

God of the Promise | Part 5 | Pastor Steve Wells | 02.06.2022
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John 3:5 (ESV)⁵ *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*

John 3:5 has been misunderstood by many! When some read Christ's words: "*unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*" they erroneously assume that Christ is making a reference to baptism. These same people see the term "water" and equate it to baptism. Logically this would lead one to believe that Christ is mandating baptism as a requirement for salvation! This understanding of the text could not be farther from the truth. While reading this text we must remember one key principle for interpreting scripture: **Context! Context! Context!** When one is studying scripture, we need to be sure to read the scripture in context. In other words, we must seek to understand the culture and genre of the specific text. We must also look at the scriptures immediately before and after the proposed verse, so that we may understand the message the Biblical author was trying to convey.

In the case of John 3:5, Christ and Nicodemus are having intellectual banter back and forth. Christ is trying to teach Nicodemus that for someone to enter the kingdom of heaven they must be spiritually made new. The theological term for this phrase is regeneration. This is the moment in which God removes one's heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh—the Holy Spirit indwells them, and they are saved. What Christ is essentially saying is that unless one is regenerated, they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. So, what does this have to do with verse 5? EVERYTHING! Christ uses a metaphor to distinguish between physical birth and spiritual birth. When He says that one must be "born of water" He is referring to embryonic fluid and the "water breaking" of one's physical birth. The second half of the verse "and Spirit" is referring to the spiritual renewal that comes from regeneration. This interpretation is made clear in verse 6 which says: "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" As we let scripture interpret scripture, we see that the water referred to is a matter of the flesh.

Let it also be known that Nicodemus would have no concept of Trinitarian Baptism (baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) because it would not be introduced until the great commission given by Christ in Matthew 28:18-20. Also, another acceptable understanding of John 3:5 is to understand that the Spirit is often described in Scripture like flowing water (See Titus 3:4-7). We are to understand Christian Baptism as an outward action that we do that represents the work that God has done within us spiritually. Baptism is important but it is not a requirement for salvation. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone because of the work of Christ alone. If one attempts to add any other requirements to salvation, then they have added works to salvation which the Apostle Paul clearly explains is incorrect (See Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 2:16). We should always strive to read and understand verses in context, interpreting scripture with scripture that we may grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Questions/Prompts:

- It is not uncommon for teens or adults to desire baptism, even though they were baptized as children or infants. Sometimes these decisions were decisions made for them by their parents, or perhaps they simply just didn't feel like they fully understood their decision to be baptized.
 - Does this describe anyone in the group?
 - If you can, share your experience.
- Share your Baptism Story - Take turns sharing your story about your decision to follow Christ in believer's baptism.