

DYERTHOUGHTS

== COMMON SENSE ==
APOLOGETICS

The New Birth

In order to enter the Kingdom

The phrase “The New Birth” comes from the discussion Jesus had with Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus was one of the religious leaders of Israel (John 3:1). He would have had an anticipation of the Kingdom of God from his study of the Old Testament scriptures (Dan 2:44, 7:14, 27). He would have also heard of John the Baptist and Jesus preaching that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (MT 3:2, 4:17). Therefore, when he comes to Jesus a discussion on the Kingdom of God is exactly what Nicodemus would have wanted to talk about. The Jews thought in that day that they were automatically going to be citizens in the Messianic Kingdom because they were physical Jews. Jesus is correcting this misconception with Nicodemus as he did in other places (John 8:31-45). Therefore, he is basically telling Nicodemus that being born a physical Jew isn't good enough but one has to be born again to see the Kingdom of God (John 3:3). Nicodemus is confused by this statement and seems to either be confused or points out the absurdity of it to prompt Jesus to give him clarification (3:4). Jesus does respond and tells him that unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. In the original Greek there is a preposition “kai” (and) which connects ‘water’ and ‘spirit’. Basically Jesus is not telling him that he needs two new births but that he needs a new birth which consists of water and spirit. He sums up his teaching in 3:6 by basically saying, “Whatever has a fleshly birth is flesh but whatever has a spiritual birth is spiritual.” He is trying to get Nicodemus to understand this new birth isn't something physical like he thought (3:4) but a spiritual birth.

Propheesied About

Nicodemus, being a teacher of the law, should have known about the new birth concept and not been so amazed (John 3:7, 9). In Jeremiah 31:29ff God tells Jeremiah that days are coming. In these days he will make a NEW covenant with Israel. This new covenant will be written on people's hearts and not be like the old covenant. Also, in Ezekiel 36:25ff God also talks about this new covenant.

He tells Ezekiel that he will give his people a NEW heart and sprinkle them clean from their sins. Therefore, Nicodemus should have known that there would be a new covenant which consisted of a change in the hearts of the people and not be another law like the one of old.

What is the New Birth

The Early Church Fathers give us good insight into what the early church taught about the New Birth. The early church fathers are the leaders in the church from the end of the first century through the first couple of centuries of the church. All these men taught that the New Birth happened at baptism. Irenaeus, who lived in the late 2nd Century, said, “It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized. Rather, this was a symbol for us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean from our old transgression by means of sacred water and invocation of the Lord. We are spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, just as the Lord has declared: “Unless a man is born again through water and the Spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”” Tertullian, who lived in the late 2nd Century, said, “Now, the teaching is laid down that “without baptism, salvation is attainable by no one.” This is based primarily on the ground that declaration of the Lord, who says, “Unless one is born of water he has not life.”” Tertullian also said in another place, ““Unless a man has been born again of water and Spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of the heavens.” These words have tied faith to the necessity of baptism.” Cyprian, who lived in the mid-3rd Century, said, “Unless a man has been baptized and born again, he cannot attain unto the kingdom of God. In the Gospel according to John: “Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”” Therefore, we see from these examples that the testimony from all the church leaders from the early church connected John 3:3-5 (New Birth) with baptism. Therefore, the new birth happens when a person is buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6).

Entering into the Kingdom

As a side note, we must understand that the Kingdom of God/Heaven is the Church. Jesus and John the Baptist both preached that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand (MT 3:2, 4:17). This means they saw it as something approaching soon but still in the future. Jesus even stated in Matthew 16:18 that he will (future) build his church upon the rock of Peter's confession. But once we get to the ministry of the apostles we realize that the Kingdom has already come. In Colossians 1:13 Paul says that Christians are already transferred into the Kingdom. John says in Revelation 1:9 that he is a fellow partaker in the Kingdom. What was the only institution that Jesus established on the fact that he was the Christ which came after his death but during the days of the Apostles? The answer is THE CHURCH. We see that it is impossible to enter into the Kingdom without being born again (John 3:3, 5). But in Acts 2:41, 47 we see that those who were baptized were added to the church. To experience the New Birth, to be saved, to enter into the Kingdom are all phrases to describe a person's conversion. Therefore, when one is baptized he experiences the New Birth by which he is saved and enters into the Kingdom.

Implications of the New Birth

Paul tells us in 2nd Corinthians 5:17 that if we are in Christ the old man has passed away, we are a new creature. In Colossians 3:1-4 he tells us that if we have been baptized we are to seek heavenly things. Again, he says in Romans 6:3-13 that if we have been buried with Christ we should consider ourselves dead to sin. Therefore, if we have experienced the New Birth it should begin to produce a changed life within us as we submit to the workings of the Holy Spirit and the Will of God. This means everyday taking up our cross (Lk 9:23) and becoming more and more conformed to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29). To do this we have to learn the will of God in order that we may better obey it (Php 2:12).