

Why Do We Need to Be Born Again? Part 2

by John Piper

We need to be born again because we are dead in trespasses and sins, and without the new birth, we will not see the kingdom of God, we will perish, and we will not have saving faith, justification, or eternal joy in fellowship with God.

Duration: 31:36

Scripture: Romans 5:1

Topics: "Spiritual Rebirth", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon delves into the necessity of being born again, exploring the profound impact of the new birth on various aspects of a person's spiritual life. It emphasizes the critical connection between the new birth, faith, justification, adoption into God's family, transformation by the Holy Spirit, and the ultimate goal of knowing and enjoying God forever.

Transcript

This message is thematic rather than an exposition of that text, but before I pray let me relate it to the text. It's the most remarkable thing that John said in verse 7, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, if we meet that condition, then we have fellowship with the Father, with the Son, and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. If we walk in the light, the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin.

That's very strange. Isn't it the cleansing from sin that enables us to walk in the light? And if we're walking in the light, what's the sin that we need to be cleansed from? Everything I say in the next two weeks is intended to help understand that verse, even though I don't even refer to it tonight. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I ask that you would do the texts that I'll refer to, not just explain them, not just help the head to get clearer about them, but to cause their power to have their appointed effect in the new birth and the awakening of Christians to know what has happened to them and to love you more and delight in you more and follow you more intensely. So come and give us your help at the South Campus and the downtown campus and in this room right now. Help us.

In Jesus name I pray. Amen. We began to answer the question last time, why must we be born again? Again.

We took as our beginning point Ephesians 2, 4 and 5, God being rich in mercy out of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive together with Christ by grace you've been saved. And we said that he made us alive is virtually synonymous with he caused us to be born again. So Ephesians 2, 5 and John 3, 7 are talking about the same reality.

And the answer to the question last time as to why we need to be born again was given twice in that text, namely we're dead. While we were dead, he made us alive. While we had no spiritual life, he caused us to be born again to life by the spirit.

And then we began to with 10 observations unfold the meaning of dead. That's one way to understand it. 10 ways of describing what's wrong with us that he would use this so powerful image.

You must be born again. And we talked about seven of them last time. Here they are.

We are dead in trespasses and sins. Ephesians 2, 5. We are by nature children of wrath. Ephesians 2, 3. We love darkness and hate the light.

John 3, 19. Our hearts are hard like stone. Ephesians 4, 18.

We are unable to submit to God or please God. Romans 8, 7. We are unable to receive the gospel and accept it. 1 Corinthians 2, 14.

And we are unable to come to Christ and embrace him as Lord. John 6, 44. Now, there are three more.

Three more descriptions of what's wrong with us. What is our desperate condition apart from the new birth that causes Jesus to say, if you're not born again, you will not see the kingdom of heaven. Number eight.

Apart from the new birth, we are slaves to sin. The apostle Paul celebrates our liberation like this in Romans 6, 17. Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart.

Thanks to whom? Me? No, thanks be to God that anybody now obeys from the heart, stony dead heart, now obeying. Thanks be to God that we who were once slaves are free to obey. And the implication is when you are born again, a new heart is given you.

The law is written on your heart. The old disinclinations and hatreds and loves are taken out. New hatreds and new loves are put in.

You hate sin and you love righteousness and your heart goes out towards holiness and now obedience marks your life. But once it was not so. Slavery was the word used of our condition and the master was sin.

Number nine. Sin wasn't the only master. Apart from the new birth, we were slaves of Satan.

This is one of the terrible things about our spiritual deadness. Our deadness is not unresponsive to the devil. Our deadness is in perfect sync with the devil.

Listen to Ephesians 2, 1 and 2. You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. In other words, the mark of the unregenerate person is that our minds and our

desires are according with, according to, that's the literal translation, accord with the devil. This may seem very strange to many unregenerate people because they would say to me, I don't even believe in the devil.

To which I respond, what would you expect from the prince of lies? Perfectly in sync with the devil is the denial of the existence of the devil. What else would you expect him to do in the 21st century but encourage people not to believe in him? That's what liars do. He is the father of lies.

He's been a liar from the beginning. The unregenerate mind is in lock step with the devil. However, that's Ephesians 2, the clearest, most wonderful description of that bondage because it happens in the context of liberation is in 2 Timothy 2, 24 to 26, and I'll read you this one.

2 Timothy 2, 24 to 26, this is a word to pastors or anybody who wants to be used in the hand of God to liberate people from their bondage to the devil. So listen carefully if you would like to be used like that in people's lives. The Lord's servant must not be, this is 2 Timothy 2, 24, the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome.

But kind to everyone. Doesn't sound exactly like an exorcism, does it? But it is. Listen very carefully.

The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them to repent, leading to a knowledge of the truth. And they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will.

Do you hear the process of liberation in that verse? We are apt to teach correcting, gently loving, displaying hopefully some of the glories of Christ in our way of loving our enemies. Demon oppressed and controlled enemies even if they like us. And God may, and this is the new birth happening here, grant them repentance.

What's that? You know the word metanoia? Change. Hmph. Or maybe like this, hmph.

Suddenly, what was boring or hated, interesting and necessary, and beautiful and crucial, and everything is changing unto a knowledge of the truth. And you know what Jesus said about truth? You will know the truth and the truth will finish it. From everything by which you're bound through sin and Satan.

So the sequence seems to be we do teaching. I'm gonna get to this in a couple of weeks about how the new birth is brought about. But here we're talking.

We're talking, we're loving. And God may open, regenerate, change, heart transplant, give faith, give repentance, knowledge happens. You remember this illustration I've used before.

I love it. I'll use it again. In the dark, we get this brooch hanging around our neck.

We love to fondle it. It's just our favorite brooch. And then the gift of light is given and we look down.

It's a cockroach. It's a cockroach hanging on this string around my neck. We rip it off and we throw it away.

That's what happens when you're born again. Freedom is to do what you want to do. And the new birth is designed to make you want holiness and hate the devil and flee from him.

Number 10. Apart from the new birth, no good thing dwells in me. Romans 7, 18.

Apart from the new birth, no good thing dwells in me. That is an unintelligible statement to the unregenerate because they know good and well that they do many good things. And they know good and well, they could do a lot more evil than they do.

So you tell them, apart from the new birth, there is no good thing in them. They simply will think you're crazy because a conviction is underneath that verse which they don't share. Here's the conviction.

Everything good that God has made, everything good that God sustains is ruined when it does not get used in reliance upon his grace and in the pursuit of his glory. So yes, the human being, the human person, soul, mind, heart, brain, eye, hand, social human structures, marriage, family, government, business, they're all good. That is, God made them.

God holds them in being. God wants that they be. It's good that they be.

But they all exist for the glory of God. Jesus said, love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength. Meaning, all that stuff you do with your hands and all that stuff you do with your brain and all that stuff you do with your heart, let it be reliance on his grace and a display of his glory.

And if you don't, it is ruined. It's prostituted. That's the meaning of the word prostitute.

You take something beautiful, something good, and you sell it. And that's what we do with our brains and we do with our hearts and our hands. If God is not the one that we're drawn down grace from and pursuing the glory of, these are prostitutes at the end of my arms.

These are prostitutes in my eye sockets. This is a prostituted heart, a prostituted brain, and a prostituted being is not a good thing. There is in me, apart from the new birth, nothing good.

And that verse that I referred to, I haven't quoted it yet because it's got a qualification in it, and I wanted to set up the situation before I give you the qualification. Now let me read the verse. This is Romans 7, 18.

I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh. Oh, what's that qualification about? That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the spirit is spirit, and spirit is good.

Everything God's doing in your life is beautiful. It may be contaminated by some leftover you, but he's doing a good work in your life. Don't belittle it.

Don't make nothing of it. There is in me, that is in my old nature, in my old John Piper that keeps trying to crawl off the cross, no good thing, but what God is doing in me is a good thing. The Holy Spirit is a good thing.

The new nature is a good thing. The new heart is a good thing. The law written on my heart is a good thing.

Inclinations of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and self-control is a good thing. And I chalk it all up to the new birth and to God and his mercy. So hear me very carefully.

Apart from the new birth, it's all ruined. And with the new birth, it's being fixed. One day after the resurrection, it'll be totally fixed, which is why I wrote the poem the way I wrote it, because Jesus really did

use the word regeneration for the whole creation in Matthew 19.

Maybe I'll preach on that at the end of this series, wherever that is. So that's the answer to the first question, or the first way of asking the question, why do we have to be born again? Ten descriptions of who I am apart from mercy and the new birth. Now, why questions are always ambiguous? Because in English, we don't have what the Germans have, several words for why.

When we say why, it's ambiguous. A why question can be asked by looking to the past and talking about causes. Why am I in the condition that requires new birth? Or a why do you need to be born again may be answered with a future-looking question.

What won't happen if this doesn't happen? Get the difference? Why do I need new birth? Tenfold mess, that's why. But there's another way to answer the question. Why do I need new birth? Because this, this, and this isn't going to happen if you don't get it.

And that's the question I turn to now and, Lord willing, next week. Next week is the Sunday before Christmas, or the Saturday before Christmas. I will take my text next week, I hope I refer to it, from John 3, 8, which says this, the reason the Son of God appeared, that's Christmas, the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

And we'll relate the first birth, the Jesus birth, with our second birth, and the destruction of the works of the devil, which is where I'm going now. So let me give you a summary rather than an exposition of these, this answer to the future-oriented question. So here's the question we're answering now.

Why must I be born again? That is, what won't happen to me if I am not born again? And Jesus gave a sweeping and devastating and simple and straightforward answer in John 3, 3. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you are born again, you will not see the kingdom of God. That's why you need to be born again. You will perish if you don't.

You'll go to hell if you don't. You won't enter into my fellowship eternally. You will be cut off from me forever, Jesus said.

However, between entering the kingdom in its final full form and the new birth, some amazing works of salvation are wrought, and the new birth is the key to all of them. And I want you to see how the new birth relates to each of these, and here they are. I'll just mention them negatively and then positively, and we'll be done.

Just a summary ending of where we're going. Here's the negative way of saying these things. Without the new birth, we will not have saving faith, but only unbelief.

Number two, without the new birth, we won't have justification, but only condemnation. Three, without the new birth, we won't be the children of God, but the children of the devil. Number four, without the new birth, we won't bear the divine fruit of love, but we'll bear fruit for death.

And fifth, without the new birth, we will not have eternal joy in fellowship with God, but only eternal misery with the devil and his angels. Now, if you're going to know yourself, and know the Savior, and know His work, and know how He saves, you need to know how the new birth relates to those five things. So let me close by saying them positively, and giving you a verse with each one.

And then next time, we just let the little bud with these five things open, hopefully. Number one, when God causes us to be born again, saving faith is awakened, and we are united to Christ. First John 5.1, everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, not will be born of God.

Say it again. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. The first flicker of life in the newborn soul is faith.

They are inseparable. They happen simultaneously, which is why sometimes the Bible says you must be born again, and sometimes the Bible says believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. They cannot be separated.

Number two, when the new birth takes place, and faith is awakened, and we're united to Christ, we are justified in an instant. God, through faith, counts us as righteous, because we're in Christ. What He is counts for us, and He was perfect.

We're not. His perfection counts for us, because we've been united to Him. Romans 5.1, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, which was awakened by the new birth, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

New birth awakens faith. Faith looks to Christ for righteousness. In that moment, we are counted righteous forever.

Number three, the new birth awakens faith, unites us to Christ. All the legal obstacles are removed by justification, and God adopts us legally into His family, and then conforms us to His Son, so that we are both legally adopted, and heirs by His transforming nature. John 1.12, to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor the will of flesh, nor the will of man, but of God.

We were born of God. Faith is awakened. We received Christ, our righteousness.

Every legal obstacle is removed. A holy God adopts us into His family, and we are heirs forever. Four, when the new birth awakens faith, and we're united to Christ, and condemnation is replaced with justification, and the spirit of adoption comes in, He now begins to work His nature.

Remember this? He now begins to work His nature. They're called the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5.6, for in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision or uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Or, 1 John 3.14, we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. When the Holy Spirit of adoption is dwelling within us, He forms Himself within us, and He is chiefly a lover of God's people. And so are we.

Finally, number five, when the new birth awakens faith, unites us to Christ, Christ becomes our righteousness. Sanctifying power of the Spirit is unleashed in our lives. We're on the narrow way that leads to life, and the pinnacle of that new life is knowing God, and enjoying Him forever.

John 17.3, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. Therefore, Bethlehem, in the name of Jesus, I say as we close, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. Marvel not that I say to you, you must be born again.

And if you would like to talk about that with any of us, and move into it, and be helped on your way as a beginning Christian, here's a couple of things you could do. You can come up and pray and talk with one of us at the front. Jason French will be over here.

I'll be here. Melvin is willing to be over there, and we'd love to pray with you. Or, you can take a piece of paper, any old scrap will do, name, a phone number, email address, and drop it in one of those boxes as you leave, and we'll try to be in touch with you quickly.

That goes for all the campuses. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for Christ.

Thank you for the new birth. Thank you for faith. Thank you for justification, and the reckoning of us as perfect and righteous and obedient with Christ's perfect, righteous obedience.

And thank you for adopting us into your everlasting family, so that we are heirs of the universe. And thank you that at the end of this painful road, there is everlasting, joyful life in your presence with you at the center. Thank you.

And I pray that any who's not on this narrow way would trust you, would come to you, would receive you. To as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the children of God. Amen.

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