

John: 3:1–21

From Catena Aurea:

1. There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:
2. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.
3. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xi) He had said above that, when He was at Jerusalem—many believed in His Name, when they saw the miracles which He did. Of this number was Nicodemus, of whom we are told; There was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxiv. 1) As yet however he was withheld by Jewish infirmity: and therefore he came in the night, being afraid to come in the day. Of such the Evangelist speaks elsewhere, Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. (John 12:42)

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xi. c. 3, 4) Nicodemus was one of the number who believed, but were not as yet born again. Wherefore he came to Jesus by night. Whereas those who are born of water and the Holy Ghost, are addressed by the Apostle, Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. (Eph. 5:8)

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xi. c. 3) What the ground of his belief was, is plain from what immediately follows: For no one can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him. Nicodemus then was one of the many who believed in His Name, when they saw the signs that He did.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxiv. 2. in Joan) He did not however conceive any great idea of them from His miracles; and attributed to Him as yet only a human character, speaking of Him as a Prophet, sent to execute a commission, and standing in need of assistance to do His work; whereas the Father had begotten Him perfect, selfsufficient, and free from all defect. It being Christ's design however for the present not so much to reveal His dignity, as to prove that He did nothing contrary to the Father; in words He is often humble, while His acts ever testify His power. And therefore to Nicodemus on this occasion He

says nothing expressly to magnify Himself; but He imperceptibly corrects his low views of Him, and teaches him that He was Himself all-sufficient, and independent in His miraculous works. Hence He answers, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xi. c. 4) Those then are the persons to whom Jesus commits Himself, those born again, who come not in the night to Jesus, as Nicodemus did. Such persons immediately make profession.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxiv. 2) He says therefore, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God: as if He said, Thou art not yet born again, i. e. of God, by a spiritual begetting; and therefore thy knowledge of Me is not spiritual, but carnal and human. But I say unto thee, that neither thou, nor any one, except he be born again of God, shall be able to see the glory which is around me, but shall be out of the kingdom: for it is the begetting by baptism, which enlightens the mind. Or the meaning is, Except thou art born from above, and hast received the certainty of my doctrines, thou wanderest out of the way, and art far from the kingdom of heaven. By which words our Lord discloses His nature, shewing that He is more than what He appears to the outward eye. The expression, From above, means, according to some, from heaven, according to others, from the beginning. Had the Jews heard it, they would have left Him in scorn; but Nicodemus shews the love of a disciple, by staying to ask more questions.

3:4–8

4. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxiv. 3) Nicodemus coming to Jesus, as to a man, is startled on learning greater things than man could utter, things too lofty for him. His mind is darkened, and he does not stand firm, but reels like one on the point of falling away from the faith. Therefore he objects to the doctrine as being impossible, in order to call forth a fuller explanation. Two things there are which astonish him, such a

birth, and such a kingdom; neither yet heard of among the Jews. First he urges the former difficulty, as being the greatest marvel. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxiv. 2) Thou callest Him Rabbi, and sayest that He comes from God, and yet receivest not His sayings, but usest to thy master a word which brings in endless confusion; for that how, is the enquiry of a man who has no strong belief; and many who have so enquired, have fallen from the faith; some asking, how God became incarnate? others, how He was born? Nicodemus here asks from anxiety. But observe when a man trusts spiritual things to reasonings of his own, how ridiculously he talks.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xi. c. 6) It is the Spirit that speaketh, whereas he understandeth carnally; he knew of no birth save one, that from Adam and Eve; from God and the Church he knows of none. But do thou so understand the birth of the Spirit, as Nicodemus did the birth of the flesh; for as the entrance into the womb cannot be repeated, so neither can baptism.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxiv. 3) While Nicodemus stumbles, dwelling upon our birth here, Christ reveals more clearly the manner of our spiritual birth; Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 5) As if He said, Thou understandest me to speak of a carnal birth; but a man must be born of water and of the Spirit, if he is to enter into the kingdom of God. If to obtain the temporal inheritance of his human father, a man must be born of the womb of his mother; to obtain the eternal inheritance of his heavenly Father, he must be born of the womb of the Church. And since man consists of two parts, body and soul, the mode even of this latter birth is twofold; water the visible part cleansing the body; the Spirit by His invisible cooperation, changing the invisible soul.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxv. 1) If any one asks how a man is born of water, I ask in return, how Adam was born from the ground. For as in the beginning though the element of earth was the subject-matter, the man was the work of the fashioner; so now too, though the element of water is the subject-matter, the whole work is done by the Spirit of grace. He then gave Paradise for a place to dwell in; now He hath opened heaven to us. (c. 2.). But what need is there of water, to those who receive the Holy Ghost? It carries out the divine symbols of burial, mortification, resurrection, and life. For by the immersion of our heads in the water, the old man disappears and is buried as it were in a sepulchre, whence he ascends a new man. Thus shouldest thou learn, that the virtue of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, filleth all things. For which reason also Christ lay three days in the grave before His resurrection. (Hom.

xxvi. 1.). That then which the womb is to the offspring, water is to the believer; he is fashioned and formed in the water. But that which is fashioned in the womb needeth time; whereas the water all is done in an instant. For the nature of the body is such as to require time for its completion; but spiritual creations are perfect from the beginning. From the time that our Lord ascended out of the Jordan, water produces no longer reptiles, i. e. living souls; but souls rational and endued with the Spirit.

AUGUSTINE. (lib. i. de Bapt. per. c. 30) Because He does not say, Except a man be born again¹ of water and of the Spirit, he shall not have salvation, or eternal life; but, he shall not enter into the kingdom of God; from this, some infer that children are to be baptized in order to be with Christ in the kingdom of God, where they would not be, were they not baptized; but that they will obtain salvation and eternal life even if they die without baptism, not being bound with any chain of sin. But why is a man born again, except to be changed from his old into a new state? Or why doth the image of God not enter into the kingdom of God, if it be not by reason of sin?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvi. in Joan. 1) Do not look then for any material production, or think that the Spirit generates flesh; for even the Lord's flesh is generated not by the Spirit only, but also by the flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spiritual. The birth here spoken of takes place not according to our substance, but according to honour and grace. But the birth of the Son of God is otherwise; for else what would He have been more than all who are born again? And He would be proved too inferior to the Spirit, inasmuch as His birth would be by the grace of the Spirit. How does this differ from the Jewish doctrine?—But mark next the part of the Holy Spirit, in the divine work. For whereas above some are said to be born of God, (c. 1:13.) here, we find, the Spirit generates them.—The wonder of Nicodemus being roused again by the words, He who is born of the Spirit is spirit, Christ meets him again with an instance from nature; Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The expression, Marvel not, shews that Nicodemus was surprised at His doctrine. He takes for this instance some thing, not of the grossness of other bodily things, but still removed from the incorporeal nature, the wind; The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. That is to say, if no one can restrain the wind from going where it will; much less can the laws of nature, whether the condition of our natural birth, or any other, restrain the action of the Spirit. That He speaks of the wind here is plain, from His saying, Thou hearest the sound thereof, i. e. its noise when it strikes objects. He would not in talking to an unbeliever and ignorant person, so describe the action of the Spirit. He says, Bloweth where it listeth; not meaning any power of choice in the wind, but only its natural movements, in their uncontrolled power. But canst not tell whence it cometh or

whither it goeth; i. e. If thou canst not explain the action of this wind which comes under the cognizance both of thy feeling and hearing, why examine into the operation of the Divine Spirit? He adds, So is every one that is born of the Spirit.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 7) But who of us does not see, for example, that the south wind blows from south to north, another wind from the east, another from the west? And how then do we not know whence the wind cometh, and whither it goeth?

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 5) The Psalm soundeth, the Gospel soundeth, the Divine Word soundeth; it is the sound of the Spirit. This means that the Holy Spirit is invisibly present in the Word and Sacrament, to accomplish our birth.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 5) Or thus: If thou art born of the Spirit, thou wilt be such, that he, who is not yet born of the Spirit, will not know whence thou comest, or whither thou goest. For it follows, So is every one that is born of the Spirit.

THEOPHYLACT. (in loc.) This completely refutes Macedonius the impugner of the Spirit, who asserted that the Holy Ghost was a servant. The Holy Ghost, we find, works by His own power, where He will, and what He will.

3:9–12

9. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

10. Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

11. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

12. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvi. 2) Forasmuch then as he still remains a Jew, and, after such clear evidence, persists in a low and carnal system, Christ addresses him henceforth with greater severity: Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 6) What think we? that our Lord wished to insult this master in Israel? He wished him to be born of the Spirit: and no one is born of the Spirit except he is made humble; for this very humility it is, which makes us to be born of the Spirit. He however was inflated with his eminence as a

master, and thought himself of importance because he was a doctor of the Jews. Our Lord then casts down his pride, in order that he may be born of the Spirit.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvi. 2) Nevertheless He does not charge the man with wickedness, but only with want of wisdom, and enlightenment. But some one will say, What connexion hath this birth, of which Christ speaks, with Jewish doctrines? Thus much. The first man that was made, the woman that was made out of his rib, the barren that bare, the miracles which were worked by means of water, I mean, Elijah's bringing up the iron from the river, the passage of the Red Sea, and Naaman the Syrian's purification in the Jordan, were all types and figures of the spiritual birth, and of the purification which was to take place thereby. Many passages in the Prophets too have a hidden reference to this birth: as that in the Psalms, Making thee young and lusty as an eagle: (Ps. 102:5) and, Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven. (Ps. 31:1) And again, Isaac was a type of this birth. Referring to these passages, our Lord says, Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things? A second time however He condescends to his infirmity, and makes use of a common argument to render what He has said credible: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our testimony. (ver. 11) Sight we consider the most certain of all the senses; so that when we say, we saw such a thing with our eyes, we seem to compel men to believe us. In like manner Christ, speaking after the manner of men, does not indeed say that he has seen actually, i. e. with the bodily eye, the mysteries He reveals; but it is clear that He means it of the most certain absolute knowledge. This then, viz. That we do know, he asserts of Himself alone.

THEOPHYLACT. This is not said of Nicodemus, but of the Jewish race, who to the very last persisted in unbelief.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvi. 3) They are words of gentleness, not of anger; a lesson to us, when we: argue and cannot converse, not by sore and angry words, but by the absence of anger and clamour, (for clamour is the material of anger,) to prove the soundness of our views. Jesus in entering upon high doctrines, ever checks Himself in compassion to the weakness of His hearer: and does not dwell continuously on the most important truths, but turns to others more humble. Whence it follows: If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. in Joan. c. 7) That is: If ye do not believe that I can raise up a temple, which you have thrown down, how can ye believe that men can be regenerated by the Holy Ghost?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvii. 1) Or thus: Be not surprised at His calling Baptism earthly. It is performed upon earth, and is compared with that stupendous birth, which is of the substance of the Father, an earthly birth being one of mere grace. And well hath He said, not, Ye understand not, but, Ye believe not: for when the understanding cannot take in certain truths, we attribute it to natural deficiency or ignorance: but where that is not received which it belongs to faith only to receive, the fault is not deficiency, but unbelief. These truths, however, were revealed that posterity might believe and benefit by them, though the people of that age did not.

3:13

13. And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

AUGUSTINE. (De Pecc. mer. et remiss. c. xxxi) After taking notice of this lack of knowledge in a person, who, on the strength of his magisterial station, set himself above others, and blaming the unbelief of such men, our Lord says, that if such as these do not believe, others will: No one hath ascended into heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven. This may be rendered: The spiritual birth shall be of such sort, as that men from being earthly shall become heavenly: which will not be possible, except they are made members of Me; so that he who ascends, becomes one with Him who descended. Our Lord accounts His body, i. e. His Church, as Himself.

AUGUSTINE. (ut sup.) Although He was made the Son of man upon earth, yet His Divinity with which, remaining in heaven, He descended to earth, He hath declared not to disagree with the title of Son of man, as He hath thought His flesh worthy the name of Son of God. For through the Unity of person, by which both substances are one Christ, He walked upon earth, being Son of God; and remained in heaven, being Son of man. And the belief of the greater, involves belief in the less. If then the Divine substance, which is so far more removed from us, and could for our sake take up the substance of man so as to unite them in one person; how much more easily may we believe, that the Saints united with the man Christ, become with Him one Christ; so that while it is true of all, that they ascend by grace, it is at the same time true, that He alone ascends to heaven, Who came down from heaven.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvii. 1) Or thus: Nicodemus having said, We know that Thou art a teacher sent from God; our Lord says, And no man hath ascended, &c. in that He might not appear to be a teacher only like one of the Prophets.

THEOPHYLACT. But when thou hearest that the Son of man came down from heaven, think not that His flesh came down from heaven; for this is the doctrine of those heretics, who held that Christ took His Body from heaven, and only passed through the Virgin.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvii. 1) By the title Son of man here, He does not mean His flesh, but Himself altogether; the lesser part of His nature being put to express the whole. It is not uncommon with Him to name Himself wholly from His humanity, or wholly from His divinity.

HILARY. (de Trin. c. 16.) Or, His descending from heaven is the source of His origin as conceived by the Spirit: Mary gave not His body its origin, though the natural qualities of her sex contributed its birth and increase. That He is the Son of man is from the birth of the flesh which was conceived in the Virgin. That He is in heaven is from the power of His everlasting nature, which did not contract the power of the Word of God, which is infinite, within the sphere of a finite body. Our Lord remaining in the form of a servant, far from the whole circle, inner and outer, of heaven and the world, yet as Lord of heaven and the world, was not absent therefrom. So then He came down from heaven because He was the Son of man; and He was in heaven, because the Word, which was made flesh, had not ceased to be the Word.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 8) But thou wonderest that He was at once here, and in heaven. Yet such power hath He given to His disciples. Hear Paul, Our conversation is in heaven. (Phil. 3:20) If the man Paul walked upon earth, and had his conversation in heaven; shall not the God of heaven and earth be able to be in heaven and earth?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom xxvii. 1) That too which seemeth very lofty is still unworthy of His vastness. For He is not in heaven only, but every where, and filleth all things. But for the present He accommodates Himself to the weakness of His hearer, that by degrees He may convert him.

3:14–15

14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvii. 1) Having made mention of the gift of baptism, He proceeds to the source of it, i. e. the cross: And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.

AUGUSTINE. (de Pecc. mer. et remiss. c. xxxii) Many dying in the wilderness from the attack of the serpents, Moses, by commandment of the Lord, lifted up a brazen serpent: and those who looked upon it were immediately healed. The lifting up of the serpent is the death of Christ; the cause, by a certain mode of construction, being put for the effect. The serpent was the cause of death, inasmuch as he persuaded man into that sin, by which he merited death. Our Lord, however, did not transfer sin, i. e. the poison of the serpent, to his flesh, but death; in order that in the likeness of sinful flesh, there might be punishment without sin, by virtue of which sinful flesh might be delivered both from punishment and from sin.

THEOPHYLACT. (in loc.) See then the aptness of the figure. The figure of the serpent has the appearance of the beast, but not its poison: in the same way Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh, being free from sin. By Christ's being lifted up, understand His being suspended on high, by which suspension He sanctified the air, even as He had sanctified the earth by walking upon it. Herein too is typified the glory of Christ: for the height of the cross was made His glory: for in that He submitted to be judged, He judged the prince of this world; for Adam died justly, because he sinned; our Lord unjustly, because He did no sin. So He overcame him, who delivered Him over to death, and thus delivered Adam from death. And in this the devil found himself vanquished, that he could not upon the cross torment our Lord into hating His murderers: but only made Him love and pray for them the more. In this way the cross of Christ was made His lifting up, and glory.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvii. 2) Wherefore He does not say, 'The Son of man must be suspended, but lifted up, a more honourable term, but coming near the figure. He uses the figure to shew that the old dispensation is akin to the new, and to shew on His hearers' account that He suffered voluntarily; and that His death issued in life.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 11) As then formerly he who looked to the serpent that was lifted up, was healed of its poison, and saved from death; so now he who is conformed to the likeness of Christ's death by faith and the grace of baptism, is delivered both from sin by justification, and from death by the resurrection: as He Himself saith; That whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. What need then is there that the child should be conformed by baptism to the death of Christ, if he be not altogether tainted by the poisonous bite of the serpent?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvii. 2) Observe; He alludes to the Passion obscurely, in consideration to His hearer; but the fruit of the Passion He unfolds plainly; viz. that they who believe in the Crucified One should not perish. And if they who believe in the Crucified live, much more shall the Crucified One Himself.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 11) But there is this difference between the figure and the reality, that the one recovered from temporal death, the other from eternal.

3:16–18

16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

CHRYSOSTOM. Having said, Even so must the Son of man be lifted up, alluding to His death; lest His hearer should be cast down by His words, forming some human notion of Him, and thinking of His death as an evil¹, He corrects this by saying, that He who was given up to death was the Son of God, and that His death would be the source of life eternal; So God loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life; as if He said, Marvel not that I must be lifted up, that you may be saved: for so it seemeth good to the Father, who hath so loved you, that He hath given His Son to suffer for ungrateful and careless servants. The text, God so loved the world, shews intensity of love. For great indeed and infinite is the distance between the two. He who is without end, or beginning of existence, Infinite Greatness, loved those who were of earth and ashes, creatures laden with sins innumerable. And the act which springs from the love is equally indicative of its vastness. For God gave not a servant, or an Angel, or an Archangel, but His Son. Again, had He had many sons, and given one, this would have been a very great gift; but now He hath given His Only Begotten Son.

HILARY. (vi. de Trin. c. 40) If it were only a creature given up for the sake of a creature, such a poor and insignificant loss were no great evidence of love. They must be precious things which prove our love, great things must evidence its greatness. God, in love to the world, gave His Son, not an adopted Son, but His own, even His Only Begotten. Here is proper Sonship, birth, truth: no creation, no adoption, no lie: here is the test of love and charity, that God sent His own and only begotten Son to save the world.

THEOPHYLACT. (in loc.) As He said above, that the Son of man came down from heaven, not meaning that His flesh did come down from heaven, on account of the unity of person in Christ, attributing to man what belonged to God: so now conversely what belongs to man, he assigns to God the Word. The Son of God

was impassible; but being one in respect of person with man, who was passible, the Son is said to be given up to death; inasmuch as He truly suffered, not in His own nature, but in His own flesh. From this death follows an exceeding great and incomprehensible benefit: viz. that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The Old Testament promised to those who obeyed it, length of days: the Gospel promises life eternal, and imperishable.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 12) For why is He called the Saviour of the world, but because He saves the world? The physician, so far as his will is concerned, heals the sick. If the sick despises or will not observe the directions of the physician, he destroys himself.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxviii. 1) Because however He says this, slothful men in the multitude of their sins, and excess of carelessness, abuse God's mercy, and say, There is no hell, no punishment; God remits us all our sins. But let us remember, that there are two advents of Christ; one past, the other to come. The former was, not to judge but to pardon us: the latter will be, not to pardon but to judge us. It is of the former that He says, I have not come to judge the world. Because He is merciful, instead of judgment, He grants an internal remission of all sins by baptism; and even after baptism opens to us the door of repentance, which had He not done all had been lost; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23) Afterwards, however, there follows something about the punishment of unbelievers, to warn us against flattering ourselves that we can sin with impunity. Of the unbeliever He says, 'he is judged already.'—But first He says, He that believeth on Him is not judged. He who believeth, He says, not who enquires. But what if his life be impure? Paul very strongly declares that such are not believers: They confess, he says, that they know God, but in works deny Him. (Tit. 1:16) That is to say, Such will not be judged for their belief, but will receive a heavy punishment for their works, though unbelief will not be charged against them.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. c. 12) What didst thou expect Him to say of him who believed not, except that he is condemned. Yet mark His words: He that believeth not is condemned already. The Judgment hath not appeared, but it is already given. For the Lord knows who are His; who are awaiting the crown, and who the fire.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxviii. 1) Or the meaning is, that disbelief itself is the punishment of the impenitent: inasmuch as that is to be without light, and to be without light is of itself the greatest punishment. Or He is announcing what is to be. Though a murderer be not yet sentenced by the Judge, still his crime has

already condemned him. In like manner he who believes not, is dead, even as Adam, on the day that he ate of the tree, died.

AUGUSTINE. (de Pecc. mer. et Rem. l. 1. c. 33) Where then do we place baptized children? Amongst those who believe? This is acquired for them by the virtue of the Sacrament, and the pledges of the sponsors. And by this same rule we reckon those who are not baptized, among those who believe not.

3:19–21

19. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxviii. 2) As if He said, So far from their having sought for it, or laboured to find it light itself hath come to them, and they have refused to admit it; Men loved darkness rather than light. Thus He leaves them no excuse. He came to rescue them from darkness, and bring them to light; who can pity him who does not choose to approach the light when it comes unto him?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxviii. 2) Then because it seemed incredible that man should prefer light to darkness, he gives the reason of the infatuation, viz. that their deeds were evil. And indeed had He come to Judgment, there had been some reason for not receiving Him; for he who is conscious of his crimes, naturally avoids the judge. But criminals are glad to meet one who brings them pardon. And therefore it might have been expected that men conscious of their sins would have gone to meet Christ, as many indeed did; for the publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus. But the greater part being too cowardly to undergo the toils of virtue for righteousness' sake, persisted in their wickedness to the last; of whom our Lord says, Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light. He speaks of those who choose to remain in their wickedness.

AUGUSTINE. (Conf. l. x. c. xxiii. [34.]) Because they dislike being deceived, and like to deceive, they love light for discovering herself, and hate her for discovering them. Wherefore it shall be their punishment, that she shall manifest them against their will, and herself not be manifest unto them. They love the

brightness of truth, they hate her discrimination; and therefore it follows, Neither cometh to the light, that his deeds should be reprov'd.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxvii. 2) No one reproveth a Pagan, because his own practice agrees with the character of his gods; his life is in accordance with his doctrines. But a Christian who lives in wickedness all must condemn. If there are any Gentiles whose life is good, I know them not. But are there not Gentiles? it may be asked. For do not tell me of the naturally amiable and honest; this is not virtue. But shew me one who has strong passions, and lives with wisdom. You cannot. For if the announcement of a kingdom, and the threats of hell, and other inducements, hardly keep men virtuous when they are so, such calls will hardly rouse them to the attainment of virtue in the first instance. Pagans, if they do produce any thing which looks well, do it for vain-glory's sake, and will therefore at the same time, if they can escape notice, gratify their evil desires as well. And what profit is a man's sobriety and decency of conduct, if he is the slave of vain-glory? The slave of vain-glory is no less a sinner than a fornicator; nay, sins oftener, and more grievously. However, even supposing there are some few Gentiles of good lives, the exceptions so rare do not affect my argument.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxviii. 3) He does not say this of those who are brought up under the Gospel, but of those who are converted to the true faith from Paganism or Judaism. He shews that no one will leave a false religion for the true faith, till he first resolve to follow a right course of life.

AUGUSTINE. (de Pecc. mer. et Remiss. l. i. c. 33) He calls the works of him who comes to the light, wrought in God; meaning that his justification is attributable not to his own merits, but to God's grace.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xii. 13, 14) But if God hath discovered all men's works to be evil, how is it that any have done the truth, and come to the light, i. e. to Christ? Now what He saith is, that they loved darkness rather than light; He lays the stress upon that. Many have loved their sins, many have confessed them. God accuseth thy sins; if thou accuse them too, thou art joined to God. Thou must hate thine own work, and love the work of God in thee. The beginning of good works, is the confession of evil works, and then thou doest the truth: not soothing, not flattering thyself. And thou art come to the light, because this very sin in thee, which displeaseth thee, would not displease thee, did not God shine upon thee, and His truth shew it unto thee. And let those even who have sinned only by word or thought, or who have only exceeded in things allowable, do the truth, by making confession, and come to the light by performing good works. For little sins, if suffered to accumulate, become mortal. Little drops swell the river: little grains of sand become an heap, which presses and weighs down. The sea coming in by little and little,

unless it be pumped out, sinks the vessel. And what is to pump out, but by good works, mourning, fasting, giving and forgiving, to provide against our sins overwhelming us?

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

3:1 A Pharisee Named Nicodemus

3:2 Nicodemus Came to Jesus at Night

Nicodemus Appears Elsewhere in the Gospel.

Chrysostom: This man [Nicodemus] appears also in the middle of the Gospel defending Christ when he says, "Our law judges no man before it hears him." The Jews in anger replied to him, "Search and look, for out of Galilee arises no prophet." Again after the crucifixion he bestowed great care upon the burial of the Lord's body: "And there came also Nicodemus," says the Evangelist, "who first came to the Lord by night and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight." And even now he was disposed toward Christ, but not as he should have been, nor did he yet have a proper regard for Jesus, being still entangled in Jewish misunderstanding. This is why he came by night, because he feared to do so by day. Yet our merciful God did not reject or rebuke him for this, or deprive him of his instruction. Rather, with much kindness Jesus talked with him and disclosed to him rather enigmatically some highly exalted doctrines indeed—nevertheless, Jesus still disclosed them. Homilies on the Gospel of John 24.1.

Nicodemus Does Not Know Who Jesus Truly Is.

Cyril of Alexandria: Nicodemus imagines that he can become pious enough to attain salvation merely by marveling at the wonders Jesus had done.... Calling Jesus a teacher from God and a co-worker with him, he does not yet know that Jesus is by nature God, nor does Nicodemus understand the plan of salvation according to the flesh. Instead, he still approaches Jesus as a mere man and has only a slight conception of who he is. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.1.

3:3 Unless One Is Born Again

Only Those Born Again Can Understand Who Jesus Is.

Chrysostom: In other words: Unless you are born again and receive the right instruction, you are wandering somewhere out there far away from the kingdom of heaven. But he does not speak as plainly as this, preferring to make what he says easier to hear by generalizing, "Unless one is born again." In this way he does not specifically address his remarks at Nicodemus.... Now, if he had spoken to the Jews this way they would have ridiculed him and then left. But Nicodemus shows he wants to learn.... And so what Christ says to him is something like this: If you are not born again, if you do not share in the Spirit that comes through the washing of regeneration, everything you think about me will be from a human point of view, not a spiritual one.... Now, some take the expression "again" to mean "from heaven"; others think it means "from the beginning." Either way, it is impossible, Christ says, for someone who is not born in this way to see the kingdom of God. By these words our Lord discloses his nature, showing that he is more than what he appears to the outward eye. Homilies on the Gospel of John 24.2.

The One Who Is Illuminated Is Washed.

Justin Martyr: At our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice by our parents coming together. We were brought up with bad habits and wicked training. However, so that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over the one who chooses to be born again and has repented of his sins the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe. The one who leads to the font the person that is to be washed calls him by this name alone. For no one can utter the name of the ineffable God. And if any one dares to say this name, he raves with a hopeless madness. Also this washing is called illumination because those who learn these things are illuminated in their understandings. The one who is illuminated is thus washed in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus. First Apology 61.

Portrait and Image in Baptism.

Athanasius: Once the likeness painted on a panel has been effaced by stains from outside itself, the one whose likeness it is needs to come once more to enable the portrait to be renewed on the same wood.

And, for the sake of his picture, even the mere wood on which it is painted is not thrown away, but the outline is renewed upon it. In the same way, the most holy Son of the Father, being the image of the Father, came to our world to renew humankind once made in his likeness. He came to find such lost individuals by the remission of their sins. He says as much himself in the Gospels: "I came to find and to save the lost." This is why he also said to the Jews, "Except one be born again," not meaning, as they thought, birth from a woman, but speaking of the soul born and created anew in the likeness of God's image. On the Incarnation 14.1–2.

Spiritual Regeneration Leads Us to Christ.

Gregory of Nazianzus: And indeed from the Spirit comes our new birth, and from the new birth our new creation, and from the new creation our deeper knowledge of the dignity of him from whom it is derived. On the Holy Spirit, Theological Oration 5(31).28.

The Two Births.

Augustine: [Nicodemus] knew only one birth from Adam and Eve. He did not yet know [the birth] from God and the church. He knew only the parents who beget death. He did not yet know the parents who beget life. He knew only the parents who beget those who will succeed them. He did not yet know the parents who, living forever, beget those who will remain. Therefore, although there are two births, he only knew one. One is from earth, the other from heaven. One is from the flesh, the other from the Spirit. One is from mortality, the other from eternity. One is from male and female, the other from God and the church. But these two are each individual instances. Neither the one nor the other can be repeated. Tractates on the Gospel of John 11.6.1.

3:4 How Is It Possible to Be Born a Second Time?

Two Points of Astonishment for Nicodemus.

Chrysostom: [Nicodemus] coming to Jesus, as to a man, is confused and startled and perplexed on learning greater things than any human being could speak, things no one had ever heard before. For a while, he is impressed by the sublime character of the sayings, but his mind is darkened and unstable, borne about in every direction and on the point of falling away from the faith. Therefore he objects to what he has heard as being impossible in order to bring out a fuller explanation from Jesus.... There were two difficulties for

him. The first concerned the kind of birth Jesus was talking about; the second, this idea of the kingdom since neither had the name of the kingdom ever been heard among the Jews, nor of a birth like this. But he stops for a while at the first, which most astonished him. Homilies on the Gospel of John 24.3.

A Twofold Cleansing.

Gregory of Nazianzus: We are a compound of both body and soul. The one part is visible, the other invisible. In the same way, our cleansing also is two-fold, that is, by water and the Spirit. The one is received visibly in the body, the other concurs with it invisibly and apart from the body.... The one that comes to the aid of our first birth makes us new instead of old and like God instead of what we now are. It recasts us without fire and creates us anew without breaking us up. For ... the virtue of baptism is to be understood as a covenant with God for a second life and a purer conversation. On Holy Baptism, Oration 40.8.

A Sinner Reborn from the Seed of the Just.

Augustine: You wonder why a sinner should be born of the seed of a just person. Don't you also wonder why a wild olive is born of the seed of an olive tree? Here is another comparison: think of the baptized righteous person as a grain that has been gleaned. Don't you observe that from this gleaned grain wheat is born with the chaff, without which it was sown? Again, while the propagation of those who are reborn is a matter of spiritual regeneration, do you really want a person to be born circumcised of a circumcised person? Certainly this kind of generation is a bodily act, and circumcision is a bodily act. And yet the offspring of a circumcised man is not born circumcised. So in the same way the offspring of a baptized person cannot be born baptized, because nobody is born again before being born. Sermon 294.16.

Nicodemus's Question Indicates a Weak Faith.

Chrysostom: You call him "Master" and say that he "comes from God," and yet you do not receive his words but utilize a word with your master that brings in endless confusion. For the "how" is the doubting question of those who have no strong belief and are still earthbound. Therefore Sarah laughed when she said, "How?" And many others who have asked this question have fallen from the faith.

Some ask, "How was he begotten?" others, "How was he made flesh?" They subject that infinite essence to the weakness of their own reasonings. Knowing this, we ought to avoid this unseasonable curiosity

because those who search into these matters will, without ever learning the “how,” fall away from the right faith. Nicodemus here asks from anxiety.... But observe how ridiculous anyone talks when he commits spiritual things to his own reasonings. Homilies on the Gospel of John 24.2–3.

3:5 The Birth of Water and Spirit

Born of Water and Spirit.

Chrysostom: If anyone asks how is someone born of water, I ask in return, how is someone [like Adam] born from the earth? How was the clay separated into different parts? How were all different kinds of things, like bones, sinews, arteries, veins, and so on made from one kind of material (which itself was only earth?) ... For, as in the beginning, earth was the subject matter but the whole fabric of the human body was the work of him who molded it, so now too, though the element of water is the subject matter, the whole work is done by the Spirit of grace.... Then, humanity was formed last, when the creation had been accomplished. Now, on the contrary, the new person is formed before the new creation. He is born first, and then the world is fashioned anew.... Then, he gave him a garden as his place to live. Now, he has opened heaven to us.... The first creation then, that is, that of Adam, was from earth; the next, that of the woman, from his rib; the next, that of Abel, from seed, yet we cannot comprehend any of these.... How then shall we be able to account for the unseen generation by baptism, which is far greater than these, or how can we require arguments for that strange and marvelous birth?... The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit do everything. Let us then believe the declaration of God. That is more trustworthy than actual seeing. Sight often is in error; it is impossible that God’s Word should fail. Let us then believe it. Homilies on the Gospel of John 25.1–2.

Baptism and Regeneration.

Justin Martyr: As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, ... [these] are brought by us where there is water and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born again.” Now, that it is impossible for those who have once been born to enter into their mothers’ wombs is clear to everyone. And how those who have sinned and repent shall escape their sins is declared by Isaiah the prophet: “Wash, make yourselves clean. Put away evil from

your souls; learn to do good. Judge the fatherless and plead for the widow and come and let us reason together, says the Lord. And though your sins are as scarlet, I will make them white like wool; and though they are as crimson, I will make them white as snow.” First Apology 61.

New Birth Manifests a Radical Break with the Past.

Basil the Great: First of all, it is necessary that the continuity of the old life be cut. And this is impossible unless one is born again, according to the Lord’s word. For the regeneration, as indeed the name shows, is a beginning of a second life. So before beginning the second, it is necessary to put an end to the first. For just as in the case of runners who turn and take the second course, a kind of break and pause intervenes between the movements in the opposite direction, so also in making a change in lives it seems necessary for death to come as mediator between the two, ending all that goes before, and beginning all that comes after. On the Spirit 15.35.

Why Is Water Included in Baptism?

Chrysostom: That the need of water [in baptism] is absolute and indispensable, you may learn in this way. On one occasion, when the Spirit had flown down before the water was applied, the apostle did not stand idle at this point, but, as though the water were necessary and not superfluous, observe what he says, “Can any one forbid water so that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?” Why then is water needed?... In baptism, the pledges of our covenant with God are fulfilled: burial and death, resurrection and life. And these all take place at once. For by the immersion of our heads in the water, the old person disappears and is buried as it were in a tomb below and wholly sunk forever. Then as we raise them again, the new person rises in his place. As easy as it is for us to dip and to lift our heads again, that is how easy it is for God to bury the old person and to show forth the new. And this is done three times so that you may learn that the power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit fulfills all this. Homilies on the Gospel of John 25.2.

Rebirth Takes Place in the Holy Spirit.

Augustine: And then that rebirth, which brings about the forgiveness of all past sins, takes place in the Holy Spirit, according to the Lord’s own words, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, one cannot enter the kingdom of God.” But it is one thing to be born of the Spirit, another to be fed by the Spirit; just as it is one thing to be born of the flesh, which happens when a mother gives birth, and another to be fed

from the flesh, which appears when she nurses the baby. We see the child turn to drink with delight from the bosom of her who brought it forth to life. Its life continues to be nourished by the same source which brought it into being. Sermon 71.19.

Rebirth Is the Rebirth of the Spirit in One's Mind.

Ambrose: Who is the one who is born of the Spirit and is made spirit but he who is renewed in the spirit of his mind? This certainly is he who is regenerated by water and the Holy Spirit, since we receive the hope of eternal life through the laver of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. And elsewhere the apostle Peter says, "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." For who is the one who is baptized with the Holy Spirit but the one who is born again through water and the Holy Spirit? Therefore the Lord said of the Holy Spirit: "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." And therefore he declared that we are born of him in the latter case, through whom he said that we were born in the former. This is the sentence of the Lord. I rest on what is written, not on argument. On the Holy Spirit 3.10.64.

Decaying Flesh Born Again. Leo the Great: Whoever of you, therefore, takes pride (with devotion and faith) in the name of Christian, ponder, by an accurate judgment, the grace of this reconciliation. To you once "cast aside," to you driven out from the thrones of "paradise," to you dying from long exiles, to you scattered into "dust" and ashes, who had no longer any hope of living—to you has "power" been given through the incarnation of the Word. With it, you can "return from far away" to your Maker, can recognize your Father, can become free from slavery and can be made again a child rather than an outsider. With this power, you who were born of flesh that is subject to decay can be "born again from the Spirit" of God and can obtain through grace what you do not have through nature. Sermon 22.5.1.

A Womb Is to an Embryo as Water Is to a Believer.

Chrysostom: There is no longer a mother, or birth pangs, or sleep or coming together and embracing of bodies. From here on out, all the fabric of our nature is framed above, of the Holy Spirit and water. The water brings about the birth of the one who is born. What the womb is to the embryo, the water is to the believer because the water is where the person is fashioned and formed. At first it was said, "Let the waters bring forth the creeping things that have life." But from the time that the Lord entered the streams of the Jordan, the water no longer gives the "creeping things that have life" but souls that are rational and endowed with the Spirit.... But that which is fashioned in the womb needs time, whereas that fashioned in

the water is all done in an instant.... For the nature of the body is such as to require time for its completion, but spiritual creations are perfect from the beginning. Homilies on the Gospel of John 26.1.

3:6 Flesh from Flesh, Spirit from Spirit

Children and Baptism.

Augustine: "But why," they ask, "does a baptized believer, whose sin has already been forgiven, beget a child who is still burdened with the first person's sin?" Because he begets him from the flesh, not from the spirit. "What is born of the flesh is flesh." "And if the outer self," says the apostle, "is decaying, yet the inner self is being renewed from day to day." It is not from what is being renewed in you that you beget a child. You beget a child from what is decaying in you. You, in order not to die forever, were born and reborn. This child is already born, not yet reborn. If you are alive as a result of being reborn, allow it too to be reborn and live.... Why oppose this? Why try to smash the ancient rule of faith with new objections? After all, what is this that you are saying: "Little children don't have even original sin in the least degree"? What does this that you say amount to, but that they should not come to Jesus? But Jesus cries out to you, "Let the little children come to me." Sermon 174.9.

Flesh Is Death, but the Spirit Is Life.

Gregory of Nyssa: We know too that the flesh is subject to death because of sin, but the Spirit of God is both incorruptible and life-giving and beyond death. As at our physical birth there comes into the world with us a potentiality of being again turned to dust, plainly the Spirit also imparts a life-giving potentiality to the children begotten by himself. What lesson, then, do we learn from this? We learn that we should wean ourselves from this life in the flesh, which has an inevitable follower, death; and that we should search for a way of life that does not bring death along with it. On Virginitv 13.

The Spirit Does God's Work of Begetting.

Chrysostom: Do you see the dignity of the Spirit? It appears performing the work of God. For above he said that some "were begotten of God." Here he says that the Spirit begets them. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He means, "The one that is born of the Spirit is spiritual." For the birth of which he speaks here is not that according to essence but according to honor and grace. Homilies on the Gospel of John 26.1.

Christ Transforms Us into Spiritual Beings.

Ammonius: As God the Father is Spirit and as God the Son is Spirit, therefore our God and Father begets by the Spirit the one who is Son and God. Therefore Christ is of one substance with the Father according to his divine nature and of one substance with his mother according to his flesh. The one and the same Christ is from both, unchangeably and without confusion [of the two natures]. But according to what is now canonically held concerning the Logos of the Lord, our minds too are then to be transformed by Christ to be completely conformed to that which is spiritual. Fragments on John 75.

3:7–8 The Wind Blows Wherever It Pleases

The Power of the Wind, the Power of the Spirit.

Chrysostom: By saying, “Do not be amazed,” he indicates [Nicodemus’s] confusion and leads him by way of example to something lighter than the body.... He speaks neither of dense bodies nor of things that are purely incorporeal. For if Nicodemus had heard this there is no way he could have received it. Instead, he found something in between what is and what is not a body, namely, the motion of the wind.... Although he says “it blows where it pleases,” he does not say this as if the wind had any power of choice. He is simply declaring that its natural motion is powerful and cannot be hindered.... The expression, therefore, “blows where it pleases,” is that of one who would show that it cannot be restrained, that it is spread abroad everywhere and that no one can stop it from passing here and there. It goes abroad with great might, and no one is able to turn aside its violence.... It establishes the power of the Comforter. For no one can hold the wind; it moves where it pleases. And so, whether it is the laws of nature or the limits of bodily generation or anything else like this—they have no ability to restrain the operations of the Spirit. Homilies on the Gospel of John 26.1–2.

Rebirth and Spirit’s Movement Are Beyond Understanding.

Hilary of Poitiers: Though I have received faith by my regeneration, I am still in ignorance. And yet, I have a firm hold on a reality I do not understand. I am born again, capable of rebirth, but without conscious perception of it. Moreover, the Spirit has no limits. He speaks when he wants, what he wants and where he wants. We are conscious of his presence when he comes, but the reason for his approach or his departure remains unknown to us. On the Trinity 12.56.

The Spirit Has Absolute Freedom, as Has the Son.

Ambrose: "Where it chooses," says the Scripture, not "where it is ordered." If, then, the Spirit does breathe where it chooses, cannot the Son do what he wills? Why, it is the very same Son of God who in his gospel says that the Spirit has power to breathe where it chooses. Does the Son, therefore, confess the Spirit to be greater, in that it has power to do what is not permitted to himself? On the Christian Faith 2.6.47.

The Spirit Spoke by the Prophets.

Ammonius: One hears the voice of the Spirit through the prophets. Fragments on John 77.

The Word and Sacrament Are the Sound of the Spirit.

Augustine: A father, a man who will one day die, begets through his wife a son to succeed him; God begets from the church sons, not to succeed him but to remain with him. And [the Gospel] continues: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Therefore we are born spiritually, and in the Spirit we are born by word and sacrament. The Spirit is present that we may be born. The Spirit is present invisibly from whom you are born, because you too are born invisibly. For [the Gospel] continues and says, "Do not wonder that I have said to you, 'You must hear his voice but do not know where he comes from or where he goes.'" No one sees the Spirit. And how do we hear the voice of the Spirit? A psalm sounds forth: it is the Spirit's voice. The gospel sounds forth: it is the Spirit's voice. God's word sounds forth: it is the Spirit's voice. "You hear his voice, but do not know where he comes from or where he goes." But if you too should be born of the Spirit, you will be such that he who is not yet born of the spirit has no idea where you come from or where you go. For he continues and says, "So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Tractates on the Gospel of John 12.5.

The Spirit Is Not Deceived.

Ignatius of Antioch: For though some would have deceived me according to the flesh, yet the Spirit, as being from God, is not deceived. For it knows both where it comes from and where it goes, and it detects the secrets [of the heart]. Epistle to the Philadelphians 7.1.

Analogy Between Wind and Spirit.

Chrysostom: Here is the conclusion of the whole matter. If, he says, you do not even know how to explain the motion or path of this wind, which you perceive by hearing and feeling, why are you so over anxious about the working of the divine Spirit, when you do not even understand how the wind works, although you hear its voice?... As then the wind is not visible, although it utters a sound, so neither is the birth of that which is spiritual visible to our bodily eyes. And yet, the wind is a body, although a very subtle one. For whatever is the object of our senses is bodily. If then you do not complain when you cannot see this body and you still believe, why, when you hear of “the Spirit,” do you hesitate and demand such exact accounts, although you do not act this way in the case of a body? Homilies on the Gospel of John 26.2.

3:9–10 The Teacher of Israel

Those Not Born of the Spirit.

Augustine: If you are born of the Spirit, you too shall be like the Spirit, that is, that one who is not born of the Spirit does not know where you come from or where you go. Tractates on the Gospel of John 12.5.

Nicodemus Is Taught Humility.

Augustine: Do we think that the Lord meant to insult this master of the Jews? The Lord knew what he was doing. He wanted the man to be born of the Spirit. No one is born of the Spirit if he is not humble, for humility itself makes us born of the Spirit since “the Lord is near to those who are of a broken heart.” The man was puffed up with his mastery, and it appeared of some importance to him that he was a teacher of the Jews. Jesus pulled down his pride so that he might be born of the Spirit. Tractates on the Gospel of John 12.6.

As a Teacher of Israel, Nicodemus Should Have Understood Jesus.

Chrysostom: Observe how Jesus never accuses Nicodemus of wickedness but only of simplicity and a lack of wisdom. But someone will say: What connection does this birth have with Jewish doctrines? What doesn't it have in common with them? The first man that was made, the woman that was made out of his rib, the barren that bare, the miracles that were worked by means of water, for instance, Elisha's bringing up the iron from the river, the passage of the Red Sea, the pool that the angel troubled and Naaman the

Syrian's purification in the Jordan—these were all types and figures of the spiritual birth and purification that would take place in the future. Many passages in the prophets too have a hidden reference to this birth, as for instance ... “your youth is renewed like the eagle's” ... and “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.” Isaac also was a type of this birth.... Referring to these passages, our Jesus says, “Are you a master in Israel, and you do not know these things?” Homilies on the Gospel of John 26.2.

Types of Cleansing Baptism in the Old Testament.

Ephrem the Syrian: Indeed, he [Nicodemus] should have known what came from the Law and the Prophets: the cleansing with hyssop, the waters for ceremonial sprinkling, the baptisms for cleansing, and all the rest. If these had not been signified as types before the coming of the Son, our Lord would have been accusing Nicodemus falsely because of them. But if they were hidden from him in his Scriptures, and he did not clearly identify them, he [our Lord] rightly put to flight his sleep, healed his infirmity by his gentle voice, and reminded him of the baptism of atonement that existed in Israel.... But this was done gently, because he [our Lord] saw that he [Nicodemus] was sick but close to healing. And since he did not understand what was previously written down in the Law, our Lord showed him the baptism of complete atonement for both body and soul. Truly, Nicodemus, did you not perceive that Jacob was born into the right of the firstborn without [the aid of] belly or womb, or that Naaman was renewed apart from a womb when Elisha spoke to him? ... And likewise for Miriam. Come now, was it not known that this was a sign of baptism given to the nations, for hyssop makes what was stained white? Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 14.13.

3:11 Not Receiving Testimony

Teach Only What Your Hearer Can Handle.

Cyril of Alexandria: He advises Nicodemus to accept in simple faith what he cannot understand. Jesus testifies that he himself knows clearly what he says because of who he is, and to doubt what he says is a very dangerous thing. For it was not likely that Nicodemus would forget that he had earlier affirmed that our Savior Christ was a “teacher who had come from God.” But to resist one who is both from God, and God, is terribly fraught with peril since one is clearly fighting with God. That is why we, who have the authority to teach, should rather provide simple arguments for those who have just come to faith, rather

than the more elaborate explanations ... not applying doctrine indiscriminately but appropriately adapted to what each can handle. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.1.

The Trinitarian Witness.

Cyril of Alexandria: Since he has the Father and the Spirit naturally, the Savior set forth the person of the witnesses in the plural number so that, as in the law of Moses, by the mouth of two or three witness what is said may be established. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.1.

3:12 Earthly Things and Heavenly Things

Heavenly Things Are Beyond the Reach of Fools.

Cyril of Alexandria: If you out of extreme foolishness did not receive a doctrine that does not exceed the understanding human beings are capable of, how can I explain things more divine? For if people are foolish in their own matters, how do they expect to be wise in matters above them? How do those who are powerless in lesser matters expect to find the greater things intolerable? And if, he says, you do not believe me when I speak alone but rather seek many witnesses for everything, whom shall I bring to you as a witness of the heavenly mysteries? Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.1.

The Charge of Unbelief.

Chrysostom: Do not be surprised that he calls baptism earthly, for he calls it this either because it is performed on earth or as comparison with his own most awesome birth. For though this birth of ours is heavenly, yet compared with that true birth that is from the substance of the Father, it is earthly.

And he has not said, "You have not understood," but "You have not believed." For when the understanding cannot take in certain truths, we attribute it to our own natural deficiencies or to ignorance. But when a person does not receive things that cannot be apprehended by reasoning but only by faith, the charge against him is no longer lack of understanding but unbelief.... These truths, however, were revealed so that posterity might believe and benefit from them, even though the people then did not. Homilies on the Gospel of John 27.1.

3:13 The One Who Ascended and Descended

Both Natures Descend and Ascend.

Ambrose: Possessing both natures, that is, the human and the divine, [Christ] endured the passion in his humanity, in order that without distinction he who suffered should be called both Lord of glory and Son of man, even as it is written: “Who descended from heaven.” *On the Christian Faith* 2.7.58.

In Heaven and from Heaven.

Augustine: Some people, certainly, find very surprising what the Lord said in the Gospel, “Nobody has ascended into heaven, except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.” How, they ask, can the Son of man be said to have come down from heaven, when it was here that he was taken on in the Virgin’s womb? People who say this are not to be rejected but instructed. I think, you see, that they are raising this question out of piety but are not yet able to understand what they are inquiring about. They do not realize, I mean, that the divinity took on the humanity in such a way as to become one person, God and man; and that the humanity was attached to the divinity in such a way that Word, soul and flesh were the one Christ. And that is why it could be said, “No one has ascended into heaven, except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.” *Sermon* 265b.2.

His Descent Is His Conception by the Spirit.

Hilary of Poitiers: “Descended from heaven” refers to his origin from the Spirit. For though Mary contributed to his growth in the womb and birth all that is natural to her sex, his body did not owe to her its origin. The “Son of man” refers to the birth of the flesh conceived in the Virgin; “who is in heaven” implies the power of his eternal nature—an infinite nature, which could not restrict itself to the limits of the body—of which it was itself the source and base. By the virtue of the Spirit and the power of God the Word, though he sojourned in the form of a servant, he was ever present as Lord of all within and beyond the circle of heaven and earth. So he descended from heaven and is the Son of man, yet is in heaven. For the Word made flesh did not cease to be the Word. As the Word, he is in heaven, as flesh he is the Son of man. As Word made flesh, he is at once from heaven, and Son of man and in heaven. For the power of the Word, abiding eternally without body, was present still in the heaven he had left. The flesh owed its origin to him and to no one else. So the Word made flesh, though he was flesh, nonetheless never ceased to be the Word. *On the Trinity* 10.16.

Son of Man Stands for the Whole Person.

Chrysostom: And in this place he does not refer only to the flesh as “Son of man” but now names, so to speak, his entire self from the inferior substance. Indeed, he often likes to do this, referring to his whole person from either his divinity or his humanity. Homilies on the Gospel of John 27.1.

In Both Natures.

Augustine: As a human being he was on earth, not in heaven where he now is ... although in his nature as Son of God he was in heaven, but as Son of man he was still on earth and had not yet ascended into heaven. In a similar way, although in his nature as Son of God he is the Lord of glory, in his nature as Son of man he was crucified. Letter 187.9.

He Descended So That We Might Ascend.

Augustine: Spiritual birth happens when human beings, being earthly, become heavenly. And this can only happen when they are made members of me. So that he may ascend who descended, since no one ascends who did not descend. Therefore everyone who needs to be changed and raised must meet together in a union with Christ so that the Christ who descended may ascend, considering his body (that is to say, his church) as nothing other than himself. On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism 1.60.

The Mystery of Christ Ascending and Descending.

Hilary of Poitiers: It is not possible by the laws of bodies for the same object to remain and to descend. The one is the change of downward motion, the other the stillness of being at rest. The infant wails but is in heaven: the boy grows but remains ever the immeasurable God. By what perception of human understanding can we comprehend that he ascended where he was before, and he descended who remained in heaven? The Lord says, “What if you should behold the Son of man ascending to where he was before?” The Son of man ascends where he was before. Can sense apprehend this? The Son of man—who is in heaven—descends from heaven. Can reason cope with this? The Word was made flesh—can words express this? The Word becomes flesh, that is, God becomes man. The man is in heaven: the God is from heaven. He ascends who descended, but he descends and yet does not descend. He is as he ever was, yet he was not ever what he is. We pass in review of the causes, but we cannot explain the manner.

We perceive the manner but cannot understand the causes. Yet, if we understand Christ Jesus even in this way, we shall know him. If we seek to understand him further, we shall not know him at all. On the Trinity 10.54.

Christ Is Everywhere.

Chrysostom: See how even what appears very exalted is utterly unworthy of his greatness? For he is not in heaven only but everywhere, and he fills all things. But here he still speaks according to the infirmity of his hearer in the hope that he can lead him up little by little. Homilies on the Gospel of John 27.1.

3:14 Lifting Up the Serpent, Lifting Up the Son of Man

The Cross as Source of Baptism.

Chrysostom: Having made mention of the gift of baptism, he proceeds to the source of it, that is, the cross.... These two things, more than anything else, declare his unspeakable love: that he both suffered for his enemies and, having died for his enemies, he freely gave them by baptism the entire forgiveness of all of their sins. Homilies on the Gospel of John 27.1.

The Brazen Serpent Is a Type of Christ's Humanity.

Ambrose: It was good that the Lord ordained that, by the lifting up of the brazen serpent, the wounds of those who were bitten should be healed; for the brazen serpent is a type of the cross.... In the same way, the world was crucified in its allurements. Therefore not a real but a brazen serpent was hung. This is so because the Lord took on himself the likeness of a sinner in his body but, in actuality, was without sin. In this way, he imitated a serpent through the deceitful appearance of human weakness, so that when he laid aside the slough of the flesh, he might destroy the cunning of the true serpent. On the Holy Spirit 3.8.50.

The Cross Raised for All the World to See.

Andrew of Crete: The cross is raised and appears above the earth, which until recently malice had kept hidden. It is raised, not to receive glory (for with Christ nailed to it what greater glory could it have?) but to give glory to God who is worshiped on it and proclaimed by it.... It is not surprising that the church rejoices in the cross of Christ and robes herself in festal clothes, revealing her bridal beauty as she honors

this day. Nor is it surprising that this great throng of people has gathered together today to see the cross exposed aloft and to worship Christ whom they see raised upon it. For the cross is exposed in order to be raised and is raised to be exposed. What cross? The cross, which a little while ago was hidden in a place called The Skull but now is everywhere adored. This is what we rejoice over today; this is what we celebrate; this is the point of the present feast; this is the manifestation of the mystery.... For this hidden and life-giving cross had to be exposed, set on high like a city on a hill or a lamp on a stand, for all the world to see. Homily 11 on the Exaltation of the Venerable Cross.

The Story of Moses and the Brass Serpent.

Cyril of Alexandria: This story is a type of the whole mystery of the incarnation. For the serpent signifies bitter and deadly sin, which was devouring the whole race on the earth ... biting the Soul of man and infusing it with the venom of wickedness. And there is no way that we could have escaped being conquered by it, except by the relief that comes only from heaven. The Word of God then was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, "that he might condemn sin in the flesh," as it is written. In this way, he becomes the Giver of unending salvation to those who comprehend the divine doctrines and gaze on him with steadfast faith. But the serpent, being fixed upon a lofty base, signifies that Christ was clearly manifested by his passion on the cross, so that none could fail to see him. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.1.

The Crucified Brings Death to the Serpent.

Justin Martyr: It seems that the type and sign that was erected to counteract the serpents that bit Israel was intended for the salvation of those who believe that death was declared to come thereafter on the serpent through him who would be crucified. But salvation was to come to those who had been bitten by him and had committed themselves to him who sent his Son into the world to be crucified. For the Spirit of prophecy by Moses did not teach us to believe in the serpent, since it shows us that he was cursed by God from the beginning. And in Isaiah he tells us that he shall be put to death as an enemy by the mighty sword, which is Christ Dialogue with Trypho 91.

The Crucified Saves Those Living Under a Curse.

Justin Martyr: By this [lifting up of the serpent], he proclaimed the mystery where he declared that he would break the power of the serpent, which occasioned the transgression of Adam. He [would bring]

salvation to those who believe on him because of this sign (i.e., his crucifixion)—salvation from the fangs of the serpent, which are wicked deeds, idolatries and other unrighteous acts.... Just as God commanded the sign to be made by the brazen serpent—and yet he is blameless—even so, though a curse lies in the law against persons who are crucified, yet no curse lies on the Christ of God, by whom all that have committed things worthy of a curse are saved. Dialogue with Trypho 94.

The Nature of the Brazen Serpent Like That of Christ.

Ephrem the Syrian: It was shown by the brazen [serpent], which by its nature cannot suffer, that he would suffer on the cross, who by his nature cannot die. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 14.15.

The Symbolism Explained.

Augustine: Let me try to explain, as far as the Lord enables me to, what these signs mean. The rod stands for the kingdom, the snake for mortality. It was by the snake that humanity was given death to drink. The Lord was prepared to take this death on himself. So when the rod came down to earth it had the form of a snake because the kingdom of God, which is Jesus Christ, came down to earth. He put on mortality, which he also nailed to the cross.... In his mercy God provided a remedy, a remedy that restored health at the time but also foretold the wisdom that was to come in the future.... Whoever has been bitten by the snakes of sin need only gaze on Christ and will have healing for the forgiveness of sins. And so, brothers, it is the mortality that the Lord took on himself that the church must go on experiencing as his body, of which he is the head, as man, in heaven. So the church experiences mortality, which was inflicted through the seduction of the serpent. We owe death to the sin of the first persons, but afterward we shall reach eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. But when does the church arrive at life and return to the kingdom? At the end of the world. That is why he took it by the tail, which is the end, in order to restore his rod to its original condition. Sermon 6.7.

3:15–16 God's Gift of His Son for Life

The Life-Giving Passion.

Chrysostom: He says that the one who was given was "the Son of God," and he is the cause of life—of everlasting life. He who procured life for others by death would not himself be continually in death. For if those who believed on the crucified did not perish, much less does the one perish who is crucified. He

who takes away the destitution of others is that much freer from it. He who gives life to others brings forth even more life to himself. Homilies on the Gospel of John 27.2.

The Intensity of God's Love and Our Response.

Chrysostom: The text, "God so loved the world," shows such an intensity of love. For great indeed and infinite is the distance between the two. The immortal, the infinite majesty without beginning or end loved those who were but dust and ashes, who were loaded with ten thousand sins but remained ungrateful even as they constantly offended him. This is who he "loved." For God did not give a servant, or an angel or even an archangel "but his only begotten Son." And yet no one would show such anxiety even for his own child as God did for his ungrateful servants....

He laid down his life for us and poured forth his precious blood for our sakes—even though there is nothing good in us—while we do not even pour out our money for our own sake and neglect him who died for us when he is naked and a stranger.... We put gold necklaces on ourselves and even on our pets but neglect our Lord who goes about naked and passes from door to door.... He gladly goes hungry so that you may be fed; naked so that he may provide you with the materials for a garment of incorruption, yet we will not even give up any of our own food or clothing for him.... These things I say continually, and I will not cease to say them, not so much because I care for the poor but because I care for your souls. Homilies on the Gospel of John 27.2–3.

The Great Physician Stoops to Heal My Festering Wounds.

Gregory of Nazianzus: Let us praise the Son first of all, venerating the blood that expiated our sins. He lost nothing of his divinity when he saved me, when like a good physician he stooped to my festering wounds. He was a mortal man, but he was also God. He was of the race of David but Adam's creator. He who has no body clothed himself with flesh. He had a mother who, nonetheless, was a virgin. He who is without bounds bound himself with the cords of our humanity. He was victim and high priest—yet he was God. He offered up his blood and cleansed the whole world. He was lifted up on the cross, but it was sin that was nailed to it. He became as one among the dead, but he rose from the dead, raising to life also many who had died before him. On the one hand, there was the poverty of his humanity; on the other, the riches of his divinity. Do not let what is human in the Son permit you wrongfully to detract from what is divine. For the sake of the divine, hold in the greatest honor the humanity, which the immortal Son took on himself for love of you. Poem 2.

Gifts of Price Are Evidence of Affection.

Hilary of Poitiers: God, who loved the world, gave his only begotten Son as a manifest token of his love. If the evidence of his love is this, that he bestowed a creature on creatures, gave a worldly being on the world's behalf, granted one raised up from nothing for the redemption of objects equally raised up from nothing, such a cheap and petty sacrifice is a poor assurance of his favor toward us. Gifts of price are the evidence of affection: the greatness of the surrender is evidence of the greatness of the love. God, who loved the world, gave no adopted son but his own, his only begotten [Son]. Here is personal interest, true sonship, sincerity; not creation, or adoption, or pretence. Here is the proof of his love and affection, that he gave his own, his only begotten Son. On the Trinity 6.40.

He Gave What Was Most Precious to Show His Abundant Love.

Isaac of Nineveh: The sum of all is God, the Lord of all, who from love of his creatures has delivered his Son to death on the cross. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for it. Not that he was unable to save us in another way, but in this way it was possible to show us his abundant love abundantly, namely, by bringing us near to him by the death of his Son. If he had anything more dear to him, he would have given it to us, in order that by it our race might be his. And out of his great love he did not even choose to urge our freedom by compulsion, though he was able to do so. But his aim was that we should come near to him by the love of our mind. And our Lord obeyed his Father out of love for us. Ascetical Homily 74.

The Precedent of Love with Abraham and Isaac.

Ephrem the Syrian: Abraham had many servants. Why did he [God] not tell him to offer up one of them as a sacrifice? It was only because his love would not be shown in a servant. His son was thus needed, so that through him Abraham's love would be revealed. God had servants like this, but he did not show his love through any of them for his creatures, but rather through his Son, so that through him his love toward us might be proclaimed....

From [the time of] Abraham, the symbols of the wood and of the lamb began to take shape. Isaac was a symbol of the lamb [caught] in the tree, and Jacob showed the wood that was life-giving for water. Thus wood was esteemed as worthy for him to hang upon it, because not a bone in him was broken. As for the earth, its fruits are stimulated by wood, and for the sea, its treasures are taken by means of wood. This is

also the case for the body and the soul. Thus it [the wood of the cross] was carved by the fury of the savage crowd. It was like a mute person in its silence, but in its use it bore fruit exalting the status of human beings. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 21.7, 9.

Christ the Life of the World.

Augustine: Unless the Father, you see, had handed over life, we would not have had life. And unless life itself had died, death would not have been slain. It is the Lord Christ himself, of course, that is life, about whom John the Evangelist says, "This is the true God and eternal life." It was he himself that through the prophet had also threatened death with death, saying, "I will be your death, O death; I will be your sting." This was as though he had said, "I will slay you by dying. I will swallow you up. I will take all your power away from you. I will rescue the captives you have held. You wanted to hold me, though innocent. It is right that you should lose those you had the power to hold." Sermon 265b.4.

3:17 God Sent His Son Not to Condemn but to Save

Resisting the Physician's Help.

Augustine: As far as it lies in the power of the physician, he has come to heal the sick. Whoever does not observe his orders destroys himself.... Why would he be called the Savior of the world unless he saves the world? Tractates on the Gospel of John 12.12.

Two Advents: Pardon and Judgment.

Chrysostom: Many of the more careless sort, using the loving kindness of God to increase the magnitude of their sins and the excess of their disregard, speak in this way, saying: There is no hell, no future punishment. God forgives all our sins....

But let us remember that there are two advents of Christ, one past, the other to come. The first was not to judge but to pardon us. The second will be not to pardon but to judge us. It is of the first that he says, "I have not come to judge the world but to save the world." But of the second he says, "When the Son shall come in the glory of his Father, he will set the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left." And the sheep will go into life and the goats into eternal punishment.... But because he is merciful, for a time he pardons instead of judging. For if he had judged immediately, everyone would have been rushed into

perdition, for “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Don’t you see the unspeakable surplus of his loving kindness? Homilies on the Gospel of John 28.1.

3:18 Those Who Do Not Believe Are Condemned Already

There Is No Need to Judge Believers.

Hilary of Poitiers: “He who believes,” says Christ, “is not judged.” And is there any need to judge a believer? Judgment arises out of ambiguity, and where ambiguity ceases, there is no call for trial and judgment. And so, not even unbelievers need to be judged, because there is no doubt about their being unbelievers. But after exempting believers and unbelievers alike from judgment, the Lord added a case for judgment of the human agents on whom it must be exercised. For there are some who stand midway between the godly and the ungodly, having affinities to both but strictly belonging to neither class, because they have come to be what they are by a combination of the two.... For many are kept within the pale of the church by the fear of God, yet they are tempted all the while to worldly faults by the allurements of the world. They pray, because they are afraid; they sin, because it is their will.... These, then, are they whom the judgment awaits that unbelievers have already had passed on them and believers do not need. Homily on Psalm 1.21–22.

Disbelief Itself Is the Punishment.

Chrysostom: He either means that disbelief itself is the punishment of the impenitent, insofar as being impenitent is to be without light, and to be without light is of itself the greatest punishment. Or he is announcing beforehand what is to be. Even if a murderer is not yet sentenced by the judge, still his crime has already condemned him. In the same way, he who does not believe is dead, even as Adam, on the day that he ate of the tree, died. Homilies on the Gospel of John 28.1.

Sins and Transgressions in Our Own Power.

Clement of Alexandria: The prophet says with justification, “The ungodly are not so, but as the chaff that the wind drives away from the face of the earth. And so, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment” because they are already condemned since “those who do not believe are condemned already.” “Nor do sinners sit in the counsel of the righteous,” inasmuch as they too are already condemned and are not united to those who have lived without stumbling. “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous; and the

way of the ungodly shall perish.” Again, the Lord clearly shows sins and transgression to be in our own power. Stromateis 2.15.

Separation from God Is Self-Inflicted.

Irenaeus: Separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness. Separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits that he has in store.... This is the same thing that happens in the case of a flood of light: those who have blinded themselves or have been blinded by others are forever deprived of the enjoyment of light. It is not that the light has inflicted on them the penalty of blindness, but it is that the blindness itself has brought calamity on them. Therefore the Lord declared, “He who believes in me is not condemned,” that is, he is not separated from God, for he is united to God through faith. On the other hand, he says, “He who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God,” that is, he has separated himself from God by his own doing. Against Heresies 5.27.2.

3:19 Condemnation of Those Who Love Darkness

The Light Comes to Them, but They Refuse.

Chrysostom: They are punished because they would not leave the darkness and hurry to the light.... Had I come to demand an accounting of their deeds, they might have been able to say that was the reason they stayed away. But now I have come to free them from the darkness and to bring them to the light. Who can pity the person who does not choose to approach the light when it comes to him but would rather remain in the darkness? Homilies on the Gospel of John 28.2.

The Power to Determine Our Own Punishment.

Cyril of Alexandria: Jesus says that unbelievers had the opportunity to be illuminated but preferred to remain in darkness. Such people, in fact, by failing to choose enlightenment, determine their own punishment against themselves and provoke their own suffering, which was in their power to escape. God preserved human freedom so that people might justly receive praise for good things and punishment for the contrary. As indeed he shows in another place, saying, “If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword.” Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.1.

Choosing to Remain in Wickedness.

Chrysostom: Then, because it seemed incredible that someone should prefer the light to darkness, he gives the reason for the infatuation, that is, that their deeds were evil.... Indeed, if he had come for judgment, there would have at least been a reason for not receiving him because one who is conscious of his crimes naturally avoids the judge. But criminals practically run to meet one who brings them pardon. Therefore, it might have been expected that those who are conscious of their sins would have gone to meet Christ, as many indeed did. Publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus.... But the majority was too cowardly to undergo the work of virtue for righteousness' sake, and they persisted in their wickedness to the end.... They are always doing evil and looking for ways to roll around in the mire of sin, with no desire to subject themselves to my laws. Homilies on the Gospel of John 28.2.

3:20 Evildoers Hate the Light

Love-Hate Relationship with the Truth.

Augustine: People love truth when it shines on them and hate it when it rebukes them. For, because they are not willing to be deceived but definitely want to practice the art of deception, they love truth when it reveals itself and hate it when it reveals them. Because of this, truth shall requite them in such a way that those who were unwilling to be discovered by it are not only discovered by it against their will but also without revealing itself to them. This is the way the human mind, so blind and sick, so base and unseemly, desires to lie concealed but still not wanting anything to be concealed from it. Instead, it receives quite the opposite—not only is it not concealed from the truth, but the truth is concealed from it. Yet, even while it is as wretched as that, it still ultimately prefers to rejoice in truth rather than in falsehood. It looks forward to the day when, without any further trouble intervening, it will rejoice in that one truth by whom everything else is true. Confessions 10.23.34.

Those Infatuated with Wickedness Hate the Light.

Chrysostom: He said this about those who choose to remain in wickedness all the time. He indeed came so that he might forgive our former sins and secure them against those sins to come. But since there are some so relaxed, so powerless when it comes to virtue that they remain infatuated with wickedness until their dying breath, he reflects here on these kinds of people. For since, he says, the profession of Christianity requires a sound way of life besides right doctrine, they are afraid to come over to us because

they would rather not have to live a righteous life. On the other hand, no one can blame a heathen because, with the kinds of gods he has and the foul and ridiculous rites that go along with those gods, his actions suit his doctrines. But those who belong to the true God, if they live a careless life, everyone will call them to account and accuse them. Even its enemies admire its truth. Observe, then, how exactly Jesus lays out what he is saying. His expression is not “the one who has done evil does not come to the light” but “the one who does it all the time, who desires always to roll himself in the mire of sin—this is the one who will not subject himself to my laws but chooses to stay outside and commit fornication without fear and do all kinds of other forbidden things. For if he comes to me, the light exposes him as a thief, which is why he avoids my dominion.” Homilies on the Gospel of John 28.2.

3:21 That Their Deeds May Be Known

Not One’s Own Merits.

Augustine: He declares that the works of the one who comes to the light are wrought in God, because he is quite aware that his justification results from no merits of his own but from the grace of God. On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins and on Infant Baptism 1.62.

Hate Your Own Work; Love the Work of God in You.

Augustine: But if God has discovered everyone’s works to be evil, how is it that any have done the truth and come to the light?... Now what [Jesus] said is that they “loved darkness rather than light.” He lays the emphasis on that. Many have loved their sins. Many also have confessed them.... God accuses your sins, and if you accuse them too, you are joined to God.... You must hate your own work and love the work of God in you. And when your own deeds begin to displease you, that is when your good works begin as you begin to find fault with your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works, and then you do the truth and come to the light. How do you do the truth? You do not soothe or flatter yourself or say, “I am righteous,” while in actuality you are unrighteous. This is how you begin to do the truth. You come to the light so that your works may be shown to originate in God. And you have come to the light because this very sin in you, which displeases you, would not displease you if God did not shine on you and his truth show it to you. But the one who loves his sin, even after being admonished, hates the light admonishing him and flees from it so that his works that he loves may not be proved to be evil.... For little sins, if allowed to accumulate, lead to death. Little drops swell the river. Little grains of sand become a

heap that presses and weighs down. The sea coming in little by little, unless it is pumped out, sinks the ship. And what does it mean “to pump out,” except that you do good works, mourn, fast, give and forgive so that sins do not overwhelm you? Tractates on the Gospel of John 12.13–14.