

Nicodemus was curious about Jesus because He had performed many signs (Jn. 3:2). So, he came to Jesus at night to speak to Jesus and to find out more about Him. Notice what Jesus tells Him in the following verses:

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”⁴ **Nicodemus said to 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, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” (John 3:3)**

Jesus’ answer confuses Nicodemus because all he could think of was the physical. He knew that he belonged to the physical kingdom of Israel and as Jew, he was considered to be part of God’s chosen nation. Now, Jesus is telling him that you must be born-again or you cannot enter the kingdom of God or even see it.

In verse 4, Nicodemus is trying to make sense of Jesus’ statement from a physical point of view. This is why he asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” He thought Jesus statement was crazy because he knew it was impossible to be physically reborn. So, Jesus restates what He said to help Nicodemus understand that He was talking about a spiritual rebirth and not a physical one. Jesus makes it clear that a person cannot enter the kingdom of God that John the Baptist said was at hand (Mk. 1:15), unless they are born-again. This means a person cannot be saved unless they are born of water and the spirit. Since, these two elements are necessary for salvation, it’s important that we take a closer look at what they are and how we are born-again.

First, let’s take a look at the word “water” and how it relates to being born-again. The word “water” comes from the Greek word “hudor,” which simply means water. It should be easy to see that water is one of the elements necessary to be born-again, which points to baptism. In fact, we can see that water is required for baptism. For instance, when John was baptizing, he baptized with water (Mk. 1:8-10; Jn. 3:23). When the apostles and disciples were carrying out the great commission, they baptized with water (Acts 8:36-39; 10:47). When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he declared there is only one baptism that saves (Eph. 4:4-5), and Peter tells us that one baptism is by water (1 Pet. 3:20-21). In Rom. 6:3ff Paul describes baptism as a burial where we die to our sins and we are made alive with Jesus (Col. 2:13). This is exactly what Jesus described to Nicodemus about being born-again. We put to death our old man of sin as we are buried under the water, and we are “born-again” as a new creature of Christ without our sins when we are raised from the water. The evidence I have provided proves that water baptism is one of the essential elements necessary to enter the kingdom of God and be saved. In fact, all the early writers, known as the “church fathers,” agree that John 3:5 is talking about water baptism.

“In his monumental work, History of Infant Baptism, William Wall, a leading scholar in the Church of England, asserted that not a single writer of antiquity denied the identification of the “water” of John 3:5 with baptism. He suggested that John Calvin was the first to disassociate the two items, and that Calvin even conceded that his interpretation was “new” (Oxford, 1862, Vol. I, p. 443 - christiancourier.com).”

Not only does the Bible prove that Jesus is talking about water baptism, all these early

noninspired writers understood that Jesus was talking about water baptism as well.

Second, let’s take a look at the word “spirit” and how it relates to being born-again. Now, we need to keep in mind there is only one birth and it consists of water and spirit. Therefore, there are not two births as some teach, but only one. Jesus is teaching us the Holy Spirit is involved in being born-again. But, the question is, how? To answer this question, we must go beyond this one passage and look at the whole counsel of God. What you will discover is the Holy Spirit instructs us through the Word of God on how to be saved. This is the role that He plays in our being born-again.

The Holy Spirit’s primary purpose was to reveal the Word of God to us (Jn. 14:26; 16:13-15). He spoke through some of Jesus’ disciples, who in turn recorded these revelations to us in our Bibles (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 2:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). So there would be no confusion, He proved a person was speaking the Word of God by backing it up with a miracle (Mk. 16:20; Acts 2:43; 5:12; 6:8; 8:13; Rom. 15:19). Jesus says, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life” (John 6:63) Paul refers to the New Testament as being a spirit (2 Cor. 3:6). This teaches us the Holy Spirit works through the Word to show us how we are to enter the kingdom of God (Eph. 6:17). It is through the Word, or we could say by the Spirit, that we learn how to be saved (1 Pet. 1:23; Rom. 1:16, Jam. 1:18, 21).

To further show how the Holy Spirit works in our conversion with water baptism, take a look at the following parallel passages.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her

with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:25-26)

Notice, the 3 elements: the word, washing of water and cleanse. The “word” is obviously a reference to the Word of God. “Washing of water” refers to water baptism. “Sanctify and cleanse” refers to being saved with our sins being removed.

“...He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

Notice the 3 elements: Holy Spirit, washing of regeneration and saved. “Renewing of the Holy Spirit” refers to how the Holy Spirit works through the Word to save us (James 1:21). “Washing” is defined as “Washing, cleansing; water (USB).” “Regeneration” is defined as a new birth or renewal or restoration of life after death (Strong’s).” So, “washing of regeneration” is referring to water baptism and “saved” means salvation.

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13).

Notice the 3 elements: Spirit, baptized, one body. Please notice Paul says, “By one Spirit” and not “With one Spirit.” This is important because this shows the baptism being spoken of here is not Holy Spirit baptism, but is by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit instructs us through the Word that we must be baptized in water into the name of Jesus for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38). So, “baptism” refers to water baptism. “One body” is the same as saying the kingdom because the body is the church (Col. 1:18, 24) and the church is the same as the kingdom (Mat. 16:18-19). Now, examine the following chart.

John 3:5	Spirit	Water	Kingdom
Eph. 5:26	Word	Water	Cleansed
Tit. 3:5	Holy Spirit	Washing	Saved
1 Cor. 12:13	Spirit	Baptized	Body

All these verses show that the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God and teaches us what we must do to be born-again, which includes believing Jesus is the Son of God (Jn. 8:24), repenting (Lk. 13:3), confessing Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9-10) and being baptized (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 22:16). When we obey the Holy Spirit's instructions, we are added to the kingdom by God (Acts 2:47), which is Jesus' church or body (Col. 1:18, 24) that He will save (Eph. 5:23).

Whenever we are born-again, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32), which means we have been sealed by Him (Eph. 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22). The word "seal" means "To mark with a seal as a means of identification, *mark, seal* so that the mark denoting ownership also carries with it the protection of the owner (BDAG)." This fits perfectly with the great commission (Mat. 28:19), which teaches us that we are baptized into the name of, or into the possession of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This seal is our guarantee of a home in heaven if we remain faithful (Rev. 2:10). Just as the Holy Spirit was a witness for Jesus (1 Jn. 5:6), He bears witness that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). Once we are born-again, we are considered to be the temple of God and all three members of the Godhead will dwell in us (Holy Spirit: 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Rom. 8:9, 11; Father: 2 Cor. 6:16; Jn. 14:23; Jesus: Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Jn. 6:56). How do they dwell in us? It is by our faith (Eph. 3:17). We can know that they dwell in us just like we can know that our sins are being removed and we

are being united with Christ at the point of baptism (Col. 2:12). Again, it is by our faith in the working of God.

So, Jesus taught Nicodemus and us a valuable lesson. If we want to be saved and be able to enter the kingdom of God, we must be born-again by obeying the instructions of the Holy Spirit, which includes being water baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of our sins.

Now, I want to deal with the objections that some have with these verses.

1. Some would say that Jesus is talking about Holy Spirit baptism. Now, I have already proven the baptism that saves us is water baptism, but let's take a look as some more reasons this cannot be talking about Holy Spirit baptism. Holy Spirit baptism only occurs two times in scripture and it was followed with the miraculous ability to speak in another language. First, at the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and second, at Cornelius' house (Acts 10). Holy Spirit baptism was a promise that Jesus would administer and He only promised it to His apostles (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33). If Jesus was talking about Holy Spirit baptism, then it would be necessary for every single person to receive it to enter the kingdom of God. Again, we only have two cases of this recorded for us in scripture. If Holy Spirit baptism was essential for salvation and water baptism is not, then we are going to have a difficult time explaining why Philip baptized the people of Samaria in water and then left them out of the kingdom (Acts 8:14-16). The only other way that a person could receive the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit was by the laying on of hands by an apostle. This is why Peter and John had to go to Samaria. This ability died out with the last apostle and is not available today. If Holy Spirit baptism was necessary, then why did Ananias tell Paul to get up and get himself baptized (Acts 22:16)?

If Holy Spirit baptism is what saves, then the Holy Spirit could have baptized Paul right then and there even if he was standing on his head. It should be obvious that water baptism is what Jesus is talking about in this verse because it was commanded and is to be done by us (Mat. 28:18-20). Water baptism was done throughout the book of Acts because it is the one baptism that saves (Eph. 4:4-5).

2. Some have said the water is talking about the amniotic fluid that surrounds a baby in the womb and the spirit is referring to being born of the Spirit, which brings us back to Holy Spirit baptism. First, it wouldn't make sense for Jesus to say that you must be born from the water of your mother because who isn't born from their mother? So, if Jesus wanted us to know that Holy Spirit baptism was necessary, he would have simply said you must be born of the Spirit. Second, Jesus had the chance to explain to Nicodemus that he had already accomplished the first element in verse 5. But instead, he said he must be born of water and spirit. Obviously, Jesus was letting him know that he had not experienced this new birth of water and spirit. Third, the word water used in this text is never used in the Bible to refer to childbirth. This should be enough to show the water in this verse does not refer to childbirth.

In conclusion, we have examined the first reference to water baptism that Jesus would command under the new covenant, which was necessary to enter the kingdom of God. The only way we can be born-again and freed from our sins is by obeying the instructions of the Holy Spirit. This would include believing Jesus is the Son of God, repenting, confessing Jesus as Lord and being water baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins. Jesus' instructions to Nicodemus proves that water baptism is necessary for salvation. **If you have a question or comment, send it to Igchurchofchrist@cablone.net**

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How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?



Nicodemus

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