

LOVING THE BRIDE OF CHRIST: What is a Healthy Church Member?

Mark #4 – Genuinely Converted

I. Introduction: “Are You Born Again?”

II. Passing in the Night...

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)

1. What do you think was on Nicodemus' mind as he came to Jesus "by night" (v. 2)? How did Jesus respond to Nicodemus' sense of self-sufficiency?
2. What did Jesus say is needed? How is this spiritual event like a birth? How is this spiritual event like "the wind" (v. 8)?

"The concept [of regeneration] is of God renovating the heart, the core of a person's being, by implanting a new principle of desire, purpose, and action, a dispositional dynamic that finds expression in positive response to the gospel and its Christ." - J. I. Packer, Concise Theology, 157.

3. What, according to v. 3, will happen (or not happen, rather) if one is not "born again"? What does this mean? Does it apply to us as it did to Nicodemus?

We Are Spiritually Dead:

"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor 2:14)

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world..." (Eph 2:1-2)

Cole: I see dead people.

Malcolm: In your dreams? [Cole shakes head no] While you're awake? [Cole nods] Dead people like, in graves? In coffins?

Cole: Walking around like regular people. They don't see each other. They only see what they want to see. They don't know they're dead.

Malcolm: How often do you see them?

Cole: All the time. They're everywhere.

We Love Darkness More Than Light:

"...the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

4. Full circle: What, therefore, is needed if we are to "see" the kingdom of God?
5. How does a healthy understanding of regeneration keep us from envying the "spiritual biography" of another?

III. Other Biblical Pictures of Regeneration

A. Creation

“...what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor 4:5-6)

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Cor 5:17)

B. Resurrection

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! 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, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:3-5)

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved...” (Eph 2:4-5)

In both of these pictures, are we the actors or the recipients?

IV. “But how can these things be”?: God’s Sovereignty and Our Responsibility in Salvation

All those whom God has predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace. (Westminster Confession of Faith 10.1)

A. Two Kinds of Calls

1. External Call – External, General, Universal

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt 11:28)

2. Internal Call – Internal, Specific, and Effectual

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Cor 1:9)

“...you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ...called to be saints...” (Rom 1:6-7)

“If men heed no more than the outward call, they become members of the visible church. If the inward call is heard in our hearts, we become members of the invisible church. The first call unites us merely to a group of professing members; but the inward call unites us to Christ himself, and to all that have been born again. The outward call may bring with it a certain intellectual knowledge of the truth; the inward call brings us the faith of the heart. The hope which anchors us forever to Christ and the love which must ever draw us back to him who first loved us. The one can end in formalism, the other in true life. The outward call may curb the tendencies of the old nature and keep a soul in outward morality; the inward call will cure the plague that is in us and bring us on to triumph in Christ.”

-Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse