

## CHAPTER THREE

The third chapter of John's Gospel is very precious to the believer. It contains the teaching of the Lord on the new birth; it contains the "golden text" of the Bible (3:16); it contains the final testimony of John the Baptist to Christ. In this third chapter may be found the grand scheme of redemption. God's part (v. 16-17) and man's part (v. 3-5) in this redemptive plan is made plain. Chapter three falls naturally into two sections as outlined below:

- II The Word manifested to the Jews and their rejection of Him. 1:19-12:50 (cont.)
  - B. The public ministry — first year 2:13 - 4:54 (cont.)
    - 2. Conversation with Nicodemus 3:1-21
      - a. Teaching on the Kingdom and new birth 3:1-8
      - b. Earthly mysteries compared with heavenly mysteries 3:9-15
      - c. More heavenly mysteries 3:16-21
    - 3. Further Judean ministry and John the Baptist's final testimony 3:22-36
      - a. John's witness concerning himself 3:22-30
      - b. John's witness concerning Christ 3:31-36

### TEACHING ON THE KINGDOM AND NEW BIRTH

#### *Text 3:1-8*

**1** Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

**2** the same came unto him by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him.

**3** Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew.

8 The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

### *Queries*

- a. Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus by night?
- b. What does "water and Spirit" have to do with being born anew?
- c. How does the wind illustrate the birth of the Spirit?

### *Paraphrase*

Now there was a man in Jerusalem by the name of Nicodemus. He belonged to the sect of the Pharisees and was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews. This man came to Jesus during the night, and said to Him, Teacher, we know that you are a teacher come with God's approval; for no teacher is able to substantiate his teaching with the miraculous signs which you are doing unless God is with him. Jesus said to Nicodemus, I tell you positively, Unless a person be born anew, he cannot participate in the kingdom of God. Nicodemus asked Jesus, How is it possible for a man to be born anew when he has already been born once? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born again? Jesus replied, I tell you positively, Unless a person be born of water and of Spirit, he cannot become a citizen of the kingdom of God. Physical birth, although renewal were possible, could not avail for an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Spiritual rebirth, however, brings forth a child of the Spirit and a child of Promise. Do not let the mysteriousness of a spiritual rebirth astonish you, Nicodemus. You are aware of the reality of the wind, for you see it act upon objects and you hear its sound, but cannot fathom its origin or destination. Just so may you be aware of the reality of the working of the Holy Spirit, by the action He causes in the spiritually reborn.

*Summary*

Nicodemus comes to Jesus, convinced that He is a teacher come from God, to see what He has to say about the glorious future of Israel. Jesus tells this Pharisee that the Kingdom of God belongs to those born of "water and of Spirit" — not the fleshly sons of Abraham. Jesus illustrates the mystery of the working of the Holy Spirit by the mystery of the wind.

*Comment*

What of this "ruler" who came and talked with Jesus "by night?" All we know of Nicodemus is that: (a) he was a Pharisee; (b) he was a ruler of the Jews (probably a member of the Sanhedrin — the Senate of the Jews); (c) he came to Jesus by night; (d) he was an esteemed teacher in Israel; (e) he later spoke on behalf of fairness in judging Jesus (7:50); (f) he boldly assisted Joseph of Arimathaea in removing the body of Jesus from the cross and in burying it (19:39); (g) he was willing to admit the verity of Jesus' miracles and that Jesus was a "teacher come from God."

Some students of the Scriptures are inclined to question Nicodemus' courage from the single phrase, "the same came unto him by night." Of course, there is the reference in John 19:39 to this same incident, but as a matter of fact, we do not know why this ruler of the Jews came to Jesus by night! It may be that he came in the night simply to have privacy and leisure. The Sanhedrin had religious jurisdiction over every Jew in the world (Mt. 23:1-3) and they were to investigate everyone suspected of being a false prophet — was this his reason? Contrariwise, Nicodemus leaves us with the impression that he did not believe Jesus to be a false prophet but a true prophet! It is remarkable that Nicodemus came at all! It may be that Nicodemus was too busy during the day to come; it may be that Jesus was too busy during the day for Nicodemus to get sufficient answers for his questions. Even though we must guess as to the reason why Nicodemus chose the night for his visit instead of the day, one fact stands out plainly — Jesus did *not* reprove him for his night visit. He who came to "seek and to save that which was lost" never smothered the faintest spark of belief but ever strove to fan it into a burning fire of faith and devotion.

We pause here, in the continuity of the context, to give the reader a brief history of Pharisaism. It was a sect which seems

(according to Josephus) to have originated some years before the Maccabean wars. This party began with a group of men whose righteous indignation had been aroused against the worldliness and paganism creeping into Israel through Hellenism (Greek cultural influence). About 200 B.C. this group of men reacted against the infiltration of idolatry and immorality and were called *hasidim* or Pietists. It seems they acquired the name Pharisee or Separatist about 135 B.C. In order to join this party, a young man had to take a pledge of entry "that he would devote all his life to studying and observing every detail of the traditions of the elders and the law of Moses." The Pharisees produced men of high morality, in most instances, and they were essentially a believing sect. They believed in God, man as a free moral agent, a general resurrection, angels, rewards and etc. They produced men like Saul of Tarsus who "lived in all good conscience" as to the letter of the Law. Their main fault was in swinging the religious pendulum, through reaction to evil, to the opposite extreme. They rebelled from the extreme liberalism of the Hellenists — but they fell into the extreme of self-righteousness and meritorious conservatism. They made religion a matter of outward conformity to traditions, rites and ceremonies. As Jesus said, "outwardly they appeared beautiful, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity." They changed the great principles of God's law into legalistic by-laws and a meritorious keeping of regulations. They "strained the gnat and swallowed the camel"; they tithed to the last tiny dill seed but neglected the weightier matters of the law — justice, and mercy, and faith, (cf. Mt. 23: Lk. 11). One good example of their emphasis on externals is their absurd regulations concerning the Sabbath. The Law merely says, "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," and that no servile work shall be done on that day. The Pharisee decided to define work. One form of work, he decided, was tying knots. Then he had to define which knots were work and which were not. "The following," says the Mishnah, "are the knots the making of which renders a man guilty; the knot of camel drivers and that of sailors; and as one is guilty by reason of tying them, so also of untying them." Knots which could be tied or untied with one hand were legal. "A woman may tie up a slit in her shift and the strings of her cap and those of her girdle, the straps of shoes or sandals, or wine skins." Notice now the absurdity of their regulations carried to a logical

end: If a man wanted to tie up a goat or donkey, he could not use a rope. He might tie up his animal with a woman's girdle or her shoe strings, for these were legal knots. A woman could not look in a mirror, for she might remove a fallen hair from her shoulder, which would be classified as "bearing a burden on the Sabbath." No one could gargle on the Sabbath, for that would be practicing medicine. Such rules and regulations were matters of life and death; by conforming to such absurdities they were sure they were pleasing God! To such a religious sect belonged Nicodemus.

For an honest-minded man, with a sensitive conscience, such a religion soon becomes unsatisfying and often disgusting. It is a religion of sham. Nicodemus appears to be an honest and sensitive man. Could it be that this "teacher of all Israel" had been dissatisfied with his externalized religion for the last few years? Could it be that he had secretly, but eagerly, listened to the preaching of John the Baptist? Perhaps he had also heard the teaching, as well as having seen the signs, of Jesus and wanted to earnestly discuss them with Him.

There also seems to be leaping within his heart of the hope that these signs of Jesus somehow proclaim the impending arrival of the kingdom promised to the Branch out of Jesse and the Son of David. He, as one of the chief Pharisees, wants to make preliminary arrangements, perhaps, for his place of honor in that kingdom.

Whatever the cause of Nicodemus' coming, Jesus brushes aside his inadequate estimate of Him, and answers the thoughts of this man's heart. Jesus knew his problem, even if we do not!

There are two problems in verse three: (a) does the Greek word *anothen* mean "from above" or "anew"? (b) what does Jesus mean by "cannot see"? As to the first problem, Nicodemus' reply (v. 4) seems to indicate that he took Jesus to mean "anew" or "again." But we cannot definitely prove that this is what Jesus meant merely by Nicodemus' reply. The Greek word may mean both "from above" or "anew." Actually, Jesus seems to indicate both meanings — a heavenly or spiritual birth which is a new birth. By the word *see* Jesus probably means participate or have part in. The same Greek word is used to express participation in death (cf. Lk. 2:26; 9:27; Acts 2:27; Heb. 11:5). Thus, any man who is not born again has no part in God's promised kingdom. Physical lineage will not do. Just because

Nicodemus was a Jew, a descendent of Abraham, did not mean he would be a member of Jehovah's new dispensation (cf. Gal. 3rd and 4th chapters). His circumcision as an Israelite was useless in the new kingdom (Gal. 5:15) — he must become a new creature.

Jesus' answer undoubtedly startled Nicodemus. That any descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob should be excluded from the kingdom of promise was absolutely foreign to the Jewish thinking. Nicodemus could not comprehend what Jesus meant. It was not the Lord's fault. Nicodemus was simply carnally minded — he could not think spiritually. "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged (discerned)" (I Cor. 2:14). Thus in verse four Nicodemus exclaims incredulously, "How"?

Just what does Jesus mean by born anew? There are veiled references to the new birth in the Old Testament. Ezekiel, chapters eleven and thirty-six, speaks of a new heart and a new spirit which God will give His people. He will "put His Spirit within them and cause them to walk in His statutes." In Ezekiel 18:31, Israel is commanded, "Cast away from you all your transgressions, wherein ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

The phrases, new birth, regeneration, new creature, born again, run through the New Testament as its absolute requirement for entering the kingdom of God!

1. "Begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3).
2. We purify our souls by obedience to the truth, and we are begotten again, of incorruptible seed through the Word of God (I Pet. 1:22-23).
3. We are brought forth of God by the Word of truth (Jas. 1:18).
4. God saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

5. We have "put off the old man . . . and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10).
6. We are to "put away . . . the old man . . . and be renewed in the spirit of our mind . . . put on the new man that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth (Eph. 4:22-24).
7. Circumcision or uncircumcision avails nothing . . . "but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15).
8. If any man is in Christ, "he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold they are become new" (II Cor. 5:17).
9. When we have buried the old man through repentance and baptism, we "rise to walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:1-6).
10. "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

In verse five, then, Jesus answers Nicodemus' "How"?

The new birth is one of "water and Spirit." There cannot be a separation of the terms "water and Spirit." There is no article (the) in the original language with either word. Regeneration is one single action. That is, the initial act of the new birth is completed at the time a person submits in faithful obedience to baptism in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Of course, after having become babes in Christ, we must continue to feed on His Word and grow spiritually (I Cor. 3:1-2; Heb. 5:11-14; I Pet. 2:2) — baptism does not make a person "eternally secure."

As will be seen from the ten Scripture references to the new birth, regeneration comes when the Holy Spirit confronts a man through the preaching or reading of God's Word and when that man crucifies (puts to death) self (cf. Gal. 2:20; 5:24; 6:14) and comes forth from the world into the kingdom of God. When

the seed, which is the Word of God, falls upon good and honest hearts, men will change their minds and their lives (by faith and repentance) and will change their state (by baptism). Such men have been spiritually transformed (cf. Rom. 12:2).

We do not propose to limit the working of the Holy Spirit to the agency of the written or spoken Word alone! He may work in and through men and women apart from the Word as He pleases. Of one thing we are certain—the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts men of “sin, of righteousness, and of judgment” (cf. Jn. 16:8). This He does through the agency of the written Word of the apostles, for He is the Holy Spirit of promise which should “guide the apostles into all the truth.” He is the same Holy Spirit which spoke through Peter and the eleven on the day of Pentecost and three thousand souls were “pricked in their hearts” from conviction of their sin (Acts 2:36-38) and were subsequently “born anew of water and Spirit.” The Holy Spirit did not act there apart from the spoken Word, nor does He now, in both convicting sinners and showing them the way of salvation.

It is unquestionable that Jesus means baptism in water when he says “born of water . . .” This is the same Jesus who later *commands*, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you . . .” (Mt. 28:19-20). The New Testament is plain that the apostles understood Jesus to mean baptism in water (cf. Acts 8:36-39; 10:47; I Pet. 3:20-21, etc.). To refuse to repent (change the mind, the will and the actions) and still claim to have been born anew would be mocking God. And, in like manner, to refuse the positive command of Christ to be baptized (immersed) in water and still claim to have been born anew is sheer mockery!

In verse six Jesus shows Nicodemus the impossibility of his suggestion of physical rebirth (v. 4). Even if it were possible to have a physical rebirth, it would produce only flesh, “and they



that are in the flesh cannot please God" (cf. Rom. 7:18—8:17). This leaves Nicodemus and all the Jews, with their physical birthright from father Abraham, outside the kingdom. Paul says that only those born after the Spirit are children of promise (cf. Gal. 3:7, 14; 4:6, 7, 28).

Jesus must have seen astonishment in the face of this learned teacher. Nicodemus cannot grasp the *how*. He is stumbling over the *how* as so many after him have. "Do not be astonished," says Jesus in verse seven, "at the mysterious working of the Spirit, for He is invisible." The Master Teacher then illustrates the Spirit's unseen nature by the wind. No man knows where the wind originates, nor its ultimate destination. Yet we know the reality of the wind from the effect it has upon certain objects. We see it blow the leaves from the trees in the fall and we hear it whistle and moan through the branches and we know the wind is there. Just so, we may know the reality of the working of the Holy Spirit when we observe the conviction and the change wrought in the lives of men through Him and hear His voice speaking forth from those who speak the Word of Christ in the spirit of Christ. Those who have experienced the birth of the Spirit will let flow from within their inner life, rivers of living water unto thirsty men (Jn. 7:38-39), and such a life will bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24).

Here is an analogy of the new birth as compared with the physical birth. This analogy is given merely in the interest of stimulating thought and meditation. It is axiomatic that an analogy cannot prove any argument—it merely illustrates. Further, we do not presume to say that Jesus had such an analogy in mind when He said, "Ye must be born anew." Remember, however, that John says of this same Jesus, "all things were made through him (physical life) . . . in him was life; and the life was the light of men (spiritual life)." He is the Giver of life in both realms, and it may be that such a comparison was in His mind as He spoke to Nicodemus.

## AN ANALOGY OF THE "NEW BIRTH"

BIRTH CYCLE	NATURAL BIRTH	SPIRITUAL BIRTH
Seed	Living sperm	Living Word of God Lk. 8:11
Place of planting	Womb	Heart (the will) Lk. 8:15
Signs of life	Action	Repentance and Con- fession Lk. 3:8-15 Lk. 19:8-9
Change of state	Delivered forth in water — translated into the world	Baptized in water — translated into the kingdom of God Rom. 6:1-6
Life comes by Circumcision	Breath of life Of the flesh	Holy Spirit Rom. 8:11 Of the Heart Rom. 2:28-29
Nourishment	Milk — then solid foods	Sincere milk of the gospel I Pet. 2:2, then solid food — Heb. 5:13-14; I Cor. 3:1-2
Relationship	Son, child of the father, heir	Son by adoption, child of God the Eternal Father, joint heir with Christ Gal. 4:5-7

It is interesting to note that the phrase "kingdom of God" is found only twice in the entire Fourth Gospel (verses 3 and 5 of the third chapter). In John 18:36 Jesus tells Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world, but one must go to the Synoptics to find "kingdom of God" repeated again and again.

In view of the supreme importance of this subject, we introduce here, before continuing our commentary, a "SPECIAL STUDY" entitled "The Kingdom of God" by Seth Wilson. Bro. Wilson is Dean of Ozark Bible College, Joplin, Missouri, and it is through his Christian courtesy that we reproduce his essay here.

## SPECIAL STUDY NO. 1

## The Kingdom of God

—by Seth Wilson

The New Testament says much about the kingdom, mentioning it 140 times by the term "kingdom," besides the other terms and phrases used. The whole message of the great prophet, John the Baptist, was the importance of the coming kingdom and of personal preparation for it. Jesus taught more about the kingdom than He did about any other subject. He taught men to pray for the kingdom to come (Mt. 6:10). He said it was the greatest treasure in the world, one for which any one should joyfully sell all other possessions that he might gain the kingdom (Mt. 13:44-46). He told us all to "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33). He made it more important than the food and clothing which are necessary to physical life. Surely it matters much whether we believe in the kingdom and know it, not only in theory, but in vital experience.

## What is the Kingdom of God?

It is not easy to give a definite and brief answer which would be satisfactory to all students or true to all the Scriptural uses of the phrase. *Its essential idea is the reign or government of God over the lives of men.* Sometimes it comprehends the characteristics and advantages of the complete submission of an individual life to the rule of God. Sometimes it refers to the whole community of men who obey God on earth. Sometimes it has reference to heaven itself as a place where God reigns in perfect peace, wisdom, and glory. But regardless of all other circumstances, it is always essentially the rule of God in the hearts of men.

Other terms and phrases are used for the same idea, and are freely interchanged with "the kingdom of God." Matthew uses the words "kingdom of heaven" about 29 times, although it is not used in any other New Testament book (cf. Mt. 13:11 with Mk. 4:11; and Mt. 13:31 with Mk. 4:30-31, etc.). It is also called "his kingdom (the son of Man's)" (Mt. 13:41; 15:28); "my kingdom" (Christ's) (Jn. 18:36; Lk. 22:29-30); "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet.

1:11); "the kingdom of God's dear Son" (Col. 1:13); "the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5); "my (Christ's) church" (Mt. 16:18); the "church of God" (I Tim. 3:5, 15); "the church" (Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-32); "the church of the first born (ones)" (Heb. 12:23); or as congregations viewed distributively "churches of God" (I Cor. 11:16); (I Thess. 2:14), and "churches of the saints" (I Cor. 14:33), and "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16).

These various expressions are not identical in their limits and points of emphasis, but they do overlap in that all of them have reference to the realm of God's rule through Jesus Christ. That reign will some day be complete and unchallenged, and will continue so eternally; but it also exists now and has for many centuries in the midst of those who resist it or deny its present reality.

The kingdom is not represented as coming all at once fully formed and in its ultimate glory, but this term is used for the rule of God in different stages, and for the growing control of Christ over men through the gospel — "first the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear" (Mk. 4:26-29). Study the other parables of the seed and of the leaven. Chiefly, of course, it looks forward to the glorious consummation, the complete subjection of all things to God, the eternal state of righteousness, peace, and blessedness that will result when God is given full control. Jesus came to establish the kingdom by revealing the righteousness, mercy, and goodness of God's will, and by winning the hearts of men to surrender themselves to Him — by redemption of sinners and reconciliation of their hearts to God, by putting the law of God into their minds and hearts through faith and love and regeneration of the Holy Spirit — (Heb. 8:10-11; Jn. 3:5). The government of God is truly desirable. Pray that it may prevail upon earth as it does in heaven (cf. Psalm 19:7-14).

John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles (before the cross) preached that the kingdom was just at hand, to be expected and prepared for immediately. It was certain to come before that generation died (Mt. 16:28; Mk. 9:1). In a sense it was already come (Mt. 12:28) in the person of the King, and it was suffering violence from the days of John the Baptist (Mt. 11:12; Lk. 16:16). The rule of God and the principles of His realm were being presented in the preaching of Jesus, and Jesus could say, "Lo, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Lk. 17:21).

This was said to the unbelieving Pharisees who did not have the kingdom in their hearts, but it was in the midst of them, in that its King was there proclaiming its laws and swaying His authority over them or at least some who were standing among them. Moreover, whenever it came to men, it was to come not with great demonstrations of force, "not with observation, but as in inward growth (Mk. 4:26-28). It was to spring from seed, which is the Word of God (Lk. 8:11), and to be brought about by preaching of the Word (Mt. 13:18-23). It was to begin small and grow to be very great (Mt. 13:31-33). During the growing stage it takes some "bad" as well as "good," who have to be separated by the angels at the end of the world (Mt. 13:47-50). The sons of the kingdom are the righteous (Mt. 5:20), who grow in the world side by side with the wicked (Mt. 13:38-41). Yet it is not a kingdom of this world (Jn. 18:36). It must be entered by a new birth of the Spirit (through faith in and submission to the word of the Spirit) and of water (baptism into Christ) (Jn. 3:5; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5; I Pet. 1:23). And the least in the kingdom is greater than the greatest born of women (Mt. 11:11). Having part in it is equivalent to having "eternal life" and being "saved" (Lk. 8:18, 25, 26).

One thing is evident — that Jesus did not mean to set up a worldly, materialistic, or military kingdom. The devil offered Him the kingdoms of the whole world, but He refused them (Mt. 4:8-10). The Jews and even the apostles wanted that kind of kingdom, but Jesus disappointed them. After the feeding of the five thousand, they sought to take Him by force and make Him king, but Jesus refused. The very next day He preached a sermon on the spiritual and eternal purpose of His ministry which was so unacceptable to them that multitudes went away and followed Him no more (John 6). This same idea presents itself at the time of the Triumphal Entry, when the people in all the clamor and excitement of a mob, gathered together as a whole nation at Jerusalem for the Passover, and welcomed Jesus into the city as "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 19:38), and as bringing in the kingdom of His father, David (Mk. 11:10). If he had wanted a kingdom of force, or of material wealth, or of political organizations, He could have had it (cf. Mt. 26:53; Jn. 18:36-37). Because of materialistic ambitions of the people regarding the Messiah, Jesus avoided telling plainly that He was the Christ, and He had to teach of His life's purpose and His kingdom by parables in order to hold their

attention and try to make plain the unwelcome message of a spiritual kingdom, instead of temporal.

One group of passages represents the kingdom under the figure of a place. This is the case in all expressions involving the act of entering into the kingdom (Mt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3). It is better to enter into the kingdom of heaven with one eye than, having two, to be cast out (Mk. 9:27). Men are said to be near or far from it (Mk. 13:34). Those who enter are those who are reborn and who do the will of God, who have by relationship with the Saviour and by their characters a certain fitness for it (Lk. 9:62; Mt. 7:21; Jn. 3:5). But after entrance has been secured, it is a place of enjoyment, as in Mt. 25:34, and a place where even Jesus Himself eats and drinks, as in Mt. 26:29.

In a second class of passages the kingdom is represented as a possession. It is said to belong to the poor in spirit and to those persecuted for righteousness (Mt. 5:3, 10; Lk. 18:16). It will be taken from the Jews and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Mt. 21:43). It is the gift of God (Lk. 12:32). It is the most valuable of possessions, and it is the height of wisdom to seek and the summit of prosperity to secure it (Mt. 6:33; Lk. 12:31).

A third class of passages represents the kingdom as an organization, or body, composed of a certain class of men.

A fourth class designates it as an order of things, or a dispensation. The special new feature of the dispensation thus announced was its spirituality. Its members are in it by choice and by their perfect willingness to do God's will. Thus its law is written on their hearts and in their minds (Heb. 8:10-12; Rom. 12:1-2).

The kingdom did come in the generation of the apostles as Jesus said it would (Mk. 9:1). It did come with power on the day of Pentecost after His resurrection. Peter was given the keys (Mt. 16:19). Paul went everywhere preaching the kingdom of God (Acts 20:25), although he determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2). Philip preached the kingdom of God, and the faith of the Samaritans caused them to be baptized into Christ and become members of the church (Acts 8:12). Paul says God "translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13), and John says "he made us to be a kingdom" (Rev. 1:6). The church is a kingdom. Today, in our dispensation, it is THE kingdom. It is certainly not a

democracy as to its nature. Christ is the absolute monarch over all things pertaining to the church and to the kingdom (Eph. 1:22).

### Quiz

1. Tell five things you know of Nicodemus.
2. Why do you think Nicodemus came to Jesus by night?
3. What was the main fault of the Pharisees?
4. Did Jesus say, "Ye must be born *anew*," or did He say, "*from above*"?
5. Give at least five Scripture references in the New Testament concerning new birth, or regeneration.
6. How is one born "*anew*" (cf. verse 5)?
7. In what way did Jesus illustrate the working of the Holy Spirit in the new birth process?
8. Essentially, what is the kingdom of God?
9. When did the kingdom of God come?

## EARTHLY MYSTERIES COMPARED WITH HEAVENLY MYSTERIES

### Text 3:9-15

9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?

11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

12 If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?

13 And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven.

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up;

15 that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life.

### Queries

- a. Who is the "we" of verse 11?
- b. What are "earthly things" and "heavenly things"?
- c. Why is the comparison made with the "serpent in the wilderness"?

*Paraphrase*

Nicodemus said to Jesus, How is it possible for all these things to come to pass? Jesus replied to Nicodemus, Are you *the* teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? I tell you positively, that John the Baptist and I are speaking that which we fully know, and we are testifying to that which we have actually seen with our own eyes, and yet none of you are receiving our testimony. If I have told you the earthly things of the kingdom which happen within the realm of human experience and you continue to disbelieve, how shall you believe if I tell you of the heavenly counsels of an Omniscient God? No mortal has ever ascended into heaven to obtain first hand knowledge of God's eternal will except He that has come down from heaven, even the Son of Man. And in like manner as Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so it is necessary that the Son of Man be lifted up in order that everyone who looks unto Him in believing obedience may be cured of sin's deadly bite and may have eternal life.

*Summary*

Nicodemus is curious as to the exact manner of working of the Holy Spirit in the new birth. Jesus tells him that inability to comprehend the secret actions of the eternal God is no excuse for unbelief. What is necessary for man to know, God has revealed through His Son.

*Comment*

Nicodemus' continual "how"? (v. 4, 9) is like that of so many men and women today. He cannot understand the secret doings of an Infinite God and therefore he refuses to obey the mysteries of this God which have been revealed and which may be empirically known. There are those today who will admit the historical verity of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth but they will not give their souls over to God in trustful obedience to His Word because they cannot probe into and prove to their senses every unveiled mystery of an omnipotent God.

In verse 10 Nicodemus is informed that he should have had some knowledge concerning the subject under discussion, i.e., regeneration. The use of the article *the* in the Greek language emphasizes identification. Since the article is used with both "teacher" and "Israel" in verse 10, the emphasis is that Nico-



demus was one of *the* esteemed teachers in all Israel. He may even have been *the* leading teacher of the day, as Gamaliel was a few years later. The Pharisees were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the nation — they were supposed to be the experts in the Scriptures. Nicodemus' ignorance of the subject of regeneration was inexcusable and should have been embarrassing. The "law and the prophets" spoke again and again of Jehovah's demand for a renewal of heart and mind (cf. Deut. 30:6; Psa. 51:10-12, 17; Isa. 1:16-20; 57-15; Jer. 24:7).

There are various interpretations of the plural *we* in verse 11: (a) Jesus speaks of Himself and the twelve disciples; (b) Jesus refers to Himself and the Old Testament prophets and writers; (c) Jesus means Himself and His forerunner, John the Baptist. We prefer the latter of the three as the most likely meaning. Both Jesus and John the Baptist knew the Spirit for they were filled with the Holy Spirit; both had seen the Holy Spirit in a visible manifestation (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 1:33-34); both were sent to testify as to the work of the Holy Spirit and to preach repentance and regeneration. Both were eyewitnesses of the working of the Holy Spirit — Jesus' testimony being greater than John's, of course, for He had descended from Heaven and from intimate communion with the Father. Jesus and the Baptist went about testifying as eyewitnesses to the reality of the Holy Spirit, but the Pharisees rejected their testimony and their message of repentance and were, in essence, calling both Jesus and John liars! The cause for rejection by the Pharisees is made plain in Luke 7:29-30. When the outcasts of society heard John's message of repentance they "justified God" (put God in His rightful place of Divine authority) and were baptized of John. But when the Pharisees heard, they "rejected the counsels of God" (dethroned God) and refused John's baptism. The Pharisees rebelled because they did not want to "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance" (cf. Lk. 3:7-14).

The omniscient Teacher now shows the mortal teacher it is useless to discuss Heavenly mysteries. Nicodemus cannot even understand earthly things. There are two general interpretations of what is meant by "earthly things" in verse 12: (a) that Jesus means the wind, or (b) that He means the earthly things within the kingdom of God, e.g., things that may be experienced such as faith, repentance, baptism, and renewal of mind and heart. We prefer the second interpretation, for it fits the context better. If

Nicodemus could not understand that a "new heart and a new spirit" was necessary to be pleasing unto God (something he should have known from the Old Testament), how much more incredible would be God's eternal purposes to such a carnal mind! It was evident even then to Jesus that the cross would be a "stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles." How could Nicodemus understand it was necessary that the Son of Man be lifted up, like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness — he could not even understand the Prophets whom he had pledged to study all his life!

Even when mortal man asks, "How can these things be?" God's wisdom is so infinite and unsearchable that none can know except they ascend into heaven and sit in personal conference with him. None except the Son of man and the Holy Spirit have ever enjoyed this intimate bosom-acquaintance with the Father. Paul informed the Corinthians the wisdom he spoke was God's wisdom, infinitely greater than men's eloquence. Such wisdom God had "hidden since the foundations of the worlds," but it had been given unto the apostles by a special revelation of the Spirit "which searcheth the deep things of God," (cf. I Cor. 2:6-11). The last phrase of verse 13, "who is in heaven," is omitted in many ancient manuscripts. It is omitted in the most recent Codex — the Bodmer Papyrus (see Introduction). Most authorities believe it to be a scribal gloss and we have, upon textual evidence above, omitted it from our paraphrase.

The incident referred to by Jesus in verse 14 is found in Numbers 21:4-9. The Israelites were in the wilderness country south of Mt. Hor, near to the Red Sea and the land of Edom when they began to rebel against Moses and God. The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and many were bitten and died. The people repented of their murmuring and came begging Moses to intercede on their behalf for mercy. Jehovah God then revealed His plan of salvation to Moses who was to tell it to the people. Moses would fashion a serpent from bronze and raise it up on a pole or a standard. Every Israelite who obeyed God's plan and looked upon the brazen serpent would be cured and restored to life. Commentators have wrested Jesus' use of this incident as an illustration in order to carry out their own analogies. There seems to be at least two main points of analogy or illustration which are revelant to the context: (a) just as the brazen serpent was the *only* cure for the deadly bite of the fiery ser-

pents, so the "lifting up" of the Son of Man is necessary — a must — as the *only* remedy for the deadly bite of sin (cf. Jn. 8:28; 12:32); (b) God provides the remedy for sin through His Son and only that man who looks upon Him in trusting obedience will be saved. Although God provided the children of Israel with a cure for snake bite, not one would have lived had they stubbornly refused to look upon the brazen serpent. "Obvious!" a reader says. Yet how many today who have been bitten by "that old serpent, the devil" are refusing to do the obvious thing and obey the gospel? Did the Israelites hold back, like Nicodemus, harping on the "how can this be?" Did they demand an explanation of the scientific and medical relationship between a bronze serpent and cure of snake bite? Indeed they did not! These people were saved, not because they understood God's requirement, but because they trusted God and obeyed His demand to look upon this brazen serpent. Whom among mortals can explain fully the relationship between Christ's death on the cross and His commandment to "believe and be baptized" with salvation? How is this possible? — it is not possible for us to fully comprehend — but it is possible for us to trust and obey! This was the lesson Nicodemus needed to learn, this was the lesson the disciples had to learn and the lesson we must all learn. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way . . ."

### Quiz

1. Why should Nicodemus have known of the subject of regeneration?
2. Give three Old Testament Scripture references that speak of regeneration.
3. What is the best interpretation of *we* in verse 11? Why?
4. What are the "earthly things" that Nicodemus could not believe?
5. Give the two main points of comparison between the brazen serpent and the "lifting up of the Son of Man."

### MORE HEAVENLY MYSTERIES

#### *Text* 3:16-21

**16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.**

17 For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him.

18 He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved.

21 But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God.

### *Queries*

- a. Why did God "so love the world?"
- b. How is the unbeliever judged already?
- c. What is the significance of the contrast between "doing evil" and "doing the truth?"

### *Paraphrase*

For God so dearly loved mankind, that He gave His Son, His Only-unique son, in order that everyone continuing to trust in Him may not be eternally separated from the presence of God, but may have eternal life. For God's primary purpose in sending His Son into the world was not to sentence and condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through the agency of His Son. The man who continues to trust in Him is not condemned. The man who continues to disbelieve is condemned already because he has not trusted himself to the Only Son of God in whose name only is salvation possible. But this is the inevitable condemnation of the unbeliever, that the Light has come unto the world and men deliberately chose to love the darkness rather than the Light; for their works were evil. For everyone who practices worthless things hates and resists the Light and comes not unto the Light in order that his works may not be shown for what they really are. But the one who continually does the truth comes to the Light in order that his works may be made manifest because they have been wrought in God.

### Summary

God, motivated by infinite love, sent His only Son unto fallen mankind, not to condemn but to save everyone who believes in His Son. The unbeliever brings condemnation upon himself by purposely rejecting the *only* life-giving light. The believer purposely manifests his works to glorify God.

### Comment

Verse 16 has been called the Golden Text of the Bible, Everyman's Text, and other equally descriptive names. It is probably the most famous verse of the New Testament, and the most often quoted. In fact, verses 16-21 do contain the heart of God's new will. We see in this Golden Text that "God is love." Until we have experienced, in a measure, the same unselfish love, we cannot know God as we ought (cf. I Jn. 4:7-12). We see (v. 16) God's love wooing mankind back unto His glorious fellowship, for He made the initial advances — we love Him only because "He first loved us" (cf. I Jn. 4:19). This text shows God loving us, not for His sake alone, but for our sakes. True love "seeketh not its own" (cf. I Cor. 13:1-7). God's love is that of a Father who is happy only when His prodigal child has returned to His fellowship (cf. Lk. 15:11-24). Augustine said, "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love . . . Love is the highest characteristic of God, the one attribute in which all others harmoniously blend. Although our finite minds cannot grasp the limitlessness of His love, we are informed of it in His revealed Word. God's love for men is declared in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (cf. Deut. 7:13; Isa. 63:9; Hos. 14:4; Rom. 5:8; I Jn. 4:10). Here are outlines of this famous verse by two famous men:

Wm. Hendriksen, author of *New Testament Commentary* "God's Love": 1. Its character (so loved, 2. Its Author (God), 3. Its object (the world), 4. Its Gift (his Son, the only-begotten), and 5. Its purpose (that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life).

R. C. Foster, author of *A Syllabus of the Life of Christ* "Doctrinal Elements of John 3:16": (1) Love of God (2) Jesus, the Son of God, deity of Jesus (3) Atonement (gave His Son) (4) Man lost in sin (5) Plan of salvation suggested (6) Eternal reward and punishment.

A few commentators have contended that Jesus' words cease at verse 15, and that from verse 16 through 21 we have the reflective words of the author, John. There are two reasons for believing to the contrary, that these words are further words of teaching by Jesus to Nicodemus: (a) the conjunction "for" establishes a causal relation between this and the preceding discourse (vs. 1-15); (b) the close connection of thought, i.e., "heavenly things" concerning the "scheme of redemption"; and, further, there is not the slightest notice indicating that the record has passed from direct conversation in v. 15, over to the writer's reflection in v. 16. Before passing on to the next verse, it will be well to note that "perish" does not mean "annihilate." That the wicked who die merely cease to exist, or are annihilated, is absolutely denied by the Scriptures. The New Testament is plain and positive in its teaching that those who refuse to believe and obey and who depart this world in such a state look forward to a "certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire . . ." (Heb. 10:27). The unsaved dead will be condemned to eternal punishment (cf. Mt. 18:8; 25:41, 46; Jn. 5:29; II Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 6-7). We must also note that the promise of eternal life is to whosoever *continues* to believe in the Son. The word "believe" is in the Greek present tense, and indicates continued action.

From the sublime contemplations of the love of God, we are abruptly faced with judgment — condemnation. Verse 17, according to one commentator, "is an attempt by Jesus to correct a Jewish misinterpretation of the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah." A long standing Jewish interpretation of Messianic prophecies held that the purpose for the coming of the Messiah was to "condemn the world," i.e., to judge the Gentile nations which had oppressed Israel. Amos, the herdsman-prophet from Tekoa, seems to be crying out against such a gross misinterpretation (Amos 5:18-20). The verse before us (v. 17) clearly teaches Christ's primary purpose in the first coming into the world was to provide a way of salvation for mankind. Skeptics are quick to seize upon this verse and compare it with John 5:22, 27; 9:39; 12:47, 48 and declare the Bible contradicts itself. A moment of unbiased contemplation of all the passages dealing with the purpose of Christ's coming will show there is no contradiction. Jesus came to save, not to judge the world. He came to judge the world (at the Incarnation) only insofar as it would not allow

itself to be saved. He still judges (condemns or sentences) the world when His good news of salvation is rejected by men. This same principle is applied in our everyday living. It is possible for us to offer to share something with a fellow-man, and, when he deliberately rejects our offer, his rejection turns out as a judgment upon him. A favorite illustration of this same principle goes: "A visitor was being shown around a famous art gallery by one of the attendants. In the gallery were masterpieces beyond all price, works of genius and fame. At the end of the tour the visitor said: 'Well, I don't think much of your pictures.' The attendant answered, 'Sir, I would remind you that these pictures are no longer on trial, for they are masterpieces, but those who look at them are.'" When the Jews rejected Paul's message they "judged themselves unworthy of eternal life" (cf. Acts 13:46). The gospel is *never* on trial, but those to whom the gospel is preached are *always* on trial. Jesus Christ was not on trial as He faced Annas, Caiaphas, Herod and Pilate in succession — but these judges were being judged!

In verse 18 comes the wonderful news of pardon for the believer, and the awful sentence of doom for the unbeliever. This verse shows why God did not need to send His son to condemn the world. Since the Son was sent with the message of salvation, the man who disbelieves and disobeys brings about his own condemnation. On the other hand, the man who accepts the testimony of Christ and obeys His Word "has passed out of death into life." The word *kekritai* is the Greek word for judged — condemned and the word from whence comes the English critic, crisis, critique, etc. That this word means condemned here is evident from verse 17 where it is placed in apposition to saved. The tense of the Greek in verse 18b shows that the unbeliever is condemned just as long as he continues to disbelieve and disobey. The men or women who even now refuse to surrender in loving obedience to the demands of the gospel walk the face of this earth with the sentence of eternal condemnation ever present upon them! God does not need a special day to determine a man's destiny — that is determined by the man's own will and sealed at death. Notice that Jesus places all of mankind in only two categories: the believer and the unbeliever — the saved and the condemned. We cannot here enter into a lengthy discussion of the possibility of the unevangelized heathen being saved through ignorance of the gospel. Suffice it to say the New Testament

indicates even the heathen has had sufficient law of conscience given to him so that "he may be without excuse" (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; Ept. 2:11-12). The point Jesus seems to emphasize for Nicodemus is that salvation is possible *only* through trust in God's Son. Unless Nicodemus accepts the *only* way, he stands condemned, regardless of his Jewish blood and ancestry from Abraham. This point needs emphasis in every generation. Family ties, traditions and family religion will not avail unless they be conformable to revealed truth!

The next verse (v. 19) is very revealing! Jesus shows that the condemnation which abides upon the unbeliever is just,—it is what the unbeliever deserves — and He further reveals the inner moral wrong which makes this condemnation deserved. The Greek word for loved in verse 19 is *agapae* which means a love of intelligence and purpose . . . a deliberate love. Thus a man who deliberately loves the darkness is morally rebellious and makes his own choice! When the light comes and convicts this man of his sins he will purposely reject the light and deliberately love the darkness. Such a man inevitably condemns himself and receives a just punishment (cf. II Thess. 2:9-12). Unbelief stems from a moral wickedness and not from ignorance! Paul recognizes as the basic cause of rejecting of the truth "having pleasure in unrighteousness."

The Lord further shows that the one who has deliberately chosen the darkness cannot remain at peace with the light. This principle is expressed by Jesus — "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (Mt. 12:30). The lover of darkness *must* hate the light. There are two different Greek words used for evil works in verses 19 and 20. In v. 19 the word *ponera* which denotes an active wickedness, and in v. 20 the word is *phaula*, which denotes worthlessness — the one positive the other negative. Even the one who is useless and inactive in the cause of righteousness is evil in the Lord's sight! The remaining words of Jesus in this 20th verse focus like a gigantic searchlight upon the very deepest recesses of the heart of the one who loves darkness. Such a man hates and wars against the light because the light reveals his works for what they really are — evil, dishonest and worthless. The verb convicted (*elencho*) means more than reprov'd. It means expose, show up, bring to light, show what is actually the case (cf. Eph. 5:13). As Lenski says, "We see here the inner, self-contradiction and self-



condemnation of all such doers of evil who in unbelief act contrary to Christ and the gospel. They choose the worthless but they do not want its worthlessness revealed. They want to be undisturbed in thinking the worthless valuable." The evil-doer does not want others to see him, nor does he want to face himself. Jesus recognized this in the Pharisees who deliberately rejected His word when He said, "Because I say the truth, ye believe me not" (Jn, 8:45).

Now what of the man who does the truth? He gladly comes to the light. The man who abides in the truth purposely comes to the light that he may manifest his works to show that they have been wrought in God. He is not afraid to have the penetrating searchlight of truth play upon his works for they have God as their source and they are good works. The disciple of Jesus is to purposely show his good works before men that they may glorify the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt. 5:16).

Thus ends Jesus' conversation, as far as we know, with this teacher of Israel. We would like to know more of Nicodemus than what is briefly told in two later passages (Jn. 7:50-51; 19:39). The important Personage for us to know, however, is not Nicodemus but the One who is now teaching Nicodemus, even Jesus.

### Quiz

1. What is the nature of God's love (cf. I Cor. 13:5)?
2. Give three Old Testament references to the love of God.
3. What reasons may be given for contending that verses 15-21 are a continuation of Jesus' teaching?
4. What is meant by the word perish?
5. What was the primary purpose for Jesus' coming into the world?
6. How does the unbeliever bring about his own condemnation?
7. Into what two categories does Jesus place all mankind?
8. What kind of choice is made by the man who loves darkness?
9. Name two types of evil as mentioned in these verses.
10. How does the unbeliever contradict himself?
11. Why does the doer of the truth come to the light?

## JOHN'S WITNESS CONCERNING HIMSELF

*Text 3:22-30*

22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.

23 And John also was baptizing in Enon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

24 For John was not yet cast into prison.

25 There arose therefore a questioning on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purifying.

26 And they came unto John, and said to him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven.

28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but, that I am sent before him.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, that standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is made full.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

*Queries*

- a. Why is Jesus' growing popularity mentioned?
- b. Why does he ask the question about purifying?
- c. How does John's analogy of the bridegroom and the friend of the bridegroom apply?

*Paraphrase*

After His ministry in the vicinity of Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples went out into the countryside of Judea and He spent some time there with His disciples and immersed. But John the Baptist was also immersing in Aenon near Salim, because there was an abundance of water there; and people were continuing to come and be immersed — for John had not yet been cast into prison. John's disciples, therefore, began a disputation with a Jew concerning the subject of ceremonial cleansing. They came to John and said to him, Teacher He that was with you beyond the Jordan, the One to whom you have borne witness, look, He is immersing and everyone is flocking to Him! John

answered and said to them, A man is not able to claim any authority if it has not been given unto him from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said positively, I am not the Christ but I was sent in advance of the Anointed One. The One having the bride, He is the Bridegroom. But the friend of the Bridegroom, the one who stands and listens for the Bridegroom's coming, rejoices greatly on account of the approaching voice of the Bridegroom. This, therefore, is the fulfillment of my work and thus my joy is fulfilled when all the people flock to Him. He must continue to grow in esteem and following while I continue to decrease in following.

### *Summary*

Jesus' ministry and popularity grows. John the Baptist's disciples exhibit jealousy. The Baptist exhibits humility and devotion to Jesus, refusing to be jealous of Him.

### *Comment*

After attending the Passover week and performing many signs and after a considerable ministry in the vicinity of Jerusalem (including the conversation with Nicodemus), Jesus goes out into the countryside. The most likely place to go with his disciples in order to baptize would be near Jericho where the Jordan was forded. It is evident from John 4:2 that Jesus baptized no one personally, but He is said to have baptized when actually His disciples performed the rite. There was Divine wisdom in this. The apostle Paul was forced to contend with division in the Corinthian church a few years later which had resulted from certain Christians taking pride in having been baptized by certain preachers and apostles (cf. I Cor. 1:14ff). It is asked, "What baptism would Christ and His disciples administer?" The only reasonable answer is that they were administering John's baptism of repentance and preparation. The baptism into His death (Rom. 6:3) could not have been instituted until after His death. The baptism instituted and commanded by Jesus at His ascension (Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16) was not a carry-over of John's baptism. John's baptism was not valid after Pentecost (Acts 2) and this is evident from Paul's instruction to some untaught disciples of the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7) and from the instruction given to Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). The list of parallels below which show the differences in the two baptisms is taken from *Studies in the Life of Christ*, Vol. 1, by R. C. Foster :

## CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

## JOHN'S BAPTISM

1. Demands explicit faith in Jesus as Son of God, as well as repentance	Was preceded by repentance
2. In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	On the general authority of God, no known formula
3. Permanent, remaining in force to the end of time	Temporary, preparing for the appearance of Christ
4. Universal — "all nations," "every creature"	For the Jews only
5. Inducts one into the kingdom and into Christ	Only in preparation for the coming kingdom
6. "For the remission of your sins."	Unto repentance and remission of sins (in promise?)
7. Followed by the "gift of the Holy Spirit"	Not connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit

In verse 23 we are informed that John changed his place of baptizing. Before this time he was "beyond the Jordan" (v. 26) which means the eastern side of the Jordan. There is much discussion as to where Aenon is located. No definite location can be established. The most acceptable location is about eight miles south of Scythopolis on the western banks of the Jordan. The primary discussion of this verse centers around the phrase, "because there was much water there." The pedo-baptists claim the phrase means "many waters, or an abundance of springs." They do this, of course, to discredit the "much water" as an inference for immersion. They say John chose a location with an abundance of water that the multitudes might have sufficient drinking water. But the whole emphasis of this context is upon baptizing. The demand of the New Testament for immersion as the only Scriptural mode of baptism cannot be denied by such egregious reasoning as the pedo-baptists have used with this verse (cf. also comment on 1:23-28).

As John writes his gospel, he is aware of Matthew's sequence of events in the ministry of Jesus and John the Baptist. John would know that Matthew has John the Baptist cast into prison just after the temptation of Jesus (Mt. 4:11-12). Here, in

John's gospel, Jesus and the Baptist are represented as preaching and baptizing simultaneously at least six months after the Lord's temptation. John, the author, is aware that those who later compare his gospel and Matthew's account may stumble and so he interjects the phrase anachronistically, "for John was not yet cast into prison." The interjection of verse 24 shows there was a considerable lapse of time between Matthew 4:11 and 12, and during this time Jesus and John were both preaching and baptizing.

As in the case when most great spiritual leaders gain a following, there arises, unsanctioned by the leaders, jealousy between the followers. Verse 25 informs us of John the Baptist's disciples beginning a disputation or argument with a Jew (probably one who favored Jesus and His ministry) over the question of cleansing. From verse 26 it seems the whole disputation was over the authority and cleansing efficacy of the two baptisms. The disciples of John began the controversy and probably challenged the Jew because he had been baptized by Jesus' disciples. That Jesus could baptize without consulting John they could not understand, and undoubtedly argued that the Jew had not been purified or cleansed because he had not been baptized by John. John's disciples probably brought the Jew with them when they came to their Teacher, expecting John to set this man right about the correct administrator of the rite of baptism.

The real trouble of these particular disciples of John was jealousy, not theological problems. Jesus was gaining popularity, and He and His disciples were preaching and baptizing and were not companying with John and his disciples. Jesus' disciples had the same trouble with the "unknown miracle-worker" (Mk. 9:38-39.). They could not understand how one could do good and practice religion and not company with them. Anyone who is doing the revealed will of God, whether he belongs to our immediate circle of fellowship or not, is for us and for Christ, and he is a child of God!

The Baptist's answer, verse 27, was probably unexpected by the disputing disciples. They were saying John should have the pre-eminence and that Jesus was a usurper. But John replies that authority and pre-eminence is divinely bestowed. In God's eternal scheme of things everyone has a place. John knew he had a definite place — his place was to be a preparer, a forerunner. Even John's own disciples testified publicly of John's previous denial that he was the Christ.

John now uses a familiar Old Testament figure to illustrate his secondary position to Christ. The bride is expressive in the Old Testament of the people of Israel in their close relation to God (cf. Isa. 54:5; Hos. 2:18; Ps. 45). The bride belongs to the bridegroom. Christ is the Bridegroom, and His people are the Bride (cf. Eph. 5:32; II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17). In the Jewish marriage ceremonies, the friend of the bridegroom often had certain tasks to perform in advance of the final union. The friend would then stand and wait for the approach of the groom. Upon hearing the groom's voice the best man could rejoice in a task completed and rejoice again when the groom voices his joy upon receiving the bride. John then tells his disciples, "Since you have come to me and told me that all people are flocking to Him, the Bridegroom, my joy is made full." The Bridegroom is receiving His Bride with joy and the friend of the Bridegroom also rejoices!

Verse 30 will stand forever as a monument to this great man, John the Baptist. It exemplifies his whole life of service in behalf of the Christ. As Barclay says, "we would do well to remember that it is not to ourselves that we must try to attach people; it is to Jesus Christ. It is not for ourselves we seek the loyalty of men; it is for Him." (Wm. Barclay in *The Daily Study Bible*, "The Gospel of John," Vol. 1). Note the word must in this verse. The word is a translation of the Greek word *dei* which, in turn, is from the Greek verb *deo* meaning "I am bound." John says, then, "I am bound, I must decrease while He is bound to increase." John is merely submitting to the eternal plan of God by giving Jesus the pre-eminence.

### Quiz

1. Where did Jesus go with his disciples to baptize?
2. Did Jesus baptize anyone? Explain.
3. Name at least 4 differences between John's baptism and Christian baptism.
4. Where is Aenon?
5. How are Matthew 4:11-12 and John 3:24 reconciled?
6. What probably caused the disputation concerning purifying?
7. How is v. 27 to be interpreted?
8. What was the joy of John the Baptist v. 29?

## JOHN'S WITNESS CONCERNING CHRIST

*Text 3:31-36*

31 He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaketh: he that cometh from heaven is above all.

32 What he hath seen and heard, of that he beareth witness; and no man receiveth his witness.

33 He that hath received his witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true.

34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for he giveth not the Spirit by measure.

35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

36 He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

*Queries*

- a. Who is "he that cometh from above" and "he that is of the earth"?
- b. What is the meaning of "He giveth not the Spirit by measure"?
- c. What is the significance of the word obey?

*Paraphrase*

The One coming from above is far above all men: but he that comes from the earth remains on an earthly level and is above no one and he speaks from an earthly standpoint. The One coming from heaven is above all men: He is bearing witness to that which He has seen and heard in the very presence of God and no one is receiving His witness! The person who has received the Son's witness has acknowledged that God is true. For the One Whom God sent is speaking the words of God, for the Father does not give the Spirit to the Son in part. The Father loves the Son and the Father has given all things into His hand. The person continuing to believe in the Son with a trustful obedience is continually possessing eternal life, but, conversely, the one continuing to disobey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him in his disobedient state.

*Summary*

The Baptist points out that Jesus comes with the full revelation of God's will. The person who accepts Jesus' words acknowledges that Jesus is God's true Representative.

*Comment*

Although it is not certain whether verses 31-36 are the words of John the Baptist or John the Apostle, contextually they seem to be the words of the Baptist. John the Baptist is certainly capable of uttering such high and lofty phrases when speaking of the Son of God (cf. Mt. 3:11-12; Mk. 3:7-8; Lk. 3:16-17; Jn. 1:26, 27, 29-36; 3:27-30).

Assuming these to be the words of John the Baptist, they are his final testimony to the Sonship of Jesus. These words of witness to Jesus' deity are but a continuation of the witness John is giving his disputing disciples. These disciples must recognize, as did Andrew, Peter, Philip and the other early disciples of John, that the Lamb of God has come and He is the pre-eminent One. Thus, the Baptist points out, since Jesus came from the "bosom of the Father" He is superior to every mortal. He is above even a great mortal like John the Baptist, for this prophet was earthly in origin like all other mortals (cf. Mt. 11:11). These loyal (but jealous) disciples of John must see that the "one to whom all men are flocking" is the One Who has come down out of heaven with the complete and final counsel of God (cf. Jn. 1:9-15; 3:11-13). The Baptist states an axiom which not only applies to ordinary fallible men, but also in some instances to Spirit-inspired mortals when he says, "he that is of the earth . . . and of the earth he speaketh." John the Baptist and some of the apostles, when left to their own fallible reasoning, reverted occasionally to carnal thinking and speaking (cf. Mt. 11:2-3; Gal. 2:11-14).

The Baptist continues, in verse 32, to explain to his disciples that Jesus has come from the very presence of the supreme God and Father with the message of absolute truth. The message of Jesus does not vary; it contains no conjectures and is not frustrating. His message is the exact will of God for men which the Son heard directly from the Father (cf. Jn. 5:19; 7:16, 29; 8:26, 38, 40; 15:15). What a blessed knowledge! He Who speaks to us through the gospels speaks the words which He heard in the council-halls of heaven. He has interpreted for us (Jn. 1:18)



the divine plan of redemption, and He became God's oath, sworn in blood, to show that the promises of God are immutable (Heb. 6:17). Then the Baptist, in the last phrase of this verse, shows the superlative guilt of one who rejects Christ's testimony. John does not mean every man, without exception, when he says "no man receiveth his witness." This is plain from the following verse (v. 33). It is so monstrous to the Baptist that even one man should reject the message of Christ that he is moved to say, "no man receiveth his witness."

John says there were some who did receive the witness of Jesus, and thereby acknowledged that "God is faithful and will fulfill all that he has promised." Those few of Israel who did accept Jesus as the Son of God realized God was fulfilling His promises through Jesus and they "set their seal" that God was true to His word. Up to this time, John the Baptist, Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, and undoubtedly John and James had all received the witness concerning Jesus as the promised Messiah. Another principle is implied in this verse (v. 33). The person who will not receive the witness of Jesus is actually calling God a liar. Jesus told the Pharisees that although they claimed God as their Father, in reality Satan was their father because they rejected the Son's witness (cf. Jn. 8:38-47). To reject the witness of Jesus is to call God a liar (I Jn. 5:10). To dishonor the Son is to dishonor the Father (Jn. 5:23b).

Verses 34-35 are John's climactic conclusions to convince his untaught disciples that Jesus is the One to be followed and adhered to. John is convinced that Jesus is the One whom God sent. Except for one or two instances, the phrase *hon apesteilen ho theos* ("The one whom God sent") is always applied to Jesus (cf. Jn. 3:17; 5:36; 6:29; 7:29; 8:42; 9:7; 10:36; 11:42, etc.) Upon others who spoke on behalf of God the Spirit came only in measure. God spoke by others "in divers portions and in divers manners," but the Son was the "effulgence of his glory and the very image of his substance," and the Spirit was given to the Son without measure. The Baptist was an eyewitness to this and he "saw the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him" (Jn. 1:33-34). Not only does the Son receive the Spirit without measure, but the Father gave all things into His hand (cf. Jn. 5:19-20; 12:49; 13:3; 17:2; Mt. 11:27; 28:18).

Verse 36 certainly fits the character of John the Baptist's preaching as it is recorded in the Synoptic gospels. There his

message was, "the axe lieth at the root of the tree . . . hewn down and cast into the fire . . . shall baptize . . . in fire . . . flee from the wrath to come . . . whose fan is in his hand," etc. Here, in verse 36, he intends to warn these quibbling disciples in no uncertain terms that to reject Jesus inevitably brings down the wrath of God upon the disbeliever. The sharp contrasts of the Baptist here between the destinies of the believer and the unbeliever are very similar to the contrast Jesus presented to Nicodemus (3:16-18). John uses the present tense to denote that the one receiving eternal life is one who continually trusts and obeys. One who has an abiding faith has also an ever-present assurance of eternal life.

The only other alternative to accepting Jesus is rejecting Him. With Christ there is no middle-of-the-road policy — men either obey Him or disobey Him. Evidently, there is a plan or a norm which the Son came to manifest, which every man must act in accordance with, or rebelliously reject Him. Believing in Christ, then, entails more than admitting His historicity, and even more than giving intellectual assent to His message and claims. A faith that does not express itself in obedience is a dead and useless faith (cf. Jn. 14:21, 23; 15:10; Jas. 2:26). The gospel of Christ is a gospel demanding obedience, and its commandments are plain enough that "they who run may read." The law of the kingdom of Christ is love. But it is a love which leads to trust, repentance, confession and baptism. These are but the entrance requirements — once received as a citizen by the Lord, the new member must participate and share in the edifying of the whole society of believers to his fullest capacities.

The dreadful sentence upon the disobedient is that even now the wrath of God is potentially abiding upon him. The disobedient does not experience the wrath of God while he yet lives, but when Jesus comes again He will "render vengeance unto all them that know not God and obey not the gospel" (II Thess. 1:8). Then those who have chosen to disobey Christ's terms of entrance into the kingdom will go into eternity to reckon with an all-righteous and perfectly just God. There the unredeemed must bear the eternal and perfect wrath of God all alone. The one who chooses to disobey can blame only himself . . . he has been given the message and the opportunity to accept or reject . . . he brings the wrath of God upon himself.

## SPECIAL STUDY NO. 2

Anticipating that there may be some question concerning the paraphrase of 3:16-21 we introduce here Special Study No. 2. This study is interjected in explanation of the substitution of "only-unique" in place of "only begotten" in 3:16, 18. It is hoped that the reader will come to a clearer understanding of the uniqueness and diety of Jesus Christ as a result of this Special Study.

The Study, in its entirety, is from an article by Sheldon V. Shirts entitled, "He Gave the Only Son He Had."

## HE GAVE THE ONLY SON HE HAD

THE MEANING OF *monogenes*.

The Greek word under fire is *monogenes*. Originally, Greek words with the common root *gen* carried the basic meaning "to beget." But, as Schmidt proves, many words built upon that basic stem soon lost this early sexual sense. Thus centuries before New Testament days, *genos*, for example, was often used to mean simply a kind of something. So in the New Testament, Jesus parabolically likens the kingdom of heaven to "a net that . . . gathered (fish) of every KIND" (Mt. 13:47), and Paul speaks of "divers KINDS of tongues" and "KINDS of voices" (I Cor. 12:19; 14:10).

*Monogenes* comes from *monos* (only) and *genos* (kind) — thus, "the only one of its kind," as such authorities as Moulton, Milligan, and Thayer show. Of course, when we speak of human beings, the translation "begotten" makes sense, but the fact remains that that is not the point — the emphasis is upon the person's uniqueness, he is the ONLY one. Thus Plato spoke of *monogenes ouranos* (the only heaven); and Clement of Rome described the legendary bird, the phoenix, as *monogenes*, not that it was the only bird begotten, but the only one of its kind, unique.

## LATIN AND SEPTUAGINT USAGE.

Accurately, the earliest Latin translators rendered *monogenes huius* by *filius unicus* (unique son), not by *filius unigenitus* (only-begotten son). It took the dogmatic Arian disputes over Christ's relation to God (318 A.D.) to give first occasion for claiming that Christ was God's "begotten Son," i.e. not a part of

creation. And there began the inaccurate Latin rendering of *unigenitus*, (only-begotten).

In the Septuagint, the word occurs eight times, referring to an only child, or to that which was unique or alone (e.g., Psa. 22:20; Judges 11:34; Tobit 3:15). Twice the King James translators render the Hebrew equivalent as "darling," showing that the word *monogenes* acquires a secondary meaning in the fact that what is unique is naturally of special value: an only son is a specially beloved son.

#### MONOGENES IN LUKE AND HEBREWS.

In the New Testament, *monogenes* appears nine times (always translated "only" in the Revised Standard Version). Only six times does the King James Version have it "only-begotten." If the rendering "only" is so inadequate, why did the King James scholars so translate it three times? An examination of the passages will make it clear. In the story of the widow of Nain, the fact that her dead son had once been begotten was of course true but now of no consequence; the important thing here was that he was her only son! What a pathetic situation! The fact that she is a widow speaks of her past sorrow, but now (Lk. 7:12) the realization that the one and only prop of her life, the stay and hope of her widowhood, had been taken from her, shows realistically her present despair. Surely few greater misfortunes are conceivable than the loss of a widow's ONLY son.

So we can understand the consuming grief of Jairus who fell at Jesus' feet and "besought him to come to his house, for he had an ONLY daughter . . . and she was dying" (Lk. 8:41-42). Likewise, we share the concern of the father of the epileptic boy who cried, "Master, I beg you to look upon my son, for he is my ONLY child" (Lk. 9:38). Can anyone mistake the significance of *monogenes* in these passages? Not even the King James translators could!

But note the strange use of *monogenes* to describe Isaac in Heb. 11:17. Though the King James Version says "only begotten," Abraham obviously had begotten other children (Gen. 25:1, 2). But the point is: Isaac was the ONLY SON OF HIS KIND, as far as God's promise to Abraham was concerned. Thus *monogenes* is justified, and the Revised Standard Version's rendering "only son."

## MONOGENES IN JOHN'S WRITING.

To render *monogenes* in John 3:16 as "only" is just as significant, and actually will more clearly reveal the great depth of God's love for us than does the more cumbersome, less accurate expression of the King James Version. For God so loved the world that He gave the ONLY SON HE HAD!

But some insist, "This is not true; John 1:12 says, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God . . . ' To call Jesus God's only Son is confusing and false; it strips Him of his divinity and makes Him no more than other men." Then, for a moment, call Him again God's "only begotten," if you must — and then notice that in the next verse, 1:13, all the sons of v. 12 have been "born (Gr. begotten) . . . of God." Constant dilemma greets the one who cannot see beyond the horizons or a single word.

Let us see, with Schaff, in what ways all believers can be called God's children in v. 12 and yet Jesus be God's only son in v. 14: (1) Jesus is the only Son in that there is none like him; they are many; (2) He is the Son eternally; they "become" (v. 12) sons within time; (3) He is the Son by nature; they are made sons by grace and adoption; (4) He is of the same essence with the Father; they are of a different substance. Note that Jesus never unites Himself with us by saying "Our Father." John 20:17 shows most clearly how He distinguishes Himself as the essential Son from all others as only adopted sons: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

## NO REFERENCE TO THE VIRGIN BIRTH.

But does not "only begotten" refer to Jesus' virgin birth? Never! In John 1:14 Jesus did not become the Son; He became flesh to manifest Himself as God's eternal Son, Who "in the beginning . . . was with God and . . . was God" (Jn. 1:1). Men became sons of God because the Son of God became man. When "God sent his only Son into the world" (I Jn. 4:9), He did not send one Who became a son only when sent, any more than when God sent forth the Spirit (Gal. 4:6) did He send forth one who became a Spirit only when sent. Jesus has been eternally "in the bosom of the Father" (Jn. 1:18); the Greek even better expresses a relation of closest intimacy and tenderest affection: they are in each other's embrace.

## THE "ONLY SON" MAKES A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE.

Thus Jesus is not merely the ONLY Son, but the precious beloved Son of God's embrace, and still God gave Him up! Take all the tenderness, forgiveness and love in the relation of an earthly father to his only child, and in that earth-drawn picture you have yet but a faint approach to the fathomless love of God, as He so loved the world that He gave the ONLY SON HE HAD — and what a precious Son — an innocent Son to be slain for the benefit of guilty men — that He might redeem them from eternal condemnation. No clearer picture of the deity of Christ, or the love of God can be seen!

*Quiz*

1. What great difference between Jesus and himself does John the Baptist point out to his disputing disciples (v. 31)?
2. What has Jesus seen and heard that He bears witness to?
3. How does a person "set his seal" that God is true?
4. Who received the Spirit without measure? Explain!
5. What is the significance of the word obey in verse 36?
6. Which is the best translation — "only-unique Son," or "only begotten Son"?

## EXAMINATION

### CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE

*Multiple Choice*

1. The city where Jesus made the water into wine was :
  - a. Capernaum
  - b. Cana
  - c. Chorazin
2. Jesus made the water into :
  - a. grape juice
  - b. intoxicating wine
  - c. we cannot be certain
3. Jesus' brothers were named :
  - a. James, Joseph, Judas

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

- b. James, Joseph, Judas, Simon
  - c. Abraham, Joseph, Levi, Peter
4. During the Feast of Passover, the Jews commemorated :
- a. The passing over of the Death Angel
  - b. Their passing over the Jordan River
  - c. The death of Pharaoh
5. When Jesus said "Destroy this temple . . ." he referred :
- a. to His physical body
  - b. to the Jew's temple
  - c. both of the above
6. When Jesus said a man must be "born of water" He meant :
- a. An ocean voyage
  - b. born of the Holy Spirit
  - c. Baptism
7. The essential idea of "the kingdom of God," is :
- a. The second coming of Christ
  - b. The reign of God over the lives of men
  - c. A church organization
8. John the Baptist called himself :
- a. The bridegroom
  - b. The bride
  - c. The friend of the Bridegroom
9. Jesus baptized :
- a. Just His disciples
  - b. Many people
  - c. No one personally, but representatively through the apostles.

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### *Match These Scriptures*

- |                                                          |                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. "His mother saith unto the servants                   | a. and in three days I will raise it up."                                                    |
| 2. "Take these things hence :                            | b. even so must the Son of man be lifted up."                                                |
| 3. "Destroy this temple                                  | c. but I must decrease."                                                                     |
| 4. "Except one be born anew                              | d. he is a new creature : the old things are passed away ; behold, they are become new."     |
| 5. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness | e. but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." |
| 6. "According to his mercy he saved us                   | f. he that believeth not hath been judged already."                                          |
| 7. "He must increase                                     | g. Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."                                                     |
| 8. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life       | h. through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."                     |
| 9. "He that believeth on him is not judged               | i. he cannot see the kingdom of God."                                                        |
| 10. "Wherefore if any man is in Christ                   | j. make not my Father's house a house of merchandise."                                       |

### *True or False*

1. \_\_\_\_ The miracle at the wedding feast was Jesus' first miracle.
2. \_\_\_\_ Jesus used His scourge of cords upon the money-changers.
3. \_\_\_\_ Nicodemus belonged to the sect of the Sadducees.
4. \_\_\_\_ Jesus told Nicodemus there was nothing required of men to enter the kingdom of God.
5. \_\_\_\_ Men judge themselves, in a sense, when they reject the light.



## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

6. \_\_\_\_\_ Those who do evil wish to remain ignorant of the true worthlessness of their deeds.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ John the Baptist was jealous of Jesus' popularity.

### *Who said it?*

1. "They have no wine."
2. "Every man setteth on first the good wine; and when men have drunk freely, then that which is worse: thou hast kept the good wine until now."
3. "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days?"
4. "How can these things be?"
5. "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, behold, the same baptizeth and all men come to him."

### *Describe the location of these:*

1. Cana
2. Capernaum
3. The temple
4. Jerusalem
5. Aenon

## EXPOSITORY SERMON NO. 3

### THE NEW BIRTH

John 3:1-8

### *Introduction*

- I Character of Nicodemus
  - A. Afraid? probably (Jn. 7:50; 19:39)  
Perhaps sought Jesus when alone — possibly his only free time
  - B. At least his mind was honest enough to accept evidence of Jesus' deity.
    1. More than other Pharisees would do
    2. Honest mind necessary to receive any truth
- II What was Nicodemus really seeking?
  - A. The kingdom of God . . . promised by his prophets
    1. Probably heard John the Baptist and Jesus both preach, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

2. There was a general excitement and expectation (Lk. 3:15)

III What does Jesus really teach Nicodemus?

- A. That the true kingdom of God is spiritual and not physical
- B. That entrance is by spiritual birth, not physical lineage

### *Discussion*

I NECESSITY OF THE NEW BIRTH (v. 3 and 5)

- A. A blow is dealt Nicodemus' religious heritage
  1. A Jew and a Pharisee, yet Jesus implies he has no part in the kingdom of God
- B. Must be "born anew" — regenerated
  1. Generate means to give life.
  2. Without regeneration (spiritually) we are without life (spiritually) **SPIRITUALLY DEAD!**  
Jesus said as much in 3:18—**LIVING DEAD MEN!**
- C. Jesus repeats, "Except" and "Ye must" **FOR EMPHASIS.**
  1. **NAME ON CHURCH ROLL, EVEN HOLDING OFFICE DOES NOT GUARANTEE ETERNAL LIFE . . . "YE MUST BE BORN ANEW."**  
**REGENERATION IS NECESSARY**

II WHAT IS THE "NEW BIRTH"?

- A. A new birth brings forth a new creature (II Cor. 5:11-17).

Note the sharp change to a new life in Saul of Tarsus

- B. The old man must die before the new man is born.
  1. "I have been crucified with Christ" etc. (Gal. 1:20)
    - a. When Christ lives in us . . . His wants are ours, His loves are ours, His hates are ours.
    - b. "I" moves out and Jesus moves in. (Rom. 8:6-9)
    - c. Our hearts are filled with fleshly desires like a barrel filled with various things  
We need to empty the barrel and fill it with Christ.
  2. Before we can be saved we must be lost!
    - a. Must first accept fact that God has just cause to demand our death because of our disobedience.
    - b. **WHEN WE VIOLATE GOD'S PERFECT STANDARD, WE JUSTLY DESERVE THE SENTENCE OF PUNISHMENT.**

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

- C. Now we are ready to accept LOVE OF GOD manifested in Christ's reconciliation.

### III HOW SHALL WE BE BORN AGAIN?

- A. Ye must be born of water and Spirit.

1. Both water and Spirit are used without the article "the."

Thus we see that the new birth is a single entity . . . baptism and Spirit one process

2. Compare Titus 3:4-5

- B. Spirit operates through the written and spoken Word of God.

1. I Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18, 21

a. Spirit came to convict men of sin — done through preaching of apostles. (Jn. 16:8, 13; 17:20)

2. When the seed (Word of God) is shown, it transforms the life.

- C. The Spirit gives life (Jn. 6:63).

But, "THE WORDS THAT I HAVE SPOKEN UNTO YOU, THEY ARE SPIRIT AND THEY ARE LIFE."

- D. We are:

1. CLEANSED BY THE WORD AND BY THE LAVER OF REGENERATION
2. SANCTIFIED BY THE WORD AND BY BAPTISM
3. LED BY THE SPIRIT (WORD)
4. PURIFIED BY OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL
5. SAVED BY WASHING OF REGENERATION AND OF HOLY SPIRIT

### *Conclusion*

#### I NOW THE APPLICATION . . . NOW THE DECISION IN REGARD TO NEW BIRTH

- A. We know its necessity, what it is, how it shall be done. WE HAVE THE TRUTH, NOW WE MUST OBEY OR REJECT

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

II Nicodemus stumbled at not being able to see this new birth.

A. Jesus replied, "If we could not see the wind blow the trees and could not hear it, we would never know it was blowing . . . in like manner, if the Spirit through the Word did not produce reborn men we would never know His presence or working . . ."

1. MY FRIEND, YOU CAN TELL A REBORN MAN!

2. THE MIND OF CHRIST WILL MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE PERSON WHO HAS CRUCIFIED SELF AND SEEKS ONLY THE KINGDOM!

III ONE WHO HAS ALLOWED THE WORD OF GOD FREE COURSE IN HIMSELF WILL:

A. Repent like Zacchaeus (with restitution if necessary)

B. Confess like Peter and John in Acts

C. Go anywhere Jesus has commanded, even unto immersion in water . . . although not completely understood

D. If you will allow him, Jesus will come into your heart and help you live as a Christian

BUT YOU MUST OBEY HIS WORD (Jn. 14:23).