

The New Birth

New Life in Christ Jesus



By John Krivack

You can start an entirely new life in Jesus, but not before you bring your old life to an end. To avoid misunderstanding, let me say that we are not talking here about suicide! We are talking about a radical change of life—a change so radical that it truly feels like a death experience. As a coin has two sides, response to the gospel requires a death to the old life and rebirth to new life in Jesus. The two are a “tandem” of absolute requirement. Yet, of the two, bringing the old life to a death experience is too easily downplayed, or even disregarded.

The Bible talks about a “new birth”, a second birth. Even a Jewish rabbi was confused by what this means: *“How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”* (John 3:4, NASB). There is a pattern of transformation that was established in the “gospel events” of the life of Jesus—His death on the Cross, burial in a tomb, and resurrection to newness of life. Jesus set the pattern: first a death experience, which is followed by a “new birth” (a resurrection). When people of faith follow Jesus through this pattern, they are born again.

Listen carefully to Jesus. All through the Gospel of John, Jesus insists “my hour has not yet come.” But when some Greeks seek Him out, Jesus knows the moment has arrived: *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him”* (John 12:23–26). First, observe the pattern in the germination of a plant from seed. Its existence in seed form comes to an end—a form of death. But out of the destruction of the seed, new life emerges—a picture of resurrection. Second, that experience is lonely, solitary for the poor seed. But once it sprouts forth, it generates more seeds that will each repeat the pattern of death and rebirth—alone no more!

The New Testament writings often discuss this death experience. Paul exclaims, *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me”* (Galatians 2:20, NASB). The pattern is clear, isn’t it? And again, *“I die daily!”* (1 Corinthians 15:31). It is clear that Paul is following the pattern set by Jesus, both modeled (on the Cross) and taught to followers: *“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”* (Luke 14:27). None of this is optional.

Now, let’s transition to the new birth: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he*

cannot see the kingdom of God," Jesus told Nicodemus. And again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:3–6, NASB). The new birth generates new life because God puts His Spirit into the heart of every person that dies with Jesus. Baptism (in water) is where death and rebirth take place. When one goes under the water, it is a burial of the "old self"—"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Romans 6:3–8, NASB).

Baptism is also the place where the Holy Spirit is received, following the pattern set by Jesus with His baptism: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him" (Mark 1:9–10). For us who follow into baptism, we are "born of water and Spirit", just as Peter promised on the day of Pentecost: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Popular music sometimes makes a nod toward Christian salvation, yet ignores the half of the tandem that requires people to answer the sacrifice of Jesus with a sacrifice of their own. The song will admit (or even boast) that the chosen path of life will drag unrepentantly through the gutters of immorality and sin. And yet—wait for it!—the refrain comes through to express the faith-filled hope that, nevertheless, Jesus will be there with free salvation! This "faith" is not the kind that saves, is not the response to the Cross that God—in full tandem—requires: "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:5–11; NASB). The catchy song carries a false gospel that eliminates a death to the old life.

The new birth brings a radical change of life. Sin had a place in the old life; it has no place in the new. How is change possible? The Holy Spirit brings the power for holiness against the power of sin. The reborn Christian is now a "saint" who is "sanctified" (that is, made holy). The new quality of life may be described in such positivistic terms, without

requiring an absolutely immediate and perfect break with sin. There is a growth process. Even so, the new birth breaks the previous slavery under sin: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls”* (1 Peter 1:3–9, NASB).

The new birth brings you fresh into the family of God, adopted and in line for a full inheritance. The Spirit, now dwelling inside you, recreates you into the image of Jesus. When He returns, you will look very much like each other!

Both halves of the tandem find anchor points in Scripture that authenticate this as theological truth. One may be “born again” only after dying to self (the “old self”) and to sin. Having done this, we may claim these accomplishments:

- We have “obeyed the gospel”! The gospel is the saving message that Jesus was crucified and resurrected. We also have been crucified and raised to newness of life.
- We have formed a “New Covenant” relationship with God through Christ Jesus! The essence of that arrangement is that the full self-sacrifice of Jesus (on the Cross) is answered with a full self-sacrifice of our own (denying self, taking up our own crosses, and following).
- We gain entrance to the Kingdom of God! Jesus warned that, without a new birth, you will not see the Kingdom of God. The same Kingdom restriction attends those who try to enter the Kingdom without a “death experience”: *“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

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