

The Gospel of John 2:23-3:10

I The Lord's Commitment Not in Miracles But in Life

- A. Even though they believed into the Lord's name, the crowds, that saw Jesus do many wondrous works, did not understand the real meaning behind His signs. As a result, Jesus would not entrust Himself to them. (**John 2:23-24**) Though they believed in the Lord, He knew their believing was entirely based on His outward works. The people of ancient Israel were the same. They knew His acts, but not His ways. God's ways are different from His acts. His acts are His activities; His ways are the principles by which He acts. The children of Israel only knew His acts, but Moses knew His ways. (**Heb.3:10, Psa.103:7**)
- B. The apostle John then presents a contrast. He says, "But there was a man...named Nicodemus." (**John 3:1**) "But" indicates that this case, concerning Nicodemus, differs from the case in the foregoing verses. (**John 2:23-25**) There the people believed into the Lord because they saw the miracles He performed. The Lord could not commit Himself to such people. But the case in this chapter 3 concerns life in regeneration; it reveals that this book is not for miraculous things but is only for life.

II Nicodemus Wants Knowledge But Christ Offers Regeneration

- A. Nicodemus considered Christ as a teacher who had come from God. (**3:2**) This indicates that he might have thought that he needed better teachings so that he could improve himself. Instead of knowledge, Jesus told him that he needed to see and enter into the kingdom of God through a new birth. (**3:3,5**) Hence, his real need was not better teachings by which he could improve himself, but the divine life by which he could be remade. To be born anew is to be born from above, from heaven, that is, to be born from God, who is in heaven. Unfortunately, Nicodemus responded to the Lord by using his carnal understanding and asked if he needed to re-enter and re-exit his mother's womb. (**3:4**)
- B. The Lord unveiled to Nicodemus that to be born anew is to be regenerated with the divine life, a life different from the human life received by natural birth. To be born again is to receive the very life of God Himself, thus qualifying him to enter into the Kingdom of God. (**v.5**). The kingdom of God is the reign of God. It is a divine realm to be entered into, a realm that requires the divine life. Only the divine life can realize the divine things. Hence, for one to see or to enter into the kingdom of God, one must be regenerated with the divine life.
- C. The words "of water and the Spirit" should have been plain to Nicodemus, without any need of explanation. In Matt.3:11 John the Baptist spoke the same words to the Pharisees; hence, they should have been fully understood among the Pharisees. "Water" was the central concept of the ministry of John the Baptist, that is, the termination of people of the old creation. "Spirit" is the central concept of the ministry of Jesus, that is, the germination of people in the new creation. These two main concepts together constitute the concept of regeneration. Regeneration is the termination of people of the old creation with all their deeds, and the germination of people in the new creation with the divine life.
- D. Since Nicodemus thought that to be born anew was to go back to his mother's womb and come out of it again, the Lord told Nicodemus, "That which is born of flesh is flesh" (**3:6**). Flesh here denotes the natural man with the natural life. Regardless of how many times we could be born of our parents, we still would be a natural man with a natural life. It can never change our nature. To be born anew is to be born of God the Spirit that we may have His divine life with His divine nature.
- E. The Spirit, mentioned first here, is the divine Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, and the spirit, mentioned second, is the human spirit, the generated spirit of man. (**3:6**) Regeneration is accomplished in the human spirit by the Holy Spirit of God with God's life, the uncreated eternal life. Thus, to be regenerated is to receive the divine, eternal life (in addition to the human, natural life) as the new source and new element of a new person. To be born anew is to be born of the Spirit in our spirit. The divine Spirit regenerates our human spirit with God's divine life. God made us with a spirit for the purpose that one day we might exercise it to contact Him and to receive Him into our being. Regeneration is not a matter of our mind, emotion, or will; it is altogether a matter in our spirit. A regenerated person is like the wind, which can be realized, but which is beyond understanding. Regeneration is not a physical thing, but spiritual, like the wind (pneuma). Although the wind is intangible, it can be realized. The Lord told Nicodemus that the regenerated spirit, like the wind, is not physical and tangible, but invisible and spiritual. (**3:8**)
- F. Why, then, is regeneration needed? The Word tells us that our heart is deceitful above all things; it is incurable (**Jer.17:9**). It also says that our evil nature (**Rom.7:18**) cannot be changed (**Jer.13:23**). So what are we to do? We need a new beginning. But having a new beginning with the same nature won't help us. We need a new beginning that comes out of a new nature and a new type of life. We need God's eternal life to be sown into us, deep within our human spirit where it can germinate, grow and transform us. Even so-called good people need this re-birth, this birth from above. No one is good enough to escape his or her nature. Only God's life can give us a new start.