

of the Spirit" seems to be fully equivalent to the phrase "born of water, even of the Spirit" in verse 5.

I agree with you in rejecting the interpretation of "water" in this passage as a reference to "the word." It is true that Paul uses the expression "that he might sanctify it [the church], cleansing it by the washing of water by the word." (Ephesians 5:26) But this is a Pauline, not a Johannine, figure. Paul is referring not to the regeneration of the individual, but to the cleansing of the church.

It is true that James and Peter both refer to "the word" as the agent of God in regeneration (James 1:18, I Peter 1:23). James uses no figure of speech in his reference to "the word." Peter compares "the word" to "incorruptible seed," not to water.

Thus it would appear that to interpret "water" in John 3:5 as "the word" is extremely improbable.

Just one more minor point. Whereas the word anōthen etymologically means "from above," yet in many cases the "etymological fallacy" is illustrated by insisting upon interpreting this word as though it clearly contained the idea conveyed by the adverb ano. Thayer, in defining the word (paragraph c), says, "...where others explain it 'from above,' i.e. from heaven. But, according to this explanation, Nicodemus ought to have wondered how it was possible for anyone to be born from heaven; but this he did not say." I once made a lexicographical study of anōthen throughout the Septuagint and the New Testament, and came quite definitely to the conclusion that it is just as likely to mean "from the ground up" as "from the top down." In John 3:16 it simply means "all over again" and is equivalent to ana, which means "up to" rather than "down from," but as a prefix simply indicates the idea "over again" (I Peter 1:3,23). It is also the equivalent of palin, as used in Titus 3:5, "...he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." By the way, this text also corroborates your interpretation as indicated above.

Thank you for letting me see the letter. I have enjoyed working out these comments on it.

Yours in Christian fellowship


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