

A Brand New You and Me

“A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.” (Matthew 7:18) “You must be born again. If a man is not born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven.” (John 3) - *Jesus*

Before Augustine became a Christian in the late 300's AD he was a wild and immoral young man. Walking a street one day, a prostitute called out to him and he kept on walking. She caught him, turned him around and said, “Augustine, don't you know who I am?” “I do,” he said, “but you don't know who I am. The Augustine you knew is dead.”

A communist leader was making a speech and when he saw a very poor man standing there, he said, “Karl Marx can put a new coat on that man.” A Christian in the crowd shouted, “That is nothing. Jesus Christ can put a new man in that coat.”

Salvation involves not only forgiveness but a change of character that leads to a change of life. People talk today about being a “born again Christian.” That is like saying a “tooth dentist” or a “female woman”. The only real Christian is a born again Christian.

The Necessity of a New You

It is necessary **because Jesus said it**. He came from God as God, and rose from the dead to prove He was God. (Romans 1:1-4) He said, “Unless a man is born again he will never see the Kingdom of Heaven.” (John 3:5) God never forgives a person unless He changes Him into a better, more loving, less selfish, human being. He never gets us into heaven in the hereafter unless He gets heaven into us in the nasty here and now. Matthew Henry said if an unsaved man got into heaven he would pick the angel's pockets.

It is necessary because of **our wickedness**. God said through Jeremiah, “The heart (human nature) is desperately wicked and deceitful. Who can cure it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) This does not mean we are horribly wicked and can do no good or kind things. The German industrialist, Schindler, put his life in danger and used all of his money to save hundreds of Jews from death. But he was also repeatedly unfaithful to his wife. The soldier who throws himself on a grenade for you, if he lives, might kill you later in a bar fight. It means we all have the *potential* for horribly evil acts and that even the good we do is *contaminated* with things like pride or hope of gain.

Selfishness-The most natural thing in the world is selfishness. If you don't believe that, tell a toddler you are going give one of his 200 toys to a poor child who has no toys. Thankfully we can teach unselfishness with toys and other items but ten thousand other devils live in every human heart just waiting to come out. That is how nice Lutheran girls could type Nazi death lists of Jews and nice Lutheran children could laugh at the Jews being transported to the death camps.

Spurgeon says human nature is like gunpowder, it isn't always *exploding* but it is always *explosive*; just waiting for the right spark to set it off. Who of us can say that we would not trample a child to get out of a burning building? Or on a more practical level, who of us could say that inheriting ten million dollars would not change us? If you answer that quickly and easily, you do not know the human heart, and you do not know your own heart. We all have horrible potential for wickedness within that can be brought out.

It is necessary because **we cannot change who we are**. Sadly, *reformation* (trying to make ourselves good) is the world's way to heaven. People all around us say do your best, let God add up the good and the bad in your life; and if the good outweighs the bad, He will let you into heaven. They believe God will grade on the curve.

Jesus said a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. (Matthew 7) God says, "Even if you wash yourself with lye and a lot of soap, the stain of your guilt is always before Me." (Jeremiah 2:22) Paul, as a Pharisee tried hard to make himself right with God, and honestly knew he was a failure. After accepting salvation as a gift to the undeserving, he said, "We know that no one is made right with God by obeying laws; all the law does is show us we have sinned." (Romans 3:20) When you and I read, "Thou shall not covet (want way too much)" all we find out is how much we do covet.

God wants **purity of heart** (Psalm 24); love for enemies; and the willingness to live or die for Him and our fellow man. (1 John 3:16) All the reformation in the world cannot produce that. Trying to do better is like mopping a dirt floor. The harder we work, the dirtier we get. It is like putting talcum powder on cancer. It is like trying to purify the water by painting the pump.

God tells you and me to **be perfect**, just like Him. (Matthew 5:48) We are told to love our enemies; give what we have to the poor; and do it all with the sincerity of a pure heart. (Matthew 5-7) These are tall orders. Most of us have trouble keeping two New Year's resolutions for a week. If I have to live by the Sermon on the Mount to go to heaven, then I am doomed to be damned.

Reformation **brings no assurance**. The rich, young, ruler said he had kept all the commandments "from his youth up", yet he came running to Jesus, wondering if he had eternal life. (Luke 18) What bothers me is if I have to be good to go to heaven, how good to I have to be? If I have to do my best, and keep asking God to forgive me, how do I know what my "best" is? Who of us can stand up today and say, "I did my best as a parent; as a child; as a husband; as a wife?" The world's gospel (good news) is bad news to me. The proud man's gospel is self improvement, but all we do is make matters worse.

Reformation **makes us proud**. Wherever you find reformation and self righteousness, you find legalism, rule keeping, and pride. The people most

responsible for the murder of Jesus were the Pharisees. Jesus condemned them as play-actors (hypocrites), who looked down their noses at others, with no desire to help, but only to judge. They were the architects of their own virtue. And when Jesus came, preaching salvation as a grace gift to all sinners, including them, they were so offended, they had Him killed.

The Bible says, “By grace (a gift to the undeserving) are you saved, through faith, it is the gift of God, so **no one can boast.**” (Ephesians 2:8) Reformation makes us proud of our work; regeneration makes us proud of God’s work. Pride makes us boast, regeneration makes us grateful. Pride makes us look down our noses at those who are not “good” and “disciplined” like us. The New Birth makes us reach out to them in love, saying, “The only difference between you and me is the Lord. Come to Him like I did.”

Reformation **cannot pardon the past.** The Bible says, “While we were still enemies, we were made God’s friends (reconciled) by the death of His Son.” (Romans 5:9) We are guilty of the same sins that helped murder God’s Son, and if someone murders your child, no matter how much he changes or how sorry he is, your forgiveness cannot be earned, it can only be given by you.

The Nature of the New You

When we give Jesus our sins to forgive and our lives to change, He does it in the miracle of what He called the new birth. (John 3) He knew God’s promise in the Old Testament:

“I will give you a new heart (Inner nature) and will put a new spirit in you. I will put My Spirit in you and cause you to follow My laws.” (Ezekiel 36:26-28) This is not coercion any more than my grandchildren “make” me love them, adore and spoil them.

New birth is **not necessarily an exciting experience.** Paul was struck blind when He received it (Acts 9); but Timothy learned and accepted Christianity from his grandmother as a child. (2 Timothy 1) Nicodemus didn’t know he was born again until three years later when he stood up against his friends and gave Jesus a decent burial. (John 3; 20) W.T. Conner says it is not how high we jump when we get it that proves new birth; it is how straight we walk when we come back down. It is simply admitting to God that you cannot even live up to your own standards of right and wrong, much less His, and humbly letting Him come in and change you initially and daily.

The new birth is **not necessarily some experience you remember.** I remember my conversion, and there are some who will tell you that unless you can remember it, it is not real. That is not only false, it is damaging. Baptists program the new birth by associating it with walking an aisle and being baptized. Most denominations do not give an invitation and many people grow up having a

multitude of experiences with the Lord, and cannot pinpoint which one brought them from death to life.

Billy Graham's wife Ruth, reared a devout Presbyterian, did not remember any one experience; but Billy says, "she was the finest Christian he ever knew." Spurgeon says some conversions are like a bolt of lightning, and others are like the coming of the dawn, when we cannot pinpoint the exact moment night becomes morning. Adrian Rogers says when you fly from Georgia to Texas you don't know exactly when you crossed into Texas, but you are there.

Looking for an experience is damaging. If you doubt your salvation today, and are trying to decide if you were really born again back then; this is an exercise in frustration. And trying to conjure up some "born again" experience is equally frustrating. What you need to do, is give Jesus your sins to forgive and your life to change right now, and do it for the rest of your life. I was born again 48 years ago and I know my repentance and faith was real because it is still going on in my life today.

Next Week – *The New Life of the New You*

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