

Fallacies of the New Birth

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Bible Text: John 3:1-21

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The phrase “born again” has become a popular but misused expression. Virtually every segment of our culture uses it, e.g., business, politics, and sports. Those whose careers experience rejuvenation claim to be born again.

Errors in the use of the phrase “born again” abound even within the Church of Jesus Christ. Everyone, it seems, has had a born again spiritual experience. But, it bears little resemblance to its Biblical roots.

The failure of the pulpit to properly explain it has led to inclusion of multitudes who claim a new birth but have never experienced it.

So, the professing Church today suffers. Believers, individually and collectively, lose the glorious presence of God, Who withdraws His blessing. In essence, a wrong concept of the new birth denies Christ's full work and grieves the Holy Spirit, quenching His work in our lives.

Ultimately, the cause of the problem lies in unbelief. Ignorance, belief in a fallacy, conformity to popular notions, and neglect contribute to cast doubt upon the truth. In some sad instances, rebellion against the truth ends with unbelief.

The Church and Christians face a crossroads. The massive spiritual declension of the Church resulting from a faulty doctrine of the new birth demands change.

To overcome the current spiritual condition and to experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives requires a reexamination of the Bible for God's ways and judgments about this issue and the return to foundational Biblical truth.

A first step in that process of revival involves an examination of the fallacies of the new birth prevalent in our culture and in the Church of Jesus Christ. Scripture provides no better setting for this investigation than Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus (John 3.1-21). This encounter brings to light numerous fallacies and misunderstandings about the new birth.

Religious knowledge does not produce the new birth. Nicodemus, a teacher of the Pharisees, possessed vast knowledge of the Scriptures without the new birth.

Religious duties and works do not produce the new birth. Nicodemus, by his position, showed himself as faithful in them, but still lacked it (Galatians 6.15).

Religious profession will not produce the new birth. Nicodemus showed a life filled with religious decisions, which changed his life in certain respects, even emulating Biblical behavior and law. He still needed the new birth.

Religious reformation does not produce the new birth. By his position, Nicodemus proved that he lived a morally reformed life of strict religious behavior.

Religious devotion cannot bring the new birth. Again, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, exemplified religious zeal. Yet Jesus emphatically said that he needed to be born again.

The new birth does not come from religious heritage. Neither a Christian home nor a Christian legacy produces the new birth. God has no spiritual grandchildren (vs. 6). In addition, several other misunderstandings about the new birth abound. It is not the creation of a new person, who had no prior existence. Nor is the new birth a cooperation between mankind and the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36.25-27).

Further, it is not a process occurring over time (note emphasis of “born” in vs. 3, 6-8). Last, the new birth does not transpire by “inviting/asking Jesus into your heart.” No Scripture teaches this practice.

Jesus emphasized to Nicodemus that the new birth does not rely upon what anyone does. Neither learning, lifestyle, language, labor, love, nor lineage brings the new birth to anyone. It is something that is done to a person by the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit (vs. 8).

Certain implications result from these truths.

They show the deplorable condition of mankind without the new birth: helpless and hopeless, dead in trespasses and sins.

They emphasize the importance of self-examination. Self-reliance and dependence upon good works account for nothing.

They reveal the necessity of the new birth, God acting upon humanity and for his benefit.

They demonstrate the nature of God's love, grace, and mercy for helpless sinners.

Nothing suffices unless you are born anew and given a new nature.

I trust that the Holy Spirit will apply these truths to your life today. I pray that He will clarify for you the truth to believe, contradict for you false doctrine to reject, convict you of self-reliance and dependence upon good works in your relationship with Christ, and correct you from your sin to bring you to full saving faith in Jesus Christ alone.

If you currently trust exclusively upon Christ as your Lord and Savior, these truths comfort you. If you do not, I pray that the Lord will be gracious and send the Holy Spirit into your life. Who knows but the Lord may be gracious to you and give to you the new birth today.