
THE NEW BIRTH: THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIAN MORALITY

Marc Gibson

***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again,
he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)***



When Jesus first spoke these words to Nicodemus, the full import of their meaning could not have been known. When all truth was revealed by the Spirit through the apostles and prophets, the nature of the person born again became known. We are now able to see what a person can become in Christ: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The new birth is the result of man’s faithful obedience to the conditions of a gracious God who offers salvation freely in Christ (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 3:24). Jesus said that we must be born “of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). Paul stated the same principle when he wrote, “...but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). Both the actions of man (faith) and God (grace) are combined to affect this new birth. When a person by faith submits to baptism in water, he is born again by the working of God who raises us from being dead in our trespasses and sins to walk in newness of life (Ephesians 2:1-9; Romans 6:3-7; Colossians 2:12). These new creatures have been transformed by the renewing of their mind to “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). This will of God includes living a moral life before God and man.

This new birth is the beginning point of moral living. A person who is not a Christian may follow some generally held rules of morality, but the fact remains that all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and until a person is reconciled to God in Christ, he is walking in the darkness of sin. No amount of moral living alone will atone for sin. All of us need the blood of Christ for the cleansing, justification, and sanctification that will start a new life of holy living. This is why the new birth is essential. Without it, there is no beginning for true moral living. After having purified our souls in obeying the truth, we are taught to desire the pure word of God that will direct us in pure living: “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:1-2; 1:22). Having begun such a life, each Christian is admonished to “gird up the loins of your mind” and “be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:13, 15).

The passage that speaks most directly about the change from the old man of sin to the new man of righteousness is Ephesians 4:17–5:11. Paul reasons with the Christians at Ephesus as to what they put off and put on when they were “renewed in the spirit of your mind” (4:23). He reminds them that they should no longer walk in the futility of mind that led them to work all uncleanness with greediness (4:17-19). They had not so learned Christ but were taught by the truth in Jesus to “put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (4:20-22). They were to repent (turn away from) the life of sin. The renewal in the spirit of their mind (4:23) is

the result of becoming dead to sin and alive in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). The new person is represented as “the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). They were created in Christ with a new character to learn of Him and accomplish good works as servants of righteousness.

Paul then proceeds to make practical application of moral truth to the life of the new creature in Christ (Ephesians 4:25–5:11). He condemns lying, sinful anger, stealing, corrupt speech, bitterness, clamor, malice, fornication, covetousness, etc. He commands speaking truth, resolving anger, honest labor, edifying speech, kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness, etc. We are to be followers of God as dear children, walking in love, proving what is acceptable to the Lord. We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God or to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Only when we put on Christ and learn of His ways do we begin to know and live the moral and godly life that will bring glory to God.

It troubles me to think that many people do not appreciate the need to make significant changes in their lives when they become Christians. We need to leave behind the immorality of this world and avoid the appearance of evil at every turn. Christians too often fall back into the pollutions of this world because they did not make a clean break from sin. Their mind was not completely renewed or brought into captivity to Christ. This is the only way that we will be able to deal with the onslaught of temptation that Satan hurls at us daily. God provides the true standard of morality and ethics in His word. Only when we are born again can we begin to live a truly moral and righteous life by the pattern and principles of Biblical morality.

As people born anew, let us live for righteousness, “knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin...but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:6, 13b).