

John 3:1-13 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. (2) He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." (3) In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (4) "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (5) Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. (6) Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (7) You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' (8) The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (9) "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. (10) "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? (11) I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. (12) I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? (13) No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.

Let's pause and ask God's blessing on our study this morning. Father, we thank You for Your Word. We've come here to learn about you, and I pray that your spirit makes real the things that are said this morning for your honor and glory in Jesus name, amen.

There were five leading political and religious groups in Israel at the time. They were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Zealots, and Essenes. While the Essenes are not mentioned in the Bible, they are mentioned in secular scripture and were a very austere, disciplined group of people. The Pharisees and Sadducees are the most mentioned in the Bible, and they were enemies of each other. The Pharisees were a religious/political group but were religious first and political second. They would be considered "right wing" people. They believed in the Old Testament from cover to cover. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, angels, demons, and were scholars of the law. They were pretty good, solid individuals. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were an aristocratic priestly group influential in the temple and the Sanhedrin. They were more political than religious and most of them were well off. They controlled the temple and all the offerings, which is why they became so wealthy. They did not believe anything not written in the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament.) They also did not believe in miracles, demons, angels, or the resurrection of the dead. They were pretty much secular humanists by nature, and they were primarily interested in maintaining their money and power. They would never ever want to upset who was empowered over them, because they wanted things to coast along as they had been.

The apostle Paul was a Pharisee, and he used this animus to his advantage. For example, in Acts 23 Paul is standing trial in front of the Sanhedrin, which is made up of 71 men. This would be the equivalent of the Supreme Court of Israel. Rome ruled Israel, but let the Sanhedrin do as they wanted, except they could not sentence someone to death. The Sanhedrin accused Paul of blasphemy for saying he had a vision from God when he said

that Gentiles could be saved along with the Jews

Acts 22:21 "Then the Lord said to me, "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.""

The Jews did not like that and were ready to kill him. As Paul addresses the court he uses his status as a Pharisee to divide the court:

Acts 23:1-10 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." (2) At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. (3) Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" (4) Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?" (5) Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'" (6) Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." (7) When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (8) (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) (9) There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" (10) The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

The Sanhedrin studied the Bible so much that it became ludicrous. They were tied up in the details of the law instead of the things of God. For example: *Exodus 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy"* is a single verse. The Jewish scholars wrote a book called the Mishna that had 24 chapters just to interpret that one verse. Then another book called The Talmud had 156 pages describing and interpreting what the Mishna had described and interpreted about that one verse! Their interpretation of the law became so technical, it sounded like the legislation the USA Congress passes.

For instance, if you tied knots for a living, then on the Sabbath day, you could not tie a knot, because it would be labor. In other words, if you didn't tie a knot through the week, then you could tie a knot on the Sabbath. If you happened to be a farmer, or sailor that tied knots in their work, then they couldn't tie a knot on the Sabbath day. However, a woman could tie a knot in her girdle, or tie knot in a scarf because that was essential to what they had to do to dress properly. So if a farmer needed to get water on the Sabbath day, he couldn't go to a well and tie a rope to a bucket because he'd have to tie a knot and that would be Labor on the Sabbath. What he could do is tie the rope to his wife's girdle, and then tie the girdle to the bucket and lower that

down and get the water. They carried their legalism to an extreme.

Nicodemus, according to secular history, was a very wealthy man, possibly the fourth richest man in Judea. So he was a man of prominence. *He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."*

It's interesting that he came at night instead of the daytime. Perhaps he wanted to keep his meeting secret from the other Jewish leaders or didn't want to be interrupted.

Nicodemus is well learned in the law and he calls Christ "Rabbi," or teacher, my master. Then he says, *We know you're from God, because of the miraculous signs you perform.*

Who is the "we" he's talking about? Most likely some of the Pharisees have been talking among themselves about the many miracles that Jesus was performing.

If Nicodemus was expecting Christ to exchange pleasantries, he must have been surprised when Jesus cut to the chase: *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

I'll guarantee that Nicodemus was taken back by Christ's abruptness. It wasn't that Christ was rude, it was because Christ doesn't see one man above another man. Look at John 2:25 where it says *He (Christ) did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.*

He knew why Nicodemus came to see him. The one thing that was on the mind of every Pharisee was the coming kingdom of God, because they wanted to be delivered from Rome. They wanted God to send a Messiah to rule and have Rome bow down to them. When Nicodemus came and politely introduced himself to Christ, Christ in essence said *"Nicodemus, you're never going to see the kingdom of God."* Think about that for a moment. Jesus declared, *I tell you the truth.* Your Bible translation may say, Verily, verily, the word is amen in the original, which means it is so, it is so. In a way what he was saying:

"Listen to me Nicodemus, what I'm about to tell you is very important. No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born from above. Nicodemus, I can see right through you I know you want to talk about the kingdom. I know you're interested in the kingdom, and I know you're not qualified to enter into the kingdom."

Nicodemus then asked a very legitimate question in. *John 3:4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"*

Nicodemus just doesn't get it. He says, "I don't know how to be born again. I don't know how I can reenter my mother's womb!"

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."

That is an interesting statement. There are five interpretations of this verse.

1. The first interpretation is that he's talking about water baptism. You have to be baptized by water and you have to be born again by the Spirit.
2. The second interpretation is that the water spoken of is referring to the Word of God. There are scriptures that talk about being washed with the water of the word, cleansed by the water of the word.
3. Others believe it's referring to repentance as taught by John the Baptist. (John the Baptist's message was repent and be baptized.)
4. The fourth possibility is that it's talking about being cleansed by God or the Holy Spirit. There are scriptures in the Old and New Testaments that talk about being cleansed by God.
5. The fifth possibility is that it's the process of a natural birth, referring to a woman's water breaking before the birth of a baby. This fits well with the next verse which says *Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*

There's only one doctrine out of all of these that really makes much of a difference for us. Is water baptism a requirement for salvation? We need to know what God says. First, I want to explain something about the word baptize. It does not mean to immerse, no matter how many Baptist preachers tell you it does. When this was first written the word baptize meant to "identify with." Over centuries the meaning has changed to mean to "immerse." "Baptize" means to identify with.

There are seven baptisms mentioned in the Bible.

1. The first baptism that we're going to look at is the baptism of John, and it is a baptism to repentance. The baptism of John the Baptist is not the same baptism that you and I experience when we have believers baptism. Paul defines it for us in chapter 19 of Acts. He was conversing with some men he didn't know and they said something that wasn't right. They didn't sound like believers.

Acts 19:1-5 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples (2) and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." (3) So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. (4) Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." (5) On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul explained that they needed to believe in Christ to be saved. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance which was for the people of Israel and no one else.

2. Baptism of Jesus: Jesus was baptized by John "The Baptist." Jesus had no sins to wash away, so he was baptized to identify him as a member of the human race.

3. Baptism of fire:

Matthew 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Luke 3:16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

So, what does it mean to be baptized with fire? It is the cleansing process that God puts you through as he works the process of sanctification in your life. Some of you were not very much like Christ a few years ago. But today, you're much more like Christ than you were then. God has been working in your life removing the impurities of your life. It's something that starts the moment you believe in Christ, and will be with you until the day you die.

4. Baptism of the Holy Spirit:

Romans 6:3-4 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (4) We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

1Co 12:13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

The moment you believe in Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit identifies you with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You're free from the old sin nature at that point, and you are identified with the organism called the body of Christ

5. Baptism of the living for the dead:

The only reference to this is found in 1 Corinthians 15.

1Corinthians 15:29 Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?

The Mormons believe that living people can be baptized for dead people. Their thinking is that if they could baptize everyone who ever lived, then everyone would get to heaven. They use genealogy to find the people to be baptized. The context of this passage is that some of the Corinthian's were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul was making the argument that if there is no resurrection, then not even Christ has been raised and if so, faith in Christ is worthless. 1 Corinthians 15:29 is not a justification for baptizing the dead, but Paul was saying *If you don't believe there's a resurrection, why are you doing that?* In other words, why baptize somebody for somebody that's dead if they can't come

back to life anyway?

6. Baptism of Moses:

1Corinthians 10:1-2 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. (2) They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

This is not about being immersed in water, as the only people who were immersed were the Egyptians and their chariots. None of them survived. It's about Moses obeying God and stretching his hand over the sea and seeing the sea part. And all the people identified with the calmness of Moses.

Exodus 14:31 When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.

They were baptized into Moses, because the word means identified with.

7. Believers baptism: Is a testimony that you're partaking in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

An example of that is given in Acts 8, when Philip meets an Ethiopian eunuch who gets saved while Philip is talking to him.

Acts 8:26-39 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) (27) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, (28) and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. (29) Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." (30) Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (31) And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (32) Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. (33) "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH." (34) The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone

else?" (35) Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. (36) As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" (37) [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."] (38) And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. (39) When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.

Do we have to be baptized to be saved? The perfect answer is found in [Ephesians 4:5](#) *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*, --- Paul is writing about the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. There's one faith in Jesus Christ, no other faith counts, and there is but one baptism. This baptism is the one that the Holy Spirit does for you. The moment you believe in Jesus Christ you are identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. I don't know how he does this, but you are supernaturally taken back to that point when Christ was alive on the earth.

The best way I know how to explain it is if your great, great granddad died when he was three years old, where would you be today? You wouldn't be here. You were in your granddad back then, your great great granddad. In the same way, we are taken back and were put into Christ. We were put into his death first, according to

[Romans 6:3-7](#) *Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, (6) knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; (7) for he who has died is freed from sin.*

You have three enemies in this world, the world, the flesh and the devil. Jesus said, Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. Referring to the devil, he said: *The one is in us greater than he that's in the world.* (1 John 4:4). You may say, "Well, I just do things because I have this old sin nature, it makes me sin." Your old sin nature can no longer **make** you sin, because the old sin nature lost its power over you the moment you put your trust in Christ. The old sin nature is still alive, but it has no dominion over you unless you give it dominion. When you're raised again, you're raised to walk in the newness of life, and you're identified with his resurrection. That means you can walk in power and live for him, which is the baptism that is spoken of in Ephesians 4:5.

(If you're a believer that's never been baptized after your salvation, then you are living outside of the will of God, and you should be baptized. The Lord Jesus has mandated, two ordinances, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.)

So, do we have to be baptized in water to be saved? The answer is no.

Requiring water baptism would be a work of man and man can't do anything to help his old dead nature become alive again. Also, Scripture reports that many people were saved without being baptized. For example, the woman at the well became a believer in Christ and she wasn't baptized, nor was the criminal who was crucified next to Christ. In fact, the apostle Paul didn't do much baptizing himself, and surely he would have if it was required for salvation. He said this in First Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:14-16 I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, (15) so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (16) (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)

*John 3:3-5 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, 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? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

When Jesus says "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water, and the spirit", I think He is referring to physical birth. My reason is based on verse 6.

John 3:6-8 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (7) You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' (8) The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

I want to tell you something. Be very careful about trying to be the "Holy Spirit" in someone else's life. This verse says that God is sovereign, and he will do with people as he sees fit. I don't know who's going to be saved next and I don't know what God's going to do with someone after He has saved them. I do know that He's not going to contradict scripture, because he doesn't contradict himself. He may want to do something with you that I know nothing about.

Romans 9:14-18 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! (15) For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (16) It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. (17) For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (18) Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

If you're saved, I hope you drop your head and say, "God, thank you for saving me." You can't do it by yourself. You can't repent of enough sins, you can't be baptized enough times.

Salvation is the work of the Spirit in your life.

There's a big debate that's been raging for years - when is a person actually saved? For instance, are they saved when they step out of an aisle and start walking down to the front of a church? Are they saved when they pray the sinner's prayer? Are they saved when they turn to God intentionally? I want to tell you something. God did not mean for us to cut this up into pieces of pie. When you put your trust, when you turn to the Savior of the world, when you turn toward him, and you accept what he's done for you - You're saved. I don't know how to say it any better. It's believing in Christ. It's the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is no kind of program that we can put together that's going to win a bunch of people to Christ, except sharing the good news, which is something that we're supposed to do. When Christ saved you, He didn't just save you from hell. He made you into something brand new. You're not what you were. You're born from above. Why act like you're something that you used to be, or somebody from the Old Testament. You don't find God taking somebody who's hard and worn and resuscitating it, or refurbishing this old house kind of thing. He takes the old out and makes you a brand new creation.

As a learned Pharisee, Nicodemus should have known this, and Jesus took him to task by questioning how he could be a teacher and not understand.

John 3:9-11 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" (10) Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? (11) Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

Look at Ezekiel 36:24-27.

Ezekiel 36:24-27 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. (25) I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. (26) And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

This is exactly what Christ was talking to Nicodemus about. He said to Nicodemus, you're a teacher of Israel. You don't know this stuff? How then can you be a teacher when you don't even know about a new heart? This is stuff Nicodemus should have known.

You need to know that God is not planning on coming down here and refurbishing this world to make it a nice comfortable place. He's going to burn it up. He's going to build a new one. God has a plan. He wants you to have a new heart, and make a new person out of you. So it's not just your sins washed away, it is that you have become someone new.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (18) All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (20) Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

We are His ambassadors. We're new creatures, we have a new heart, and we live a new life. And lastly, God wants us to share our faith. When was the last time you shared with somebody that Jesus Christ can make you a new person? It has probably been too long. It's our job. It's our business. Everything I'm to do in life (not because I'm a preacher, but because I'm a saved, redeemed individual), I am to reflect who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for the world, to those who don't know him. So are you. You have a responsibility. No one's going to swat you if you don't, but there will be a day when you wish you had. I want to encourage you, I implore you, share Christ with others. Do it your way. Share that you're a new creature, act like you're a new creature, and live like you're a new creature.

If Christ is not your Savior, then I'm going to ask that you receive Him and become new in him.

Now Father, I pray that we will live for you like we've never lived for you before. I pray that because we're new creatures in you, it has really come home that we've been born from above, that we should live the lives that you want us to live for your honor and glory in Jesus name. Amen.