

## ENTERING THE CHURCH

Last week we considered the supreme importance that the church has in the New Testament. We found that Christ and the church cannot be separated, and that one cannot have Christ in his heart without being a member of the church. We observed that the church of the New Testament was bought with the blood of the son of God (Acts 20:28); that Christ is the saviour of the body which is the Church (Ephesians 5:24); that we are reconciled to God through the cross in that one body (Eph. 2:16); that the church is the household or family of God to which one must belong if he is to be a child of God (I Timothy 3:15). Thus, it is clear that according to the New Testament, salvation resides in the church because that is where Christ saves and it is for the church that he died. We must, then, be members of the New Testament Church if we hope to reign with Christ in heaven. Church membership, is not an optional matter.

But the all-important question now comes before us: how does one enter the church of God? How does he become a member of the church we read about in the Bible? The importance of this question is immeasurable. Since salvation resides in the church, to ask how one becomes a member of the body or church, is to ask how one is saved from his sins? For to be a member of the church is to be saved, and to be saved is to be a member of the Church. As Acts 2:47 records: "the Lord added to the church those that were saved." Since God adds to the church those who are saved, it is evident that all saved are apart of the church. Thus, it is a very important question which is before us, that question is: how does one become a member of the church, or how does one enter the body of Christ which is the church?

In answer to our question, one passage of Scripture is particularly clear. Listen to what Paul the apostle wrote in I Corinthians 12:13. He says there: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit, for the body is not one member, but many." The text is quite clear. It affirms without reservation that we were all baptized into one body. The body of Christ is, of course, the church itself. Thus, the Corinthians were all baptized into the church. It is through baptism, then, that one enters the church of the New Testament; that he becomes a member of that body which Jesus saves and which his blood purchased.

However, recently some Pentecostal groups argue that this particular text, I Corinthians 12:13, does not refer to water baptism, but to baptism in the Spirit or Holy Spirit baptism. Holy Spirit Baptism is that miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit which imparts the ability to perform miraculous works, such as healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and etc. They argue that baptism in I Corinthians 12:13 refers to that Holy Spirit baptism which the Corinthians received which gave them the ability to perform miracles. However, two very important points mitigate against this particular view.

First, all Pentecostal groups argue that Holy Spirit Baptism is a gracious gift received subsequent to conversion, after one has been saved. In other words, baptism in the Holy Spirit is not the means of salvation, but is a blessing received after one has been saved. However, our text in I Corinthians 12:13 is the consummative act of conversion. It is the act which places one into the church which is the body of the saved.

Thus, baptism in the Holy Spirit cannot be the same as the baptism in I Corinthians 12:13 because Holy Spirit Baptism is subsequent to conversion while the baptism in this text is that which places one in a saved condition, that is, in the church. Water baptism is the only baptism that places one in a saved condition; as I Peter 3:21 records "baptism does also now save us." Water baptism, not Holy Spirit baptism, is the consummative act of conversion, and therefore, I Corinthians 12:13 must refer to water baptism.

A second point to consider is that according to Pentecostalism everyone who is baptized in the Holy Spirit has the ability to speak in tongues. Since, then, all at the church in Corinth were baptized according to I Corinthians 12:13, if our text refers to Holy Spirit baptism, it means that all members of the church in Corinth had the ability to speak in tongues. However, this is not the case. In I Corinthians 14:5 Paul expresses the wish that everyone could speak in tongues, thus indicating that not all the Corinthians could. Further in I Corinthians 12:30 Paul asks the rhetorical question: All do not speak with tongues, do they? The answer is obvious: no, they do not. Since all do not speak in tongues, yet all were baptized according to I Corinthians 12:13, then the baptism of our text is not Holy Spirit Baptism, but water baptism.

Having determined that water baptism is spoken of in our text, let us read I Corinthians 12:13 again. There the apostle writes: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jew or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Paul's affirmation is clear: we were all baptized into one body. The

body of Christ is the church. Thus, we were baptized into the church. Christ saves only the church because he purchased only it with his blood. Thus, to be baptized into the church is to be saved by baptism. This is in strict accordance with what Peter taught in I Peter 3:21; there he wrote: "Baptism does also now save us."

How, then, do we enter the church? We enter it by being immersed in water where the Spirit works to effect our salvation by adding us to the redeemed body. However, this is not the only place where the Bible affirms this idea. Another place is Galatians 3:27.

To be in Christ is to be in the church, and if we are not in Christ we are not in the church. On the other hand, if we are not in the church we are not in Christ. This is so because the church is the body of Christ. Colossians 1:18 affirms that Christ is the head of the body which is the church. Thus, to be in Christ, to have union with our Lord, is to be a member of his body; and to be a member of his body is to be a member of his Church--the church he paid for with his own blood (Acts 20:38). In light of this, let us read Galatians 3:27. There the apostle Paul writes: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus because all of you who were baptized into Christ clothed yourselves with Christ." How does one enter Christ, or how is union with Christ effected, or put another way, how is entrance into the church effected? Galatians 3:27 answered our question. Paul said that we are baptized into Christ. Thus, baptism if accompanied by faith effects union with Christ, and thus entrance into the church. We enter the body of the redeemed by being immersed in water

upon a confession of our faith. Romans 6:3,4 says the same thing, that we are baptized into Christ.

In Christ as in the church is where salvation resides. II Timothy 2:10 affirms that salvation is in Christ. Ephesians 1:7 affirms that redemption is in Christ. Colossians 1:13,14 affirms that the forgiveness of sins is in Christ. II Corinthian 5:17 affirms that in Christ one is a new creature. All spiritual blessings reside in Christ, and since Christ cannot be separated from the Church; all spiritual blessings reside in the church as the wife of Christ. But the important question is: how does one enter Christ? Romans 6:3,4 and Galatians 3:27 which we have read answered our question above. We are, as Paul says, "baptized into Christ." Through baptism the Spirit of God on the basis of our faith effects union with Christ and entrance into the church at the same time.

Thus, Christ paid for the church with his blood, and the saving blood of Christ saves us from our sins when we become members of that church. The Bible tells us quite clearly that unless one is baptized he cannot become a member of that church you read about in the Bible. If you have not been immersed in water upon a confession of your faith in Jesus, then you are not a member of the New Testament church; and therefore you are outside of Christ without hope and salvation in this world. You can be baptized today, and become a member of that church. Just call the Church of Christ in your area and he will assist you in every way possible. Call now, and become a child of God by entering the family of God, the church, through your faith in the operation of God in baptism (Colossians 2:12).

## TO BE BORN AGAIN

Within the past two years there has probably been no more discussed topic in Christianity than that of being born again. It seems that everyone from athletes to the President of the United States has been born again. Numerous books have been written attempting to explain this phenomena. Billy Graham even wrote a book on how to be born again. The interest in this experience is phenomenal, but the misconceptions of what it is are likewise phenomenal. As is true with so many aspects of Christianity, those hungry for public attention and favor distort the message of the Biblical texts which speak of certain elements. The Biblical picture of being born again is no exception. Thus, this morning we wish to discuss the nature of the new birth; what it means to be born again.

Early in Christ's public ministry a man named Nicodemus came to him by night to seek further information about the Kingdom of God. He was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews-- a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, Israel's supreme Court. Nicodemus opened the conversation with this observation: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Overlooking his compliment, Jesus answered Nicodemus in John 3:3 by declaring how one becomes a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. He says: "Verily, Verily I say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." The condition of entrance into the Kingdom of God is the new birth; to be born again. Be careful to note the necessity of this birth, One cannot, Jesus says, see the Kingdom of God unless he has been born again. Anyone who has not been born again cannot

be saved.

The language of Jesus puzzled Nicodemus as it puzzles many today. In fact, Nicodemus misunderstood Jesus for he thought Jesus was referring to a second physical birth. In order to dispell any such misconception, the Lord answers Nicodemus in John 3:5 where he says: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Jesus himself explains what he means by being born again; to be born again is to be born of water and of the Spirit. The new birth is a spiritual birth, not a physical one. Our first birth gies us a human nature; our second bestows a spiritual nature. The natural birth inducts us into the natral world; the spiritual birth brings us into the spiritual. The first birth implants the image of the natural parents; the second restores us in the image of the Father of our spirits. The new birth is a rebirth; a new birth when our sinful selfs are renoveated and we become as Paul puts it a new creature in Christ.

However, there is much confusion over what exactly Jesus meant in John 3:5. Let us read the passage again. Jesus tells Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." By this Jesus expkains what he means by being born again, but what does he mean by the phrase "of wather and of the Spirit." It is here that many are led astray and they misunderstand the nature of the new birth and how one is born again. We are born again by the wter and the Spirit, but what does that phrase mean? To this question we now turn our attention.

Some argue that by water in John 3:5 our Lord refers to our physical birth, and by Spirit he refers to our spiritual rebirth. In other words, when Jesus says that we must be born of water and the spirit; he was actually saying that we must be born physically and spiritually in order to enter the Kingdom of God. However, this is clearly in error. There are not two births in John 3:5 for this verse is to explain the one birth in John 3:3. Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again; Nicodemus did not understand, and in verse five Jesus explained his meaning by declaring that to be born again one must be born of water and the spirit. There are not two new births, one of water and one of spirit, but one. Both water and spirit are required in the one new birth. Physical birth is not involved in water. If Jesus had wished to convey the idea, surely he would have used a more transparent noun or phrase as in John 1:13 which reads: "born of God, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man," "Water" as standing for Physical birth in John 3:5 would be an obscure, even concealed figure. However, our Lord did not wish to conceal his meaning, but to explain it. Therefore, water and spirit are two elements of one birth, that birth which is from above-- to be born again.

Many argue that water in John 3:5 does not refer to literal water, but uses the term in a figurative sense. However, the difficulty with such an approach is that it ignores the literal use of water in John 1-4. There is John's baptism (1:26,33; 3:23); the water turned into wine (1:1-10) and Jesus' baptism (3:22; 4:1-3). An unquestionable use of "water" as figurative does not occur till 4:14 and in

that cause it is clearly indicated as such. A figurative use of the term "water" in the Bible is always, always introduced as "living water" (as in John 7:38) or some other similar phrase (as in Revelation 21:6). John 3:5 if figurative is a glaring exception. This, I think, is an indictment against all figurative interpretations of "water" in John 3:5.

However, these considerations have not hindered many from positing figurative meanings for the term water in John 3:5. Some argue that the word "water" in John 3:5 means "Spirit" or it refers to the Spirit. Thus, according to this interpretation the passage should read: "Except a man be born of Spirit and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." This is in itself absurd that Jesus would repeat the same word twice. More decisive, however, is why Jesus in verse 5 would introduce the concept of Water which he has to explain as Spirit, then never use it in the conversation again? If this objection is correct, then the use of water here is superfluous, adding nothing to the discussion. In their attempt to remove any literal use of water in the verse, they also remove any meaningful use of the term within the literary construction of verses 3-8, and are left without any reason for its introduction.

Others seeing the weakness of this position argue that "Water" does not mean water also, but neither does it mean Spirit; rather it means the word of God. But there is one problem with this interpretation: there is not one passage in all the Bible which identifies water as the word of God. They have no reason in Scripture for such an equation, and more than equating the water here with the Spirit of God.

In fact, one passage of Scripture establishes a clear distinction between "water" and the "word". Listen carefully as we read Ephesians 5:26, where Paul writes: that Christ gave himself for the Church "that he might sanctify here, having cleansed here by the washing of water with the word." Paul here clearly distinguishes the action of Christ by the word from that by the water. If there is any identification with the word of God in John 3:5 it is with the Spirit for Scripture elsewhere records that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). The spirit produces faith in the hearts of men by the word of God, and thus the word is more naturally identified with the Spirit in John 3:5 rather than the word.

The real question before us is whether when JESUS said that we must be born of water and the spirit, did Jesus mean something other than water, or did he mean what he said. Did Jesus mean what he said or didn't he? There is no contextual reason for interpreting water figuratively here. Rather, Jesus said what he meant and meant what he said. Water here in John 3:5 means exactly that water literally conceived. But then what did Jesus mean when he said that we must be born of water and the Spirit before we could enter the Kingdom of God? We will reserve that question till next week when we will continue this discussion.

## TO BE BORN AGAIN (II)

Last week we began a discussion of what it means to be born again, or how are we born again. Our text is taken from Jesus' discussion with the Pharisee Nicodemus in John 3. In that chapter, particularly verse five, our Lord says: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Our discussion last week centered in the word water--whether it is figurative or literal. We concluded that when Jesus said water, he literally meant water for there is nothing in the context to indicate that water here is figurative. Thus, Jesus declares that for one to enter the Kingdom of God, he must be born of both water and the Spirit. What does Jesus mean by water and the Spirit?

Dr. William Wall who wrote the book entitled The History of Infant Baptism made this observation: "All ancient Christians (without the exception of one man) do understand that rule of our Saviour in John 3:5 to be baptism." The tradition of Christianity till the Reformation era stands behind the interpretation of water as Christian baptism. This, surely, is impressive testimony in favour of considering this a baptismal passage, but it can never be conclusive. Tradition can never dictate to the Bible. However, four factors contribute to the case for Christian Baptism in John 3:5.

First, the context of the first four chapters provides us with three different baptisms: John's in water (1:26; 3:23); Jesus in the Spirit (1:33); and Jesus in water (3:22; 4:1,2). The conjunction of Spirit and water in John 3: (as in 1:33) would naturally lead one to consider this a baptism where

the Spirit and water unite (whereas they were separated in previous baptisms). Second, the conjunction of water and the Spirit is not unknown in baptismal passages. For instance, notice what Paul wrote in Titus 3:5. He says: "God saved us, not on the basis of deed which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." In this passage, the apostle writes that we were saved, How?, by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit. The washing here refers in the Greek to a bath of water, or as is denominated elsewhere: baptism. In Titus 3:5, then, Paul argues that we are saved by baptism and the Spirit. This is exactly parallel with John 3:5 where Jesus argues that one enters the Kingdom of God, that is, he is saved by water and the Spirit, that is, by baptism and the Spirit. Note a further passage from the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 6:11. There the apostle writes: "and such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." Here Paul equates sanctification, and justification with washing. That is, Paul argues that when one is washed, that is washed with water of course, he is sanctified and justified in the Spirit. The Spirit of God, then is very closely associated with washing in I Corinthians 6:11. The washing here evidently refers to baptism, so that when one is baptised, through faith the Spirit works in the waters of baptism to sanctify and justify the believer. Thus, Paul in two places Titus 3:5 and I Corinthians 6:11 expresses exactly the same meaning as Jesus in John 3:5. On

cannot enter the Kingdom of God, that is, be saved, unless he is born of the water and the Spirit. In other words, unless one submits to baptism having faith in the operation of God's Spirit, he cannot be saved.

Third, the new birth imagery present in John 3 is not at all foreign to baptism. Note carefully again what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6:3,4. He says: "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Paul affirms that one raised from the watery grave of baptism does so to walk a new life, he has been born again. He has experienced a new birth in baptism. Baptism is a resurrection experience wherein one is made alive; recreated or regenerated. Baptism is a rebirth. As we read a few moments ago, Paul calls baptism in Titus 3:5 a washing of regeneration. It is the new birth, it is being born again. This is made clear also from Colossians 2:12,13 where Paul writes: "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." In this passage, Colossians 2:12,13, being resurrected from the watery grave of baptism is equated with being made alive or quickened. We are made alive to God, freed from sin when we submit to baptism in faith.

In conjunction with this, listen again as we read what Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus in ephesians 2:5,6: "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, he made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places." This quickening, or this making alive is regeneration; it is the new birth; it is to be born again. Baptism, according to the Bible, is the means by which this new birth occurs. Thus, Jesus' statement is clear for he said: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." We must submit to baptism in faith if we are to be saved.

Lastly, place yourself in the position of Nicodemus and the early Christian reader who would read this statement by our Lord in John 3:5. Would not Nicodemus have associated "water" with the contemporary baptisms that were occurring? For instance, John the Baptist was still baptizing and Jesus had also begun his baptizing ministry. Nicodemus would surely be convinced that water here meant baptism. Further, "water" to the early Christian reader, those to whom John was writing, would most naturally indicate baptism. For there is only one element in all of Christianity which has water-- and that is baptism. Water here in John 3:5 can mean nothing else than baptism. To say otherwise is to accuse Jesus of saying something he did not mean. He said water, and I believe, and so that settles it. Do you believe Jesus?

What, however, does all this have to do with you and me? Of what significance is it to understand this word water here? In the first place, Jesus said it was impossible for anyone

to be saved if he had not been born again, that is, if he had not been born of water and the spirit. One cannot be born again by sitting around and waiting for the spirit to enter his heart, neither can one be born again by praying for forgiveness. Jesus declared that one is born again, not by these methods, but by being born of water and the Spirit. That is, one is born again by submitting to baptism in faith and repentance. For when we obey God's command to be baptized, the Spirit works in the waters to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It is in baptism that one sees the saving activity of God, excluding any meritorious act of man (I Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5). It is Jesus who sanctifies and cleanses the church in baptism (Ephesians 5:26). In baptism one receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). In baptism one participates in the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-7; Colossians 2:12,13). Baptism is not an act which merits salvation, but the obedient act through which God conveys grace much like the preaching of the cross produces faith.

Therefore, Jesus explicitly teaches in John 3:5 that unless one is baptized he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Therefore, baptism must be considered an essential condition of salvation (as is faith). We must declare with Peter that the remission of sins is through faith, repentance and baptism. We are saved by God in his grace when we obey. If you have not so obeyed, then you are not born again. But you can be saved today, just responded to his gospel call in faith and obedience to the command of baptism.