

THE RELIGIONS ON JESUS' TEACHING THAT UNLESS ONE IS BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT ONE CANNOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

John 3:5. When having a chat with Nicodemus, Jesus claimed that only a person born of water and the Holy Spirit could go to Heaven, "Unless a man is born from above (or born again) of water and the Spirit, he cannot ever enter the Kingdom of God". This has been used to justify baptising babies into the Church. The argument is that babies are given God in baptism to take away any sin in them and to vaccinate them against the wiles of sin and Satan.

Does it really say baptism is necessary to get you into God's kingdom?

An evangelical work, Jehovah of the Watch-Tower tells us that Jesus was referring to a baptism of repentance when he said we have to be born of water and that we have to be born of the Spirit as well (page 151). The book correctly observes that there is no other water baptism but the baptism of repentance in the Bible. There is no baptism of regeneration. It is entirely possible that Jesus went through a baptism in the Jordan not for his own sins but for ours so he fulfilled the requirement of baptism for repentance for us meaning all we have to do now is to accept the Holy Spirit for regeneration. So when you receive the Holy Spirit you are vicariously born of water. The vicarious baptism of Jesus makes you born of water. You can be born of water without touching it just like Peter hints that Noah and co were born of the water of the flood when they were on the ark. Jesus never said we actually have to be washed in water to be born of it and he would have been clear that we need to be if he thought we needed to be. Catholics and Protestants hold that circumcision which was a religious initiation rite for the Jews did what baptism does now and yet Jesus told Nicodemus, a circumcised Jew, that he needs to be born again of water. This indicates that Jesus did not want him to go through another rite to be born again but to accept the baptism of repentance that Jesus made for him as if it were his own which would involve repenting. What he was saying was this, unless you are born again of repentance and the Holy Spirit you will not be saved.

Jesus was instructing a Jew who was probably intended to share the same instruction with other Jews. The born of water could then refer to the baptism of John which was a baptism of repentance and not a sacrament and the born of the Spirit could mean the baptism of the Holy Spirit which had to be received by faith alone. So Jesus was saying that unless you repent and accept God's mercy by faith alone you will not be saved. He was not saying everybody has to be born of water and have John's baptism but just fitting the plan of salvation into a Jewish context. In other words, he was asking that salvation by repentance and faith must be worked into Jewish tradition if people want to do it that way and the way to do the repentance is by being baptised in water in that case. In any case, it is clear that Jesus envisaged not babies being baptised but adults. If Jesus say recommended a prayer to say to get saved it would not matter if you changed that prayer to be prayed by intention and not using words. It is the same thing here, the method of salvation does not change but the way you can exercise the method or express it can and that is okay.

The Seventh-day Adventists say that we are born of the Spirit at conversion and born of water at baptism and deny that Jesus is saying that the birth in water is the same as birth of the Spirit. Yes, there is no reason to assume the two are identical. Jesus is promising that baptism will be administered to the person who is really converted and is a sign from him that the conversion is real. Of course fakes can be baptised but the important thing is the assurance of the Holy Spirit that Jesus agrees with the water baptism being performed. That makes the difference. So even if you accept that the water is baptism you still are not obligated to follow the Catholic interpretation. Jesus would have said, "Unless a man be born of water which is the same as being born of the spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God", had he meant what Catholics hope he meant. The fake Christian may go through the rite but he or she is not really born of water into the kingdom because he or she is a phoney. Born of water means being born into the kingdom through water and you cannot enter the kingdom unless you are sincere and mean to do what God wants. This implies you have to be baptised again if the first baptism was just a performance.

The Way International is a major Bible movement in the United States which teaches salvation by faith alone. It teaches that Jesus Christ and the apostles never taught that water baptism forgives sin and unites you to God. They say that Jesus did command water baptism but his death did away with it so that Christians don't need it now. They think this doing away took place when the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost on the apostles and the Church. Then water baptism was superseded by the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. They contend that what today's Christians need is the baptism of the Holy Spirit which is given directly by God when the person is ready and when the person accepts Jesus Christ and gets his sins forgiven.

The interpretations do not fit the mainstream Christian understanding. The fact remains that Jesus did not say you need baptism and the spirit but water and the spirit. When he was so unclear he was clear. He did not mean you need baptism.

