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BORN AGAIN?



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How can a man be **BORN AGAIN?**

by Chuck Smith

Hidden under a shroud of darkness, a man cautiously approached Jesus of Nazareth. A ruler of the Jews, the man had waited until nightfall, for he had a question he needed to ask, a question he didn't want anyone else to hear. Standing in the background, Nicodemus had been watching Jesus as he performed one miracle after another. He knew that no one could do these things unless God was with him. But now, finally, Jesus was alone. Now was the time to ask his question.

"Rabbi," Nicodemus began. "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, as He was apt to do, came right to the point. He knew what Nicodemus wanted. "Unless one is born again," he replied. "He cannot see the kingdom of God."

Rightfully, at this point, Nicodemus asked, "Just what do you mean, 'born again'?"

This is the same question that men have been asking for centuries, as they pondered Jesus' statement in John 3:3. What does it mean to be born again?

You see, God originally created man as a trinity of spirit, mind, and body. The mind is governed by the spirit, and thus, when the spirit rules, man lives in communion and fellowship with God. Plant life, on the other hand, is one-dimensional. Having a physical body, it feeds on nutrients from the soil and atmosphere, or in rare cases like the Venus flytrap, on insects. Roots hold plants firmly in place, while all reproduction is done through a genetic code encapsulated within its seed. Animal life, being two-dimensional, possesses a physical body, as well as a consciousness, or "mind." Animals feed on plants or other animals and have a wide range of mobility.

Like plants, they reproduce through a genetic code in their seed, which is often fertilized by the male. But, because of their consciousness and increased mobility, the animal kingdom is far superior to the vegetable kingdom.

Now, when God created man, He created him a three-fold being, having three dimensions: spirit, body, and mind. The added dimension of the spirit puts man a quantum leap above the animal kingdom, because it puts man in touch with God.

Jesus said that God is a spirit and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24). So that when He first created man (with spirit, mind, and body), God designed him for fellowship.

We have that beautiful verse in Genesis 3:8, "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." Man met God and lived in communion with Him because of the spirit dimension of his being. However, when a man's spirit is dead, he is reduced to living in the "animal" plane of existence. His thoughts are primarily concerned with his physical needs and appetites.

Man's spirit is dead because of his trespasses and sins.

In the beginning, when God first created man he lived in an ideal, pure environment. He possessed a strong, healthy body with no genetic defects, and since his spirit was alive, he had both fellowship and communion with God. But there was a dilemma.

Did man live in fellowship with God because he loved Him?

Or did he live in fellowship because there was no other alternative?

To determine man's true heart, God placed an extremely attractive tree in the midst of the Garden of Eden: a tree with forbidden fruit, fruit that carried the threat of spiritual death. Man now needed to make a choice. Did he want to continue in fellowship with God or did he want to satisfy his own fleshly desires at the cost of alienation from God?

Unfortunately, Adam chose to live after the lust of his flesh and he ate of the forbidden fruit. And in so doing, his spirit died. At that moment, man became a two-dimensional being: body (physical) and soul (mind).

Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again (John 3:7).

We need to have a spiritual birth. We were born once of the flesh and alienated from God, but we have to be born again of the Spirit if we want to know the blessing and joy that comes from living in fellowship with God. Adam, having killed the spirit, found that there was no way he could resuscitate it by being good, by being religious, or by keeping rules or regulations.

We may try to be good, but we can never be good enough.

Jesus continued speaking to Nicodemus, "Unless you've been born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

A natural man can't understand this dimension. He has no comprehension. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God,

which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:11-14).

As Paul said, a natural man cannot know or understand the things of the Spirit. It seems foolish to him. This makes it hard for us to communicate because a gulf exists between a spirit-governed man and a flesh-governed man.

Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to explain things to a child? It can be frustrating because you think, "Why can't he understand? I mean, it's so clear. It's so plain. It's so obvious and rational. Why can't he see?"

In spiritual things, a natural man is like a child.

The Bible tells us that the natural man cannot know spiritual things because they need spiritual discernment. That's why Jesus said, "You've got to be born again if you're going to see the kingdom of God." If you're going to see this dimension of God's

kingdom, it requires a spiritual birth. Therefore, you must be born again.

So, Nicodemus' question was obviously, "How then can I be born again? By what process is a man born again? How can these things be?"

Jesus then explained by using an illustration that Nicodemus would understand. He told a story from the Old Testament Book of Numbers. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they began to complain against God and against Moses. They said, "They've brought us out of Egypt to kill us here in the wilderness. We don't have any bread and we're sick of this manna" (Numbers 21:5).

Because they murmured and complained against God, He allowed deadly serpents to come into their camp. Soon hundreds of people were dying from snakebites. The Israelites ran to Moses and apologized, begging him to pray for them. Moses, in turn, asked God to heal the people.

However, rather than healing them, God made a provision that left their healing up to them.

In Numbers 21:8 we read, "And the LORD said unto Moses, 'Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it

upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looks upon it, shall live."

So, Moses made a serpent of brass and put it on a pole in the midst of the camp. Then whenever anyone was bitten by one of these poisonous snakes, they were instructed to look at the brass serpent on the pole, and they were instantly healed.

Let me explain the symbolism behind this. In scripture, brass is a symbol of God's judgment. The Israelites had a brazen (brass) altar where their sacrifices were placed (2 Kings 16:15). Also in scripture, the serpent is a symbol of sin (remember the serpent in the Garden of Eden—Genesis 3:13). However, in this particular instance, lifting the serpent up on a pole referred to the cross where Jesus would be crucified. Jesus said, "So must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). And then again in John 12:32 He said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

Jesus was prophesying that He would die on the cross. Therefore, the brass serpent on the pole is symbolic of our sins being judged by God on the cross.

Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man had to be lifted up. How can a man be born again? He can be born again by the process God provided through the death of His Son. Jesus took the judgment for our sins upon Himself when He died in our place. When we understand this and look in faith at Jesus on the cross, we realize that He died for our sins, bearing God's judgment that was due to us.

Imagine that you lived with the children of Israel about 3,800 years ago when these snakes came into the camp. One day while you are talking to a friend in your tent, a snake slithers in and strikes him on the foot. You watch helplessly as his foot swells and then a moment later, he goes into convulsions.

So, you quickly drag your friend out of the tent and cry, "Look at the snake on the pole, the one that Moses set up in the midst of the camp!"

"I don't understand how that's going to help me," he answers.

"Don't argue," you shout. "Just look!"

"But I don't understand it. How can looking at a snake on a pole help me? I'm dying."

"I don't know how it works," you frantically try to explain. "I only know that all around us hundreds of people were dying just like you. They looked at the serpent on the pole and now they're okay. Look!"

"That's just foolishness," your friend refuses. "I'm not going to look."

Then your friend dies. And you can't believe it. You didn't ask him to do anything horrendous; you only asked him to look. He didn't have to understand the process in order to benefit.

Likewise, Jesus Christ died for our sins, but we don't have to understand the process whereby the spirit is born. We don't need to know how we can have such a radical transformation; all we need to know is that it is possible. Like the Israelites in the desert, we don't have to understand the process to enjoy the results. We can live in conscious communion and fellowship with God. We can know how wonderful it is to have eternal life and be set free from sin.

Jesus explained the process of how to be born again when He said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted

up and whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

At best, without spiritual birth you're only two-thirds of a person. The natural man is somehow subtly conscious of the fact that there's something missing in his life, and he constantly seeks to fill that void. The problem is that he usually seeks to fill that void through a physical or emotional experience. But ultimately, even though a man may gorge himself with physical pleasures or emotional experiences, he still comes up with a sense that something is missing. For nothing can fill that void of the Spirit, except being born again.

Man was created to worship God. If you don't worship the true and living God, then you'll find a substitute. It may be your car or your home or your boat. The list can go on and on forever. But worship is an innate part of our existence as humans.

You may think this is all too simple. You may not understand how you can have a spiritual birth by just believing in Jesus Christ. Simple as it is, God made it that way so that even a child could be born again.

Jesus went on to explain to Nicodemus that God so loved the world; a world that was being destroyed by sin and perishing as the result of sin that whoever believed in Him would not perish, but would have everlasting life (John 3:16).

I think again of the Israelites as they wandered in the desert, blaming God for all their problems, murmuring and complaining against Him because of their misery, when in reality, they were to blame. How typical this is of mankind. We turn our backs on God; we live after the flesh. We begin to experience the agony of a life in the flesh—the emptiness, the frustration, the consequences. The life of the flesh is deadly. Like a poisonous snakebite, it will destroy you and you will perish.

But the Israelites' long and arduous wilderness experience was not God's original purpose and plan for them. He wanted to bring them into the Promised Land, where they could enjoy the fertility and the blessings of the land; blessings that He had promised to their father, Abraham. But they rejected the testimony of Caleb and Joshua. They said, "We can't go in and take that land. The enemy is too

strong." Instead they turned back into the wilderness. And then later, they tried to blame God when they suffered the consequences of living in a wilderness.

If you're living in a wilderness today, it's not because God wants you to live there. God doesn't want you to live the life of the flesh. He wants you to live the full life of the Spirit, and enjoy the blessings and benefits that come from fellowship with Him.

The Israelites misunderstood the purposes of God, and why He sent the poisonous serpents. He wanted to bring them back to Him. You see, God will often allow hardships to come when we wander into dangerous territory. He knows painful experiences have the potential to wake us up, so we will turn back to Him. It isn't really God's judgment. Rather He is saying, "Come back to Me. You can't live apart from Me. You're going to be destroyed. Here's a sample of the destruction that comes when you try to live without Me."

It's all designed to bring you unto Him, that you might be born of the Spirit and live this wonderful life of fellowship with God.

Without God's assistance, the Israelites would have died in the wilderness. They wouldn't have lasted two weeks, much less forty years. In the same way, God sustains you even though you may be going through a wilderness right now. Without God's sustaining hand, you wouldn't last five seconds.

You owe your very existence to Him. He sustains you so that you might come to know His great love and concern and care for you, so that you might be born of the Spirit, and come into this full dimension that God has intended for each of us.

Right now many of you are taking a dangerous path that leads to destruction. You need to turn to God before you're destroyed. The wonderful promise of God is that if you will just believe in His Son, you will not perish but have everlasting life. Everlasting life is not just quantity. It's also quality. You see, quantity without quality is hell. But life in the Spirit possesses a quality of life that is far above the animal (or physical) plane of existence, far above our imagining.

And that's the life that God is calling you to, the

life of the Spirit, the life of fellowship with Him. The Bible says that the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace and joy. That's what God desires for you; eternal life, peace, and joy; joy that comes from living in fellowship with God, knowing that He is there with you, guiding you, knowing that God is in control.

A man is born again by believing in the loving provision that God made to provide for the forgiveness of your sins, sins that Jesus took upon Himself. Thus, when you receive Jesus as your Savior and believe that He died for your sins, there is a marvelous, mysterious transformation that takes place inside as your spirit is born. And suddenly, you're living a fuller life with a new dimension of the Spirit that you never dreamed about and never knew existed. It is so glorious and wonderful and so far beyond anything that you've ever experienced before, that you'll find difficulty describing it. Paul said that the things he experienced in the Spirit were so wonderful that it would be a crime to try to describe them in words (2 Corinthians 12:4). There isn't any language to describe it.

Jesus said, "If you want to see the kingdom of heaven, and you want to understand it, you've got to be born again."

To enter God's kingdom, you must be born again. Just look to Jesus Christ, who died for your sins on the cross, and believe in Him and His love for you, and that transformation will take place. Thus the question, "Have you been born again by the Spirit of God?" If not, the process is very simple.

Today you're in one of two camps; it all depends on your relationship to Jesus Christ. You can either believe and look in faith to Jesus, who died for you on the cross; or you can continue going on as you are. It's an amazing thing – to be lost, you don't have to do anything. Just keep on doing what you're doing now and you will perish.

But, if you look to the cross and believe in the One who died for your sins, then the free gift of God is yours ...

The gift of eternal life.

Sinner's Prayer

If you want a personal relationship with God and the assurance that your sins have been forgiven, here is a suggested prayer.

Father, I come to you, confessing my sin and asking for your forgiveness. I thank you, Lord, for You have promised that if I will confess my sins, You will be faithful to forgive me and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I want to turn from my sins, and live in a way that will please You. And so I ask for your help, Lord. I ask that you give me the power through your Holy Spirit to live the right way.

I thank you that Jesus Christ died on the cross, paying the price for my sins, and then rose from the dead. I accept Him now as my Savior, my Lord, and my friend.

I also thank You, because You've said that whoever comes to You, You will in no wise cast out. Thank you for giving me a new life in Christ. I surrender myself to you. Make me what you want me to be in Jesus' name. Amen.

What Next?

If you have decided to accept Jesus Christ as your savior, you are now born again. Here are a few things that will help you to grow as a Christian...

1. **PRAY**—prayer is like a telephone line that goes directly to God. It's important to spend time talking to Him every day, the more the better (Philippians 4:6).

2. **READ THE BIBLE**—the Bible is like a love letter from God. The more you read it, the more you'll fall in love with Him (1 Peter 2:2).

3. **FELLOWSHIP**—you need to have friends who share your beliefs and who can encourage you. This is why it's so important to find a good, Bible-believing church where you can meet other Christians (Hebrews 10:24-25).

4. **WITNESS TO OTHERS**—share your faith in Jesus Christ with others. Pray that the Lord will reveal how you should witness and when (Mark 16:15).

If you need help finding a church in your area, feel free to call us at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, California. Our staff can help you locate a good place to fellowship. Our phone number is (714) 979-4422 and we are available between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Pacific standard time.

Also, here are some websites that can help you:

www.calvarychapel.com/gospel

[www.calvarychapel.com/costamesa/
newbelievers/study/index.htm](http://www.calvarychapel.com/costamesa/newbelievers/study/index.htm)

www.twft.com

www.calvarychapel.com

God bless you and we pray that you continue to grow closer to the Lord every day!

Chuck Smith, senior pastor at Calvary Chapel
Costa Mesa, California, has been a Bible teacher
for more than sixty years. His Bible studies can be
heard weekdays on the nationwide radio program,
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