

14 – BORN AGAIN: SPIRITUALLY ALIVE

My wife and I were about to have our first baby. We were nervous and excited at the same time. Anxious for everything to go smoothly, my wife tried to plan ahead by preparing the house and the baby room, cooking extra food, and packing necessary items for the hospital stay. When the labor pains begin to be very regular and the water broke, we knew it was time to get to the hospital quickly.

Out of nervousness and habit, I ended up driving the longer way around the lake to the hospital. Joan was sure I hit every railroad track and bump in the road that was possible. 15-20 minutes later we arrived at the emergency room. About three hours later we had the privilege of holding a healthy baby boy.

We were reminded of what David had written. We are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Psalm 139:14. What a privilege it is to be alive and participate in creating new life. May we never lose sight of how precious every person is to God.

Unfortunately, sin has brought tremendous pain, heartache, and brokenness to the human race. Without a Savior, there is no hope for anyone. Without the Holy Spirit living within, there is no spiritual life within us. Jesus communicated this to Nicodemus when He said, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3.

THE NEED TO BE BORN AGAIN

1. Read John 3:1,2,10

A. What position did Nicodemus have?

B. When did he come to meet with Jesus?

John 2:23-25 says many believed in Jesus “when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,... for He knew what was in man.”

Nicodemus appears to be one of those who believed in Jesus because of the signs, but was not fully committed to Him. He was a Pharisee. Pharisees took the scriptures very seriously, as opposed to the Sadducees, who said “there is no resurrection” Matthew 22:23.

As a “ruler of the Jews,” Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme judicial and administrative council of the Jews. (See Matthew 26:3,47,57,59). Jesus also refers to him as “the teacher of Israel,” showing he was very highly respected.

2. What is necessary for us to experience if we are going to see or experience the kingdom of God? John 3:3

3. Why was Nicodemus so puzzled by what Jesus said? John 3:4

Nicodemus asks a question about being reborn physically, knowing this was impossible. But he must have wondered, “Why would I need to be reborn at all? I am a faithful and leading member of the Jewish nation. Since God had already chosen Israel as His special people, I should already be a part of the Kingdom of God?” (Exodus 19:5,6).

4. Why was being a part of the nation of Israel not enough?

A. Deuteronomy 30:6

B. Ezekiel 36:26,27

Physical circumcision was a sign that they were part of the special people of God. It was also a symbol to remind them that being a part of the nation of Israel was not enough. They needed to have their heart circumcised.

God promised He would replace their “heart of stone” with a “heart of flesh.” A heart of stone is a word picture to illustrate the hardness that develops when we hold onto “an evil heart of unbelief” or become “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” Hebrews 3:12-15.

Any time we are willing to resist the Holy Spirit and violate our conscience, we become less sensitive. Our conscience begins to be “seared with a hot iron” 1 Timothy 4:2. The more we do this, the less offensive sin will appear in our own eyes.

Fortunately, when we are born again, God is able to make us soft and sensitive once again. We can then learn to recognize Jesus’ voice and follow Him as our “good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 27).

5. How did Jesus distinguish the first birth from the second one? John 3:5,6

Jesus talks about two kinds of births: born of the flesh and born of the spirit. Being born physically was not enough. Only those who are born of the Holy Spirit will enter the Kingdom of God. Being born of the Spirit is the second birth that everyone needs. Without this experience, it is impossible to understand or experience genuine Christianity.

Many try to be Christians without surrendering their lives to Jesus. They have “a form of godliness” without power (2 Timothy 3:5). With an outward conformity motivated by fear and reward, they will not experience the genuine “fruit of the Spirit” that everyone is longing for and that makes life worth living (Galatians 5:22,23).

A NEW CREATION ON THE INSIDE

6. What does Jesus compare the Holy Spirit's work to? John 3:7,8

Since the spiritual birth is not tangible like a physical birth, it is harder for us to understand when it happens. However, we can see the results. As we see the effects of the wind, so we can see the effect of the Holy Spirit on all who are born again (Galatians 5:22,23).

7. What happens in the life of the person who is born again?

- A. John 1:10-13 Jesus “came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the _____ to become _____ of God, to those who believe in His name: who were _____, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of _____.”
- B. Galatians 6:15 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new _____.”
- C. Hebrews 8:10 “I will put My _____ in their _____ and write them on their _____.”

Since God created us, we were His children to begin with. But we became children of Satan when Adam chose to sin (John 8:31-44).

Through His death on the cross, Jesus redeemed the world and legally adopted the human race back into His heavenly family (Ephesians 1:5-7; John 12:31,32; Colossians 1:13). This gives each of us the freedom to choose which family we want to be a part of.

The word translated “right” in John 1:12 is “exousia.” It has a full range of meanings: “privilege, freedom, delegated influence, authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength” (Strong’s Concordance).

Those who receive Jesus as their Savior will *experience* not only the right to be a child of God, but the freedom from slavery to sin and the power to live for His glory.

NICODEMUS RECEIVES TIME AND EVIDENCE

8. How did Nicodemus respond to this truth? John 3:9,10

Nicodemus appears to be totally bewildered. What Jesus was saying was so different and new, he couldn’t figure out how it fit into his theological perspective. We have the same problem. When the Bible presents ideas that contradict what we have believed, we are faced with a decision. Will we believe the truth and surrender to God’s will or not?

God is anxious to share His truth with us, for He knows that when we receive it, we will be transformed and set free from guilt, shame, and slavery to sin. We will experience the abundant life and understand what God’s will is for our lives (John 8:31-36; 10:10; 16:12,13; Rom. 12:2).

9. What prophecy did Jesus give that helped Nicodemus to eventually make a decision to follow Jesus? John 3:14-16; 19:39

Jesus used a story from the Old Testament to illustrate His mission to save the world. A bronze serpent was lifted up on a pole to save those who were bitten by a snake (Numbers 21:4-9; Deuteronomy 8:15). Those who looked on the bronze serpent were healed.

Jesus said He would be “lifted up” on a cross (John 12:32-34). He would be made “sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” 2 Corinthians 5:21. Those who believe in Him will live.

This prophecy seemed unbelievable to Nicodemus. He was expecting the Messiah to deliver the Jews from the Roman Empire, not to save the world from sin. To his credit, he chose to be honest, to listen, and to see what would happen (John 7:50, 51). After Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus believed and chose to help with His burial (John 19:38-42).

God gives time and evidence to everyone. He is patient, forgiving, and compassionate as He draws us to Himself (John 12:32). But putting off making a decision for selfish reasons will little by little harden our heart.

BLESSINGS & PROMISES FOR FOLLOWERS OF GOD

10. What are some of the blessings a person experiences as a result of being born again?

A. John 10:10 “I have come that they may have _____, and that they may have it more _____.”

B. Revelation 21:1-5 “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

C. Matthew 6:33 “Seek _____ the kingdom of God and _____ righteousness and all these _____ shall be added unto you.”

D. Mark 10:28-30 Those who have left all for Jesus and the gospel will receive “a _____ now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, _____.”

Jesus gives what people are truly looking for: security, belonging, and life with meaning and purpose. A born again person also experiences a brand new family, made up of all who have received Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Jesus said, “Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother” Mark 3:35.

While the blessings are wonderful, Jesus doesn't gloss over the challenges. He says there will also be persecution in a world that is at war with His love and truth.

COUNTING THE COST: A CALL TO FULL SURRENDER

11. Jesus says we are to “count the cost” before we make a decision to follow Him (Luke 14:28). What cost is involved in choosing to follow Jesus? Luke 14:25-33

A. “If anyone comes to Me and does not _____ his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his _____ also, he _____ be My _____.” (v. 26)

B. “Whoever does not _____ his _____ and come after Me _____ be My _____.” (v. 27)

C. 33 “Whoever of you does not _____ that he _____ cannot be My disciple.” (v. 33)

Jesus' words are unmistakable. We are to forsake everything. We are to put Him above our family and even our own lives. If a family member doesn't want us to follow Jesus, we will have to choose who we will obey. If we choose Jesus, it will appear to the family member that we "hate" them. In reality, following Jesus will enable us to truly love them. However, they may not see it that way and may refuse to receive the love that we have to give them.

12. What truth does Jesus understand that enables Him to lovingly ask for total surrender? Luke 9:23-25

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him _____, and take up his cross _____, and follow Me. For whoever desires to _____ his _____ will _____ it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he _____ the whole _____, and is himself lost or destroyed?"

As our Creator and Savior, Jesus knows that the only way to experience the abundant and eternal life is through Him. The most loving thing He can do is call for full surrender, for that is the only way He can pour out all the blessings He wants to give. He will never force us to receive the blessings He is anxious to give us.

While Jesus is asking for the total surrender of our lives to Him, He is not asking for perfect performance before we come. He knows we cannot give it. We are to come to Him just as we are and let Him save us from all aspects of the sin problem:

- The wages of sin – death;
- The power of sin – slavery;
- The evil effects of sin – sickness, pain broken relationships, death

Until we surrender, Jesus knocks from the outside (Revelation 3:20). If we choose to cling onto pride, selfishness, or any known sin, we will be telling God that we don't want Him as our Savior and Lord.

**13. What did Jesus say may be the result of choosing to follow Him?
Matthew 10:28, 34-39**

- A. “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” 28
- B. “I did not come to bring _____ but a_____.” 34
- C. “A man's _____ will be those of his own_____.” 36

When the light of the gospel comes, everyone must respond. When some members of a family accept Jesus and others reject Him, there will be division. While Jesus promises inner peace to the Christian, He doesn't promise peace in our relationships with those who reject Him.

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” John 14:27.

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” John 15:18,19.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” John 16:33.

Those who choose to reject Jesus are the ones who will be inspired by Satan to fight and hurt others (1 Peter 5:8, 9; Revelation 12:17).

RESPONDING TO THREATS AND ABUSE

14. How should Christians respond to threats or abuse from others?

Romans 12:17-21 - “Repay no one _____ for _____. . . . As much as depends on you, live _____ with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is

written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is _____, _____ him; If he is _____, give him a _____; For in so doing you will heap _____ of _____ on his head.’ Do not be overcome by _____, but overcome _____ with _____.”

In response to threats and abuse, we are called to fight back with faith and love, not revenge or retaliation. The best way for us to win family and friends to Jesus is to follow the outline in Revelation 12:11:

- Cling to the blood of the Lamb as our only hope for abundant life now and forever.
- Share our testimony with others about what Jesus has done for the human race and what He is doing in our lives.
- Grow into maturity in Christ so that we may love others as Jesus has loved us, even if it means enduring suffering or even death.

WALKING AWAY FROM JESUS

15. Why did many follow Jesus when He was on earth? John 6:14,15, 26

When Jesus fed the large multitude with five loaves and two fish, the crowd got excited. They thought for sure He was the Messiah who would deliver them from the Roman Empire and lead them to rule the world. He could feed armies and heal the wounded. They couldn't lose!

They were following Jesus for the temporal advantages and benefits they thought they could get from Him.

16. What happened when they learned the truth? John 6:27-29,66

When Jesus made it clear that His mission on earth was to save the world from sin, “many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” John 6:66. If we follow Jesus because we want Him to satisfy our lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life (1 John 2:15-17), we will be very disappointed. Eventually we may turn away from Him altogether. On the other hand, if we want Jesus to be a Savior from every aspect of the sin problem, we will not be disappointed.

Jesus will:

- Forgive us our sins
- Cleanse us from all unrighteousness
- Free us from our slavery to sin
- Give us eternal life in a sin free universe

In the light of this, surrendering everything to Jesus is like exchanging:

- A broken, dried up pen for a trillion dollars.
- A life that is sickly and terminal for a life that is whole and forever.
- A life of selfishness for an eternity with people who are loving.

SURRENDERING TO HIM WHO LOVES US MOST

“Whatever shall draw away the heart from God must be given up. Mammon is the idol of many. The love of money, the desire for wealth, is the golden chain that binds them to Satan. Reputation and worldly honor are worshiped by another class. The life of selfish ease and freedom from responsibility is the idol of others. But these slavish bands must be broken. We cannot be half the Lord's and half the world's. We are not God's children unless we are such entirely.”

“There are those who profess to serve God, while they rely upon their own efforts to obey His law, to form a right character, and secure salvation. Their hearts are not moved by any deep sense of the love of Christ, but they seek to perform the duties of the Christian life as that which God requires of them in order to gain heaven. Such religion is worth nothing.”

“When Christ dwells in the heart, the soul will be so filled with His love, with the joy of communion with Him, that it will cleave to Him; and in the contemplation of Him, self will be forgotten. Love to Christ will be the spring of action.”

“Those who feel the constraining love of God, do not ask how little may be given to meet the requirements of God; they do not ask for the lowest standard, but aim at perfect conformity to the will of their Redeemer. With earnest desire they yield all and manifest an interest proportionate to the value of the object which they seek. A profession of Christ without this deep love is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery.”

“Do you feel that it is too great a sacrifice to yield all to Christ? Ask yourself the question, ‘What has Christ given for me?’ The Son of God gave all--life and love and suffering--for our redemption. And can it be that we, the unworthy objects of so great love, will withhold our hearts from Him? Every moment of our lives we have been partakers of the blessings of His grace, and for this very reason we cannot fully realize the depths of ignorance and misery from which we have been saved....

“But what do we give up, when we give all? A sin-polluted heart, for Jesus to purify, to cleanse by His own blood, and to save by His matchless love. And yet men think it hard to give up all! I am ashamed to hear it spoken of, ashamed to write it.”

“God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. In all that He does, He has the well-being of His children in view. Would that all who have not chosen Christ might realize that He has something vastly better to offer them than they are

seeking for themselves. Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by Him who knows what is best and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of transgression is the path of misery and destruction” Steps To Christ, 44-46.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

17. Read John 16:8-11. What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would convict the world of? What reason is given for each?

(9) _____

(10) _____

(11) _____

Sin – The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, not to condemn or criticize, but to help us realize our need for Jesus. The reason anyone will be lost in the end is not because of committing sins. It is because of the spirit of unbelief – rebellious rejection of God (Hebrews 3:12-19).

Righteousness –Jesus goes to the Father to represent us. He presents His righteousness on our behalf that we might be acceptable to God and qualified for eternal life. When Jesus lived among us He was a living illustration of what righteousness looked like. Now that He is no longer here, the Holy Spirit helps people understand what is right or wrong.

Judgment – Since our natural tendency is to be attracted to sin, Satan entices us with temptations to lead us away from God. The Holy Spirit convicts people that Satan has been judged and will eventually come to an end. God wants everyone to know that those who follow Satan will perish with him (Matthew 25:41; John 3:16).

18. What does Jesus say we can expect from the Holy Spirit when we are born again?

- A. John 14:16,17 “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another _____, that He may _____ with you _____-- the Spirit of truth,... He dwells with you and will be _____ you.”
- B. John 14:26 “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will _____ you all things, and bring to your _____ all things that I said to you.”
- C. John 15:26 “When the Helper comes,... He will _____ of Me.”
- D. John 16:13,14 “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will:
- Guide you into all _____...
 - Tell you things to _____...
 - Glorify _____...
 - Take of what is _____ and declare it to you.”

BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

19. What does Paul say we should be filled with? Ephesians 5:18

When we are born of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is abiding within our lives. When this happens, there are now two opposing natures battling for control. In Galatians 5:16-18, Paul writes, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

It is possible to be born again, but still be dominated by the flesh. Paul described some of the Christians in Corinth as “carnal” or “babes in Christ” 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Carnal comes from the same Greek word that is translated flesh in Galatians. They hadn’t grown up into maturity. The “envy, strife, and divisions” among them convinced Paul that the flesh was still in control of their lives.

20. What is the difference between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit? Romans 8:5-9

A person who is filled with the Spirit is being led by the Holy Spirit and is filling the mind with the things of the Spirit. A carnal Christian is filling the mind with the things of the world. Continuing this mindset will eventually lead to rejecting Jesus and perishing in the end.

21. While John baptized with water, what does Jesus baptize with? Matthew 3:11; John 1:33; Acts 1:5

The word baptism comes from the Greek word, baptizo. It means to totally immerse something. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is another way to describe being filled with the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was on this earth, the 12 disciples could have been described as carnal Christians, for they were filled with envy, strife and divisions. They were so convinced that the Messiah was going to overthrow the Romans and set up an earthly kingdom, they were not open to what Jesus had to tell them. When Jesus was taken to His trial, “all the disciples forsook Him and fled” Matthew 26:56. They were terrified. Their whole outlook on life was being torn apart.

After Jesus was resurrected, they were humble and teachable. They became unified and full of love for one another (Acts 4:32-37). They grew more in a few weeks than they had grown throughout their lifetime. Emptying themselves of pride and jealousy, they made room for the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. Jesus was then able to baptize or fill them with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5,8; 2:4).

This empowered them to share the gospel “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” Acts 1:8.

It is important to understand that being baptized with the Holy Spirit doesn't make us more qualified for heaven. From beginning to end, the perfect life and death of Jesus is the only thing that makes us acceptable to God and qualifies us for heaven.

However, if a person remains a spiritual infant, they will be tempted to totally give up on Jesus like Judas did when he betrayed him. The other disciples fell away, but they were willing to repent.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with:

- How old we are, but how broken and humble we are.
- How long we have been a Christian, but how open we are to truth.
- What position we might hold, but how empty we are of self.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit empowers and equips us for ministry in cooperation with the whole body of Christ. In freely giving and receiving love, the whole body grows into maturity and bears much fruit for the glory of God (Ephesians 4:11-16; John 15).

MY RESPONSE

22. Is there anything the Holy Spirit is convicting me of now?

23. What would God have me do today to be a blessing to others?
