

The Miracle of Regeneration John 3:1-10

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

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

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

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”

The New King James Version. (1982). (Jn 3:1–10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

INTRODUCTION

If you go to the [Barna Group](#) online — it's an organization that specializes in religious research and statistics — you'll read things like this: "Born Again Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians." The same kind of statistics are given by Ron Sider in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* and by Mark Regnerus in his book *Forbidden Fruit: Sex and Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*.

American Church Not Unlike the World

What I am picking up on here is precisely the term "born again." The Barna Group in particular uses it in reporting their research. So that report is titled "*Born Again* Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians." Sider uses the word "evangelicals" but points out the same kind of thing: "Only 9 percent of evangelicals tithe. Of 12,000 teenagers who took the pledge to wait for marriage, 80% had sex outside marriage in the next 7 years. Twenty-six percent of traditional evangelicals do not think premarital sex is wrong. White evangelicals are more likely than Catholics and mainline Protestants to object to having black neighbors."

In other words, the evangelical church as a whole in America is apparently not very unlike the world. It goes to church on Sunday and has a veneer of religion, but its religion is basically an add-on to the same way of life the world lives, not a radically transforming power.

A Profound Mistake

Now I want to say loud and clear that when the Barna Group uses term "born again" to describe American church-goers whose lives are indistinguishable from the world, and who sin as much as the world, and sacrifice for others as little as the world, and embrace injustice as readily as the world, and covet things as greedily as

the world, and enjoy God-ignoring entertainment as enthusiastically as the world — when the term “born again” is used to describe these professing Christians, the Barna Group is making a profound mistake. It is using the biblical term “born again” in a way that would make it unrecognizable by Jesus and the biblical writers.

Here is the way the researchers defined “born again” in **their research**:

“Born again Christians” were defined in these surveys as people who said they have made “a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today” and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “born again.” Being classified as “born again” is not dependent upon church or denominational affiliation or involvement.

In other words, in this research the term “born again” refers to people who say things. They say, “I have a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. It’s important to me.” They say, “I believe that I will go to heaven when I die. I have confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior.” Then the Barna Group takes them at their word, ascribes to them the infinitely important reality of the new birth, and then blasphemes that precious biblical reality by saying that regenerate hearts have no more victory over sin than unregenerate hearts.

I’m not saying their research is wrong. It appears to be appallingly right. I am not saying that the church is not as worldly as they say it is. I am saying that the writers of the New Testament think in exactly the opposite direction about being born again. Instead of moving from a profession of faith, to the label “born again,” to the worldliness of these so-called born again people, to the conclusion that the new birth does not radically change people, the New Testament moves the other direction. It moves from the

absolute certainty that the new birth radically changes people, to the observation that many professing Christians are indeed (as the Barna Group says) not radically changed, to the conclusion that they are not born again. The New Testament, unlike the Barna Group, does not defile the new birth with the worldliness of unregenerate, professing American Christians.

For example, one of the main points of the first epistle of John is to drive home this very truth:

- **1 John 2:29:** “If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”
- **1 John 3:9:** “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”
- **1 John 4:7:** “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”
- **1 John 5:4:** “Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith.”
- **1 John 5:18:** “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”

john Piper
NOVEMBER 18, 2007
You Must Be Born Again
Why This Series and Where We Are Going

REVIEW

JOHN 2:23

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Jn 2:23–3:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

LESSON

I. THE SINNERS WORRY

II. THE SAVIORS WAY

III. THE SPIRITS WORK

I. THE SINNERS WORRY

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

Pharisee. (Separated)

Devout religious leader

In many ways, the Pharisees were the worst people in the world. They were cold and legalistic. At the same time, the Pharisees were the best people in the whole country. They were the holy men who kept the law; they pursued purity with a passion and wanted nothing more than to live lives that pleased God. They were sincere, albeit sincerely misguided.

There were never any more than six thousand Pharisees in the country. They were known as the “chaburah,” or “the brotherhood”. They entered into this brotherhood by taking a pledge, in front of three witnesses, that they would spend all their lives observing every detail of the scribal law.

Phil 3:4

If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Php 3:4–6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Pharisee

where part of a religious system that had reached the point of ridiculous external moral ritualism

1. Could not look in the mirror on sabbath, lest tempted to pluck out a grey hair
2. If you had a sore throat, you could not gargle with vinegar (that's work) all you could do is swallow

3. You could not eat an egg that was laid on the sabbath unless you had planned to kill the chicken that had laid the egg

4.

Well, work had to be defined; carrying burdens had to be defined. For example, one could,

- get milk enough for one swallow, and

- carry a spoon weighing no more than one fig.

It was the scribes and Pharisees who were embroiled over the discussion as to whether or not, on the Sabbath, a woman could wear a brooch, a mother could pick up her child, or a man could wear his wooden leg. These were burdens.

Now the Bible said we were to rest on the Sabbath – not work! Is that clear enough? No. Work had to be defined. For example, in this agrarian setting, i

was decided that tying a knot was work. However, a knot had to be defined. Listen to the definition.

The following are the knots the making of which renders a man guilty; the knot of camel drivers and that of sailors; and as one is guilty by reason of tying them, so also of untying them.

Furthermore,

A woman may tie up the strings of her cap and those of her girdle.

Now, suppose a man wanted to let down a bucket into a well to draw water on the Sabbath day. He could not tie a rope to the bucket, for a knot on a rope was illegal on the Sabbath. But, he could tie the bucket to his wife's girdle and then, tie a rope to the girdle and let it down into the well, because any knot associated with a girdle was legal. Thank goodness!

It was ridiculous, yet these were men who committed themselves to the incredible inconvenience of keeping thousands of regulations in order to please God! It was tragic, yet passionate.

The scribes had expounded and developed all of the written law into thousands of regulations. The Pharisees dedicated their lives to keeping them.

Here we are, enjoying grace and freedom – we know the truth! Yet, we have little passion to please God, and an even smaller desire to inconvenience ourselves. We silently sink into our contemporary culture, without causing a ripple of distinction.

Nickodemus

Since Nicodemus' (compound noun—*nike*, victory and *demos*, people or crowd) name means “conqueror of the populace
part of the 70 that make up the Sanhedrin.

He is of the elite. the highest you can go.

His part of a religious system that is bankrupt and he knows it.
He is able to see enough in his heart that he knows that he is not able to do what God requires. (perfection)

v10Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?

he is the teacher

2. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him,

Volumes have been written about this.
All it means is that he did not come at daytime
it has no reflection on the darkness of his heart.

Scientific explanation of why Nicodemus came to Jesus by night.

In a website with the address "make me genius"

We have day and nights on earth because of the Earth's rotation on its axis. Axis is an imaginary line passing through North and South poles of the earth. The Earth takes 24 hours to complete one rotation around its axis. Half the time i.e. for 12 hours one side of the Earth is facing the Sun, in this side there is Day whereas on the other side there is night.

When we look up in the sky during different times of the day, we see that the sun is moving from one direction to the other. It rises in the East in the morning and sets in the west. In reality, the sun is not moving, it is our earth that is rotating around the sun, this rotation causes day and night as explained above.

2. "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

He believed that Jesus

1. Was a Rabbi
2. From God
3. The the signs were legitimate

Good start but not enough.

II.THE SAVIORS WAY

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

verily verily (amen amen) truly truly 25 times in John

unless one is born again,

again

to be conceived from above v. — to be or become refashioned by a supernatural source; understood as undergoing conception by a heavenly (paternal) source.

But **Jesus** was not on the same level with Nicodemus. He is “from above” (*anōthen*; v. 31); therefore Nicodemus must be born “from above” (v. 3, niv marg.; *anōthen*). To be **born again** or born “from above” (*anōthen* has both meanings; e.g., “from above” in 19:11 and “again” in Gal. 4:9) is to have a spiritual transformation which takes a person out of the kingdom of darkness into **the kingdom of God** (cf. Col. 1:13). The kingdom is the sphere or realm of God’s authority and blessing which is now invisible but will be manifested on earth (Matt. 6:10).

Blum, E. A. (1985). John. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 281). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

In Jn. 3:3, 7, the story of Jesus and Nicodemus, the important question is whether GK. *ánōthen* here means “again” or “from above.” While the English versions take it in the former sense, the other is possible, and not without support. Indeed, elsewhere in John *ánōthen* clearly means “from above” (3:31; 19:11, 23). Büchsel (TDNT, I, s.v.) argues strongly for this meaning, pointing out that John “always describes birth in terms of its origin, i.e., of God (1:13; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:18), of the Spirit or flesh (3:6), of water and the Spirit (3:5).” In making his case he appeals also to a possible underlying Hebrew or Aramaic (on this see SB, II, 420f), to ecclesiastical tradition, to a connection with Job 3:4, and to the psychology of the story.

DeHoog, J. W. (1979–1988). Anew. In G. W. Bromiley (Ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Vol. 1, p. 123). Wm. B. Eerdmans.

unless one is born again,

Jn 1:13

who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

The New King James Version. (1982). (**Jn 1:13**). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Gal 6:15

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

The New King James Version. (1982). **(Ga 6:15)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins

The New King James Version. (1982). **(Eph 2:1)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit

The New King James Version. (1982). **(Tt 3:5)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth

The New King James Version. (1982). **(Jas 1:18)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

The New King James Version. (1982). **(1 Pe 1:3)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

The New King James Version. (1982). **(1 Pe 1:22–23)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

He must be born before he can see, (believe, understand, comprehend)

Ordo salutis, (Latin: "**order of salvation**") refers to a series of conceptual steps within the Christian doctrine of **salvation**. It has been defined as "a technical term of Protestant dogmatics to designate the consecutive steps in the work of the Holy Spirit in the appropriation of **salvation**."

Regeneration precedes faith.

dead men cant believe;
blind men cant see
deaf men cant hear

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

The New King James Version. (1982). (**Jn 1:5–6**). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
Lest they should see with their eyes,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them

The New King James Version. (1982). (**Jn 12:39–40**). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day

The New King James Version. (1982). (**Dt 29:4**). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

(Je 5:21–23)

‘Hear this now, O foolish people,
Without understanding,
Who have eyes and see not,

And who have ears and hear not:
 Do you not fear Me?’ says the Lord.
 ‘Will you not tremble at My presence,
 Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea,
 By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it?
 And though its waves toss to and fro,
 Yet they cannot prevail;
 Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.
 But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart;

The New King James Version. (1982). **(Je 5:21–23)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
 And seeing you will see and not perceive;
 For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
 Their ears are hard of hearing,
 And their eyes they have closed,
 Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
 Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
 So that I should heal them.’

The New King James Version. (1982). **(Mt 13:11–15)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

The New King James Version. (1982). (**Mt 16:17–18**). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

The New King James Version. (1982). (**2 Co 4:3–5**). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

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

The New King James Version. (1982). (**1 Co 2:14**). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil

The New King James Version. (1982). (**Jn 8:43–44**). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The New King James Version. (1982). (**Ro 8:7–8**). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

A PASSIVE SINNER

Jesus answered and said to him: Truly truly I am telling you, unless one may be born from above, he is not able to understand the kingdom of God. —John 3:3 (translation)

In the study of the total spiritual inability of the unregenerate, one cannot ignore the passivity of those who are not born of God. The passive voice of the Greek verb *gennaō* (may be born) in John 3:3 represents the subject as the recipient of the action, signifying that the subject is being acted upon. If the subject were a participant in regeneration, it would be in the middle voice. Furthermore, if the subject could regenerate himself,

the action would be in the active voice. Anytime man is associated with the active or middle voice used with *sodzo* or *gennaō*, there is no connection with one's being made spiritually alive. This brings us to the importance of Christ's first statement to Nicodemus in John 3:3.

Jesus Christ gave no instruction to Nicodemus concerning how he could be born of God. But how many times have we heard preachers and others tell people how they can be born again? They are doing something the Savior Himself never did throughout His personal ministry. Although Christ used the imperative (command) when He said, "repent" (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15) and "believe" (Mark 1:15; 5:36), He never commanded anyone to be born from above, be regenerated, or be quickened. Distinction must be made between the new birth and faith. Christ's first statement to Nicodemus was, "Truly truly I am telling you, unless one may be born [*gennethe*, aorist passive subjunctive of *gennaō*, to be born] from above, he is not able [present passive indicative of *dunamai*, is able, negated by the adverb *ou*] to understand [*idein*, aorist active infinitive of *horaō*, to see, observe, or understand] the kingdom of God" (John 3:3—translation). The subjunctive mood of the verb *gennaō* is in the passive voice. The definition of the passive voice should be considered from two points of view: (1) The subject of the verb is inactive, and (2) the subject is acted upon by someone else. The following is a list of the verses where the passive voice of the verb *gennaō* is used:

1. John 1:13— "Who not out of bloods nor out of the will of the flesh nor out of the will of man but out of God were born [*egennethesan*, aorist passive indicative]" (translation).
2. John 3:3— "...Truly truly I am telling you, unless one may be born [*gennethe*, aorist passive subjunctive]..." (translation).
3. John 3:5— This is the same as verse 3.
4. John 3:6— "That which has been born [*gegennemenon*, perfect passive participle] out of the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born [*gegennemenon*, perfect passive participle] out of the Spirit is spirit" (translation).

5. John 3:7— "Do not wonder because I said to you: It is necessary for all of you to be born [*gennethenai*, aorist passive infinitive] from above" (translation).

6. John 3:8— "The Spirit is breathing where He desires, and you are hearing His voice, but you have not understood where He is coming from and where He is going; thus is everyone who has been born [*gegennemenos*, perfect passive participle nominative masculine singular] out of the Spirit" (translation).

7. I John 2:29— "If you may know absolutely that He is righteous, you know also that everyone doing righteousness has been born [*gegennetai*, perfect passive indicative] out of Him" (translation).

8. I John 3:9— "Everyone who has been born [*gegennemenos*, perfect passive participle nominative masculine singular] out of God does not practice sin, because his seed is remaining in him; and he is not able to be sinning, because he has been born [*gegennetai*, perfect passive indicative] out of God" (translation).

9. I John 5:1— "Everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ has been born [*gegennetai*, perfect passive indicative] out of God, and everyone loving the One who gave birth is loving the one who has been born [*gegennemenon*, perfect passive participle accusative masculine singular] out of God" (translation).

10. I John 5:4— "...because everything that has been born [*gegennemenon*, perfect passive participle nominative neuter singular] out of God is overcoming the world; and this is the victory overcoming the world, our faith" (translation).

11. I John 5:18— "We have known [perfect active indicative of *oida*] that everyone who has been born [*gegennemenos*, perfect passive participle nominative masculine singular] out of God does not practice sin, but the one having been born [*gennetheis*, aorist passive participle] out of God is guarding himself, and the wicked one cannot harm him" (translation). This list of Scriptures proves that regeneration (born out of God) is the exclusive work of the sovereign God upon the passive sinner. To deny that the sinner is completely passive to spiritual things is to deny depravity.

**THE BORN-AGAIN PHENOMENON
(A COVER-UP FOR HERESY)**

by

W. E. Best Copyright © 1992

III. THE SPIRITS WORK