

BORN OF THE SPIRIT

- A. Introduction: Christianity is not a moral code or a belief system, although it has both. Christianity is about supernatural transformation accomplished by the power of God. God is working to transform mankind and the earth in order to restore both to their created purpose.
1. Almighty God created men and women to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ. He made the earth to be home for His family. Eph 1:4,5; Isa 45:18
 - a. The plan was seemingly taken off track when humanity chose independence from God through sin. When Adam and man in Adam sinned, a curse of corruption and death entered the entire material creation. Men became unfit for sonship and earth was no longer a fit home for God and His family. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 8:20; etc.
 - b. This turn of events didn't take God by surprise. He had a plan in mind to deal with it—His plan of redemption through Christ. Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Rev 13:8
 1. Redemption provides deliverance or salvation from bondage to corruption and death and restores man and the earth to our created purpose. II Tim 1:9,10; Titus 1:2; etc.
 2. Christianity is about God indwelling men and women and restoring us to what He intended us to be by His power working in us.
 2. The apostle Paul prayed for Christians that we would have revelation from God and know the greatness of His power in and toward those who believe. Eph 1:16-19
 - a. That power is God Himself, working in us to change us, restore us, and work through us. It is the same power that raised Christ from the dead, the power of the Holy Ghost. Eph 1:20; Rom 8:11
 - b. Paul challenged believers: Do you know your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost? I Cor 6:19
 1. Note this translation: Are you not conscious that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit that is in you? (Williams)
 2. If Jesus is your Lord today, then God is in you! But do you live with the awareness that you are indwelt by Almighty God and that His power is in you to work in and through you?
 - c. We're talking some time to look at what the Bible says about His power in us to increase our consciousness of this reality and make us more able to cooperate with Him as He works.
 3. The night before Jesus was crucified (at what we call the Last Supper) He shared much information with His disciples aimed at preparing them for the fact that He would soon be leaving them.
 - a. John 14:16,17; 26--Jesus told them that the Father would give them the Holy Spirit (another like Himself). Jesus said the Holy Spirit had been with them, but would now be in them after He left.
 - b. Acts 1:3-5--Jesus was crucified, rose from the dead, and spent forty more days with His disciples before returning to Heaven. Just before Jesus left them, He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father and were baptized with the Holy Ghost. This event occurred ten days later at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).
 - c. To fully appreciate the power in us (the Holy Spirit) and what He is in us to do we must understand that the New Testament teaches two distinct experiences with the Holy Spirit—being born of the Spirit and being baptized with or in the Spirit.
 1. This can be difficult to discuss because we have almost 2,000 years of various traditions that have developed, with widely varying views regarding the Holy Spirit and what it means to be born of and baptized in the Holy Spirit. This discussion is further complicated by the fact that many varying views have also developed about water baptism and its purpose.
 2. We must closely examine the Bible and be willing to accept its testimony above our experience or our denominational background. We must consider what all these terms and experiences meant to the people who lived and walked in the days of Jesus and His disciples.
- B. The people to whom Jesus first came (Israel) understood from the Old Testament prophets that God will one day establish His visible kingdom on earth and live with His people forever. Those living in Israel

when Jesus took on flesh and was born into this world also understood that sinful people cannot enter God's kingdom. So they were looking for the Messiah (Redeemer) to cleanse them from their sin.

1. Matt 3:1-12--John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare Israel to receive the promised Redeemer. He preached: Repent for the kingdom is at hand and baptized those who confessed their sins. Participation in John's baptism meant the individual believed the Lord's coming was near and was preparing for it.

a. Forget what you know about baptism for a moment and consider what it would have meant to the people in John's day. Baptism to them meant the application of water for ceremonial purification. This was a common practice among the Jews, as well as other cultures of that day.

1. The Jews washed whole persons (or parts thereof), clothing, vessels, utensils, and furniture as a symbol of purification from uncleanness. Aaron and his sons were washed to prepare them for their work as priests (Ex 29:4; Lev 8:6). Israel washed their clothes to prepare for the Lord to meet with them on Mount Sinai after they left Egypt (Ex 19:10,11).

2. By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had all kinds of rules about washing. Mark 7:3--They complained that Jesus' disciples didn't wash to the wrists (literal meaning). This wasn't the ordinary cleansing of the hands. It was a ceremonial washing practiced by the Pharisees.

b. The word baptism is a transliteration of the Greek word *bapto* which literally means to dip. It has the idea of immerse, submerge, and emerge. John immersed people when he baptized. v16

1. By the time Greek manuscripts of the New Testament were translated into English in 1611 infant baptism through sprinkling was the order of the day and the translators made an English word out of the Greek word rather than translate it.

2. John the Baptist's audience understood him to say: I cleanse you ceremonially by immersing you in water in preparation for the Lord's coming, but One is coming after me who will cleanse you with the Holy Ghost. v11

c. Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15--When Jesus began His public ministry His first words were: Repent and believe for the kingdom is at hand.

2. In John 3:3-5 He revealed that unless a man is born again he cannot see or enter the kingdom of God. Born again in the Greek is literally born from above. In v6 Jesus makes it clear that He is referring to an action carried out on a man by the Spirit of God.

a. The new birth is an inward transformation of the immaterial part of human beings accomplished by the Spirit of God through the Word of God. It transforms men and women from sinners to sons, from unrighteous to righteous, from dead to alive. (Lessons for another day.)

b. v5--Jesus stated that a man must be born of water and of the Spirit. Some misinterpret this to mean that we must be water baptized to be saved. Jesus was not talking about natural water.

1. Remember, these are people familiar with ceremonial washing to symbolize purification. They knew that, to enter the kingdom of God, they needed to be cleansed of sin. So picturing the action of the Spirit of God on men as cleansing water made sense.

2. The Bible uses a number of word pictures to convey spiritual truths. None by themselves are sufficient. But, all together they help us understand how an Infinite God interacts with finite beings like ourselves.

A. We have more than just a legal relationship with God. We have a living or organic relationship with God. We are partakers of His life and Spirit. Something of Him in us as a result of being born again.

B. We are born again, not through the natural waters of baptism, but by the action of the Holy Ghost when we believe on Jesus. It is a supernatural occurrence.

c. Throughout His ministry Jesus used water as a word picture of what God by the power of the Holy Spirit would accomplish in those who believe on Him. (Remember, He compared the baptism in the Holy Spirit to John's baptism where he immersed people in water. Acts 1:5)

1. John 4:9-14--In talking with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus contrasted natural water and its effects with the living water He would give—whoever drinks of the water I give will

never be thirsty again.

2. John 6:35--Jesus later made it clear that this water is received through believing on Him.

3. John 7:37-39--Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as living water that will flow out of the belly of those who receive Him.

d. In John 3:5 Jesus was referring to the cleansing, purifying power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. When people believe the Word of God concerning salvation through Jesus and His sacrifice, the Spirit of God produces the new birth in in them. I Pet 1:23; James 1:18

3. Part of Jesus' ministry prior to the Cross was to prepare His disciples for changes in the relationship between God and man as a result of His death. Men would become literal sons of God by partaking of His uncreated, eternal life.

a. Much of what Jesus taught them emphasized the need for inward (as opposed to outward) change. During the three years the disciples walked with Jesus they watched Him deal over and over again with the Pharisees who were outwardly clean. (Lessons for another day).

b. Matt 23:26-28--The main charge Jesus leveled against them was that they looked good on the outside, but not on the inside. Outward cleansing with natural water couldn't correct that problem. They (like all of us) needed inward transformation by the power of God through the new birth.

4. John 13:5-9--At the Last Supper Jesus washed His disciples feet to illustrate that believers are to serve one another. Jesus made a statement relevant to our discussion when Peter refused the Lord. v8--

Unless I wash you, you have no part with [in] Me—no share in companionship with Me. (Amp)

a. Even if the disciples took Jesus' words to mean He needed to give them a water bath in order for them to be clean enough for the kingdom, Jesus cleared up any confusion later in the evening.

b. Jesus revealed how He cleanses (cleans) people—with His Word (John 15:3). When He ended the evening with a prayer to His heavenly Father, Jesus prayed that the Father would sanctify His followers with His Word (John 17:17). Sanctify is a different Greek word than cleanse, but the

idea is similar (to purify or consecrate)

5. This is consistent with what Paul revealed. Remember, Paul was personally taught the message he preached by Jesus Himself. Gal 1:11,12

a. Eph 5:25-27--Paul wrote that Jesus gave Himself over to death on the Cross in order to sanctify and cleanse the church (believers) through the washing of water by the Word.

1. Sanctify is the word used in John 17:17. Cleanse means to cleanse (literally or figuratively) and is used of the Blood of Christ cleansing or purging us from sin (I John 1:7,9).

2. Washing is from the Greek word for bath, to bathe. It is spoke of the cleansing that takes place at salvation.

b. Titus 3:5--Paul wrote that God saves us, not because of any righteous works we've done, but according to His mercy by washing us through regeneration of (by) the Holy Ghost.

1. Washing is the same word used in Eph 5:26. Regeneration is from a Greek word that literally means birth again or new birth.

2. When we believe the Word of God regarding Jesus and the Cross, the Holy Spirit through the Word regenerates us or imparts eternal life to our dead human spirit and we are born again.

6. Water baptism is an outward symbol or sign of the inward change produced by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God when a person believes on Jesus as Savior and Lord (lessons for another day).

a. Through baptism you signify the fact that you are turning from your old life of living for self to a new life of living for God. Peter called it the answer of a good conscience toward God.

b. I Pet 3:21--Baptism, which is a figure [of their deliverance], does now also save you [from inward questionings and fears], not by the removing of outward body filth (bathing), but by [providing you with] the answer of a good and clear conscience [inward cleanness and peace] before God,

[because you are demonstrating what you believe to be yours] through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Amp)

- C. Jesus' apostles followed Him from the beginning of His public ministry. They heard Him proclaim: Repent (turn to God) and believe (Mark 1:16). They heard Him make the statements we quoted above about the new birth and water of the Holy Spirit.
1. Luke 24:44-48--Following His death and resurrection Jesus explained to them from the Scriptures that His death dealt with sin and men could now be cleansed from their sin through faith in Him. He called them to preach remission or the wiping away of sin which qualifies men for the kingdom.
 - a. Mark 16:15,16--As part of Jesus' final instructions to His disciples before He returned to Heaven, He told them to preach the gospel assuring them that he that believes and is baptized will be saved.
 - b. Notice, believing precedes baptism. Jesus further said the one who doesn't believe (as opposed to isn't baptized) shall be damned.
 2. Acts 2:38--This verse is used by some to say that unless you are water baptized in Jesus' name you aren't saved. The only way one can reach that conclusion is by taking this verse out of the context of everything else the New Testament says about salvation, new birth, and water baptism.
 - a. Peter, who made the statement, heard every verse we've quoted thus far (except for Paul's words because he was not yet a Christian). He heard Jesus say: Repent and believe. He knew that remission of sin comes through believing not baptism.
 1. These people were baptized after they believed--Then those, who welcomed his message, were baptized (v41, Berkeley). The word "for" in the Greek is *eis* which means "because".
 2. v38--Be baptized upon the ground of your confession of belief in...Jesus. (Wuest)
 - b. Acts 3:12-26--In Peter's next recorded sermon he once again preached the resurrection and told the crowd that through Jesus their sins could be wiped out. He preached the Word of God so they would believe it (v19).
 - c. Acts 10--Through a series of supernatural happenings, the Lord led Peter to Caesarea where he preached the gospel to a gentile family. In Acts 11 Peter, back in Jerusalem, recounted what took place to the other apostles. We'll say more next week, but note these points.
 1. Acts 10:42,43--Peter preached to Cornelius and his family that the wiping out (remission) of sins comes through believing in Jesus. He said nothing about water baptism saving them.
 2. Acts 11:13,14--Peter was sent to tell the gentiles words that would bring them salvation.
 - d. Acts 8:5-8;12--Philip went to Samaria to preach Jesus the people believed and were baptized.
 1. Acts 8:26-35--At the direction of the Lord Philip went south to Gaza and met an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the Book of Isaiah. Philip used it to preach Jesus to the man.
 2. Acts 8:36,37--The man wanted to be water baptized. Philip's response was: If you believe with all your heart, you can be baptized. Believing preceded baptism.
- D. Conclusion: We have a lot more to say next week. But consider this point as we close. God's plan from the beginning was and is to indwell His sons and daughters. Jesus died to take away our sin so sinners can be born of God and transformed into sons in whom God dwells.