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Nicodemus (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg interprets John chapter 3 and discusses Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to Jesus at night to learn more about him. Steve suggests that Nicodemus might have already drawn the conclusion that Jesus was God, but was hesitant to admit it openly. Steve highlights the concept of being "born again" as a spiritual rebirth, not a physical one, and emphasizes the importance of being born of the Spirit. He also discusses the contrast between being born of the flesh and being born of the Spirit, and how this impacts one's relationship with God.

Transcript

Let's turn to John chapter 3, obviously a chapter that immediately upon the mention of it, everyone knows what its contents are, I would think. I mean, maybe not everyone, but you're not a Christian for very long, probably, before you hear sermons about or read and remember the things that are found in this chapter. And that is, of course, the evening visit of Nicodemus to Jesus and the significant conversation that took place there.

This conversation is no doubt abridged in the record, because it's really quite short as it's recorded, and in all likelihood, we only have the essence preserved for us of what the conversation was about. Now, let's read some of these verses. I'd like to get through verse 21 in this session, but we'll just see if we can.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus said to him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not

marvel that I said to you, You must be born again.

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said to him, Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what we know and testify what we have seen, and you do not receive our witness.

If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but he who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God. Now, it's very difficult to know whether Jesus was still the speaker all the way up into verse 21.

The New King James has quotation marks closing at the end of verse 21, suggesting that the translators understand all those words from verse 10 through 21 to be an extended comment by Jesus. The last words of Nicodemus in the conversation are in verse 9, where he says, how can these things be? And Jesus is apparently the only speaker all the way to the end of verse 21, and then the scene shifts, so we don't read how the conversation ended. What Nicodemus' frame of mind was at the time that he left this encounter, although we do read of him again later in the Gospel of John, and we have some indicators.

But what I wanted to suggest is that it is possible that a portion of that which is here represented in the quotation marks, as if Jesus spoke it, might not be so much Jesus' actual words as commentary by John. Now, what I mean by that, John's Gospel, more than any other, is theologically oriented, and John will sometimes give comments of his own about things that Jesus said. An example which is obvious would be in John chapter 7, where Jesus stood up in verse 37, he stood up in the great day of the feast, and he said, if anyone thirsts, let him come unto me and drink.

And he who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. And then John says, in verse 39, in parentheses, this he spoke of the Holy Spirit, who was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified. Now, for John to make these comments about what Jesus said, sort of expand on them or clarify them or explain them, is part of John's whole operation.

He's writing a theological gospel. What I mean by that is, he does give the historic information of what Jesus said and did, but he always wants to make sure his reader catches the meaning of it. And John is himself, of course, a preacher, and we can see that in his other writings, for instance, 1st and 2nd and 3rd John, this writer also makes a lot of the same points about light and darkness and so forth that we find here.

It is conceivable that Jesus' words end at the end of verse 12 of this chapter. Conceivable, but not at all certain. That's the last place we have Jesus speaking in the first person.

If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? It is possible that that is the end of Jesus' recorded statements and that from verse 13 on, John is writing his commentary on what Jesus just said. One reason for saying that is because in verse 13 it says, the Son of Man who is in heaven. At the time John wrote this, Jesus had gone back to heaven, and therefore John in commenting could say, the Son of Man who is, meaning who is now at the time of writing, in heaven.

It is a little difficult to know how Jesus could have meant it if he was speaking of himself as the Son of Man who is in heaven, when in fact he wasn't in heaven at the moment. One way to solve that slight difficulty is to point out that the expression, who is in heaven, at the end of verse 13 is not in some of the manuscripts. That gives us always the out.

That phrase, which is troublesome in verse 13, might not be original. It might be an addition later since the manuscripts don't all contain it. But given the possibility that that phrase is original, then it would certainly suggest that John and not Jesus is the one making the comments.

There are no quotation marks in the Greek manuscripts, which means that where the quotes close is any interpreter or translator's judgment call. It is not impossible for the quotes to close at the end of verse 12. But I'm not sure that that's so.

It's just a possibility. I would point out to you that in the remainder of the same chapter, after the point that we left off reading, verses 22 and following, we have John the Baptist in conversation with his disciples. And it's possible that verse 30 is the last thing that John the Baptist actually says there.

He must increase, but I must decrease. Now, the New King James puts the quotation

closing at the end of verse 36. But if you notice verses 31 through 36, the content of those verses, which we'll take another time, not now, is such that John, again, the writer, may be making his comments springboarding from what John the Baptist has said.

Because there are no quotation marks in the original, it is impossible to know for certain where the quoted material ends and where John's own comments begin. But it's interesting that the vocabulary and the concepts and so forth of verses 31 through 36 are identical, or at least very, very closely related to, those found in the latter part of the portion we read. And they both may represent John's own commentary on what Jesus said in the first case and on what John said, the Baptist said, in the latter.

We don't know. But I bring this up because we can't be sure, although the quotation marks in the New King James would indicate it, we can't be sure that Jesus is intended to be understood as the speaker all the way through verse 21. It is possible, but not entirely clear.

We do know, however, Jesus was speaking up through verse 12 and possibly all the way up through verse 21. Now, Nicodemus is introduced to us in chapter 3, verse 1. It says, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Now, he was of the Pharisees, which speaks of his theological orientation.

It's like saying he was a Baptist or a Presbyterian or a Catholic or something like that. It would be his religious denomination. He was a Pharisee, not a Sadducee.

And the Sadducees had a certain set of theological beliefs, the Pharisees a different set. It's actually a little bit more like saying a man is a theological liberal or a theological conservative. The Sadducees, in some respects, were more like our modern liberals.

They didn't believe in the supernatural. They didn't believe in the spiritual realm and so forth, like liberal theologians today. The Pharisees were more conservative, more traditional, sort of like fundamentalists today.

So, again, the word Pharisee functioned to give some idea of the guy's theological leanings. But there was also, of course, a defined group, just like there are a defined group called Southern Baptists today, which were called the Pharisees. Josephus tells us there were only about 6,000 of them altogether in the nation.

And there were about 700,000 Jews in Palestine at this time. So, for only 6,000, that's less than one in 100 Jews. Less than 1% were Pharisees.

However, they were respected disproportionately to their numbers. This particular Pharisee is also said to have been a ruler of the Jews. Now, this means that in some capacity, he had an office over his Jewish countrymen.

Without any further information, we could possibly conclude that this meant that he was

maybe a ruler of a synagogue. Every Jewish town had a synagogue in it, and there was some guy who was sort of like the master of ceremonies at the synagogue service. And they were referred to as the ruler of the synagogue.

For instance, the rich young ruler who came running to Jesus, the famous story about the rich young ruler. He was probably a ruler of the synagogue in his town, as opposed to a higher ranking official in the Jewish government. But Nicodemus is mentioned twice again in the Gospel of John, and we get the impression he's something more than just a ruler in the synagogue.

Because we have in chapter 7 of John, the Jews send out soldiers to arrest Jesus. It says in John 7.32, the Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. Now, the chief priests would have been, of course, the high priests and other priests of high rank.

The high priest was actually the president of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel. Other chief priests probably were also ranking Sanhedrists, although it's not certain that they are so. But we find among them, Nicodemus in verse 45, it says, the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, Why have you not brought him? The officers said, No man ever spoke like this man.

Then the Pharisees answered them, Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed in him? Notice, the rulers of the Pharisees. But the crowd that does not know the law is accursed. Nicodemus, he who came to Jesus by night being one of them, said to them, Does our law judge a man? etc.

etc. Now notice, they said, Have any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed in him? And Nicodemus seems compelled to speak up, because he is apparently one of the rulers of the Pharisees. We are told in John 3.1, he was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews.

Here, a ruler of the Pharisees is the term that is used. And he was one of this group of high ranking Jews that had the authority to send officers out to arrest Jesus. Although Nicodemus had not personally approved of the arrest, it would appear.

He was one of them, it says, in verse 50. Now, there is one other reference, of course, to Nicodemus, elsewhere in the scripture. It is also in the Gospel of John, chapter 19, in verse 39.

Actually, we should read prior to that, verse 38. After this, Josephus of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus.

And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 100 pounds. They took the body of Jesus, and of course, they

buried it. Now, Josephus of Arimathea and Nicodemus, we have on other authority, at least about Josephus of Arimathea, that he was a member of the council.

In fact, I'm trying to find the specific place that mentions this. Let me see if I can quickly locate it. If I can't, I'll give up the search quick, because we don't want to waste any time.

It may be in Matthew 27. Let me have a look and see. In Matthew 27.57, it simply says that Josephus of Arimathea was a rich man.

But I believe that we have it on authority of one of the other Gospels, that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. I'm sure of it, in fact. I just need to find the place.

Mark 14.42 also mentions him, I think. Mark 14.42, I'm just going to scan here real quick. Not 42.

That is not the right... Maybe it's 15.42, I don't know. Yeah. There it is.

Got it. I knew it was there, somewhere. Mark 15.43, that's where it is.

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member. Now, a council member means a member of the council, the Sanhedrin. So, Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin.

In Mark 15.43, it says. John 19.38 says that he and Nicodemus together got the body of Jesus and buried it. So, he and Nicodemus were friends.

And it seems to me, likely, that we understand this to mean that Nicodemus, when it says he was a ruler of the Jews, it means he was a member of the council, the Sanhedrin, just like his friend Joseph of Arimathea was. He was a ruler of the Pharisees. And I think that that is generally understood to be the case.

Although, I'm not sure that anywhere in the record it specifically mentions Nicodemus being a member of the Sanhedrin. It certainly is implied in the information we have, what little we have on him, that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. Who did not approve, of course, of the Sanhedrin's decision to condemn Jesus.

But, it says that he was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. Now, most of the members of the Sanhedrin were not Pharisees. The Sanhedrin was weighted heavily with priests who tended to be Sadducees in their beliefs.

And they also tended to be Sanhedrists because they were on it. But, the Pharisees were the minority party on the Sanhedrin. The Sadducees were the majority party.

However, Nicodemus apparently had an unusually well-respected role among the Jews. In addition to being on the Sanhedrin and a Pharisee and a ruler of the Pharisees, Jesus

referred to him as the teacher of Israel. In verse 10, Jesus answered and said to him, Are you the teacher of Israel? Now, the King James says, Are you a teacher of Israel? But, in the Greek it has the definite article, The.

As if that was Nicodemus' title. He was recognized as the teacher. Like a leading rabbi.

Very highly respected. So, we have the impression from these data that Jesus was visited by a very high-ranking Phariseic rabbi who also held a seat on the Supreme Court of the nation. So, he had political power.

He was a religious fundamentalist. And a high-ranking one at that. So, here Jesus has got a local dignitary visiting him.

Now, we are told that the man came to Jesus by night in verse 2. And some have felt that they can make a lot out of this. That he, in fact, came by night because he was afraid to be seen visiting Jesus. This is a possibility.

If this is so, we might read in verse 20 sort of a backhanded gentle criticism. Or, maybe not so gentle criticism of Nicodemus. It says, Everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed.

If Nicodemus chose to come to Jesus under cover of darkness because he didn't want people to know what he was doing. He was not walking in the light, as it were. And it speaks of his not being completely okay.

But, I'm not sure that it's correct to say that Nicodemus was afraid to be seen. Nicodemus speaks as if he's representing a group who have sent him to speak on their behalf. Because he says, his first words are, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher from God.

Now, who are we? He doesn't explain. But, he is a Pharisee. He is a member of the Zanhedrin.

And, he must be representing himself as being there to represent the interests of a group of people. Possibly fellow Pharisees or fellow members of the Zanhedrin. Who are curious to know what Jesus has to say about himself.

Now, we know from John chapter 1, that when John the Baptist was up in the Galilee area baptizing. That the Jews from Judea sent people up to ask John what he said about himself. I mean, they were hearing about John.

Now, they were hearing about Jesus, probably especially since he had cleansed the temple. On this same visit to Jerusalem. But, also he had done some signs.

We see that in the comment in verse 2. For no one can do the signs that you do unless God is with him. Now, we don't have record of what any of these signs were. Although, in

chapter 2 verse 23.

After Jesus had driven the money changers out of the temple. It says, now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover during the feast. Many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did.

So, Jesus while there at Passover did some unnamed, unspecified signs. We don't know what they were, but they apparently caused a number of people to believe in him. Nicodemus apparently was representing some of those who had come to believe in him.

Or at least to be curious about whether they should believe in him. Because of the signs. Now, Nicodemus words would indicate that he and those he represents.

Actually had already drawn the conclusion about Jesus that he was from God. That there is no other explanation that would fit the evidence. These signs that Jesus was doing.

Couldn't do that unless he was from God. It's interesting that not all the Pharisees. And not all the Sanhedrists reached that conclusion.

For example, later on. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. A sign which should have truly and unmistakably been recognized as from God.

The Sanhedrin, when they heard of it, didn't believe. They instead decided to try to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus. And destroy the evidence.

Because people were believing in Jesus on account of that miracle. Not everyone becomes a believer because they see miracles. But Nicodemus apparently was at least open to it.

And he felt like that was the direction the evidence pointed. That these miracles must be done by somebody who was from God. How could it be otherwise? Now, think about it, if you would.

Jesus at this point is an unknown. More or less. He hasn't really gathered many crowds yet.

He's done only one miracle that's been recorded. That was the turning of water to wine. Then he did some other signs.

We don't know what they were in Jerusalem. He did cleanse the temple. That caused a stir.

But he's still basically got no reputation. What he stands for. He hasn't been teaching publicly yet.

Who he is. What he's claiming about himself. What he represents.

What his message is, if he has one. All of that is still a mystery. He's still basically an enigma man.

Not well known. Now at a later time when he was preaching throughout Galilee. What he stood for was well known.

Everyone knew who he was. They may not have all agreed that he was a messiah. But they knew what he represented.

What he said and what he taught. He's a well known guy. He's visited by one of the best known Jewish leaders.

It would be like getting a visit from somebody who held one of the top ranking political offices in this country. Or one of the leading clergymen of this country. Or not leading clergymen but someone who is well known.

Pat Robertson or Billy Graham or Oral Roberts or someone. Came to you and you were just starting out in the ministry. No one even knew you existed yet.

He came and said, I know you're from God. I am impressed by you. That could go to your head a little bit.

This guy here that everyone reveres. Everyone sees him as the teacher of Israel. He's here telling me that he knows I'm from God.

And that he's been impressed. But Jesus was not impressed. It didn't affect him at all that this guy was standing there flattering him.

Jesus just decided to cut right to the chase. He said, listen buster. If you're not born again you're never going to see the kingdom.

You know. I mean the guy hadn't even mentioned the kingdom. The kingdom had not come up in conversation.

No questions had been asked. Jesus chose the agenda. Jesus set the subject of the conversation.

He didn't say thank you. I appreciate that compliment. He just said, listen.

Let's not waste any time here. You're not even going to see the kingdom unless you're born again. First of all, because as I said, Nicodemus hadn't even mentioned the kingdom.

But it must have been what Jesus perceived to be on his mind. And how could it not be? The kingdom of God was on all the Jews' minds. When John the Baptist appeared doing strange things, the first thing I learned, this is the Messiah.

He's coming to establish the kingdom. He disowned that title himself. Jesus, when he started making a stir, people thought, maybe this is the Messiah.

And Messiah means the one who's going to bring in the kingdom. Now, remember to the Jew, the kingdom was a political thing, as far as they knew. The kingdom was going to be an earthly government reigned over by the Messiah and whoever was his chosen cabinet.

Nicodemus and others of his rank would have reason at this early date to wonder whether a kingdom established by someone like Jesus would include them as ranking members or authorities. Now, in the kingdom of Israel as it was now, which at that time was not an autonomous kingdom, it wasn't sovereign, they were a vassal under Rome, but they did have a government, they did have an authority structure and the members of the Sanhedrin were at the top of that pile. They were the leaders, the power brokers.

If any Jews had power over other Jews, they were the ones who did. Now, of course, if the Messiah comes and brings the kingdom, he's going to be the one who's in authority. The question is, will he take the power of the administration, make them cabinet members and officers and so forth.

No doubt, this was one of the things that got Jesus crucified, was that as his ministry progressed, it became clear to those who were in power that he was not likely to pick any of them to be cabinet members. Everything he said was against them and the guys he was choosing for the likely positions were tax collectors and fishermen and people that didn't hold any rank among the Jews. Jesus was building an entirely different house and he was the cornerstone of the house that God was building and they, the builders, were rejecting him, but God was going to make him the cornerstone of a new house.

It was clear that Jesus was starting a kingdom that was in competition with theirs. It's not that he was coming to affirm their leadership and affirm their government and affirm what they were doing, but he was coming to do something in competition with them. No one knows where he stands.

All they know is he's really taking charge, going into the temple, driving people out, doing some signs to convince people that he had the right to do this kind of stuff. And of course, on everyone's minds, is this the Messiah? Is he bringing in the kingdom? And those who were in authority, the Sanhedrists would be talking among themselves, do you suppose this could be the Messiah? Do you suppose this is the beginning of the end? And no doubt some of them, the ones most positively disposed toward Jesus at this early point, sent Nicodemus to represent them and to inquire about this. Are you here to bring in the kingdom of God? Now I'm reading between the lines, but I don't think I'm making any leaps.

The fact that Jesus immediately cuts the chase and talks about the kingdom of God

suggests that this is what was really on the guy's mind. He's got all this diplomacy and talking about how Jesus is a wonderful guy from God and Jesus immediately cuts to what is important and that is that this man was not prepared to enter the kingdom of God. Now if anyone felt by natural qualifications they could enter the kingdom when the Messiah came, probably it would be a man like Nicodemus.

First of all, it is without doubt that he had an impeccable pedigree. He would have been a Sanhedrin if he was a lesser Jew. And the less Jewish blood you had in you, the lesser you were as a Jew.

Like Paul himself. Paul was being groomed for the Sanhedrin before he was a Christian. He was a Pharisee also.

He says he was of the strictest pedigree of the tribe of Benjamin and he makes all kinds of boasts about this in Philippians 3 after which he says all this I have to boast about and do me any good with God. Well Nicodemus I am sure we can assume had a very glorious ancestry. By natural birth he probably ranked among the best of them.

He had been chosen probably partly on that basis and partly on the basis of his education to be in the Sanhedrin. Furthermore, he was already an experienced leader of Israel and a teacher no doubt of the law. All these things that he would think by natural considerations would make him a shoe-in.

An obvious choice for leadership in the new kingdom. And Jesus says you are not even in it. You can't even see it.

And you certainly can't enter it unless you start from scratch again and are born again. Now, to say he had to be born again was emphasizing something very important to the Jew because they thought who their parents were. Whether they were properly descended from Abraham.

Pedigree was the issue with them. And his birth was not adequate, Jesus said. You have to be born all over again to even see it.

Now some translations say you have to be born from above. The word again in verse 3 can also be translated from above. Born from above.

Either translation is fine. They both convey a similar idea. Jesus was talking about being born of God.

Being born of the Spirit. Being spiritually born. You can just call that being born again or being born from above.

Either way would be accurate. But Nicodemus didn't understand it. And he said, how can a man be born when he is old? Now when I was young, as a child I was raised in an

evangelical home.

I knew the expression being born again. I knew what it meant from a pretty early age. When I was old enough to read and I heard Nicodemus' response to it, I thought, this isn't realistic.

A guy couldn't really be that stupid to ask a question like that. Could a person really make the mistake of thinking that Jesus was talking about going back into the womb again and being born? He should have known obviously that Jesus had something else in mind other than that. And then when I got older and got out and started witnessing, I found out that people were talking about the issue of being born again.

A number of people in apparent sincerity say, you mean you have to go back into a womb again and be born again? And by the way, there are a whole lot of people who think that Jesus taught reincarnation. And they thought that this was a place where they could prove that Jesus was a believer in reincarnation because he had to be born again. And of course, if their understanding were correct, they would have been born again.

starting a life in the womb and coming out of the womb again every time. Now it's obvious to me now that a lot of people would make this mistake. Nicodemus' question is a very natural one.

It's just that I've been so familiar all my life with the expression being born again and I knew it was something other than going into the womb. I remember thinking when I used to read this, could a man really have made this kind of a stupid question? But people do make that question because it's a stupid thing to tell people they have to be born again. See, it's become sort of a cliché for Christians now.

Born again Christians. I mean, even the secular media uses the expression and they seem comfortable using it. I don't know if they understand what it means, but the point is it wasn't a common expression when Jesus used it.

He originated it on this occasion. And when you try to hear that expression through fresh ears, this question is a natural one, it seems to me. And it now seems.

It says, can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? And Jesus answered, most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Now this is an important verse to stop and discuss for a moment because Jesus makes reference to being born of the water and being born of the Spirit, one of them is held by many Christians. Although I didn't first hear it from Christians, I heard it from Mormons.

The Mormons officially take a particular view of this verse and use it to prove a particular point. And I used to think it was just a Mormon view until I met Christians who in all sincerity thought this was what it meant just upon reading it. And that is the view that

when he's talking about being born of water and born of the Spirit, what he really means is being baptized in water and baptized in the Spirit.

The Mormons teach that you have to be baptized in water and baptized in the Holy Spirit to be saved. And they use this verse as a proof of it. Because Jesus said unless you're born of water and born of the Spirit, and they read baptized in water and baptized in the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

When I first encountered this argument in conversation with a Mormon, I thought what a ridiculous way that I could understand that passage. And then I found a lot of Christians, including scholars and commentators, who understand it that way. So I've had to take it a little more seriously and ask whether there's any merit to that viewpoint.

My conclusion after giving it a lot of, I think, hopefully fair and serious thought, is that there isn't any merit in it, but I still need to deal with it since possibly some of you wouldn't most naturally understand it that way. What I would observe about it is this. First of all, the Bible does not teach that God commands us to be baptized in water.

It does teach that God commands us to be baptized in water, and that if we do not, there's reason to wonder whether we got saved in the first place. But, I mean, the thief on the cross is the classic example we always point to. We know he was saved because Jesus told him he was.

He told him he was going to be in paradise, not in hell. And yet the man was never baptized. So, I mean, it's quite obvious that if Jesus were saying, in this case, that a person has to be baptized in water and if he made one exception, it must be one of those things that is not without exception.

There must be, maybe, or could easily be other exceptions. And if there are a number of exceptions, or even one exception, it can't be a universal thing. We know of at least one case, namely the thief on the cross, who entered the kingdom without being baptized.

And if there's one case, there must be nothing in the nature of the situation that makes it a universal thing, such as Jesus makes it, either born or baptized in water to enter the kingdom of God. Now, I've never seen it to mean this, and I still find it remarkable that some people immediately give it this interpretation, because there's no obvious reason why the word born would be a metaphor for baptized. I mean, clearly the word baptized isn't found in the verse.

John 3, 5 doesn't mention anything about baptized, it talks about being born. And, it seems, there seems no obvious reason why we should connect being born with being baptized. Maybe I'm missing something.

Does anyone here, maybe someone can see things a little more clearly than I do. I've never been able to understand why there'd be an immediate leap from the idea of being

born in the spirit to being baptized in the spirit, or from being born of water to being baptized in water. I've just never been able to see it.

First of all, there's nothing in the passage, there's no suggestion in all of the teaching of this conversation that baptism is in view. And, to say this, and mean baptism, would seem to be contrary to what the Bible teaches elsewhere. It's not water baptism that is a universal requirement for salvation.

Now, another view is, this is a second and an alternative view, which is the view that I always held, which I may still hold, I'm not sure, the view I held most of my life, and I still think has good merit to it, is that being born of water is a reference to natural birth. Now, in that aforementioned conversation with the Mormons, when I first heard their view of this, I explained to them that I didn't think it meant anything about baptism. I said, I think it means you have to be born naturally and born spiritually to be saved.

And their response was, as I think others might respond, well, why would Jesus be telling some guy to be born naturally? Obviously, he's already been born naturally, so why would Jesus have to tell him he has to be born naturally and command him to be born naturally? Well, other people have raised that same objection, but they haven't read the verse carefully. Jesus didn't command the man sitting before him to be born naturally, nor did he even command him to be born spiritually. He just made a statement.

He said, most assuredly I say to you, unless one, he's speaking generically, unless a person is born of water he has to be born physically, obviously, but he also has to be born a second time. Now, Nicodemus and all the rest of us have already been born physically. Jesus was not commanding him to go do that again.

The man had already come out of the mother's womb once. What he's asking is, do you have to do that a second time? The answer is no. Once of that kind of birth is enough.

But you need another kind of birth as well. You need to be born not only naturally, but also you need a birth that's a spiritual birth. Now, the question then is, is that what born of water means? Is born of water an expression that refers to natural birth when we came into this world as babies? Again, that's not altogether obvious.

There are a couple of things in its favor. Let me just say what's not in its favor. What's not in its favor is it's not a regular way of speaking about natural birth.

There is no other place in the Bible or as far as I know in other literature that speaks of natural birth as born of the water. And it's not the most natural way to speak of that concept. On the other hand, there are a couple of things in its favor.

One is simply the fact of nature that along with the baby, water is emitted. At the time of birth, one reason that a woman knows that the baby is about to come is that she is born of water. As it were, with a stream of water.

Now that doesn't give any obvious reason why natural birth should be called born of water, but it's a consideration. The most important consideration in favor of this particular interpretation is what it says in verse 6, which is immediately following. It says, that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.

Now notice, verse 5 and verse 6 have something in common with each other. They both refer to two kinds of birth. And in each case, the second kind that each verse mentions is being born of the spirit.

Verse 5 talks about two births, born of water and born of the spirit. Verse 6 talks about being born of the flesh and born of the spirit. Born of the spirit is the second birth in each case.

While it cannot be said to be indisputable, it seems probable that born of the flesh and born of water are two ways of saying the same thing. In verse 5, born of water is contrasted with born of the spirit. In verse 6, born of the flesh is contrasted with born of the spirit.

And verse 6 appears to be explanatory of verse 5. That is the impression I have anyway. I've always had that impression. And to me, that has been a very strong argument for the idea that born of the water in verse 5 is the same thing as natural birth.

You need both. You need to be born the first time. Of course, everyone has that qualification they meet.

But now, there are some who still have another qualification they meet. Namely, they have not yet been born of the spirit. That has to happen too.

If you're born of the flesh merely, all you are is flesh. If you're born of the spirit, however, you're a spiritual being. And of course, he tells the woman as well in chapter 4 of John, God is a spirit.

You have to be born of the spirit in order to relate with God. If you're born of the flesh, I don't care how many times it is, reincarnated a zillion times, every one of those incarnations is in the flesh. In the flesh, in the flesh.

It doesn't matter if you're born of the flesh a million times, you're still flesh. Because whatever is born of the flesh is flesh. It's not until you have an entirely different kind of a birth that you change from being in the flesh to being in the spirit.

By the way, I use the Christian vernacular to speak of a person being in the flesh or in the spirit and means something somewhat different, I think, by that expression than what Paul uses it. Paul uses these expressions in Romans 7 and in Romans 8. He uses the expression in the flesh and also in the spirit. I don't know about you, but in the circles I've always been in, people sometimes say, well, I really got in the flesh.

I wasn't behaving very spiritually. I kind of let my baser instincts kind of lead me by the nose, as it were, and I kind of did the wrong thing. I had a brief lapse into unspirituality.

And that lapse I call being in the flesh. However, when I'm really walking in the spirit, it's common to say I was really in the spirit when I got that word from the Lord. That's not the way those expressions work in the Bible.

I'm not saying we can't use them that way as long as we understand that when we encounter the same expressions in the Bible, they mean something else. In the flesh, according to Paul, means unconverted, unregenerate. In the spirit, means regenerated, born again.

I'll show you how Paul uses them here so we can get that clear. I can find it immediately in chapter 8. There is also a case where he mentions it in chapter 7. Let me just say, in chapter 8 of Romans, verse 6 will start, For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace, because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. In the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the spirit of God dwells in you, now if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he is not his.

Now it's quite obvious here that if you are a Christian, he says, you are in the spirit. And if you are in the flesh, that's like being unregenerate. He's using the expression to mean not regenerated.

What I was looking for in chapter 7, I actually looked at 7.5, but I didn't see the words there, so I looked elsewhere. I wasn't reading carefully enough. You are talking and reading at the same time, and you are reading something different than what you are saying.

That is the verse. Thank you very much. Romans 7.5, For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were expelled by, so we should serve in the newness of the spirit and not the oldness of the letter.

That means our service to God now comes from an agreement from our inner man, from the spirit, and not just the oldness of the letter.