

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

John: Believing On The Christ, The Son Of God, For Eternal Life

Part XII: Believing On Christ Due To His Witness To A Ruler Of The Jews, John 3:1-21

A. Believing On Christ Due To His Requirement Of GOD'S Spiritual New Birth

(John 3:1-13)

I. Introduction

- A. Jesus came to a nation that was led by "aristocratic, well-intentioned but unenlightened" Jews typical of many in Western lands who think they will enter heaven by works, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to John 3:1.
- B. His interaction with Nicodemus, "a ruler of the Jews" as a "member of the Sanhedrin" (Ibid.), the ruling religious body in the nation, represents a classic testimony to those who think heaven is attained by works, and John 3:1-13 reveals God's claim that salvation is of necessity **not** by human meritorious works, but by **grace**:

II. Believing On Christ Due To His Requirement Of GOD'S Spiritual New Birth, John 3:1-13.

- A. Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, a theological conservative as a Pharisee (John 3:1; Z. P. E. B., v. Four, p. 745-752), approached Jesus by night, confessing that he [with other teachable men] knew He was from God, for no man could do the miracles Jesus did unless God was with Him, John 3:1-2.
- B. Jesus' miracles in the Hebrew prophetic Scriptures were meant as signs of His identity as Messiah (cf. Isaiah 35:5 with Matthew 11:4-6) that men might trust in Him for salvation (John 20:31), but the spiritual blindness of the Sanhedrin led them to miss this point. Jesus thus **immediately** told the **teachable but spiritually blind Nicodemus** of his **need** for the **spiritual new birth** to **enter** the **Kingdom of God**, John 3:3-13:
 - 1. Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a man was born "again, anew" or "from above" (*anōthen*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 76), the term is "purposely ambiguous," for it carries both meanings theologically (John 3:3 ESV fn.), he could not see the Kingdom of God, John 3:3.
 - 2. Thinking in terms of the natural, spiritually blind Nicodemus asked how to be naturally reborn, John 3:4.
 - 3. Jesus replied that one had to be "born of water and of the Spirit," a phrase we need to clarify, John 3:5:
 - a. Various ideas have been proposed as to what Jesus meant by the words "born of water," ideas like water baptism, the natural birth, the Holy Spirit or repentance. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 281)
 - b. However, Jesus did not mean water baptism as that would be salvation by works opposite Ephesians 2:8-9, and the other ideas all strain the smooth flow of thought in Jesus' argument, making them unlikely.
 - c. Nevertheless, Jesus Himself opened the door to show what He meant in John 3:5 by stating in John 3:10 that He spoke to a "master in Israel" who was **supposed** to **know** "these things," so we check the Old Testament that this "master" would know and find a **precise clarification** in Ezekiel 36:21-32: (1) There, God taught that in spite of Israel's sin, He planned to uphold His reputation to bless her in line with His promise by gathering Israel from the nations where He sent her in judgment (Ez. 36:21-24), and to **sprinkle her with clean water**, a **figurative** phrase for **purification from sin**, and to put a **new heart** and **Spirit** within her, Ez. 36:25-27a. (3) Israel would then live righteously back in her land, Ez. 36:27b-32.
 - d. Accordingly, the "new birth" Jesus taught that Nicodemus needed was the spiritual birth performed by God the Holy Spirit in unmerited favor totally apart from any meritorious work on the part of the sinner!
 - 4. Jesus further clarified that the natural birth was distinct from this spiritual birth performed by God, that Nicodemus was not to marvel at his need for the spiritual new birth by God, John 3:6-7.
 - 5. To illustrate, Christ used a play on words where the Greek term *pneuma* means **either** "wind" or "spirit," to claim that as the [wind] *pneuma* blows, and is real but unseen, so is every one that is born of the [Holy Spirit] *pneuma* of God, John 3:8; U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 329; Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 680-685.
 - 6. By his John 3:9 question, Nicodemus revealed he still did not grasp the fact that this new birth was a supernatural one from God apart from what man could do, so Jesus critiqued him as a master of Israel for not knowing these truths, John 3:10. The darkness of even Israel's well-meaning leaders was intense!
 - 7. Jesus added that Nicodemus had no alternative but to believe in what He had said, for no mortal had any other way to attain this truth as he could not ascend up to heaven to learn it himself, John 3:11-13.

Lesson: *Jesus taught that salvation was by the sole, supernatural work of God in His unmerited favor whereby one was spiritually born again, anew, from above, and that apart from such an event, there was no salvation!*

Application: *(1) May we abandon all self-help and human merits for salvation and cleave only to God's gracious, spiritual, supernatural birth from above to enter the Kingdom of God. (2) May we teach only this way of salvation.*