

COMMENTARY ON JESUS' TEACHING IN JOHN 3, IT DOES NOT SUPPORT THE CATHOLIC SYSTEM BASED ON BAPTISM

JOHN 3 NIV

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus' reply, which follows, suggests God cannot be approached or learned from or his kingdom entered unless they are born again. Remember you must understand the next line in the context of what Nicodemus said. It is a reply.

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

Quick facts, the correct translation may be water and wind which are emblems of the Spirit so that rules out real water. As Jesus may mean you need the Holy Spirit as much as you need to exist and as you need to be born the water may mean the water in the womb. Jesus says that you need water and the spirit to be saved but he didn't use the word baptism! He does not say that you get the Spirit when you get the water! So the verse does not do what Catholics want it to do.

Here are more thoughts on the subject. That you can skip.

There is no reason to translate Spirit here for the word in the original also means wind. Water (Ezekiel 36:25-27) and wind are symbols for God's saving energy, the Holy Spirit, so Jesus may be asserting that we need to be saved by the Holy Spirit. This verse is no foundation for the notion that without water baptism there is no salvation.

The Holy Spirit is said to be water you can drink in John 7:37-39 - a metaphor. It appears also in John 4 when Jesus told the Samaritan woman at a well about the water he can give. It shows that Jesus was using water to picture the Holy Spirit. Jesus then was saying that a man needs to be born of water and wind to enter the kingdom of God meaning a man needs to be born of the Holy Spirit.

He talks later of one being born of the Spirit without mentioning the water. Besides, it doesn't make a lot of sense to be saying that one is born of water and the Spirit even if one believes that one receives the Spirit at water baptism. One is still born of the Spirit not water. The Church teaches there is no power in the water at all. Water pictures the saving action of the Holy Spirit but water does not save, the Spirit does. One is then begotten of the Holy Spirit.

Water and wind. Is this just an interpretation? Even if it is, it still proves that the verse can't definitely prove baptismal salvation. But Jesus himself implied this interpretation.

First he told Nicodemus that rebirth was necessary for salvation. Nicodemus thought that he meant reincarnation so Jesus set him straight saying one needs to be born of water and the Spirit.

There is no water baptism at all in the Old Testament.

Jesus then told Nicodemus, as we will see later, that he should know that being a teacher of Israel and if he could not understand earthly things how could he understand heavenly. Jesus therefore told him that the interpretation of the water and the wind/Spirit was in the Old Testament which never speaks of salvation by water baptism or such baptism thus it was symbolic. Nicodemus could not understand earthly symbolism and Jesus tells him that he will not understand his new heavenly doctrines. Jesus went on to say that faith in Jesus saves and bestows everlasting life. Nicodemus would have understood that for he believed that trust in God and obedience were necessary for salvation as the Law said. (Notice how this implies that faith alone without good works is what God requires for salvation.) The chapter must never be understood as saying that Nicodemus did not understand what the spirit does for all Jewish teachers knew that it gives life and pardon and help to serve God.

Notice that instead of refusing reincarnation, Jesus simply rephrases what he said previously. It is a case of Nicodemus asking if a man can go back to the womb to be reborn and Jesus saying you must be reborn. It is false that Jesus is correcting Nicodemus here for what he says is not clear enough to correct anything. It could even be read as saying, "Nicodemus you are right to take me to mean bodily rebirth and nobody gets into God's kingdom without natural birth and the Holy Spirit."

Here is what some say is a more accurate rendering of the verse . "Unless a man is born of water and [even] the Spirit, he cannot [ever] enter the Kingdom of God"

The even makes the Spirit sound like an extra. Even Catholicism says baptism would be useless if the spirit of God was not working in it. So is the solution that water itself is the Spirit? Is it a symbol? The Bible speaks of water being in the heavenly firmament so is water really an image of Heaven? You need to be born of Heaven before you can enter the kingdom of God.

Born of the Spirit implies the Spirit is being seen here in a female role as a kind of mother. The water then is the Spirit's breaking of the waters. It is a symbol. The Church objects that God is never described as any other than male. But the Spirit being depicted as female could be an image. It might not mean we should call the Spirit Mother or Her.

The water may be a symbol of washing from sin for the word Spirit may be really wind in the original Greek. The "Spirit" translation is just a guess (page 135, All One Body – Why Don't We Agree? Or read the notes in the New American Bible for this passage. In its dictionary – look up SPIRIT – it says that the word pneuma means spirit and several other things.) Water and wind are emblems of the Holy Spirit so Jesus may be saying that we should be born of the Spirit and not of literal water plus the Spirit.

6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

The flesh gives birth to flesh refers to the water part - the water means natural birth for there is water in the womb. The Spirit part refers to the spirit birth. Jesus is saying you need to be born into this life as much as you need to be born of the Spirit or vice versa in order to be saved. This is poetry.

7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

The implication is that Nicodemus should know from his faith or his experience or both that he needs radical fixing as signified by being born again.

8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

It is not surprising that he is on about the need for transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit. He takes it for granted that it is clear that nobody is really right with God unless God miraculously changes the person. He says that the wind goes where it wants and no man can tell where it comes from or where it is going. Wind and spirit are the same word. Wind is an emblem for the Holy Spirit. The notion that a man or a Church can be a channel for the Holy Spirit by giving it in baptism is rejected. It is Catholic doctrine that those who baptise you in water give you the Holy Spirit.

The Church responds that the notion that you don't know where the Spirit is from or where it is going does not exclude the notion that man is needed to give the spirit through sacraments. It says that Jesus said it is everyone who is born of the spirit who is like the wind not the Spirit.

9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"

11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.

12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

The earthly thing he means seems to be natural birth. That is what the "water" refers to. What is the earthly thing that Nicodemus fails to believe? Jesus is going to speak of heavenly things now.

13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,

15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

He talks about how he saves sinners and those who believe get this salvation and salvation refers to living a fulfilled life forever.

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

This is why the power of Christianity is so hard to explain. If Jesus' is right children should be often cursing the sacraments and the Church and the Bible. Men and women should die cursing and hating Jesus. What happens is they go along with the religion and put up an act.

21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God."

Whoever does not come for the salvation does not want it. They don't want to be holy. The stress on choice in a sermon about water and Spirit excludes the notion that babies should be baptised if the water refers to the waters of baptism which according to Catholicism gives you the Holy Spirit and a new birth. For what is supposedly a sermon on baptism, it seems remarkably unconcerned with the water!

22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.

FINAL THOUGHTS - Being born of water and even the wind is saying you just need baptism in the Holy Spirit. Water and wind are only ways of saying Holy Spirit. They are not real.

An important clue regarding what Jesus meant is to be found when Jesus told Nicodemus that Nicodemus should understand him for he was a teacher too. Jesus said that he was telling him of earthly things and wondered how Nicodemus could believe anything he would tell him of heavenly things when he could not believe his utterances about earthly things. So Jesus was saying this being born of the Spirit was an earthly thing. What Jesus meant was that Nicodemus was unable to understand that the body is born of water and the mind is born of Spirit for flesh is born of flesh and spirit is born of spirit and that you need to be born again but by the power of God because the spirit and the flesh are in opposition for they are too different. So Jesus said that when a man needs to be born of water and the spirit to enter the kingdom of God he was talking about us coming into existence and not about water baptism at all. He does not say we need water to be born again which means to receive the power to become holy like God.

The notion that water and spirit is water and wind and it is not literal water fits the double meanings Jesus used at times. It could also refer to the water of the womb and the spirit. There is no reason why both interpretations cannot be both valid and correct.