

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 48

You Must Be Born From Above

By Sharon K. Griffiee

Our lesson begins in the third chapter of John, with Nicodemus who went to Jesus at night hoping to get some answers. He was interested in Jesus and respected him as a teacher from God. As background information, it is important to know that Nicodemus was a man of prominence in Israel. He was a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish ruling council. The Sanhedrin had 70 members, which were responsible for religious decisions. When he found Jesus that night, he knew that Jesus was more than just another rabbi (teacher). As John the Baptist boldly testified,

John 3:31-32a, 34 (KJV) – *“He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth... For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.”*

As we turn now to the third chapter of John and follow the conversation that Nicodemus had with Jesus that night, we learn what Jesus expected of him.

John 3:1-10 (NIV) - *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” “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!” 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. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?”*

When Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be “born again” or “born from above”, this must have been a shock to him. He didn’t fully grasp the magnitude of the change demanded of him if he was to become a disciple of Jesus. Nicodemus may have been a prominent religious teacher in Israel, but in reality he was just another man needing salvation. Even though he was a respected teacher and schooled in Old Testament Scriptures, he didn’t have the spiritual insight to understand what Jesus was saying. *“How can this be?”* he questioned. He failed to understand that the prophet Ezekiel had used similar language speaking to Israel in the Old Testament.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (KJV) – *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”*

“A new heart...and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh.” What an awesome promise! With our cooperation God will turn a dead stony heart into living flesh; one that is soft and tender, capable of complying with His will. The question is, *will we let Him?*

One of the biggest reasons people fail to live a victorious Christian life, is that some people are trying to live like Christians *outwardly* (superficially) who have never truly been born again (born from above). To be “born from above” is to have a *spiritual transformation*, which takes a person out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God.

Colossians 1:12-14 (KJV) *Giving thanks unto the Father... Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:*

We have redemption through *His blood*. Not through our *own efforts*. Try as we may, we cannot deliver ourselves from the power of darkness. To try to do so is just getting into works of the flesh; trying to earn God’s favor through good works. The more we try,

the bigger mess we make out of our lives. Why? Because inside we are still living in bondage to sin. We stubbornly want to live the way we want to live, and still get all the blessings from God, too!

Pay close attention to what Jesus said, "*Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit*" (**John 3:6 - NIV**). A fallen man (the flesh) cannot regenerate himself. Only God's Holy Spirit can regenerate [restore] a human spirit. To be a victorious Christian we need God's Spirit living *in us!* Not living on the outside, still trying to get in. Brothers and sisters, we can only be delivered from the power of sin and darkness through *spiritual transformation*; through the enlightening [edifying] power of God's Spirit.

God wants us fully cleansed of sin. God wants us to be fully cleansed of sin, so we can be fully restored to righteousness. For that to happen we must bring forth fruit meet for repentance. It starts with a humble heart; humble, submissive as a child, or we cannot enter the kingdom of God. Jesus said,

Luke 18:17 (KJV) - *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.*

What was Jesus talking about? How *do* little children receive the kingdom of God? They come with expectation and excitement. They come realizing they are not sufficient in themselves. They come willing to be taught. Jesus warns that if this same attitude is not present in adults, they will see no need to enter into the kingdom of God. They think they are good men and women just the way they are.

Are we confident of our own righteousness?

Luke 18:9-14 (KJV) - *And he [Jesus] spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other:*

for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

God is looking for humility. He is looking for those who can say, as the Publican, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" Until we recognize we are sinners, in need of a Savior, we are not sufficiently humble to repent and receive the new birth. God isn't impressed when we exalt ourselves by counting off our long list of accomplishments, while putting others down. When we spend our prayer time trying to justify ourselves, it's a dead give away we are living in the flesh, "*flesh gives birth to flesh*" (**John 3:6a**).

The bottom line: To be fully cleansed of sin, "self" must be nailed to the cross. With "self" out of the way, the Holy Spirit then performs the miracle of the new birth, taking up residence in our heart. Amen.

Questions for personal or group study:

1. Was Nicodemus the only member of the Sanhedrin that wanted answers from Jesus? **John 3:2a**
2. What did Jesus tell Nicodemus was the requirement for anyone who wanted to *see and enter* the kingdom of God? **John 3:7**
3. Even though Nicodemus was schooled in Old Testament Scriptures, he didn't understand what Jesus meant when he said, "*You must be born again*". What Old Testament prophet spoke similar language?
4. What is one of the biggest reasons people fail to live a victorious Christian life?
5. What is the only way a person can be delivered from the power of sin and darkness?
6. Jesus said we should receive the kingdom of God as a little child. How do little children receive the kingdom of God?
7. What did Jesus say would happen to those who trust in themselves, while looking down on others? **Luke 18:14b**
8. Is it absolutely necessary for "self" to be nailed to the cross to be born from above - receiving the new birth?