

ADVANCED BIBLICAL COURSE



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What is the New Birth?

JOHN 3:1-21

Many a brilliant man has been confounded and bewildered by the word of Jesus, “*You must be born again.*” Many good, religious, pious men have wondered at, and sometimes even become agitated by, the words “*Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” Some have even become indignant.

Jesus’ words to Nicodemus are staggering when we realise who Nicodemus was – a rich, educated, religious, pious leader who truly admired Christ! These words reveal that Nicodemus was not yet truly satisfied and Jesus was not impressed. He told Nicodemus that he had to experience ‘the new birth’ in order to see the kingdom of God. Somebody once asked John Wesley, “*Why do you keep on preaching that a man must be born again?*” He answered, “*Because ye must be born again.*”

I WHAT THE NEW BIRTH IS NOT

◆ It is not religion.

One of the definitions of ‘religion’ in the dictionary is ‘any system of faith and worship’. A ‘religionist’ is one earnestly devoted to a religion’. To become a ‘religionist’ and dedicate ourselves to a certain religion is not the new birth. We can even change religions or denominations and not experience the new birth.

Christian Digest: “Religion isn’t Salvation,” Pandita Ramabai, the noted Christian leader of India, tells how she followed that religion of her country during her childhood days and right up until after she was married and had grown to womanhood, and of how it never satisfied. One day she heard about Christianity, and she said, “That is what I want. Christianity will satisfy the longings of my heart. I will embrace the Christian religion.” Accepting Christianity, she sailed for England, where she was baptised and later confirmed. She joined the Church of England and for eight years lived a most exemplary Christian life. One night she happened to be listening to a message on the new birth. Never before had she

been told that she must be born again, born from above. She was convicted, and right there and then she accepted Jesus Christ as her personal Saviour, and passed out of death into life. This is her testimony in her own words, “I found the Christian religion but did not find the Christ of religion.” She had embraced Christianity, but had not accepted Jesus Christ. In John’s gospel the word “*life*” occurs 44 times, while the word ‘religion’ does not occur once.

◆ It is not reformation.

A drunkard stops drinking, a thief stops stealing, a prostitute becomes respectable. These may be good, but none of them are the new birth. We can reform, turn over a new leaf, change our friends, change our places of entertainment, and even break some of our habits, and still not be ‘born again’.

Hyman Appleman tells of a preacher who explains it like this: “Suppose you were to take a pig the best pig that ever won a prize at a country fair. Suppose you were to take him out of the pigpen and put him into the bath-chamber, give him a bath, scrub him with Lifebuoy to take the odour away, apply Palmolive to give him a ‘schoolgirl complexion’, put fingernail polish on his hoofs, perfume him with fragrant perfume, tie a ribbon round his neck, and bring him into a dainty lady’s boudoir. Something would change, but it would not be the pig. The same is true of human nature. You cannot change a pig’s nature. He was born a pig, will live a pig, die a pig and make good pork chops. That is about all. It is the same way with a man – exactly the same way.”

◆ It is not respectability. ‘Good works’ (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The new birth is not: -

- joining a church
- having your name placed on a membership roll
- starting to attend services regularly
- starting to pray and read your Bible daily, etc.

They are all good and very important, but you can do all these things and still not be born again.

II WHAT THE NEW BIRTH IS

◆ **The new birth is a new life (2 Corinthians 5:17)**

- I no longer live the way I used to.

- I am changed.
 - God changes me completely by His power.
 - He makes me alive to Himself.
 - I am a new person: same looks, same age, same job, but different person.
 - It is not so much me battling to be good – but Christ living His life through me.
(Galatians 2:20)
 - I don't behave the way I used to or say the things I said, etc.
 - It is not because I am not allowed to.
 - I don't want to!
 - I'm different.
 - God has changed me.
- ◆ **This change involves the whole person.**
- mind
 - conscience
 - will
 - thoughts
 - attitude
 - behaviour: how can I say I am a Christian and still steal, swear, curse, blaspheme, deceive, etc?
- ◆ **I must allow God to change me completely.**
- The new birth is new longings.
 - A desire to be clean, pure and pleasing to God (obedient).
 - New ambitions.
 - The new birth is new love.
 - The new birth must affect the heart – the seat of the will, intellect and emotions.
 - *“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”* (Proverbs 4:23)
 - The heart determines character. *“For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”*
(Proverbs 23:7)
 - The heart controls speech. (Luke 6:45)
- ◆ **God has promised to give us a new heart.** (Ezekiel 36:26-27)
- We receive the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4)
 - We begin to love God (Matthew 23:37) and others (Matthew 22:38).
 - This is the proof that we are Christ's disciples. (John 13:35 & 1 John 2:9-11)

III WHY MUST YOU BE BORN AGAIN

- ◆ **Because Jesus says you must.** (John 3:7)
 - He brought the Kingdom of God to earth.
 - He is God and He knows what you need and why.
- ◆ **Because of what you are by nature.**
 - According to Romans 5, all are sinners by nature, see also Romans 3:23.
- ◆ **Because you cannot change yourself.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- ◆ **Otherwise you cannot truly enjoy life here.**
 - God made man for Himself and you will never be truly happy without God. (1 John 5:11-12)
- ◆ **Otherwise you cannot go to heaven.**

IV HOW TO BE BORN AGAIN (John 3:14-18)

- ◆ **Make a confession.**
 - of sin (1 John 1:9)
 - of Christ (Romans 10:9-10)
- ◆ **Repent.** (Acts 3:9)
 - it is not enough to acknowledge that you are a sinner
 - you must turn from your sin to the Saviour
- ◆ **Ask Jesus.**
 - to forgive you
 - to come into your heart and change you (Luke 11:9-10 & 1 John 5:13-15)
- ◆ **Have faith (trust).**
 - having asked, you must trust Him
 - He has promised to do for you what you ask
 - He will never lie to you
- ◆ **(John 1:12; Revelation 3:20 & 1 John 5:11-14)**
- ◆ **Obey.**
 - saving faith involves obedience (Romans 1:5 & 16:26)
 - in order to be happy as a Christian, just keeping **obeying** Him