

14 – BORN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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

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

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

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

THE NEED TO BE BORN FROM ABOVE

1. What position did Nicodemus have? John 3:1, 10

2. When did Nicodemus come to meet with Jesus? John 3:1

Nicodemus was a “ruler of the Jews” and “the teacher of Israel.” He was highly respected. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme judicial and administrative council of the Jews (Matthew 26:3,47-59). As a Pharisee, he took the scriptures seriously, as opposed to the Sadducees, who said “there is no resurrection” Matthew 22:23.

Like many others (John 2:23-25), Nicodemus believed in Jesus because of the signs He did. However, he wasn't ready to publicly profess his conviction, so he met Jesus at night.

By referring to Jesus as a teacher from God, Nicodemus must have thought he was affirming Him. He revealed his desire to have a theological discussion with a colleague, another teacher. In reality, by *not* referring to Jesus as the Messiah, Nicodemus revealed his belief in Jesus was limited. Jesus recognized Nicodemus needed a Savior from sin more than an intellectual discussion.

3. What do we need to experience if we are going to “see the kingdom of God?” John 3:3,7

The Greek word translated “again” is *anōthen*. It means “from above.” (Strong's Conc.) This is how it is translated in John 3:31 and 19:11.

4. What choice enables us to be born from above? John 1:11-13

5. What kind of birth did Nicodemus ask Jesus about? John 3:4

Nicodemus was surprised. He asked a question about being reborn physically, knowing this was impossible. But he must have wondered, “Why do I need to be born from above? I am a teacher of Israel. God has already chosen Israel as His special people (Exodus 19:5,6). I am already part of the Kingdom of God, aren't I?”

6. In John 3:5-8, how did Jesus clarify His message to Nicodemus?

A. What is associated with being born of the Spirit? (5)

B. How did Jesus describe the two kinds of births He referred to? (6,8)

Born of the _____

Born of the _____

Jesus refers to two kinds of birth, not three. Being “born of water” is associated with being “born of the Spirit” because it is a tangible way to communicate we have repented.

7. Who are the ones that Jesus calls to repentance? Luke 5:31,32

Those who are sick need a physician. Jesus invites us to come to Him just as we are to receive the healing that we need (Psalm 103).

8. What were people to do before they were baptized? Luke 3:7,8

John wanted people to bear fruits that were consistent with repentance before they were baptized. When people asked what they were to do, John gave them some examples (Luke 3:10-14):

- Share with others in need;
- Do not abuse people or take advantage of them;
- Do not falsely accuse others;
- Be content with what you have.

In other words, they were to confess their failure in these and other areas and repent by choosing God’s will for their lives. “Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to [John] and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins” Mark 1:5.

Baptism in water is a symbol that we have repented. Unfortunately, many people have been baptized in water for the wrong reason. Some have been “baptized” as infants by the choice of their parents. There was no opportunity for them to repent. Others have been baptized because they thought the act itself was required in order to go to heaven. This would have been an attempt to earn their way to heaven.

Baptism without repentance appeals to our human nature, for we like to maintain control of our own lives. However, this will lead to “having a form of godliness” without the presence and power of God (2 Tim. 3:5).

Baptism without repentance will create the same kind of experience the Jews had when they looked to “circumcision” to make them acceptable to God. The true meaning of circumcision was lost. The history and meaning of circumcision can help us understand the proper role of water baptism and other symbols in the Christian life.

THE HISTORY OF CIRCUMCISION

Abram, age 75 – Abram received a promise from God in Genesis 12:1-4:

“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”

Abram, age 85 – Abram and Sarai were still childless.

“Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing *children*. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.’ And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in . . . Canaan. So he went in to Hagar and she conceived” Gen. 16:2-4.

Abram and Sarai doubted that God could fulfill His promise to give them a child. Sarai felt she needed to help God out. Instead of trusting in God, Abram listened to his wife and had a son named Ishmael.

Abraham, age 99 – God communicated the following:

1. Every male child in the household must be circumcised (17:9-14).
2. Their names would be changed to Abraham and Sarah (17:5,15). Abraham means father of a multitude. Sarah means princess or woman of nobility. Kings would come from her.
3. Abraham would have a child through Sarah. His name would be called Isaac and the everlasting covenant would be fulfilled through him, rather than through Ishmael (17:16-21).

Abraham's willingness to have a child through Hagar revealed his lack of faith. Circumcision was to be a tangible reminder to Abraham and all his descendants of their need to trust God, rather than themselves.

God chose to wait to give Abraham and Sarah a son until it was humanly impossible for them to have a child on their own (Gen. 18:11). Isaac was a miracle from God. The symbol of circumcision was able to remind the descendants of Isaac that they were alive physically because of the miracle of God. It would also be an illustration of the spiritual circumcision God desired to perform on their hearts.

Deuteronomy 10:16 – “Circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.”

Deuteronomy 30:6 – “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

Jeremiah 9:26 – “. . . all *these* nations *are* uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel *are* uncircumcised in the heart.”

Romans 2:28,29 – “For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.”

Galatians 6:15 – “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

Unfortunately, the Jews misunderstood the symbol of circumcision. They began to believe the act of circumcision made them acceptable to God. This led them to see themselves as better than everyone else.

Just before Stephen was stoned to death, he pointed out the hypocrisy of those who rejected Jesus. “*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they

killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers” Acts 7:51-53.

It took the supernatural providence of God to help Jewish Christians accept Gentiles as people whom God loved and redeemed. Immediately after receiving a vision from heaven, Peter received an invitation to go to the home of a Gentile. When he arrived, he shared the lesson he was learning. “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” Acts 10:28.

Since circumcision had been so badly misunderstood, God inspired Paul to bring an end to the division created by circumcision. “Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters*” 1 Corinthians 7:18,19.

Those who follow Jesus today need to remember that water baptism is an outward symbol that communicates a person has already repented and chosen to surrender their life to Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

If water baptism is “required” before a person can be accepted by God, then the gospel would be perverted. This perversion would make it easy for people to add other requirements to a list to earn God’s acceptance.

Jesus’ perfect life and death is what makes us holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 10:10) Our growing into maturity leads us to hate sin, love righteousness, and enjoy being with God and serving Him.

NICODEMUS RECEIVES TIME AND EVIDENCE

9. How did Nicodemus respond to the truth Jesus shared? John 3:9

Nicodemus appears to be totally bewildered. What Jesus was saying was so different and new. It didn’t fit into his system of beliefs. We have the

same problem. When the Bible presents ideas that contradict what we believe, we are faced with a decision. Will we believe the truth and surrender to God's will or hold onto what is familiar to us?

God is anxious to share truth as fast as we are willing to receive it. He wants us to be transformed and experience the abundant life. When we abide in His truth, we will experience freedom from fear, guilt, shame, and slavery to sin (John 8:31-36; 10:10; 16:12,13; Rom. 12:2; 1 Jn 5:18).

10. What prophecy did Jesus give that helped Nicodemus choose to follow Him later on? John 3:14-16; 19:39

Jesus used an Old Testament story to illustrate His mission to save the world. A bronze serpent was lifted up on a pole to save those who were bitten by a snake (Num. 21:4-9; Deut. 8:15). Those who looked on the bronze serpent were healed. This illustrated the truth that Jesus would be made "sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" 2 Corinthians 5:21. Those who believe in Him will live.

Jesus said He would be "lifted up." At the time, this phrase referred to being crucified (John 12:32,33). This prophecy seemed unbelievable to Nicodemus. He taught "the Christ remains forever" (John 12:34; 3:10).

Nicodemus was expecting the Messiah to deliver the Jews from the Roman Empire, not to save the world from sin. He observed Jesus' life and listened to what He said (John 7:50, 51). After Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus believed in Him and helped with his burial (John 19:38-42).

Everyone is given "light" and evidence of truth (John 1:9; Rom. 1:20). God is very patient, forgiving, and compassionate as He draws us to Himself (John 12:32). However, putting off making a decision for selfish reasons can harden our hearts. Any time we are willing to resist the Holy Spirit and violate our conscience, we become less sensitive.

Our conscience begins to be “seared with a hot iron” 1 Timothy 4:2. The more we do this, the less offensive sin will appear in our own eyes.

11. How can our conscience become sensitive again? Ezekiel 36:26,27

Fortunately, when we are born of the Spirit, God is able to give us a new heart that is sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We can then learn to recognize Jesus’ voice and follow Him (John 10:11, 27).

12. What right is given to those who receive Jesus? John 1:12,13

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

Those who receive Jesus as their Savior can live with the assurance that they are the children of God (1 John 3:1). They can also experience freedom from slavery to sin and the power to live for the glory of God.

BLESSINGS AND PROMISES

13. What blessings does a person experience as a Christian?

- A. John 10:10 “I have come that they may have _____, and that they may have it more _____.”
- B. Revelation 21:1-5 “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

C. Matthew 6:33 “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things [food, clothing, and shelter] shall be added unto you. Therefore _____ about tomorrow.”

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

All who are born from above can experience security, belonging, and meaning in life. They become part of a new family. Jesus said, “Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother” Mark 3:35. While these blessings are wonderful, Jesus doesn’t gloss over the challenges. He assures us there will also be persecution in a world that is at war with His love and truth.

COUNTING THE COST: A CALL TO SURRENDER

14. What may be the result of following Jesus? Matthew 10:28, 34-39

A. “Do not fear those who _____, but cannot kill the soul.” (28)

B. “I did not come to bring peace but a_____.” (34)

C. “A man's _____ will be those of his own_____.” (36)

When the gospel is revealed, everyone must respond. When some accept Jesus as their Savior and others reject Him, there will be division.

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

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

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

15. Jesus says we are to “count the cost” before we make a decision to follow Him. What cost is involved? Luke 14:25-33

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

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

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

Jesus’ words are unmistakable. We are to forsake everything. We are to put Him above our family and even our own lives. If family members do not want us to follow Jesus, it may appear to them that we “hate” them if we choose to put Jesus first in our lives. In reality, Jesus will enable us to truly love them. However, they may not see it that way and may refuse to receive the love we have to give them.

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

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him _____, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to _____ his _____ will _____ it, but whoever loses his life for

My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he _____ the whole world, and is himself lost or destroyed?”

Jesus knows the only way to experience abundant and eternal life is through Him. The most loving thing He can do for us is to invite us to surrender and offer ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Any sin we refuse to surrender will spread like cancer and destroy us.

While Jesus asks for total surrender, He is not asking for perfect performance before we come to Him. He knows we cannot give it. We are to come Him just as we are and let Him save us from the wages of sin, the power of sin, and the evil effects of sin (See lesson 6).

We are to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow Jesus. A decision to follow Jesus yesterday or last year is important, but not sufficient for life today. Each day and in each situation, we are to have the attitude Jesus had when He said, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father” John 5:30. This led Him to pray, “Not my will, but Yours be done” Luke 22:42. As we surrender to God’s will and let the Holy Spirit lead us into all truth, we will grow in our ability to discern what is the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God” Romans 12:2.

17. How should we respond to abuse from others? Romans 12:17-21

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

- Cling to Jesus as our only hope for life now and forever.
- Share our testimony of what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do.
- Grow into maturity that we may love others as Jesus has loved us and trust God for our needs and for life itself.

WALKING AWAY FROM JESUS

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

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

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

19. What did many do when they learned the truth? John 6:66

In John 6:27-59 Jesus made it clear that His mission on earth was to save the world from sin. He wanted to give them eternal life, but they wanted physical food. They wanted to conquer the Romans, but Jesus came to give His life for the world (John 6:51). After this, "many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more" John 6:66.

If we follow Jesus out of selfish motives, we will be disappointed. He will not satisfy our sinful cravings and desires (1 John 2:15-17).

On the other hand, if we want Jesus to be a Savior from every aspect of the sin problem, we will experience what our hearts long for: a living relationship with God that is full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23).

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

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

SURRENDERING TO HIM WHO LOVES US MOST

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

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

“When Christ dwells in the heart, the soul will be so filled with His love, with the joy of communion with Him, that it will cleave to Him; and in the contemplation of Him, self will be forgotten. Love to Christ will be the spring of action. Those who feel the constraining love of God, do not ask how little may be given to meet the requirements of God; they do not ask for the lowest standard, but aim at perfect conformity to the will of their Redeemer. With earnest desire they yield all and manifest an interest proportionate to the value of the object which they seek. A profession of Christ without this deep love is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery.”

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

“But what do we give up, when we give all? A sin-polluted heart, for Jesus to purify, to cleanse by His own blood, and to save by His

matchless love. And yet men think it hard to give up all! I am ashamed to hear it spoken of, ashamed to write it.”

“God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. In all that He does, He has the well-being of His children in view. . . . Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by Him who knows what is best and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of transgression is the path of misery and destruction” Steps To Christ, 44-46.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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

(9) _____

(10) _____

(11) _____

Sin – The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, not to condemn or criticize us, but to help us realize our need for Jesus.

Righteousness –Jesus goes to the Father to represent us. His righteousness makes us acceptable to God. When Jesus was on the earth, He was their Teacher. Now the Holy Spirit is also able to lead us into all truth and through the Bible help us to discern what is right and wrong.

Judgment – Our natural tendency is to be attracted to sin and to be motivated by fear. Satan appeals to both of these tendencies to lead us away from God. The Holy Spirit convicts us that following Satan is a dead end. He also brings hope through the conviction that Satan, rebellion and evil is judged / condemned and will be brought to an end.

21. What will the Holy Spirit do for us when we are born again?

A. John 14:16,17 _____

B. John 14:26 _____

C. John 16:13,14 _____

BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

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

When we are born of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is abiding within us. When this happens there are two natures battling for control.

“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” Galatians 5:16,17.

It is possible to be born again, but still be dominated by the flesh. Paul described some of the Christians in Corinth as “carnal” or “babes in Christ” 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Carnal comes from the same Greek word that is translated flesh in Galatians. They hadn’t grown up into maturity. The “envy, strife, and divisions” among them convinced Paul that the flesh was still in control of their lives. (Lesson 16 will focus on this.)

23. As Christians, what are we to set our mind on? Romans 8:6,7

A Christian who fills their mind with the things of the world will eventually not want God in their lives (John 3:19,20). Those who fill their minds with the truth and promises from God’s perspective will want more and more of Him. The Holy Spirit will live in them and enable them to bring glory to God.

24. What does God want to baptize us with? Acts 1:5; Luke 11:13

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

When Jesus was on earth, the disciples could have been described as carnal Christians, for they were filled with envy, strife and divisions. They were so convinced the Messiah was going to overthrow Rome and set up an earthly kingdom, they didn't understand why Jesus was willing to be arrested and go to the cross. They "forsook Him and fled" Matthew 26:56. Their whole outlook on life was being torn apart.

After Jesus was resurrected, they were humble and teachable. They became unified and full of love for one another (Acts 1:14; 2:1; 4:32-37). They grew more in a few weeks than they had grown throughout their lifetime. Emptying themselves of pride and jealousy, they made room for the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. They were baptized with the Holy Spirit and empowered to share the gospel "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" Acts 1:8; 2:4.

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

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

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

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

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