



# BEING BORN AGAIN

“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man 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.’ Jesus answered 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? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’” [John 3:1-8](#)

In this passage, we are introduced to a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was clearly very religious, believed Jesus to be a teacher who had come from God, and acknowledged Him as one who did the works of God. Nicodemus displayed many of the characteristics one would today expect of a Christian. However, Jesus’ response to Nicodemus, far from being affirming, appears confrontational.

Jesus declared to Nicodemus man’s inability to enter or even “see” the Kingdom of God unless he is **“born again.”** By Nicodemus’ response, we can see his difficulty in understanding what Jesus was saying. The fact is that Nicodemus would have to experience a transformation so radical that it would, in fact, be a new birth.

In this session, we will discover what the Scripture has to say about being born again, which is also called the “new birth.” In particular, we will answer the following questions:

- **What is being born again?**
- **Why do we need to be born again?**
- **How are we born again?**
- **What are the evidences of being born again?**

## WHAT IS BEING BORN AGAIN?

To some of us, the concept of being born again may seem as strange as it did to Nicodemus. It sounds both absurd and impossible. Others may be familiar with it, but simply consider it equivalent to believing in Jesus. The frequent and/or incorrect use of the term has immunized many against the reality of its meaning. Since the new birth is essential for us to even begin to understand the Kingdom of God, we must be clear regarding what exactly Jesus meant when He stated that we “**must be born again.**”

One of the deceptions of “religious” thinking is that we can work ourselves into the will of God. So-called “religion” offers many alternatives to the new birth:

- **Being born in a “Christian country”**
- **Having Christian parents**
- **Being “baptized” or christened as a baby**
- **Making mental assent to some facts or doctrines**
- **Doing your best to live a good life**
- **Taking sacraments or attending church meetings**

Right relationship with God is not something we naturally inherit (it is “**not of natural descent**” [John 1:13 - NIV 1984](#)) or earn (it is “**not a result of works**” [Ephesians 2:9](#)).

In contrast to all of these, being born again is coming to life by the Holy Spirit, as the very nature of God courses through us. It is the regenerating experience of God’s supernatural power.

The new birth is the creation of something new. It is not just a “fresh start” or the improvement of your old life. The new birth is the life of Christ in us. It brings into existence that which did not exist before:

“**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**”  
[2 Corinthians 5:17](#)

This does not mean that everything about us instantly changes. We still look the same, have the same personality and many of the same traits. However, we are new. Our desires, attitudes, and actions begin to change to reflect our new life in Christ. We are alive to God in a way that we never knew was possible. We need not be held back by our past sins, old weaknesses, or hereditary patterns.

## WHY DO WE NEED TO BE BORN AGAIN?

The Bible states several reasons why new birth is necessary. One of the ways it does this is by stressing who we are apart from the new birth. Before we are born again:

### 1. We are dead

“**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—**”  
[Ephesians 2:1-2](#)

### 2. We love what is wrong

“**And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.**” [John 3:19-20](#) (see also [Romans 7:18](#))

**3. Our hearts are hard and unable to submit to God or please Him**

“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Romans 8:7-8 (see also Ephesians 4:18, Ezekiel 36:26)

**4. We are slaves to Satan and sin**

“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,” Romans 6:17

**5. We are under the Law**

“that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives... Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.” Romans 7:1b, 4

**6. We are unable to come to Christ and receive the gospel**

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:44 (see also Ephesians 4:18, 1 Corinthians 2:14, John 6:37, 65)

To be freed from the above conditions, we need to be born again.

**HOW ARE WE BORN AGAIN?**

God causes the new birth. We do not. This is an important truth. Nicodemus asked how we can be born again. Jesus answered stating that the wind blows wherever it wills. We don’t cause it; we just see its results. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is the One who causes us to be born again of His own will. We just see the results.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—” Ephesians 2:4-5

Just as a baby cannot cause itself to be born, or a dead person cannot raise himself, so we cannot cause ourselves to be born again. Someone else must act on our behalf. This is the very thing God does. He is so rich in mercy and love for us that He takes the initiative in giving us new life.

The Bible describes our experience of being birthed by God as hearing God’s call:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9

Before the call, each of us may have thought very differently about Jesus Christ. We may have hated Christianity and sworn we would never become a Christian. We may have been indifferent to it, without giving it much thought. We may have felt that we always believed in Jesus Christ deep down, even though we never really followed Him.

Also, each of us may experience the call differently. It may come in a moment of intense conviction or we may just experience a subtle shift, after which everything is different.

However it is experienced, the result is the same. We begin to feel that God is speaking to us. We simultaneously know conviction of the truth of the gospel, sorrow for the way we have lived, and a desire to live differently. We may not even be able to say why, but we believe the gospel.

The call of God is experienced through the declaration of God's Word. His Word comes and is implanted within us, and the Holy Spirit brings us to life through it.

“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” 1 Peter 1:23 (NIV 1984)

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Romans 10:17

## WHAT ARE THE EVIDENCES OF BEING BORN AGAIN?

When a natural birth occurs, we certainly know about it! In the same way, when we have been born again, there are clear evidences of the new life.

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” 1 John 5:13

### The new birth is evidenced in the following ways:

**FAITH IN GOD** — Being born again is not just some ambiguous spiritual experience. It awakens within us real conviction in Jesus of Nazareth, both in who He was historically and is eternally. We come to believe in Him and to love Him. This is authentic faith.

One way this trust is shown is through our faith in His Word. We begin to read the Bible with a real faith in all that it says. We become convinced that its message is for us, drawing specific encouragement from the Scriptures that refer to salvation. We know that we are born again because God has declared it.

“...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Romans 10:9-10

**THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** — We will cover this more thoroughly when we talk about being filled with the Spirit, but for now we want to note two assurances of the new birth that the Holy Spirit gives to us:

a) When we are born again, God takes up residence in us by His Spirit, who assures us inwardly of the change that has taken place:

“you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,” Romans 8:15b-16

b) The indwelling of the Spirit empowers us to live the Christian life. We find a new ability within us to stop sinning and to start living righteously:

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” Romans 8:9

**WORSHIP** — When we are born again, we not only believe in God but we delight in Him. We become amazed at how awesome and wonderful He is. We do not feel forced to obey Him, but want to please Him. We develop a genuine preference for what God wants.

“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12b-13

This free offering of ourselves is our worship to God:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” [Romans 12:1](#)

**OBEDIENCE** — When we are born again, we begin to take on the characteristics of the life of Christ within us. Our lives begin to resemble the obedience that was fully manifested in Jesus’ life. Obedience often begins with repentance, which is the act of changing your mind or turning around. This process has a two-fold rhythm. We turn from our old ways of living and turn toward God’s will. This means that while God causes us to be born again, we still have a role to play. We have a responsibility to work out what God has worked in us.

So complete is this inner change that the Bible declares that we can recognize this new birth by the absence of habitual sin. We are not perfect, but the habits of our lives begin to reflect obedience to God:

“You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him... No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.” [1 John 3:5-6, 9](#)

## CONCLUSION

Being born again is the start of spiritual life. There is no other start. There is no other way. There is no other answer. If a man achieves everything there is to achieve in life but is not born again, he has less than nothing. All that we will leave this life with is either our spiritual life in Christ, which will lead us into eternity with Him, or our spiritual death through not responding to His glorious gospel, which will lead us into an eternity in Hell.

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” [2 Corinthians 13:5](#)

In the light of such sobering truths, we urge you to consider Paul’s words and examine yourself in the faith. Whether this examination exposes something that is lacking, or confirms what is present, our prayer is that all will come to an unshakable assurance of the authenticity of their salvation.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Finally Alive* by John Piper