

# View

## You Must Be Born Again

BY JEFF HERRIN

"Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?" That question from Jesus must have made Nicodemus squirm. Nicodemus had initiated the conversation in John 3:2 with some very respectful words about Jesus, but Jesus immediately turned the discussion to being born again. Nicodemus was first baffled and then told that as a teacher he of all people should have some grasp of what Jesus was talking about.

I don't think Jesus was saying that being born again is simple to understand. The phrase "born again" is commonly used in our sermons, Bible classes, and hymns. Maybe it is so familiar to us that even we fail to grasp what an astonishing figure of speech Jesus confronted Nicodemus with. Nevertheless, Jesus cornered Nicodemus on this topic and emphasized that it is essential to entering the kingdom of God. Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand something about this topic. Is it possible that there is something regarding this topic that we also should understand, but have also failed to grasp or practice?

### Baptism and Being Born Again

Jesus discussion with Nicodemus is inseparable from what the New Testament teaches about baptism. The role of the Spirit in baptism is stressed in 1 Co. 12:13. Newness of life as a result of baptism is taught in Romans 6:4. However, Jesus discussion with Nicodemus is well before Peter first directed an audience for gospel preaching to be repent and be baptized in Acts 2:38. I think Jesus was telling Nicodemus something with broader and more immediate application to his life. He would not have to wait for Pentecost to apply an underlying principle of rebirth that applies to baptism and is, in some ways, even more fundamental to our faith in God.

Many people want their lives to be enhanced. They want to evolve and progress. Some even want to reform their lives and leave some bad habit behind. Still, asking us to be born all over again is more than most of us feel is necessary. We are too clever and too proud of what we have accomplished. Just give us a boost, but don't expect us to abandon all the progress we have made for ourselves and start from zero. Nicodemus was a success as both a man of the Pharisees and a ruler of the Jews. Jesus offered no promotion. Jesus told Nicodemus he needed to start from scratch to enter the kingdom of God.

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## A Regeneration Movement

In this country we have benefited greatly from the spreading of the gospel that accompanied the Restoration movement. Restoration is a biblical idea (just read 1 and 2 Kings and Ezra) and still worthy of our efforts today, but I wonder if Jesus would tell us that what many Christians are overdue for today is a regeneration movement (Titus 3:5). We need to really live like we have been born again. Are we holding our own with the world or are we being transformed? Do we handicap ourselves in the struggle to resist surrendering to the world's mold because we are not willing to break the mold and start from zero? Are we keeping the "old man" on life support instead of embracing the rebirth and newness of life that God has provided?

Regeneration is a wonderful and exciting Bible doctrine. Although Jesus clarified to Nicodemus that he was not literally talking about a man entering his mother's womb a second time, don't think that Jesus was exaggerating to make a point. You could no more be begotten again from above under your own power than you could re-enter your mother's womb. Peter tells us, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). Although we voluntarily choose to be purified (1 Pt. 1:22), the seed must come from God's word. Even in baptism,

Paul gives God all of the credit, saying "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:11-12).

### The Born Again Life

Have you ever thought about why the epistles contain so much instruction about baptism to people who had already been baptized? Even in the first century, there were a lot of Christians who did not understand the consequences of baptism that result from the underlying principle of being born again. Read Paul's instruction in Romans 6. He does not tell them to be re-baptized because they did not know enough or get the point the first time. Instead, he urges them to take a deeper look at the consequences of their baptism into Christ's death. The old man is left behind and they had entered newness of life. Like them we need to take on a new and fruitful purpose in our lives.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to stop their internal rivalries by recognizing that they were all members of one body. He begins this discussion in verse 13 by reminding them of another consequence of baptism. All are baptized into one body and

all drink of one Spirit. Being born again creates new relationships and we need to recognize those ties just as much or more (Mk 3:35) than those that exist in our physical families.

In Galatians 3:26-29, we are born again into the family of God through baptism. There are no favored sons or daughters. We are equally treated by our Father. Every one of us belongs to Christ and is an heir according to the promise.

Paul encourages us to leave the philosophy and tradition of the world behind when we are born again in Colossians 2:9-13. We have been reborn to new ways of thinking, so fill yourself up with Christ (verse 10) and let him guide your steps. Our upbringing, accustomed ways of doing things, and even our experiences can be deceiving. Instead give yourself to the new way of thinking that relies on the truth of God to direct your life.

### Are You Sure You Have Been Born Again?

You must be born again! Don't check that box prematurely just because you have been baptized. We have to live like we have been born again. Although we may dread change, great change is required on our part. We will never experience the liberty of newness of life in Christ until we finish cutting our ties to the old life and make a fresh start as a reborn child of God.