

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Born of water and the Spirit

(Jerry Fite)

Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven one must be “born of water and the Spirit” (*John 3:5*). The importance of Nicodemus knowing this is clearly in the mind of Jesus for He prefaces His remarks with, “Verily, verily”, or as the Greek word is often transliterated, “*Amen, amen*”, denoting the “truth” which attracts attention and is about to be said. The statement is also important, not only for its prerequisite for entering into God’s kingdom, but for it explaining what it means to be “born anew” or “born from above” (*John 3:5*).

Some believe being born of water is the physical birth we all experience. Here, water is connected in their mind to the amniotic fluid which ruptures as the child comes forth from the womb. Then, in this view, one must experience the spiritual birth in order to enter the kingdom. If so, Jesus is referring to “two births”: one physical and one spiritual. The phrase has the one preposition “of” connecting two coordinating nouns. This seems

to indicate that Jesus is stressing one birth associated with “water” and “the Spirit”, not two births.

Water and the Spirit are connected together in one birth when we are baptized in water and begin to walk in newness of life led by the Spirit through the Word. Paul refers to this new birth as the “*washing of regeneration*” and the “*renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (*Titus 3:5*).

Water and Spirit are connected in this new birth as a cleansing and renewing process. One is cleansed from his or her sins by the blood of Christ when baptized into His death (*Rev. 1:5, Romans 6:3-4, I Peter 1:22*). Paul himself was instructed to “*arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on His name*” – the name of the Lord (*Acts 22:16*). Begotten through the Gospel, one continues to be renewed in spirit being led by the Spirit’s revealed word (*I Corinthians 4:15, I Peter 1:23-25, Romans 8:6, 9, 11, 14*).

Jesus is stressing to Nicodemus the necessity of the spiritual new birth characterized by

cleansing and renewal. This begins at baptism in one being raised to walk in the newness of life (*Romans 6:4*). The Spirit’s truth continues to be the guiding light for the continued renewal of the mind (*Ephesians 4:21-24*).

Curtis Porter’s first debate was with a Baptist preacher named D.N. Jackson in 1916. The Baptist made the statement that he knew of only three things that were born of water: “*a frog, a mosquito and a Campbellite*”. Curtis Porter, a 19 year old preacher of the Gospel at the time, responded by saying he knew the very act that makes one a Baptist is water. That is the final thing that puts a man into the Baptist Church. The Baptists therefore are born of water. Porter reminding Jackson of his previous statement of only three things born of water and retorts, “*I know you are not a Campbellite. I want to know which are you? A frog, or a mosquito?*” This indeed was what Porter would later in a series of speeches and at the end of his life classify as a “quibble that backfired” on the Baptist preacher.