

Born of the Spirit

John 3:1-8

By Scott Huckaby

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Why do we need a Savior?

Genesis 2:16-17 – *The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”*

As we know, Adam and Eve did eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which had consequences that have plagued mankind since then.

If any of us were in place of Adam or Eve, would the outcome have been any different?

There was only one Law; surely it would have been easy enough to avoid breaking just one law.

- But we all have the same human nature as Adam and Eve.
- You’ve heard the old adage, “curiosity killed the cat”...

I can testify that this is true... my wife has four cats and one thing none of them can resist is an open box on the floor. Sooner or later, they all have to get in the box. I’m sure the first one in the box must tell the others that there is nothing in the box, but despite that, they all have to see for themselves.

What happened to Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit?

The greatest consequence of our sin nature is death.

- Now Adam did not drop dead physically right away... Genesis 5:4 says he lived 800 years and had many sons and daughters.
- One immediate consequence we do see in Scripture is that he hid himself from God because his sin caused there to be a break in fellowship with Him.

This demonstrates what did die immediately, His human spirit was dead to God.

Why would God create us with a sin nature that would cause us to be subject to death?

Genesis 1:27 – *God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

One important aspect of being created in the image of God is that He has given us a free will to accept or reject Him.

- Yes, God could have created robots that executed His commands flawlessly; but He wanted us to experience a relationship with Him that is only possible if we are free to accept or reject Him.

How else were we created in the image of God?

There are many other aspects to being in the image of God but the one most relevant to my message this morning is this:

- As God is a triunity being Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- People are triunities being Body, Soul, and Spirit
1 Thess 5:23 – *may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*

The fact that we have a body is easy for us to understand; we are physical beings created to live in a physical world. But, the physical part of us is not all we are...

What is the distinction between the soul and spirit?

People often confuse the terms soul and spirit using them interchangeably but Scripture makes a distinction:

Hebrew 4:12 – *the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

God’s Word helps us distinguish what is of the soul and what is of the spirit.

- Soul: our personality, emotions, thoughts; inner self
 - Spirit: that part of us that has the capacity to know God
- We have all been born with a human spirit that is dead to God.

How do we come by a spirit that is dead to God?

Our dead spirits are passed down to us by our father...

Romans 5:12 – *just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*

This is why the Messiah Jesus is referred to in Genesis 3:15 as the seed of the woman because He is the only one of us who did not have an earthly father.

- So, then Jesus is the only one of us who was without sin and thus He is the only one who could pay the penalty of our sin which is death.

So, we are all born with mortal bodies that will die someday, human souls that have a propensity for selfishness which the Apostle Paul referred to as our sin nature, and human spirits that are naturally dead to God.

John 3:1-8

¹ *There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* ² *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.”*

³ *Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

⁴ *Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”*

⁵ *Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter 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 *Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’* ⁸ *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.”*

What does this passage reveal about Nicodemus?

Nicodemus was Pharisee and “a ruler of the Jews”

- Nicodemus was a spiritual leader of the Jews and probably part of the 70-member Sanhedrin; the ruling body of the Jews that the Romans let preside over religious matters.
- The Pharisees were hyper-religious Jews who believed salvation was obtained by fastidiously following God’s Law.

That sounds good but they were wrong... Jesus went out of His way to show people the error of the Pharisees. There is no way we can earn favor with God through our self-righteousness

Isaiah 64:6 – *All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.*

This is what sets biblical Christianity apart from all the world’s religions, the fact that we cannot earn God’s favor for salvation...

Ephesians 2:8-9 – *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast*

Why did Nicodemus come to see Jesus by night?

As a ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus was probably afraid of the implications of associating openly in conversation with Jesus. He chose night in order to have a clandestine meeting with Jesus rather than risk disfavor with his fellow Pharisees among whom Jesus was pretty unpopular.

What was the real question that Nicodemus had on his heart?

Jesus knew what was on his heart and responded by telling him that “*unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*”

- Jesus used the term “kingdom of God” to refer to salvation because all the Jews were looking forward to the Messiah and recognized that the coming of the kingdom of God would be their salvation.

But what most people hadn’t figured out at that time was that the Messiah had come to establish a spiritual kingdom... He’d return to set up a physical kingdom but being part of the spiritual kingdom of God was the most urgent thing to Nicodemus and to all of us even today.

Why didn’t Nicodemus initially grasp about what Jesus was talking?

Jesus used physical terms to describe the spiritual need to be born again and Nicodemus didn’t get it. Nicodemus thought Jesus was talking about being physically born a second time.

Why did Jesus refer to being born-again as being born of the water and the Spirit?

Being born of the water doesn’t refer to:

- physical birth – People have said this is physical birth as in you can’t be born again until you are first born physically. In this position people suppose the water is a reference to amniotic fluid but "water breaking" was not used as a description of physical birth for centuries later.
- water baptism – If it was water baptism, then Jesus would be making it a requirement to enter the kingdom of God here. This cannot be water baptism because one of the thieves who died on the cross next to Jesus was saved without having to be baptized (see Luke 23:39-43).
- Instead, the term water is another reference to the Holy Spirit, or the cleansing and life-giving activity of the Holy Spirit. This is reinforced by the Greek grammar which indicates that the two items are one concept.

How is being born of the water and Spirit the same concept?

Because the cleansing effect of the Holy Spirit is often represented in Scripture by water.

John 7:37-39 – *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

The Holy Spirit sanctifies us and gives us a new nature.

Titus 3:5 – *according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*

Even the Old Testament uses water to represent the Holy Spirit...

Isaiah 44:3 – *For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring;*

The water could also be a reference to the cleansing power of God's Word since it was inspired by the Holy Spirit...

Ephesians 5:25-26 – *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word*

What is the difference of being born of the flesh and born of the Spirit?

Humans can only produce more flesh. Only God, the divine Spirit can give spiritual life. At the same time God puts his Spirit in us, we are given a new regenerated human spirit.

- Our role is to listen to and obey the Holy Spirit whom we are now able to understand because we are a new creature in Christ.

So, is being born-again an action we can do for ourselves?

Being born again is something which only comes from God, it is not something someone else can do for you like confirmation...

John 1:12-13 – *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Only two people know if you have been born again: yourself and God.

- People confuse making a decision for Christ with making a decision to join a church. Joining a church is

not what saves you, people join churches because they are saved.

3:8 – What does it tell us that the Holy Spirit is compared to the wind?

Just as the wind cannot be controlled or understood by human beings but its effects can be witnessed, so also it is with the Holy Spirit.

- We cannot know which direction He comes from and He cannot be controlled, but the proof of His work is apparent.
- Where the Spirit works, there is undeniable and unmistakable evidence.

How is it that those who are born again have a whole new life?

2 Corinthians 5:17 – *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

For the believer, certain things have passed away such as old values that are focused on the material world which itself is passing away...

1 John 2:17 – *And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

Our perspective changes to view all things in the context of eternity. Our values begin to be aligned with God's.

How is being born-again is a resurrection of our human spirit?

Where before we were dead to the things of God, our having a born-again spirit enables to know God:

1 Corinthians 2:14 – *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

I've seen this in my own spiritual walk. God breathed life into my spirit when I was an adult so I remember very well what life was like without Him.

- I recall trying to read the Bible a couple times and didn't get very far... as any book, I started at the beginning but both times I only got as far as the genealogies in Genesis 5. I got bogged down in them and thought, what is the point?
- After I was born again, I read the Bible starting in the New Testament first because I was anxious to learn more about Jesus. To this day I have a special affinity for the Book of Matthew.
- Then when I went back to read the Old Testament, I found references and insight to Jesus everywhere... even in the genealogies.

What else does being born-again enable?

It makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to indwell us...

John 14:15-17 – *If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*

This is what happened at Pentecost... when the Holy Spirit began indwelling born-again followers of Christ.

- This promise is unique to the church. Prior to Pentecost, believers could have the presence of the Holy Spirit but not be indwelled by Him FOREVER!
- This is why David prayed in Psalm 51:11, “do not take your Holy Spirit from me.” His presence wasn’t guaranteed then and David witnessed God taking His Spirit from Saul

How does having the presence of the Holy Spirit gives us certainty about our eternal destiny?

Being born-again gives us assurance that we are saved:

Romans 8:16 – *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*

The presence of the Holy Spirit within us is a guarantee of our salvation...

Ephesians 1:13-14 – *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory*

So, how is it that we must be born again?

Without having a born-again human spirit, it is impossible to have a relationship with our Creator-God. Jesus prayed:

John 17:3 – *And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*

How do we know that we’ve been born again? Do we need a supernatural experience to confirm it?

There may well be some sort of supernatural experience accompanying your being born again but I believe this is the exception rather than the rule.

- And consider this: the very fact that you have changed your attitude toward God is supernatural.

The greatest way we know we’ve been saved is that we now have faith in God’s Word where we didn’t before.

1 John 5:4 – *For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith.*

If we expect to spend eternity with our Creator-God, Jesus Christ, at some point we must answer the question: Have I been born of the Spirit?

How are the words of Jesus, "you must be born again" both a challenge and an invitation?

- It is a challenge because you cannot enter into the Kingdom of God without being born again.
- It is also an invitation in that it is not something we can do on our own, Jesus is saying, "allow me to do this for you".

This is an invitation that the Lord Jesus Christ extends to all people...

John 6:37 – *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.*

This promise is reinforced through-out Scripture...

Romans 10:13 – *whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*

What applications do we see from this discussion this evening?

- We all need a Savior for eternal life because we are born with our human spirits dead to God.
- We must be born again which means born of the Holy Spirit
- Being born again is necessary to have the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- The presence of the Holy Spirit helps us understand the things of God.
- Having the presence of the Holy Spirit gives us eternal security.
- It is not necessary to have a supernatural experience to have assurance of our salvation.