

## The New Birth (John 3)

(Regeneration means “being reborn” i.e. born again)

### I. Regeneration is Necessary for Salvation (v. 1-5)

#### A. A Profession of Christ’s Authority is Made (1-2a)

##### 1. Nicodemus came to Jesus at Night (1)

###### a. Nicodemus is a man of the Pharisees

i. Although Pharisees are increasingly seen as the enemy of Christ, they were the faction of the Jews most devoted to doing God’s will. They believed that keeping the law in the strictest sense would grant them standing before God. Although we know that is impossible, they were seen as the most righteous and God-fearing people. Nicodemus seems to be genuinely seeking God here.

###### b. Nicodemus is a ruler of the Jews

i. This implies that he is not just a Pharisee but a member of the ruling council of the Jews – the Sanhedrin.

ii. Later, Jesus calls Nicodemus “THE” teacher of Israel which implies he may have been prominent as a teacher

##### 2. Nicodemus Confesses Jesus is From God (2b)

###### a. He calls Jesus “Rabbi”

i. It must have took some humility for this well-educated, renown teacher of Israel to come seeking the instruction of Jesus who had never been through any schools or held any religious title.

###### b. He confesses that Jesus has come from God

i. Nicodemus admits that God has sent Jesus to teach Israel.

ii. Nicodemus bases this on the fact that Jesus is doing miracles to prove His authority

iii. Nicodemus does not fully understand who Jesus is or what He has come to accomplish, yet He proclaims Jesus is from God and able to do mighty works from God

a. This is like many today who believe Jesus is God and that He was risen from the dead

b. To believe in the facts is not enough, one must be spiritually reborn to see God’s kingdom

c. To believe in Jesus’ authority is not enough, He is more than a teacher from God. Only those who are supernaturally born from God can understand this.

#### B. A Profession of Christ is Empty without Regeneration (3-5)

##### 1. Regeneration is Necessary to See God’s Kingdom (3-4)

- a. Jesus gives no answer to Nicodemus' profession. Instead Jesus replies that Nicodemus cannot see God's kingdom yet.
  - Kingdom here refers to God's rule over individuals and adoption into His family so that the person is a child of God.
  - To see the Kingdom may mean to understand the truth of salvation and righteousness before God
- b. Jesus is proven right because Nicodemus misunderstands his words (He cannot yet see the Kingdom) (4)
  - Nicodemus asks if being reborn means climbing back into his mother's womb
  - Nicodemus is a smart man so it seems like he may just be being coy rather than actually thinking it is possible to get back into the womb

## 2. Regeneration is Necessary to Enter God's Kingdom (5)

- a. Jesus answers Nicodemus' question by affirming what He said before.
  - There seems to be a vicious circle going on here. Jesus says you can't see or enter unless you are born again, and Nicodemus can't see how its possible. Jesus says you can't understand and Nicodemus can't understand it.
- b. What does "born of water and the Spirit" mean?
  - This is still being debated – there are basically three possibilities but you need to understand that the point of the text has to do with being born again. Ultimately by saying "water and Spirit" Jesus is restating what it means to be "born again."

### POSSIBILITIES

- 1) It refers to Baptism (either John's or Christian baptism) – I find this highly unlikely because Christian baptism was not instituted until Acts and Nicodemus would have no knowledge of it. Also, John's baptism did not bring about regeneration but was simply a preparation for the coming Messiah.
- 2) Water refers to the Natural Birth – Being born of water refers to the breaking of a woman's water in childbirth. You are born of water and then you must be born again by the Spirit to enter the Kingdom of God.
- 3) Water and Spirit together refer to the fulfillment of God's promise in the Old Testament.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 – *"Then will I sprinkle clean **water** upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new **spirit** will I put within you: and I will*

*take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my **spirit** within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them"*

Ultimately it doesn't matter. We know that Jesus is saying "you must be reborn," regardless of what He means by water and Spirit. No man can enter into right relationship with God unless he is supernaturally born again.

## II. Regeneration is a Mystery to the Natural Man (6-10)

### A. The Natural Man is not born of the Spirit (6)

1. Flesh can only give birth to flesh
  - a. You cannot enter the kingdom by being born from a certain family or line
  - b. You cannot enter the kingdom by any work your flesh can accomplish
2. Only the Spirit can give a spiritual birth into the kingdom

### B. The Natural Man Cannot Comprehend this Birth (7-8)

1. Man cannot comprehend the wind's origin or destination
  - a. Nicodemus shouldn't marvel about regeneration
  - b. Nicodemus understands that he cannot see the moving of the wind, yet he can feel its effect
    - in the same way he cannot grasp the wind and lay hold of it, He cannot grasp the power of the Spirit regenerating a man.
    - Only the effect of regeneration can be seen in man's life

### C. The Natural Man Does not Comprehend (9-10)

1. Proving Jesus' point, Nicodemus doesn't understand (9)
  - a. "How can these things be?"
2. Jesus asks Nicodemus how he can teach Israel and not understand (10)
  - a. Nicodemus is founded in the belief that man can work for salvation
  - b. Yet, Jesus is here telling him that salvation and righteousness come from a rebirth by the Spirit
  - c. Nicodemus is reacting to the fact that he cannot contribute anything to entering into the Kingdom of God
  - d. This would be hard for someone who lived their whole life thinking he must do righteousness in order to be righteous.
  - e. How hopeless Nicodemus must have felt!

## III. Regeneration Comes Only Through Christ (11-19)

### A. Jesus Alone Makes Known the Salvation of God (11-15)

1. Jesus testifies to realities He alone has seen (11)
  - a. Jesus is telling Nicodemus what he has seen but Nicodemus refuses to believe it.
  - b. Jesus is not telling Him what He has learned from teachers or from dreams and visions. He is telling Nicodemus of what He himself has seen. He has come from Heaven to give this message that Nicodemus doesn't accept.
2. Jesus' Testimony must be trusted (12)
  - a. Unless man trusts what Christ actually says, he cannot hope to ever see the Kingdom of God.
  - b. Jesus has told them earthly things – things in his preaching that demonstrate the call of God by grace through faith – if they refuse that teaching they can never see the “heavenly” things – i.e. being born again and transformed by the Spirit.
  - c. Understanding and knowledge of the kingdom cannot come through comprehension of facts – it must come in regeneration by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Jesus' Testimony is the only Reliable Witness (13)
  - a. No one has gone into heaven to bring back the pure message of God except Jesus who came from heaven to earth.
  - b. The Son of Man is a title used in Daniel 7:13-14
 

*I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the **Son of man** came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed*
  - c. Jesus is claiming here to be the Son of Man who has been given the Kingdom. Therefore, he is the authority regarding who enters the Kingdom. He alone bears the true testimony.
4. Jesus' Testimony is Salvation by Faith in Him (14)
  - a. The Son of Man must be lifted up like the Serpent of Moses
 

- this refers to Numbers 21 – God sent fiery serpents among the wandering Israelites in Judgment. When the people repented Moses prayed that they would be spared.

*“And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”*  
*Numbers 21:8-9*

b. In the same way as Moses' serpent, everyone who looks in faith toward Jesus lifted up on the cross will have eternal life.

B. Jesus Alone Removes the Condemnation of the World (16-18)

1. God Loved the World by Sending His Son (16)

a. God sent the Son to be "lifted up" (crucified) so that those who "look to" (believe) in the son will have eternal life

2. God Sent the Son to Save Rather than Condemn (17-18)

a. The world does not need the Son to condemn it

b. The world is already condemned

c. Those who refuse to believe in Christ are already under the condemnation of God (this may explain why they cannot see the kingdom of God – they must first be born again.)

IV. Regeneration is Revealed in Man's heart and Life (19-21)

A. Condemnation is Present Because Men's Hearts Love Darkness (19)

1. This is the Judgment (i.e. condemnation) – Light has come but men love darkness

a. They love darkness because their works are evil

b. Notice that this passage ends with Jesus saying to Nicodemus – it is not a matter of understanding, it is a matter of obeying. Nicodemus doesn't accept this because he loves his sin not because it is too sophisticated for him.

B. Condemnation and Regeneration are Revealed in Men's Lives (20-21)

1. Those who live a lifestyle of Evil demonstrate their condemnation (20)

a. They refuse to come to the light

b. They would rather stay in darkness

c. This is the demonstration that they are condemned

2. Those who live a lifestyle of Truth demonstrate their regeneration (21)

a. They do come to the light

b. But notice that it is not they who do good works, it is God who accomplishes good works in them. *"But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God"* John 3:21

c. Doing good works does not make one born again, but one's lifestyle of obedience to God demonstrates that they have been born again. Unless man has faith, it is impossible to please God.