

# The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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## Dear Brother Faull,

Jesus seemed surprised about Nicodemus not understanding "Ye must be born again" or "except a man is born of the water and Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God".

Why should have Nicodemus understood these statements? Is it true that the King James Version's use of the word "thee" is singular and the use of "ye" denotes plural? Marvel not that I say unto thee (Nicodemus), ye (all) must be born again?

### ANSWER:

To your latter questions you are correct for Jesus said, "Except a man be born again or from above he cannot enter the Kingdom of God". This would include any man, Jew or Gentile.

The word "again" is translated "from above" the majority of times John uses the word.

E.g. **John 3:31**, "He that cometh from **above** is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all."

**John 19:11**, "Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power *at all* against me, except it were given thee from **above**: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

This shows that God is involved in the new birth.

As to the former question, there are several reasons Nicodemus should have known what Jesus was speaking about. Let's look at some reasons:

1. The Greek says that Nicodemus was "the teacher of Israel". The Greek calls him the teacher of Israel as Jesus used the definite article so He should have known the prophecies in Ezekiel. For example, **Ezekiel 36:24-31**. What did Ezekiel promise God would do?

**Ezekiel 36:24-28**, "24 For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. 25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and **ye shall be clean**: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 A **new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you**: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*. 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

Three times Ezekiel gave God's promises of a new heart and

spirit. We need a new heart and a new spirit from God to be a new man. Reforming will not remove our iniquities.

Repentance and cleansing are necessary to be born from above. This is highlighted in **Hebrews 10:22**, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

My father used to use an illustration of an old Indian chief who told a Christian had to forgive and love his enemies, do good to those who used him, stop killing and stealing from other tribes, and stop stealing other men's wives. He would need to learn the golden rule and the Royal law. Do to others what you would have them do for you and do for your neighbors as you would for yourself.

The old Indian said, "Great Creator spirit would have to give Indian a new heart and Spirit". Exactly, one must be born from above. Nicodemus should have known Ezekiel's prophecies.

2. All four Gospels testify as to whom John was. The people thought he was the Christ as in **Luke 3:15-16**, "15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; 16 John answered,

saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:"

When John was in the wilderness of Judea, he affirmed we must repent because the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. **Matthew 3:2.**

The people of Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about Jordan went out to hear him and were baptized of him in the Jordan. However, he refused to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees.

**Matthew 3:7-8**, "7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:"

He told the people he was not worthy to wear Jesus' shoes. He baptized with water, but the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. **Matthew 5:11, Mark 1:2-8**

**John 1:20** answers some of the Pharisees, Priests, and Levites when they asked him pointed questions if he was not Elijah, the prophet like unto Moses (**Deuteronomy 18:15**) or the Christ.

He made it plain he was the voice Isaiah foretold who would be forerunner of the Christ. But the Baptizer did no miracles. (**John 10:41**)

But Nicodemus was convinced he was of God for John said Nicodemus said, "The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, 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." **John 3:2**

So, he knew from his friends who John was not and was sure Jesus, the miracle worker, was from God. The Pharisees were rejected by John whom he had called them snakes and vipers. We do not know if Nicodemus was with those whom the Baptizer rebuked. Maybe he did not want the public rebuke from Jesus that John had given them, so he went at night.

Listen to **Luke 7:29-30**, "29 And all the people that heard *him*, and the publicans, **justified God**, being baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and lawyers **rejected the counsel of God against themselves**, being not baptized of him."

We do not know if Nicodemus was one of them who refused the baptism of John or not, but he had no plans of being a public disciple of Jesus. His Pharisee brethren did not believe Jesus. They said, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" **John 7:48**

These verses seemed to show that Nicodemus had not been baptized of John nor believed on Jesus yet. Either peer-pressure from his fellow Pharisees, or fear of a public rebuke by Jesus as John had done to the Pharisees, or he was just not sure yet as to Whom Jesus was. It made him cautious.

He knew Jesus was a man sent from God and he should have known Jesus was not just saying you have to be born of your mother and born again from above. This would be ludicrous for Jesus to have said such a thing.

3. Another passage that should have made Nicodemus realize what Jesus was talking about instead of imagining entering his

mother's womb a second time, is found in **Psalms 87**. Let us quote it.

**Psalms 87:4-6**, "4 I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this *man* was born there. 5 And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. 6 The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, *that* this *man* was born there. Selah."

How could the teacher of Israel not realize that this Psalm is telling us that men from other nations such as Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia would be spiritually born in Jerusalem? These men were said to be born in Zion or Jerusalem. When the Lord counts when he writes His people, it will be said they were born there.

**Acts 2:41, 47**, "41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day **there were added unto them about three thousand souls**. 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And **the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.**"

**Romans 9:24-25**, "24 Even us, whom he hath called, **not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?** 25 As he saith also in Osee, **I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.**"

Jesus was firm with the teacher and had assured him three times that except a man was born again, or from above he cannot **see** the kingdom of God.

Again, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot **enter** into the kingdom of God, Again Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye all must be born again or

from above. **He taught him not to mix Spiritual birth from above and second birth of a mother.**

He also said, "If I told you **earthly things** and ye believe not, how shall you believe if I tell you of **Heavenly or Spiritual things?**"

There are still a lot of Nicodemus' around who want to make the birth from above to be both the water in a mother's womb (fleshly birth) and the Spirit a Heavenly birth.

He did error in not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.

4. Another reason he should have known what Jesus spoke of was there is evidence that the Jews required immersion of the Gentiles who were wishing to join the Jewish covenant. This was in addition to circumcision.

They call such immersed gentiles, according to Alfred Edersheim, "born again". So later the Talmud and other Rabbis tell us this. Nicodemus should have known the Lord was speaking of water baptism.

**That term "born again" was not new to John.** The gentiles were as if they had been born a Jew with all the rights of being Jews. It could not have been John's baptism because the Holy Spirit was not associated with John's baptism and John only baptized Jews and not gentiles. He said he baptized with water, but Messiah would baptize with the Spirit. The Spirit was not given until after Jesus ascended and was given the Kingdom.

**John 7:39,** "(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"

**Daniel 7:13-14,** "13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed."

Nicodemus could not enter into the Kingdom because Jesus had not been raised to sit on David's throne as Peter announced on Pentecost.

**Acts 2:31-33,** "31 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, **he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; 31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.**"

When Peter announced on Pentecost that they had killed the Christ, David's son, who was now on His throne and given the Kingdom, the people wanted to know what to do. **They then were the first who were told to repent and be baptized, and they would receive remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

What Jesus told Nicodemus that men must do is what Peter announced on Pentecost now that Jesus was King on His throne. John's baptism gave the remission of sins (**Mark 1:4**) but not the Holy Spirit. **John 7:39,** "(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"

This is why the followers of John the Baptist were baptized into Christ so that they may receive the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 19:2-5,** "2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. 3 And he said unto them, **Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5** When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

God expects to declare you His Son and give you His Spirit at your Christian baptism.

5. Yet another reason Nicodemus should have found a more reasonable explanation of the "Ye must be born again or from above" is the fact how a man became a priest if he was of the Aaronic order.

He was to proceed to the laver and put off his clothes and then completely bathe himself in the laver. Here he was anointed with oil which they knew sanctified him to do the work of the priest.

He was anointed with oil, which represented the anointing of the Spirit of God. He then put on his priestly garments. He then, and only then, could enter into the Holy Place to do the duties of his priesthood. If not born of water and Spirit, you cannot enter the Kingdom.

Nicodemus should have made the connection of the baptism in the water of the laver and sanctification to serve with full rights to enter into the Holy Place. Only priests could enter the Holy Place.

The Christian today is taught that he puts off the old man and is cleansed at his baptism and sanctified by the Spirit to be a member of the royal priesthood.

**1 Peter 2:9**, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:"

We serve as one cleansed and anointed and clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Jesus did not explain all this to Nicodemus but being the teacher of Israel, Nicodemus should have seen the obvious parallel of the laver and anointing oil.

There was a need for cleansing (water) and sanctification of the Spirit (oil). Admittedly this is clearer by some New Testament Scriptures because of the parallel of **John 3:5** and **Titus 3:5**, where it tells we are saved by the laver of regeneration (what means to be born again) and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Many things Jesus taught are enlarged upon in the New Testament, once the Kingdom had been given to Jesus at His ascension. The King had gone to a far country to receive His Kingdom and having received it, His apostles finished out the story in their writings.

- There is one more thought that the teacher of Israel could have thought upon when we know, "Ye must be born again or from above." I do not know if the apostle Paul was the originator of his illustration that the Jews were immersed or baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. I do not know if the Jews thought this deeply on this subject before Paul explained the cloud was over them and the water stood up putting them in a

womb of water. **1 Corinthians 10:1-2**

The Spirit was above them and the water around them and they were born again, no longer slaves but free men.

If this was commonly understood by the Jews and used by Paul to teach the Jew's birth coming out of the water and the cloud and the illustration was used of the birth of the Jewish nation, then Nicodemus should have seen the analogy between the Red Sea crossing and Christian baptism. They were typically born of the water and Spirit.

There was a difference in John's baptism and proselyte baptism.

- Proselytes baptized themselves to become a Jew.
- John baptized them in water as an act of repentance to prepare for Christ.
- Proselyte baptism was only for Gentiles, but John's was only for the Jews who repented of their sins.
- Proselyte men and women were baptized in the nude (women only in the presence of women). John baptized them in their clothes.

In baptizing only Jews John was emphasizing that Jewish converts were in need of cleansing and forgiveness too, like Gentiles.

These both differed from Christian baptism.

- Christian baptism was for both Jew and Gentile. **Acts 2:38-39, Matthew 28:28, Mark 16:16**
- Christian baptism resulted in not only forgiveness of sins but in receiving of the Holy Spirit. **Acts 2:38**
- The proselytes were baptized but Christians did not baptize themselves.

- Both Jews and Gentiles and women believers were immersed in the New Testament even if they had proselyte baptism or John's baptism earlier.
- Before Christian baptism, faith in Christ was a prerequisite. Thus,
- Like John, Christian baptism did not include infant baptism. **Acts 8:36-38**
- Christian baptism was in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and an imitation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. **Matthew 28:28, Romans 6:3-5, 1 Peter 3:21.**

#### SUMMARY OF THIS ARTICLE:

Reasons why Nicodemus should have not misunderstood Jesus' statement about being born again:

- He was the teacher of Israel and should have understood Spiritual birth from the prophecies of the Old Testament where God promised a new heart and Spirit. **Ezekiel 36**
- He taught that Jesus was a man sent from God and it would be ludicrous for him to think the Messiah was speaking of necessity of physical birth to enter the Kingdom.
- He should have understood **Psalms 87** foretelling of foreign-born Gentiles would be said to be Spiritually born in Jerusalem.
- The Gentiles were baptized when they wanted to accept Judaism. They were called "born again". It was not a new statement to him and should have known that Jesus was referring to baptism in water. When Jesus insisted that the Jews be baptized to enter Heaven, Jesus was indicating they needed cleansing to enter the Heavenly Kingdom as much as Gentiles did to enter the Jewish covenant.

5. He should have caught the parallel when a man became a priest he had to wash in the waters of the laver and be set apart (sanctified) by oil before he could enter the Holy Place.
6. If Paul's illustration of the Jews being born of Red Sea baptism was used before Paul used it, Nicodemus should have known where being born again takes place.
7. The difference between Proselyte baptism, John's baptism, and Christian baptism is worthy of learning.
8. If one desires more information on proselyte baptism, we suggest these:

*Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah* by Alfred Edersheim Vol 1 Book 2 Chapter 11 page 273 and Appendix 12. (May be read off of the internet.)

What the Bible says of Salvation by Virgil Warren – College Press pgs. 262, 292-294, 296, 304-305, 316.

The Talmud mentions it, but some scholars do not believe it was practiced in the day of Jesus. This is arguing from silence of Josephus. Hillel and Shammai had schools of thought in Jesus' day. Shammai believed proselytes who were baptized could eat of the Passover, but Hillel forbade it.

Surely baptism of proselytes occurred if they were disagreeing on this question. Modern "Jews for Jesus" literature advocate it was an occurrence in Jesus' day.