

## What Makes a Real Christian?

### *Do You Know What Makes a Christian Really a Christian?*

I read recently about a couple in Texas who were fabulously successful. They had plans to be YouTube sensations. Both husband and wife were attractive, charismatic people who had a tremendous number of people following them as they remodeled and rebuilt homes. This couple had hundreds of clients who paid them large amounts of money to fix up their homes. He listed his credentials as being a licensed architect and contractor. She promoted herself as an expert in remodeling and designing homes. Both were arrested and sentenced to years in prison. They were scam artists. He was not licensed either as an architect or a contractor, and they started rebuilds but did not finish them; keeping though the large deposits they were paid for agreeing to do the projects. Authorities were notified when the couple refused to pay the people they hired to do the work. One of the articles I read about this couple provided strategies for avoiding scam artists like them. People are not always what they seem to be and it is tough sometimes to know what is real and what is not, what is true and what is false. I have known people who got married and then after a couple years realized that the person they wed was not who they thought that person was. That of course is a much worse circumstance than discovering the house you bought is not what you were promised or the car you purchased did not live up to the advertisement. What if you completely misunderstand what religion is and the part God plays in your life? Does that matter? Here is our big idea. To experience the Kingdom of God, you must be transformed.

Today we continue to look at John 3 and the fascinating conversation between the Jewish leader Nicodemus and Jesus. As was mentioned last time, Nicodemus believed that he stood on firm ground spiritually. He was an expert on the Bible and a good man. He is like perhaps billions today who think everything is right with them and God and that when they die, they will go to heaven. What Nicodemus discovered was that many, like him, are mistaken. Without preparing him, Jesus informed Nicodemus that he was completely in the dark when it came to his relationship with God. **Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly I am saying to you, if a certain one is not begotten from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God."** (John 3: 3) That was an astounding statement and Nicodemus completely misunderstood what Jesus was telling him. The many English translations make it difficult to see the depth of Nicodemus's confusion but let me explain. The term translated 'begotten from above' can also be rendered, "born again" and generally is. That is why Nicodemus responded how he did. **"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"** (John 3: 4 NIV) When put that way, Jesus' declaration seems preposterous. The idea of having to be born once more must have seemed ridiculous to Nicodemus but only because he did not grasp the supernatural work Jesus was presenting.

The term translated "born again" in John 3: 3 can just as rightly be rendered "begotten from above" because the Greek words can go either way. In other words, Jesus' admonition is either about who your father is or who your mother is. Nicodemus thinks Jesus is talking about the mother, but he got it wrong. Jesus is saying that your Father must be God if you hope to "see the kingdom of God". That's what "begotten" speaks of; the one who fathered the child. So what is Jesus insisting? Nicodemus was at a complete loss and so are many who read this. Jesus explained what He meant. **Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."** (John 3: 5-6 NIV) Many have mistakenly thought Jesus was talking about baptism here, but He wasn't. Literally, He says "begotten out of water and Spirit". Begotten out of water and Spirit speaks of the same supernatural work expressed two different ways. Water is symbolic of the cleansing that comes as a result of what the Spirit of God does in you. Notice this prophecy found in Ezekiel. **I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.** (Ezekiel 36: 25-26 NIV)

Nicodemus had the idea, as do many today, that he could do something to make himself right with God. Do religious things. Be a good person. Work hard. But he could not. Nicodemus could do nothing to be a part of God's Kingdom. And believe me, that is what he wanted most in life. A supernatural event must take place for everyone who wants a right life with God. Jesus did not tell Nicodemus he was ok, that just a couple tweaks in his life were needed to correct things. Just visit the synagogue more. Offer a couple additional sacrifices. Treat your wife better. Jesus gave Nicodemus nothing to fix. What was needed for him was a supernatural transformation that only the Spirit could perform. Ezekiel would tell him he needed a new heart and a new spirit that could come only from God. That is

exactly what Jesus was saying. It wasn't something Nicodemus could do because flesh only gives birth to flesh. It is the Spirit who gives birth to spirit. God only can make things right for you. Let us be clear about this. You do not need to add something to your personality to join God's Kingdom. We are not talking about an upgrade. Jesus is saying you need to become a completely different you. It is like one species becoming an altogether different species, an entirely different being.

Let me give an illustration of this. Before He was crucified, Jesus was only able to be at one place at a time. Not only that, the laws of nature applied to Him. He could only go from one room to another in a house through a door or maybe a window. His body was just like yours. It was completely physical and restrained by time and space. But when Jesus was raised from the dead, He had a new body, one that looked the same but was completely different. He could be at two places at the same time as was the case when He walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus but was also meeting with Peter. Jesus could be unrecognizable as happened when Mary Magdalen saw Him but did not know who He was or when the disciples on the road to Emmaus walked with Jesus several miles but did not realize they were with Jesus until He left. **Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.** (Luke 24:13-16 NIV) Jesus could pass through walls as happened when He was suddenly in the same room as the disciples, despite the fact that there was not a way for Him to get in there. **On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"** (John 20: 19 NIV)

Yes it was the same Jesus after He was raised from the dead as before, but He had a different species of body then. You may have the same heart as you did before, but when the Spirit transforms you, it becomes as different from what you had as a heart of stone is from a heart of flesh. What you need if you want to see the Kingdom of God is to be made by the Spirit into a completely new person and you cannot make that happen. Consider again what Jesus warned Nicodemus. **Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly I am saying to you, if a certain one is not begotten from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God."** (John 3: 3) You must recognize this crucial point. See here does not have the same idea as a tourist staring off at the Golden Gate Bridge. "See", as in see the kingdom of God has the idea of it becoming a part of your life. You can have nothing to do with the kingdom of God if you do not become a transformed you. See means to experience, to participate in it. Picture the ten virgins, five of whom had the oil necessary to enter the wedding banquet and five did not and they never were a part of the wedding, or to use Jesus' term, they did not see it. You are completely outside the kingdom of God if you are not begotten from above, if you are not transformed by the Spirit into a totally new creation. Imagine a fish trying to live up on a mountain top without benefit of water. It is not where the fish belongs. A man or woman who has not been begotten from above, transformed into a new creation, can have nothing to do with the Kingdom of God because that person cannot enter it.

If you have put your hope in Jesus Christ for your salvation, then you have the Holy Spirit living in and through you and that makes you a completely different species of human being. Therefore embrace your new life. Become attuned to the Holy Spirit, looking for Him to guide you, empower you, bring you forward. Why would a blind man given a set of eyes not use them, or a woman born without legs who is remade with legs not walk with them? Our big idea is that to experience the Kingdom of God, you must be transformed. And if you are transformed, then live like it. Give the Holy Spirit your full attention as you go about your day.