

THE NEW BIRTH

We hear much today about the new birth. Many people say they are “born again Christians.” They do not seem to understand that one cannot be a Christian at all unless he has been born again. How can one be born again? That is, how does one become a Christian? What does the Bible say?

The Bible speaks of the new birth in John 3:1-13. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus. Nicodemus was both a religious man and a good man. He knew that God had sent Jesus into the world because he had seen the miracles which Jesus did. Nicodemus was looking for the kingdom of God.

Jesus knew what Nicodemus was thinking and answered by saying: ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*** “To see” the kingdom is to be a part of it and to enjoy its blessings. Nicodemus was a Jew. He had become a part of the kingdom of Israel by being born into a Jewish family. Probably he thought that Jesus’ kingdom would be an earthly kingdom also. But he was mistaken.

The kingdom which Jesus came to establish was a spiritual kingdom. Jesus later told Pilate, ***“My kingdom is not of this world”*** (John 18:36). When Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus promised to build His church. He then promised to give Peter the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:16-19). It is clear in these verses that Jesus uses the word ***“church”*** and ***“kingdom”*** to refer to the same thing. Many years later, the Apostle Paul reminded members of the church of Christ at Colossae that God had ***“conveyed them into the kingdom of the Son of His love”*** (Colossians 1:13). Since the kingdom and the church are the same thing, then the way one gets into the church is the same way he gets into the kingdom. If one is in the kingdom, he is a member of the church.

Jesus further said to Nicodemus: ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*** This means that there is only one way that one can enjoy the blessings of the kingdom and that is by being born again.

Jesus said that one must be born of (1) water, (2) the Spirit. In a human birth two things are necessary: (1) the father who begets, (2) the mother who brings forth. Jesus is using the physical birth into a human family to explain the spiritual birth into the kingdom of God which is God’s family.

In the new birth, the Holy Spirit begets. The seed is the Word of God. Notice these words: ***“Of his own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures”*** (James 1:18). Again, let us read a similar Scripture, ***“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”*** (1 Peter 1:22-23).

The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). It is the Word which the Spirit uses to produce faith in the human heart. ***“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”*** (Romans 10:17). When the Word of God is preached, the Holy Spirit by this means begets faith in the sinner’s heart. Thus, one may be said to be begotten of the Spirit when he hears and believes the Word of God.

But how is one born of the water? This is done by baptism. When one hears and believes the Word of God, he obeys the Word by being baptized in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19,20). This baptism is a burial in water (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). It is for the remission (forgiveness) of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). By baptism, the believer is put into the Lord's body (1 Corinthians 12:13), which is the church (Colossians 1:18), the kingdom of God.

We have seen that to be a Christian it is necessary to be born again. If one has been born again, he is in the kingdom of God which is the church of Christ. This new birth of water and the Spirit takes place when the Spirit inspired Word begets faith in the human heart and the believer responds by being baptized for the remission of sins. Thus he is born of water and the Spirit and has thereby entered the kingdom.

Reader friend, what about you? Are you saved? Are you in the kingdom of God? Have you been born again of water and the Spirit? If not, then you do not have the hope of eternal life. Believe the Word and be baptized today that salvation may be yours: ***“And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”*** (Mark 16:15,16).