



In this issue:

Born Again—p.1

Born With Benefits—p. 6

Robert Saucy Quote—p. 7

Born Again

“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 and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, 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 hi moth-

er’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, 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 the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’” John 3:1-8

What does it mean to be born again? We cannot miss what the Lord meant if we trust in the Scripture as the Word of God. Jesus was not talking about a physical birth but a spiritual birth. Nicodemus may have been a little confused at first, but the teaching of Jesus is clear. Jesus said we must be born of water and the spirit. If we will keep his words in the entire context of John chapters three and four, we should be able to discern what Jesus meant to teach.

Of course, what is taught about being born again depends on who is asked the question. Even Atheist have their ideas about being born again. When we look at a website for Atheistic beliefs, we can find many diverse ideas about being born again. One individual wrote:

How do atheists view the concept of being born again? I regard it as hilarious.

The whole thing comes from a Bible story about Jesus, in the gospel of John, chapter 3. In a nutshell: Jesus is talking about how no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born *anōthen*, a Greek word that can mean various things, including ‘again’ and ‘from above.’ His interlocutor, Nicodemus, assumes that Jesus meant “again” and protests that it makes no sense: is he expected to crawl back up his mother’s vagina to be born a second time? Jesus chides him and says in effect “No, Nicodemus you Numbskull; I mean *anōthen* as in ‘from above’: you have to be born to be among the chosen, you need to be one of the spiritually endowed.” So the point about being born again is that in the story, it’s a comical misunderstanding. Jesus didn’t tell Nicodemus that he had to be born again; he told him that you needed to be born from



above. Nicodemus gets it comically wrong in order to give the character of Jesus a chance to expand and expound on his subject by correcting Nicodemus and clarifying. And what do some modern-day Christians do? They proudly adopt the label of the guy who completely missed the point. (Petter Haggholm, divineatheist.quora.com)

It is important to understand other people's point of view even when we do not agree with them. We must know what others are saying if we want to defend the truth of what the Bible teaches. Here is another more moderate response by another atheist:

For me being 'born again' has two connotations. To be reincarnated or in the Christian context, be born again in Christ. There is no evidence of reincarnation just like there is no evidence of god/s, so atheists would just dismiss it as easily. It makes fun fiction though, some of them may admit. Being born again in Christ just means that you fully accept him as your personal lord and savior, as most born again Christians attest. Of course Atheists would just find this a funny ritual that doesn't make sense. (Rej Cea Maranan, divineatheist.quora.com)

This second response from an Atheist does acknowledge that to Christians being born again means "that you fully accept him as your personal lord and savior." But he says this is a funny ritual that doesn't make any sense. Even an Atheist must admit there is a sense in which men attempt to follow a higher standard for life. The Atheist does not agree that the Scripture is the Word of God; therefore, he dismisses the idea of a new birth and often attempts to make light of it or ridicule it as absolute nonsense.

However, we find that even various Christians may hold differing views on what it means to be born again. Christians agree that Jesus is talking

about a spiritual birth, but they may disagree on when it occurs and the steps that lead up to it. Here is a short discussion of two different Christian views on what it means to be born again:

The Reformed view of regeneration may be set apart from other outlooks in at least two ways.

First, classical Roman Catholicism teaches that regeneration occurs at baptism, a view known as baptismal regeneration. Reformed theology has insisted that regeneration may take place at any time in a person's life, even in the womb. It is not somehow the automatic result of baptism. Second, it is common for many other evangelical branches of the church to speak of repentance and faith leading to regeneration (i.e., people are born again only after they exercise saving faith). By contrast, Reformed theology teaches that original sin and total depravity deprive all people of the moral ability and will to exercise saving faith. ... Regeneration is entirely the work of God the Holy Spirit – we can do nothing on our own to obtain it. God alone raises the elect from spiritual death to new life in Christ.

The term born again has become widely associated with the evangelical Christian renewal since the late 1960s, first in the United States and then around the world. Associated perhaps initially with Jesus People and the Christian counterculture, born again came to refer to a conversion experience, accepting Jesus Christ as lord and savior in order to be saved from hell and given eternal life with God in heaven, and was increasingly used as a term to identify devout believers. By the mid-1970s, born again Christians were increasingly referred to in the mainstream media as part of the born again movement.

The traditional Jewish understanding of the promise of salvation is interpreted as being rooted in "the seed of Abraham"; that is, physi-

cal lineage from Abraham. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that this doctrine was in error – that every person must have two births – natural birth of the physical body and another of the water and the spirit. This discourse with Nicodemus established the Christian belief that all human beings – whether Jew or Gentile – must be "born again" of the spiritual seed of Christ. (*Wikipedia*)

It does not appear that Nicodemus was claiming himself approved because he was of the lineage of Abraham. Nicodemus' question points directly at the idea of entering the womb again and being born again. However, we know that the Jews often claimed approval for themselves because they were children of Abraham. We find this encounter between Jesus and the Jewish leaders:

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, “You will be made free”?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.’ They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’” (Jn. 8:31-39)

Jesus recognized these leaders were the physical descendants of Abraham, but they had not experienced the spiritual re-birth that would make them the spiritual children of Abraham. John the Baptist proclaimed that God could raise up physical descendants of Abraham from stones (Matt. 3:9). Claiming the lineage of Abraham had its merits

and its place in history, but being born of water and the spirit superseded that physical connection.

The Apostle Paul teaches that we become the spiritual children of Abraham when we are baptized into Christ: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:26-29)

The promise of which we are heirs is the one God made to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12:3, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.” Paul explains this promise further in Galatians 3:16, “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” Jesus is the promised Seed of Abraham in whom all families of the earth will be blessed.

When Jesus talked to Nicodemus about the new birth, this is his meaning. Being a physical descendant of Abraham did not matter. What now matters is being born again, a spiritual birth in Christ. This birth is accomplished by the Spirit of God who indwells the Christian. God’s indwelling Spirit comes to us as a gift from God when we obey the gospel and are baptized into Christ.

As we noted earlier, there are disagreements among Christians regarding being born again of water and the spirit. Some say the water mentioned in John 3 refers to the physical birth of a man. What Jesus was saying to Nicodemus is that he had to be born as a human being and then he had to be reborn by the Spirit of God. However, others contend that the water mention in John 3 refers to the water of baptism, and that we must be baptized into Christ and also receive his Spirit to

accomplish the new birth. What does the context of John chapters three and four teach us about these matters?

It is interesting that a popular and well-known passage is found in the middle of this context. It is John 3:16-17, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” There are those who teach that faith is all that is necessary to be born again, and baptism does not enter into it. However, most of those who believe in “faith only” regeneration also teach that one should say a prayer to welcome Jesus into one’s heart.

One website I researched offered this formula for salvation:

SALVATION PRAYER

Committing your life to Jesus is a personal and individual decision. By praying a prayer like this, you are inviting Jesus into your life and releasing your cares and worries to Him.

“Jesus, right now, I ask you to become Lord of my life. You are my Savior and I thank You for the sacrifice You made on the cross. I receive Your grace and confidently believe that my life is forever changed.

Jesus, help me to live for You. My heart and my life are open to what You have for me. I want to know Your ways and love people as You love me. Everything within me is submitted to You. Thank You for Your mercy, hope, and unfailing love.

In Your name I pray,
Amen.” (Newlifechurch.tv)

While much of what is said here is admirable and encourages us to live our lives for the Lord, the

fact is that we do not find a Salvation Prayer like this in Scripture. What we do find in God’s word is this formula for our salvation in Mark’s Gospel: “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’” (Mk. 16:15-16) Christians who have already obeyed the gospel and have been baptized into Christ are taught to pray for forgiveness (Simon in Acts 8:5-25 and the Christians to whom John wrote in 1 Jn. 1:8 – 2:2). The Sinner’s Prayer, as it is popularly taught in many places, is not found anywhere in the Scripture. Baptism for the remission of sins is found in several passages (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk.16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 8:36-40; 10:44-48; 16:14-15; 16:31-33; 18:8-9; 19:1-5; 22:14-16).

We believe that faith is essential to our salvation. We also believe that only faith can save us, but faith only does not save us. The faith that saves is one that is alive. As the Apostle James states in James 2:17-26:

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the

body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

A faith that is alive obeys the commands of God. The works that James talks about are not works of self, but they are works ordained by God that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). It is not trusting in works to save us when we obey a command of God; it is building on the rock instead of on the sand (Matt. 7:24-27). The Wise Man built his house upon the rock.

Jesus told Nicodemus that we must be born of water and the spirit. We believe the water he is talking about is the water of baptism. When we return to the context of John chapter three, we find this truth: “After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

Then there arose a dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification. And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!’” (Jn. 3:22-26)

Jesus and his disciples were baptizing, and John and his disciples were baptizing also. John was working in Aenon near Salim because there was much water there. We must keep the water mentioned here in context with the water Jesus mentioned to Nicodemus.

In John 4:1-3 we read, “Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.” It appears that Jesus’ disciples were baptizing more converts than John’s disciples at this time. What

this context teaches us is the connection between Jesus’ statement that we must be born of water and the spirit and baptism.

We know for certain that Jesus was teaching a truth about a spiritual renewal, a new birth that is connected with water and the spirit’s work in our lives. When Peter proclaimed the gospel on the Day of Pentecost and those who had crucified the Lord were cut to the heart by the things he said about Jesus, we read, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’” (Acts 2:37-39)

Peter did not tell them to pray; he told them to be baptized for the remission of their sins. He also said that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the indwelling spirit of God that begins the work of sanctification in our lives. We are taught to walk after the spirit and not after the flesh (Gal. 5:16-18). We believe that Nicodemus believed and obeyed the Lord because when Jesus died, Nicodemus assisted in his burial (Jn.19:38-42). Nicodemus came to understand what it means to be born again of water and the spirit. My friend, have you been born again of water and the spirit?

L Scott Gage

Fayetteville, AR

Born With Benefits

Is this the beginning of a new place to have babies? Is it true that Chick-fil-a now offers delivery service?

There are traces of truth in both of the above statements. The story happened on July 20 in San Antonio, Texas when Falon Griffin began banging on the door of a Chik-fil-A. Late in her pregnancy, she was in urgent need to use the restaurant's restroom, but the store was closed. The manager, Brenda Enriquez, showed compassion and opened the door. Soon it became obvious that her child would be born - soon.

The father, Robert, was thankfully present and was able to unwrap the umbilical cord from their new daughter's neck. Gracelyn made a healthy entrance into the world. Chik-fil-A celebrated the event by granting Gracelyn free food for life at their restaurants, and a guaranteed job when she turns 14.

How many babies are awarded free food for life when they enter the world? Under normal circumstances they have that expectation from their families for their first few years, but not for life and not from strangers. That's newsworthy of a headline.

Ezekiel 16 tells a story to show how much God loved Israel. Israel was like an infant that was unwanted and cast out by her parents. God found her, still unwashed and covered in blood; her umbilical cord had not even been cut. "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'" (Ezekiel 16:6).

God described how this child was provided the best of everything, including food: "You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil" (Ezekiel 16:13). Here was a child who had first been rejected and set out to die. When adopted into God's family, she received amazing benefits.

Ezekiel's parable well describes our situation. Here's how Paul described it in Galatians 4:4-7: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent

forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

What a change takes place when we are adopted into God's family! Outside of that family we are slaves with misery and oppression our lot. In His family we are "heirs," receiving all the benefits of one naturally born into the family. Why would anyone reject such an offer and forfeit so many benefits?!

Timothy D. Hall
LightGrams, July 26, 2018
Volume 22, Number 26



We are not born again just so we can be in heaven someday, but we are born from above by the Spirit of God to actually live a brand-new life in Christ now. A life that grows.

The message of Scripture is that our life in Christ is more than the forgiveness of sins, more than the escape from God's condemnation, but a new way to live, a new source of zest that thirsts and hungers for more.

All too often, sincere believers find themselves trying the usual Christian practices — reading the Bible, attending church, praying — with little, if any, success. Disappointed and defeated, they wonder: “Why is nothing really different? The same fears and anxieties are with me. My attitudes and actions toward things don't seem to be any different. What do I have to do to experience more of this new life? How does it all work?”

Believers want more than knowledge of biblical and theological doctrines. They want to experience God. They want to know how this new life operates. They want to know how they can grow in this new life. Like all important areas of our life — physical, intellectual, and ethical — spiritual growth involves time and effort. It is a process, and Scripture gives light to the means of growth and the dynamic operations of these means.

Robert Saucy

C. S. Lewis Institute



Volume 44 - Number 1 - Jan/Feb 2025

BC is published every other month. Send all inquiries, address changes and subscriptions to the editor: L Scott Gage, PO Box 3425, Fayetteville, AR 72702-3425 Voice 479-521-6809

Email: Lsgage129@cs.com

www.basicchristianity.net