

DOES JOHN 3:5 PROVE THAT BAPTISM IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION?

John 3:5 accurately quotes Jesus as saying, ". . .Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." But it should be noted that nowhere in this verse does the word "baptism" even appear. The uncontested ability of God to express Himself precisely is a strong case for the proposition that baptism is not the subject under discussion or else it would be clearly so stated. Furthermore, an investigation of other references utilizing similar terminology discloses a far different understanding of this expression.

It is feasible that our Lord could have been describing physical birth in terms of being "born of water." Or "water" might be symbolical of the written Word of God. Both of these viewpoints are held by orthodox Christians. Another strong possibility, however, links John 3:5 with John 7:37-39. Here the same writer (John) quotes the same speaker (Jesus) using the same word (water). But this time the symbol is specifically explained: ". . .this spake he of the Spirit. . . ." Thus, the "water" of John 7:38 is actually the Holy Spirit. That interpretation also satisfies chapter 3, especially when considering one simple feature of the Greek language. The conjunction "and" in the phrase "water AND the Spirit" (John 3:5) [emphasis mine] is the Greek word "kai" which can be translated "even." When that optional translation is substituted, the result is, "Except a man be born of water, even the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Parallel passages seem to support this view. Titus 3:5 speaks of ". . .the washing of regeneration, and [even?] renewing of the Holy Ghost." Ephesians 5:26 mentions a ". . .washing of water by the word." If the "water" is the Holy Spirit, this verse pictures the Holy Spirit using Scripture as He works with men. This compares favorably with 1 Peter 1:23-25, where the Word is the instrument of the new birth.

Any attempt from John 3:5 to make baptism a requirement for eternal life is grossly inconsistent with the Biblical plan of salvation. We cannot misunderstand the simple message found elsewhere in John 3. Verses 15 and 16 both state that ". . .whosoever **believeth** in him should not perish. . . ." Verse 18 declares, "He that **believeth** on him is not condemned. . . ." Verse 36 concludes, "He that **believeth** on the Son hath everlasting life. . ." [all emphases mine].

Therefore, to be "born of water" certainly is not baptism. It is, instead, a new birth brought about by the Holy Spirit whenever saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is exercised.