

Staff Work

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On Being Born Again

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On Being Born Again

Abstract

"This rebirth, then, is wholly a work of grace. Of God's action. We are sinners, but now the work and righteousness of Christ has been given to us, and our lives have been changed."

Posting about what it means to be born again from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/on-being-born-again/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

On Being Born Again

 [inallthings.org /on-being-born-again/](https://allthings.org/on-being-born-again/)

Robert Lancaster

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 121](#)

[Genesis 12:1-4a](#)

[John 3:1-17](#)

[Romans 4:1-5, 13-17](#)

The Gospel of John starts off with a bang. We first find Jesus turning water into wine. Then we see him driving the merchants out of the temple while promising to destroy the temple and raise it up again in three days. Needless to say, this would have upset the religious authorities. So if one of those authorities wanted to go see Jesus, it would not be a good idea for him to walk up to him during the daytime. Thus, when Nicodemus decides he wants to go talk to Jesus, it makes sense for him to go under the cover of night. Nicodemus was a Pharisee of Pharisees—a ruler of the Jews. He was expected to be opposed to this trouble maker from Nazareth. But now that Jesus is on the scene, Nicodemus is curious. Jesus often has that effect on people.

We pick up the story with Nicodemus approaching Jesus. It's late—Jesus may even be drifting off to sleep...when suddenly he hears the approach of footsteps. “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.” This seems like a great confession. So Jesus's response feels a little shocking—if not rude. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In Greek, the phrase “born again” can also mean “born from above,” but Nicodemus takes Jesus literally; so the next question is natural—“How can someone enter again into his mother's womb and be born again?” But the more Jesus says, the more he confuses Nicodemus.

Born again...

Water and Spirit...

Flesh and Spirit...

The wind blowing where it will...

It is not terribly hard to sympathize with the confusion of Nicodemus.

So what is Jesus saying? “Unless one of born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” That is, born twice. To be one “born of water” has the meaning of fleshly birth, of actually being born. And being one born “of the Spirit” is being born again, of being renewed in our inward soul by the Spirit of God—and having our life transformed so that the fruits of the Spirit become evident. Though we must be born of the flesh, it is our birth through the Spirit by which we receive meaning, and by which we are defined.

How then are we defined? By the love of the Son of God.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” These two verses present the great truth of life—and in many ways encapsulate the heart of the Gospel message. This might sound too good to be true—that no matter what we have done in our life, if we look upon Christ, then we will be saved. As Soren Kierkegaard once wrote, “God be praised that it is not because of my worthiness that God loves me. Otherwise I might at any moment die of fear lest the next moment I cease to be worthy.”

This rebirth, then, is wholly a work of grace. Of God's action. We are sinners, but now the work and righteousness of Christ has been given to us, and our lives have been changed. We no longer primarily desire to sin—we no longer want to repeatedly turn to worthless things. Instead, we have been changed deeply by Jesus, and every day we are being made more and more like him through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what it means to be born of the Spirit. We now live our life in the presence (and the power) of God. In an age like ours, this is good news. This is the Gospel. This is what we remember throughout Lent—and what we prepare to celebrate during the Easter season.