

EVANGELISM FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

I. The Defamation of the Term *Born Again*¹

- A. The Barna Group claim: “Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as Are Non-Christians” (see also Ron Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?*)

“I want to say loud and clear that when the Barna Group uses the 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 term born again in a way that would make it unrecognizable by Jesus and the biblical writers.” - Piper, *Finally Alive*, 13.

- I. Barna’s Definition of *Born Again*: “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.’”
- B. Barna Group View: Profession of faith → label *born again* → worldliness of *born again* people → Conclusion: the new birth does not radically change people.
- C. The OPPOSITE New Testament View: Absolute certainty that the new birth changes people → many professing Christians (as Barna says) are not radically changed → Conclusion: They are not really *born again*.

“[I]nstead of following the Barna Group, the Bible says that the research is not finding that born again people are permeated with worldliness; the research is finding that the church is permeated by people who are not born again.” - Piper, 15.

II. The Shocking Necessity of the New Birth

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² 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." ³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."⁴ 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?"⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? (John 3:1-10)

- A. What does “cannot see the kingdom of God” (v. 3) mean?
- B. Why is the Bible’s teaching about the new birth unsettling to us? Who is responsible?
- C. What does the new birth say about God? Why is this potentially unsettling?

III. WHAT is the New Birth?

- A. The new birth involves getting new life.
- I. What does it mean to be born of “water and the Spirit”? (Hint: this will prove we get new life at the new birth)

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezek 36:24-28)

¹ Much of this material is taken from John Piper, *Finally Alive*, Christian Focus, 2009.

- B. The new birth involves experiencing the supernatural, not just observing it.
 C. The new birth involves getting connected to the spiritual life offered in Jesus.

On the one hand: *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all."* (John 6:63)

On the other hand: *"And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."* (1 John 5:11-12)

Conclusion (so far): New birth occurs when the Holy Spirit imparts new life to us by uniting us to Christ.

"The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself." - Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1

- D. The new birth is experienced "on our side" with the exercising of faith: *"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith."* (1 John 5:4)

"Your act of believing and God's act of begetting are simultaneous. He does the begetting and you do the believing at the same instant. And—this is very important—his doing is the decisive cause of your doing. His begetting is the decisive cause of your believing." - Piper, *Finally Alive*, 102.

Conclusion (so far): New birth occurs when the Spirit unites us to Christ, replacing our hard hearts with a cleansed heart (symbolized by water) that treasures Him above all, experienced by us when we believe in Him by faith.

IV. WHY is the New Birth Necessary?

- A. Apart from new birth in Christ:

- we are dead in sin (Eph 2:1-2)
- we are children of wrath (Eph 2:3)
- we love darkness (Jn 3:19)
- our hearts are hard (Ezek 26:26)
- we can't submit to God (Rom 8:7)
- we refuse the Gospel (Eph 4:18)
- we are slaves to sin (Rom 6:17)
- we are slave to Satan (Eph 2:1-2)
- Nothing good is in us (Rom 7:18)

V. HOW is the New Birth Accomplished?

- A. The incarnate Christ ransomed us by His death: *"...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ"* (1 Pet 1:18-19)
- B. The incarnate Christ was raised from the dead: *"According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."* (1 Pet 1:3)
- C. God calls us to life by the power of the His own Word: *"...you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... And this word is the good news that was preached to you."* (1 Pet 1:23, 25)

VI. What is the New Birth FOR?

- A. To highlight the mercy and goodness of God: *"...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit"* (Titus 3:5)
- B. To prepare us today for the cosmic renewal to come: *"Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world ("in the regeneration"), when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" (Matt 19:28)*
- C. To declare to others the means (Word of God) that saved us: *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* (1 Pet 2:9)