

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

I. [John 3:1-8](#) [Ephesians 2:1-5](#) [1 Peter 1:20-25](#)

A. [John 3:1-8](#) (ESV) Jesus says we must be born again: **1** 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."

B. What John is talking about when he uses the term *born again, born of God, born from above, born of the Spirit*, is regeneration. As the Bible says, we were conceived in sin. We were not born basically good, we were born dead in our trespasses and sins; totally depraved, as the Reformers put it. God's wrath was not only aimed at us, we were facing His judgment unto eternal damnation. Here's the bad news/good news found in [Ephesians 2:1-5](#) (AMP) **1 And you [He made alive when you] were [spiritually] dead and separated from Him because of your transgressions and sins, **2** in which you once walked. You were following the ways of this world [influenced by this present age], in accordance with the prince of the power of the air (Satan), the spirit who is now at work in the disobedient [the unbelieving, who fight against the purposes of God]. **3** Among these [unbelievers] we all once lived in the passions of our flesh [our behavior governed by the sinful self], indulging the desires of human nature [without the Holy Spirit] and [the impulses] of the [sinful] mind. We were, by nature, children [under the sentence] of [God's] wrath, just like the rest [of mankind]. **4** But God, being [so very] rich in mercy, because of His great and wonderful love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were [spiritually] dead and separated from Him because of our sins, He made us [spiritually] alive together with Christ (for by His grace—His undeserved favor and mercy—you have been saved from God's judgment). (So my most fervent prayer is that you own these words I just read!)**

C. This coming Wednesday, July 11, 2018, will be my 50th Birthday in Christ. That was the Day God apprehended me, opened my heart to respond to Him, raised me from death to life, transferred me from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of His beloved Son—the Day He regenerated me—caused me to be born in the Spirit.

Let me tell you the story of how all that went down...

On July 11, 1968, I was a 12 year old camper at Camp Otterbein, outside Logan, Ohio. It was a Thursday evening. That meant there would be a consecration service. Testimonies would be shared, the Gospel would be preached, and calls to repent and believe in Jesus Christ would come. I loved everything about church camp, but that.

My mom and dad divorced when I was about a year old. At about the age of five, my Mom came to Christ. From that point on we went to church. Sunday School and Bible School and Sunday sermons became regular parts of my life. As I moved towards adolescence, Mom began to share with me that just because she was a Christian, didn't make me one. There would be no getting into the Kingdom clinging to her skirt tales. It was around then that anytime I heard the Gospel it convicted me deeply. As far as the Good News message, only the bad news part applied to me then. Even though I "*believed in God*" (like the demons do) I knew I was a sinner. I didn't need convincing. I was guilty as charged and the evidence was overwhelming. So when I went off to church camp each year, I looked forward to the fun stuff, but not the God stuff.

First up for that Thursday evening was an evening vesper service, on *Vesper Hill* no less. This was a beautiful hill with amazing sunset views. Surrounded by trees and bushes, there was a large cross there with wooden log benches. Absolute reverence was maintained by staff before every vesper service. We began by singing a few songs and then counselors began sharing their testimonies of how Christ had become their Lord and Savior. Then they opened it up for campers to likewise share. A young man named Mike Siniff stood up. Mike had a developmental disability and everybody loved him. Mike's testimony was clear, passionate, and powerful and it pierced my heart. No matter what I thought I had in the way of cognitive or physical advantages, Mike knew and loved Jesus and possessed eternal life and I most certainly did not. There on that log bench I whispered to the Lord, "Tonight I want to give You my life!"

The Vesper Service concluded. We hiked down to the lodge for a snack time just prior to the Consecration Service. The service would take place around a large campfire just down below the lodge. I was anxious to get there but reticent as well.

The Consecration Service began with singing and then an evangelist spoke. His name was Rev. Adams. The man preached like a house on fire! Just prior to the service beginning, each of us were given a stick which represented our life. Upon hearing the gospel message, anyone who wanted to respond was told to cast their stick into the fire. As Rev. Adams gave the invitation, the Spirit of God moved! Most of the campers, including some of the staff, began weeping and praying aloud.

Singing broke out. Many huddled arm-in-arm in small groups. Everyone except me. There I sat on the bench, the last one, waiting for my emotions to catch up with my heart's desire. I wanted to feel what the rest of them were feeling. Then a lady named Mrs. Wilson sat down beside me and put her arm around me. She said, "Steve, don't you want this too?" When I said, "Yes!" the dam broke. I broke. Tears flooded down and a river of joy came gushing in.

My heart felt like it was being power-washed. Love and forgiveness filled me--I felt totally clean! Staff were equally impacted. Songs were not only being sung, they were being shouted! We hiked back up on Vesper Hill in the dark of night, jumped up on the benches, and were singing and shouting and crying tears of unspeakable joy! We were beside ourselves. No one spoke in tongues but everyone could have! If the last trumpet had sounded, we'd have been ready for Jesus to return! It was a Great Awakening! It was Pentecost revisited! I knew I would never be the same. And I never have been!

D. If I was to ever have a bucket list, at the top of it would be to preach a sermon and see the Holy Spirit move like He did on that blissful night. But I also know that everybody's coming to Christ story is different. Some come to Christ with both heels dragging. Some have more of a gradual conversion. Some start out as doubters and detractors but end up being convinced otherwise. Some come to the Lord because of a great trial or tragedy, a season of loss, a painful ordeal, or in the depths of hopeless. Some come after great successes that have proven unfulfilling. Some come to believe as children; others as elderly adults; others on their deathbeds. They come to Him a thousand different ways. But they all come as dead men walking who are born anew in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

E. So my prayer for you is that you come. That you yield, surrender, and believe on Him with your whole heart. It will not be because of the cleverness of my words or an emotional appeal, or a tactic of fear, or as a result of grandiose promises. It will because you hear the Good News about Jesus and the Spirit of God takes those Words to the deepest recesses of your heart and turns them loose. Just as Jesus called Lazarus to life from physical death, may He call you to eternal life in Christ! The whole reason I man this pulpit is for such a thing to happen.

F. Who is this Jesus and what do I hope for between you and Him? 1 Peter 1:20-25 (NLT) is my answer:
20 God chose Him (The beloved Son of God, Jesus the Christ) as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days He has been revealed for your sake. 21 Through Christ you have come to trust in God. (Have you?) And you have placed your faith and hope in God because He raised Christ from the dead and gave Him great glory. 22 You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. (Like repentance & faith, love is evidence of rebirth!) 23 For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living Word of God. 24 As the Scriptures say, (Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6-8) "People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. 25 But the Word of the Lord remains forever." And that Word is the Good News that was preached to you.

G. Abraham Kuyper said: "There are two kinds of beauty; there is a beauty which God gives at birth, and which withers as a flower. And there is a beauty which God grants when by His grace men are born again. That kind of beauty never vanishes but blooms eternally." **(It is this latter beauty of New Birth which I pray for all of you!)**

* Close with Prayer...

[Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff](#)

[John 3:1-8 \(ESV\)](#)

1 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."

[Ephesians 2:1-5 \(AMP\)](#)

1 And you [He made alive when you] were [spiritually] dead and separated from Him because of your transgressions and sins, **2** in which you once walked. You were following the ways of this world [influenced by this present age], in accordance with the prince of the power of the air (Satan), the spirit who is now at work in the disobedient [the unbelieving, who fight against the purposes of God]. **3** Among these [unbelievers] we all once lived in the passions of

our flesh [our behavior governed by the sinful self], indulging the desires of human nature [without the Holy Spirit] and [the impulses] of the [sinful] mind. We were, by nature, children [under the sentence] of [God's] wrath, just like the rest [of mankind]. **4** But God, being [so very] rich in mercy, because of His great and wonderful love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were [spiritually] dead and separated from Him because of our sins, He made us [spiritually] alive together with Christ (for by His grace—His undeserved favor and mercy—you have been saved from God's judgment).

1 Peter 1:20-25 (NLT)

20 God chose Him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days He has been revealed for your sake. **21** Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because He raised Christ from the dead and gave Him great glory. **22** You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. **23** For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. **24** As the Scriptures say, "People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. **25** But the word of the Lord remains forever." And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.

Quote by Abraham Kuyper

"There are two kinds of beauty; there is a beauty which God gives at birth, and which withers as a flower. And there is a beauty which God grants when by His grace men are born again. That kind of beauty never vanishes but blooms eternally."

Camp Otterbein - Consecration Service - July 11, 1968

"Never has the Spirit moved among campers during a Consecration Service here at Camp Otterbein as it did last night. The inspiring message delivered by Rev. Adams, had something to say to everyone present at the campfire. The response was tremendous and many accepted Christ for the first time, rededicated their lives, and were called into full time Christian service. But probably even more important and more rewarding was the spirit of the campers following the service. Spontaneous songfests broke out everywhere and everyone truly felt that Christ had come into their hearts on that night, July 11, 1968."

- *The Albright Chronicle*, Volume 1, Issue 1, July 12, 1968, Junior High Camp No. 2.

Film Clips & Article Links

Regeneration - John MacArthur (Sermon Jam)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jd2DKYKsmm8>

Are Born Again Christians Just Like the World? - John Piper

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3dFZyqgVmQ>

Must I Be Born Again? - R.C. Sproul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKZGF4McEao>

Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again by John Piper (The Whole Book)

<https://document.desiringgod.org/finally-alive-en.pdf?ts=1446647305>

Bonus Stuff

2 Corinthians 5:17 (AMP)

17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ [that is, grafted in, joined to Him by faith in Him as Savior], he is a new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, new things have come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life].

Colossians 2:13-14 (ESV)

13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, **14** by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.

1 Peter 1:3-5 (NIV)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, **5** who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 John 5:4 (AMP)

4 For everyone born of God is victorious and overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has conquered and overcome the world—our [continuing, persistent] faith [in Jesus the Son of God].

Quote by A.W. Tozer

"The moment the Spirit has quickened us to life in regeneration our whole being sense its kinship to God and leaps us in joyous recognition. That is the heavenly birth without which we cannot see the Kingdom of God."

- A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine*.

Quote by Augustine

"No one will make a good end to the life into which he is born unless he is born again before he ends it."

Quote by John Piper

"Faith is the evidence of new birth, not the cause of it."

Quote by William Law

"Receive every day as a resurrection from death, as a new enjoyment of life; meet every rising sun with such sentiments of God's goodness, as if you had seen it, and all things, new-created upon your account: and under the sense of so great a blessing, let your joyful heart praise and magnify so good and glorious a Creator."

Quote by Major Ian Thomas

"Eternal life is not a peculiar feeling inside! It is not your ultimate destination, to which you will go when you are dead. If you are born again, eternal life is that quality of life that you possess right now."

Quote by John Piper

"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 biblical term *born again* in a way that would make it unrecognizable by Jesus and the biblical writers."

- John Piper, *Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again*, The Desiring God Foundation, © 2009, p. 13.

C.S. Lewis on His Conversion

"I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven into Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. And yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. "Emotional" is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake. And it was, like that moment on top of the bus, ambiguous. Freedom, or necessity? Or do they differ at their maximum?"

- C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, 1955, p. 237.

Augustine: Account of His Own Conversion

By Albert C. Outler

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aug-conv.html>

BOOK THREE - CHAPTER I

1. I came to Carthage, where a caldron of unholy loves was seething and bubbling all around me. I was not in love as yet, but I was in love with love; and, from a hidden hunger, I hated myself for not feeling more intensely a sense of hunger. I was looking for something to love, for I was in love with loving, and I hated security and a smooth way, free from snares. Within me I had a dearth of that inner food which is thyself, my God--although that dearth caused me no hunger. And I remained without any appetite for incorruptible food--not because I was already filled with it, but because the emptier I became the more I loathed it. Because of this my soul was unhealthy; and, full of sores, it exuded itself

forth, itching to be scratched by scraping on the things of the senses. Yet, had these things no soul, they would certainly not inspire our love. To love and to be loved was sweet to me, and all the more when I gained the enjoyment of the body of the person I loved. Thus I polluted the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence and I dimmed its luster with the slime of lust. Yet, foul and unclean as I was, I still craved, in excessive vanity, to be thought elegant and urbane. And I did fall precipitately into the love I was longing for. My God, my mercy, with how much bitterness didst thou, out of thy infinite goodness, flavor that sweetness for me! For I was not only beloved but also I secretly reached the climax of enjoyment; and yet I was joyfully bound with troublesome tics, so that I could be scourged with the burning iron rods of jealousy, suspicion, fear, anger, and strife.

CHAPTER IV

Among such as these, in that unstable period of my life, I studied the books of eloquence, for it was in eloquence that I was eager to be eminent, though from a reprehensible and vainglorious motive, and a delight in human vanity. In the ordinary course of study I came upon a certain book of Cicero's, whose language almost all admire, though not his heart. This particular book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy and was called Hortensius. Now it was this book which quite definitely changed my whole attitude and turned my prayers toward thee, O Lord, and gave me new hope and new desires. Suddenly every vain hope became worthless to me, and with an incredible warmth of heart I yearned for an immortality of wisdom and began now to arise that I might return to thee. It was not to sharpen my tongue further that I made use of that book. I was now nineteen; my father had been dead two years, and my mother was providing the money for my study of rhetoric. What won me in it [i.e., the Hortensius] was not its style but its substance.

8. How ardent was I then, my God, how ardent to fly from earthly things to thee! Nor did I know how thou wast even then dealing with me. For with thee is wisdom. In Greek the love of wisdom is called "philosophy," and it was with this love that that book inflamed me. There are some who seduce through philosophy, under a great, alluring, and honorable name, using it to color and adorn their own errors. And almost all who did this, in Cicero's own time and earlier, are censured and pointed out in his book.

BOOK V - CHAPTER XIII

23 And to Milan I came, to Ambrose the bishop, famed through the whole world as one of the best of men, thy devoted servant. His eloquent discourse in those times abundantly provided thy people with the flour of thy wheat, the gladness of thy oil, and the sober intoxication of thy wine. To him I was led by thee without my knowledge, that by him I might be led to thee in full knowledge. That man of God received me as a father would, and welcomed my coming as a good bishop should. And I began to love him, of course, not at the first as a teacher of the truth, for I had entirely despaired of finding that in thy Church--but as a friendly man. And I studiously listened to him--though not with the right motive--as he preached to the people. I was trying to discover whether his eloquence came up to his reputation, and whether it flowed fuller or thinner than others said it did. And thus I hung on his words intently, but, as to his subject matter, I was only a careless and contemptuous listener. I was delighted with the charm of his speech, which was more erudite, though less cheerful and soothing, than Faustus' style. As for subject matter, however, there could be no comparison, for the latter was wandering around in Manichean deceptions, while the former was teaching salvation most soundly. But "salvation is far from the wicked," such as I was then when I stood before him. Yet I was drawing nearer, gradually and unconsciously.

BOOK VIII - CHAPTER XII

28. Now when deep reflection had drawn up out of the secret depths of my soul all my misery and had heaped it up before the sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, accompanied by a mighty rain of tears. That I might give way fully to my tears and lamentations, I stole away from Alypius, for it seemed to me that solitude was more appropriate for the business of weeping. I went far enough away that I could feel that even his presence was no restraint upon me. This was the way I felt at the time, and he realized it. I suppose I had said something before I started up and he noticed that the sound of my voice was choked with weeping. And so he stayed alone, where we had been sitting together, greatly astonished. I flung myself down under a fig tree--how I know not--and gave free course to my tears. The streams of my eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to thee. And, not indeed in these words, but to this effect, I cried to thee: "And thou, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord? Wilt thou be angry forever? Oh, remember not against us our former iniquities." For I felt that I was still enthralled by them. I sent up these sorrowful cries: "How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour make an end to my uncleanness?"

29. I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or a girl I know not which--coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, "Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it." ["tolle lege, tolle lege"] Immediately I ceased weeping and began most earnestly to think whether it was usual for children in some kind of game to sing such a song, but I could not remember ever having heard the like. So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon. For I had heard how Anthony, accidentally coming into church

while the gospel was being read, received the admonition as if what was read had been addressed to him: "Go and sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." By such an oracle he was forthwith converted to thee.

So I quickly returned to the bench where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle's book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.

- From Augustine: *Confessions*, newly translated and edited by: Albert C. Outler, Ph.D., D.D., Professor of Theology, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, 1994.