

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



What Is the Meaning of Being Born Again?

KEY PASSAGE: John 3:1-16 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: John 5:24 | Titus 3:5

► SUMMARY

What does it mean to be born again?

There are a variety of opinions on this matter, but to understand what this term truly means, we must go to the Bible. Jesus used this phrase to describe a spiritual change that is required in order to have eternal life. Unless we are born again, we cannot enter heaven.

► SERMON POINTS

John 3:1-16 records a conversation between Jesus and a Jewish Pharisee. After observing His miracles and hearing His teaching, Nicodemus came to Jesus one night saying, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (v. 2). Instead of commenting on Nicodemus’ observation, Jesus told him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (v. 3).

How can I be born again?

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that his impressive education, obedience to the Law, and religious prominence in Judaism would not get him into heaven. What he needed was a brand new start—to be born from above. Being born again is the act of God by which He imparts eternal life to those who were dead in their trespasses and sins but have now accepted Jesus as Savior.

Nicodemus responded to Jesus with a question, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” (v. 4). To

help him understand, Jesus explained, “Unless [one] is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (v. 5). In other words, someone is born physically into this world as a baby, but to enter the heavenly realm, he must be born of the Spirit.

For his entire life, Nicodemus had been taught that being Jewish and doing good works were what would gain him entrance into heaven. But now his pride was shattered, and he realized that nothing he’d done or built his life upon would benefit him eternally. He was spiritually bankrupt with no way to enter God’s kingdom.

He is not unlike many people today who have the mistaken idea that they are good enough to go to heaven. They attend church, give their offering, and may have even been baptized, yet have never truly been born again. Some defend themselves by reasoning that God will surely accept them because they’ve tried to live a good life and haven’t committed any crimes. But in reality they aren’t good enough because everyone is born a sinner.

We must be careful not to make the same mistake the Pharisees did. They saw Jesus’ miraculous signs and heard Him teach, but they walked away without considering whether His claims were true. Nicodemus was different; he risked his religious reputation as a Pharisee to come see Jesus, listened to Him, asked questions, sought to understand what He was saying, and learned the truth.

What is the nature of the new birth?

■ **It’s a spiritual experience.** The new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He convicts us of sin and

helps us understand that our good works are insufficient in His eyes and will never make us fit for heaven. But He also assures us of God's love and leads us to confess and repent of our sins and trust Jesus Christ as our Savior.

- **It's a definite experience.** Like physical birth, there's a specific point at which a person is born again. It starts with conviction of sin and the realization that Jesus Christ died on the cross as payment for the penalty for our sin. We call out to Him for forgiveness, turn away from our old sinful lifestyle, and in faith accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. It's not a slow process but a radical change. There must be a transformation within our hearts that is so clear that we will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we have been born again. For some people, this moment may have occurred in childhood and they may no longer have a specific memory of it. But as long as there is full faith in Jesus, they have been born again.

Jesus is the only one who can make us fit for heaven with a new birth. All other religions rely on good works, but no one can be good enough for God because we've all sinned against Him. We may seem righteous in our own eyes, but when measured against the perfection of God's standards as found in His Word, we have no hope of heaven.

We are not saved by our righteous acts but by God's mercy and the regeneration of the Spirit (Titus 3:5). If we could have been good enough, then the cross was a horrible mistake because it would have been unnecessary. However, only the shed blood of God's Son could make forgiveness possible. This is the evidence of God's awesome love and power—that He would reach down and save sinners.

- **It's a lasting experience.** Being born again changes us forever, but this doesn't mean that we will be perfect. Our old sinful nature is still present in us, but as we confess our sins, Jesus' blood continually cleanses us. We are now called to a life of holiness, obedience, surrender, and love

for God. There must be external evidence that proves there's been an inner transformation.

What are the results of being born again?

- **There's a change in our relationship with God.** Until Jesus becomes our Savior, we are enemies of God. Although we may be quick to deny that we are against Him, there is no neutral ground. We have either been reconciled to God through His Son, or we are at odds with Him.
- **There is a change in our position.** The separation and enmity between God and us has been removed. Now we're a part of His kingdom and members of His family. Our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and we will never lose our salvation.
- **There's a change in our attitude.** The Holy Spirit works in us, sealing us as God's children, transforming our hearts, and living out Christ's life through us. He gives us wisdom, reveals truth, and guides us throughout our lives.
- **There is a change in our destination.** Jesus said, "He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). The Holy Spirit's presence in us is our guarantee that we are forever children of God, and our eternal destiny in heaven is secure.

► RESPONSE

- Can you point to a time in your life when you became born again? If you sense this may not have happened for you yet, what is keeping you from surrendering to Christ and receiving forgiveness and eternal life?
- If you are born again, what fruit in your life gives you reassurance of that? How has your life changed?

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