

A NEW FAMILY IDENTITY



Introduction

WITSEC is the nickname for one of the United States most heavily secured programs: the federal Witness Protection Program. It was officially established in 1970 under the Organized Crime Control Act and later written into law. It was created as a federal response to the growing power of organized crime and the need to protect witnesses whose testimony could take down their dangerous networks. The program is run by the U.S. Department of Justice and

operated by the U.S. Marshals Service, which continues to run it today.

Since its creation, WITSEC has protected thousands of witnesses and their families by relocating them with new identities, secure housing, and assistance for basic living needs as they transition into new communities. The U.S. Marshals Service offers 24-hour protection during high-risk periods such as trials and court appearances. Participants receive new documentation, help with employment, and support in building a life that cuts all ties to their past.

Today, the program remains one of the most effective security operations in the world, protecting witnesses involved in cases against organized crime, gangs, and terrorist organizations. It maintains an extraordinary success rate with witnesses who follow program guidelines having no recorded instances of being harmed while under active protection.

WITSEC offers people more than a new identity, it offers them a completely new life with confidence they are safe so long as they follow the program's guidelines.

✚ **If you had to form a new physical identity, what would you pick as your new name and place to live?**

Session Context

Since God's prophecy in Isaiah 49, centuries have passed. Israel's longing for a savior is still alive and they are back in the Promised Land under Roman rule. Spiritually, they are hungry and waiting for God to fulfil the promise of a Messianic king to rescue them from foreign rule.

The Pharisees, a popular group of Jews teaching the Law and explaining Scripture, are prominent and well respected

among the Jews. But a new teacher has emerged, challenging some of their traditions and beliefs. His name is Jesus Christ, a Nazarene from the town of Bethlehem. He's young, controversial, and gaining popularity. The way he explains God's kingdom is unlike anything the Pharisees have heard before and many are worried his teachings undermine their authority and will erode the people's confidence in them. Yet he performs miraculous signs and wonders that can't be ignored. Some wonder if he is the Messiah they've been waiting for.

Scripture Exploration

John 3:1-21

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."

³ Jesus answered him, "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born anew, he can't see God's Kingdom."

⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and Spirit, he can't enter into God's Kingdom. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Don't marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

⁹ Nicodemus answered him, "How can these things be?"

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and don't understand these things? ¹¹ Most certainly I tell you, we speak that which we know and testify of that which we have seen, and you don't receive our witness. ¹² If I told you earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven. ¹⁴ As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born[†] Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him. ¹⁸ He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only born Son of God. ¹⁹ This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the light and doesn't come to the light, lest his works would be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God."

VERSES 1–3

Nicodemus's membership as a Pharisee meant he believed in the resurrection and had a reputation for understanding God's law well enough to teach others. By acknowledging Jesus as teacher and miracle worker, Nicodemus revealed his reason for approaching Jesus at night – he wanted to understand God's kingdom. Jesus had already been preaching about it by the time Nicodemus came to him and Jesus's teachings were different than what the religious leaders of the time were saying.

VERSES 4–8

Nicodemus's question revealed how the Pharisees did not fully grasp the way God brings spiritual transformation. They practiced full-body water immersion for ritual purification and supported using it when converting people to Judaism. However, they didn't understand true renewal requires God's Spirit to live and work within us. Jesus used the metaphor of wind to symbolize the actual nature of spiritual transformation.

VERSES 9–13

Despite Jesus's analogy, Nicodemus was still confused, highlighting a larger gap in the Pharisee's understanding of Scripture. Jesus explained understanding and experience are connected. Jesus, being from Heaven, understood heavenly realities, including the work of the Holy Spirit. Though the Pharisees knew of the Spirit, they hadn't experienced its transformative power as promised in scriptures like Ezekiel 36:25–27.

VERSES 14–16

Jesus provided another analogy to help Nicodemus understand what was required for Israel to be saved. Just as Moses held up the serpent staff in Numbers 21:8–9 so that the Israelites who looked on it would live and not die, Christ had to be put on a cross to bring eternal life. However, this time, it would be for the whole world.

VERSES 17–21

Jesus concluded his conversation with Nicodemus by addressing another misconception the Pharisees had – that God would send Israel a king to judge the world in favor of the Israelites. Instead, God sent Jesus to save the world, including the Israelites. Because of their narrow Messianic view, the Pharisees struggled to see Jesus Christ as the savior he truly was.

Life Application

+ **We can be intellectually right and spiritually wrong.**

Nicodemus knew the Scriptures well. He believed in angels, demons, and the Messiah. But he struggled to understand the rebirth Jesus said was required to enter God's kingdom because he was thinking carnally, not spiritually.

Knowing the Bible doesn't mean we fully understand it. We can even live out parts of it and miss its transformative power when we haven't let the Holy Spirit take control of our hearts and minds. It's only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we come to fully know God and live according to his will.

+ **We need a rebirth to see, understand, and enter God's kingdom.**

The Pharisees knew the scriptures promised a king from the line of David would be raised up and his kingdom would endure forever. They interpreted it as a physical Earthly kingdom. However, Jesus said the requirement to enter that kingdom was to be reborn of water and Spirit because only the Spirit can give the new birth needed to perceive and participate in God's spiritual kingdom.

Our Earthly birth is natural and equips us to live physically. The eternal life God promises is Spirit-given, requiring a new (spiritual) nature to experience it. With that new nature comes a new family and identity. God becomes our Father, Jesus our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our Helper. We also gain a host of brothers, sisters, and elders to journey with through life. Our identity shifts from being naturally-minded individuals to spiritually-minded children of God.

+ Our new identity calls for new Spirit-led actions anchored in it.

Jesus likened the Spirit to the wind. Even though we've learned to observe wind patterns and forecast its movement, the wind remains something we can't see, control, or predict. It removes, reshapes, and redirects everything it touches, as it desires. Likewise, the Spirit is invisible, sovereign, mysterious, and undeniably powerful.

We receive our new identity the moment we're born of water and Spirit. But like newborn babies, we must grow into the fullness of that new identity. The Spirit works to reshape us as reflections of God's image (holy, loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, gentle, faithful, and self-controlled) until our new identity becomes clear to ourselves and others.

Session Reflection

- What are some things about Nicodemus's experience that you can relate to?
- What are some things you have knowledge of but not experience to fully understand?
- Where do you sense the Spirit inviting you into deeper transformation in your Christian journey?
- What steps can you take to live more fully in your new Spirit-identity as part of God's family?

Notes
