there any ancient cultural practices in the passage that need to be explained? What was their *sitz im glauben* ("faith situation"), i.e. what was the condition of their religious faith? REMEMBER TO USE FULL SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS THROUGHOUT. EXAMINE THE SAMPLE PAPER IN THE BACK OF THE STUDY GUIDE FOR FORM AND CONTENT!

The Gospel of John was probably written by the apostle John. Various proposals have been made concerning the authorship of this Gospel. In addition to the traditional view that the author is the apostle John, Guthrie describes several other views in his book. One alternative view suggests the existence of an influential John from Jerusalem who had access into the high priest's house. Another view suggests that the name of John should be ignored, and that this name was a "later apostolic ascription." Papias gave a famous statement that led some scholars to support the view that a 'John the elder' who had connections with Ephesus was responsible for the Gospel (*Introduction* 275-78). However, according to Gundry, Papias probably used the "term *elder* in an apostolic sense." The traditional view is further attested by the testimony of Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John (252-53).

This writer agrees with the traditional and generally accepted view that the author was John, the Apostle, the younger son of Zebedee. According to the Gospel of John, the author is "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:20, 24, NIV). This expression also appears in John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7. In the context of chapter 21, John 21:2 implies that the author is either a son of Zebedee (James or John) or one of the two unnamed disciples in the verse. This disciple is close to Peter (13:24; 20:2; 21:2); therefore, he is probably one of the inner circle of three that were "especially close to Jesus in the Synoptics" (Morris, *John, Gospel According to* 1099). "Since James died as a martyr long before the time of writing (Acts 12:1-5) and since Peter appears as a different person from the beloved disciple [John 21:20], only John is left to be the beloved disciple and author of the fourth gospel" (Gundry 254). The author was a Palestinian Jew and surely an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry as evidenced by both his claims (John 19:35, 21:24-25) and his details of specific events. From Mark 1:19-20, John seems to have been a prosperous fisherman who possessed a boat on the Sea of Galilee and had hired servants. Barclay describes John as "a man of temper and ambition and tolerance, and yet of courage" (17).

The date of this Gospel has been the subject of much debate. Dates have been estimated from AD 45 to the middle of the second century. Many conservatives support the traditional date of the last decade of the first century. Morris reasons that the date "cannot be late in the second century because a papyrus fragment dated in the first half of that century has been found in Egypt" (*The Gospel According to John* 25). "This Gospel was probably written at a time when the church was composed of second and third-generation Christians who needed more detailed instruction about Jesus and new defenses for the apologetic problems raised by apostasy within the church and by growing opposition from without" (Tenney 4).

Morris quotes the early church father Irenaeus as saying that John published the Gospel "during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." In addition to the traditional site of Ephesus, Morris notes two alternative places of composition: the general region of Antioch, or Alexandria or somewhere else in Egypt (*The Gospel According to John* 54-55). Assuming that John wrote from Ephesus, he may have written to an audience living in the province of Asia (Tenney 11).

Tenney comments that the "intended recipients of John's Gospel are not clearly identified....[It] would seem that he was probably writing for Gentile [Christians] outside Palestine.... who had already acquired a basic knowledge of the life and works of Jesus but who needed further confirmation of their faith" (10). However, if the Gospel was written with an evangelistic thrust, John could have been writing to "a pagan constituency to bring them to belief in Jesus as Christ and the Son of God" (Tenney 10).

In John's Gospel, the writer's purpose is made clear that "these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31, NIV). Concerning this verse, Tasker notes in his commentary that "the verb translated *believe* is found in some [manuscripts] in the present tense, and in others in the aorist" (228). In other words, the phrase could be translated "that you may go on believing" or "that you may begin believing," respectively. If John used the former, he wrote to establish believers in their faith in spite of the false teaching prevalent in his day. If John used the latter, he wrote evangelistically to convince unbelievers of the Gospel message of believing in Jesus Christ to be saved. Regardless, John seems to have had both purposes in mind. In addition to the author's own statement, Guthrie describes several other theories for the author's purpose including: "An ancient account of John's purpose," "to supersede the synoptic gospels," "for unbelieving Jews," "to combat Gnosticism," to "present a Hellenized Christianity," to correct "a Baptist cult," "an ecclesiastical polemic," and "to correct the church's eschatology" (*Introduction* 284-95).

During New Testament times, approximately four million or more Jews lived in the Roman Empire, though only about 700,000 "called Palestine their home." Three main languages prevailed in the Roman Empire: Latin was the legal language used primarily in the West; Greek was used primarily in the East; Aramaic and Hebrew was spoken by Palestinians. Therefore, "Jesus and the first disciples were probably trilingual" (Gundry 43).

In New Testament times, Israel had many sects and parties in Judaism, including Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes, and Herodians. The **Pharisees** were mostly concerned with their religious faith and wanted to be "legally pure"; they believed that they were "clean" when they were obedient to the law (Gower 257). Professor Bright notes that the Pharisees' "moral earnestness won them widespread respect among the people. Indeed, they became true spiritual leaders of Judaism and set its tone" (461). The Jewish historian Josephus states that there were about 6,000 Pharisees towards the end of Herod's life (Bruce 79). In addition to accepting the Torah, the Pharisees also accepted other parts of Scripture as authoritative. Furthermore, the oral law that was developed to interpret the written law was regarded as obligatory. Bright comments that the Pharisees "believed that Judaism's future was to be the holy people of God through keeping the law, written and oral, to the minutest detail; Jews then await the fulfillment of the promises, which would come in God's own time" (Bright 461). Theologically, the **Sadducees** rejected tradition and only accepted the written law of the Torah. They primarily consisted of a few wealthy and leading priestly families (Bruce 74-75). Although similar to the Pharisees in regard to the law, the **Zealots** were "fanatically brave and reckless men who were ready to strike for independence against whatever odds, trusting that God would come to their aid" (Bright 462). "They believed that only when the Romans were driven from the soil would God redeem his people," and they believed that it was treason against God to pay

taxes to the Roman Empire (Gower 260). The **Essenes** consisted of about 4,000 people who would withdraw from the world and form communities of their own in order to attain a greater degree of purity (Gower 258). "The **Herodians** supported the family of Herod as rulers" (Gower 256), and therefore, for the most part, they supported the Romans who gave the Herodian dynasty the ability to rule (Gundry 77).

The governing body of the Jews that controlled the internal Jewish affairs was known as the national council, or **Sanhedrin**, and consisted of seventy members (among the Sadducees and Pharisees) and the president (high priest). A high priest was regularly selected from a wealthy Sadducean family (Bruce 78). "According to Josephus, in the time of Christ the Sanhedrin was formally led by the Sadducean high priests, but practically ruled by the Pharisees, who were immensely popular with the people (*Antiq.* 18.1.4). The Pharisees were more and more represented in the Sanhedrin as they grew in importance" (Barabas 896). The members of the Sanhedrin came from three classes named in Scripture: "the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law" (Barabas 896). The "high priests" represented acting and former high priests who had been from a privileged family. The "elders" were "tribal and family heads of the people and the priesthood," and the "scribes" were legal experts (Thompson 1071). The teachers of the law (scribes) were mostly Pharisees, but "not all Pharisees were professional scribes" (Barabas 896).

HERMENEUTICS EXEGESIS PAPER

4/8/96

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CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In examining the context of the assigned passage explain how the passage "flows" with the preceding and succeeding passages, i.e. explain how the thought of the passage fits and complements the preceding and succeeding passages. Tell how the passage fits with the overall message of the book. Explain any key words or phrases in the passage. End by SUMMARIZING what you think is/are the main thought(s) the text is trying to convey. Your goal is to find the PLAIN MEANING of the passage as INTENDED BY THE INSPIRED AUTHOR. Did you examine the sample paper in the back of the study guide?

Gundry outlines the Gospel of John into eight series of passages, each of which contain a *narrative* section and a *discourse* section (260). Gundry labels the first series (1:19-4:42) as "The faith-producing impact of Jesus' Initial Ministry." The passage that precedes John 3:1-21 is the last of three consecutive narratives and describes "the cleansing of the temple and the performing of signs in Jerusalem (2:13-25)." John 3:1-21 is the first of three consecutive discourses and contains a dialogue about "the new birth, in conversation with Nicodemus (3:1-21)." The second discourse (3:22-36) shows "the superiority of Jesus, as testified by John the Baptist during their concurrent ministries of baptism." The third discourse (4:1-42) describes "the water of life, in conversation with the Samaritan woman, plus her conversion and that of her fellow townspeople." Tasker summarizes these four passages as "the new temple; the new birth; the new worship" (39).

From the author's explicit statement, John's purpose in writing the Gospel is so "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31, NIV). John wrote to establish believers in their faith and also to convince evangelistically unbelievers of the Gospel message of believing in Jesus Christ to be saved. This theme is prevalent in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21. Jesus shares with the learned Jewish teacher, Nicodemus, that the requirements for a person to enter into the kingdom of God is that he/she be "born again." Jesus continues to clarify the gospel message of his sacrificial love and the necessity of believing in Him to have eternal life.

John 3:1-21 has several key words and phrases that relay important concepts about Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus about eternal life. Verse 1 sets the stage for the discourse by introducing Nicodemus as a man of the Pharisees and a "ruler of the Jews." The term "ruler" in Greek is *archon* and refers to the "members of the Sanhedrin" here and in John 7:26 and Acts 3:17 (Tourville 63). Considering his reputation and position of influence as one of seventy members of the supreme court that had religious jurisdiction over every Jew in the world (Barclay 123), it is understandable that Nicodemus would come to Jesus during the evening for fear of being seen by those Jews who considered Jesus a false prophet, though he may have approached Jesus at this time because the rabbis declared that nighttime was the best time to study the law and it would enable him to have a lengthy, private discussion with Jesus who would be undisturbed (Barclay 124).

In verse 3, Jesus says to the learned Nicodemus that "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (NAS). The word for "again" in verses 3 and 7 in Greek is *ἀνωθεν* and is transliterated as *anōthen*. According to Thayer, the word *anōthen* is used in three different ways in the New Testament but is interpreted by Nicodemus in verse 3 as "anew, over again, indicating repetition" (52). Therefore, with crude literalism, Nicodemus attempts to rephrase Jesus' words and

declares that it is absurd to be born physically a second time in a mother's womb. Another definition of the word is "from the first, from the beginning on." A third meaning for *anōthen*, and the primary sense in which Jesus used the word, is "from above, from a higher place, . . . from heaven" (Thayer 52). Tourville comments that "born again" (*anōthen*) should be translated "born from above," but "again" is implied because a spiritual birth is a second birth. Tourville believes "Nicodemus was figuratively stating the impossibility of a physical rebirth to parallel the ridiculousness of Jews having to be born from above. He felt he was already a child of the Kingdom, a subject under the rule of God" (65). Tenney has an interesting insight when he says, "Birth is our mode of entrance into the world and brings with it the potential equipment for adjustment to the world. To be born again, or 'born from above,' means a transformation of a person so that he is able to enter another world and adapt to its conditions. . . . To belong to the heavenly kingdom, one must be born into it" (47). Morris also supports both senses and summarizes these thoughts, saying, "anyone who would enter the kingdom of God must be born in a radically new fashion, and this second birth is from heaven" (*The Gospel* 189). He adds, "our nature is so gripped by sin that an activity of the very Spirit of God is a necessity if we are to be associated with God's kingdom" (194).

Three major interpretations have been suggested for John 3:5 where Jesus says that a man must be "born of water and of the Spirit." The phrase "born of water" could refer to human birth coming from a sac of water, to water baptism, or to the Word of God (Wuest 54). This writer believes that Jesus is implying both a natural birth and a new spiritual birth. "The new birth is conditioned on the repentance and confession of the individual in response to the appeal of God and by the transformation of life by the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Tenney 47).

The first Greek word *pneuma* in verse 8 is popularly translated as "wind" but could also be translated as "breath, spirit, and Spirit," and the second appearance of *pneuma* is translated as Spirit (Tourville 67). Although the origin and destination of the wind are unknown, its effects and sounds are noticed. Similarly, a person lacking spiritual life may have contact with one born of the Spirit and notice a difference but not know the origin or destination of their new life (Morris, *The Gospel* 195). The work of the Spirit in the human heart cannot be seen, but its effects are clearly evident.

The word for "know" in verse 10 is *ginoskeis* (γινώσκεις in Greek) and means to "know by experience" (Tourville 69). Wuest comments that the word John uses implies "a knowledge gained by experience. Jesus not only expected this teacher of Israel to have an intellectual knowledge of the new-birth, but an experiential knowledge. That is, it should be, not merely a head knowledge, but a heart knowledge. The teaching of the new-birth should not be accepted merely by an intellectual assent, but by a heart appropriation" (61). Barclay appropriately warns readers, "It is easy to sit in discussion groups, to sit in a study and to read books, it is easy to discuss the intellectual truth of Christianity; but the essential thing is to experience the power of Christianity. . . . It is certainly important to have an intellectual grasp of the orb of Christian truth; but it is still more important to have a vital experience of the power of Jesus Christ" (132-33). Those who have truly accepted the Gospel message can testify of the experience that they have had with God.

Verse 14 contains the verb *hupsoō* in Greek and means "to lift up on high, to exalt," and is "used of the elevation of Jesus on the cross" (Thayer 647). F. F. Bruce observes that "the verb . . . is carefully chosen; it denotes not only literal lifting up in space but also exaltation in glory. In this Gospel Jesus is glorified by being crucified (cf. John 8:28; 12:23, 32, 34)" (*The Gospel of John* 88). In Brown's *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Muller confirms that "they lift Jesus up by crucifying him; but it is precisely through his crucifixion [and humiliation] that he is lifted up to his heavenly glory as the Son of Man" (204). Jesus recalls an episode from Numbers 21:4-9 where

fiery serpents bit the Israelites and Moses was told to make a snake of bronze and set it on a pole so that whoever looked at the bronze snake (with their thoughts toward God) would be healed. Paralleling this scene, Jesus said "the Son of Man must be lifted up" on the cross so that whoever looks upon him in faith as the substitutionary sacrifice for their sin would be delivered from their sin and receive "eternal life" or salvation. His eventual sacrifice on the cross illustrates the "how" of the new birth.

John 3:16 contains three key words that give insight into the Gospel message: loved, believes, and eternal. The verb translated "loved" in the phrase "for God so loved the world" is *agapaō*, not *phileō*. Vinyard notes that *agapaō* and *phileō* are often used interchangeably, but "if any difference can be discerned, it seems to be that *phileō* represents a deep affection for a friend, an animal, or a family member, while *agapaō* expresses a love that does not require a comparable response" (33). Furthermore, with respect to the noun *agape*, "it expresses a love that wills to initiate a relationship and show kindness and self-sacrifice regardless of whether the object of the love is worthy or even likable. Thus it is a love that does not depend on emotional response. Rather, it is an expression of the nature and character of the one who loves" (34). Gunther describes God's compassionate and forgiving *agape* as a "love which asserts itself despite the world's inimical rejection of it" (546). Concerning God's love for the world, Wuest aptly comments, "God the Father gave His Son as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin, thus satisfying His justice, and maintaining His divine government, and opening the flood-gates of mercy to a hell-deserving race of sinners" (67).

The word for "believes" is *pisteuō* and means "to be persuaded of," and hence, "to place confidence in, to trust" and implies reliance upon, not mere credence (Vines 61), and obedience (Tourville 71). The Bible promises that whoever *believes* in Jesus, as the substitutionary sacrifice for their sins, "should not perish but have eternal life" (NAS). The word "perish" is contrasted with the words "eternal life." Tasker comments that the word for "eternal," *aiōnion*, does not mean "forever", though the idea of duration is not absent from the word, but the emphasis is on a different *quality* of life (72). Guhrt notes that the word indicates "a definite quality: it is a different life from the old existence typified by hate, lack of love, sin, pain and death. Eternal life does not therefore just begin in the future, it is already the possession of those who have entered upon fellowship with Christ" (832). Tourville comments that "it is eternal because it is Christ's life in us, not because we cannot lose it. It begins here and now with believing in the Lord Jesus Christ" (73).

Verse 18 uses the word "believe" three times to stress its importance. According to Tourville, *pisteuōn* "is a present participle and indicates continuous action. Those who keep on believing and trusting in Jesus are not condemned, are not under judgment" (73). Those who do not believe in Jesus as God's Son have made a decision to condemn themselves.

The phrase "does evil" in verse 20 uses the word *phaula* for "evil" and implies that a man who does not believe in Christ has chosen to continue to practice evil and make evil his life-style. Wuest describes *phaula* as "that which is paltry, ugly, poor," (69) while Tourville describes it as those actions done out of a selfish motive or low and worthless motives (75). People who habitually do evil do not want to come to the light for fear of being reprimanded. On the other hand, those who have believed the Gospel will produce good deeds and will want to draw closer to the light.

John's main emphasis in John 3:1-21 is to convince readers of the necessity of believing in Jesus in order to be "born again" from "above" and thus have eternal life. Nicodemus represents the epitome of self-righteous piety, and yet Jesus said that even he needed to have a radical change in his life and to experience the new birth of the Spirit by simply believing in Jesus. God loves people

so much that He sent His Son to be lifted up on a cross to die a substitutionary death for sinful people, in hopes that they may believe in Jesus and receive a new quality of life instead of continuing to do evil and thereby choosing condemnation.

HERMENEUTICS EXEGESIS PAPER

7/4/96

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THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

On this page you will look at your chosen passage and determine what it says about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, sanctification, the Church, human sin, the end times, etc. Does the author present a particular "slant" on our understanding of these concepts? (a particular passage will usually only deal with one of the above--do NOT try to find all of the above in every passage, only the one that is there!) Did you examine the sample paper in the study guide?

This writer, along with the majority of evangelical scholars, believes in the idea of progressive revelation--"the concept that God's revelation gradually increased in definiteness, clarity, and fullness as it was revealed over time," and yet the revelation remained perfect each step of the way (Virkler 133). Virkler states well that "the law continues to perform the same functions in the New Testament that it did in the Old Testament. The misunderstanding that law was actually a second means of salvation is based on the fact that the [later] Israelites themselves misunderstood the law similarly, and turned the law from its proper purpose into legalism, the attempt to earn salvation by keeping it. . . . Faith in God's provision of a sacrifice remains the basis for salvation throughout the Old and New Testaments" (144-45). The law was not given as a means of justification, "but as a guideline for living after Israel's commitment to serve the Lord" (140).

At the heart of John 3:1-21 is the gospel message. God so loved mankind that He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for the sins of mankind, so that all who look upon Jesus in faith as God's provision for the penalty of their sin would be "born again" and have eternal life. This passage enlightens us to several important theological realities: **God, human sin, Jesus, salvation, the Holy Spirit, and the end times.**

Although **God** is known as a God of love in the Old Testament and Jewish literature, this truth has a more dominant role and a sharper focus in the New Testament according to Guthrie (104). Guthrie says that the main evidence that love is an essential characteristic of God is the Father's love for the Son, clearly shown in the Gospel of John. God "loved so comprehensively" is evident in John 3:16 where God gave his Son for the world that he loved very much (104). Concerning this verse, Erickson describes one dimension of God's love as *benevolence*, which means "the concern of God for the welfare of those whom he loves. He unselfishly seeks our ultimate welfare" (292).

God so loved the world, "**humankind**" (Ladd 262), even while it was in opposition to him. According to Ladd, the expression for "the world" (*kosmos* in Greek) "designates the realm of humanity and human affairs set in contrast to the world above and the realm of God" (252). In John 3:18, the Bible describes **sin** as unbelief in God's Son as shown by the condemnation pronounced against unbelief. Guthrie states, "the cause of unbelief and its consequent darkness is found in the evil character of men's deeds (Jn. 3:19), since the deeds reflect the real nature of the persons doing them" (194). Moreover, Jesus clearly links sin with unbelief in Christ (John 16:9). Erickson shows that sin is universal by the fact that there is a universal need for everyone to be transformed by the new birth in John 3:5 (624). If someone was to be a child of the Kingdom, surely Nicodemus thought that he qualified by being a leader of the Jews and a man of good works and piety. "The necessity of the new birth is an indictment of all of us, for it points out that none of us is good

enough in his or her natural state; we all need to undergo metamorphosis if we are to please God" (944). Since man cannot save himself, God had to intervene.

Because God loved the world and wanted to save them from their sin nature and their opposition to him, he gave humankind his **only begotten Son, Jesus**. Verses 16 and 18 describe Jesus as God's "only begotten Son," and implies a "unique kind of sonship" that is different from the kind of sonship that man possesses (Guthrie, *Theology* 313). Ladd confirms this saying:

Others may become children of God, but Jesus' sonship stands apart from that of all others. This is supported by the fact that Jesus never speaks of God as "our Father" in such a way as to place himself in the same relationship to God as his disciples. (284)

Jesus sets his sonship apart by addressing God as "my Father."

Guthrie states that the title "**Son of man**" used for **Jesus** is used consistently among the synoptic sayings and John's Gospel, though the latter "contributes some features more explicitly" (*Theology* 282). John 3:13 mentions the ascent and descent of the Son of man, and verse 14 mentions the necessity for lifting up the Son of man, suffering as a human, in order to obtain eternal life for believers. Erickson says that John 3:13 alludes to the preexistence of Christ (686). In this same verse, Jesus uses the title in a passage that points to his heavenly status, thereby supporting that Jesus Christ "was both earthly man and preexistent divine being who became incarnate" (726). Guthrie agrees and says this verse "allows for the idea of incarnation" and that it expresses "the breaking in of the Son of man from the spiritual world of God to the material world of men" (*Theology* 285). Jesus was conscious of "having been sent by and from God" and that he would ascend and return to God (285). Ladd notes that the phrase "Son of Man" is always used by Jesus as an expression of himself in the Gospels; "it is never applied to him by his disciples or by the people" (280). According to Ladd, "the Son of Man was a heavenly, supernatural being who should come to earth with apocalyptic glory . . ." (281). Nicodemus recognized, in verse 2, Jesus as a man and a teacher (or rabbi) coming from God because of his signs and works that "witness to the presence and power of God" (Ladd 310-11). In conclusion, John's perception of the Son of man is consistent with the synoptic's presentation, presenting "both heavenly and earthly aspects" (Guthrie, *Theology* 287).

Jesus was sent by the Father so that the world might be **saved** through him by his redemptive and atoning work (John 3:17). "The Father was personally involved, for the penalty fell on his own Son, whom he had voluntarily sent" (Erickson 806). In reference to the typological allusion in verse 14 and Numbers 21:4-9, just as the Israelites were bitten by fiery serpents and Moses was told by God to make a snake of bronze and set it on a pole so that whoever looked at the bronze snake (with their thoughts toward God) would be healed, Jesus said that because of sin that has bitten humankind, "the Son of Man must be lifted up" on the cross so that whoever looks upon him in faith as the substitutionary sacrifice for their sin would be delivered from their sin and receive "eternal life" or salvation. John's Gospel emphasizes "believing" in Jesus, yet the word "faith" (*pistis*) does not occur (Guthrie, *Theology* 722). Guthrie reconciles this by stating:

It is faith which secures eternal life (Jn. 3:16) and lack of it that leads to condemnation (Jn. 3:17). If the latter seems harsh it must be remembered that it is the natural consequence of the former. . . . To believe in Jesus involves a radical transformation. If John says nothing about repentance, it is certainly not because no repentance is necessary. There is need for a renunciation of the world. (582)

Eternal life begins for an individual the moment the act of faith has been appropriated (John 3:15-16). Erickson aptly describes "that the type of faith necessary for salvation involves both believing that [something is true] and believing in [the name of Jesus], or assenting to facts and trusting in a person. It is vital to keep these two together" (940). Erickson supports this writer's Arminian view

that "the biblical evidence favors the position that conversion is prior to regeneration. . . . God regenerates those who repent and believe. . . . Although we have depicted conversion as a human response to divine initiative, even repentance and faith are gifts from God." (932-33, 941).

John's gospel emphasizes the work of the **Holy Spirit** in the life of the believer. Ladd sees the expression "to be born from above" in verse 3 as an indication "that an inner change must take place by the Holy Spirit--by Christ--by the word, for one to enter the Christian life" (637). Guthrie says this verse "goes beyond the synoptics in linking regeneration with participation in the kingdom" (*Theology* 426). Ladd interprets the reference to water in verse 5 not as a literal reference to the sacrament of baptism, but as "a symbol of the spiritual cleansing effected by the Spirit" (321). Guthrie sees the focus of the verses 5 and 6 "on the renewing or re-creative power of the Spirit in believers" (known as regeneration), and the "new birth cannot be achieved through 'flesh', only through 'Spirit', in this case the Holy Spirit" (*Theology* 527). He continues:

This idea is a considerable advance on the promise of the Spirit as a guide or a power for life. It means in short that the believer's whole spiritual existence depends on the activity of the Holy Spirit. It involves a totally new mode of existence. It is not surprising that Nicodemus misconstrued this radical teaching. Spiritual renewal of this kind is bound to affect every part of man's life, but Jesus does not enlarge on this. It was left especially to the apostle Paul to give a fuller exposition of its implications. (527)

According to Erickson:

Regeneration is the miraculous transformation of the individual and implantation of spiritual energy. Jesus made very clear to Nicodemus that regeneration is essential to acceptance by the Father [in verse 3] . . . Jesus makes clear that regeneration is a supernatural occurrence, and the Holy Spirit is the agent who produces it. The flesh (i.e., human effort) is not capable of effecting this transformation. Nor can this transformation even be comprehended by the human intellect. Jesus in fact likened this work of the Spirit to the blowing of the wind [in verse 8]. (873)

It is very difficult to track the movements of the Spirit, and Jesus used a play on words for wind (pneuma) as an analogy to symbolize that which is invisible and yet has visible effects. Guthrie says the analogy suggests that the Holy Spirit has "considerable power, sometimes boisterous, sometimes gentle" (*Theology* 527). "Although salvation was planned and originated by the Father, and actually accomplished by the Son, it is the Holy Spirit who applies it to the life of the believer, thus bringing to fulfillment the divine intention for humans" (Erickson 945).

Those who believe in Jesus will not perish but have **eternal life** now and in **the end times**. Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3, NASB). "Knowing God and knowing Jesus Christ is the main aim of heavenly living," beginning now and continuing throughout eternity (Guthrie, *Theology* 878). Guthrie links John's references to 'eternal life' with the synoptic Gospels' emphasis on the kingdom (643). Ladd says that the synoptics present eternal life as a future eschatological blessing while John emphasizes eternal life as a present realized blessing (251) that "assures the believer of participation in the eschatological resurrection" (295). Furthermore, ". . . the Kingdom of God is a present reality to be received now that qualifies one to enter the Kingdom of God in the future. Present and future are inseparably bound together" (339).

While those who believe in Jesus receive eternal life, those who do not believe are judged or **condemned** already according to verse 18. Although there is no direct reference to "hell" in the Gospel of John, "there is mention of condemnation (3:17) on those who do not believe, but no

details are given on the form of judgment" (Guthrie, *Theology* 890). Condemnation is "seen as implying eternal death" since it is the opposite of eternal life in this context (854). Ladd aptly elaborates:

The future eschatological judgment will essentially be the execution of the sentence of condemnation that has in effect been determined on the basis of people's response to the person of Christ here and now. . . . The future condemnation is determined already because people have refused to believe in Christ. . . . Those who believe in Jesus have in a sense passed beyond judgment; it is as though they were already on the other side of judgment, having passed from death into life (Jn. 5:24). (343)

The person who believes in Christ not only has eternal life but also has become a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). Guthrie states, "The gospel brings about a spiritual transformation which carries over with it a totally new range of ethical values. Darkness is directly linked with evil deeds (3:19). To turn deliberately away from darkness (8:12) is therefore to turn away from evil deeds" (*Theology* 908).

HERMENEUTICS EXEGESIS PAPER

7/21/96

NAME: **Douglas E. Woolley**

ASSIGNED PASSAGE: **JOHN 3:1-21**

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

for

Weekly Bible Study at Work

In this section you get your chance to preach or teach what you have learned in the previous two sections. Here you will take the main thought(s) of the passage and make the material interesting and relevant to a particular group you might have in mind, e.g. a home Bible study, etc., WHICH YOU WILL IDENTIFY AS YOU BEGIN THIS SECTION. This part COMES OUT OF the previous work you have done and SHOULD BE RELATED TO IT, i.e. do NOT now invent some clever presentation that has nothing to do with your careful exegesis. Instead, present as accurately as possible the PLAIN MEANING the inspired author intended in ways modern people can understand.

As young and middle-aged professionals working for GTE Data Services, we have committed ourselves to meet once a week to study the Bible. Even more important than gaining an intellectual grasp of spiritual truth is the necessity of being experientially changed by that truth. In the Gospel of John, we read of an encounter that Jesus had with a spiritual leader and how this man--and all mankind--must undergo a radical change that is not produced by our own efforts but by the Spirit of God. People of all ages have pondered the question, "what must I do to receive eternal life?" Some have tried to earn it as if it were a reward for good behavior; others think that if they belong to the right church or ascribe to the right doctrinal beliefs then they will be eligible for heaven. Jesus, the Son of God who came from heaven, says authoritatively what must happen for seekers to have eternal life--they must be "born again."

The natural response to such a command is, "impossible!" until it is understood that to be "born again" is to be born spiritually from above or from heaven. Such an experience still seems out of reach until it is understood that this is the supernatural and invisible work of the Holy Spirit that is automatically accomplished in a person who genuinely believes in Christ--who puts his or her trust in Jesus as their Savior and no longer trusts in his or her own good works to be saved. Out of God's goodness and grace, He has provided the means for salvation and enables people to repent and have faith.

God loves all people very much. His love extends to those who have intentionally broken his commands repeatedly as well as to those who have tried to live a morally good and upright life. God desires the best for people and desires that no one would perish but that all would have eternal life. However, sin is universally inherent within all, and those who continue in their sin, the foremost being that of unbelief in God's Son, will ultimately be condemned. Out of God's love for mankind, He sent His only begotten Son to the earth to die on the cross for the sins of the world, and thus provide salvation from sin for all who will trust in Jesus.

Each individual person needs to believe in Jesus in order to have eternal life. Even if one is a teacher of spiritual truths, a morally upright leader in the community, or someone who sincerely believes that he or she is approved by God, if the person does not believe in Jesus and trust in His redemptive substitutionary sacrifice on the cross, then that person will not enter the kingdom of God nor inherit eternal life. Because all people are born with a sin loving nature, we must all be "born again" through a spiritual birth from above. Since man cannot accomplish this radical change on his own, God has to intervene in a miraculous way. As a result of God graciously enabling a person to

repent of his or her sin and trust in Jesus as his or her Savior, the Holy Spirit will regenerate the convert and supernaturally transform the believer on the inside--in his spirit. Although the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be seen visibly, His effects can be seen by the changed life of the believer who now trusts in Christ.

In gaining eternal life, the believer receives a new quality of life and relationship with God. His or her life is no longer characterized by hate, pain, and sin, but is characterized by love, joy, and a righteous standing with God. Not only has the person changed his thinking about God and Jesus, but the Holy Spirit has changed the person's heart in such a radical experiential way that he is considered a "new creature." As a result of a believer's gratefulness for receiving eternal life, there is a natural response of love and obedience to the Savior. Those who continue to believe in Jesus and naturally obey Him will not be condemned but will spend all of eternity with God.

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ASSIGNED PASSAGE: **JOHN 3:1-21**

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