

An In-Depth Study Of John 3:1-12

[Part 3]

Wind and spirit –

John 3:8 [NIV] *“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.”*

Does this say Christians are born of the spirit at the resurrection?

No, it does not.

The context is **not** future but present tense.

The centre focus of this conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus Christ is a comparison between Judaism and the effectual working of Christianity for the receiving of the gift of eternal life.

Jesus continues to make His point that entrance into the Kingdom of God does **not** depend on physical attributes or pedigree, but on spiritual ones.

John 3:8 contains another Greek word with multiple meanings.

In this case the word is “*pneuma*”, translated wind.

“*Pneuma*” is like the Hebrew word “*ruach*” which means wind, spirit or breath.

In John’s gospel, “*pneuma*” is used with all these three meanings.

Here Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit, like the wind, is **not** visible, and He breathes into a person new life.

The workings of the Holy Spirit are invisible and therefore mysterious to us.

The words “so it is” refer to the mysterious nature of the Holy Spirit’s activity, not bodily makeup.

John 20:22 [NIV] *“And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”*

With this unusual gesture Jesus Christ was illustrating that new life [rebirth] comes by receiving the Holy Spirit [compare **Genesis 2:7**]

John 4:20-24 [NIV] *“Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.”*

The time had come when the children of God were to worship Him in a very different way.

Previous worship by God’s people had been linked to physical things and places, limited to repeated rituals in certain buildings by authorised humans.

Worship of the eternal God in a spiritual realm was to be within the spiritual realm.

The working of the Holy Spirit is not limited to a building or an appointed place.

Acts 7:48-53 [NIV] *“However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: ‘‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?’ ‘‘You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him, you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.”*

To try to limit the Holy Spirit does **not** please our Creator God, if we try we are seen as stubborn and **not** converted.

When the Christian Church was born, recorded in Acts, the Holy Spirit came down out of heaven [from above] upon the disciples.

Acts 2:1-4 [NIV] *“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*

They heard the sound of this Holy Spirit, for it was like the sound of a rushing mighty wind.

The effects of the Holy Spirit were indeed mysterious, even now many people are confused as to what exactly happened that day.

A Jewish argument might contend the work of the Holy Spirit because this new birth is **not** visible, unlike the physical accoutrements of Israelite worship, or that of other non-Christian religions.

Therefore such worship is ineffectual or a figment of the imagination.

Such an argument is no more valid than it would be if used of the wind.

In each case, judgement is to be based on the effects produced by its presence.

Often prospective members of the Christian Church are told, upon baptism and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, by the laying on of hands, **not** to expect to experience anything dramatic.

Lightning bolts will **not** come down from heaven nor will a halo appear above their heads.

In essence, they are told that receiving the Holy Spirit is not something they can physically detect.

The proof of conversion, the work of the Holy Spirit in us, will manifest itself down the road as they look back on the experience with noticeable spiritual growth.

Realise that their approach to life as a whole is beginning to change.

Goals in their lives have changed, their priorities have changed and gradually their relationships with other human beings have changed.

Why is this?

Those who are born of the Spirit are not of this age, [world or society] but of an age to come, the Kingdom of God.

Though they continue to live in this world and society, they are **not** really a part of it. [John 15:18-19]

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

It is the Holy Spirit working in a person that redirects the heart, mind and human spirit to conform now to those things that please our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In **John 3:8** it is **not** a spirit being that is described, nor is it describing the Holy Spirit.

What is really being described is the nature of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the life of a “born from above” Christian.

Conclusion –

Nicodemus was incredulous and overwhelmed.

His ideas of worship, conversion, circumcision, the Kingdom of God, the Messiah, the Holy Spirit, the very foundations of his religion, were in question.

Nicodemus faced the disturbing prospect of having to start all over again in his old age.

Yet Nicodemus’ training as a Pharisee should have better prepared him for this meeting with the Messiah.

John 3:9-15 [NIV] *“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No-one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”*

The prophets had written about the giving of the Holy Spirit and the work of Jesus Christ, the looked-for Messiah.

Since Nicodemus would **not**, without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, believe Jesus to this point, there was **no** point to continue with this conversation.

The main point in John 3:1-12 is to show that Judaism and other non-Christian religions are insufficient to enable their people to enter the Kingdom of God.

Mark 12:28-34 [NIV] *“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no-one dared ask him any more questions.”*

Here was a man who understood what was needed to make this dramatic change of direction in his worship of the Creator God.

Jesus told him that he was not far from the Kingdom of God.

We do not know if he applied what the Holy Spirit had allowed him to understand.

What about Nicodemus? Did this meeting with Jesus Christ have an impact on his future worship?

John 7:50-52 [NIV] *“Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, “Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?” They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”*

Nicodemus showed courage in protesting against the condemnation of Jesus Christ without giving Him a hearing.

John 19:38-39 [NIV] *“Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.”*

This final mention, where Nicodemus brought a lavish gift of spices to anoint the body of Jesus Christ.

Nothing more is known of Nicodemus despite a large number of legends, for example the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus.

The Pharisees thought their pedigree was sufficient.

The point behind the term “born from above” or “born again” is that no-one’s pedigree is sufficient.

A change of our whole inner nature must take place before a new creature is born.

Circumcision is the outward sign that a man is a Jew, a child of God’s Kingdom, according to the Jewish religion.

Paul reminds the Christian Church at Rome which was mainly Jewish but contained an increasing number of Gentiles, that external circumcision was **not** enough. [**Romans 2:25-29**]

What happened in your heart and mind is what is important.

The physical Jew should have known this as it is written in the prophets.

Jeremiah 4:4 [NIV] *“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done, burn with no-one to quench it.”*

Circumcision of the heart is needed if a person is to be part of the community of spiritual Israel and a true child of Abraham, then receiving the promises made to Abraham.

John 8:39-47 [NIV] *“Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does.” “We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth,*

for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

Where people rely on outward practises and rituals, but not a change of heart, mind and human spirit, they are not children of the true Creator God.

Galatians 3:7 [NIV] *"Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham."*

Only those who accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour are children of Abraham and heirs to the promises.

Galatians 6:15-18 [NIV] *"Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; **what counts is a new creation.** Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. Finally, let no-one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen."*

This sums up well what we have been studying.

John 3:1-12 teaches us that, while some passages in the Christian Bible are self-evident, some are best understood in both their immediate and greater context including historical and social background at the time they were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The authors of the various books of the Christian Bible had a plan, with purpose in mind that were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

When we trample on those purposes or ignore them, we do so to our own detriment.

The good news is, when we rightly handle the scriptures and respect them for the way they are written, the truth of God becomes abundantly clear, and so does our own personal relationship with Him.