

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES
FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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LESSONS FROM NICODEMUS

Nicodemus was the wealthy, powerful Pharisee who came to Jesus by night (John 3:1-9). As to why he came at night has caused much speculation and discussion. Christians often like this type of discussion, as it is one that you can keep going on and on, but can never be settled. And even if we could settle why this man came at this time, it would not cause us to change our beliefs or our lives, the doing of which can cause us great trouble.

He is identified as being a man of the Pharisees, a small, powerful, and very exclusive sect in Israel. They were meticulously correct in all their actions; they were moral, zealous, and righteous. Their place in society and their sectarianism led some of them to do much that was contrary to the will and word of God. Nicodemus must be considered as one whose life was exemplary among them. He is also described as being one of the rulers (a chief) of the Jews. This indicates that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, those seventy men who made up the governing body in Judea.

One can easily imagine the prolonged and intense discussions that went on in this governing body and among the Pharisees concerning the person, the words, and the works of the Lord Jesus Christ. There were many good men among the Pharisees, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, and in the beginning of His ministry, before all the rancor and bitterness arose, the discussions in the Sanhedrin and among the Pharisees were probably conducted on a high plane of propriety. However, we know nothing of what went on, especially in the closed meetings of the Sanhedrin, but Nicodemus in his nighttime visit to Jesus made known the outcome of these discussions. His statement when amplified was: **"Rabbi, we understand and appreciate by the facts we have observed and considered that you are an**

authoritative teacher come from God, for no man can do these attesting miracles that you are constantly performing except God be with him" (John 3:2).

The pronoun "we" here can refer only to "the rulers of the Jews," that is, the Sanhedrin, as there is no other antecedent. And it is 'Nrong to imagine one, such as certain others who may have accompanied him on this visit. His statement reveals that seventy of the best minds in Israel, men in a position to make a judgment based upon information not readily available to others, had considered the person and works of the man Jesus and knew and comprehended that the miracles of Jesus accredited Him as a teacher sent from God.

Since all the miracles of Jesus Christ were performed to let men know what could be expected when God governed the world, each one being a foretaste of the kingdom of God (See Issue No. 67), and since a vast amount of truth was contained in each one of them, the declaration of Nicodemus revealed that the rulers in Israel had apprehended and comprehended much truth concerning the kingdom of God.

The word Nicodemus used which is translated "know" is *eideo*, a word that means to get knowledge by means of any or all of the senses. Note this in Luke 5:24. His declaration brought forth from the Lord an answer that must be regarded both as a commendation and a warning to him and to all the rulers of the Jews. **"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Except a man be generated from above he cannot see (*eideo*) the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).**

What these rulers had perceived, and Nicodemus confessed that they knew and comprehended, was the outcome of divine generation. Nicodemus had said: "We know" (*eideo*) and the Lord used his exact word in His reply, saying, "Except a man be generated from above he cannot see (*eideo*) the kingdom of God." Thus, only one conclusion is possible. If Nicodemus spoke the truth, then these rulers had been generated of God, otherwise they would not have known the message of His miracles. Our Lord declared that a divine work had been done in the lives of all of these, an enabling work that had made it possible for them to know and comprehend. This had brought upon them a new responsibility and accountability to God, one that could not be ignored or treated lightly. Words that have a bearing on this are found in **John 9:41: "Jesus said unto them (the Pharisees), If you were**

blind you would have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."

The outcome of neglecting to respond to the generating work of God is set forth in a later passage: **"If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father" (John 15:22,24).**

From this we know that if they had heard His words and seen His works, and had lacked the ability to recognize and appreciate the truths that these words and works were declaring, then they would not have been condemned. And since there was nothing in human ability that could bring an understanding of the things of God (1 Cor. 2: 11), they had to be given divine ability. This, the rulers had enjoyed, for God had performed in them a generating work that made this understanding possible. Thus their condemnation was just.

Jesus Christ was not demanding of Nicodemus that he be generated of God. This Pharisee stood before Him as one who had been generated from above. He said, "We know" (*eideo*), and the Lord had informed him that this was evidence of a divine activity in his life, since apart from generation from above, no one can know.

The Lord's answer put Nicodemus on the spot, one that demanded decisive action. It must have surprised him, so as a delaying tactic he asked a question. **"How can a man be generated when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be generated?" (John 3:4).**

This question was asked in order to draw more information from the Lord about this strange matter of being "generated from above." He infers that the only generating he knows anything about is that which takes place in the mother's womb, and that once this was complete, nothing could be added to it, neither could it be done the second time. He certainly knew, even as we do today, that one's capabilities and possibilities are inborn, and that these are fixed in us when we come forth. It is the genes of the father combined with the genes of the mother as developed over a nine-month period that makes us what we are.

In his question Nicodemus toyed with the idea that the imperative generating work the Lord spoke about was somewhat like and maybe related to the human generative process that produces in the end a child. But the Lord quickly set him straight by declaring in answer: **"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be generated of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."** (John 3:5).

Quite a bit of confusion exists in regard to this passage due to the failure of most translators to properly render two figures of speech. I have done this deliberately in my rendering above in order to get the problem before the reader. Two metaphors are used here. Something is called *hudor*, which literally translated means "water," but actual water is not meant. Water never generated anyone, no matter how solemn the ceremony or what words were spoken when it was applied. Something else is called *pneuma*, which literally means "wind," but actual wind is not meant here. In most versions we get translation of the first metaphor and interpretation of the second. If we had a literal translation of both words it would read: **"Except a man be generated of water and of wind,"** just as *pneuma* is literally translated "wind" in verse eight. And if we had interpretation of the figures in both places it would read: **"Except a man be generated of the Word, even of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the knowledge of the kingdom of God."**

Inasmuch as the Lord later declared, **"The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit" (John 6:63)**, I have translated *kai* as "even" to show that only one thing is meant. The Lord combined these two under the word Spirit in verses six and eight. And since knowledge and comprehension are so dominant in the context, I have amplified the translation by adding the word "knowledge" in my version.

All this fits in with the next statement of our Lord: **"That which is generated of the flesh is flesh; and that which is generated of the Spirit is Spirit. Marvel not that I said unto you. You must be generated from above" (John 3:6,7).**

In these words the Lord further clarifies the truth for Nicodemus. That which the flesh generates is always flesh, but it generates nothing that will make it possible for a man to know and comprehend God's truth concerning the kingdom of God. Since Nicodemus has said "we know," then, if this be true, there had to be the generating work of God that produced this knowledge and made it possible. They are now faced with the divine judgment that: **"Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke 12:48).**

Following this our Lord added an illustration applicable to all who have enjoyed the generating work of God, saying: "**The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it came from or where it is going. So is everyone that is generated by the Spirit**" (John 3:8).

Since this illustration is of those who are "generated by the Spirit," let us be honest interpreters and keep it that way. When men are generated by God's Spirit, there is no way that we can know what caused this to be done, what the divine purpose is, or what the result will be. Generation only makes things possible for us. It does not make them positive. We know from His Word that God generates, and that this makes possible among men such things as love, works of righteousness, perception of truth, and, most important of all, belief that the man Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Apart from divine generation, faith in Jesus Christ would disappear from the earth.

This fact is sure to cause us to ask if this generating work, this enabling work is one that God does for every man. And if I were able to determine the source and destiny of the wind, I would try to answer this. However, of this I am sure: Whenever and wherever Jesus Christ is faithfully presented, when the record God gave of His Son is declared, God will provide the ability for the hearer to comprehend and believe. If the herald does what he should do, God will do what He alone can do. But the hearer still has a part that he must also do. God does not do the believing for anyone.

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