

JOHN CHAPTER THREE
THE NEW BIRTH
Take - a - ways

The Necessity for the New Birth (Vss 1-5)
The Nature of the New Birth (Vss 6-13)
The Basis for the New Birth (Vss 14-21)
The Confusion About the New Birth (Vss 22-36)

What is the New Birth?
It is spiritual, not physical
We are born with a sin nature
We cannot be repaired, restored or rehabilitated
We must be Born Again

What is belief?
It is to trust in Jesus
It is to confide in Jesus
It is to commit yourself to Jesus
It is to turn your affairs, your decisions over to Jesus

In 1941 Dr Harry Ironsides wrote this Sinner's Prayer:
Jesus, I will trust Thee, trust Thee with my soul. Weary, worn and helpless, Thou canst make me whole. There is none in heaven or in earth like Thee. Thou hast died for sinners - Thou hast died for me.

The Three Musts of John 3:
Vs 7 - you MUST be born again
Vs 14 - the Savior MUST be lifted up on the Cross
Vs 30 - John MUST decrease - Jesus MUST increase

The Three Relationships of John 3
A Living relationship - from the new birth to death to eternity
A Loving relationship - He loved us enough to die for - He will never stop loving us
A Learning relationship - He will never stop teaching us new things thru His Word

Born once - die twice - physically and spiritually - eternity separated from God
Born twice - die once - physically only - spirit lives on with the Father in Heaven
Body and spirit reunited at the Rapture

05-10 Lesson: John 3 — New Birth, Baptism Clarifications, and Nicodemus’s Journey

Date Time: 2026-05-10 17:05:41

Location: First Baptist Church Tallassee Alabama

Instructor: Sid Edwards

Summary

On 2026-05-10, the lesson examined John 3’s “new birth,” addressing its necessity, nature, basis, and common confusions. It clarified that spiritual rebirth is solely God’s work and not achieved by water baptism; highlighted metaphors of water, wind, and light to explain the Holy Spirit’s unseen yet evident work; and expounded John 3:16–21 as the heart of the gospel, including God’s prior love, Christ as the “only begotten,” the scope of “whosoever,” and the contrast between perishing and possessing eternal life now. The session then covered John 3:22–36, detailing early Judean ministry, concurrent baptisms by John’s disciples and Jesus’s disciples, a possible follow-up visit by a singular Jew (speculated to be Nicodemus), and John the Baptist’s humble affirmation, “He must increase, but I must decrease,” with a five-part explanation of Christ’s superiority. It concluded with John 3:36’s division of humanity into believers with eternal life and rejecters under abiding wrath, and revisited Nicodemus’s journey (John 7 and 19) to argue he likely came to saving faith over time.

Knowledge Points

1. The New Birth: Necessity, Nature, and Confusion

- Necessity of New Birth
 - Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born again; it is absolutely necessary for salvation. Human effort cannot produce spiritual life; only God creates the spiritual.
 - Both Jew and Gentile are saved the same way: by hearing, believing, and receiving. There is no alternative path.
- Nature of New Birth (Spiritual vs. Physical)
 - Nicodemus misunderstands, thinking in physical terms while Jesus speaks of spiritual realities. The spiritual birth is not something man can engineer; it is God’s work through the Holy Spirit.
 - Ezekiel’s “sprinkling clean water” refers to cleansing from impurity and idolatry, distinct from immersion baptism; Jews practiced ceremonial washings (e.g., water pots for cleansing), but immersion baptism as John the Baptist practiced was alien to them, contributing to confusion.
- Baptism Clarifications
 - If water baptism were required for salvation, no one in the Old Testament could have been saved; therefore, baptism is not the saving means.
 - John 4 indicates Jesus himself did not baptize; his disciples did. There is no “magic” in Jesus personally performing baptisms, underscoring baptism’s non-salvific, symbolic role.

- Wind as Metaphor for the Holy Spirit
 - Jesus uses the breeze/wind to illustrate the Spirit's unpredictability and uncontrollability; people cannot predict when the Spirit will work.
 - Evidence of the Spirit is seen in effects (changed lives), like wind's effects in trees or damage, though the wind (and the Spirit) is never seen directly.
- Ascending and Descending Claim
 - In contrast to mystical claims that prophets ascend to a higher realm for instruction and then descend, Jesus asserts he came from heaven with heavenly wisdom; he did not go and return to obtain instruction. He brought heaven to earth in his first coming.
- Light and Darkness Contrast
 - Jesus teaches that light has come, but people love darkness because their deeds are evil; those doing evil avoid the light to evade exposure, while those practicing truth come to the light to show deeds wrought in God.
 - Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came "by night" (darkness), underscoring tension between fear and the call to the light. Jesus, the "Light of the World," dispels darkness; light and dark cannot coexist.

2. The Basis of New Birth: The Serpent and John 3:16–21

- Serpent on the Pole Typology
 - In Moses' day, not everyone bitten looked and lived; likewise, salvation is for those willing to look in faith. God does not drag anyone into heaven; salvation is for those who want to receive it.
- John 3:16 as "Miniature Gospel"
 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Martin Luther called it the miniature gospel, the entire Bible's story in about twenty-five words.
 - Corrects misconceptions: God is not a stern judge seeking punishment; he is the essence of love. God's love precedes the cross; Jesus' death did not enable God to start loving mankind.
- God's Prior Love and Propitiation
 - 1 John 4: God revealed love by sending his only Son so we may live through him; not that we loved God, but he loved us and sent his Son as propitiation (substitute) for sins—love first, then sending.
 - Romans 5: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, proving love long before our merit.
- "Only Begotten" Meaning
 - Refers to Christ's uniqueness and one-of-a-kind relationship with the Father, not merely birth order or being an only child.
 - Abraham and Isaac: Isaac called "only begotten" despite Ishmael's existence, showing "only begotten" points to unique relationship and role, not family position.
- "Whosoever" Scope

- Passages defining “whosoever” characteristics:
 - Matthew 16: Those who lose life for Christ’s sake save it.
 - Romans 10: Those who call upon the name of the Lord; those who believe and are not ashamed.
 - 1 John 4: Those who confess him and dwell in him.
 - Luke 9: Those who receive a little child in God’s name become great.
 - Acts 10: Those who believe in him receive remission of sins.
 - Matthew 7: Those who hear and do Jesus’ sayings become wise.
 - Mark 8: Those who come, deny themselves, and take up their crosses.
 - John 4: Those who drink Christ’s water never thirst again.
 - Mark 11: Those who do not doubt see mountains cast into the sea.
- Conclusion: “Whosoever” are the willing—those who want to do and respond in faith and obedience.

- “Perish” vs. “Have” Eternal Life

- “Perish”: For Jews, conveyed going into utter darkness, a strange, unknown place; here, means judgment forever, torment forever, eternal separation from God—eternal existence of poor quality.
- “Have” (present tense): Salvation is possessed now, not merely hoped for later; you have it instantly and throughout life. Eternal life entails quality—endless fellowship with God.
- Harry Ironside’s conversion summary: “God loved; God gave; I believed; I received; I have everlasting life.”

- John 3:17–18: Mission and Judgment

- God sent the Son not to judge the world but to save it; believers are not judged, while unbelievers are judged already because they have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
- God sees only two groups: saved and not saved. Condemnation stems not from the lifetime of sin per se but from refusing the offered solution—salvation and forgiveness.

- John 3:19–21: Light’s Exposure and Human Response

- Light has come; people loving darkness avoid light to prevent exposure of evil deeds. Those practicing truth come to the light, revealing deeds as wrought in God.
- Jesus uses the water, wind, and light/dark metaphors to guide Nicodemus, who leaves without a recorded immediate decision, while Jesus continues his mission.

3. Early Judean Ministry, Baptisms, and Emerging Controversy (John 3:22–36)

- Geography and Movement

- Jesus met Nicodemus in Jerusalem (Nicodemus: Pharisee, temple teacher). Afterward, Jesus and disciples went into Judea (region including Jerusalem), leaving the city for rural areas where people were more receptive, while Jerusalem’s religious establishment plotted against him.
- Towns Aenon and Salim: exact locations unknown; names imply springs/water, suggesting ample water for baptisms.

- Concurrent Baptisms and Roles
 - Jesus spent time with disciples while baptizing occurred—performed by his disciples, not Jesus himself (to be detailed in John 4).
 - John the Baptist also baptized in the same region; this was before John’s imprisonment. Timeframe plausibly late 28 AD or early 29 AD, within the first year to eighteen months of Jesus’s ministry. Jesus would later relocate ministry base to Galilee/Capernaum due to greater receptivity.
- Discussion on Purification and Possible Visitor
 - John’s disciples had a discussion with “a Jew” (singular per newer translations) about purification. Some theorize this Jew might have been Nicodemus, intrigued yet confused and seeking more; though interesting and plausible, there is no proof.
 - Jews wrestled with giving up centuries of rituals/ceremonies (sacrifices, annual Passover sin forgiveness) in favor of repentance and once-for-all forgiveness through Jesus, creating confusion.
- Perceived Competition and John’s Response
 - John’s disciples worried that crowds were flocking to Jesus and leaving John. John rejects competition: this shift is intended—Jesus flourishing, John decreasing.
 - John’s declaration: “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven... I am not the Christ... He must increase, but I must decrease.”
 - John affirms divine calling: God gave him a time-bound ministry, words, and place; he came to reveal Messiah, not to build his own ministry or attract attention to himself.
- Wedding Analogy: Bridegroom and Best Man
 - Drawing on familiar wedding traditions (as seen in Cana, week-long celebrations, focus on bridegroom), John explains roles:
 - Bride = Church of Christ.
 - Bridegroom = Jesus, coming to claim his bride.
 - Friend of the bridegroom (best man) = John the Baptist, who prepares the way and rejoices at the bridegroom’s voice; he is not and will never be the groom.
 - Israel was intended as Jehovah’s bride but repeatedly went after strange gods; after the resurrection, at Pentecost, Israel would be set aside for a season (still ongoing), and the Church becomes Christ’s bride.
- Five Reasons Christ is Superior (John’s Dissertation)
 - Origin and Perspective: Jesus comes from heaven; above all. John is from the earth, speaks as human; Jesus possesses heavenly perspective.
 - Source and Standard of Truth: Jesus has seen and heard truth firsthand from God and testifies it; he is the standard of truth. Anything outside what Jesus says is false; John cannot create or define truth.
 - Unity with the Father: Christ and God are always in agreement—one and the same, never contradictory—whereas humans (including John) exhibit contradictions.

- Fullness of the Spirit: Jesus receives the Spirit without measure; the Holy Spirit is his constant source of wisdom, power, and truth. John receives Spirit-given wisdom “as needed,” in parts, not the fullness at once.
- Supreme Reign: The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hands. Jesus participated in creation and sustains it—reigns supreme over all creation.
- Final Division and Abiding Wrath (John 3:36)
 - “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” (present possession). “He who does not obey the Son will not see life; the wrath of God abides on him.”
 - The study’s title “Abide” (for John) emphasizes dwelling in Christ. Here, John uses “abide” solemnly: the lost who reject Jesus will abide forever in damnation with Satan in the lake of fire—eternal torment—because they chose the wrong abiding.

4. Nicodemus’s Journey Across John’s Gospel

- Initial Encounter (John 3)
 - Nicodemus, a Pharisee and teacher, visits Jesus at night, grappling with water, wind, and light metaphors and spiritual rebirth. Likely not saved that night due to the weight of tradition and the amount to process.
- Midpoint Advocacy (John 7)
 - Amid the scribes’ and Pharisees’ fury at Jesus, Nicodemus urges a fair hearing, questioning their rush to condemn without understanding—signs of growing openness and defense of Jesus.
- Later Act of Devotion (John 19)
 - Joseph of Arimathea (a secret disciple) obtains Jesus’s body with Pilate’s permission; Nicodemus accompanies him, bringing about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. Together they wrap the body with spices and linen per Jewish custom and lay it in a nearby new tomb in a garden on the day of preparation.
 - John explicitly identifies this Nicodemus as the same man who earlier visited Jesus at night. The lecturer concludes Nicodemus was very likely saved, with a process unfolding from early to mid to late stages, culminating in clear belief that Jesus is the Son of God.

Assignments

- 1. Review John 3:1–21, noting each metaphor (water, wind, light) and write a brief explanation of how each illustrates the Holy Spirit’s work in new birth.
- 2.
 2. Read Ezekiel’s cleansing passage and list differences between ceremonial cleansing and Christian baptism, and why baptism is not the means of salvation.
- 3.
 3. Memorize John 3:16–18 and write a reflection on God’s prior love versus the misconception that the cross enabled God to love.
- 4.

4. Compile the “whosoever” references (Matthew 16; Romans 10; 1 John 4; Luke 9; Acts 10; Matthew 7; Mark 8; John 4; Mark 11) and summarize the traits of those who are the “whosoever.”
5.
5. Study John 3:22–36 and outline John the Baptist’s five reasons for Christ’s superiority; include the wedding analogy and “He must increase, but I must decrease.”
6.
6. Trace Nicodemus’s appearances (John 3, 7, 19) and write a short essay on his progression toward faith.
7.
7. Prepare for next week’s study of John 4 by reading the chapter and noting references to baptism practices and Jesus’s interaction in Galilee/Capernaum.