**Wednesday Night Bible Study**

**Speak a Word 2022 lent study**

**Wednesday, March 9, 2022**

**Queens Chapel UMC \* 7410 Muirkirk Road \* Beltsville, MD 20705**

**Instructor: Minister George Smith**

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

 *Last week we began the 40 days of Lent with* ***Shrove Tuesday.***

***Shrove Tuesday*** *is the last day before Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday. Its name comes from the old custom of being shriven, that is of confessing and receiving forgiveness, prior to the season of Lent. Shrove Tuesday comes at the*

*end of a period of carnival and merrymaking in many countries and corresponds to the Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) of the French and Pancake Tuesday of the English. It represents the last feasting before the leaner days of Lent. (Carnival means "end of meat.") So that no food will go to waste, the English make pancakes to use up the fats, eggs and cream that are not eaten during Lent. Mardi Gras celebrations typically include elaborate masks. These symbolize the "front" we sometimes show to others rather than the true self both we and God know. "Shrove" comes from the Latin for "to write." "To write."*

***Ash Wednesday****is a*[*Christian*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity)*holy day of*[*prayer*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer)*and*[*fasting*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fasting)*. It is preceded by*[*Shrove Tuesday*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shrove_Tuesday)*and falls on the first day of*[*Lent*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lent) *(the six weeks of*[*penitence*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penitence)*before*[*Easter*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter)*). Ash Wednesday is traditionally observed by*[*Western Christians*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Christian)*. It is observed by*[*Catholics*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholics)*in the*[*Roman Rite*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Rite)*,*[*Lutherans*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutherans)*,*[*Moravians*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moravian_Church)*,*[*Anglicans*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglicans)*,*[*Methodists*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodists)*,*[*Nazarenes*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Nazarene)*, as well as by many from the*[*Reformed tradition*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformed_tradition)*(inclusive of the*[*Congregationalist*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congregationalist)*,*[*Continental Reformed*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Reformed)*, and*[*Presbyterian*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterian)*traditions).*

*As it is the first day of Lent, many Christians begin Ash Wednesday by marking a*[*Lenten calendar*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenten_calendar)*, praying a Lenten*[*daily devotional*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daily_devotional)*, and making a*[*Lenten sacrifice*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenten_sacrifice)*that they will not partake of until the arrival of*[*Eastertide*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastertide)*.*

*Many Christians attend special church services. Ash Wednesday derives its name from the placing of*[*ashes*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ash)*on the foreheads of participants to either the words "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" or the dictum "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." The ashes are prepared by burning*[*palm leaves*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palm_leaves)*from the previous year's*[*Palm Sunday*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palm_Sunday)*celebrations.*

 *If you were at the 12-noon service last week we wrote down our sins for which we seek forgiveness, then we burned the paper, turning our sins to ash. With Ash Wednesday, we begin the period of Lent, which prepare! us for Good Friday and Easter*

***What is Lent? Lent is the 40 days (not including Sundays) from Ash Wednesday to the Saturday before Easter. Lent is often described as a time of preparation and an opportunity to go deeper with God. This means that it’s a time for personal reflection that prepares people’s hearts and minds for Good Friday and Easter.***

 ***SEEK***

***Week 1: SEEK TRUTH***

***SCRIPTURE JOHN 3:1-21***

1. ***Nicodemus and the new birth.***

***1. (1-3) Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night****.*

***1.****There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*

***2.****This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.*

***3.”*** *Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

1. ***Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:*** *Nicodemus was one of those impressed by Jesus’ signs (John 2:23), and a member of the ruling Sanhedrin. He was religious (of the Pharisees), educated (Nicodemus is a Greek name), influential (a ruler), and earnest enough to come by night. Nicodemus came to Jesus as a representative of all men (John 2:23-25), and in a sense he represented what is highest and best in men.*

***b.******This man came to Jesus by night:***

1. *Perhaps Nicodemus came by night because he was timid, of perhaps he wanted an uninterrupted interview with Jesus.*

 ***c. We know that You are a teacher come from God:*** *It is difficult to know if Nicodemus spoke of himself, of the Sanhedrin, or of popular opinion.*

***d. No one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him:*** *We understand the sense in which Nicodemus meant this, but his statement was not entirely true. The Bible tells us that deceivers and false prophets can sometimes perform remarkable signs  2 Thessalonians 2:2,9 and*[*Revelation 13:13-14*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+13.13-14&t=NKJV)

***E.******Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God:*** *Jesus’ reply to Nicodemus shattered the Jewish assumption that their racial identity – their old birth – assured them a place in God’s Kingdom. Jesus made it plain that a man’s first birth does not assure him of the kingdom; only being born again gives this assurance.*

***i.*** *It was taught widely among the Jews at that time that since they descended from Abraham, they were automatically assured of heaven. In fact, some Rabbis taught that Abraham stood watch at the gate of hell, just to make sure that none of his descendants accidentally wandered in there.*

***ii****. Most Jews of that time looked for the Messiah to bring in a new world, in which Israel and the Jewish people would be pre-eminent. But Jesus came to bring new life, in which He would be preeminent.*

***iii.*** *Nicodemus addressed Jesus as a rabbi and teacher; Jesus responded to him as the one who announced new life. “Our Lord replies, It is not learning, but life that is wanted for in the Messiah’s Kingdom; and life must begin by birth.”*

***F.******Born again:*** *The ancient Greek word translated again (anothen) can be also translated “from above.” This is the sense in which John used this word in*[*John 3:31*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+3.31&t=NKJV)*and in*[*John 19:11*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+19.11&t=NKJV)*and*[*19:23*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+19.23&t=NKJV)*. Either way, the meaning is essentially the same. To be born from above is to be born again.*

 ***i.*** *Jesus clearly said that without this-that unless one is born again-he cannot enter or be part of the Kingdom of God. Moral or religious reform isn’t enough. One must be born again.*

 ***ii.*** *this isn’t something that we can do ourselves. If Jesus had said, “unless you are washed, you cannot see the kingdom of God” then we my think, I can wash myself.” A man might wash himself; but he could never birth himself.*

***2.*** *(4)* ***Nicodemus answers: How can this be?***

 ***4.*** *Nicodemus said to 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?”*

***a.******How can a man be born when he is old?****Nicodemus’ reply may not have been out of ignorance, but from thinking that Jesus meant a moral reformation. His question may be “How can you teach an old dog new tricks?” One way or another, Nicodemus clearly did not understand Jesus or the truth about the new birth****.***

1. ***How can a man be born when he is old?****In His description of new birth, Jesus recalled a familiar theme from Old Testament promises of the New Covenant. Deuteronomy 30:1-6* ***30,*** *Jeremiah 23:1-8, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Jeremiah 32:37-41, Ezekiel 11:16-20, Ezekiel 36:16-28, Ezekiel 37:21-28)*

*These passages essentially made three promises in the New Covenant:*

***. The gathering of Israel.*** *·*

***· The cleansing and spiritual transformation of God’s people.***

***· The reign of the Messiah over Israel and the whole world.***

***i.*** *In Jesus’ day, the common teaching among the Jewish people was that the first two aspects of the New Covenant had been fulfilled. They saw Israel gathered – at least in part – after the Babylonian exile. They saw strong spiritual movements like the Pharisees, which they believed fulfilled the promise of spiritual transformation. All they waited for was the reign of the Messiah.*

***ii.*** *That’s why Jesus’ statement about the new birth was so strange to Nicodemus. He thought that the Jewish people already had it; they certainly weren’t looking for it. They only looked for a triumphant Messiah.*

***3. (5-8) Jesus explains the new birth.***

 ***5.*** *Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter 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.*** *Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’*

***8.****The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

***a.******Most assuredly… you must be born again:*** *Jesus was emphatic in saying that man does not need reformation, but a radical conversion by the Spirit of God. We must be born of water and the Spirit.*

***i.*** *“In verse 3 Jesus has spoken of ‘seeing’ the kingdom of God, whereas here He speaks of ‘entering’ it. There is probably no great difference of meaning.”*

***ii.******Most assuredly:*** *“The words add solemnity to and underline the truth of what follows. The modern expressions, ‘In truth I tell you’, ‘Believe me when I say’, ‘I do assure you’, convey the meaning.”*

***iii. Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God:*** *If a nation passed a law that said no one could live there except those who were born in that nation, and someone wanted to live there who was not born there.*

*· It wouldn’t matter if he took a name that was common in that nation.*

*· It wouldn’t matter if he spoke the language.*

*· It wouldn’t matter if he observed some of the customs.*

*· It wouldn’t matter if he dressed like those in that nation.*

*· It wouldn’t matter if he practiced some of the religious traditions of that nation.*

*· It wouldn’t matter if his parents were born in that nation.*

*· It wouldn’t matter if his children were born there.*

*· It wouldn’t matter if he had many friends in that nation.*

*· All that would matter was if he was actually born there.*

***iv.*** *“A man may cast away many vices, forsake many lusts in which he indulged, and conquer evil habits, but no man in the world can make himself to be born of God; though he should struggle never so much, he could never accomplish what is beyond his power. And mark you, if he could make himself to be born again, still he would not enter heaven, because there is another point in the condition which he would have violated — ‘unless a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”*

***b. You must be born of water:*** *We know from*[*John 3:10*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+3.10&t=NKJV)*that whatever being born of water was, it should have been familiar to Nicodemus from the Old Testament.*

***i.*** *Some have thought born of water means to be baptized. Water here may represent baptism, but there is no real Old Testament foundation for this.*

***ii.*** *Some have thought that born of water refers to our physical birth, since we come forth from a sack of water. This approach is more attractive, but doesn’t it simply state the obvious? However, it does make a good parallel with the idea of that which is born of the flesh in*[*John 3:6*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+3.6&t=NKJV)*.*

***iii.*** *Some have thought that born of water means to be born again by the Word of God. In other passages of Scripture, water represents the Word, as we are washed by the water of the word (*[*Ephesians 5:26*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+5.26&t=NKJV)*).*

***iv****. Some have thought that born of water means to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, the living water of*[*John 7:38-39*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+7.38-39&t=NKJV)*.*

***v.*** *Some have thought that born of water means to receive the water of cleansing prophesied in*[*Ezekiel 36:25-28*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ezekiel+36.25-28&t=NKJV)*as part of the New Covenant. This is the approach that has the most weight (though it is a tough call), because of its firm connections to Old Testament prophecy – which Jesus says Nicodemus should have known to understand these things.*

***c.******That which is born of the flesh is flesh:*** *Without the new birth of the Spirit, the flesh taints all works of righteousness. Yet, everything that a Spirit-led man does can be pleasing to God.*

***i.*** *“In this flesh is included every part of that which is born after the ordinary method of generation: even the spirit of man, which, receptive as it is of the Spirit of God, is yet in the natural birth dead, sunk in trespasses and sins.”*

***d.******Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again”:*** *Again, Nicodemus did marvel at this statement, because he – like most all Jews of his time – believed they already had the inner transformation promised in the New Covenant. Jesus wants him to take hold of the fact that he does not have it, and must be born again.*

***i.*** *We should not forget whom Jesus said this to. Nicodemus was a religious leader, a Pharisee, an educated man, and an earnest man. By all outward appearance, he was already transformed unto God – yet he was not.*

***ii.*** *“These solemn words for ever exclude the possibility of salvation by human merit. Man’s nature is so gripped by sin that an activity of the very Spirit of God is a necessity of he is to be associated with God’s kingdom.”*

***e. The wind blows where it wishes:*** *Jesus’ idea to Nicodemus was “You don’t understand everything about the wind, but you see its effects. That is just how it is with the birth of the Spirit.” Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know that he didn’t have to understand everything about the new birth before he experienced it.*

***i.*** *Since we can’t control the Spirit, “It should lead us to be very tender and jealous in our conduct towards the Holy Ghost, so that we do not grieve him and cause him to depart from us.”*

***4. (9-13) Jesus responds to the question “how can these things be?”***

***9****. Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”*

***10.*** *Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?*

***11.*** *Most assuredly, I say to you, we speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.*

***12.*** *If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*

***13.*** *No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”*

***a. How can these things be****? Nicodemus was confused. He was so set in his thinking that the new birth has already happened to him and all of faithful Israel, that he had a hard time thinking differently. Jesus had to keep explaining.*

***b. Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?****Jesus chided Nicodemus for not being aware of the need and the promise of the new birth, because these were plainly laid out in the Old Testament. Nicodemus knew these passages well but believed that they had been fulfilled in regard to the new birth. He should have known better.*

***i. Are you the teacher of Israel:*** *“Nicodemus’s exact position in the theological circles of Israel is not defined, but the language suggests that he was a very important person. Jesus implies that as the outstanding teacher of the nation, Nicodemus should have been familiar with the teaching of the new birth.”*

***c. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?****A simple look at earthly things – like the illustrations Jesus used, and even a look at his own life – should have made the point plain to Nicodemus. If he could not see that he needed this spiritual transformation, what more could Jesus tell him?*

***d. No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven:*** *Jesus “makes it clear that He can speak authoritatively about things in heaven, though no one else can.”*

***i.*** *“In short, we have here the basis in Christ’s own words of the statement in the prologue that the Word was in the beginning with God and became flesh to be a light to men.”*

***5. (14-15) Jesus and the brazen serpent.***

***14.****“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,*

***15.*** *That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

***a. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness:*** *Jesus made a remarkable statement, explaining that the serpent of*[*Numbers 21:4-9*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+21.4-9&t=NKJV)*was a picture of the Messiah and His work.*

***i.*** *Serpents are often used as pictures of evil in the Bible (*[*Genesis:15*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+3.1-5&t=NKJV)*and*[*Revelation 12:9*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+12.9&t=NKJV)*). However, Moses’ serpent in*[*Numbers 21*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+21&t=NKJV)*was made of bronze, and bronze is a metal associated with judgment in the Bible, because bronze is with fire, a picture of judgment.*

***ii.*** *So, a bronze serpent does speak of sin, but of sin judged. In the same way Jesus, who knew no sin became sin for us on the cross, and our sin was judged in Him. A bronze serpent is a picture of sin judged and dealt with.*

***iii.*** *We would have wanted to diminish our sense of sin and put the image of a man up on the pole. Our image of man might represent “both good and bad” in man. But a serpent is more apparently sinful and shows us our true nature and true need of salvation.*

***iv.*** *In addition, if the serpent lay horizontally on the vertical pole, it is easy to see how this also was a visual representation of the cross. However, many traditions show the serpent being wrapped around the pole, and this is the source for the ancient figure of healing and medicine – a serpent, wrapped around a pole.*

***v.*** *In the*[*Numbers 21:4-9*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+21.4-9&t=NKJV)*account, the people were saved not by doing anything, but by simply looking to the bronze serpent. They had to trust that something as seemingly foolish as looking at such a thing would be sufficient to save them, and surely, some perished because they thought it too foolish to do such a thing.*

***vi.*** *As it says in*[*Isaiah 45:22*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Isaiah+45.22&t=NKJV)*: Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. We might be willing to do a hundred things to earn our salvation, but God commands us to only trust in Him – to look to Him.*

***b. Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up:*** *Even though Jesus bore our sins, He never became a sinner. Even His becoming sin for us was a holy, righteous, act of love. Jesus remained the Holy One throughout the entire ordeal of the cross.*

***i.*** *“Nicodemus had failed to grasp the teaching about the new birth when it was presented to him in terms drawn from Ezekiel’s prophecy; now it is presented to him by means of an object-lesson, from a story with which he had been familiar since childhood.”*

***c. Lifted up:*** *This is a term later used to describe both Jesus’ crucifixion (*[*John 12:32*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+12.32&t=NKJV)*) and His ascension (*[*Acts 2:33*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+2.33&t=NKJV)*). Both meanings are in view, His suffering and exaltation. Jesus was lifted up in both ways.*

***i.*** *The Son of Man is to be lifted up. Yes, but not on a throne in Herod’s palace. He was to be conspicuous, but as the brazen serpent had been conspicuous, hanging on a pole for the healing of the people.”*

***d. Should not perish but have eternal life****: The idea behind eternal life means much more than a long or never-ending life. Eternal life does not mean that this life goes on forever. Instead, eternal life also has the idea of a certain quality of life, of God’s kind of life. It is the kind of life enjoyed in eternity.*

***6. (16) God’s gift of salvation.***

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

***a. For God so loved the world:***[*John 3:16*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+3.16&t=NKJV)*has long been celebrated as a powerful, succinct, declaration of the gospel. Of the 31,102 verses in the Bible, it may be the most popular single verse used in evangelism.*

*i. We learn the object of God’s love: For God so loved the world. God did not wait for the world to turn to Him before He loved the world. He loved and gave His only begotten Son to the world when it was still the world!*

***ii.*** *What Jesus told Nicodemus in*[*John 3:7*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+3.7&t=NKJV)*(You must be born again) refuted the popular Jewish idea regarding the way to salvation. Now Jesus refuted the popular Jewish idea regarding the scope of salvation: for God so loved the world.*

***iii.*** *The Jews of that day rarely thought that God loved the world. Many of them thought that God only loved Israel. The universal offer of salvation and life in Jesus was revolutionary.*

***b. He gave His only begotten Son:*** *This describes both the expression and the gift of God’s love. God’s love didn’t just feel for the plight of a fallen world. God did something about it, and He gave the most precious thing to give: His only begotten Son.*

***c. Whoever believes in Him:*** *This describes the recipient of God’s love. God loves the world, but the world does not receive or benefit from that love until it believes in Jesus, the gift that the Father gave. Believes in means much more than intellectual awareness or agreement. It means to trust in, to rely on, and to cling to.*

***d. Should not perish:*** *This describes the intention of God’s love. God’s love actually saves man from eternal destruction. God looks at fallen humanity, does not want it to perish, and so in His love He extends the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. Everlasting life: This describes the duration of God’s love. The love we receive among people may fade or turn, but God’s love will never change. He will never stop loving His people, even unto the furthest distance of eternity.*

***i.*** *We may say there are Seven Wonders in*[*John 3:16*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+3.16&t=NKJV)*.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***God*** | ***The Almighty Authority*** |
| ***So loved the world*** | ***The Mightiest Motive*** |
| ***That He gave His only begotten Son*** | ***The Greatest Gift*** |
| ***That whoever*** | ***The Widest Welcome*** |
| ***Believes in Him*** | ***The Easiest Escape*** |
| ***Should not perish*** | ***The Divine Deliverance*** |
| ***But have everlasting life*** | ***The Priceless Possession*** |

***7. (17-21) Sin’s condemnation.***

***17.“****For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved****.***

***18****.He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God****.***

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

 ***20.*** *For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*

***21.*** *But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”*

***a. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world:*** *Jesus revealed the heart of God the Father in sending God the Son; to bring salvation – rescue, hope, healing – to the world through Him.*

***i.*** *“Some men will, in fact, be condemned, and that as the result of Christ’s coming into the world (*[*John 3:19*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+3.19&t=NKJV)*). But the purpose of His coming was not this.*

***b.****He who does not believe is condemned already:*[*John 3:16*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+3.16&t=NKJV)*is the most gracious, wonderful offer conceivable – eternal life for all who believe. Yet the offer has inherent consequences, for any who reject, who refuse to believe. Their refusal makes their condemnation certain.*

***i.*** *A significant issue regarding those who do not believe is, “What about those who never had the opportunity to believe because they never heard the good news of Jesus Christ?” This is an important but separate question, addressed best by the Apostle Paul in*[*Romans 1*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+1&t=NKJV)*and*[*2*](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+1.2&t=NKJV)*. Here, the focus seems to be on those who deliberately reject the message, as those who heard and encountered Jesus in the first century had opportunity to do.*

***c. This is the condemnation:*** *Jesus came to bring salvation, but those who reject that salvation condemn themselves. We never need to leave the reason for anyone’s condemnation at God’s door. The responsibility is theirs alone.*

***d. Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil:*** *Jesus explained what keeps people from faith and rescue in Him. It is because they are drawn to darkness and love it more than the light. There is a critical moral dimension to unbelief that is often denied or ignored.*

***i.*** *Those who consciously reject Jesus often present themselves as heroic characters who bravely put away superstition and deal honestly with deep philosophical problems. It is far more often true that there is a moral compromise at the root of their rejection.*

***ii.*** *Many opponents of Christianity have a vested interested in fighting against the truth of Jesus, because they love their sin and don’t want to face it or face a God who will judge their sin.*

***iii.*** *When we think of the love of sin that sends people to hell, we often other think of notorious sin. But the simple demand to be lord of my own life is enough of a sin to deserve condemnation before God.*

***e. Everyone practicing evil hates the light:*** *Some express their hatred of the truth by actively fighting against it, and others express their hatred by ignoring God’s truth – by saying to Jesus “You are not worth my time.” In contrast, he who does the truth comes to the light.*

***i.****He who does the truth: “‘To do the truth’ is at any rate to live up to what one knows; to live an honest, conscientious life.”*

***ii.*** *“They chose to walk in the darkness, that they might do the works of darkness-they broke the Divine law, refused the mercy offered to them, are arrested by Divine justice, convicted, condemned, and punished. Whence, then, does their damnation proceed? From THEMSELVES.*

*Notice the role of questions in these Scripture passages. When we’re broken, when we’re feeling less than whole, we turn to God seeking direction. New life is ours if we are willing to open our hearts, claim the courage to not take the easy path and live among the deepest questions. Today, in this pandemic, we wear masks to protect and preserve life.*

 ***But how willing are we to discard our metaphorical masks and stand with vulnerability before the mirror as we seek truth?***

*Nicodemus comes seeking light, even as he uses darkness as a cover.*

***. Do you ever wrestle between darkness and light?***

***. What is one area in your life in which you hide your true self by putting on a mask or cover?***

***. How does this mask separate you from who God intends you to be?***

***. In what ways do our masks keep us from being truly born anew?***

***. How might your faith community help one another to seek truth and remove the burden of the metaphorical masks we all***

***wear?***