

MINISTUDY What It Means to Be Born Again

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Nicodemus was a high-ranking Pharisee deeply interested in the teachings of Jesus Christ. One night he came to Jesus secretly, not wanting to be seen talking to Him.

During that meeting, Jesus revealed a profound truth - something that completely mystified Nicodemus. "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," said Jesus (John 3:3).

Totally perplexed, Nicodemus asked: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (verse 4).

Nicodemus understood what it meant to be born. But he did not understand how anyone could be "born again." He thought Jesus was referring to a second human birth.

But Christ was actually describing two different kinds of birth - one physical, the other spiritual. He was comparing spiritual birth to physical birth, the physical being a type of the spiritual_

When one is born of his mother he is composed of flesh. But "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," said Jesus (verse 6) - no longer composed of flesh, but of spirit.

That's the plain teaching of the Bible. The second birth is not some kind of emotional experience, as so many have erroneously believed! Let's begin to understand the awe-inspiring truth revealed in the Bible.

Simply look up and read in your Bible the scriptures you are directed to after each question. Comments following the questions elaborate on the verses just read. (This study is based on the Revised Authorized Version of the Bible, but you may use any translation.) Now let's begin this eye-opening study.

1. After whose "image" and "likeness" was man created? Genesis 1:26-27.

In God's pattern for all life, kind reproduces like kind. Just as each form of plant or animal life reproduces after its own kind, so humans reproduce humans. But unlike any of the animals, man was created in God's own image and likeness. God made man like Himself -- same form and shape. But why?

The astounding truth is that God's purpose is to create man after the God kind! This includes God's character as well as composition.

Notice again in Genesis 1:26 what God said: "Let Us make man in Our image." The original Hebrew indicates far more than merely God's outward appearance. "Image" also refers to mind and character.. God wants us to develop His holy, righteous character during this mortal life. But more about this later in the study.

2. Even though man is made in the likeness of God. are both of the same composition? John 4:24, Genesis 2:7, 3:19.

There is a vast difference between spirit and dust. Although man was created in the very shape and likeness of God, he was not created out of spirit. He was made out of the dust of the ground, subject to death and decay. But God's purpose is to one day snake him a spirit being.

3. How does I Corinthians 15:46-49 corroborate this marvelous truth?

Clearly, man is much more than any animal. Man has the potential to become divine spirit - just as God is spirit.

Astonishing as it may sound, God is now in the process of creating His greatest creation of all - His supreme masterpiece. God's purpose is to create, from mortal mankind, individuals composed of spirit possessing perfect spiritual character. Notice the overwhelming proof:

4. What interesting comparison is drawn in Isaiah 64:8? Did Job realize God was forming a sped creation in his life? Job 14:14-15.

Notice especially the latter part of verse 15: "You shall desire the work of Your hands." The "work" was Job. Job knew he was being molded and shaped spiritually by the hands of the Master Potter.

6. Are true Christians being fashioned by God for a specific purpose? Ephesians 2: i0.

"We," then - if we are indeed Christians - are God's "workmanship." We, today, are in the process of being "created" - why? - "for good works." God, through the power of the Holy Spirit He places within us (after repentance and baptism), is forming in us His holy, righteous character. With our cooperation

through obedience to Him, God is creating in us His own character-image.

The Gospel message Jesus brought to mankind reveals that God is in the process of reproducing Himself through mankind. Jews' Gospel is the good news of the "kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14). But the Bible shows that Kingdom is dual. It is not only the ruling government that Christ will establish on 'earth when He returns, it is also the Family of God.

And, incredible as it may sound, Jesus taught that humans can be born into the Family, or Kingdom, of God!

At present there are only two members in the God Family - God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son (John 1:1-2, 1 Corinthians 8:6). But God is planning to expand His Family.

B. Does God plainly show that it is His purpose to increase His divine Family by bringing many spiritual children into it? 11 Corinthians 6:18, Hebrews 2:9-11, Revelation 21:7. Is Jesus Christ actually the "firstborn" of many children of God? Romans 8:29.

To be conformed to the image of Christ means to become like Him -- to be glorified as He is now glorified - to be a member of the divine Family of God even as Christ now is.

Few have really grasped the tremendous significance of• this marvelous truth. But this is what salvation is all about. Our awesome potential is to become God's literal, Spirit-born children - members of God's own divine Family!

7. Are true Christians already, during this mortal life, God's children? I John 3:1-2, Romans 8:14-16. Are they inheritors of the Kingdom of God, or only heirs to it? Verse 17.

Although they are now the children of God. Christians are only heirs -- ones who shall, in the future, inherit the glory of God's Family with Jesus Christ. Why only heirs? Because they are now only Spirit-begotten children (I Peter 1:3). They are unborn children of God. It is when they are born of God that they will become inheritors of God's Kingdom -- divine members of the Family of God.

Before the second phase of our creation -our spiritual creation - can begin, God the

Father must first beget each of us by placing His Holy Spirit within our minds. Thus our minds can be compared to an egg or ovum, and the Holy Spirit to an impregnating seed or germ of eternal life.

Receiving God's Spirit is the begetting of the spiritual life of God within our minds. And as a newly begotten physical embryo begins to grow in its mother's womb, we must begin to grow in God's spiritual character after we are begotten by His Spirit (I Peter 2:1-2, 11 Peter 3:18, Ephesians 4:11-15). This growth comes from Bible study, prayer and walking with God in obedience to Him as we are empowered by His Holy Spirit within us.

And so all Spirit-begotten Christians are the unborn children of God the Father in the same sense that an unborn human embryo or fetus is the child of its parents.

8. Can anyone, while still flesh_ and blood, inherit or enter God's Kingdom? I Corinthians 15:50. What must happen to us to be born as divine members in God's Family? Verses 51-53.

"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit," said Jesus (John 3:6). But we have not yet been born of the Spirit. We are still flesh and blood capable of pain and bleeding when injured.

But when born into the God Family, we will be free of pain and suffering (Revelation 21:4). And with our now spirit bodies, we will be unfettered by the physical limitations of time and space.

9. To what did Jesus compare one who is born of the Spirit? John 3:8.

The effects of the wind are easily discerned, but the wind itself cannot be seen. When one is born again --- born of the Spirit of God -he will be invisible to mortal eyes like the wind.

After Christ was resurrected - born again -- was He able to pass through solid walls? John 20:19, 26.

Obviously, any human who claims to be born again is in error, for he is still flesh and blood.

Jesus Christ is the only one who has ever been born again. He said we must be "born of the Spirit" -- composed of spirit -- to see or enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). When the glorified Christ returns to earth, the Spirit begotten children of God who have died through the ages will all be resurrected to spirit life, and those still alive will be instantly changed into spirit (I Thessalonians 4:)6-17).

Then, at that moment, they all will be born again, this time as glorified immortal members of God's own Family, and they will begin to reign on earth with Jesus Christ! .