

John 3: Born Again

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John 3 introduces one of several righteous Pharisees in the person Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a member of the Sanhedrin, and in the end of the Gospel account he is one of the men who removed Jesus' body from the cross. It seems that while Jesus is in Jerusalem, Nicodemus will use this opportunity to personally ask Him if He is "The Prophet". When he comes to Jesus, Jesus answers a question that does not seem asked; He tells Nicodemus that in order to "see" and "enter" the Kingdom of Heaven, one must be born again.

Throughout the Old Testament, prophets spoke about a coming kingdom that would be the eternal one, of which the Messiah would be in control (Daniel 2:44, Micah 4:1, Isaiah 2:2). The use of the word "kingdom" is the expression for the authority of God (Isaiah 66:1) (consider that the Greek word translated kingdom, *basileaus*, refers to authority) and it is identified with heaven because this is the location of the throne (source of authority) of God. Jesus speaks in John of seeing as being an allegory to understanding, or acceptance (John 9:41).

Jesus then elaborates to end Nicodemus' confusion. Being born again is a spiritual act, obtained through water and the Spirit. Later, after the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, John adds the blood of Christ, not because it was not originally part of the new birth, but because the effect of the new birth could not occur until after the blood: *1 John 5:6-8 This is He who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.*

What does this mean? The Spirit we presume is the Holy Spirit; Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is manifested in His words later in this Gospel (John 6:63). The Spirit is the mind of God made known, and John will tell us that the Spirit is the Revealer of all things (John 14:26). Thus, the Spirit needed to be born again is manifested by the knowledge given by God. Peter makes a great point of the place of knowledge in our salvation: *II Peter 1: 2-3 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,*

The water might be the living water of chapter four, but that really would be a redundant reference, since that water is identified with the Holy Spirit. The likeliest conclusion is that the water is the water of baptism. The Apostle Paul describes a water in which we are "regenerated", or made again, along with the Holy Spirit: *Titus 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,*

In Mark 16:16 Jesus taught the same doctrine of salvation when He said: *Mark 16:16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

We can see a pattern taught by all of the apostles, that to be of God, one must be born again of water and the Spirit. The water is clearly baptism, the immersion of a person into water.

The blood can only refer to the blood of Christ, the purchase price of the human race (Acts 20:28). John reminds us of this blood when telling of the Roman soldier piercing the side of Christ on the cross, where we see blood and water immediately after Jesus has given up His spirit: *John 19:34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.*

There is little debate that the blood is the very grace of God, manifested by His love in sending His son. Blood is the purchase price of our salvation, thus making it "free" for us. The Spirit is the means in which we know this to be true. As all Scripture is Spirit filled (II Timothy 3:16-17), the Spirit is manifested as the Bible now, the message of the Gospel in the time of John (before it was written down). The Water is the action(s) one must take to accept this gift. John is fundamentally clear, that the gift is free and conditional all at once. The blood, the water and the Spirit testify to individual salvation (I John 5:8).

Jesus places a great deal of importance on the idea of believing in Him. This must be seen in the context of the purpose of the book, which is to believe He is the Christ, the Son of God. Let us not interpret these passages exclusively, as some are wont to do; Jesus makes clear that to love Him was equal to keeping the commandments He gave (John 14:15). Later, Paul would make us understand that to believe is necessarily to obey: *Romans 10:16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"*

Jesus is not saying that belief alone is sufficient to save (for as James said, even demons believe in Jesus, James 2:19). He is saying that He will provide the necessary proof that people can believe in, and thereby can know the way to eternal life. Faith is the beginning of salvation, not the end.