



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

FOLLOWING JESUS

What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?

Why Jesus Said New Life Is Necessary - and How God Makes a Person New

The short answer

To be “born again” means to receive new spiritual life from God. Jesus used this language when He told Nicodemus: “Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3, CSB Jesus was not telling Nicodemus to become more religious. Nicodemus was already religious. He was not telling him simply to improve his behavior. He was telling him that something far deeper was necessary. Human beings need new life. Sin has affected humanity so deeply that people do not merely need better habits, additional information, or stronger religious effort. They need God to make them spiritually alive. The Bible describes this work in several ways: being born again, being born of the Spirit, receiving a new heart, being made alive with Christ, becoming a new creation, and experiencing regeneration. These descriptions point to the same great reality from different angles: God saves sinners and gives them new life through the Holy Spirit. Being born again does not mean becoming instantly perfect. It means that a real change has begun. The person now belongs to Christ. There is a new relationship with God, a new spiritual life, a new direction, new desires, and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. New birth is not self-improvement. It is God giving life. “Jesus replied, ‘Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” John 3:3, CSB

Purpose The phrase “born again” is familiar to many people. It appears in churches. It appears in testimonies. It appears in Christian books. It sometimes even appears in political surveys or cultural descriptions where people are asked whether they identify as “born-again Christians.” But Jesus did not introduce the phrase as a cultural label. He used it to describe something absolutely necessary. A respected religious leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Nicodemus knew Scripture. He belonged to the Pharisees. He was a teacher of Israel. He recognized that something extraordinary was happening through Jesus. Yet Jesus told this deeply religious man: “You must be born again.” John 3:7, CSB That statement raises enormous questions. Why would a religious person need to be born again? What exactly is wrong with humanity? What does “born again” actually mean? Who causes the new birth? What does the Holy Spirit do? What did Jesus mean by being “born of water and the Spirit”? Is being born again the same as deciding to follow Jesus? What is the relationship between new birth and baptism? Which comes first-faith or regeneration? What changes when someone is born again? Does a born-again Christian still sin? Can someone genuinely be born again without experiencing a dramatic emotional conversion? How can someone know whether new life is real? What if someone has serious doubts? What if a Christian fails badly after coming to Christ? And why did Jesus say that without this new birth, no one can see the kingdom of God? Those questions take readers directly into the heart of the gospel. Christianity is not fundamentally a program for making bad people behave better. It announces something far more radical. God gives life to people who cannot give spiritual life to themselves. This study was not created to replace the Bible. Its purpose is to help readers love and understand God’s Word. Every section is intended to send readers back into Scripture with greater confidence, deeper understanding, and a clearer picture of Jesus Christ. If the study leads to more time reading the Bible than reading these pages, it has accomplished its purpose. Memory Anchor Being born again is not turning over a new leaf. It is receiving new life from God.

PART ONE • BEGINNER GUIDE

1. START WITH JESUS AND NICODEMUS

Read John 3:1-21. The conversation begins with an unexpected visitor. “There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.” John 3:1, CSB Nicodemus was not an obvious spiritual outsider. He was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were known for taking religious obedience seriously. Nicodemus was also called: “a ruler of the Jews.” And later Jesus calls him: “a teacher of Israel.” John 3:10 This was an educated, respected, religious man. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night and says: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him.” John 3:2, CSB That sounds like an impressive beginning. Nicodemus recognizes that Jesus has come from God in some significant sense. But Jesus immediately takes the conversation deeper. “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3, CSB Jesus does not congratulate Nicodemus on his religious credentials. He tells him that he needs new life. That is one of the first lessons of John 3: Religion Is Not The Same Thing As Regeneration. A person can:

- know Bible stories,
 - attend church,
 - understand Christian vocabulary,
 - believe in God,
 - practice religious habits,
 - and even admire Jesus without yet understanding the new life Jesus describes. Nicodemus needed something his education, reputation, and religious activity could not produce. He needed to be born again.
- Reflection If religious knowledge alone could give spiritual life, why would Jesus tell a teacher of Israel that he must be born again? Memory Anchor Religious knowledge can teach about God. Only God can give spiritual life.

2. WHY DID JESUS USE THE LANGUAGE OF BIRTH?

Nicodemus is understandably confused. He asks: “How can anyone be born when he is old? Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?” John 3:4, CSB Nicodemus hears Jesus’ words physically. Jesus is speaking spiritually. Why use birth as the picture? Because birth emphasizes something important: Life is

received. A baby does not create his or her own life. Birth is not self-improvement. It is the beginning of life. Jesus is describing a work so fundamental that improvement is not a large enough word. People do not merely need:

- more education,
- better habits,
- stronger discipline, or greater religious commitment. They need spiritual life. This helps explain why Christianity cannot be reduced to: “Become a better person.” Jesus is describing something deeper. Memory Anchor Jesus did not say, “Improve yourself.” He said, “You must be born again.”

3. WHY DO PEOPLE NEED NEW LIFE?

The answer begins with sin. Scripture says: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23, CSB Sin is more than occasional bad behavior. Sin includes rebellion against God and reaches into human desires, thinking, worship, relationships, and choices. Paul describes humanity apart from Christ in startling language: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.” Ephesians 2:1, CSB Paul does not mean physically dead. The people receiving the letter had obviously been physically alive before becoming Christians. He is describing their spiritual condition apart from Christ. Human beings do not merely need spiritual coaching. They need life. This is why the gospel is more than: Try harder. Become more disciplined. Attend church. Be nicer. Stop doing bad things. Those things may involve good changes, but they cannot create spiritual life. Only God can do that. Jesus Connection Jesus did not come merely to give humanity better moral instructions. He says: “I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.” John 10:10, CSB Memory Anchor The deepest human problem requires more than improvement. It requires life.

4. WHAT DOES “BORN AGAIN” MEAN?

The Greek word translated “again” in John 3 is *anōthen*. It can carry the sense of:

- again,
- anew,
- or from above, depending upon context. This is important because John often records conversations in which Jesus speaks with a deeper meaning than His listener initially understands. Nicodemus hears: born a second time. But Jesus’ explanation points toward birth that comes from God—from above. John has already prepared readers for this idea. Earlier in the Gospel, those who receive Christ are described as people: “who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:13, CSB The new birth is therefore not simply: starting over. It is birth whose source is God. The familiar phrase “born again” is appropriate. But “born from above” helps reveal another part of Jesus’ meaning. The new life comes from God. Caution It would be a mistake to insist that *anōthen* has only one possible English meaning here. John appears to make meaningful use of the word’s range. Nicodemus hears one sense. Jesus leads him toward the deeper reality. Memory Anchor Born again means more than another chance. It is new life from above.

5. WHAT DOES “BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT” MEAN?

Jesus continues: “Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” John 3:5, CSB This phrase has generated significant discussion. For a beginner, the most important clue is something Jesus expected Nicodemus—a teacher of Israel—to understand. The Old Testament had already promised a future work of God involving cleansing, a new heart, and the Spirit. God says through Ezekiel: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.” Ezekiel 36:25, CSB Then: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.” Ezekiel 36:26, CSB And: “I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes.” Ezekiel 36:27, CSB Water represents cleansing in this prophetic context. The Spirit gives transforming life. Jesus appears to be pointing Nicodemus toward God’s promised work of cleansing and renewal. This is not merely external religion. God cleanses. God gives a new heart. God gives His Spirit. Part Two will examine other interpretations of John 3:5, including its relationship to Christian baptism. For now, the central truth is clear: The new birth is God’s cleansing and life-giving work. Memory Anchor God does not merely tell sinners to become clean. He promises to cleanse and renew them.

6. THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES LIFE



Jesus says: “Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.” John 3:6, CSB Then: “Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again.” John 3:7, CSB The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus continues with an illustration: “The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” John 3:8, CSB The illustration works especially well because the Greek word *pneuma* can refer to spirit, wind, or breath depending on context. People cannot see wind itself. But they can see what wind does. Branches move. Leaves scatter. Clouds shift. The wind is invisible, but its effects become visible. Jesus says something similar about the Spirit’s work. People cannot manufacture the Holy Spirit. They cannot control Him. They cannot create spiritual birth through human technique. But when God gives new life, His work begins producing effects. Reflection What might be some visible effects of an invisible work of God within a person? Memory Anchor The Spirit’s work is invisible. Its effects do not remain invisible forever.

7. GOD PROMISED A NEW HEART

- The idea of new birth did not suddenly appear in John 3. God had promised spiritual renewal long before Jesus spoke with Nicodemus. Ezekiel records: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Ezekiel 36:26, CSB A heart of stone pictures resistance and hardness. A heart of flesh pictures responsiveness to God. Notice again who acts: “I will give...” “I will put...” “I will remove...” “I will give...” God is the One performing the transforming work. This does not make human response meaningless. Scripture calls people to repent, believe, obey, seek, and follow. But beneath salvation is grace. God does what sinners cannot accomplish for themselves. Memory Anchor The new heart is not a human achievement. It is a gift of God.

8. GOD MAKES THE DEAD ALIVE

Paul uses another picture. Not birth. Resurrection. After describing people as dead in sin, he writes: “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!” Ephesians 2:4-5, CSB Two of the most beautiful words in Scripture are: But God. Humanity was spiritually dead. But God is rich in mercy. Humanity was trapped in sin. But God loved. Humanity could not create spiritual life. But God made people alive with Christ. This is why Christians cannot boast about salvation. A spiritually dead person cannot say: Look how successfully I resurrected myself. Salvation is grace. Jesus Connection New life cannot be separated from Jesus. Paul does not simply say: God made us alive. He says God: “made us alive with Christ.” Christian new life is life connected to the risen Jesus. Memory Anchor The Christian testimony is not “I made myself alive.” It is “But God.”

9. NEW BIRTH AND THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Why can Christians have new life? Because Jesus lives. Peter writes: “Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” 1 Peter 1:3, CSB Notice the connection: New Birth. Living Hope. Resurrection. Christianity is not built around the memory of a dead teacher. Jesus rose bodily from the dead. His resurrection means death has been defeated. Those united to Him share in His life. Paul writes: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” 2 Corinthians 5:17, CSB New birth is not simply deciding to adopt Christian values. It is participation in the new life God gives through the risen Christ. Memory Anchor New birth leads to living hope because Jesus is alive.

10. IS BEING BORN AGAIN THE SAME AS BECOMING RELIGIOUS?

No. Nicodemus is the clearest evidence. He was already religious. The problem was not that he needed more religion. He needed new life. Religious activity can be valuable when it flows from genuine faith. Christians gather with the church. Read Scripture. Pray. Worship. Serve. Give. Obey. But these practices cannot manufacture regeneration. A person can learn Christian behavior without knowing Christ. Jesus warns about people who outwardly appear religious while inwardly remaining unchanged. Matthew 23 repeatedly confronts this problem. This means church involvement should never become a substitute for asking the deeper question: Do I know Jesus? Has the gospel become personal? Am I trusting Christ rather than my religious activity? Is there evidence that God is changing the direction of my life? Memory Anchor Religion can change a schedule. Only God can change a heart.

11. NICODEMUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN: EVERYONE NEEDS LIFE FROM JESUS

Read John 3:1-21 and John 4:1-42. John places two very different encounters beside each other. First comes Nicodemus. Then comes a Samaritan woman. The contrast is striking. Nicodemus A man. A Jew. Religiously respected. Educated. A leader. Morally reputable in the eyes of society. He approaches Jesus. He comes at night. The Samaritan Woman A woman in a culture where religious teachers did not ordinarily engage women publicly in the same way. A Samaritan, part of a community with a long history of tension with Jewish people. Not presented as a religious leader. Her personal history includes multiple marriages and a current relationship outside marriage. Jesus initiates the conversation with her. The encounter happens in daylight beside a well. These two people appear to stand at opposite ends of the social and religious spectrum. Yet both need Jesus. Nicodemus needs: birth from above. The woman is offered: living water. Jesus tells her: "Whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again. In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up in him for eternal life." John 4:14, CSB The images differ. New birth. Living water. But both point toward life that cannot be produced through human effort. Nicodemus cannot educate himself into new birth. The Samaritan woman cannot repair her past enough to create eternal life. Jesus is the answer for both. This is important because people often assume that one type of person especially needs conversion. The obviously broken person. The immoral person. The outsider. John gives readers Nicodemus first. The respected religious person also needs life. Then John gives readers the Samaritan woman. The outsider is not beyond the reach of grace. Jesus confronts both. Jesus speaks truth to both. Jesus offers life. What This Reveals About Jesus Jesus is not impressed into silence by religious status. And He is not repelled by a complicated past. The religious insider needs Him. The social outsider needs Him. Everyone needs the life only God gives. Reflection Are you more likely to think of new birth as something needed by obviously broken people-or as something every person needs? Memory Anchor Religion cannot remove the need for new birth. A broken past cannot place someone beyond the reach of Jesus.

12. WHAT CHANGES WHEN SOMEONE IS BORN AGAIN?

Being born again does not mean every part of life changes instantly. But something real changes. Scripture describes several dimensions of this new life. A New Relationship With God Those who receive Christ become children of God. John 1:12-13 A New Heart God promises inner renewal. Ezekiel 36:26 A New Spiritual Life God makes the spiritually dead alive with Christ. Ephesians 2:4-5 A New Identity Anyone in Christ is a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17 A New Relationship With Sin Sin remains a battle, but it is no longer the unquestioned master. Romans 6:11-14 New Desires Believers begin desiring God, truth, holiness, and obedience-even while old desires continue fighting for attention. Philippians 2:13 The Presence Of The Holy Spirit The Spirit dwells within those who belong to Christ. Romans 8:9 A New Direction Christian life now moves toward Christ. Not perfectly. Not without setbacks. But genuinely. Reflection Which of these aspects of new life is easiest to understand? Which raises the most questions? Memory Anchor New birth does not make a person instantly mature. It gives a genuinely new life and direction.

13. DOES BEING BORN AGAIN MEAN CHRISTIANS STOP SINNING?

No. John writes to Christians: "If we say, 'We have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1:8, CSB New birth does not mean sinless perfection. Christians still experience temptation. They still make sinful choices. They still need confession. They still need correction. They still need grace. But their relationship with sin changes. John also writes very strongly about the incompatibility between new life and ongoing rebellion against God.

- First John 3 must be read together with First John 1. John cannot mean: A genuine Christian never commits any sin. He has already said Christians who claim to have no sin deceive themselves. His stronger statements emphasize that new birth creates a changed relationship with sin. Sin cannot remain comfortably enthroned as the unquestioned pattern of a life that has been made new. The Christian may fall. But the Christian is called to repent, confess, return, and continue following Christ. Memory Anchor New birth does not eliminate the battle with sin. It changes which side of the battle the believer belongs to.

14. WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT BEGIN PRODUCING?

Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Galatians 5:22-23, CSB Notice the language. Fruit. Fruit grows. Usually gradually. A newly planted tree does not produce a mature harvest the next morning. Likewise, spiritual maturity develops. Some changes may happen quickly. Others may take years. Some old sins may disappear dramatically. Others may

become long battles requiring prayer, accountability, wisdom, and perseverance. The question is not: Did every struggle disappear? A better question is: Is the Spirit producing a new direction? Is there growing:

- love for Christ,
- hatred of sin,
- desire for Scripture,
- willingness to repent,
- love for others,
- obedience,
- humility, and dependence upon God? These things do not earn salvation. They are fruit consistent with new life. Memory Anchor Fruit does not create life. Fruit reveals that life is present.

15. WHAT IF THERE WAS NO DRAMATIC CONVERSION EXPERIENCE?

Some Christians can identify the exact day they trusted Christ. Others cannot. Some experience overwhelming emotion. Others experience quiet conviction. Some can describe dramatic transformation from a destructive lifestyle. Others came to faith gradually, perhaps while growing up around Christian teaching. The Bible does not require every conversion story to feel identical. The question is not: Was the experience dramatic enough? The question is: Is the person trusting Jesus Christ? A person is not saved by: remembering a date, feeling a particular emotion, walking down an aisle, raising a hand,

- repeating certain words, or having a dramatic testimony. Those things may accompany genuine faith. They do not create new birth. Salvation rests in Jesus. A quiet conversion can be genuine. A dramatic conversion can be genuine. And a dramatic religious experience can also occur without genuine new birth. The object of faith matters more than the emotional intensity of the moment. Reflection Have cultural expectations about what a conversion “should” look like ever made it harder to recognize God’s quieter work? Memory Anchor The evidence of new birth is not how dramatic the beginning felt. It is the reality of faith in Christ and the life God begins producing.

16. CAN SOMEONE MAKE THEMSELVES BORN AGAIN?

Jesus’ birth imagery answers this question. No one gives spiritual birth to himself or herself. John says believers are born: “not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:13, CSB James says: “By his own choice, he gave us birth by the word of truth.” James 1:18, CSB Peter writes: “because you have been born again-not of perishable seed but of imperishable-through the living and enduring word of God.” 1 Peter 1:23, CSB God gives life. Yet Scripture also commands people to respond to the gospel. Jesus says: “Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15, CSB Paul and Silas tell the Philippian jailer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” Acts 16:31, CSB Scripture therefore holds together truths people sometimes try to pull apart: God gives new life. People are genuinely called to repent and believe. Part Two will explore how different Christian traditions understand the relationship between these truths. For now, the gospel invitation remains wonderfully simple: Come to Jesus. Memory Anchor No one creates new birth. God gives life, and the gospel calls sinners to come to Christ.

17. HOW DOES BAPTISM RELATE TO THE NEW BIRTH?

Baptism is important. Jesus commanded His disciples: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19, CSB Throughout Acts, people who believe the gospel are baptized. Acts 2:41 Acts 8:12 Acts 16:30-34 A new believer should therefore not treat baptism as an unimportant extra. Baptism publicly identifies a person with Jesus Christ and His people. It is an act of obedience to Jesus. But Christians differ over the precise relationship between baptism and regeneration. Some Christian traditions understand baptism as a sacrament through which God communicates regenerating grace. Other traditions understand baptism primarily as the commanded outward sign of a new birth and salvation already received through faith. Those differences are explored in Part Two. For a beginner, several truths can be held clearly. Jesus Commanded Baptism. It matters. Baptism Should Never Be Treated As A Human Achievement That Earns Salvation. No ritual makes someone worthy of God. Salvation Rests In Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection are the foundation. A Person Who Trusts Christ Should Desire To Obey Him. That includes pursuing baptism faithfully rather than ignoring His command. If you have trusted Jesus and have not been baptized, speak with

a faithful Bible-teaching church. Ask them to explain what they believe Scripture teaches about baptism. Open the Bible. Study the passages. And take obedience seriously. Memory Anchor Baptism matters because Jesus commanded it. But salvation is never earned through a human achievement.

18. HOW CAN SOMEONE KNOW WHETHER THEY HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN?

This question can produce either healthy reflection or unhealthy fear. The place to begin is not endless examination of feelings. Begin with Jesus. Ask: Who am I trusting for salvation? Is confidence resting in personal goodness, religion, a prayer once spoken, or Jesus Christ? Jesus says: “the one who comes to me I will never cast out.” John 6:37, CSB Then Scripture also encourages believers to recognize evidence of God’s work. Do you increasingly recognize sin as sin? Do you desire to know Christ? Is there willingness to repent? Do you care about God’s Word? Is there a growing desire to obey? Do you love other believers? Is the Spirit producing fruit, even imperfectly and slowly? None of these things saves. Jesus saves. But fruit can provide evidence that life is present. Avoid two opposite errors. Error One: Constantly examining yourself until you barely look at Christ. Error Two: Never examining life at all while assuming a past religious experience guarantees everything is fine. Look first to Jesus. Trust His promise. Then gratefully recognize the evidence of His work. Memory Anchor Assurance looks first to Christ and then recognizes the fruit of His work.

19. WHAT IF DOUBT WILL NOT GO AWAY?

Some believers experience repeated fear: What if I am not really saved? What if I did not believe correctly? What if my conversion was not genuine? What if I did not repent enough? What if I cannot remember the exact moment I was born again? What if I feel spiritually numb? What if I keep asking the same questions? Persistent doubt can turn assurance into exhausting self-examination. When this happens, return to several truths. Look First At Christ The foundation of salvation is not the perfection of your memory, feelings, or spiritual performance. It is Jesus. Ask: What did Jesus accomplish? What has He promised? Who am I trusting? Do Not Build Salvation On A Perfect Conversion Memory Some people know the exact day they trusted Christ. Others cannot identify it precisely. A person does not need to remember the moment of physical birth in order to know that he or she is alive. Likewise, the absence of a precise conversion date does not automatically mean new birth never occurred. Confess Known Sin If doubt is connected to known rebellion, do not merely seek reassurance. Repent. Bring the sin into the light. Ask God for forgiveness. Make needed changes. Do Not Require Perfect Fruit Fruit grows gradually. Do not ask: Am I perfectly loving? Am I perfectly obedient? Do I never doubt? Instead consider direction. Is there growing desire for Christ? Is sin increasingly recognized and resisted? Is there willingness to repent? Does Scripture matter? Is there evidence of God’s work, even if it seems small? Seek Help When Needed Persistent assurance struggles can become difficult to evaluate alone. Talk with: a mature Christian, a trusted pastor, or a faithful church leader. Allow other believers to help you think biblically rather than remaining trapped inside repeated fear. Do Not Keep Trying To Create A Stronger Conversion Experience Some people repeatedly pray to “get saved again” because the previous prayer did not feel powerful enough. The strength of salvation does not rest in the emotional force of a prayer. Jesus saves. Prayer expresses faith. It does not manufacture regeneration. Reflection When doubt appears, does attention move toward Christ-or deeper and deeper into analyzing yourself? Memory Anchor The answer to weak assurance is not stronger trust in yourself. It is deeper trust in Christ.

20. WHAT IF A CHRISTIAN FAILS BADLY?

Serious failure can shake assurance. A believer may think: If I were truly born again, how could I have done this? That question should never be answered by minimizing sin. Sin matters. Some sins cause devastating consequences. Trust may need to be rebuilt. Relationships may be damaged. Civil or church consequences may be appropriate. But serious failure does not mean Jesus has suddenly become incapable of mercy. Consider Peter. He insisted he would remain faithful. Then he denied Jesus three times. Luke 22:54-62 Peter’s failure was serious. He wept bitterly. But Jesus had not finished with him. After the resurrection, Jesus restored Peter and commissioned him to shepherd His people. John 21:15-19 David provides another sobering example. His sin involving Bathsheba and Uriah was devastating. Second Samuel 11 Nathan confronted him. Second Samuel 12 Psalm 51 records deep repentance. David suffered serious consequences. Grace did not make the sin harmless. But sin did not place repentance beyond possibility. The

proper response to serious failure is not: Pretend it was minor. Nor is it: Assume restoration is impossible. The biblical response is:

- confess,
- repent,
- accept appropriate consequences,
- seek help,
- make restitution when possible, and return to God. First John says: "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father-Jesus Christ the righteous one." 1 John 2:1, CSB Jesus is not an excuse for sin. He is the hope of sinners. Memory Anchor Serious failure should produce serious repentance. It does not make Christ's mercy small.

21. WHAT IF CHANGE IS VERY SLOW?

Slow growth can be discouraging. But slow does not necessarily mean false. Consider how living things grow. A person rarely watches a tree grow moment by moment. But compare the tree across several years and the growth becomes obvious. Spiritual growth can be similar. Instead of asking only: Am I struggling today? Sometimes ask: What has God changed over time? Perhaps: sin is confessed sooner,

- forgiveness comes more readily,
- Scripture matters more, prayer is becoming more natural, pride is recognized more quickly, compassion is growing, temptation is resisted more seriously, or dependence upon Jesus is deepening. Growth may be uneven. There may be setbacks. Some seasons may feel dry. The Christian hope rests partly in this promise: "He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6, CSB God does not merely begin life. He continues His work. Memory Anchor Do not measure new life only by today's struggle. Look at the direction God is producing over time.

22. NEW BIRTH CHANGES WHAT CHRISTIANITY IS

If Jesus had said: "You need better information," Christianity could primarily be education. If He had said: "You need better behavior," Christianity could primarily be moral reform. If He had said: "You need stronger religious habits," Christianity could primarily be ritual. But Jesus said: "You must be born again." That means Christianity begins with a miracle of grace. God gives life. And because He gives life, everything else begins changing. Scripture becomes more than information. Prayer becomes more than ritual. Obedience becomes more than rule keeping. Church becomes more than attendance. Worship becomes more than music. Repentance becomes more than guilt. Baptism becomes more than an empty ceremony. Jesus becomes more than a historical teacher. He becomes Savior and Lord. The Christian life grows out of the life God gives. Final Beginner Memory Anchor Being born again means receiving new spiritual life from God through the Holy Spirit. It is necessary because sin has left humanity unable to create spiritual life for itself. It is possible because Jesus died and rose again. It produces a new relationship with God, a new heart, a new identity, and a new direction. And it is received entirely by grace.

Practical Application

1. READ JOHN 3 SLOWLY

Do not begin with what others say "born again" means. Begin with Jesus. Read John 3:1-21 several times. Notice what Nicodemus asks. Notice what Jesus emphasizes.

2. THEN READ JOHN 4

Compare Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. Ask: What is different about them? What do they both need? What does Jesus offer each of them?

3. ASK WHAT YOU ARE TRUSTING

Religious activity? Good behavior? Family background? A conversion experience? Or Jesus Christ?

4. ASK GOD FOR AN HONEST HEART

Pray: "Search me, God, and know my heart." Psalm 139:23, CSB Ask God to reveal misplaced confidence, hidden sin, and areas of resistance.

5. DO NOT TRY TO MANUFACTURE A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE



New birth is not measured by emotional intensity. Come honestly to Christ.

6. WHEN SIN BECOMES CLEAR, REPENT

Do not hide it. Confess it. Turn toward God. Receive His mercy.

7. WHEN DOUBT COMES, RETURN TO JESUS

Do not repeatedly search your feelings for proof. Return to Christ. Return to His promises. Ask mature Christians for help when necessary.

8. BEGIN LOOKING FOR FRUIT OVER TIME

Not perfection. Fruit. Is God producing greater love, humility, obedience, repentance, truthfulness, patience, and dependence upon Christ?

9. READ THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

John explains why he wrote: "So that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John 20:31, CSB

10. CONNECT WITH A FAITHFUL LOCAL CHURCH

New life is not meant to be lived in isolation. Learn Scripture with other believers. Pray together. Worship together. Serve. Receive encouragement and correction.

11. PURSUE BAPTISM

If you have trusted Christ and have not been baptized, speak with a faithful church about baptism. Study the Scriptures they use. Understand what baptism means. And take Jesus' command seriously.

Scripture-Grounded Prayer

- Father, Thank You that salvation is more than an invitation to become a better version of an old life. Thank You for giving new life. Thank You for Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and rose from the grave. Thank You for the Holy Spirit, who gives life and dwells within those who belong to Christ. Reveal every place where religion, morality, knowledge, experience, or personal effort has replaced dependence upon Jesus. Where there is spiritual hardness, soften the heart. Where there is sin, bring repentance. Where there is unbelief, give faith. Where there is fear, lead back to the promises of Christ. Where doubt has become consuming, turn attention away from endless self-examination and back toward Jesus. Where there has been serious failure, give courage for honest confession, true repentance, appropriate accountability, and faithful restoration. Where there is confusion, give understanding through Your Word. Where growth is slow, give perseverance. Where there is genuine new life, produce fruit that increasingly reflects Jesus. Give a growing hunger for Scripture. A deeper life of prayer. A greater hatred of sin. A stronger love for others. A willingness to forgive. A desire to obey. And increasing dependence upon Your grace. May no one settle for merely appearing religious. May those with broken pasts understand that they are not beyond Your mercy. May those with impressive religious backgrounds understand that they still need Your grace. May the reality Jesus described become clear: "You must be born again." Give life from above. And teach those You make alive to walk faithfully with Jesus.
- In His name, Amen.



Review And Reflection

1. Who was Nicodemus? 2. Why is it significant that Jesus told a religious leader he must be born again? 3. Why did Jesus use birth as an illustration? 4. What does humanity's spiritual condition have to do with the need for new birth? 5. What can the Greek word *anōthen* mean? 6. How does Ezekiel 36 help explain John 3? 7. What role does the Holy Spirit have in the new birth? 8. What does Ephesians 2 mean when it describes people as spiritually dead? 9. How is new birth connected to Jesus' resurrection? 10. Why is becoming religious not the same as being born again? 11. What can be learned by comparing Nicodemus with the Samaritan woman? 12. What changes when someone receives new life? 13. Does being born again mean a Christian never sins? 14. What is the fruit of the Spirit? 15. Does every genuine Christian need a dramatic conversion experience? 16. Can someone create the new birth through personal effort? 17. What is the relationship between baptism and new birth? 18. How can a believer think about assurance without becoming trapped in constant self-examination? 19. What practical steps can help when doubt becomes persistent? 20. What should a Christian do after serious failure? 21. Why can spiritual growth sometimes be slow? 22. How does the doctrine of new birth change the way Christianity itself is understood?

Beginner Review

Complete the statements:

- Jesus said, "You must be born _____." John 3:7 New birth comes from _____. The Holy _____ gives spiritual life. God promises to give His people a new _____. Ezekiel 36:26 Apart from Christ, people are spiritually _____ in sin. Ephesians 2:1
- God makes believers alive with _____. Ephesians 2:5 Anyone in Christ is a new _____. 2 Corinthians 5:17 New birth does not mean instant _____. The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-_____. Galatians 5:22-23 Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples and _____ them. Matthew 28:19 The evidence of new life is not merely a dramatic experience but a new _____ toward Christ.

PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

The beginner guide is complete without Part Two. This section offers additional biblical, theological, and interpretive depth for readers who want to continue.

INTERMEDIATE

23. JOHN 3 IN THE FLOW OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

• John 3 should not be isolated from what comes immediately before it. Near the end of John 2, many people see Jesus' signs and "believe" in His name. But John adds something surprising: "Jesus, however, would not entrust himself to them, since he knew them all." John 2:24, CSB The Greek text contains a wordplay. The people "believed" in Jesus, but Jesus did not "entrust" Himself to them-the same Greek verb, *pisteuō*, stands behind both ideas. John then says Jesus: "knew what was in man." John 2:25, CSB Immediately afterward: "There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus." John 3:1 The chapter division can hide the literary connection. John has just told readers that Jesus knows what is within humanity. Then one particular man approaches Him. Jesus immediately tells that man he must be born from above. This suggests that John 3 is not merely a detached theological conversation. It develops John's larger theme: Signs and outward belief are not enough. Jesus knows the human heart. What humanity needs is life from God.

24. JOHN 3 AND JOHN 4: THE INSIDER AND THE OUTSIDER

John's placement of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman deserves closer attention. The contrast is literary as well as theological. Nicodemus is:

- Jewish,
- male,
- educated,
- respected,
- religiously influential, and associated with Jerusalem. The woman is:

- Samaritan,
- female,
- unnamed,
- socially vulnerable, and encountered away from Jerusalem. Nicodemus approaches Jesus. Jesus initiates the conversation with the woman. Nicodemus comes at night. The woman encounters Jesus around midday. Nicodemus initially struggles to understand Jesus' teaching. The woman eventually returns to her town and tells others about Him. These contrasts should not be turned into an overly rigid symbolism where every detail carries hidden meaning. But John clearly demonstrates the reach of Jesus' mission. The respected insider needs new birth. The marginalized outsider is offered living water. Neither religious privilege nor social shame settles the question of spiritual life. Jesus is necessary for both.

25. ANŌTHEN - "AGAIN" OR "FROM ABOVE"?

The Greek adverb anōthen appears several times in John. Its semantic range includes "from above" and "again." John 3:3 and 3:7 are especially interesting because Nicodemus interprets Jesus in terms of a second physical birth. But elsewhere John clearly uses anōthen in the sense of "from above." John the Baptist says: "The one who comes from above is above all." John 3:31, CSB Jesus tells Pilate: "You would have no authority over me at all...if it hadn't been given you from above." John 19:11, CSB This makes "born from above" a significant part of John 3's meaning. English translations differ because no single English expression captures the wordplay perfectly. "Born again" preserves Nicodemus's misunderstanding and the familiar Christian phrase. "Born from above" emphasizes the divine source. The best interpretation need not force readers to choose one idea and discard the other. Jesus is describing a genuinely new birth whose source is above-from God.

26. THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND: EZEKIEL 36

Jesus' surprise at Nicodemus is important. "Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" John 3:10, CSB Why should Nicodemus have understood? Jesus may be drawing on several Old Testament promises, but Ezekiel 36 is particularly significant. God promises:

- clean water,
- cleansing from impurity and idols, a new heart, a new spirit, removal of the heart of stone, a heart of flesh, and His Spirit placed within His people. Ezekiel 36:25-27 The sequence is strikingly close to Jesus' language: "born of water and the Spirit." John 3:5 Ezekiel's promise is part of Israel's restoration hope. The people had defiled themselves and suffered covenant judgment. God promises restoration not because Israel has earned it, but for the sake of His holy name. Ezekiel 36:22-23 Then He promises internal transformation. This means Jesus' teaching about new birth is rooted in the larger biblical story. Humanity needs more than external law. God must cleanse and renew the heart.

27. JEREMIAH AND THE NEW COVENANT

Ezekiel is not alone. Jeremiah announces a coming new covenant. God says: "I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts." Jeremiah 31:33, CSB And: "I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin." Jeremiah 31:34, CSB The new covenant involves:

- forgiveness,
- internal transformation, and a renewed relationship with God. Jesus later identifies His sacrificial death with the new covenant. At the Last Supper He speaks of: "the new covenant in my blood." Luke 22:20, CSB The new birth should therefore be understood within this larger biblical movement. God promised cleansing. God promised new hearts. God promised His Spirit. God promised forgiveness. Jesus announces that entrance into God's kingdom requires precisely this kind of renewal.

28. WHAT DOES "WATER AND THE SPIRIT" MEAN?

John 3:5 has several major interpretations. A responsible study should acknowledge them. View One: Water And Spirit As Ezekiel'S Cleansing And Renewal

- This interpretation sees John 3:5 primarily against Ezekiel 36:25-27. Water represents cleansing. Spirit represents God's renewing presence. Strengths include: the Old Testament background,
 - Jesus' expectation that Nicodemus should understand, and the close pairing of water and Spirit in Ezekiel.
- View Two: Water As Christian Baptism Many Christians throughout church history have connected John 3:5

directly with baptism. This interpretation remains especially prominent in Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican, and some other sacramental traditions. Its strength includes the close relationship between water, conversion, baptism, and the Spirit elsewhere in the New Testament. View Three: Water As Natural Birth Some interpreters understand “water” as physical birth and “Spirit” as spiritual birth. This interpretation is sometimes connected with Nicodemus’s question about entering his mother’s womb. However, the claim that “water” was a standard Jewish expression for natural birth is difficult to establish, and many scholars find the Ezekiel background more persuasive. View Four: Water As John’s Baptism Or Repentance Some connect the language with the ministry of John the Baptist and his baptism of repentance. This may contribute to the wider setting, though it does not explain the phrase as naturally as some alternatives. A Careful Conclusion The Ezekiel 36 background offers a particularly strong explanation because Jesus expects a teacher of Israel to understand the concept. At the same time, Christian baptism naturally became closely associated with the new-covenant realities of cleansing, faith, Spirit, and incorporation into Christ. The text should not be forced into modern denominational categories that Nicodemus could not have known. The central point remains: Entrance into God’s kingdom requires cleansing and renewal that God provides.

29. DOES JOHN 3 TEACH BAPTISMAL REGENERATION?

“Baptismal regeneration” generally refers to the belief that God gives or communicates regenerating grace through baptism. Christian traditions disagree. Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, and some Anglican traditions commonly understand baptism sacramentally and connect it closely with regeneration. Many Baptist, evangelical, and Reformed Christians distinguish regeneration from water baptism more sharply and understand baptism primarily as the commanded sign of union with Christ and profession of faith. Other traditions occupy positions between these descriptions. John 3:5 contributes to the discussion but should not carry the entire theological argument by itself. Other passages must also be considered: Acts 2:38 Romans 6:3-4 Galatians 3:27 Colossians 2:12 Titus 3:5 1 Peter 3:21 alongside passages strongly emphasizing salvation through faith: John 3:16 John 5:24 Acts 16:31 Romans 3:28 Ephesians 2:8-9 The disagreement should not obscure shared truths. Jesus commanded baptism. Matthew 28:19 The early church baptized converts. Baptism should not be treated casually. And salvation rests finally in the saving work of Jesus Christ rather than human merit.

30. TITUS 3 AND “THE WASHING OF REGENERATION”

Paul writes: “He saved us-not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy-through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Titus 3:5, CSB The Greek noun *palingenesis*, translated “regeneration,” refers to renewal or new birth. It appears only twice in the New Testament: Titus 3:5 and Matthew 19:28, where it refers to cosmic renewal. In Titus, regeneration is closely connected with:

- God’s mercy,
- washing,
- renewal, and the Holy Spirit. Christians debate whether “washing” directly refers to baptism or uses cleansing imagery more generally. Either way, Paul’s central emphasis is unmistakable: “He saved us-not by works of righteousness that we had done.” Regeneration is mercy. The Holy Spirit renews. Human works do not create salvation.

31. THE SPIRIT, WIND, AND BREATH OF GOD

John 3:8 contains another important wordplay. The Greek word *pneuma* can mean:

- spirit,
- wind, or breath. The Hebrew word *ruach* has a similar range. This creates rich biblical connections. In Genesis 2:7, God breathes life into Adam. In Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones comes alive as breath enters them. God tells Ezekiel: “Prophesy to the breath...and say to it: ‘This is what the Lord GOD says: Breath, come from the four winds and breathe into these slain so that they may live!’” Ezekiel 37:9, CSB Then God explains: “I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live.” Ezekiel 37:14, CSB Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus participates in this biblical world of imagery. God’s Spirit gives life. The dead live because God breathes life. Again, the central subject is God.

32. REGENERATION AND FAITH - WHICH COMES FIRST?

This is one of the major theological debates surrounding new birth. The disagreement often concerns logical order rather than necessarily a measurable gap in time. Reformed View Many Reformed theologians teach that regeneration logically precedes saving faith. Because fallen people are spiritually dead and unable to come to Christ apart from divine grace, God first gives spiritual life, resulting in repentance and faith. Passages often emphasized include: John 6:44 Ephesians 2:1-5 Acts 13:48 1 John 5:1 Arminian/Wesleyan View Arminian and Wesleyan theology also insists that salvation begins with God's grace. It commonly describes prevenient grace as God's prior work enabling sinners genuinely to respond to the gospel. Faith precedes regeneration in the logical order, though even the ability to respond depends upon grace. Passages often emphasized include: John 3:16 John 20:31 Acts 16:31 Ephesians 1:13 Shared Ground Neither historic position teaches that sinners save themselves without grace. Both affirm: God acts graciously. The gospel must be received. Faith matters. New life comes from God. Jesus saves. The debate concerns how God's gracious work and the human response relate. Scripture does not command people to determine the invisible order of salvation before coming to Christ. It commands: Repent. Believe. Come. Trust.

33. DOES "DEAD IN SIN" MEAN PEOPLE ARE INCAPABLE OF RESPONDING?

Ephesians 2 describes people as: "dead in your trespasses and sins." Ephesians 2:1 Christians agree that this language describes a desperate spiritual condition. They disagree somewhat over how precisely the metaphor should be pressed. Reformed interpreters commonly understand spiritual death as including moral inability: apart from regenerating grace, fallen humanity will not and cannot savingly come to God. Other traditions caution against building every aspect of a theological anthropology from the physical properties of a corpse. They emphasize that Scripture still portrays spiritually dead sinners:

- hearing warnings,
- resisting God,
- responding to grace, and being commanded to repent. Both sides should avoid careless reasoning. A metaphor communicates what its biblical context intends. Paul's unmistakable emphasis in Ephesians 2 is that humanity's condition is hopeless apart from divine mercy. The solution comes with: "But God...made us alive with Christ." Ephesians 2:4-5 Whatever further theological distinctions are made, the passage leaves no room for boasting.

34. NEW BIRTH AND UNION WITH CHRIST

Regeneration should not be separated from union with Christ. Paul repeatedly describes believers as being: "in Christ." Romans 8:1 2 Corinthians 5:17 Ephesians 1:3 Believers participate in His death and resurrection. Paul writes: "Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life." Romans 6:4, CSB New life is therefore not an independent spiritual substance God places inside someone. It is life in relationship with the risen Christ. Jesus says: "Because I live, you will live too." John 14:19, CSB The Christian's new life is inseparable from Jesus' resurrection life.

35. NEW BIRTH AND ADOPTION ARE RELATED BUT DISTINCT

Scripture uses several pictures of salvation. New birth describes receiving life from God. Adoption describes being welcomed into God's family with the status and privileges of His children. Paul writes: "You received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father!'" Romans 8:15, CSB These doctrines overlap but should not simply be collapsed. REGENERATION asks: How does someone spiritually dead receive life? ADOPTION asks: What new family relationship and status does the believer receive? JUSTIFICATION asks: How can the guilty be declared righteous before God? SANCTIFICATION asks: How does God increasingly transform His people in holiness? UNION WITH CHRIST asks: How is the believer joined to Christ so that His saving benefits become theirs? Different biblical images illuminate different dimensions of one great salvation.

36. NEW BIRTH AND SANCTIFICATION ARE NOT IDENTICAL

Regeneration begins new life. Sanctification is the continuing work of growth in holiness. This distinction helps explain why born-again Christians still struggle. A Christian does not need to be "born again again" every time sin occurs. The life has been given. But the believer needs continual repentance, grace, correction, renewal of thinking, and growth. Paul tells Christians: "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2, CSB

And: “put on the new self.” Ephesians 4:24, CSB Those commands are addressed to people who already belong to Christ. New birth begins life. Sanctification develops maturity.

37. FIRST JOHN - WHAT DOES NEW BIRTH LOOK LIKE?

First John repeatedly uses birth language. Those born of God are associated with: faith in Jesus as the Christ, 1 John 5:1

- righteousness, 1 John 2:29
- love, 1 John 4:7 and victory over the world through faith. 1 John 5:4 But First John also contains strong statements about sin. “Everyone who has been born of God does not sin.” 1 John 3:9, CSB Taken alone, that could sound like sinless perfection. But John has already written: “If we say, ‘We have no sin,’ we are deceiving ourselves.” 1 John 1:8 And: “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father-Jesus Christ the righteous one.” 1 John 2:1, CSB Therefore John cannot mean that genuine Christians never commit a sinful act. The larger context concerns the pattern, practice, and allegiance of life. New birth creates a real break with sin’s unquestioned rule. A Christian may fall into sin. But sin cannot be treated as though nothing changed when God gave new life.

38. CAN SOMEONE BE BORN AGAIN AND SHOW NO FRUIT?

Jesus warns about false profession. Matthew 7:21-23 James warns about dead faith. James 2:14-26 John connects new birth with transformed life. First John repeatedly does this. This makes the question serious. Fruit is not the cause of new birth. But complete and permanent absence of spiritual fruit raises legitimate questions about whether new life is present. At the same time, Christians must be careful about judging the speed of another believer’s growth. Some believers mature quickly in certain areas. Others carry deep wounds, poor teaching, entrenched habits, or long patterns that take time to confront. The proper distinction is not: Mature Christian = born again. Struggling Christian = not born again. The better question concerns spiritual life and direction. Is there faith in Christ? Repentance? A changed relationship with sin? Love for God’s people? Desire for truth? Evidence of the Spirit’s work? Growth may be small. Life may be weak. But living things eventually show signs of life.

39. CAN SOMEONE THINK THEY ARE BORN AGAIN AND BE MISTAKEN?

Jesus’ warnings require Christians to answer: Yes. Religious profession by itself is not infallible evidence of regeneration. Jesus says: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 7:21, CSB The parable of the soils describes different responses to the word. Mark 4:1-20 Some appear promising for a time but do not endure. This should produce sober examination. But it should not produce endless terror among believers who are genuinely trusting Christ. The New Testament gives both:

- warnings against false assurance, and promises intended to give real assurance. Jesus says: “My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.” John 10:27-28, CSB Biblical assurance is neither careless presumption nor constant panic. It rests primarily in Christ while taking His transforming work seriously.

40. DOES NEW BIRTH REMOVE HUMAN PERSONALITY?

No. God does not save people by erasing their humanity. Peter remains recognizably Peter. Paul remains recognizably Paul. John remains recognizably John. Their personalities, backgrounds, experiences, and gifts continue to matter. But sin no longer has the right to define those traits. Boldness can become courage rather than arrogance. Sensitivity can become compassion rather than fear. Leadership can become service rather than control. Intelligence can become worship rather than pride. New birth does not destroy personhood. It begins restoring people toward what humanity was created to be under God. The goal is not personality replacement. The goal is Christlikeness.

41. IS NEW BIRTH INDIVIDUAL OR PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER?

Modern Christians sometimes describe being born again almost entirely as an individual experience. The Bible certainly speaks personally. “You must be born again.” But the new birth belongs to something larger. Jesus announces the kingdom of God. The prophets promised covenant renewal. The Spirit creates a people. Believers become part of Christ’s body. God is ultimately renewing creation itself. Peter speaks of new birth into: “a living hope.” 1 Peter 1:3 Jesus uses the related Greek term *palingenesia* in Matthew 19:28 for the future “renewal of all things” in some translations. The individual believer’s new life is therefore a preview of

something enormous. God intends to make all things new. Revelation 21:5 Every new birth is a small sign pointing toward the coming renewal of creation under Christ.

42. THE TRINITY AND THE NEW BIRTH

New birth is not the isolated work of one Person of the Trinity. The Father purposes salvation. James says: "By his own choice, he gave us birth by the word of truth." James 1:18 The Son accomplishes salvation through His death and resurrection. Peter says God: "has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 1:3 The Holy Spirit applies life. Jesus says: "whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit." John 3:6 Christian salvation is thoroughly Trinitarian. The Father is not reluctant to save while Jesus persuades Him. The Son is not detached from the Father's purpose. The Spirit is not merely an impersonal force. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit act in perfect unity in the salvation of God's people.

43. WHY NEW BIRTH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR PRIDE

If salvation were primarily moral improvement, people could compare performance. If salvation were intellectual discovery, people could boast about insight. If salvation were religious achievement, people could boast about devotion. But new birth destroys boasting. A baby does not boast about causing birth. A dead person does not boast about resurrection. A heart of stone does not boast about replacing itself. Scripture intentionally uses pictures that emphasize grace. Paul writes: "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift-not from works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8-9, CSB The proper response to new birth is not spiritual superiority. It is gratitude. Humility. Worship. And compassion toward those who do not yet know Christ. Intermediate Memory Anchor New birth is God's gracious, life-giving work by the Holy Spirit, rooted in the new-covenant promises, accomplished through Jesus Christ, and resulting in genuine spiritual life. Christians differ over some questions concerning baptism and the logical relationship between regeneration and faith. But Scripture is unmistakably clear about the center: Human beings cannot manufacture spiritual life. God saves. The Spirit gives life. The gospel calls sinners to repent and believe. And those made alive begin walking in newness of life.

The Most Important Invitation

- The most important question raised by John 3 is not: Can the doctrine of regeneration be explained perfectly? It is the question Jesus places before every reader: Have you received the life only God can give? God created people to know Him. Humanity was created for relationship with God, worship, love, holiness, and life under His good rule. But sin entered the world. Every person has sinned. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23, CSB Sin separates humanity from God. And no amount of human effort can create spiritual life. Good works cannot do it. Religion cannot do it. Church attendance cannot do it. Christian parents cannot do it. Bible knowledge cannot do it. Generosity cannot do it. Moral improvement cannot do it. A religious experience cannot do it. Jesus told Nicodemus: "You must be born again." But the same Jesus who announced the necessity of new birth also explained how deeply God loves sinners. "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16, CSB And the very next chapter shows Jesus offering living water to someone whose life looked completely different from Nicodemus's. The religious insider needs Him. The obvious outsider needs Him. Everyone needs Him. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He lived without sin. He willingly died on the cross for sinners. He bore sin and judgment. He was buried. And He bodily rose from the dead. Jesus is alive. Salvation and reconciliation with God are gifts of grace. The biblical response is repentance and faith. Repentance turns from sin toward God. Faith trusts Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Do not wait until life is cleaned up. Do not wait until every question disappears. Do not try to manufacture the new birth. Come to Jesus. Anyone may speak honestly to Him. A prayer might sound like this:
 - Jesus, I know that I have sinned and cannot give myself the spiritual life I need. I cannot save myself. I believe You are the Son of God. I believe You died for sinners and rose from the dead. I turn from my sin toward You. I trust You as Savior and Lord. Forgive me. Give me the new life only You can give. Fill me with Your Spirit. Teach me to know You, love You, and follow You. Amen. The words themselves do not save. Prayer is not a formula. Jesus saves. Trust Him. Anyone beginning to follow Jesus should begin reading Scripture.

The Gospel of John is an excellent place to begin. Pray honestly. Connect with a faithful, Bible-teaching local church. Speak with mature believers. Pursue baptism in obedience to Jesus. And begin learning what it means to walk in the life God gives.



One Faithful Summary

Nicodemus had religion. Education. Scripture knowledge. Respect. Position. And interest in Jesus. Yet Jesus told him: “You must be born again.” Then John introduces a Samaritan woman whose life looks almost completely different. Different gender. Different background. Different religious community. Different reputation. Different circumstances. Yet she also needs the life Jesus gives. Nicodemus is told about birth from above. The woman is offered living water. Together their stories reveal something important. No religious achievement removes the need for grace. And no broken past puts someone beyond the reach of Jesus. Humanity’s need is universal. People do not merely need better behavior. They need new life. Sin has left humanity unable to repair its relationship with God through personal effort. But God promised something remarkable. Through Ezekiel: cleansing. a new heart. a new spirit. His Spirit within His people. Through Jeremiah: a new covenant. forgiveness. God’s instruction written upon the heart. Jesus announces that these promises are becoming reality. To enter the kingdom of God, people must be born of water and the Spirit. They must receive life from above. The Holy Spirit gives this life. Jesus compares His work to wind. The wind itself cannot be seen. Its effects can. In the same way, regeneration is an invisible work of God that eventually produces visible effects. New desires. New allegiance. A changed relationship with sin. Love for Christ. Repentance. Faith. Spiritual fruit. A desire for obedience. New birth does not create instant perfection. Christians still sin. Still struggle. Still doubt. Still need correction. Still need grace. Some fail seriously. When they do, grace does not make sin harmless. The Christian response is confession, repentance, accountability, and return to Christ. Assurance should not depend upon perfect emotions or a perfect conversion memory. It looks first toward Jesus. Then it recognizes the Spirit’s work over time. Baptism also matters. Jesus commanded it.

The early church practiced it. Christians differ over its exact relationship to regeneration, but no faithful approach should treat it casually or turn it into a human achievement that earns salvation. Those who trust Christ should desire to follow Him. Christians also disagree about some deeper theological details. How exactly should “water and Spirit” be understood? What is the precise relationship between baptism and regeneration? Does regeneration logically precede faith, or does grace enable faith through which regeneration is received? Faithful Christians have answered these questions differently. Those disagreements matter and deserve careful study. But they should never obscure the center. God gives life. Jesus saves. The Spirit renews. The gospel calls sinners to repent and believe. And those who are born from above begin walking in newness of life. Being born again is not becoming more religious. It is not adopting a Christian label. It is not producing enough emotion. It is not turning over a new leaf. It is not repairing the old life until God finally approves. It is receiving life that comes from God. And because that life comes from God, the proper response is not pride. It is gratitude. Worship. Dependence. Obedience. And wonder. “You must be born again.”

Continue Studying

Read these passages slowly: Genesis 2:4-9 Deuteronomy 30:1-10 Psalm 51 Jeremiah 31:31-34 Ezekiel 11:14-21 Ezekiel 36:22-32 Ezekiel 37:1-14 John 1:1-18 John 2:23-3:21 John 4:1-42 John 5:19-29 John 6:35-51 John 10:22-30 John 14:15-27 John 20:24-31 Romans 6 Romans 8 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 Galatians 5:13-26 Ephesians 2:1-10 Ephesians 4:17-32 Colossians 3:1-17 Titus 3:3-8 James 1:16-27 1 Peter 1:3-25 1 John 1:5-2:6 1 John 2:28-3:10 1 John 4:7-21 1 John 5:1-13 Revelation 21:1-7

A Simple Study Method

As these passages are read, use four headings: The Human Condition What does this passage reveal about humanity apart from God? God’S Action What does God promise, accomplish, give, cleanse, renew, or make alive? The Human Response What does the passage call people to believe, repent of, receive, obey, or trust? The Result Of New Life What changes when God gives life? Then ask: Does this passage explicitly teach new birth? Does it describe a related aspect of salvation? Or is it simply using similar imagery? That final question helps prevent every reference to life, water, birth, breath, or renewal from automatically being turned into a direct statement about regeneration.



Final Memory Anchor

“You must be born again.” Jesus did not say humanity merely needs more religion. He said new life is necessary. Nicodemus needed it. The Samaritan woman needed it. Every person needs it. God promised cleansing. God promised a new heart. God promised His Spirit. Jesus died and rose again. The Holy Spirit gives life.

Those who trust Christ become new creations and begin walking in a new direction. New birth is not self-improvement. It is not human achievement. It is not spiritual pride. It is grace. Life from above. Given by God. Through Christ. By the Spirit. And the life God gives is meant to increasingly look like Jesus.

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