

In John Chapter 3 verse 5 we have these words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of ~~Heaven~~ God." Jesus spoke these words to a man who was a Pharisee. This man was the opitomy of religion, for a Pharisee went to the temple at least three times a day and prayed seven long prayers a day. The Pharisees, along with the Scribes, had invented many religious traditional activities and laws under which they would put themselves. Many of the Pharisees would blindfold themselves and walk down the street so that they would not be lured away from God and into the world. The Lord Jesus upbraided these Pharisees because their religious traditions had actually nullified the Word of God. Of course, religion invariably distorts the truth of the Word of God and is incompatible with it. The Lord Jesus says, "Verily, verily." "Verily, verily" is used 25 times by the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of John. It could be rendered, "Of a truth, of a truth." This expression was employed only when the Lord Jesus was about to mention something that was very important. Thus, it is stated twice for emphasis--"of a truth, of a truth." That means that we should pay very close attention to what follows these "verily, verily's" as they're found in the Gospel of John. Regeneration is synonymous with the new birth, but there are those who have actually misinterpreted or confused this verse with what the new birth actually is because they have interpreted this verse to mean that when one is "born of water and of the Spirit" they are baptized. So they take the word "water" literally, and say it means not only water baptism, but many believe that it means infant baptism. They believe that when they are baptized as an infant that is when they are born again. This is referred to theologically as "baptismal regeneration." As the result of the sprinkling of an infant by a minister in a church they are then brought into the family of God. The Bible knows nothing of infant baptism; in fact, there isn't one shred of this found in the Scriptures from Genesis to the Book of Revelation. And really, its contrary to the grace of God, for you see, baptism or baptizing infants could not remove that which Christ already took care of on the cross, nor can that religious work be a way in which to appropriate that grace for then it would not be of faith, but really it would be of works. There are those that reject the doctrine of baptismal regeneration for infants, and teach that this is for adults. They say that faith and repentance and water baptism are indispensable and absolutely necessary in order to be saved. Now here again this is not true, for baptism is in no wise essential to salvation. It does not form even one of the conditions which God requires for the sinner in order to become a child of God. You see, if baptism were necessary for salvation, then really no one would have been saved before the days of John the Baptist. In fact, even the Baptism of John was unto repentance for a nation, and was a badge whereby those who had acknowledge the fact that John the Baptist was laying out the red carpet as the forerunner of the Lord

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TRUTH

WATER
BAPTISM

Jesus, that his message in connection with the Messiah that was following him was valid. They identified themselves with John through this baptism. You will not find baptism in the Old Testament, and that would mean, of course, that all of those who lived before John the Baptist as far as water baptism is concerned, would be lost. If baptism was necessary for salvation, then every professing believer that died during this present age of grace is lost if he died without being baptized. Of course, this would shut heaven's door to the penitent thief who hung upon the cross who God promised eternal life to apart from baptism. Quakers, members of the Salvation Army, and the vast majority of those who have been true Christians who have never been baptized would be shut out of heaven if water baptism was essential for eternal life. If baptism, as far as water in a ritual is concerned, is necessary for salvation, then of course, we must thoroughly ignore every passage in God's Word which teaches that salvation is by grace alone, and not of works. There are 150 passages in the New Testament which teach that salvation is conditioned on believing alone. There are 35 passages which teach that salvation depends upon faith alone. Of course, faith and belief are synonyms. There are 82 passages where it says "Believe and confess sins," or "believe and pray," "Believe and be baptized," "Believe and repent," "Believe and make restitution." There are actually six added subjects mentioned in the Scriptures, but in those areas their intended meaning is fully understood in the context. The thrust of salvation is always, "You are saved by grace, through faith." The Gospel is that Jesus Christ died for your sins, was buried, and arose again. Through faith in that finished work results in God imputing to you a righteousness which is compatible to His own. What does the word "water" mean then in JOHN 3:5? Well, as we take it through the Gospel of John we find in John 4, for example, the Lord Jesus making reference to water. Here He is speaking to the woman at the well in John 4:14, and he says, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give them shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Was this literal water? You see, one has but to ask the question to answer it clearly. Water as here used was implematic. Again, in John 7:37,38, we're told, "In the last days, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying, If any man let him thirst let him come unto me and drink." How does he drink? "He that believeth on me as the scriptures have said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Here too the word water is not to be understood literally, but rather implematically. These passages in John's Gospel are sufficient to warn us from giving the word in John 3:5 a figurative meaning. In other words, the water used here can be defined in I Pet. 1:23, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." The new birth is defined as to its agency in I Pet. 1:23. In Eph. 5:26 it says, "We are sanctified by the washing

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of the water by the Word." Thus, the Word of God and the Spirit of God that authored the Word always work together in connection with the salvation of a soul. The water is in reference to the word of God; thus we are told to "preach the word." All through the Word of God it is given the ability to save. God employs a number of emblems really in describing the Word of God. The Word is likened to a lamp in Psalm 119:5, because it illumines. It is likened unto a hammer in Jeremiah 23:29, because it breaks up the stony heart. It is likened unto water because it cleanses (Psalm 119:9). And in John 15:3 and Ephesians 5:26. To be born of water means to be born of the cleansing, purifying Word of God. In James 1:18 it says that we have been begotten by the Word of truth. In James 1:25 it says, "Receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls." Thus, the commission given to the Apostles was always to preach the Word. Never was a commission given to administer the gospel by way of a ritual or rite. Thus, the Apostle Paul himself said in I Cor. 1:17, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." Thus, the Gospel centers around the cross; and through the cross one obtains eternal life if their faith is placed in that finished work. And if you add a religious rite or ritual or work to the cross of Christ and faith in that alone, invariably your faith is no longer in the finished work of Christ, but rather, it is in that rite which he participated in. I have talked to many people who believe that they were saved through a sacrament. If you ask them how they know they are saved they become very hesitant, because when your faith is in a work it must be maintained by a work; thus, they are cognizant of the fact that they may fail this year or next week. They are not absolutely sure, but they say that their faith is in the fact that at one time they were baptized. Now try to reconcile that with Paul when he said, "I thank God that I baptized none of you" in I Cor. 1. Then he goes on to say in verse 18, "For Christ sent me not to baptize." Now baptism plays a part after one is saved, and baptism in the Word of God always follows salvation, for it is a privilege for a child of God. Invariably in the Word of God you always have the word "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" then baptism follows, which is a privilege but adds nothing to salvation. So Paul said to the Corinthians, "You heard the word, you believe the word, then as a result, you were baptized." "Being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible by the Word of God." Have you been born by way of the Word? Is your faith in the Word of God? I hope it is.

WATER
OF
GOD

WORKS
VS
GRACE

THE NEW BIRTH #32

I would like to draw an analogy between the mystery of physical birth and the deeper mystery of the spiritual birth or the second birth.

The development and birth of a physical baby is indeed a mystery, but the mystery of the new birth is even deeper. I would like to bring out a parallel or similarity between these two births.

When one is born physically, they receive a life for which they had done nothing, and in which they had no part. It is the gift of the parents. They generated a life and paid the price for it in pain and labor and blood. All you or I did was receive that life. And so it is with the new birth. It is actually the work of another. By nature we are born dead in trespasses and sins. As a dead man we are helpless and we are hopeless. The new life, therefore, must come from elsewhere, outside of ourselves. Jesus Christ left the glories of heaven to bring that life. He said, "For I come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." That statement is in reference to his resurrected life, which is now available to all those who receive him as their very own personal saviour. When a child is born into this world, he is born of natural parents and receives three things as a natural born baby: 1. He receives a position, a legal standing, in a family, 2. He also receives a name which identifies him as a member of that family, and 3. He also receives a nature which is the nature of that family. This is also true when one is born again spiritually. The moment that sinner is born again or born from above he receives a legal position in the family of God, and becomes a child of God. As it is put in John 1:12, "To as many as received him (Christ), to them gives he the power to become the sons of God." This, we call justification. That means that the righteousness of God is imputed to one who accepts Christ as their personal saviour. My wife and I have seven children, and they have been given a position in our family. On occasions, I am displeased with them, and as a result, I must reprimand them. On occasions they must be punished. But, you see, irregardless of whether I pat them on the head and am exceedingly pleased with them, or pat them on the sitter because I'm displeased with them, the position they have been given in the family never changes. The same principle holds true with the family of God. Once you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and given by God a position in Christ, you have a quality of life that's not renewed semiannually, nor is it something that you can quickly discard; it is a life which is eternal in quality, everlasting in nature, and it is perpetuated throughout the endless ages of eternity. Thus, this position that you are given in Christ can never change. This is the beauty and the glory of the Gospel. Through your first physical birth you obtain a nature. That nature is sinful and looks out for number one. That nature seeks to exalt self and to be in the limelight and glorify itself and please and satisfy itself. But, you see, when the Spirit of God comes into the heart and life

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of that one who accepts Christ, the Spirit of God seeks to exalt Christ.

Frequently parents say to their children that they should or shouldn't do things because it doesn't befit the name of their family. This is another principle that follows in the Word of God, for // a child of God. You see, there are some things that are beneath the dignity of the child of God. Because they were beneath the dignity of the Son of God, they are beneath the dignity of a child of God or one who is in Christ. You see, there are many things that a child of God does not do because it is not befitting to his position as a child of God. There is true humility in the Godhead, for Jesus Christ came down to earth to glorify the Father. The Father was glorified in the Son. The Lord Jesus said, "It's expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come. When he comes, he will not speak of himself, but he will speak of me." Thus, when the Spirit of God comes into the heart and life of a child of God, it desires to exalt the Lord Jesus. When I accept Christ as my Saviour the Spirit of God comes in for the purpose of exalting the Lord Jesus. This is a new nature, as well as a new position. This nature is inherited from God. And of course, if God's nature dwells in you that nature would not encourage you to rob banks or to be immoral or to lie, cheat, and steal, or to do what normally comes natural through your physical birth. The very nature that one receives when they accept Christ is a God-like nature, a nature of righteousness.

The second thing that the believer receives when he accepts Christ as his personal Saviour is a name. As a child inherits the family name of his parents by his natural birth, so the moment a sinner comes to Christ and places their faith in him, he becomes a Christian, a Christ-one or one in whom Jesus Christ lives. That's the simplest definition of a Christian. "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). In Acts 11:26 it says, "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." It would appear as though when they were called Christians this was not a compliment to those disciples, but rather, it was a means of identifying the fact that they were not followers of the Lord Jesus. This is the name the true child of God bears. In Acts 4:12 it says, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved." That is the lovely name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, the Gospel of Christ centers around the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the name under which God is operating today. So, you see, to proclaim a message and leave out the name of the Lord Jesus Christ means I have no message at all. Those cults and -isms which preach names which God at one time employed, such as "Jehovah" miss the whole principle of the New Testament gospel of grace. For Paul says, "I don't want to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

That was the Apostle Paul's ambition, and he was used of God to write (numerically speaking) about half of the New Testament. This was Peter's desire as well. Jesus Christ is the central theme of the Word of God, and of course, he is the center of the Gospel of God. When I accept him as my Savior I now bear his name. I have his name because I am in him. We are also told that one day in the future when we receive our glorified bodies we are going to obtain new names. So we sing the song, "There's a New Name Written Down in Glory, and it's mine. Yes, it's mine." So we wait for that new name which will befit that new glorified body that will be fashioned just like the Lord Jesus' glorified body. Every child of God, then, has a standing in Christ. He also has a name which identifies him with the Lord Jesus Christ. He also has within him a new divine nature, which is the nature of Christ. This is really how Christ is represented through the child of God. In II Peter 1:4 it says, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lusts." Then he goes on to tell the children of God how to be diligent in utilizing this divine nature, & In verse 3 the divine power that is given to every believer. Every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, referred to as a "divine nature." We might say that every born again man is two men, for when he receives a new life (born again), he not only receives a new life, but he still retains the old man, the flesh. He is still a soulish man. The new man is of the Spirit, and the old man is corrupt and sinful and is incapable of any spiritual good. In contrast to that, the new man is absolutely perfect and really is incapable of sinning. The Holy Spirit, then, seeks to control the life of the believer. My responsibility now as a believer is to allow the Spirit of God by the Word of God to have his way in my life. In Ephesians 4:22 it says, "Put off, therefore, concerning your former way of life, the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts." Verse 24 says, "Put on the new man, which is after God created in righteousness and true holiness." You see, within the child of God there is a struggle. This is normal, because there are two natures now present in the believer--the old nature which seeks to exalt self, and the new nature, or the Holy Spirit, which seeks to exalt Christ. My responsibility is to reckon myself dead to the flesh, dead to self, and by faith allow the Word of God and the Spirit of God to fill that life which is pleasing to the Lord Jesus.

Do you have a position in Christ? Do you truly bear His name? Do you have within you a new divine nature, which you received when you accepted Christ by faith? That means you are in a struggle. "But thanks be unto God who always causes us to triumph in Christ."

I would like to draw your attention to that which should normally follow within the life of one who has been born again. This, in turn, will enable you to determine how old you are spiritually.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

We have noticed that there is a parallel presented by the Word of God between the physical and spiritual realms. As the physical life begins with a physical birth, and growth then is a normal result, so spiritual life begins with a birth, and growth then should be the normal result. If a physical baby fails to mature mentally and physically, it is considered abnormal. If a new-born child of God does not grow spiritually, it too is considered by the Word of God as being abnormal. For the normal pattern of a believer is to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:18). In I Peter 1:23 we have this statement concerning how one begins the Christian life--"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." This is the starting point of the Christian life. One must be born from above. The new birth is through personal faith in the Gospel of Christ. In I Peter 1:24 it says, "But the Word of the Lord endureth forever, and this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." The Gospel centers around the Lord Jesus Christ, the fact that Jesus Christ died for me, was buried for me, and he arose for me. The benefits of all that he purchased there upon that Cross was for me, and they become mine when I personally place my faith in the living Word and allow it to become a living reality in me, and allow this living, resurrected Christ to take up residence within me. The Spirit of God also comes in; in fact, the Trinity becomes an inner living reality within the heart and life of the one who truly places their faith in the fact that Christ died for them, was buried for them, and arose for them, and all that he now is becomes the possession of one who simply receives from him all that Christ offers in Himself. Have you been born again? Have you experienced the new birth? Have you placed your faith in Jesus Christ so that the Word of God has become alive in you and you know you have been born again? When I'm born again, it says in Galatians 4:6, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Translated, Abba means Papa. When I'm born again the Spirit of God comes into my heart, and I can call my heavenly Father, "Daddy" or "Papa." This is the literal translation, and this is what happens the moment I am born again. When I exercise my personal faith in response to the Gospel which has been presented to me. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (ROMans 10:17).

As we move on, it says in I PEter 2:2, "As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." We're moving on into the concept or the principle of maturity. The moment one accepts Christ as their personal Saviour, they become a babe in Christ. That means that if one is 84 years of age physically, when that person accepts Christ at that physical age they are still referred to in the Word of God as a

"newborn babe" in Christ. From that point on they begin to mature, but of course, at that physical age they would not have enough time left physically to mature very greatly. There are advantages in accepting Christ as a young person. The reason for that is that they have an entire physical life ahead, many more years that they can use to glorify Christ and to gain those reward at the judgment seat of Christ, which the older person would not have. Someone has said that when a young person accepts Jesus Christ as their Saviour, God then receives and has at his disposal an entire life to use for Himself. When an older person gets saved, though they are saved and have eternal life, there isn't much life left to be used for the glory of Christ. This is the reason why Ecclesiastes 12:1 says that one should look to their Creator "in the days of thine youth" before the "evil day" comes upon them. "Evil day" is in reference to the fact that their flesh becomes old. Their body becomes weak. They cannot see, hear, and manipulate themselves as they could have at one time. So, the point that we're after here is that there is a starting point, and all who receive Christ as their personal Saviour become babes in Christ. From that position as a baby they then should move on into maturity. From a baby, they would move on into the age of adolescence. From adolescence they would move on into a mature father in the faith. This is how John puts it in the epistle of I John 2:12-13. "I write unto young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you little children, because you have known the Father. I write unto you little children, because you know your sins are forgiven. I write unto you fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning." Now notice here that John puts every believer into one of three classifications--little children, young men, and fathers. Really every child of God falls into one of those three categories. If you are a child of God you are either a babe in Christ, or you are a young man in Christ (an adolescent), or you are a mature father in the faith. Now I might say that this group, fathers, would have the smallest number, for there aren't too many fathers in the faith. Paul mentions this to the Corinthians. He said, "You have not many fathers in the faith," and that is very true. Most believers are babes. This is normal when you first get saved, but abnormal when over a period of time they should have grown to be at least an adolescent, and going on into maturity when they could say that they are now a father in the faith. The reason for the fact that so many are still babes in Christ is because of their failure to use the Word of God, to learn the Word of God, to study the Word of God, and to put themselves under the hearing of the Word of God where they could learn the Word of God as they should. This is normal and natural for a new babe in Christ. I might say that there is a difference in the Word of God between spirituality and maturity. This is often confused within the minds of many believers. Spirituality is a moment by moment concept. You see, I'm

either spiritual or I'm not. Paul says in Ephesians 5:8, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." This admonition to be filled with the Spirit is given to babes in Christ, but it is also given to adolescents and mature believers in Christ. You see, it is possible for the babe in Christ, the adolescent believer, and the mature believer not to be filled with the Spirit. We will discuss the filling of the Spirit more fully another time, but I just want to make this distinction as we discuss maturity. Maybe I could use David as an illustration. David knew the Word of God. He studied the Word of God and memorized it and meditated on it as a young man keeping the sheep in the fields. Many of the Psalms that he sang are recorded in the Book of Psalms. As a teenager he whipped a giant by the name of Goliath as he stood on the promises of God. He eventually became king and ruled the entire nation of Israel. But, as a mature giant in the faith, when he should have been on the front lines fighting for the Lord he was sleeping in mornings. As a result of walking on his roof when he should have been fighting on the front lines for the Lord, he saw a very beautiful girl next door on another roof. This resulted in David committing adultery. It also resulted in him having her husband murdered. This means that David at this juncture in his life, though very mature, was backslidden. The New Testament word is carnal. That meant that he no longer was obeying the Word of God or was under the domination of the Spirit of God, though he was mature. That means he took his life in his own hands and indulged in that which his flesh wanted to indulge in. So he was carnal, though mature. One can be carnal at any point in time, and one can be spiritual at any point in time, but spirituality is not received on an installment plan basis, nor can one become more spiritual. However, one can become more mature. When one accepts Christ as their Saviour he has all of the Holy Spirit he will ever receive. The difference is that the spirit of God wants to get ahold of more of me and more of you. He wants to use us more and more. That comes through a process of growth. As I grow, the Spirit of God can accomplish exactly that. Let's say, by way of illustration, that you wanted to be an accomplished pianist. How could you become that? Would it not take practice daily? Then weeks of practice, months of practice, years of practice? And after a period of one then could say if they were diligent, "I am an accomplished pianist." Really, this would be true in any area where a person becomes accomplished. It takes time and experience. As a result of knowing Christ, if I spend time with his Word, the Spirit of God can take that Word and apply it to practical situations, problems, trials, and tests that I'm confronted with day by day, and coupled together the Word of God can become real to me as I take these truths and apply them to each practical given situation that I find myself in from day to day.

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