

## Salvation Is Dependent on Being Born Again

*“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3-5)*

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Early in Christ’s public ministry a man named Nicodemus came to Him by night to seek further information about the kingdom of God. He was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews - a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He recognized that Christ’s miracles were proof that Christ came from God (John 3:2).

In speaking to him, Christ addressed Himself directly to **how** one becomes a citizen of the kingdom. “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (v.3). The language of Jesus puzzled Nicodemus. He could not understand how mature men could experience another physical birth. Hence, he inquired, “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (v.4). The Savior explained, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (v.5). The He said: “Marvel not that I said unto thee, *Ye must be born again*” (v.7, emp. added). What does this language of Christ mean?

There are not two new births, one of water and one of Spirit, but one. Both - water and Spirit - are required in the one new birth. The new birth is not a second physical birth. This is not the birth that Jesus had in mind. But what is it to be born again of water and Spirit? This has been clearly revealed in God’s Word. Let us, therefore, study the language of Christ carefully in connection with other statements in the Scriptures on the same subject and learn the full meaning of what the new birth is. This is a very important subject.

### The Kingdom of God

By “the kingdom of God” Christ meant the church, the spiritual institution soon to be set up by Himself, and which was being preached by John the Baptist (cf. Mark 1:2-4, 14; Matthew 16:13-19; Hebrews 12:22-23, 28). To “see the kingdom of God” meant to experience the blessings of it. All had to be “born again” to enter into it. It was near.

The Jews were expecting the establishment of an earthly kingdom. Doubtless, this is what Nicodemus had in mind, but the Lord corrected him. Under the old covenant (the Law of Moses), all the Jewish people were included as members, whether good or bad, by the process of natural birth. Christ’s kingdom was to be different.

Christ was to establish a new kingdom (a new covenant, the New Testament), and Nicodemus would have to be born again to partake of the blessings of this kingdom (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:8-12). Since Christ’s kingdom is a spiritual one, a different kind of birth is required to enter it. Jesus made a *spiritual* birth essential to being a child of God. All had to be born again to enter the kingdom of God. The new birth is the door into the kingdom.

Christ used the word “born again” to describe the process of becoming a Christian and being added by the Lord to His church. There is a similarity in some respects between a spiritual birth and a physical birth, but the two are not identical. In Scripture, this new birth is also called “conversion” (cf. Matthew 18:3; Acts 2:47; 15:3). Hence, the new birth is a spiritual change - a spiritual birth into a spiritual kingdom.

### **“Born of Water and the Spirit” Defined**

Note the meaning of Christ’s term “born of water and of the Spirit.” For a spiritual birth two things are necessary: (1) a begetting and (2) a bringing forth. By this spiritual conception and bringing forth one becomes a Christian or enters the church, the kingdom of God.

A begetting by God through the Holy Spirit is necessary for rebirth. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God” (1 John 5:1 ASV). One is begotten of the word of God. “Of his own will beget he us with the word of truth” (James 1:18); “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever...And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:23, 25); “the seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). Hence, God begets us by the word of truth. The germ is in the living seed. The “seed”, the word of God, is eternal.

But the Holy Spirit gave man the gospel through inspired men (2 Peter 1:21). Jesus promised to the apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). The New Testament is the inspired book which contains that message. Thus, one is begotten by the Father through the word in believing the gospel and may also be said to have been begotten or born of the Spirit (See ASV).

However, God employs human agents in the use of preaching (teaching) the gospel. Paul went to Corinth and preached. Later he wrote, “I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15). Hence, the Bible contains such expressions as “born - begotten - of God,” “born of the Spirit,” and “begotten through the gospel.” These all relate to the same birth. The Holy Spirit always begets through the Word, and not in some direct, mysterious way. One is begotten when he believes. Since faith comes by hearing God’s Word (Romans 10:17), this is how God begets. Faith is produced in the heart by the inspired Word.

However, the begetting is only part of the new birth. The believer is spiritually begotten, but he is not born again at that time. He has the privilege to become a child of God. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11-13). After the begetting, there must be a bringing forth to complete the process of birth. Thus in every rebirth, there is first the begetting, afterwards comes the birth or delivery.

A bringing forth or birth of water is necessary for being born again. To be “born of water” means to be baptized. The words *water* and *Spirit* are used literally; they mean what they say - water and Spirit.

A common teaching is that “born of water” refers to the natural birth and “born of the Spirit” refers to the new birth. This theory does not agree with the language of Jesus. Christ did not say, “Except a baby be born of water and a man be born of the Spirit, he (the man already born physically) cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” He said, “Except a *man* be born again, born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus had been born of human parents - the natural birth, now Christ tells him he must be born again - not physically, but of water and the Spirit (both) in order to become a citizen of the kingdom of God. Nicodemus had asked, “How can a man be born when he is old?” The answer was, “He is born of water and of the Spirit.”

### **“Born of Water” Defined**

“Born of water” is coming forth from the waters of baptism. Bible baptism is a burial in water and a resurrection therefrom, and it is for the purpose of entering into Christ or for the remission of sins. This we will now note from the Bible.

It is not surprising that those who deny to baptism its proper place among the conditions of pardon would interpret “water” in John 3:5 to mean something other than baptism. In so doing, they are in conflict with the Scriptures and with the scholarship of the world, both ancient and modern. Many have stated that all attempts to get rid of baptism in this passage have sprung from doctrinal prejudices by which the views of expositors and Bible teachers have been warped. Moreover, to teach baptism as being essential to salvation is not teaching “water salvation.” “Baptism doth also now save us” declared Peter (1 Peter 3:21). Peter also told believers on the day of Pentecost to “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

The reason some do not want to believe that water in John 3:5 means water is they do not want to believe that baptism is a divine command and a condition of salvation. But the Bible teaches that it is. Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). By the order of Christ, baptism is made essential for obtaining all blessings in Christ, in the kingdom of God (Ephesians 1:3).

Practically all scholars agree that the word “water” in John 3:5 refers to baptism. Many names could be mentioned. The effort to destroy the references to baptism in John 3:5 of modern origin. To be “born of water” means to be baptized, as all faithful gospel preachers teach.

According to the Bible, in baptism one is submerged completely and comes forth from the water. Baptism is both a burial and a resurrection. (Christ was born from the dead when He came forth from the grave, Colossians 1:18). So in baptism one is “born of water.” Note the language of Scripture:

“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” (Romans 6:4).

“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” (Colossians 2:12).

Therefore, ***to be born of water and to be immersed and raised to walk in newness of life are identical***. It is impossible for a person to be born of water when only a few drops are used. The individual who has had water sprinkled or poured upon his head cannot truthfully say that he has been buried with Christ in baptism. In all the Holy Scriptures, water alone was never sprinkled on any person, for any purpose, in any age, by the Lord's authority. The person who has not been immersed in water has not been born of water.

By following the Spirit's instruction one is immersed, after he hears and believes the Spirit's message. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles..." (1 Corinthians 12:13). Baptism is the means appointed for translating the believer from one realm into another (cf. Colossians 1:13-14). But when baptism is changed to sprinkling or pouring there is no coming out of the water, or a birth of water.

The new birth brings one into a new state or environment, that is, into the kingdom of God. Paul said: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). One is a new creature when he enters into Christ, and he enters into Christ when he is baptized into Christ (cf. Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). The new life follows the resurrection from baptism in water. Being born of water and the Spirit, therefore, includes the entire process of becoming a child of God. In plain terms, being born again simply means becoming a Christian, a member of Christ's church. One is born of the Spirit by hearing and obeying the Spirit's message; he is born of water when as a believer, he is immersed in water and raised to walk in a newness of life.

Nicodemus must have marveled at the thought of a spiritual birth, for Christ continued by saying, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).

### **The New Birth Demonstrated**

By studying the many examples of conversion, as recorded in the Book of Acts, one learns exactly what the new birth is. For it is here, after the church was established, that the process of being born again is amply demonstrated. These examples describe how souls, both Jews and Gentiles, were born anew and entered into the kingdom of God (See Acts 2, 8, etc.). Some say, "Just believe in Christ," that is all that is necessary to be saved. We shall see that such is not true.

### **Not "Faith Only"**

Believing God is simply believing what He says. This faith "cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). One must believe that God is and believe everything that God says: "for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). The faith that saves is an obedient faith. That faith believes everything that God says, regardless of the circumstances, and will try to do everything God says, regardless of the cost. One must be baptized, "born of water and of the Spirit," with a sincere, believing, penitent heart to be saved from his sins.

Jesus said, in giving the great commission to His disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:15-16).

Returning again to John, chapter three, we read: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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” (John 3:14-16). In Numbers 21, we read that when the children of Israel were marching in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses, that many of them sinned, and God sent fiery serpents, and many were bitten, and many were dying. Penitently, they came to Moses and asked for help. God told Moses to take some brass and make a brass serpent and put it on a pole in the midst of the camp, and say unto the people that “every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live” (v.8). And all those who thus obeyed the Lord were cured (v.9). Would any of them have been cured if they had not “looked” as God told them? It was not the pieces of brass that cured their sickness, but the Lord did, when they obeyed. The same principle is true regarding “faith in Christ.” We must obey the Savior to be “born again”. James wrote that: “faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone...that faith without works is dead...that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:17-24). James was speaking of an obedient faith in the Lord, and all are to have that kind of faith today. A person cannot believe the Lord and not believe that it is necessary to be baptized to be saved. Paul wrote: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27).

All of this disputing over baptism being necessary for forgiveness of sins is the most uncalled for thing under heaven. Jesus said we **must** be born again of water and the Spirit. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Our Lord said it and it must be so.

### Modern Denominational Preaching

One of the greatest sins of this age is men going all over the world preaching and teaching doctrines, that when people embrace them, forbid them from believing in God and entering into the kingdom of the Lord. They are led to believe in “faith only”, or “pray the sinner’s prayer,” and all is well. This doctrine is taught by nearly all of the man-made churches that exist, and millions of dollars are yearly spent to disseminate this religious error. Are we not warned by our Lord of false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15)? How sad it is to think of those who are giving error to the nations instead of the pure gospel (cf. Philippians 1:16; Acts 20:26-27). How sad it is to think of the multiplied thousands that are being deceived by this false teaching, and are not being saved from their sins. To believe God is to believe what God says. Teaching people a doctrine that God does not teach and getting them to believe it is not leading them to believe God. How can one believe the Lord and not believe “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”? But denominational preachers will say, “He that believeth and is saved may be baptized, but it is not necessary.” One who is believing this, is **not** believing God, for the Lord did not say such a thing. To make souls expect the promise of salvation before obedience is rendered is to make them **disbelieve God**.

Indeed, we surely, as faithful children of God, need to arise, in the name of our Lord, and flood this country and the whole world, by tongue and pen, with the pure Word of God, that the doctrines of men may deceive the honest seekers of truth no longer. Hearing the gospel, faith in Christ, repentance, confession and baptism constitute the new birth.

### Conclusion

Christ the Savior becomes the author of one's salvation when he obeys Him (Hebrews 5:9). Salvation is extended only to those who obey the Lord. There is no mystical power in baptism itself, neither is there any mystical power in faith. "Joining a church" is not synonymous with being "born again", in spite of the fact that the struggle for numbers has placed the names of thousands of people on church rolls, many of whom have never been born again. Many say, "I am a born again Christian," but they are not. Christ puts the new birth between the sinner and the kingdom of God.

In his study these facts have been noted:

1. Christ told Nicodemus that none could enter the kingdom of God without being born again of water and the Spirit.
2. A person is begotten of God through the gospel, the seed of the kingdom.
3. One is begotten of the Father through the Holy Spirit when he believes the gospel.
4. After being begotten, or made a believer, one is born again when his faith leads him to repent, confess, and be immersed in water for the remission of sins.
5. When the believing penitent is baptized, he is then born of water and of the Spirit and enters into the kingdom of God, the church, the spiritual family of God.
6. Therefore, except a person is immersed in water, after believing in his heart that Jesus is the Son of God, he cannot become a Christian.

Are you a Christian? If not, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, **and be baptized**, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Your salvation is dependent upon your being born again. Obey today!