

New Birth - New Beginning

Are you truly alive in Christ? It is the hope and prayer of this series that everyone who participates has had a personal, 'new birth' experience in Christ (called 'born again' in the Bible). You may be thinking, "That's an odd thing to say. After all, we're here – in church – aren't we?" But the unfortunate truth is that there are many reasons why some folks attend church besides a personal relationship with and a love for the Lord Jesus.



In the Gospel of John we learn of a religious man, Nicodemus, who sincerely wanted to know deeper truths, so he had a rendezvous with Jesus one night only to discover that his real need was a whole new life (read John 3:1-21) Jesus confronts him in a direct way with the undeniable 'love of the Father' but also shows him his true 'condition'. He then offers Nicodemus the perfect solution to his condition - Himself. Such a sacrifice is the greatest love act of all (see John 15:13) In the next few lessons we will explore more closely how great a 'gift' the Father gave us, but for now let's assume your 'new life' has begun and that Christ is your foundation. So, how do we build upon that foundation? (read 1Cor 3:9-11)

"To put it another way, you are God's house...Let each carpenter who comes on the job take care to build on the foundation! Remember, there is only one foundation, the one already laid: Jesus Christ. Take particular care in picking out your building materials. Eventually there is going to be an inspection. If you use cheap or inferior materials, you'll be found out. The inspection will be thorough and rigorous. You won't get by with a thing." (1 Cor 3:9-14 from *The Message*)



The above interpretation reminds us to take care in building on the foundation of our new life in Christ, using only the 'materials' God prescribes in His word. The boys in this cartoon are reading their Bibles alright, but they also seem to be trying to 'enjoy' everything else as well! (Honestly, they look like they're on their way to a pretty sore stomach!) Yes, being a Christian can be 'fun', but it is also a life of new responsibility.



But that's not as bad as it sounds. In fact, being "in Christ" (knowing Him, belonging to Him) will actually begin to change your 'desires' and 'interests' so that you want what He wants. The more you know Him the more you'll love Him, and the more you love Him the more you will want to please Him!

Read now (and later memorize) **2Cor 5:17**. Here it says that to be "in Christ" is to become a "new creature" (literally a "new work of His creation" - like a piece of art that the 'artist' continues to improve upon!) Many "old things" have passed away or are in the process of "passing" (and it's different with each one of us) but the one thing that should be new in all of us is...well, read it for yourself (2Cor 5:14-15). That's right - a new love for Jesus which compels us to live for Him...now, in this life! If Jesus showed the "greatest love" to "lay down" His life for us (remember John 15:13?) then shouldn't we do the same for Him?



One of the first acts of Christian obedience that a new believer should seek to do is **water baptism**. It is the outward 'testimony' of the inward miracle of our new birth. Not only is it commanded in the scriptures (Mat 29:19:20 & Acts 2:38:39) but it will also encourage you to stand up to temptation and make the right choices. Read and consider Rom 6:1-6.

Even Jesus was baptized (as he himself said), "to fulfill all righteousness." Then he went straight out to the desert to take on the devil, winning over every temptation that was thrown at Him. Read the full account in Mat 3:13 - Mat 4:11.

Did you notice that there were three different 'kinds' of temptation? When the enemy tried to take advantage of Jesus' hunger ("command...stones be made bread") he assaulted the Lord's **flesh**. Next he sought to find **pride** by daring Jesus to "cast" Himself off the temple just to prove the angels were responsible for His safety [remember the Lord's response: Don't tempt God by taking unnecessary chances!!] And lastly, a view of all the "kingdoms of the world" were placed before His **eyes**, but Jesus knew that 'no matter how good it looks' - sin isn't worth the consequences!!

Makes you wish Eve knew that ahead of time, doesn't it? Read her story in Gen 3:1-7. Did you see the three 'kinds' of temptation in verse 6? Every thing the devil tries to throw at us can be placed in one of these three groups [try to think of one that doesn't.] This is why a very important verse for you to study, even to commit to memory, is **1 John 2:15-17**.

Once again the three categories of sin are mentioned, along with a stern warning about what will happen to this world and its 'lusts'. But there is also the wonderful promise of everlasting life for those who obey the Father and His word. He has made us His children and one day, when He brings us 'home' to Himself, will transform us in a glorious way so that we can live with Him forever. Now, let's close this lesson with these encouraging words - **1 John 3:1-3**.

