

YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

and Other Sermons

by

Evangelist Hyman Appelman

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SERMON ONE

“YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN”

(John 3:1-15)

You know, if the Lord Jesus Christ had said to an ordinary man, to a common, everyday man, **“Ye must be born again,”** that message would not be nearly as forceful as it is when spoken to a man like Nicodemus.

If the Lord Jesus Christ had said that to the thief on the cross; if He had said it to Zacchaeus, the Publican, to Mary Magdalene, to some thief, to some drunkard, to some gentile, it would not have nearly the power that it bears now, when He spoke it to Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was a Jew, a circumcised Jew, one of God’s chosen people, a Jew, one of God’s covenant people, a Jew. If anybody in the world could get into heaven without the new birth, a Jew ought to be the one, because in the beginning of God’s dealings with men it was His purpose to make the Jews His people.

Not only was Nicodemus a Jew, but he was a good Jew; he was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the truest of the true, the most religious of the religious Jews of Christ’s time.

Not only was Nicodemus a Jew and a Pharisee, but he was a ruler among the Jews.

It has happened quite often that a man is made a deacon because he has money, or popularity, because of his social, economic, or political position. It is not so among the Jews; not among my kind, the orthodox Jews. A man has to be good and clean. He has to know the Word of God. His reputation must be beyond question before his people will lift him to the position of president of a synagogue or of any sort of rulership among his people. So Nicodemus was a good man.

He came to Jesus seeking the way of salvation. Jesus turned to him, to this good Jew, to this Pharisee, to this ruler, and said: **“Nicodemus, you must be born again.”**

Now, if Nicodemus had to be born again, surely every one of us, every man, woman, and child in this congregation needs that same experience. So it behooves us to realize what the new birth means and how we may get it. What is the new birth? Why do we need it? How may we get it?

I. WHAT IS THE NEW BIRTH?

It is not generation, not physical birth, for God says, **“which were born not of flesh nor of blood nor of the will of man, but of God.”** It is not the physical birth. A Jew born in covenant relationship with God needs to be born again. A child born into the best Christian family cannot get to heaven upon the merits of his father or mother. Christianity is not transmissible. It is not inheritable; not something that can be passed on from father to son. I wish it were possible to pass it on in that way, but it is beyond anything we can do.

The new birth is not education. It is not cultivation. It is not training. It is not information. It is not teaching. You may study the Bible and know the Greek, the Hebrew, the Latin, the English of it; you may know the latest on criticism, on commentators, on homiletics, but that is not enough. The more you get out of the study of God’s Word from the preaching of the gospel, from the ceremonies of the church, the more you realize your need of regeneration. These things, however, are not in themselves the new birth. You cannot reach the heart; you cannot affect the soul; you cannot change the character by some merely outward applications.

Someone has a good illustration on the point. It almost blisters a Jew’s tongue to tell it, but it is the best I have ever heard. The man was preaching who told this story. He said, “Suppose you were to take a pig, the best kind of pig that ever won a prize at a county fair; suppose you take him out of the pig pen into the bath chamber, give him a bath, scrub him with Lifebuoy to take the odor away, apply Palmolive to give him a schoolgirl complexion, put fingernail polish on his hoofs, perfume him with Evening-in-Paris, or any other kind of prevalent, fragrant perfume, tie a ribbon round his neck, and bring him into the dainty lady’s boudoir. Something will change, but it will not be the pig.” Even a Jew knows that is right.

It is the same way with human nature. That story is so true that it might as well have been put in the Bible. You can’t change a pig’s nature. He was born a pig, will live a pig, die a pig, and make good pork chops for a Gentile. That is about all. (Don’t try me too much if you don’t believe a Jew can eat pork chops). It is the same way with a man, exactly the same way.

I have a friend, a great Christian gentleman, married to a superlative Christian wife, living in a magnificent Christian home. His life is as clean as was that of the Apostle Paul. Unfortunately he and his wife could not have any children. So they adopted two girls. One girl is as sweet as can be. The other girl is a “terror on wheels.” How my heart goes out to that man, to that preacher! What is he going to do? He adopted her.

Here is a man who is willing to give that girl everything that her heart could desire. He has surrounded her with the cleanest, finest, gentlest, daintiest, purest, holiest atmosphere, but the devil in her will come out. It takes more than training, it takes more than fine surroundings, it takes more than exterior circumstances to change the heart.

It is not confirmation. By that I mean you cannot join the church and by that process be born again. You cannot be baptized and by that ordinance enter into the new birth. You cannot walk down the aisle and say, “Hocus-pocus; I am born again.”

What is the new birth? Now, would it not be presumption for anybody like me to tell you out of my own mind what the new birth is? I am not that big a fool. I am going to tell you what God says.

First, it is a divine change.

God does it. For it is written, **“To as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God”**—to them gave He power; God gave power to become the sons of God. It is a divine change. Listen, **“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.”**

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the shedding upon us of the Holy Spirit.” According to His mercy He saved us. It is of God. That is the first thing. No man can do it; no group of men can do it. No man can acquire it. No group of men can order it to come to pass. It is entirely and altogether of God.

Second, it is a complete change.

It is written, **“If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature, old things are passed away, all things are become new.”** Now, let me take a minute to see if I can make you understand what I mean by saying it is a complete change.

Here is a drunkard, a drunkard who cannot resist the temptation to drink. He comes to God. He accepts Christ as his Saviour. By the new birth God does one of two things to him: either He takes away the appetite for drink or He gives the man the power to overcome it. That is what I am talking about.

Here is a gambler. That man has tried every way he knew how to give up his gambling. He has promised his wife; he has promised his children; he has promised himself to quit his sin, but the devil is just too much for him. Let that man come to Jesus Christ, accept Him as Saviour, and by the authority of the Word of God, by the testimony of the nineteen hundred years that have passed, God will do one of two things to him: either take away the appetite for gambling or give him the power to say “No.”

Here is a lustful person, driven by the red demon of lust, maddened by the passion in his blood, forced by Satan into practices that make him hate himself, helpless, enmeshed, enslaved, powerless to resist the whip of appetite. Let him come to Christ and Christ will give him the grace to overcome that killing sin.

Paul said this: **“The things I once hated I now love, and the things I once loved I now hate.”**

It turns a man inside out. You say, “Preacher, how do you know it?” I know it beyond question, beyond argument, beyond doubt, because Jesus has done that to me. I have seen, even in my own brief, humble ministry, scores of men, women, even children, smirched, spotted, stained with sin, in the terrible toils of Satan, torn loose from the devil, given the liberty that God through Christ and the Holy Spirit can alone provide. Oh, if you are here tonight, unsaved friend, fighting some sin in your soul, fighting a losing battle, come to Jesus Christ and He will win it in you, through you, for you.

Third, *it is a permanent change. It is an everlasting change.*

“Verily, I say unto you,” says Jesus, **“he that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death unto life.”** It is written, **“In whom we have,”** ever have, always have, eternally have, **“redemption, the forgiveness of sins through faith in His blood.”**

Once you are made a child of God, there is nothing that can happen to you, nothing that can be done to you, that will make you anything else but a child of God. You may prove disobedient; you may backslide; you may drift away; you may even engage in your old sins, but if you have really been born again, if you have been born a child of God, you will remain a child of God world without end, amen. That is what this blessed Book teaches, for it is written, **“I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

II. WHY DO WE NEED THE NEW BIRTH?

Let me not stop there. Why do we need the new birth? Why do we have to be born again? Permit me to call your attention to three or four reasons.

First, *our own nature requires it.*

By nature we are the children of wrath, disobedient, aliens to the commonwealth of Israel. Our lives are steeped and stained with unworthiness, disqualifications of every kind and description. We have not lived up to God’s law nor glory. Everyone of us has sinned. We are not fit for God or heaven. Something has to happen to turn us from sinners into saints, from demons into angels. Something has to happen to change our nature from being lovers of this world to becoming lovers of God. Something has to happen to make our ambitions set on things on high instead of groveling on the things here below.

The second reason we have to be born again is *because God’s nature requires it.*

God is holy, without spot, without sin, without stain. He cannot countenance sin. He cannot stand sin. He cannot pass over sin, cannot accept, receive, or take sin into heaven. For us to be acceptable in the sight of God, we must be changed. To become fit subjects for heaven, we must be made over. We must be cleansed by His grace, sanctified by His power.

You may be a fit subject for the best society in this man's town, but that doesn't make you receivable in Heaven's courts. You may be as good in every way as the best members of this church, as the best of us; you may be as clean as Paul the Apostle, but Paul was not good enough, and you are not good enough. Paul went to heaven not by his goodness but by the righteousness which was in, and of, and by, and because of the Lord Jesus Christ. You need that, too. The only way you can have it is by the new birth.

Third, beloved, *the work of Christ requires it.*

If there were any other way to be saved except by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of our hearts in the Holy Spirit, if there were any other way to be saved except by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, if any man, woman or child in this congregation could be changed in any other way, then Jesus would never have had to die on the cross. If God could save one of us outside of Christ, He could save everyone of us without the blood.

Jesus said, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by Me."** Peter said, **"None other name is given under heaven whereby we must be saved."** Paul said in the Book of Hebrews, **"Without the shedding of blood is no remission."** He said, **"Without faith it is impossible to please God."** All that is true. The work of Christ, the fact that Jesus shed His blood on the cross to wash away our sins, proves beyond peradventure, beyond any chance of dispute, or doubt, or question, or argument that every one of us must go by way of the blood into the new birth.

Fourth, and really I should have said this first and let it go at that, *the Word of God requires it.*

Not only does our nature, not only does God's nature, not only does the blood-stained work of Christ on Calvary demand it, but God's Word, the Bible, insists on it.

- It is written: **"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven."**
- It is written, **"Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."**
- It is written, **"Marvel not that I said unto thee; Ye must be born again."**
- It is written: **"Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."**
- It is written: **"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."**

Those are just a few of the passages that declare the universal need of the new birth. God's Word cannot be mistaken in that universal requirement.

III. WHAT WILL THE NEW BIRTH DO FOR US?

What will it give us? What will it bring to us?

There are three things the new birth offers us. It will take care of the past. It will provide for the present. It will insure and guarantee the future.

1. It will take care of the past by the pardon of every sin, by the cleansing of every transgression, by the removing of every blemish and stain that may be on our records tonight, as the blood of Jesus courses across God's books.

That is the first thing. Everything in the past that we have done that is wrong is covered over, blotted out, driven away, and taken away by the blood of God's Son. What a joyous thought that is! How many times have I sinned against my father and my mother! How many times have I sinned against my teachers! How many times have I come to my father and apologized!

Sometimes I got whipped for my misdeeds, but not always. My mother loved me too much. She was gentle; she overlooked everything. Mother would say, "Son, I will forgive you. Let's start all over new. Let's turn over a new leaf."

How good it felt that Mamma had forgiven, had forgotten, that loving father was not going to hold the thing against me anymore!

There were many things in my life for which I was sorry. There were many black things staining my soul, many crushing weights breaking my heart. I knelt before God and cried for forgiveness. God said to me, "All right, son. I will turn over a new page."

Glory to Jesus! I wish that I could preach so I could make you understand just how good I feel. God turned over a new leaf for me, gave me a new start. The past was gone.

You say, "Preacher, don't you remember your sins?" Only too well, but God has forgotten them and that is what I am glorying in, that is what I am shouting over. God has forgotten; that is the thing about which I am rejoicing. The past is taken care of by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. You are here unsaved. You are thinking of all those things that stand in the way. Brother, sister, by the Word of God, if you come to Christ tonight, God will turn over a new page and give you a chance to start all over again.

2. The new birth will take care of the present.

Jesus Christ tells us, **"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his inner being shall flow rivers of living water."** John adds to that, **"This spake He of the Spirit which was not yet given because Christ was not yet glorified."** But, thank God, Jesus has been glorified!

The Holy Spirit came down on the Day of Pentecost. When we come to accept Christ as Saviour, we are born again, and the Holy Spirit comes in, fills our souls, takes possession of our lives. It is the Holy Spirit then and thereafter who resists Satan, who **"worketh in us both to will and to do,"** who gives us wisdom, power, grace, courage, and everything else that we need to overcome the adversary, the evil one. It is the Holy Spirit Who gives the Christian the courage to walk with his head erect no matter what he may face. It is the Holy Spirit Who is the victory that overcometh the world.

There is a wonderful little illustration about the small boy who came to a party and played and played until it grew dark. He knew he had to leave. He stood with his little face pressed against the glass of the door. His hostess came to him and asked, "What is the matter?"

"Well, it is time for me to go home." But he was afraid. Between the house where he was playing and his home there was a cemetery. The little boy would have to walk through it all by himself, and he was frightened at the thought of the long, lonely, dark walk along the tombstones.

The woman realized his fright and felt sorry for the lad. She said, "Son, don't be afraid. When you get ready to go home, tell me, and I will go, or John [her husband] will go, or big brother will go." The little "tike" brightened up and went back to his games. An hour passed. He stood before the woman, cap in hand. "Madam," he said, thank you for the ice-cream, thank you for the cake, thank you for the present. I am going home."

"Darling, you know you'll have to walk in the dark through that cemetery. Something might happen to you."

The boy said, "I'll go; I'm not afraid."

She was unwilling to let him go. Anything might happen to an eight-year-old child, walking through the dark, ghostly graveyard. "No, wait, I'll send my husband with you."

The little boy said, "I am not afraid because Mamma sent my big brother to take me home."

He wasn't afraid. I am not afraid either. I am not afraid of sickness, nor of old age, nor of poverty. I am not afraid. I am not afraid of any tombstone, not afraid of any graves, my own or that of anyone else, because my Big Brother has His hand on mine and there isn't anything that can hurt Him, not anything. He will take care of me. That is what I mean when I say if you are born again the Lord will watch over your present needs.

3. The Lord will provide for your future.

Jesus said, **"In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."**

Not only does He blot out the past, not only does He sustain our present, but He provides for our future until the glory light of resplendent heaven is shining over us all the time. There is no night for a Christian, never! There is no dark valley for the Christian who is in the right path, who serves the Lord.

Why? Because up yonder beyond Calvary, beyond Joseph's open tomb, higher than the loftiest mountain, more brilliant than a million suns rolled into one, is the heaven that Jesus is preparing for us. By faith we can see it. By faith we travel toward it. By faith we shall attain it. That is something to sing about, to praise God about, to rejoice over, like the old deacon in the story.

There was an old deacon who was all the time shouting. He shouted upon every provocation. As long as his old pastor was there, the deacon's shouting didn't bother him. He liked the shouting. He was the shouting kind himself. But after a while the old pastor died. The flock called a college man with a frock-tailed coat, who used precise English, but he preached like a house afire. When the young pastor got in a weaving way, the old deacon would cut loose at the top of his voice with his "Amen! Let him go! Amen! Ain't he preaching!"

That young preacher didn't like the old man's shouting. He was collegiate. He wanted decency, decorum. That shouting interfered with his dignity. One day he called a group of deacons together and said, "Brethren, I want you to go to that old man and stop his shouting."

Two of the deacons went out to where the old man was plowing, stopped him, and passed the time of day. After a while, they came to the business in hand. "We like you. We know you got religion. But that pastor, he doesn't like you shoutin' that way all the time. You're hurting his preaching." They went on and on, trying to explain themselves.

After a while the old man stopped them and said, "Brethren, I noticed what you all are talking about. I want to give it up and almost make up my mind that I won't shout. Then I think how Jesus came down from heaven, how he died for me, how he washed me in His blood. When I think how He saved my soul; how He saved my wife, my children, how He has answered my prayers, given me my family, given me a little money, given me my home, given me a whole lot of good, loving friends; when I think that one of these days I am going to stretch out and die, and how this same Jesus will come and take me to glory, brethren, hold this mule while I shout!"

That is what I want to do. I want to shout because of what Christ has done for me. That is what God has promised to every one of us. Listen to this Jew. You had better turn that mule over once in a while and shout if you want to get anything out of your religion. Don't take it cold! It's not made to be taken that way. It is burning, inspiring, enthusiastic. Look to Calvary. Recognize what God has done for you. Go again to the Rock that was riven for your sins and for your refuge. Look into the pit from whence you were saved. Look up to Jesus, who died and saved you! Look up to God! Look to the glory that is waiting for you and shout until the gates of hell shake and tremble at your song of victory.

Yes. Thank God, God offers all that in the new birth; the forgiveness of your sins, the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost, that glory circled home in heaven. He offers all these mighty, munificent blessings to everyone who loves the Lord and waits for His appearing. To everyone who comes to God by Christ the Lord offers freedom from the past, fellowship in the present, fullness of fruition in the bright future.

IV. HOW DO WE OBTAIN THE NEW BIRTH?

What must we do to be born again? There is just one thing God requires of us. Here it is: "**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**"

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” There is just one way to obtain that salvation. There is one way to be born again, to become a child of God, to become a citizen of God’s kingdom. That way is by faith in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

By faith, our sins are forgiven, for it is written, **“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man there is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are freely justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.”**

- By faith our sins are forgiven us.
- By faith we become children of God, for, I quote again, **“to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them which believe on His name.”**
- By faith, by faith we shall be raised from the dead.

Not by education, not by culture, not by training, not by money, but by faith, our immortality in God is guaranteed. **“I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.”**

That is the word of God. Believe and be saved. Believe and be born again. What more do you want? How much easier, how much simpler can God make it? Will you accept God’s offer? Will you be born a child of God? Oh, what mighty gifts, what mighty blessings, God stands ready to shed on everyone of us through faith in His Son. God is waiting for you, pleading with you.

If you really want to be a child of God; if you really want to be certain of your salvation, of your everlasting life, of your fellowship with Christ, of your home in heaven, come and accept Jesus as your Redeemer, by faith. God will do the rest. Every man, woman, and child has faith enough, if you will exercise it, to come to Christ, to accept the free gift of God’s love. You may be born of the Spirit and of the blood, never through an endless eternity to be unborn. Accept God as your Father. Make Christ your elder Brother. Oh, may God in His compassionate mercy give you the grace, each of you, to come and accept that salvation by faith in Christ. In Jesus’ name. Amen!

~ end of sermon 1 ~

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