

THE BIBLE VIEW

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Born Again

Bill Brinkworth

One of the most popular stories told to explain what it means to be saved from Hell is found in John 3. It is the story about Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was a very influential, scripturally-educated leader of the Jews (John 3:1). Perhaps this ruler was afraid, ashamed, or embarrassed to be seen with Jesus who was causing much confusion among the Jews he was leading. For whatever reason, Nicodemus visited Jesus at night.

Jesus told this man a spiritual truth that has troubled many people since.

"... Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

Immediately, this strict follower of the Jewish law admitted he did not understand what Jesus was saying. The leader questioned if Jesus was saying that his physical body had to be re-birthed (John 3:4). This man had much scriptural learning, but he was missing something fundamental. He was missing an understanding of spiritual things.

Jesus went on to explain to the man how all could know if they were Heaven-bound when they die. The way of salvation involves believing in Jesus only. Salvation hinges on belief. People must look to Jesus and trust His death on the Cross as the only payment for the forgiveness of sins that God will accept. Salvation cannot be earned by anything that is done or said. Jesus has done it all for us by His sacrifice.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." John 14:6

"Born of Water"

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"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which

is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” John 3:3-7

The religious Nicodemus, although he had quite a lot of knowledge of the Word of God and participated in many religious rites, was missing an essential ingredient that would keep him from Heaven when he died. He needed the second “birth” to have the assurance of eternity with the Father.

When Nicodemus approached Jesus, Christ informed the Pharisee that he must be “born of water” AND a spiritual birth. There has been much question as to what “born of water” means. Many hold incorrectly that it is referring to water baptism. There are also other thoughts about what it means.

The Bible makes it clear that “born of water” is referring to natural birth. When a mother cries, “My water has broken,” shortly after that, a child is delivered from the amniotic water where the baby safely resided inside his mother for many months. This is the “born of water” to which these verses refer. Here are many reasons why “born of water” can only be describing the first, natural birth that every living person experiences:

- Verse three specifies that another birth is required to get to Heaven: “born again.” This implies that there is a previous birth that all have. It is the natural birth. Substituting “born of water” with water baptism or any other idea of what it means does not even make any sense according to what other Scriptures teach and to the context of what is being spoken of here.
- Verse four indicates even Nicodemus thought that Jesus was referring to the natural birth. Nicodemus questioned, “... How can a man be born when he is old ...” There is no way that the religious leader was referring to water baptism or anything else other than the natural birth in this verse.
- Verse five mentions again that there are two births, “born of water” (natural) “AND of the Spirit” (spiritual). If one believes that “born of water” is referring to baptism or the understanding of the Word of God that “birth” becomes a good work. Good works cannot get anyone to Heaven (Eph. 2:8-9).
- “Be born” (the Greek “gennaō”) in verse five means “procreate, properly, of the father, but by extension of the mother; figuratively, to regenerate: bear, beget, be born, bring forth, conceive, be delivered of” — from *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, James Strong). It is applied to the natural and spiritual birth.
- “Water” in verse five figuratively and literally means water. It cannot have any connotation to being knowledgeable of the Word of God, as some claim it to mean.
- “Verse 5,6: Flesh, at its best, can only produce flesh, and since we must become spiritual to enter the spiritual kingdom of Jesus. We must inevitably be born again, or else remain strangers to the things of God. Every man must be born twice or die twice: let this never be forgotten.” — *C. H. Spurgeon*
- Verse six reiterates that there are two different births: flesh and Spirit. When “Spirit” is referenced in these verses, it is with capital letters as it is talking about an Individual: the Spirit of God. One can only personally know the Spirit of God when they are born into His family. The natural man cannot have a personal relationship with God because he is not saved from his sins until he is born again.
- “Flesh” (“sarx” — Greek), in verse six, is referring to the “meat under the skin.”
- Verse seven reinforces that all, even a religious individual such as the Pharisee Nicodemus, need to have another birth experience. This assumes that all living

creatures have the first, natural birth. It would not make sense that this first birth could have anything to do with being baptized or knowing the Word of God (although knowing the Word of God is essential for a spiritual birth to occur), as some teach.

Every person is born the same way — from their mother. That natural birth is not enough to get anyone to Heaven. An additional spiritual birth is required to get one to Heaven.

This spiritual birth happens when one first realizes he is a sinner and realizes he is bound for Hell because of his sins. To change destinations to be with God in His Heaven, one must believe and trust that there is nothing one can do to get rid of the wages of their sin — an eternity in the Lake of Fire.

There is, however, one that has already paid for our sins. That is Jesus. He died on the Cross, not for anything He had done, but He died as payment for our sins. When we believe His shed blood is payment for our sin debt and ask Him to be our Saviour, we can have God's promise of eternity with Him. It is then one experiences the spiritual birth. One is then "born-again."

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Romans 10:9

It'll Never Grow

Bill Brinkworth

"A sassafras tree. Oh, thank you. I have always wanted one," I thanked my friends for the gift.

When I got home, I found the perfect spot for it, a nice sunny spot in the corner of my yard. I removed all the weeds in the area of its new home and dug the hole for it deep and wide. After placing the young plant in the hole, I fertilized and watered it well.

Every day for weeks, I faithfully watered it. After several weeks, I noticed that the leaves were losing their greenness. Slowly, one leaf after another got yellow and fell off. This is usually an indication that the plant is not doing well, so I sprinkled on more fertilizer. The remedy did nothing to stop the plant from further decline. It was not long until the little tree was nothing more than naked twigs. I tried everything I knew to keep it alive, but still, it died.

In removing the dead plant from its grave, I found the reason for its demise. When it was in its original pot, the soil appeared to be rich and thick, but I found that it was just a cover because the roots were embedded totally in white sand. Nothing would grow in that poor soil. There was no nourishment. No wonder it died.

Many people are in a similar spiritual environment. On the outside, they seem to be spiritual. They appear to live and do right. Perhaps they even go to church for a while or help in a ministry. However, something is missing in their lives. They run on their energy, not help or direction from above. After they run out of their own steam, they return to the condition they were initially in – or worse.

They were not rooted well and did not get enough spiritual nourishment. It was evident they were weakening. Their prayer life declined, as did their Bible reading. They ran out of their good intentions and started missing church. Soon, no one saw them in church anymore. They stopped living the right kind of life.

Why? In many cases, it was good works they were trying to perform; sometimes, it was just acting "religious." That kind of acting does not last long. People like that are often referred to when people mention "hypocrites." They were trying to change the outside and never allowed God to alter the inside. People can act holy, but they can never be holy, unless there is a real change in their hearts.

We are all sinners. (*"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" Romans 3:23*) You can put on your best clothes, brush your teeth, and comb your hair, but you are still a dirty sinner. The actual dirt is on the inside. You will always lean towards being sinful because of the sin nature with which you were born.

The only way to change is to change one's spiritual nature. One needs the new birth the Bible speaks of: "... *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" (*John 3:3*) The first time anyone was born, it was with a lost, sinful nature. If we realize we are sinners, we need to believe that Jesus, God's only son, took our punishment. When he died on the Cross, it was for our sins that he died.

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (*Romans 5:8*)

If we believe that Jesus' blood that was shed on Calvary covers ALL our sin and that He rose from the grave, Jesus can be our Saviour from an eternity in the Lake of Fire.

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." *Romans 10:9*

Being saved is when we become spiritually alive. It is then we become children of God.

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." *Galatians 3:26.*

The second birth is the only way to be a member of God's family! It is the start of spiritual growth. Our spirit is then made new. We are a different creature. Then the changes will be permanent because they were made on the inside by God. When the inside is changed (reborn), the outside will show signs of the change.

You will grow spiritually if your "roots" are getting the proper biblical and spiritual nourishment. Being born into the family of God is the first step in getting spiritual food to help one grow and face the trials and testings of this world. In what spiritual soil are your roots planted?