

YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."--John 3:7.

"Born again" has become a very popular term in these days. Charles Colson of Watergate fame has been presented in a book entitled *Born Again*. Jimmy Carter, all along his political trail, talked about being a "born again" Christian. It hasn't shown up much in the White House, however. Even Larry Flynt, the infamous pornographic editor of *The Hustler* magazine, has been using the term, because of his association with Ruth Carter Stapleton, the President's sister. In spite of all this loose use of the term, it's still a glowing and wonderful Bible term. It carries with it a holy, sacred meaning, as well as feeling.

God seems to be an advocate of the "See it big; keep it simple" philosophy. Someone added that the way to really make things happen, was to "See it big, keep it simple, and make it burn." This Bible term, "born again," seems to have it all. One dear old colored brother gave testimony to his experience when he said, "I goes to church, I gives my money, I does the best I can; then somebody comes along and says, `Ye must be born again.'"

John Wesley preached 3,782 times on "Why Ye Must Be Born Again." Someone asked him, "Mr. Wesley, why do you preach so much on `Ye Must Be Born Again'?" His answer, "Because ye must be born again." Paul spoke one time about his natural birth and nine times of the new birth.

Years ago someone illustrated that, if a dead rabbit fell in the well, you could paint the pump, but that wouldn't improve the taste of the water. You might even build a new concrete foundation. That wouldn't do it either. You could put a new pump on the new foundation, but that still wouldn't do it. The only answer is to get that dead rabbit out of the well!

You can get a sinner new clothes, a new job and move him into a new house; you can teach him new language and habits; but until the old nature is replaced by a new nature by a spiritual birth experience, he's still going to have that bad taste down inside. We do not need exterior decoration; we need interior regeneration. That's probably why Ghandi said, "If it weren't for Christians, I'd be one."

The new birth is not something you can explain. The new birth is something you must experience. It is a mystery that cannot be explained. It is a reality that cannot be explained away.

In his little book, *Flying Worms*, Dr. M. R. DeHaan explained the process of metamorphosis. The caterpillar gets into the cocoon and is transformed into a beautiful butterfly. No one can explain quite what happens. So it is with the new birth. Only God can explain that.

There are four things about the new birth that are important to us today:

I. IT IS INDIVIDUAL

By this we mean it is not by parents. Covenant theology, a well-known religious philosophy, teaches that children born to two Christian parents automatically are under the covenant promise of God and are assured of salvation. However, the Bible says to these children the same as to the children born into the home of sinners, "Ye must be born again." It is not by priests. It is not by proxy or by substitute or representative. No one can be born into God's family for you. The old-timers used to sing,

You've got to walk that lonesome valley,

You've got to go there by yourself.

There's nobody here to go for you,

You've got to go there by yourself.

They were referring to death, of course, but that same principle also applies to the new birth. Ye must be born again. It is not by perception. In the testimony of Eldridge Cleaver, he claims he saw the face of Jesus and several religious personalities of the past in the moon in a vision. He claims he knew that he'd been born again because of this vision. It just doesn't work that way. There must be individual repentance and faith and individual acceptance of God's plan. It is individual.

II. IT IS INSTANTANEOUS

Being born again is something like turning on a light. It happens right there on the spot. Dr. Fred Brown used to talk about turning off the light and trying to get in bed and get covered up before it went out. That would be pretty quick! The new birth is faster than that. When the Apostle Paul was brought in contact with the light of the Lord on the Damascus Road and heard the voice of the Lord, he cried out, "Who art thou, Lord?" If he knew it was the Lord, why did he cry out, "Who art thou, Lord?" If he knew who it was, why did he call him Lord? Surely, no one ought to call a person Lord unless they know who it is. The real truth is, Paul got saved between the words "thou" and "Lord."

Someone might say that you can't really get saved that quick. I heard about a man fixing some shingles on his roof. He caught his foot in the gutter spout and fell. A friend ran up to him and said, "Are you all right, Joe?" When Joe answered in the affirmative, the man said, "Thank the Lord you're all right, Joe. You're not saved."

"Oh, yes I am," said Joe.

"Well, you weren't saved before," said the first man.

Joe answered, "I wasn't saved when I left the roof, but I was when I hit the ground!" A person can get saved mighty quick! The new birth is instantaneous.

III. IT IS INDISPENSABLE

Ye must be born again. There is no other way to get around the salvation experience if a person intends to go to Heaven. Nicodemus was a very religious man, but he still had to be born again. He was a righteous man, but he still had to be born again. He was a rich man, yet he still had to be born again. He was a ruler; he still had to be born again. He was recognized, but he still needed to be born again.

Now, if a religious, righteous, rich ruler who was recognized by all the people needed to be born again, so do you and I. The Old Testament prophet asked the question, "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can the leopard change his spots?*" The answer is obviously no. The new birth is indispensable.

IV. IT IS INITIAL

The new birth is the start of a brand new life. It is the beginning of our relationship to God. It is the doorway into Heaven. It is the earnest of the Spirit or the down payment of our salvation.

Years ago I visited a nuclear plant near Detroit. A man showed me all the flashing lights and clicking instruments in the large computer room. He explained the process of nuclear fission. Then he pointed to a little red button. He said, "When I pull up that little red button, everything in here comes alive. When I push it down, it all stops." It was the safety button to prevent accidents from happening in the nuclear plant. He smiled and said to me, "That little red button represents faith. When faith is put into action, it opens up everything—God, Heaven, and all of the good things that God has prepared for us and has given to us. If faith is dead and the button is pushed down, then we are in the dark and nothing is alive."

The new birth is like that little red button; it is the beginning, and it gets everything started. I trust you, my dear friend, have been born again. If not, I want to encourage you to get this matter settled as soon as possible.

In our living room at home we have an antique clock that used to run for several days after being wound. When we moved to Louisville and put it on the mantle, we could never get it started again. It sat there on the fireplace mantle for seven years. Praying right near that clock one morning at the beginning of the year, I suddenly became aware of the fact that it was running.

The old clock had been dusted every week; but sat there to look at. On this particular Friday, when it was dusted, the jar or movement set the thing in motion, and it started to run. It must have been running for a couple of days when I became aware of it. I thought, "That old dead clock has been lifeless and useless for seven years; now, suddenly, it has come to life."

So it is with many a sinner that comes into contact with Christ. The brush with the Lord brings him into action. He begins to be useful again.