

Part 2: We affirm the necessity of the new birth.

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“Have you been born again?” If you are anything like me, you may not like that question. Evangelicalism and being “born again” brings negative images to mind for many, even me. I’m not a fanatical “holy roller”. And yet...

I “roll” with holy (albeit imperfect) people.
I am fanatical about Jesus.
I am an evangelical.
I am born again.

Jesus says new birth is necessary for anyone who follows him. “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born again... no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:3,5).

Jesus speaks these words to Nicodemus, a Pharisee who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus was a bible-believing, bible-living man. Jesus refers to him as one of “Israel’s teachers.” And yet, it seems that he doesn’t have eyes to see the workings of God as they are playing out right in front of him, in the person of Jesus.

The hard thing about being born again (and seeing God’s kingdom) is recognizing the conditions of our “first-birth” life. It can be difficult to acknowledge that our lives keep us from living according to God’s will and way. Human beings are born self-centered. It is a survival mechanism. Our culture encourages us to build our own kingdoms. It’s security. Natural tendencies and evil powers work so closely to the core of our very selves that we have trouble seeing them.

But once we see how our first-birth lives keep us from having a right relationship with God who is the center of the universe and the one and only true King, we recognize that we need some help in getting our lives aligned with His. We need more than help. We need Him! And God gives us himself, most fully and clearly in the person of Jesus.

Jesus is God-Redeemer. Through God-Redeemer’s sacrificial death, God-Creator forgives us of our first-life faults. And through God-Redeemer’s resurrection, God-Creator introduces us to our new life with Him - a life that is characterized by love, joy, hope, justice and peace! In this, we are born again.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17, TNIV). Some point to a date where they were made new in Christ. Others experience a season

of transformation into their new life in Christ. Thankfully, as we read on in the Gospel of John, we discover that Nicodemus must have been reborn at some point. It is Nicodemus who provides a generous portion of embalming spices and assists Joseph of Arimathea in Jesus' burial (John 19:39-42).

No matter how new life in Christ begins one thing is the same for all. It never ends. I find myself being reborn in Christ every morning I wake, recommitting myself to God's will and God's ways. So the next time someone asks, "Are you born again?" I won't cringe. I'll nod and say, "Every moment of everyday."

Bible Study

Ephesians 4:1-32

The Apostle Paul writes a letter to the church in Ephesus, not to confront a heresy or problem, but to strengthen and encourage the churches in the area. Paul had spent over three years with the people in Ephesus. He had a close relationship with them. In Ephesians 4, Paul writes Instructions to them for mature Christian living, which includes unity in the church.

Questions:

1. Share your story of initial new birth. Was it on a particular day or over a period of years?
2. What "first-birth" life characteristics did you need to acknowledge before being reborn?
3. What 1-2 characteristics of mature Christian living is God calling you to develop? What are concrete ways you can live into new birth?
4. How are you being reborn, even today?