

'LOVE FROM ABOVE'
(Fullness of Joy through Biblical Fellowship in Christ)
Studies in 1 John

2 BAPTISMS
'Born of Water & the Spirit'
John 3

Upon *'repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ'* (*Acts 20:20-21*), truly *born-again* Christians get two *baptisms* (Greek word *'bap-tid-zo'* / *immersion*). The first baptism is immediate *Spirit baptism* in which the Holy Spirit implants the new believer as a living part of *'the body of Christ'* on earth (*1 Corinthians 12:12-14, Galatians 3:26-29*). This isn't experienced as an emotional feeling or phenomenal manifestation – it is God's action making one part of 'the Church', his bride and official member of His spiritual family of believers (*Ephesians 2:19-22*). This second baptism is left entirely to the new believer to do as a loving gift of obedience and public commitment to be a faithful disciple of Christ Jesus the Lord (*Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38, 8:35-38, 10: 48, etc.*).

Spirit baptism is unseen, unfelt and unconditional; *believers' baptism* is seen, felt and conditional upon being an unashamed follower of the Savior. The believer doesn't do anything to receive *baptism into the body of Christ*, but is commanded by God to submit to *'water baptism'* of his or her own free will out of love and appreciation to their Savior and heavenly Father (*John 15:14-17*). Failure of a true believer in the saving cross-work of Christ to yield themselves to God's command to be baptized by immersion, is deliberately disobeying God's Word and experiencing less than the *'abundant life'* that comes with obedience to the Lordship of Christ (*John 16:23-33*). God's gift of *'Spirit baptism'* comes first; believers reciprocate with *'believers' baptism'* if they truly want to please the Lord and receive all the other gifts that come when we fully obey (*Romans 12:1*).

Two baptisms may have been what Jesus was trying to teach Nicodemus, the Pharisee, about when the religious ruler came to Him by night early in Christ's public ministry (*John 3:1-8*). John, God's prophet, had been baptizing repentant people who wanted to be ready for the coming kingdom of God, at the Jordan River (*Matthew 3:1-12, Mark 1:1-8, Luke 3:4-17*).

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, religious ruler of the Jews, probably had been one of those religious leaders who went to review what John was doing and heard John preach about a *water baptism unto repentance* and a *baptism of the Spirit* (*Matthew 3:7-12*). He was obviously perplexed about the subject of baptism and came to Jesus to find out more (*John 3:1-4*). Getting immersed in water for repentance and a new life seemed as strange to him as somebody trying to enter his mother's womb and be reborn with a new physical life *'when he is old?'* The Lord, seeing his perplexity due to being merely religious, but not 'born again' spiritually informs the religious clergy 'seeker': *'Unless you are born-again you will never enter the kingdom of God'* – *'Unless you are born of water AND the Spirit, you will not be acceptable to God'*.

Some commentators believe Jesus is referring to physical birth (*'born of water'* referring to the fluids involved when a baby is born) and spiritual conversion to Him (*'spiritual life imparted by the Holy Spirit the moment of salvation'*). No doubt this interpretation is valid and is a warning to all people, regardless of how old or religious they may be, that salvation is something that must happen in people's hearts sometime during their life when they are old enough to repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness of sins. No dependable interpretation believes Jesus was referring to a religious tradition done to babies to wash away sin! Nothing done to a person's exterior has any effect on the soul within. In Scripture, no babies are ever seen having baptism done to them. Prior to being old enough to understand, babies were dedicated to the Lord (*Luke 2:22*) and prayerfully blessed without water (*Mark 9:13-16*). Immersing babies with love and prayer is fine, but baptism is premature.

Baptism is a gift to God symbolizing who the new believer is trusting to be saved; it is never a gift of salvation from God to someone who hasn't yet believed (*1 Corinthians 1:14-17*). Even if baptism is done to an infant it has no value whatsoever according to the Bible (*John 1:12-13*). It is clear that Nicodemus, who had seen baptisms at the Jordan, understood that it was a symbolic act of those who sincerely believed to publicly proclaim their faith, and that it was not the water that did anything, but the life-changing Holy Spirit that performs the inner baptism upon the soul of one who is already *saved*.

God still commands all true believers in Christ to be saved after they knowingly put their faith in the cross-work of the Savior. If you have never been baptized by immersion since becoming a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, you should do so without delay (*Acts 9:17-18, 18:8*). If you've been baptized for the wrong reason or only as a baby you should be re-baptized after you believe (*Acts 19:3-5*). God will take care of the 'Spirit baptism' into Christ's body, the Church; but 'water baptism' is your turn to publicly prove your love and obedience to the Savior. PtL

Our Father's Likeness

(Restoring the Image of God in Us)

1 John 3:9-18

"Whoever has been born of God does not (deliberately keep living in) sin, for His seed (divine life nature) remains in him (or her); and he (or she) cannot (habitually live in) sin, because he (or she) has been born of God." **3:9**

The Brethren – You've Got to Love Them

(The common trait of righteousness and obedience)

"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteousness." **3:10-12**

The World – It's Got to Loathe You

(The common trait of being disdained by unbelievers)

"Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who doesn't love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." **3:13-15**

The Lord – He's Got to Love through Us

(The common trait of sacrificial love for brethren)

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or tongue, but in deed and truth." **3:16-18**