

The New Birth & Conversion

Scripture Reading: John 3:1-11 & Acts 3:11-26

Two very important topics in Scripture are “The New Birth & Conversion.” They do much to clarify our ability to know if we are a true child of God and to know what we should be doing, as a child of God. They also lay a foundation of understanding in order for us to help others come to Christ and follow Him. Our two texts represent the two topics.

In John chapter three, Jesus tells a teacher and ruler of the Jews that his knowledge of the Bible and his religious activity is not going to give him a place in heaven. Even worse, he can’t even understand the work of God’s kingdom, which is going on “right under his nose” (Greek word for “see” means to comprehend with the mind – John 3:3). This “good” religious man needed to be “*born again*.” The new birth is a work of God’s Spirit done **to** a person. A person cannot do it for himself.

In Acts chapter three, Peter is telling a large crowd of Jews that the miracle they just witnessed was done by the power and authority of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Peter explained that the promised Messiah came to Israel, but the rulers and people of Israel ignorantly rejected and killed their Messiah. The Son (*Servant*) of God rose from the dead, went to heaven and will return again to earth, but now there is something for men to do: “Repent and be converted” (Acts 3:19). God has granted a way to be forgiven and accepted. If we believe the message of the Gospel, we are to “repent” (change our minds about ourselves) and “be converted” (cooperate with God in the changing of ourselves). This is a work of God **in coordination** with those who have believed and repented. They must do something about this.

Let’s take a more careful look at “The New Birth & Conversion.”

The New Birth

This is the work of God’s Spirit, through His Word / The Gospel to raise a person from the deadness of the sinful state and give them spiritual life in Christ. It is like a resurrection. Jesus said, “You must be born again” because our original physical birth left us dead to God. When Adam sinned, he brought the whole human family into this spiritual deadness. So, spiritual things are foreign and foolish to the natural man. New birth restores that part of us that can know and love God. See Romans 5:12-21; I Corinthians 15:21-22; 2:1-16; John 6:63; Ephesians 2:1-7 [the KJV word “quicken” = “to make alive”].

Let’s go back to John chapter three. Nicodemus came to tell Jesus that He was a good man and a good teacher. That does not give us a spiritual relationship with Christ (**John 3:1-2**). Jesus gave Nicodemus the divine imperative: “You must be born again” (**John 3:3, 7**). As mentioned before, without the new birth, we do not even comprehend God’s Kingdom / spiritual things. Even a sincere, Bible-teacher / religious leader can be deceived and in the dark (**John 3:9-11**). Nicodemus had no idea what Jesus was talking about, even though Old Testament Scripture had spoken of a work of God’s

Spirit that would come upon Israel (**John 3:4, 10** cp. Ezekiel 36:25-27; 11:16-21; Isaiah 44:3-4; Deuteronomy 30:1-14; Zechariah 12:10). Jesus used “water” as a metaphor and “the Spirit” to describe the action of God in the new birth (**John 3:5**). Unfortunately, this has been turned into a description of baptism, which is absolutely not what Jesus is introducing here. The Old Testament showed water as a symbolic cleansing (Numbers 19:1-13 – “*water of separation/purification/cleansing*” or “*water for impurity*”). **This symbol is fulfilled by the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 3:5 cp. I Peter 1:23)**. The new birth is not the work of men or of churches. Another metaphor of God’s spirit is the wind, which is a force that man cannot understand or control (John 3:8). When Paul talked about his salvation experience he compared it to his first/physical birth (Galatians 1:15-16). Babies are completely passive when they are born. Even so, people do not bring about their own new birth. It is the work of God (John 1:12-13). The results of the new birth bring about spiritual understanding and spiritual desire, which is first evidenced in man by faith and repentance. Man cannot manufacture this (John 3:6; 6:63; I Peter 1:3; I John 3:9; II Corinthians 5:17).

Conversion

This is God working with the will of a born-again person to desire and submit to change, which God is going to produce through the indwelling Spirit of Christ (Romans 6:17-18; 8:1-13). The Greek word for “repent” means “to change the mind.” The Greek word for “conversion” means “to turn” or “to change direction.” God’s Spirit works in us “*to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:12-13). He makes us willing to change in character and conduct.

Peter calls the people of Israel to “repent” and “to be converted” (Acts 3:19). Though conversion is something God has to bring forth, man is responsible to willingly surrender to this work of God. Consider the call of God to “turn” (Acts 26:18-20; I Thessalonians 1:5-10). Jesus made it clear that conversion would bring about a decisive change in our lives (Matthew 18:1-4). So, did Paul (Ephesians 4:17-32). Conversion is a work of God’s Spirit through Christ and the Gospel (I Corinthians 6:9-11). Conversion is also something for which man is held responsible and accountable to God (John 5:36-47; Acts 13:38-41; II Timothy 4:1-4; Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7 – 4:2; James 1:21-25).

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The importance and enormity of these two subjects and the Scripture texts which have been used to present them could require a very long process of research. That is not possible in this study. It is only hoped that broaching these subjects will cause a person to begin a search in the Scriptures, along with self-examination. There are people who think that they are going to heaven, but they are not born again and therefore are not converted. There are people who do not know if they are going to heaven that need to see the clear message and seek the Lord correctly, gaining a true assurance of salvation. There are followers of Christ who are trying to reach out to other people to help them know the Lord. Sometimes, these efforts are not effective because they are centered in religion and the natural resources of man (conscience & will-power). May God give you grace, so that you find

yourself able to identify the work of God in your life, through His Word and by His Spirit, and follow Christ in full assurance, not only walking in His light, but reflecting that light to others as well.