

## COMMENTARY ON JOHN

### LESSON NUMBER 37

*John 3:25* “**Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.** <sup>26</sup> **And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him.** <sup>27</sup> **John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.**” ..... John 3:25-27)

### **A QUESTION AMONG JOHN'S DISCIPLES**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Commencing with the ministry of John the Baptist, the entire landscape of the Jewish community changed. We have no record of any prevailing interest in the things of God prior to that. There were occasions when Israel sought the Lord because of impending danger (Ex 14:10), various plagues, punishment, and transgressions (Num 11:2; 21:7; Deut 26:7; Josh 24:7; Judges 3:9,15; 4:3; 6:6-7;10:10; 1 Sam 12:10; 2 Chron 13:14; 14:11; 18:31). That was a consistent pattern prior to John the Baptist, and under the Law. Israel is often said to have sought after and served “*other gods*” (Judges 2:12-19; 2 Chron 25:20; 1 Sam 8:8; 1 Kgs 14:9; Jer 1:16; Hos 3:1). When the Lord would chasten them severely, then, at times, they would seek Him. As it is written, “*Therefore their days did He consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. When He slew them, then they sought Him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer*” (Psa 78:33-35). That is the manner of those who must be directed by Law. However, beginning with John the Baptist they came because of the message he was preaching, and to repent of their sin. This continued in increasing measures with Jesus. Men began seeking the Lord for who He was, not merely because of grief or chastening. It is true that they brought the sick and infirm to Jesus, but that was because they discerned His power, not because they were being punished. We will know that revival has come when men begin to seek the Lord because they earnestly want forgiveness, and because they desire to have what He promises. When men are offered regimented ways to overcome debilitating transgressions that are viewed as mere habits and addictions, there has been a departure from proclaiming the Gospel, which is the power of God (Rom 1:16).

### **THEY CAME TO JOHN**

*John 3:25* “**Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.**”

**THERE AROSE A QUESTION.** Prior to Matthew, it is rare to read about any kind of question. The words “question,” “questions,” “questioned,” and “questioning” occur five times from Genesis through Malachi. Four of them pertain to the Queen of Sheba asking questions of Solomon (1 Kgs 10:1,3; 2 Chron 9:1,2). One time it is said of king Hezekiah, *“Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps”* (2 Chron 31:9). The *“heaps”* were the offerings and tithes the people brought for the sustenance of the priests. Following his discussion with the priests and the Levites, Hezekiah commanded to *“prepare chambers in the house of the LORD; and they prepared them, and brought in the offerings and the tithes and the dedicated things faithfully”* (2 Chron 31:11-12). Those few texts represent fifteen hundred years of God’s identity with a particular people. Very rarely was there any kind of inquiry concerning the will and way of the Lord.

By way of comparison the word *“question”* in its various forms is mentioned twenty-eight times from Matthew through Titus. Thirteen of them are in the Gospels. The religious culture of the land was so significantly changed that men began to inquire about things relating to God. There were actual discussions about things pertaining to life within the framework of God and His Law. That tells us something about the impact of the light that commenced with John, and increased with Jesus.

**JOHN’S DISCIPLES.** The word *“disciple”* or *“disciples”* occur a single time from Genesis through Malachi – twice in the NIV. The use of *“disciples”* occurs only once, in Isaiah 8:16: *“Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples.”* There, the reference is to those who have been effectively taught by God.

**There is no record of any man of God having disciples prior to John the Baptist –** not even Moses or any of the prophets. During the time of Jesus, it is recorded that some Pharisees had *“disciples”* (Matt 22:16). Gamaliel spoke of two men who gathered disciples, or followers: *“For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed”* (Acts 5:36-37). We gather from this that discipleship was not at all common, and neither the men who had gathered disciples, nor their followers met with a good end. Yet, commencing with John, and continuing with Jesus, the very idea of disciples began to increase, and there was no reason to think that bad things would happen to them as a result. They were not insurrectionists against the government, but were eager to be taught things superior to the world and its activities.

**ABOUT PURIFYING.** Other versions read, *“about purification,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> *“ceremonial washing,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“washing,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“cleansing rituals,”* <sup>CEB</sup> *“purification ceremonies,”* <sup>GWN</sup> *“about making things pure,”* <sup>IE</sup> *“ritual purification,”* <sup>ISV</sup> *“cleansing,”* <sup>ABP</sup> *“a ceremony of washing,”* <sup>CEV</sup> *“the whole matter of being cleansed,”* <sup>PHILLIPS</sup> and *“the nature of baptism.”* <sup>MESSAGE</sup>

As the text will confirm, this was a question regarding baptism – particular if being baptized by Jesus was better than being baptized by John. The reason for John’s baptism was clearly stated: *“the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”* (Mark 1:4). However, the question arose because the people were paralleling it with the ceremonial washings that were required under the Law. A ceremonial washing is one that does not really do anything to the individual. It merely validated something. The Law, Hebrews affirms, stood in distinctions made *“only in meats and drinks, and divers washings”* (Heb

9:10). Other versions read, *"ceremonial washings – external regulations,"*<sup>NIV</sup> and *"various baptisms."*<sup>NRSV</sup>

Priests were dedicated with *"washing"* (Ex 29:4). When Aaron and his sons went into the Tabernacle, they had to *"wash their hands and feet"* (Ex 30:19). A leper who had been cleansed was to *"wash himself in water"* (Lev 14:8). Before putting on the priestly garments, the high priest had to *"wash his flesh"* (Lev 16:4). If a person had eaten an animal that died of itself, or that was torn by beasts, he had to *"both wash his clothes, and bathe himself with water"* (Lev 17:15). A person who had touched anything unclean was required to *"wash his flesh with water"* (Lev 22:5-6). In the offering of a red heifer, following the offering the priest had to *"wash his clothes,"* and *"bathe his flesh with water"* (Num 19:5-7). **These were all ceremonial.** They effected no change in the individual, and did not remit sin. No inner cleansing occurred.

Now the question arose between John's disciples and the Jews, whether the baptism of John, and the baptism of Jesus, were mere ceremonies. And, if they were, which one was best? Which baptism was superior? Which ceremony was better? The church in Corinth had the same kind of issue, except it revolved around whose preaching they preferred. Some said, *"I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ."* Paul asked about their baptism: *"were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"* (1 Cor 1:12-13). They were apparently treating baptism as a mere ceremony – and were not the last to do so.

### **PERCEIVED COMPETITION**

<sup>26</sup> *"And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him."*

**A WORD ABOUT BAPTISM INTO CHRIST.** At this point we ought to establish that baptism into Christ is not a mere ceremony. This is precisely the point that Peter makes in First Peter 3:21: *"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet 3:21). Regarding the parenthetical explanation, *"(not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God),"* some of the versions seriously distort and corrupt the text: *"not the removal of dirt from the flesh,"*<sup>NASB</sup> *"nor the removal of dirt from the body,"*<sup>NIV</sup> *"washing clean the flesh,"*<sup>BBE</sup> *"removes dirt from your body,"*<sup>CEB</sup> *"washing off of physical dirt,"*<sup>NJB</sup> *"not because our bodies are washed clean by the water,"*<sup>LIVING</sup> *"not getting rid of body dirt,"*<sup>IE</sup> *"washing off of material defilement,"*<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> *"the mere removal of physical stains,"*<sup>WILLIAMS</sup> *"washing away dirt from your skin,"*<sup>MESSAGE</sup> and *"not by the removing of outward body filth [bathing]."*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

Peter is saying baptism into Christ is **not** a mere ceremony, such as was required by the Law. Under the Law, *"washing"* did not touch the soul, or the mind. It merely qualified the person to perform a sanctified routine, and to enter in among the people. However, in baptism a *"good conscience"* is obtained. Further, baptism saves us *"by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* That is, we are raised together with Him (Rom 6:3-4). Remove the parenthetical thought in Peter's words, and you see how that he is not talking about a mere ceremony: *"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us . . . by the resurrection of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet 3:21). **We must see that baptism is not be treated as a ceremony, such as was under the Law.**

**HE THAT WAS WITH THEE BEYOND JORDAN.** Other versions read, *"on the other side of Jordan,"* <sup>NIV</sup> and *"across the Jordan."* <sup>NRSV</sup> At the time of our text, John was a baptizing in Aenon, near to Salem. The place to which his disciples now refer was when he was baptizing southeast of Aenon, *"in Bethabara beyond Jordan"* (John 1:28). That is where John baptized Jesus, which is the time and event to which his disciples are referring.

**TO WHOM THOU BAREST WITNESS.** The witness of John was duly noted by those who heard him.

1. *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"* (Matt 3:11-12).
2. *"This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me"* (John 1:15).
3. *"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29).
4. *"I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost"* (John 1:32-33).
5. *"And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God"* (John 1:34).
6. *"He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom"* (John 3:29).
7. *"He that cometh from above is above all"* (John 3:31).

In spite of John's witness, and even though he was sent to prepare the way for Jesus, yet these disciples had not yet become one of Jesus' disciples. God was gracious during this interim period. But men would eventually have to follow Jesus.

**THE SAME BAPTIZETH.** So far as these disciples of John and the ones with whom they had conversed were concerned, the issue here regarded purification, or, what they saw as, a religious ceremony. Whose baptism was the best? John's or that of Jesus? Was there a competition here that had not been addressed by John? Until Jesus, John was the only one who was baptizing, and men were flocking out to him. Now, another Baptizer had arisen, and what were they to do about it.

**AND ALL MEN COME TO HIM.** John had already affirmed Jesus was preferred to him. He had affirmed Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He was the One who would purge the floor, determining who was acceptable and who was not. Rather than associating the popularity of Jesus with His superiority to John, they felt they should report these happenings to John. Perhaps he could shed some light on the circumstance.

We get a sense here of what is involved in giving one's allegiance to Jesus, particularly when a godly, but introductory, man is being followed. Although the prophets had declared the coming of a particular and unique *"Man"* (Isa 32:1), yet it was not easy to recognize His presence and yield to Him. That is precisely why the Lord Jesus must be continually proclaimed through the Gospel. Men are still prone to think there are other effective ways to address life.

### **EXCEPT IT BE GIVEN HIM FROM HEAVEN**

<sup>27</sup> *"John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven."*

**JOHN ANSWERED AND SAID.** John will prove to be a man *“sent from God”* (John 1:6). He will not be confused by circumstance, or baffled by the report of the popularity of Jesus. Being *“filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb”* (Lk 1:15), he will know how to address this matter.

**A MAN CAN RECEIVE NOTHING.** Other versions read, *“A man can receive only,”*<sup>NIV</sup> *“no one can receive anything,”*<sup>NRSV</sup> *“A man is unable to have anything,”*<sup>BBE</sup> *“No one can receive anything,”*<sup>CEB</sup> *“No one can receive a single thing,”*<sup>CSB</sup> *“God in heaven appoints each man’s work,”*<sup>LIVING</sup> *“No one can do anything,”*<sup>CEV</sup> *“It’s not possible for a person to succeed – I’m talking about eternal success,”*<sup>MESSAGE</sup> *“A man cannot take any thing by his own choice,”* and *“A man can receive nothing [he can claim nothing, he can take unto himself nothing].”*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

This is a broad statement, as indicated by the words *“receive nothing.”* **I take it to include one’s work or commission, the power to fulfill it, and the success that is realized through it.** Those who conducting labors for the Lord did not take that honor unto themselves, or receive it from men. The same rule applies to them that applied to the Savior Himself; *“And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, to day have I begotten Thee”* (Heb 5:4-5).

Men cannot create or confer the credentials required to fulfill an office in the body of Christ. Men do wrong to take such a responsibility upon themselves. Further, in my opinion, no individual that is doing a valid work for the Lord should allow one of his peers to confer a license to function in that work.

As used here, the word translated *“nothing”* means, **“ABSOLUTELY, NOTHING WHATEVER, NOT AT ALL, IN NO WISE,”**<sup>THAYER</sup> **“IN NO WAY, IN NOTHING AT ALL.”**<sup>FRIBERG</sup> That is, this applies to anything and everything pertinent to carrying out the work of the Lord: the calling, the commission, the ability, the success, the attraction of the people, and the honor – EVERYTHING. None of that is generated by man, whether self or another – in any sense.

**EXCEPT IT BE GIVEN HIM FROM ABOVE.** Other versions read, *“unless it has been given to him from heaven,”*<sup>NKJV</sup> *“what is given him from heaven,”*<sup>NIV</sup> *“if it is not given to him from heaven,”*<sup>BBE</sup> *“unless God gives it from heaven,”*<sup>NLT</sup> *“God in heaven appoints each man’s work,”*<sup>LIVING</sup> *“if heaven has not given it to him,”*<sup>IE</sup> and *“A man must be content to receive the gift which is given him from heaven; there is no other source.”*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> The source of everything required to be a *“laborer together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9) is from heaven – from God in heaven. No resource comes from earth – not wisdom, aptitude, or anything else.

**Given this truth, there cannot be any form of competition between laborers.** Their work has been assigned to them, their ability has been given to them, and it is all being worked together within the framework of Divine purpose. All of this is based upon the fact that God and the exalted Christ are Sovereign, with all power and all wisdom. God has exalted Jesus, and given the reins of the Kingdom to Him. He is *“the only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords”* (1 Tim 6:15), *“the King of saints”* (Rev 15:3), *“the Mighty God”* (Isa 9:6), *“over all”* (Rom 9:5), *“the Lord of all”* (Acts 10:36), *“the Governor”* (Matt 2:6), *“the Head of every man”* (1 Cor 11:3), and *“the Head of the church”* (Eph 5:23).

It is ever true, *“For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left His house, and gave authority to His servants, and to every man his work”* (Mark 13:34). Men have no right to create offices or functions within the body of Christ. If they do so

anyway, that office will not be productive in the real work of the Lord. It will only accomplish the will of men, and will finally be rejected as invalid. John was acquainting his disciples with the manner of the kingdom, and it appears they were slow in comprehending it. You may recall that when John was imprisoned, and before he was beheaded, he sent some of his disciples to Jesus to confirm that He was the One for whom they should be looking, and whom they should follow.

Concerning the misconception of competition, a similar thing happened with Christ's disciples. They once saw what they thought was a competitor. John said to Jesus, *"Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us"* (Mark 9:38). The Lord's answer was much like that of John: *"Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name, that can lightly speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is on our part"* (Mark 9:39-40). This was simply another perspective of the principle that John declared to his disciples. When it comes to the work of the Lord, it is strictly governed from heaven. For that matter, everything on earth is managed from heaven – orchestrated in such a manner as to bring the purpose of God to its fulfillment – the times, the seasons, the participants, the required authority, and the needed aptitudes. In view of that, who is on the Lord's

side? COMMENTARY ON JOHN

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### **A QUESTION AMONG JOHN'S DISCIPLES**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Commencing with the ministry of John the Baptist, the entire landscape of the Jewish community changed. We have no record of any prevailing interest in the things of God prior to that. There were occasions when Israel sought the Lord because of impending danger (Ex 14:10), various plagues, punishment, and transgressions (Num 11:2; 21:7; Deut 26:7; Josh 24:7; Judges 3:9,15; 4:3; 6:6-7;10:10; 1 Sam 12:10; 2 Chron 13:14; 14:11; 18:31). That was a consistent pattern prior to John the Baptist, and under the Law. Israel is often said to have sought after and served *"other gods"* (Judges 2:12-19; 2 Chron 25:20; 1 Sam 8:8; 1 Kgs 14:9; Jer 1:16; Hos 3:1). When the Lord would chasten them severely, then, at times, they would seek Him. As it is written, *"Therefore their days did He consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. When He slew them, then they*

*sought Him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer" (Psa 78:33-35). That is the manner of those who must be directed by Law. However, beginning with John the Baptist they came because of the message he was preaching, and to repent of their sin. This continued in increasing measures with Jesus. Men began seeking the Lord for who He was, not merely because of grief or chastening. It is true that they brought the sick and infirm to Jesus, but that was because they discerned His power, not because they were being punished. We will know that revival has come when men begin to seek the Lord because they earnestly want forgiveness, and because they desire to have what He promises. When men are offered regimented ways to overcome debilitating transgressions that are viewed as mere habits and addictions, there has been a departure from proclaiming the Gospel, which is the power of God (Rom 1:16).*

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men who had gathered disciples, nor their followers met with a good end. Yet, commencing with John, and continuing with Jesus, the very idea of disciples began to increase, and there was no reason to think that bad things would happen to them as a result. They were not insurrectionists against the government, but were eager to be taught things superior to the world and its activities.

**ABOUT PURIFYING.** Other versions read, *"about purification,"* <sup>NKJV</sup> *"ceremonial washing,"* <sup>NIV</sup> *"washing,"* <sup>BBE</sup> *"cleansing rituals,"* <sup>CEB</sup> *"purification ceremonies,"* <sup>GWN</sup> *"about making things pure,"* <sup>IE</sup> *"ritual purification,"* <sup>ISV</sup> *"cleansing,"* <sup>ABP</sup> *"a ceremony of washing,"* <sup>CEV</sup> *"the whole matter of being cleansed,"* <sup>PHILLIPS</sup> and *"the nature of baptism."* <sup>MESSAGE</sup>

As the text will confirm, this was a question regarding baptism – particular if being baptized by Jesus was better than being baptized by John. The reason for John's baptism was clearly stated: *"the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins"* (Mark 1:4). However, the question arose because the people were paralleling it with the ceremonial washings that were required under the Law. A ceremonial washing is one that does not really do anything to the individual. It merely validated something. The Law, Hebrews affirms, stood in distinctions made *"only in meats and drinks, and divers washings"* (Heb 9:10). Other versions read, *"ceremonial washings – external regulations,"* <sup>NIV</sup> and *"various baptisms."* <sup>NRSV</sup>

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Now the question arose between John's disciples and the Jews, whether the baptism of John, and the baptism of Jesus, were mere ceremonies. And, if they were, which one was best? Which baptism was superior? Which ceremony was better? The church in Corinth had the same kind of issue, except it revolved around whose preaching they preferred. Some said, *"I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ."* Paul asked about their baptism: *"were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"* (1 Cor 1:12-13). They were apparently treating baptism as a mere ceremony – and were not the last to do so.

### **PERCEIVED COMPETITION**

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**A WORD ABOUT BAPTISM INTO CHRIST.** At this point we ought to establish that baptism into Christ is not a mere ceremony. This is precisely the point that Peter makes in First Peter 3:21: *"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet 3:21). Regarding the parenthetical explanation, *"(not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience*

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**HE THAT WAS WITH THEE BEYOND JORDAN.** Other versions read, "*on the other side of Jordan,*" <sup>NIV</sup> and "*across the Jordan.*" <sup>NRSV</sup> At the time of our text, John was a baptizing in Aenon, near to Salem. The place to which his disciples now refer was when he was baptizing southeast of Aenon, "*in Bethabara beyond Jordan*" (John 1:28). That is where John baptized Jesus, which is the time and event to which his disciples are referring.

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2. "*This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me*" (John 1:15).
3. "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29).
4. "*I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost*" (John 1:32-33).
5. "*And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God*" (John 1:34).
6. "*He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom*" (John 3:29).
7. "*He that cometh from above is above all*" (John 3:31).

In spite of John's witness, and even though he was sent to prepare the way for Jesus, yet these disciples had not yet become one of Jesus' disciples. God was gracious during this interim period. But men would eventually have to follow Jesus.

**THE SAME BAPTIZETH.** So far as these disciples of John and the ones with whom they had conversed were concerned, the issue here regarded purification, or, what they saw as, a religious ceremony. Whose baptism was the best? John's or that of Jesus? Was there a competition here that had not been addressed by John? Until Jesus, John was the only one who was baptizing, and men were flocking out to him. Now, another Baptizer had

arisen, and what were they to do about it.

**AND ALL MEN COME TO HIM.** John had already affirmed Jesus was preferred to him. He had affirmed Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He was the One who would purge the floor, determining who was acceptable and who was not. Rather than associating the popularity of Jesus with His superiority to John, they felt they should report these happenings to John. Perhaps he could shed some light on the circumstance.

We get a sense here of what is involved in giving one's allegiance to Jesus, particularly when a godly, but introductory, man is being followed. Although the prophets had declared the coming of a particular and unique "Man" (Isa 32:1), yet it was not easy to recognize His presence and yield to Him. That is precisely why the Lord Jesus must be continually proclaimed through the Gospel. Men are still prone to think there are other effective ways to address life.

### **EXCEPT IT BE GIVEN HIM FROM HEAVEN**

*"<sup>27</sup> John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven."*

**JOHN ANSWERED AND SAID.** John will prove to be a man "sent from God" (John 1:6). He will not be confused by circumstance, or baffled by the report of the popularity of Jesus. Being "filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb" (Lk 1:15), he will know how to address this matter.

**A MAN CAN RECEIVE NOTHING.** Other versions read, "A man can receive only,"<sup>NIV</sup> "no one can receive anything,"<sup>NRSV</sup> "A man is unable to have anything,"<sup>BBE</sup> "No one can receive anything,"<sup>CEB</sup> "No one can receive a single thing,"<sup>CSB</sup> "God in heaven appoints each man's work,"<sup>LIVING</sup> "No one can do anything,"<sup>CEV</sup> "It's not possible for a person to succeed – I'm talking about eternal success,"<sup>MESSAGE</sup> "A man cannot take any thing by his own choice," and "A man can receive nothing [he can claim nothing, he can take unto himself nothing]."<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

This is a broad statement, as indicated by the words "receive nothing." I take it to include one's work or commission, the power to fulfill it, and the success that is realized through it. Those who conducting labors for the Lord did not take that honor unto themselves, or receive it from men. The same rule applies to them that applied to the Savior Himself; "And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, to day have I begotten Thee" (Heb 5:4-5).

Men cannot create or confer the credentials required to fulfill an office in the body of Christ. Men do wrong to take such a responsibility upon themselves. Further, in my opinion, no individual that is doing a valid work for the Lord should allow one of his peers to confer a license to function in that work.

As used here, the word translated "nothing" means, "ABSOLUTELY, NOTHING WHATEVER, NOT AT ALL, IN NO WISE,"<sup>THAYER</sup> "IN NO WAY, IN NOTHING AT ALL."<sup>FRIBERG</sup> That is, this applies to anything and everything pertinent to carrying out the work of the Lord: the calling, the commission, the ability, the success, the attraction of the people, and the honor – EVERYTHING. None of that is generated by man, whether self or another – in any sense.

**EXCEPT IT BE GIVEN HIM FROM ABOVE.** Other versions read, "unless it has been given to him from heaven,"<sup>NKJV</sup> "what is given him from heaven,"<sup>NIV</sup> "if it is not given to him from heaven,"<sup>BBE</sup> "unless God gives it from heaven,"<sup>NLT</sup> "God in heaven appoints each man's work,"<sup>LIVING</sup> "if heaven has not given it to him,"<sup>IE</sup> and "A man must be content to

*receive the gift which is given him from **heaven**; there is no other source.*" <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> The source of everything required to be a *"laborer together with God"* (1 Cor 3:9) is from heaven – from God in heaven. No resource comes from earth – not wisdom, aptitude, or anything else.

**Given this truth, there cannot be any form of competition between laborers.** Their work has been assigned to them, their ability has been given to them, and it is all being worked together within the framework of Divine purpose. All of this is based upon the fact that God and the exalted Christ are Sovereign, with all power and all wisdom. God has exalted Jesus, and given the reins of the Kingdom to Him. He is *"the only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords"* (1 Tim 6:15), *"the King of saints"* (Rev 15:3), *"the Mighty God"* (Isa 9:6), *"over all"* (Rom 9:5), *"the Lord of all"* (Acts 10:36), *"the Governor"* (Matt 2:6), *"the Head of every man"* (1 Cor 11:3), and *"the Head of the church"* (Eph 5:23).

It is ever true, *"For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left His house, and gave authority to His servants, and **to every man his work**"* (Mark 13:34). Men have no right to create offices or functions within the body of Christ. If they do so anyway, that office will not be productive in the real work of the Lord. It will only accomplish the will of men, and will finally be rejected as invalid. John was acquainting his disciples with the manner of the kingdom, and it appears they were slow in comprehending it. You may recall that when John was imprisoned, and before he was beheaded, he sent some of his disciples to Jesus to confirm that He was the One for whom they should be looking, and whom they should follow.

Concerning the misconception of competition, a similar thing happened with Christ's disciples. They once saw what they thought was a competitor. John said to Jesus, *"Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us"* (Mark 9:38). The Lord's answer was much like that of John: *"Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name, that can lightly speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is on our part"* (Mark 9:39-40). This was simply another perspective of the principle that John declared to his disciples. When it comes to the work of the Lord, it is strictly governed from heaven. For that matter, everything on earth is managed from heaven – orchestrated in such a manner as to bring the purpose of God to its fulfillment – the times, the seasons, the participants, the required authority, and the needed aptitudes. In view of that, who is on the Lord's side?