

July 11, 2010 – 2 of 12 in Signs of Life

# Exist and Live

John 3:3–8

## INTRODUCTION

WHEN WE GET DEEPER IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, there are many things that are still not obvious to many of us. The more we learn, the more questions pop up. Now I think if we are being honest, one of the main questions that arise is this: If God saves us by his grace alone—from before the foundations of the world as a free gift and keeps us in his love until the end—that certainly is the greatest news imaginable...for those who really are saved! But how do I know that I am one of his children? Is there any definite way to tell? Can I have assurance that I am for real? Are there places in the Bible that give us things to look for—some signs of life?

This first text will likely be the most confusing and most depressing. And that may actually be your first good sign! It was confusing and depressing to its first audience. A man named Nicodemus, the leading religious teacher of his day, came to Jesus in the middle of the night. The report is found in John 3. Notice that Nicodemus had **deep knowledge**, he was a **seeker**, and he was **willing to be ostracized**.

- WE ARE BORN AGAIN BEFORE WE SEE AND ENTER
- WE ARE BORN AGAIN BY THE SPIRIT, NOT THE FLESH
- WE ARE BORN AGAIN BY THE DECISION OF THE SPIRIT
- WE ARE BORN AGAIN WITH A REAL SPIRITUAL LIFE

**The Big Idea** is that Jesus commands that you be born. You can't. So He creates what He commands!

In one sense, Jesus and his contemporaries had a commonly agreed upon definition of the kingdom of God. They had a common past with a common destiny, a common book with a common center of worship. And even as they could all look back together at the promises made to their fathers, so they could all look forward together to the day when the Lord would redeem them from their oppressors forever and put an end to all evil. It sounds an awful lot like our culture's common idea of a perfect world. Jesus and Nicodemus had a common ground to start on: a basic, superficial idea called the kingdom of God, which meant "salvation" or

“the world put back together for God’s people.” And when everything is common, everything that is most real is taken for granted. Because in another sense the idea that Jesus had about the kingdom and the idea that Nicodemus had couldn’t have been more different!

## DOCTRINE

### I. WE ARE BORN AGAIN BEFORE WE SEE AND ENTER

#### A) Seeing and Entering are Treated Interchangeably

##### 1. (idein) “see” or “enter” – similar to “seek”

[Mat. 7:7–8] “seek and you will find...the one who seeks finds.”

[Jer. 29:13] “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”

##### 2. Superficial seeking has always been a human problem [cf. Ps. 14:2]

[Is. 64:7] “There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you.”

##### a. In the Bible, God solves the seeker problem by doing the seeking himself!

[Is. 65:1] “I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here am I, here am I,’ to a nation that was not called by my name.”

#### B) Natural Man’s Inability is Treated Categorically

##### 1. Unless “one” (anyone) is born again...

##### a. So first you get created, then, you’re there to do stuff!

[Jn. 5:24] “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me **has** eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but **has passed** from death to life.”

[1 Jn. 5:1] “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ **has been** born of God.”

##### 2. Unless this first that cannot happen, because sinful man is...

##### a. unable to see the value of Jesus [2 Cor. 4:4]

##### b. unable to change his moral habits [Jer. 13:23]

- c. unable to obey the law of God [Rom. 8:7]
- d. unable to understand spiritual things [1 Cor. 2:14]
- e. unable to come to Jesus [Jn. 6:44, 65]
- f. utterly dead to God [Eph. 2:1]

Back in the Old Testament, the Lord promises that, “a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh” [Ez. 11:19]. God will perform the necessary surgery on the terminal patient. And Jesus warns the Pharisees: “you refuse to come to me that you may have life” [Jn. 5:40]. The clear implication is that before coming to Christ we do not have life. We are dead. We are helpless [cf. Rom. 5:6]. That is the force of Jesus’ categorical first statement to Nicodemus: Unless you are born again, you cannot enter. You cannot see. Being born again is likened to first believing in the same way as the blind man first sees, the deaf man first hears and the lame man first walks. All this we cannot do.

## II. WE ARE BORN AGAIN BY THE SPIRIT, NOT THE FLESH

\*\*\*Paint the picture of the “Sunday School Comic Foil” Nicodemus and refute it\*\*\*

### A) Two Offspring Are Compared Here

[Rom. 9:6] “This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.”

#### 1. The Scriptures pit the Spirit against the flesh in all good works.

[Gal. 5:17] “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other.”

- a. Note from that verse that God has desires that He gives to all Christians!

[Jn. 6:63] “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.”

- b. Here is the principle—like the law of biogenesis—that spiritual life only comes from the Spiritual Life:

[Mat. 16:17] “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For **flesh and blood** has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”

[Jn. 5:21, 26] “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will...**For** as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”

## B) Each Offspring Can Only Come After their Kind

[1 Cor. 1:30] “He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus.”

[Eph. 2:5] “even when we were dead in our trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ.”

## III. WE ARE BORN AGAIN BY THE DECISION OF THE SPIRIT

### A) The Holy Spirit is Compared to the Wind

1. This is unsettling to us because it is outside of our control.

- a. We need exactly what Nicodemus needed, and we are utterly dependent on God to accomplish it...We've lost control of religion, of our own hearts! We never had it.

[Jam. 1:18] “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth”

### B) This Sovereign Method of Regeneration is Universal

“...so it is with **everyone** who is born of the Spirit” (v. 8)

1. This “wind” has “wishes” and those are the decisive factor

[Mat. 11:27] “no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

[Jn. 1:13] “who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

[Phi. 1:29] “For it has been granted to you that...(you) believe in him...”

[Rom. 9:16] “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

2. Therefore this new birth is no different than any other part of salvation—it is an act of sheer grace and mercy:

[1 Pet. 1:3] “**According to his great mercy**, he has caused us to be born again”

[Titus 3:5] “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but **according to his own mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”

Actually it is the Spirit anointing the same word that He inspired in those ancient authors on the lips of a human preacher, or, perhaps when you are reading your Bible on your bed at night. Something clicks. The scales fall from your eyes. A passage that you have read (or thought you had) a hundred times suddenly pierces your heart and shatters your world. You are alive! Though you may be shaken and filled with new fears, you would not trade it for the world to go back a minute in time to your former

darkness. You know that this is the way on because you have been changed in an instant:

[2 Cor. 5:17] “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

#### IV. WE ARE BORN AGAIN WITH A REAL SPIRITUAL LIFE

##### A) That Which is Born of the Spirit is a Spirit

##### 1. We remember the wind in this picture: don't forget the leaves!

[Heb. 12:23] “to the **spirits** of the righteous made perfect.”

##### a. You see its effects! You see the Spirit's affections!

[Gal. 5:22–23] “But the **fruit** of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (all affections and/or attitudes)

“In some way or other, all affections do have an effect upon the body. As we have seen already, the nature of the union of body and soul is such that all lively and vigorous effects on the mind influence the body. But intense bodily reactions are not evidences that the affections are spiritual. On the other hand, I do not know of any standard which can prove that gracious and holy affections will not have a great affect on the body.”  
JONATHAN EDWARDS, *Religious Affections*

##### b. Lazarus is a picture of this (that's why it had to be bodily: note the bound corpse), so Jesus compares the new birth to the resurrection.

[Jn. 11:23–26, 43–44 **TURN**] Jesus said that this life is never lost [Jn. 5:25] “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when **the dead will hear** the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”

##### B) The Prophecy of Ezekiel 36 Alluded to Here

##### 1. So the “water and the spirit” refer to cleansing and regeneration.

[Ez. 36:25–27] “I will sprinkle clean **water** on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new **spirit** I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put **my Spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

- a. So this new spiritual life (sense) is not a “second you,” but the New You **being formed in the form of affections** by the Holy Spirit for the whole of God [cf. Rom. 12:2, 2 Cor. 3:18 – **transformed**]

## 2. And the implication is a totally new heart that lives:

- a. Thus Edwards’ first sign of authentic godly affection is a real spiritual sense of God.

[2 Pet. 1:4] “he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**”

“true believers experience ‘a new inward **perception or sensation** of their minds, entirely different in its nature and kind, from anything that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were (saved)...this new spiritual **sense** is not a new faculty of understanding. So that new holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense is not a new faculty of will, but a foundation laid in the nature of the soul for a new kind of exercise of the same faculty of will.”

JONATHAN EDWARDS, *Religious Affections*

\*\*\*If you’re wondering whether Edwards’ first sign is directly taught in this text, look down to verses **9–15!**

- b. We cannot stress enough that this is the only kind of Christianity there is:

[Rom. 8:10–11] “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”

## APPLICATION

**Why ‘preach the new birth’?** (a helpful clue as to what we’re doing in this series)

At the heart of the Law is a whole heart for God. Consider the Greatest Commandment that Moses taught Israel [Deut. 6:4–5] and the Jesus repeated in the New Testament [Mk. 12:29–30]. Now if the whole law is summarized in the highest affections for God, then reconsider the traditional logic about the gospel—hearing the Law (infinite affections for God) breaks us to receive the gospel...

- P1. IF law must precede gospel to prepare the heart for grace,
- P2. IF the heart of the law is the impossible, highest affections for God,
- C. THEN the commanding of the highest affections most readily prepares the heart for grace.

So I want to draw attention to this because the senses of despair and resistance and expectancy will naturally be intensified by drawing attention to it.

**What do you do with your reaction to this message? (Despair or Resistance)**

1. If resistance, then ask yourself what you're resisting. Jesus himself has issued a demand here to you: You must be born again. You must exist with a new existence. You must live with a new life. You are obligated to do this and you have no ability to do this. This must break you before you genuinely repent. The sinner is a harder thing than a steel beam that needs to be bent to start behaving a certain way;
2. If despair, then