

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.

ASK: "What are some reasons you think people go to church?" [possible answers: 1. family tradition (such as children taken by parents) 2. enjoy the music or preaching 3. feel welcomed (it's a friendly place) 4. sense of security (especially for the elderly who want to know they will be cared for 5. to make an 'appearance' for sake of job



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 [**Try to read through this passage without discussion**]) Jesus confronts him in a direct way with the undeniable 'love of the Father' but also shows him his true 'condition'.

ASK: "What is said about the love of God the Father? What was Nicodemus' true condition?" He then offers Nicodemus the perfect solution to his condition - Himself. Such a sacrifice is the greatest love act of all (John 15:13) [**Have someone read John 15:13**] **ASK: "Who are the friends Jesus mentions**

here?" (see v. 14-15) 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) [**Have a student read the following, but first explain briefly that this is one interpretation of the passage, which is how we need to consider most of the newer translations.**]

"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*)

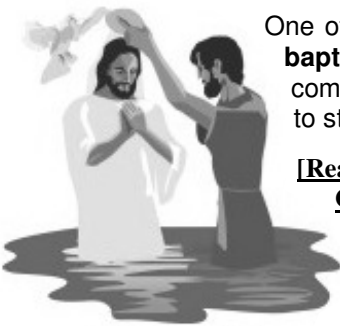


The above interpretation reminds us to take care in building on the foundation of our new life in Christ, using only the 'materials' God prescribes in His word. The boys in this cartoon are reading their Bibles alright, but they also seem to be trying to 'enjoy' everything else as well! (Honestly, they 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!) **ASK: "What are some of the things you think God would like to improve in you?"** 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 [**Have a student read this...**] (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? **SAY: "Listen to how these verses were translated in the New Living Translation: 'Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them. So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!'"**



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.

[Read the following from Rom 6:1-6 in *The Message* : "So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If we've left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn't you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land! That's what baptism into

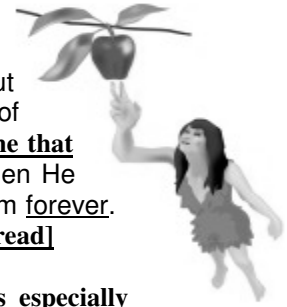
the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country. Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer at sin's every beck and call! What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection.”]

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. **[Leader should read with students following in their Bibles. Try to avoid discussion at this time]**

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!! **[Depending on class time remaining, have a brief discussion on ‘not tempting God’ - “what are some examples of people doing that?” Also, before continuing repeat the line ‘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. **[Have a student read this passage. If time is too short summarize the story and just read v.6]** 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**. **[Teacher should read, slowly with emphasis]**

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. **[repeat the words: “...but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.”]** 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**. **[Have a student read]**



[Closing: Suggest that this last passage would also be good to memorize but that it is especially important to learn 2 Cor 5:17, then 1 Jn 1:15-17. Tell them the importance of committing to memory key verses so the Holy Spirit can bring ‘to remembrance’ when needed most. There will be more on that in the next lesson which will cover Prayer, Bible Study, and Christian Fellowship. Encourage students to read over this lesson again before the next meeting.]