

What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Him by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” (Joh 3:1-4)

What does the Lord Jesus Christ mean when He says that a man must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God? As Nicodemus asks in verse four, are we to enter again into our mother’s womb? The answer, of course, is “No”. The Lord is not talking about another physical birth, but rather a spiritual rebirth; the birth of a new creature that is able to have a relationship with God, and eventually live in eternity with Him.

The question we need to answer is: Why is it necessary for a person to be born spiritually; are we not born with a spirit at the time of our physical birth? At birth all men are born with a body and soul, but without a human spirit. We are born this way because when Adam sinned, he died spiritually, and as the head of the human race, he represented all who would follow. However, we are actually better off as born-again believers in an imperfect world than Adam was as a perfect man in the perfect world of the Garden of Eden. Those who are born again have eternal salvation, and are eternally secure, whereas Adam had to remain perfect to maintain his relationship with God in the garden:

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, “There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.” (Rom 3:9-12)

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. (Rom 5:12)

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:18-19)

The death in Rom 5:12 is a spiritual death, meaning separation from God without any chance of fellowship or eternal life with Him. Because of this, a spiritually dead person, no matter how good he may be, can never live with God in eternity because he lacks God’s righteousness. Man’s problem is his birth; he is born without a spirit, which is

necessary to have a relationship with God:

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. "(Joh 4:23)

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. (1Co 15:22)

All of mankind needs to be born again. At our first birth (our physical birth), we received a body of flesh and blood, and we were born into the family of Adam. In order to enter into the family of God, we need to be born of the Spirit; we need to be born again. We then have a body, a soul, and a human spirit as noted by the apostle Paul. **"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Th 5:23).**

When we are born again, God the Holy Spirit creates in us a brand new spirit, one that is born of God; eternal and indestructible. No one has ever been born again apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. When a person is born again, he first receives a human spirit, and then the Holy Spirit takes up residence in his body. It was this that Paul spoke of when he asked, **"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own" (1Co 6:19)?** The indwelling of God the Holy Spirit enables the individual to have fellowship with God and learn spiritual truths. No one can grow spiritually and discover the plan of God unless the seed of life has been planted by the Holy Spirit.

Christianity is the new birth; it is a brand new life created by God. It is not something we do, but rather it is something that is done to us. Just as you cannot give birth to yourself, the same is true regarding the new birth. While the effects and results are very real, you do not fully understand it at the time. In a similar way, we do not know from where the wind comes or to where it goes, but we can certainly see and feel its effects: **Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. (Joh 3:7-8)**

The Deception of Religion

Nicodemus was a very devout and religious man who was a member of the Sanhedrin, which was the ruling body of the Jews:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (Joh 3:1)

The Sanhedrin was comprised of scribes, Sadducees and Pharisees. The scribes were the guardians and the scholars of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Sadducees were the highly educated rationalists who denied the supernatural, such as the resurrection and eternal life. The Pharisees were very religious and filled with legalism. Pharisees worked overtime at being outwardly good, so Nicodemus prayed seven times a day and went to the temple three times a day. However, when it comes to the righteousness of man, remember that the Bible says, **“for all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away” (Isa 64:6)**. It was the Pharisees that gave money to the poor, prayed the longest and performed sacred rituals in a manner that attracted a lot of attention. Believing that they were impressing God, they were first in line shouting the loudest when there were functions in the temple. As a typical Pharisee, Nicodemus was religious, self-righteous, proud, and vain. He was one of those whom our Lord described:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (Mat 23:27)

One of the requirements of becoming a Pharisee was outward physical perfection. The Pharisees were like all religious people, who are very difficult to impress with truth, because they are blinded by their own good deeds. They don't understand that we are all born as sinners, unable to please God. Instead, they believe that depravity describes only those in the gutter. However, the sins of religious people are much worse; the sins of pride, and thinking they can impress God with their good deeds. Although Nicodemus was a very important person, according to human standards, and his life was filled with good deeds as he tried to earn his way into heaven, he did have some concern that he needed help.

Many have speculated as to why Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. Some say that he was embarrassed, and others say that he did not want any of the other Pharisees to see him. Whatever the reason, he did come to the Lord saying **“Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (Joh 3:2)**. Whether Nicodemus had heard of the miracles or witnessed them personally, he was more fascinated and attracted by the deeds of Jesus than by His

words. The true purpose of miracles was to focus attention on the message, which is why Jesus did not heal everyone in the world. He was, and still is, more interested in the eternal safety of the soul than the physical healing of the body.

In verse two, Nicodemus recognized that Jesus was a teacher from God, for he admitted, **“No one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”** But here is where the religious Nicodemus missed the whole point, which is that a teacher from God teaches and communicates truth. The true miracle takes place in the heart of those who respond to the message. Nicodemus was confused, so the Lord interrupted him in verse three by saying, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3).** The interruption was well timed. Nicodemus was a typical Pharisee: long-winded and boring. The Lord Jesus Christ came right to the point, and He pulled no punches, by saying in essence, “You will never get into the kingdom of God unless you are born again.” Remember that our Lord is talking to a man who is very proud of all of his merit badges and yet, Jesus ignores the knowledge Nicodemus thinks that he has. As you can imagine, this is quite a shock to the religious person who thinks that he has been so good. However, the problem with Nicodemus was not his personal sin, but rather, his birth. He had been born physically, but not spiritually.

Man needs to change his position from “in Adam,” where he is spiritually dead, to “in Christ,” where he is spiritually alive. That is, man needs a new position which requires a new birth. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying; Nicodemus had been born physically, so he possessed a body and a soul, but no human spirit. As a result, Nicodemus, though very moral and religious, could not relate to the spiritual information because he was lacking a spirit. Instead, his reaction revealed the blindness behind religion:

“How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” (Joh 3:4)

This is a perfect illustration of a religious man’s blindness to spiritual truth. Without a human spirit, which is received at salvation, no one is capable of understanding any spiritual phenomena. The only exception to this occurs when God the Holy Spirit acts as a human spirit and makes the Gospel information understandable to the unbeliever. Although Nicodemus is very moral and religious, he is having a very difficult time understanding all of this. Nicodemus was a man trying to finish the course before he had even started, and this is where the one who has been brought up in a religious atmosphere is frequently misled. Our Lord makes it crystal clear in Joh 3:3 where He says to the religious person that unless a man is born again, he cannot even **see** the kingdom of God, let alone **enter** it! You cannot begin to grow spiritually until the seed of life has been planted in you because **“that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Joh 3:6).**

A parallel story is that of Martin Luther who assumed, that as a Roman Catholic, he had a right relationship with God. Luther was very dissatisfied with life, so he became a monk; one who takes a religious vow of poverty and is a religious hermit. Then, through

the study of Scripture, he came to that critical understanding that he had been wrongly taught and realized the truth: The just shall live by faith. While he had been concentrating on how to live a holier life, he had never experienced the true freedom of salvation. Luther thought that his infant baptism with water had given him new life, and assumed that he was a Christian simply because he was brought up in a religious environment.

"Do not be amazed that I said to you, you must be born again." (Joh 3:7)

Note that our Lord is dealing with religion, and religion is Satanic! Religion includes false doctrine (1Ti 4:1), a false communion table (1Co 10:19-20), a false Gospel (Gal 1:6), a false Jesus (2Co 11:4), and a false spirit (2Co 11:4). In fact, religious people are called "whitewashed tombstones," beautiful on the outside, but full of dead men's bones on the inside as noted in Mat 23:27. Jesus' words, "**do not be amazed**" suggest the reaction of Nicodemus as being shocked. In spite of all his human accomplishments, he was totally baffled.

In verse eight, Jesus illustrates that a spiritual thing is not something that can be seen. When you were born again, God the Holy Spirit entered you into union with Christ, and the Holy Spirit came to dwell inside you, but you did not see it happen. This is what is meant when John notes that "**the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit**" (Joh 3:8). Where does the wind begin and where does it end? The wind cannot be seen; only the effects of the wind are visible. It is the same with spiritual birth; it is unseen, but it is real!

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" (Joh 3:9)

Nicodemus had been taught well at the theological seminary and yet, he couldn't understand this simple principle. Notice that our Lord uses a little sarcasm at just the right time.

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things'" (Joh 3:10)? We could call this "sanctified sarcasm."

"Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man?" (Joh 3:11-13)

In verse 13, Jesus declares that He is in heaven at the very moment that He is speaking to Nicodemus. Our Lord could be in heaven at the same time that He was also in His human body because He is the God-Man, the unique Person of the universe.

"No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man." (Joh 3:13)

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (Joh 3:14-16)

In this passage, "God" refers to the first Person of the Trinity, God the Father. Since God is perfect, His plan is perfect. In eternity past, a perfect God solved man's greatest problem; the problem of man's entire nature, the Old Sin Nature, which commits sins and human good. A perfect God made a perfect provision for every need that we would have in time, as well as a perfect solution for every sin; and that solution is the Cross. Therefore, every sin that would ever be committed in the human race has a divine solution "in Christ."

What Happens if I Do Not Become Born Again?

This is a very unpleasant subject, but it must be approached and studied honestly in the light of relevant passages in the Bible.

"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (Joh 3:18)

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (Joh 3:36)

When a member of the human race rejects God's offer to become born again, he becomes subject to judgment from His divine justice. In addition to His love, God is also perfectly holy (righteous and just). God can have nothing to do with sin, evil, or fallen man because He cannot have fellowship with spiritually dead human beings. There is no place in God's kingdom for unregenerate mankind who is doomed to spend eternity in hell. Also called the lake of fire, hell is the place that has been prepared for the devil and his angels, and it will be the final residence for all who refuse God's free offer of salvation. It is at the final judgment where Jesus will **"say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Mat 25:41)**. The Bible is very dogmatic about the existence of a literal hell.

There are over 160 passages in the New Testament that teach this, many of them taught by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In fact, our Lord spoke about hell seven times more often than He spoke about heaven! The unbeliever will go to a place that is described by the following terms:

A place of torment (Luk 16:23, 16:28).

A place where desire is never met (Luk 16:24-31).

A place of unspeakable misery in eternal fire (Mat 25:41).

A place where the worm (conscience) never dies, and the fire is never quenched (Mar 9:44).

A place called the lake [which many believe to be a liquid form of lava] that burns with fire and brimstone (Rev 21:8).

A place called a bottomless pit (Rev 9:1-2).

A place of outer darkness (Mat 8:12).

A place of fire unquenchable (Luk 3:17).

A place described as a furnace of fire (Mat 13:42).

A place described as blackness of darkness (Jud 1:13).

A place of everlasting torment (Rev 14:11).

Many individuals, including some believers, reject the fact that a literal hell exists. So let's note some principles concerning the reality of hell. A perfectly righteous God

can have nothing to do with sin. God cannot even “**look upon sin**” according to Hab 1:13. Since infinite and pure holiness demands that sin be judged, God’s holiness (His righteousness and justice) must be honored. When man first sinned, he died spiritually, which meant that he was separated from God. The serious state of man’s condition is revealed by the fact that God made the greatest sacrifice He could possibly make. If there was no hell with everlasting punishment for His creatures, why did God have to sacrifice His Son to save them? From what did they need to be saved?

Hell is real, and we can trust that God has devised the best solution to handle the problem of sin. In the end, mankind will understand that God did that which is right and just, and He will be justified and glorified forever. When a person realizes the evil character of sin as God knows it, then he will understand why hell exists and why it is justified. The marvel of the plan of God is not that sinners are lost, but that sinners are saved! The death of our Lord Jesus Christ not only delivers us from hell, but also is the basis of a greater condemnation upon those who reject Him. When individuals reject Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, their inherent unrighteousness is increased, and their helpless, hopeless condition is magnified by the sin of rejecting the perfect remedy that infinite divine love has provided. God’s infinite Divine grace has made it possible through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ to offer man the opportunity to accept or reject the Savior. Therefore, hell is a biblical revelation that needs no confirmation or approval from man. Just as heaven is a real place, so too, is hell a real place and not a mere state of mind (Mat 5:22; Mat 5:29-30; Mat 11:23; Mat 16:18). Hell is a place of horrors that are beyond description. Many of the Scriptures describing hell come from the lips of the Lord Himself, and to deny the reality of hell is to call the Lord Jesus Christ a liar.

One of the biggest errors concerning hell is the tendency of many religious people to fall back in blind dependence on only one attribute of God; His love. Many ask how a loving God could cast His creatures into hell or the eternal lake of fire. To ask the question is to ignore His justice and righteousness, and the function they perform in protecting His integrity. If love alone could save people, and forgive them of their sin as an act of kindness, then God would compromise who and what He is. Additionally, to say that hell does not exist is to say that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ was unnecessary, because if God could save His creatures by mere generosity, then the death of Christ becomes an act of divine futility. It is unthinkable to believe that God sent the Lord Jesus Christ to the Cross, with all its pain and agony, when He could have forgiven us through an act of kindness. Divine holiness demands either the condemnation of the sinner, or the acceptance of Christ and His substitutionary death. God is love and that love is revealed by the gift of His Son so that man might be saved. Because of His perfect righteousness, God cannot save the lost unless His righteous demands are satisfied and they can be satisfied only through Jesus Christ. When love has paid such a price so that a sinner may be saved without compromising divine righteousness, man is a fool to question God’s revelation that there is a place of never-ending punishment. Those who resent the idea of hell are resenting divine love and holiness. God will never send anyone to hell because He desired to do so; people go to hell only because they choose to reject the Lord Jesus Christ (Joh 3:18-36).

How Do I Become Born Again?

God so loved the world that He did something so incredible that no one need suffer eternity in hell. God has provided a perfect salvation. The message of God's grace is not a declaration of eternal condemnation, but rather, it is the "good news" of salvation through the Savior that divine love has provided. It is God's desire that all be saved and come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ:

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1Ti 2:3-4)

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2Pe 3:9)

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him." (Joh 3:16-17)

We are all born without the ability to love God because we are all born spiritually dead. Therefore, God loved us when we were incapable of loving Him. His attitude toward us from eternity past was always one of love, and the result of that love was His gift to us. That gift was His very own uniquely born Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only member of the human race to be born without an Old Sin Nature. Every member of the human race is born in sin, and under the domain of the Adamic curse, with Adam's original sin imputed at physical birth. Only One was born as the Son of God; everyone else must become a son, for none were born this way. Christ died for all, and not just the elect or a select few, as some would teach. The Lord Jesus Christ paid the penalty for every sin that would ever be committed in the human race, even those who end up in hell.

Every sin in human history was covered at the Cross, with the exception of one. The only sin that is unforgivable is the sin of rejecting Christ and the work He did on the Cross to secure our salvation. God gave His creatures free will, and throughout history, He never violates human volition. When one of His creatures chooses to reject their Savior, He will not override that decision, and therefore He must sentence that person to the lake of fire. All of these principles are clearly stated throughout the Bible:

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (Rom 5:6)

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; (2Co 5:14)

Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2Co 5:19)

Who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. (1Ti 2:6)

For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. (1Ti 4:10)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men. (Tit 2:11)

But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. (Heb 2:9)

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1Jo 2:2)

These verses leave no doubt that what Christ did on the Cross, He did for all. Since all sins have been judged, they cannot be mentioned at the last judgment; even the unbelievers' sins will not be brought to light. Instead, the unbeliever is condemned because he did not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, not because of his sins:

"And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Rev 20:12-15)

All sins were judged at the Cross where the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price. Why did He do this for us? The answer is because **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (Joh 3:16)**. Even though we do not deserve it and do not deserve anything, He still loved us enough to provide this wonderful salvation. He did it all and we need only to believe that it is true because it is written that **whoever believes will be saved**. Since the beginning of time, every person who has ever been saved received salvation in the same way, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone; there is no other way, **"and there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved"** (Acts 4:12).

Each individual must make the choice for himself. No one can do it for you and God will not force you; it must be your decision.

If you have not made the choice to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are without hope and without eternal life. As such, you are destined to live for eternity in the lake of fire. But do not give up hope; Jesus Christ took your punishment and died as your substitute. He had you personally in mind while suffering on the Cross. Now God has given you the freedom and opportunity to make your own decision. Right now, wherever you are, whoever you are, in the privacy of your own soul, you can tell God the Father that you recognize that you are a sinner and that you realize your need for the only Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that you are believing in His Son Jesus Christ for eternal life. In that very moment, your destiny will be secured for all eternity.

It is simply faith alone in Christ alone. Faith in Christ means you will be a child of God and will live forever with Him in heaven. The choice is yours - choose wisely.