

In John 3 we find an interested episode in the life of Jesus. Here we see Nicodemus, a Pharisee ruler of the Jews coming to see Jesus. But he comes under the cover of darkness. Perhaps he didn't want to address all the questions that he'd get if he met Jesus during the day and was seen by fellow Jews. While we don't know his reason for coming at night, we know that Nicodemus knew something about Jesus and his teaching. He calls him Rabbi which was a title of respect for a Jewish teacher. He acknowledges that Jesus was a teacher from God because of the miracles that Jesus had done. Jesus' miracles were his credentials that he was indeed from God.

But instead of discussing his miracles, Jesus moves to a more important matter. He talks to Nicodemus about being born again. Jesus begins with the words "verily, verily" which indicated what he is about to say is a true statement and then he talks about the kingdom. The Jews were looking for a kingdom and both John the Baptist and Jesus were preaching about the kingdom. So this was a hot topic during that time. Jesus shows the spiritual aspects of the kingdom since it was not to be a physical kingdom. Just as a person has to be born into a physical kingdom to be part of that kingdom; one has to be born into the spiritual kingdom Jesus is discussing. ***John 3:3 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.***

The word "again" in verse 3 is from the Greek word *an'-o-then* and is the same word in John 3:31 used to mean "from above." Implication is that this birth Jesus is talking about is a new birth from above. Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was talking about and neither would we if we didn't have the rest of the story contained in scripture. Without knowing the spiritual significance of this new birth such a statement made by Jesus would be just as confusing to us as it was to Nicodemus.

(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? Nicodemus thought Jesus was speaking of a physical birth. He was confused. Jesus goes on to explain in order to be in the kingdom, one has to experience a spiritual birth. ***(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.*** To experience this spiritual birth, one has to be born of water and of the Spirit. What does this mean? Let me suggest "born of the Spirit" is a new birth of the spiritual part of man. It's what is developed on the inside. Born of water is the external, physical part of the new birth which takes place through baptism.

It parallels the physical birth of a child. A child is conceived and for nine months he is being developed within the womb of its mother. It is here that a new life is developed. This can be likened to the spiritual development. In the

spiritual birth, there is the spiritual development. This begins by hearing and believing. Romans 1:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Notice how James, the brother of Jesus puts it. ***James 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*** This spiritual process begins with the word of truth. Now let's see what Peter says. ***1 Peter 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.***

But just as a child in the womb is not fully developed enough for birth at conception, neither is the spiritual child of God developed enough for his spiritual birth when he believes. More development is needed. After hearing about Jesus and what he did for mankind and after believing that He is indeed the son of God, one needs to be convicted enough to change. In Biblical terms this is called repentance. When you compare your life against the standards of Jesus you will find things that need changing. This spiritual development will lead to a changing mind set. You spiritually make the decision that you are going to begin changing your life; bit by bit. ***Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent:***

Spiritually you are developing, but it's still a bit early for the physical part of the spiritual birth. You are not quite ready to be born of water. The Lord wants you to verbally confess him. This is a mark of spiritual commitment. While the Bible speaks of confessing ones sins, this is not the confession we are considering here. We're speaking about making a verbal public confession. When you make such a confession, you are making a stand.

Years ago at the Alamo, Corneal Travis took his sword and drew a line in the sand and asked those willing to take a stand to cross over that line. This is what confession of Christ is. It's a statement that you are ready to enter the Christian fight. ***Romans 10:10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.***

Now, one is ready for the physical aspect of the new birth; born of water. Once a person believes in Jesus, is made up his mind to change and ready to acknowledge his faith in Jesus, he is ready to be baptized. The physical aspect of the new birth is immersion in water for the remission of sins in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). ***Romans 6:3-4 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? (4) Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.***

Notice what Paul wrote to the churches in Colossae. ***Colossians 2:12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also***

ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. Do you see born of the water and spirit in this verse? Born of water is seen in “*buried with him in baptism*” and born of the Spirit is seen in “*the faith of the operation of God.*”

After a person is born of the water and Spirit, he embarks on a new life. Paul refers to such a person as “a new creature.” ***2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.***

When a child is born physically, he becomes part of a family. Likewise when one is born spiritually he is added to the Lord’s spiritual family. The one born again is added to the church. ***Acts 2:47b ... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.***

The majority of religious denominations do not embrace what I have just put forth because they don’t consider baptism as necessary for salvation. A major division within Christendom pertains to the point at which the “new birth” occurs. Many maintains a person is born again when that person “*accepts Jesus Christ as his personal savior.*”

By this expression, it is meant that a person must mentally and/or orally decide to embrace Christ as the Lord of life. Hence, the new birth is seen simply as a determination of the will—a moment in time when the person accepts Christ in his heart and couples that decision with an oral confession.

In an effort to avoid identifying “water” (vs. 5) as water baptism, other ideas have been proposed. I want to share a few of the most common explanation of born of the water and spirit that’s embraced by some who argue against baptism.

Some have proposed that “water” has reference to the Holy Spirit. While it certainly is true that John uses the word “*water*” symbolically (John 7:38-39) to represent the Spirit; there the meaning of the word had to be explained. However, here in chapter 3, the normal, literal meaning is clearly in view. It is not referencing some figurative obscure meaning. Some 18 verses later the same word for water is used where the term clearly has a literal meaning. ***John 3:23 And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.*** Additionally, if “water” in John 3:5 is an allusion to the Holy Spirit, the results would be nonsensical: It would read, “*unless one is born of the Spirit and the Spirit.*”

Another effort to avoid using the word water for baptism is to argue that it is symbolic for the blood of Jesus, but there is no rationale exists for making such a connection. Elsewhere John refers explicitly to water and blood, but

clearly distinguishes them from each other in their import (1 John 5:6). But if that meaning is correct, there is still that link between the blood of Christ that washes away sin (Revelation 1:5) and baptism which too washing away ones sins (Acts 22:16)

Perhaps the most popular notion, advanced only in recent years, is that "water" is a reference to a pregnant woman's "water" - i.e., the amniotic fluid that accompanies the physical birth of a child. However, this suggestion likewise fails to fit the context of Jesus' remarks. In fact, Nicodemus himself thought that Jesus was referring to physical birth ("mother's womb"). But Jesus corrected his misconception, and contrasted such thinking with the intended meaning of "water and Spirit." **(6) *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.***

Indeed, Jesus would not have told Nicodemus that he needed to be born physically ("of water"). This birth is something a person MUST do to enter the kingdom. **(7) *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*** Jesus would not have included the act of a physical rebirth in His listing of prerequisites to entering the Kingdom. That would make Jesus say that before a person can enter the Kingdom he must first be a person! What would be the point of stating such a thing? Would one argue that in John 3:23 John baptized near Salim "*because there was much amniotic fluid there*"?

Let us consult the rest of the New Testament in order to allow the Bible to be its own best interpreter, and to allow the Bible to harmonize with itself. Let's consider John 3:5 in light of a few others passages. In John 3:5 we have Spirit, Water, and Kingdom. Read 1 Corinthians 12:13. ***1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*** Here we see the same message although worded differently. Here we see Spirit, Baptized, and Body.

Consider ***Ephesians 5:26-27 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, (27) That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*** Here we read about the word, washing with water, resulting into a glorious church.

One more. ***Titus 3:4-5 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, (5) Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*** This passage speaks of a renewing of the Holy Ghost, a washing and

saving by mercy. When people submit to the terms of entrance into the kingdom of Christ, they are saved by the blood of Christ and the grace of God – not of their own effort. Water baptism is not to be viewed as a work of righteousness which we have done (Titus 3:5). When we are baptized we are being saved by the kindness and love of our God. (Titus 3:4) We are being saved according to his mercy (Titus 3:5).

These additional passages harmonize with John 3:5 if you use the meaning that I presented. They will not harmonize using the meaning put forth by many of the other denominations.

Have you been born again? Again let me emphasize John 3:7 where it says that you **MUST** be born again if you want to be in the kingdom. Why is this important? It is this kingdom that Jesus is going to present to God the Father at his return (1 Cor 15:24).

So have you been born of the Spirit and the water?

Invitation?