

The Just shall live by Faith

Volume 2 - Study 9 Revisiting John 3 / consider again the words 'spirit' and 'Spirit'

C. Ronald Johnson, Christian Wilderness Press: **3:1) There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2) The same came to Jesus by night,...**

These are brief studies, not
“teachings” or “doctrines.”

Volume 2, Study 9

Again Considering the words 'spirit' and 'Spirit'

In Volume 1, Study 16 more than a few words are shared regarding John chapter 3. I am going to do it again, but this time specifically with a view to the words 'spirit' and 'Spirit'. Therefore, it would be good for you to first consider Volume 2, Study 5 in its several parts to familiarize yourself with the usage of these words in all of scripture. With that fresh in your mind, then, this study shall look particularly at what Jesus said in John 3 about the subject (i.e. with little or no consideration regarding other subjects).

In the modern Church and its many splintered parts there exist many concepts, definitions, doctrines, and claims regarding the subject of spirit and Spirit. Because John 3 is of major importance to Christians; and since early in his ministry Jesus spoke these words to a high level Jewish teacher; I am revisiting this particular chapter regarding spirit and Spirit.

The apostle John (writer of this Gospel) earlier than this chapter used the words only once. In 1:32,33 - '**Upon whom [i.e. Jesus] thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost**'. And here we see '**Holy Ghost**' as well (in the KJV). If you have read Volume 2, Study 5 then you know that the Greek word means *blowing of breath*, obviously God's breath. There is another Greek word that simply means *breath*. Indeed, God's *breath* is in, among, and around His people; and at times - as He sees fit - He *blows*... sometimes lightly, sometimes heavily... depending on His purpose.

In the whole of scripture, when in a passage the Spirit *was active* the inference was that God's breath *was blowing*. Just as the wind can be physically sensed, so can the Spirit be spiritually sensed. That is when in a passage the Spirit became *manifest*, it was surely *blowing*. In such passages, then, it could have been a private strong message or a moving to an individual, but most often the Spirit's movement had been observed publicly.

3:1) There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2) The same came to Jesus by night,...

Typically, modern Christians assume that Nicodemus was “lost” and needed to be “saved”. However, consider verse 19-21. And 21 has '**But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God**'.

Jesus is the '**light**'. Nicodemus, prompted by no one (but the Holy Spirit), had come to the '**light**'. He wanted to examine the '**light**' and thus to be examined by the '**light**'.

...and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

'...we know that thou art a teacher come from God'. Who are the 'we' in the verse? This occurred early in Jesus' ministry, being Jesus' first ministry trip to Jerusalem. Even so, rulers of the Sanhedrin have had many reports about him. Many scribes, teachers, and Pharisees had ventured north into Galilee, and we know that at least some of the Pharisees had believed that Jesus had '**come from God**'.

Nicodemus' statement was that Jesus had '**come from God**'. Then Jesus responded to that statement.

3:3) Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot [even] see the kingdom of God [i.e. which is above].

The Greek words translated '**born again**' actually mean *born from above*. Moreover, '**born**' infers *come forth from* (see also the NIV verse 3 note g): indeed it means *birthed* as from out of a womb); and this infers *the source of something* (i.e. the *origin* as of the mother's womb).

The verse means: '**Except a man** [originate from above], **he cannot** [even] **see the kingdom of God** [which is above] [much less '**come**' down to earth '**from God**' even as Nicodemus had just stated about Jesus].

Jesus had been preaching in Galilee and in the last few days in Jerusalem that "The kingdom of God has arrived from God". (Note in other passages that it is stated "The kingdom of heaven has arrived from God".)

Therefore, knowing all of the scriptures about the coming of the Messiah, Nicodemus had become curious about this particular part of Jesus' preaching. Nicodemus had approached to seek '**light**' on this most wonderful subject. Moreover, Nicodemus had become (spiritually) impressed that this messenger obviously knew (i.e. the Spirit had manifested upon Jesus and in his words when preaching and teaching) a lot about the subject. So, very much into this subject, then, -

3:4-7) Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born [originate from something] when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Knowing the scriptures, Nicodemus had rightly assumed that Jesus preached and was working miracles regarding the kingdom of God as promised to Israel as prophesied in the scriptures. That is, it was prophesied that the kingdom would be set up under the Messiah on earth in Jerusalem; and in fact the disciples following Jesus thought this very thing - would it happen soon? Indeed, after the Resurrection, the apostles initially thought that they would see Jesus come again and set up the kingdom in their lifetime.

Therefore, wanting to be a part of this kingdom, Nicodemus was confused, wondering if Jesus was saying that somehow there would be a renewal of his body, which according to his knowledge of scripture was not making sense to him.

Ah, but Jesus wanted this mature Teacher of Israel to come into an understanding about the *spiritual* kingdom of God, which could visit the earth as God desired -

...Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born [both] of water and of the Spirit, he cannot [even] enter into the kingdom of God.

Note that Jesus had not '**entered into the kingdom of God**' as he had originated from the kingdom of God and had come down from it.

...That which is born of the flesh [i.e. 'of water'] is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again [i.e. born from above to be able to enter therein].

Jesus had switched over to the very reason for Nicodemus' visit: to know about and even '**enter the kingdom of God**'. Remember (from other studies) that 'the Jews' were keepers of the Mosaic Law and of the holy city Jerusalem, which holy city would become the center of the Messiah's kingdom.

Nicodemus had approached unto Jesus, the '**light**', and therefore the '**light**' wanted Nicodemus to know more about this messenger that was conversing with him. Jesus expanded upon Nicodemus' statement that Jesus had '**come from God**'. (Indeed, Nicodemus would become an important Jewish leader in the Church in Jerusalem.)

Not to dwell on it, but consider the water sack in the womb as like a baptismal pool. When the sack bursts the baby issues forth (is born) into the world as a new child '**of the flesh**'. Scriptural baptism, then, represents a person having been birthed anew as a new spiritual babe. '**That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again [i.e. born from above].**'

When saying that "a person is a christian" often I will say that "a person is a child of

God". The latter implies that he is a christian, but it also implies the origin of the christian as "of God" or "from above". The christian is "from above". Only his flesh is "of this world" and it shall be changed in the blink of an eye to its promised "of above" state .

3:8,9) The [physical earthly] wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh [i.e. from where it came or originated], and whither it goeth [i.e. where it is going]: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be [i.e. how can they come to be, come to pass]?

The Greek word for '**wind bloweth**' is the same as for '**spirit**' and '**Spirit**' which is '*blowing of breath*'. God's Breath (Spirit) is with all of His children. And when God decides to blow His Breath then It becomes *noticeable*, not just to the christian but sometimes to nearby people of the flesh (while at the same time they do not know from '**whence it cometh, and whither it goeth**'). That which is fleshly (earthly as you and I are in part) can tell when It Really Blows.

'**How can these be[come]?**' Was Nicodemus asking how it could become so to him?

3:10) Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

Nicodemus was a '**master of Israel**', not a priest, and so this was as high in the religious government of Judea as a person could attain. See John 7:45-53 where later, in his high office, Nicodemus spoke out in defense of Jesus, basically stating that the Pharisees had no (legal within the law) business judging Jesus without hearing him (whom of course Nicodemus has already heard and reported to his own small group of Pharisees).

Jesus' disciples closely following him also in the doctrinal sense had not known '**these things**'; and Nicodemus' spiritual understanding of such things was only beginning.

3:11) Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know [about the kingdom of God], and testify that we have seen [the kingdom of God]; and ye receive not our witness.

Who are the '**we**' in this verse? Jesus and his disciples had only just come to Jerusalem for the first time; yet, there had been others, perhaps many others, in Judea and in Jerusalem who had the Spirit and these may have prompted Nicodemus to ask for a private visit with Jesus.

Later on, Jesus said about Zacchaeus the tax collector that '**he also is a son of Abraham**'.

Nevertheless, Jesus primarily spoke here of the prophets who in prophesying to God's people also spoke of heavenly things as given to them by the Spirit of God. Moreover, the prophets and many others through the ages had witnessed things as the forces of heaven had come down and worked on earth. Though the 'kingdom of God' is the 'kingdom of heaven', God in heaven can send His Spirit or His forces down as He chooses.

Yet, the nation as a whole had not '**receive their witness**' and as a whole was not receiving the son of God's witness.

3:12) If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

The word '**believe**' in the Greek is the same for *the verb form of the faith*. In other words, Nicodemus was struggling with Jesus' words (as so often did the disciples). Therefore, Nicodemus was not yet faithing Jesus' words; at that point Nicodemus was trying to understand (as so often did the disciples... as so often so do we). Jesus' disciples constantly struggled with Jesus words of spiritual things and of earthly things; and often then in parables he would teach them of heavenly things.

Nicodemus was searching and wanting to understand how the '**earthly things**' (perhaps Jesus' miracles also) were worked from heaven.

3:13) And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

Therefore, Jesus informed Nicodemus that only he (Jesus) was the One that had come down from heaven and that all the others who had the Spirit and who work with heavenly things *had not yet been to heaven*.

Therefore, Jesus told him that Nicodemus in his flesh-earthly-state can only be able to see and experience the kingdom of God when and as the kingdom of God's forces (in this case the Son of God) comes down for a brief visit to earth. This is what was implied to Nicodemus regarding Jesus' visitation to earth from heaven. In the following verses, Jesus gave Nicodemus a brief summary of why the Father had sent His Son down to earth; here is Jesus' mission.

3:14-21) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth [i.e. faiths] in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth [i.e. faiths] in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth [i.e. faiths] on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not [i.e. not-faiths] is condemned already, because he hath not believed [i.e. not-faithed] in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

3:22) After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.



Now, dear reader, we briefly switch to the end of the chapter where the Apostle John recorded what John the Baptist had spoken to some of his disciples about Jesus.

3:23-27) And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

Both the Jews and John's disciples were wondering about Jesus, and was Jesus '**purifying**' the people?

However, John was speaking of the Spirit and of assignments on earth given from heaven to a man so that when the Spirit (God's Breath) moved It would move on and in such a chosen man... even as they already understood that the Spirit was upon John.

The prophet responded to reintroduce the fact that Jesus is the Christ come down.

3:28-30) Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of [hearing] the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.

3:31) He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.

'...he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth'. An earth-bound person may speak about some heavenly things as taught by the Spirit, but he is limited with '**earthly**' words to speak of what he has not seen in heaven. Paul tells us, even in his understanding from God, that he yet sees (i.e. understands) as through a dark glass.

John the Baptist inferred here that a man of the Spirit can only speak of what he knows... of what he has experienced on earth (spiritually and earthly) as he continually walks by faith (see Jesus' words in 10, 11, 12). Such a person, if called to it, works for the One '**that cometh from above**' who is '**above**' him and '**above**' all else.

John told his disciples and these believing (faithing) Jews, in their desire to be truly spiritual, that while they are earth-bound they will be limited even as John himself was limited; and that the One who had '**come from above**' had unlimited Spirit; and that '**this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.**'

3:32-34) And what he [i.e. the One from above] **hath seen and heard, that he testifieth** [of things of heaven]; **and no man receiveth** [i.e. 'gets hold of'] **his testimony** [i.e. 'evidences' by God through Jesus].

...[However,] **He that hath received** [i.e. 'gets hold of'] **his testimony** [i.e. the 'evidences'] **hath set to his** [i.e. Jesus'] **seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent** [down, the One from above,] **speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.**

'...and no man receiveth [i.e. 'gets hold of'] his testimony': At this point in the workings of heaven on earth, no man had as yet (in the scriptural sense) 'gotten hold of' even one of the evidences that God had been offering through His Son *about this Season of the Messiah as promised to Israel*. Jesus' very words were the '**words of God**', and also God had given the Spirit to Jesus without measure (i.e. unlimited).

On earth the seal was set by Christ Jesus '**that God is true**' as he was testifying of what he had seen and heard while in heaven. And God was giving many heaven-signs day by day. Also note that when a man '**receives**' ('gets it') there has been '**set**' something of a '**seal that God is true**' (but only when the Spirit blows does it become *manifest*).

John had witnessed the sign promised to him: that the Spirit would in a physical manner come upon the Christ, the Messiah. John had received ('gotten hold of') it and then he testified that the scriptures were '**true**' - that God had sent down his Son, Christ Jesus.

However, as yet men were not receiving ('getting hold of') John's testimony of the Christ, nor were yet men receiving ('getting hold of') Jesus' '**testimony**' or the '**evidences**' by God through His Son. Nor yet had even Jesus' own disciples '**gotten it**'.

I suspect that Nicodemus had experienced *limited* evidences of the Spirit with other men. In Jesus, however, he witnessed the Spirit *without measure*. However, in verse 1-13 we only see Nicodemus trying to understand, to comprehend; he would '**get it**', but not in those verses had he '**gotten it**'.

In this chapter, the Apostle John recorded what Jesus had said to Nicodemus and then he recorded what John the Baptist had explained to his disciples. 'With two or three witnesses' is the true scriptural testimony: Jesus had given it, John the Baptist had given it, and God by His Spirit had been giving it in signs and wonders from heaven. Therefore, the apostle also was giving it renewed in John 3.

3:35-36) The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth [i.e. faiths] **on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not** [i.e. not-faiths] **the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.**

John was giving his disciples advice, forewarning them to be seeking out Jesus. He made clear that Jesus is the '**Son**' of God, the One that '**the Father loveth**'. He wanted to make sure that his disciples did not stay faithful to him after he had '**decreased**', and thereby miss out on '**everlasting life**'. And with such advice must come the warning.



In this short study we have considered the words flesh (i.e. of water), earthly, from heaven, born of (origin), spirit, and Spirit (blowing Breath), etc. I trust that you will read John 3 more, and more often. And as far as 'born again' is concerned see -

1Peter 1:22-23) Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born [i.e. begat] again [‘again’ is not the Greek], not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

So let me write it again: *Being born, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible.*

Since you were once born of the flesh and now born '**not of corruptible seed**', the translators did not err in adding 'again'. That is, they did not misstate the meaning and nothing was missed. Thus, there is truth to the words often used 'born again'. But its use in John 3 missed much meaning.



This summer, on the Bible Studies page, I added a “Note about these short Bible studies”; it contains a few pages describing how Bible authors often introduced a theme about which they would then write episodes that portrayed a message to their readers. This study is just one example. If you have not read the Note then please do so now as it is just a few pages.

So, let us go to the passage where the Apostle John introduced John 3 -

John 2:23) Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed [i.e. faithed] in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.

As I had stated at the beginning of our study, this was Jesus' first ministry trip to Jerusalem. Jesus had preached and taught on the feast day and a great many people had been in the streets. Therefore, many many people heard Jesus and the Spirit had been working. The Apostle John had been there and we shall see that his telling of it here is to introduce what he will write in chapter 3.

'**Many believed** [i.e. faithed] **in his** [Jesus'] **name, when they saw the miracles**'. As the Power of God was working through Jesus, the Spirit was working in many individuals such that they faithed what they saw and heard. This does not mean that each one understood or had a significant idea of what was going on, but each reacted to what God was doing in the manner that He intended. 'Believing or faithing in the name of Jesus' was a phrase popular with the New Testament writers and they used it often. However, each person accepting what God was doing in him only knew what he was experiencing. Many if not most of these would go to John the Baptist to be baptized.

The Apostle John emphasizes '**when they saw the miracles**' they faithed in the name. This does not mean that they '**got it**' (as described above), that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, come down from heaven from God.

In other words, God was getting each individual, but not until after Jesus' resurrection and the apostles' preaching did the great majority of these people '**get it**' that Christ had come down taking the form of man in Jesus and now he is at the right hand of the Father. It is very likely that Nicodemus had heard Jesus and observed the miracles. I suspect that he quickly sought out others of his circle in Jerusalem to discuss these things and banter with them about this 'Jesus'.

But that was not enough for Nicodemus. He needed to approach the '**light**' face to face.

2:24) But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,

Jesus the man knew a great deal about mankind. Christ was the Word that created man of the dust of the ground and observed Adam and Eve and all mankind through the ages. This is too deep a subject to try to discuss here. '**Jesus did not commit himself unto them**', for citizens of Jerusalem in less than three years would crucify him.

Though the people did not yet 'get it' that he was the Messiah come down from God, because of the miracles he was doing they surely would have made him king, which would deviate from God's Plan. Satan had tried to deviate the Plan (and failed) when Je-

sus was in the wilderness for forty days.

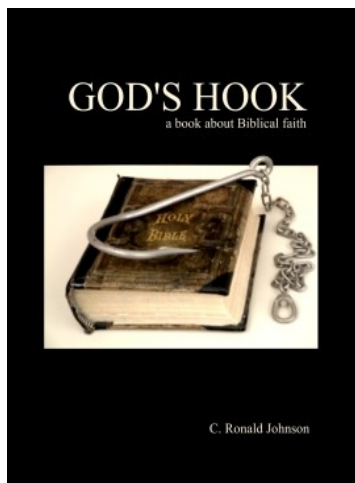
2:25) And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

This statement by the Apostle John has to do with the fact that *Jesus was tempted as any man*. It seems strange to me that the Apostle John would make this particular statement here...unless it was particularly suited for what he would be writing next in regards to Nicodemus. Indeed, there need not be a chapter-break from chapter 2 to chapter 3 since the apostle's words continue as an ongoing flow right into chapter 3.

In other words, what is written about Nicodemus and Jesus is actually an example written by the apostle of what he had stated in 2:23-25.

I hope that this helps in understanding what I wrote in the Note at the beginning of the Bible Studies page, but even more I hope that it serves as a check on what is in this study. Christ Jesus surely knew exactly what was going on inside Nicodemus. My imagination suggests to me that perhaps that feast day that an eye-contact had occurred between Jesus and a man in the crowd dressed in the attire of a high teacher of Israel, man of the Scriptures. Perhaps even then he saw into Nicodemus' soul and recognized the Spirit working there. Perhaps he even was expecting Nicodemus and had sent his disciples away to enjoy the last daylight hours of the day of feast.

- These are short Bible studies by C. Ronald Johnson at Christian Wilderness Press -



a book
about
Biblical
Faith

the life of
Moses
and the
Exodus

