

## HE MUST INCREASE BUT I MUST DECREASE

### INTRODUCTION

What does the term “legalism” mean? It refers to the act of adding extra laws to the Word of God. In John 3:25, it says that John the Baptist’s disciples had a discussion with a Jew on this issue because they wanted to discuss “purification” or the Jewish cleansing laws with him. What happened afterwards? John pointed them back to Jesus and said “He must increase but I must decrease” (verse 30). We are going to study that today by looking at “4 Observations from this Discussion Concerning Purification and Baptism.”

#### **1). The Setting of It (Verses 22-25).**

The Apostle John begins this story by telling us where it occurred – in Aenon near Salim. He also tells us what it was over initially - “purification.” We do not know why this issue arose but it could be because John the Baptist was baptizing people and some in Israel were confusing one ceremony with the other which is why John’s disciples had to be careful not to get sidetracked by that. Sinners were getting saved and a revival was happening in their area. However, they could not help the new converts if all they did was spend time arguing over secondary issues like this.

#### **2). John’s Response (verses 26-30).**

As the story unfolds, the disciples come to John and say “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan... behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him” (Verse 26). It is not clear why they brought that up, either, after their previous conversation about purification. However, John is very clear about his response to Jesus’ popularity: “He must increase but I must decrease” (verse 30). In other words, Jesus’ success was a good thing because John was not trying to build up his own personal kingdom. He was trying to build up Christ’s so that, as long as that was happening, he felt like his ministry was a success.

### **3). John's Further Response (verses 31-36).**

Apparently, John could not express all that he wanted to say about Jesus in just a few verses. So he expands his original statement on the greatness of Christ by saying that "Jesus is above all" (verses 31), "He testifies [to God]" (verse 32), and "He gives the Spirit without measure" (verse 34). John also tells his disciples that "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." All of this shows them what is at stake in the battle against legalism: eternal life. Choose Christ alone and you have it. Choose anything else and you do not.

### **4). The End.**

John 3:36 gives us the last thing that John the Baptist says in the Gospel of John. However, his story does not stop there because Mark 6:14-32 records his gruesome death at the hands of Herod the Great because John did not die in a blaze of glory. He died in a lonely, dark prison because he stayed faithful to the work that the Lord had called him to. Out of love for Christ, he continued preaching the Gospel and calling sinners to repentance even when it cost him his life. In the words of one Commentator, "John was a remarkable person because he preached that Hell is hot, Heaven is sweet, sin is black or white, judgment is sure, and Jesus saves." May we all learn from his example.