

Lifebyte 52

Kingdom Living (Part 2)

To Enter The Kingdom You Must Be Born Again

Jesus Proclaims A Kingdom



*For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?
Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)*



Restoration Ministries International

Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz
Web: www.Restorationministries.org

To Enter The Kingdom Of God You Must Be Born Again

Jesus declared, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he CANNOT SEE the kingdom of God." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he CANNOT ENTER the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:3-8).



The phrase "born again" has been used to refer to everything from refurbished cars to a byword of evangelical Christendom. Yet because of its familiarity, it seems that few have pursued what Jesus meant in His call to be "*born again*" or "*born from above*" or "*born of the Spirit*".

Most Christians would assert that Jesus inaugurated the concept of rebirth in His discourse with Nicodemus in John 3. However, consider this: If experiencing a spiritual rebirth were a new teaching, why would Jesus ask Nicodemus, "*You are Israel's teacher and you don't know this?*" (v.10).

The issue of being born again must have been well-known for Jesus to have addressed this august Council member

in such a manner. Spiritual birth was, and is, a mandate for people to both *see* the Kingdom and to *enter* it: "*You should not be surprised at My saying, 'You must be born again'"* (v.7). Thus, our ability to both recognize and comprehend the Kingdom which Jesus is establishing depends on our spiritual rebirth.

Did you know that for over two hundred years *before the coming of Jesus* the Hebraic Stream of rabbis taught that a person must experience *spiritual rebirth* in their relationship with God? In Hebraic terms, "conversion" involved the total person responding to God's call on his life.



It's as if *His Spirit* was calling out to *your spirit*. When you respond to that bidding, you are "*born from above*" or "*born again*". To recap: To be *born from above* was understood as a positive response to our Father's appeal to a person's spirit.

Being *born from above* is a whole different mechanism than relying on your sin nature-controlled soul! When your spirit is aligned in union with the Spirit of Christ, you're changed from knowing *about* God through your mind to *knowing Him intimately* through your spirit.

To be born again in spirit as a Kingdom person is a shift from institutionalized religion and its obligatory practices to a life journey of personal intimacy with our Father in the Lordship of King Jesus.

The temptation to try to blend religious form and practice with your new life in the Spirit appears reasonable at first glance. But while that may seem good to your mind, the danger to *your spirit* is as real as an exploding wineskin:

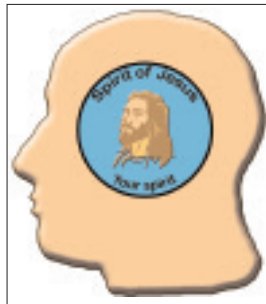
*No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the **patch will***

pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.

*Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the **skins will burst**, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour **new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved** (Matthew 9:16,17).*

In essence, the King of kings is telling us that you can't live in His Kingdom and practice religion at the same time. If you try, you'll only tear yourself apart. Perhaps you'll revert back to the familiarity of your old religious practices rather than press on in your relationship with Him.

Why is this? Because from the day you were physically born, your *sin nature-controlled soul* (your mind, will, and emotions) guided you. In contrast, when you are *born again*, the Spirit of Jesus in you wants to rule through your spirit. This transformation process is called "sanctification"—a total departure from life-long reliance on your soul to total dependence on the Spirit of Christ in you.



Because of the powerful influence of your sin nature from the moment you were born, the transition from "soulish reliance" to Spirit-dependence is formidable. The battle is ongoing and intense:

*For the **sinful nature** [within your soul] **longs after** what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the **sinful nature**. They are **in conflict with each other**, so that you do not do the things that you wish (Galatians 5:17).*

Much of contemporary western Christendom has abused the truth of biblical grace, tending instead to appease man's sin nature by *tolerating and excusing* sinful attitudes and actions. Many who have swallowed this false gospel find satisfaction in believing that they can allow their sin nature to rule and yet be acceptable in God's sight.

Unconfronted by the reality of their sin and willful disobedience, they receive soulish comfort in their traditions and religious practices, most of which emanate from pagan Hellenism and Romanism. [We'll discuss this topic more thoroughly in a later Lifebyte.]

Both the standard and the means of experiencing spiritual rebirth is Jesus Himself. That implies we must trust completely in Him "*as the Scripture [Older Testament] has said*" (see John 7:38,39) — with the same devoted, obedient intensity as Abraham trusted and was thus declared righteous. As we discussed in Lifebyte 51, the biblical foundations of understanding the Kingdom which Jesus came to establish are found in the *Older Testament*, the Hebrew Scriptures.

You can't trust wholly in Jesus while still relying on religious tradition to appease your soul! Your "trust" will wither to half-hearted belief while your soulish adherence to form will lull you into self-righteousness. Consider the parallel between clinging to worldly values while claiming God is your Master, and holding tightly to religious form and practice while proclaiming Jesus as Lord of your life:

*No one can serve **two masters**. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You **cannot serve both God and [religion]** (Matthew 6:24).*

While Christendom identifies with the *name* of Jesus the Christ, little of the *agape* love He both personified and called for is manifested in its midst.

In essence:

Religion not only comes between you and King Jesus, it's also the greatest impediment for you to become like Him in fulfilling your purpose in His Kingdom.

ALL religion is man-made, attempting to satiate the demands of some god "out there" as well as appease man's sin nature-controlled soul. But "new wine" calls for an entirely new kind of wine-skin, relating through the spirit to our heavenly Father in Spirit:

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23,24).

Why does our Father demand that you worship Him in *spirit*? Because when you embrace the Covenant He offers through Jesus, He consummates the Covenant by sealing you with the *Holy Spirit* (Ephesians 4:30).

The Holy Spirit is the *Spirit of Christ* who takes up His rule through *your* yielded spirit (Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:16,17; Colossians 1:27; Philippians 1:19). The Kingdom of God begins when the Spirit of King Jesus takes up residence in you.

[For more on this new Covenant, see our Hebraic Article: *The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation.*]

Agape Love: A Sign That You're Born From Above, and The Hallmark Of His Kingdom's Servants

Signs appear frequently throughout both testaments of God's Word as indicators that prove a truth. The *compassionate love* that grows in a heart that's yielded to the Holy Spirit is an evidential sign of His Presence at work in you. Lifebyte 51 deals significantly with our Father's desire for *relational intimacy* with His children, a compassionate relationship of love that's as intimately personal as a Father with His sons and daughters.

Jesus both emphasized and reflected devoted and intense love for His Father. This love relationship emanated from His obedient trust in His Father. His call to all who would follow Him as Lord is the same as the command to the people of Israel: *to love God.*

The Hebrew word for the love He commands is *ahav*, a passionate devotion for Him which both yearns to be in His presence *and is dedicated to pleasing Him in obedient trust.*

The Hebrew letters in *ahav* mean "*a window into the Father's heart.*" When you are born again, you're choosing to lovingly relate to Him as the Spirit of Jesus in you enables you. Our Father reveals Himself to a born-again son or daughter in a dynamic and intensely intimate manner through the Spirit of Jesus in them. It's vital that you grasp this truth!



One of the five criteria for embracing the Covenant our Father offers you in Jesus is to *love Him*. You enter into Covenant with Him with a heart of *grateful love* for Who Jesus is and what He has done on your behalf to bring about forgiveness and the intimacy of covenant

union. This ongoing love is also an element of your trust-filled determination to *continue* to live in Covenant with Him by His wonderful sustaining grace.

The apostle Paul, who zealously persecuted the early followers of Jesus, had in mind the critical importance of *love* when he penned 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. Without love you “*are nothing*” in the Kingdom and “*gain nothing*” in the Kingdom.

So many false gospels that are being peddled today call for no change in your life — “just believe a few select verses, and you can continue on in your life as before and still be ‘saved’.”

The true Gospel of the Bible, however, calls for you to be sanctified by the Spirit as part of your pilgrimage to your salvation. *Sanctification* is the lifelong purifying process of the Spirit of Jesus in you that enables you to be conformed into His likeness. He works in you so that you’ll both experience and share His love with others, *and* be fruitful as you fulfill His purposes for you in His Kingdom.

One of the signs that you’re truly born again in a Covenant relationship with our Father is that you are conforming more and more to the *love-based motivation* of Jesus. By His loving grace He enables you to do this—again *by His Spirit* at work in you! In fact, because of the Spirit of Jesus in you, your desire to be like your Lord is so powerful that you’re never satisfied; you want *more* of His gracious transformation into His likeness.

The Spirit of Christ in you both draws and empowers your spirit to be progressively transformed in character and love like that of Jesus. As a result, you increasingly live as if our Lord Jesus is living through you. This inner longing to be

more like Jesus is a good indicator that you’re truly born from above.

Each step of your spiritual transformation is earnestly aimed at producing a love in you that points to the Spirit in you bringing praise to your Lord:

*For this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge**; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love* (2 Peter 1:5-7).

**Contemporary Christendom has been plagued by an overriding pursuit of *knowledge*. Many men in particular hold themselves in esteem because they know *about* the Father, but have never allowed or even asked Him to reveal His loving heart to them. Their spiritual progression has stopped with “knowledge”.

To Be Born From Above Is To Experience Your Father’s Heart

The Pharisees, like so many people of Jesus’ day, yearned to see the hated Romans overthrown and the government of God on earth restored. So they asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come. Jesus replied, “*The Kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the Kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:20,21).

Through the apostle John, the Lord voiced concern that His Jewish audience was missing what the Older Testament aimed for—Jesus as *King* over a kingdom: “*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me [as the Scriptures have said] to have life*” (John 5:39,40).

Because the religious leaders were not born again, they were seeking the prophesied king through their *souls*. They expected their Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom like all those around them—the same grievous error their Israelite ancestors had made!

Sadly, many who call themselves “Christian” today are not born again according to God’s parameters. Man’s religious traditions take precedence and lift verses out of context, ignoring the foundations of the Hebrew Scripture from which Jesus drew. As a result, these man-made, man-pleasing gospels appeal to the mind, will and emotions but have no root in biblical truth.

The Spirit of Jesus does not abide in those who accept an unscriptural formulaic gospel, so those who give way to this framework seek a *form of religion* as an expression of their belief. Paul warned his spiritual son, Timothy, about such religious systems that lead people astray: They practice outward rites of religion but deny the power (the indwelling Jesus) by missing the truth. He warns us all to stay away from these people (see 2 Timothy 3:5)!

If you’re going to have a relationship with anyone, especially a *loving* relationship, you must experience it with them. Only a born-again person, indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus, can *experience the Father*. Experiencing Him should be as much a life reality for you as experiencing the people with whom you have any intimate relationship.

Relational connectedness was critical to the Hebraic Stream, as it is for all who would be born again in spirit. When you read about the life of Abraham, would you agree that he *experienced God* in his relationship with Him? How about

Moses and Joshua? Was their dependent trust in Him an ongoing expression of His reality in their lives? And David, the man after God’s heart who readily sought His guidance in all matters? Each of these men experienced *divine interaction*.

Our Father’s loving nature and faithfulness to His people permeate the Bible. His Father’s heart yearns for born-again followers of His Son to experience Him through the Spirit of Christ in them. Our compassionate Father indeed seeks for *you* to experience His heart through the presence of Jesus in you. This is a relationship of intimacy that only gets deeper the longer you cling to Him in loving and obedient trust!

That all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me (John 17:21).

Can you comprehend the joy and beauty of this internal interconnection? Is it something *you* are experiencing by faith? If not, would you like to?

Born Again: Not A “Believer” But An Absolute Truster

Have you always thought of yourself as a “believer”? You might want to reconsider. *Belief* basically means that you acknowledge that someone or something exists. And even the demons are *believers* (see James 2:19). Belief reflects thoughts, ideas and opinions but doesn’t necessarily change your life.

However, along with loving Him, our Father demands *intensely deep dependence* on Him. He calls for faith that’s demonstrated in absolute trust in Him, since His Spirit is fully capable to bring this about.

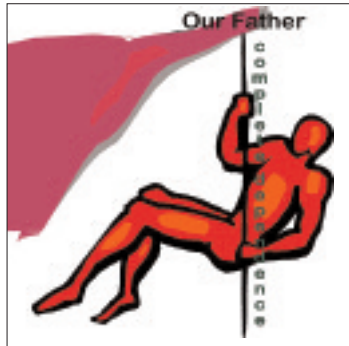
Our Father knows Who He is. The real issue is: Do you know your Father

and absolutely trust Him?

The Hebrew word for “faith” is *emunah*. It means far more than belief; it is absolute trust in and dependence on your Father. *Emunah* is an emotional and responsive term that emanates from your heart (spirit). To truly trust in our Father requires that you wholeheartedly yield yourself to Him unconditionally.

Faith, an authentic trusting faith, is a sign of true spiritual rebirth in those who follow Jesus as their Lord and King. The faith Jesus calls for if you would be “born again” is reflected in the total confidence you have in the reliability of our Father. This confident trust penetrates the very core of your being.

Your trust in our Father is similar to hanging off a cliff—but HE’S holding the other end of the rope! Your entire life journey of living in Covenant with your Father entails this type of trust—because He is worthy of it.



Let's recap: *Salvation* among the early Hebraic followers of Jesus was understood to be a process that culminated before His Throne in heaven. *Entry* into this process—being “born again”—meant to trust that the shed blood of Jesus fully paid the penalty for your sin.

Picture if you can what this substitutionary sacrifice on their behalf meant for them. On the Day of Atonement each year each Jewish household offered an unblemished lamb to *cover over* their sins. They trusted that God, through His abundant grace and mercy, would forgive them the guilt of all their sin—the same

trust that we in Jesus have that we're forgiven by His death and have resurrection life:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7).

It's sometimes difficult for us Gentiles to grasp the significance of the Jewish community as a people who understood the severity of sin and their need for forgiveness, yet trusted that the shed blood of a lamb could bring the forgiveness they so earnestly desired.

Suddenly, after centuries of penitent Days of Atonement, the contemporaries of our Lord were being asked to trust that through the sacrifice of Jesus, God would forgive all their sins. Surely there were only two responses: wholehearted joyful acceptance, or dumfounded angry disbelief.

As recorded in Scripture, most refused to trust in Jesus as the acceptable Lamb of God. Religious forms and practices had become an end in themselves. They could not patch their religion and its traditions onto a trust in Jesus as the prophesied Atonement sacrifice (Isaiah 53). Only one who had been born again in spirit could accept this.

Those who heeded the Spirit's call to trust joyfully responded, initiating a strand that's extended for two millennia:

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:38,39).

With repentant hearts they were *born again*, placing their trust in the sacrifice of Jesus, who bore the punishment their

sins deserved. In that new birth they were sealed with the Holy Spirit, initiating a new relationship with their heavenly Father.

From a Hebraic viewpoint, trust is ongoing and life-motivating—not a belief system but a *way of life* that evidences His work in and through those He makes righteous:

*For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God's powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who **keeps on trusting**...For in it is revealed how God makes people righteous in His sight; and from beginning to end it is **through trust**—as the scriptures put it, 'But the person who is righteous will **live his life by trust** (Romans 1:16,17, Jewish New Testament).*

*And it is a righteousness that comes from God, through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah, to all who **continue trusting**...Therefore, we hold the view that a person comes to be considered righteous by God on the ground of **trusting** (Romans 3:22,28, Jewish New Testament).*

How would you know if you have the love-grounded, born-again faith of one who is acceptable to our Father in Jesus?

- You find complete purpose and fulfillment in your relationship with Him and express this life of trust by deeds of gratefulness which are empowered by the Spirit's indwelling presence.
- Your Father eagerly shares His boundless grace with you, His beloved child.
- You realize that you're helpless apart from His sustaining power and love. As our Father initiates each life circumstance and situation, you respond in such a way that you recognize He is both real and trustworthy.

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are counterfeit”
(2 Corinthians 13:5).

- Describe what you've previously believed being “born again” meant.

- Having read this Lifebyte, has any of your definition changed? If yes, how? Are you truly born from above?

- The Hebrew letters for love, *ahav*, mean “a window into the Father's heart.” How has your Father revealed His heart to you?

- Has your faith walk flowed with experiencing God? If so, list three recent testimonies.

- We wrote, “Religion not only comes between you and Jesus, it's also the greatest impediment for you to become like Him in fulfilling your purpose in His Kingdom.” Write why you agree or disagree with this statement.

- On the scale of *belief* and *trust* below, indicate where you would place yourself.

Belief Trust
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Describe why you answered as you did.

- Based on the question above, do you believe God is pleased with your level of trust? If not, why? How can you change?

- In Lifebyte 40, *Do You Confront For Jesus? Or, Placate For Satan?*, we discussed the trap of cold love. On the scale below, indicate where you would place yourself.

Cold love Christ-like Love
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Describe why you answered as you did.

- Based on the question above, do you believe God is pleased with your level of love? If not, why? How can you change?
