

# Reborn

The phrase 'born again' used to be the almost exclusive property of Christian believers, who claimed that, through faith in Jesus Christ, their lives had been so radically transformed that there was no better way to describe what had happened to them. Besides, Jesus himself had used the phrase in that well-known night-time conversation with Nicodemus, when he had told him most emphatically – and several times – that he needed to be 'born again'.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, the phrase has migrated into more ordinary uses, but it still seems clear that it has been borrowed from Christianity, as it is used to describe someone who is extremely enthusiastic about a new interest or hobby, such as "She's a born-again health freak." Mirroring the all-consuming enthusiasm of 'born-again' Christians, it seems a legitimate phrase to use to describe near-complete commitment to an idea or ideology, as if it were parallel to a religious faith. It still has those spiritual overtones.

Let's see a few definitions found on the internet:–

*Born again, or to experience the new birth, is a phrase, particularly in evangelicalism, that refers to "spiritual rebirth", or a regeneration of the human spirit from the Holy Spirit, contrasted with physical birth. (Wikipedia)*

*Born again is a phrase used by many Protestants to describe the phenomenon of gaining faith in Jesus Christ. It is an experience when everything they have been taught as Christians becomes real, and they develop a direct and personal relationship with God. (J. Gordon Melton)*

*The phrase "Born Again Christian" applies to people who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour or Redeemer. To be born again in this sense is not an actual physical rebirth, but it indicates a spiritual rebirth. (Christianity.com)*

*Born-again: used to refer to someone who has decided to accept a particular type of evangelical Christianity, especially after a deep spiritual experience. (Cambridge Dictionary)*

There are many more, of course, but the general meaning is clear.

Not surprisingly, as it is used to describe the threshold experience of many believers, 'born again' often becomes a shorthand way of describing someone who has had such an experience and subscribes to evangelical theology. Probably most Christians who describe themselves as 'born again' would insist that only 'born-again' Christians are **real** Christians, that others may be well-meaning and sincere but, as Jesus said to Nicodemus 'you **must** be born again'.

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<sup>1</sup> John 3:1-21

# What Did Nicodemus Hear?

What a strange question! We all know the answer! Jesus told him that he needed to be born again, so that is what he heard, isn't it?

Not quite.

The words that Jesus used carried even more radical meanings which will have been immediately obvious to Nicodemus as he heard them, to John as he recorded them and to the simplest person reading or hearing them in the original Greek.

The word translated 'born' doesn't really mean 'born'! Its fundamental meaning is much more basic – and nine months earlier! To quote from Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries “*to procreate (properly of the father, but by extension of the mother); figuratively to regenerate: - bear, beget, be born, bring forth, conceive, be delivered of, gender, make, spring.*” So its primary meaning is the male side of a child being conceived and, of course, that extends to include the whole process of conception, gestation and actual physical birth.

The old English word 'beget' probably comes closest to an accurate translation, but no-one uses it these days. Old Bible translations of the genealogy in **Matthew 1** were full of 'begats', which modern translations have tried to express by words and phrases such as 'fathered', 'became the father of', 'was the father of', 'to — was born' and 'brought forth'.

Yes, this is the same word that Jesus used when speaking with Nicodemus. It's a bit different, isn't it? All the way through the passage in **John 3**, the word translated 'born' is this same word.

So, what Nicodemus really heard was something like 'You must be fathered again' !

And what about that word 'again' . . ?

Some Bible translations accurately insert a margin note “*Or 'from above' ”*. To quote Strong's Dictionaries again: “*from above; by analogy from the first; by implication anew: - from above, again, from the beginning (very first), the top.*” So 'again' is OK but once more the meaning is more radical.

This word is used in various ways in the New Testament, but 'from above' – meaning 'from heaven' – is the commonest, (5 times)<sup>1</sup> with 'from the top' used twice, referring to the temple curtain ('veil') being torn from top to bottom at the actual moment of Jesus' death.<sup>2</sup> It is also used twice to mean 'from the beginning', by Luke in describing how he had researched the life and ministry of Jesus and by Paul saying how the Jewish authorities had known him for a long time <sup>3</sup> (maybe since his years studying with Gamaliel?)

I am reminded of the expression 'take it from the top', meaning 'start again from the beginning', used when musicians need to start a piece of music again, from the top of the page. 'Da Capo' is an Italian musical term that means “from the beginning” (literally, “from the head”). In sheet music, it is usually abbreviated as D.C. The term is often used to save space, as a directive to repeat the music from the beginning.

So, what DID Nicodemus hear? Remember, he did not need any of this explanation; the meaning was instantly clear as soon as the words were spoken.

<sup>1</sup> John 3:31, John 19:11, James 1:17, James 3:15, James 3:17

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38

<sup>3</sup> Luke 1:3, Acts 26:5

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that he needed to be fathered again, begotten again from the very beginning and from above, from God himself. This understanding makes his reaction so much more logical, because his next question was “How can a man be fathered when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be fathered, can he?” Not just the obvious physical impossibility of a grown man being physically re-born, but the even more radical impossibility of having his whole nature reconstituted by being conceived again, from the very beginning, from ‘the top of the page’ and from God himself.

In modern terms, Jesus was telling Nicodemus that his whole DNA needed to be re-written.

## Yes, But How?

“How?” asked Nicodemus. Of course, this was partly the ‘how’ of disbelief. How on earth could it be possible for a grown man to be re-fathered? It was obviously totally impossible and could never happen. If we told him today that his whole DNA would need to be re-engineered, we could expect the same reaction – “It can’t be done!” Maybe, in these days, genetic engineering may be able to make some minor DNA adjustments to an embryo in the womb, but the total re-writing of an adult’s genome – especially an older person? No, there is just no way that it can be done.

But Jesus takes his question seriously and gives him an answer to ‘how?’ He speaks about entering the kingdom of God, not re-entering the womb, but he goes on talking about being being fathered – of water and the Spirit. The word translated ‘of’ means ‘out from’ and speaks of the **origin** of that fathering.

In later chapters, Jesus uses water as a picture of the Holy Spirit<sup>1</sup> but here he refers to water as cleansing *alongside* the power of the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus will have been familiar with the prophecy in Ezekiel, where the LORD promises to sprinkle clean water on his people so that they will be made clean, to give them a new heart of flesh instead of their heart of stone and to put his Spirit in them so that they will follow his directions. A prophecy of cleansing, resulting in restoration, obedience and fruitfulness,<sup>2</sup> and echoed by the call of John the Baptist, who ‘appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ saying “I baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit”.<sup>3</sup> Paul writes to Titus about the way that we have been saved, “not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> A repeated emphasis on cleansing alongside the renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

We don’t know specifically what response Nicodemus made at the time, but it seems that he did start to follow Jesus, firstly by supporting him in a meeting of the Pharisees and later when he had the courage to join Joseph of Arimathea in arranging Jesus’ burial.<sup>5</sup> Not easy decisions for a respected Pharisee teacher in a position of authority!

But we are still left with the question: How?

How can we experience this new ‘fathering from above’, this reconfiguration of our spiritual DNA, this radical shift in the foundation of our lives?

Or maybe we have already started to experience it but need to explore more of what it really means?

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<sup>1</sup> John 4:10-15, John 7:37-39

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 36:25-28. Compare Jeremiah 31:31-34

<sup>3</sup> Mark 1:4,8

<sup>4</sup> Titus 3:5

<sup>5</sup> John 7:45-52, John 19:38-42

# A Surprising Discovery

I first responded to the gospel at the age of 11. Despite being ‘taken to church’ all my young life, I had never heard anything that implied that I needed to make any response to the message of Jesus. What WAS his message, anyway? I knew lots of the stories that he told as parables and many of the things that he had done, including miracles – everything from boosting the wine supplies to raising the dead. In fact, had anyone ever told me that Jesus HAD a message?

Then I was confronted with the information that this person I had heard and read about was very much alive and interested in me; that he offered me something that I had not realised that I needed – forgiveness. Oh, you say, what does an 11-year-old boy know about his need for forgiveness? Plenty! Think back to the guilty secrets of childhood, to lies and petty deceptions, to the selfishness of even small children, wilful disobedience and a host of other things that you would have been mortified to have revealed to the world at large. I suddenly became aware of my need but also of the answer to that need in the death of this Jesus I had heard about.

Of course, I already knew that he had died on a cross. The horror of that form of execution had somehow been concealed from me by the fact that it had been made into a religious symbol. But now I was told that he had paid the price for all my failures (‘sins’ the speaker called them) and that was what his death was all about. And not just for my sins, but for everyone else’s as well.

I knew that there was a decision to be made. The speaker gently but firmly insisted that we needed to decide whether we were going to follow Jesus, to take him up on this amazing offer and make a commitment to him. He even had some ‘decision cards’ which we could sign if we wanted to have a clear record of our decision. I’m not sure whether the phrase ‘born again’ was actually used, but it probably was, though I don’t remember it being on the ‘decision card’.

My mother (who had been ‘taking me to church’ all these years) saw the card in my Bible one day and said “that’s nice.” Her total comment! Probably by then, I had started going to a Bible Class every week and had begun to learn a bit more about what it meant to be ‘born again’, as well as getting gradually more involved in the wider Christian ‘scene’, largely through the encouragement of one of the Bible Class leaders.

One of the booklets which the evangelist had given me mentioned ‘Bible Class’ and, as I had no idea what that was, I had written to him to ask. He wrote back and directed me to a local Bible Class and I simply turned up one Sunday afternoon. Looking back on it, I think the leaders were maybe a little surprised that this lad had decided to come to Bible Class on his own initiative, not encouraged along by his parents, as probably most of the other boys were. In fact, my parents were decidedly cool about it, my mother considering it as ‘nice’ (but perhaps a little extreme) and my militantly agnostic father *very* sceptical. I think they both expected it to be a phase that I would soon grow out of.

A little later, I moved up into a new school and, with what was apparently a fine treble singing voice, was very soon in the school choir and singing in the school chapel.

From time to time, the choirmaster would give us new pieces to learn and practise together and I clearly remember singing ‘Blessed be the God and Father’ by Samuel Sebastian Wesley and coming across some surprising words: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy, **hath begotten us again** unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead . . .” Straight out of **1 Peter 1:3** in the King James (Authorised) Version.

By this time, I must have been at least 13, possibly 14, and was still pretty ignorant about many things. However, even with this archaic language, I could figure out that being 'begotten again' might be the same thing as being 'born again'. I had been told that I had been born again as a result of my response of faith to the *death* of Jesus, but here I was, singing about being 'begotten again' as a result of his *resurrection!*

I didn't follow it up at the time but it stayed on the 'back burner' of my memory for many years

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# Delayed Realisation

It didn't seem to be a big deal, after all. No-one else at Bible Class or school Christian Union seemed to pay any attention to *how* we had been 'born again'. We just knew that we *had* been and that it had given us a passport into this new life – or was it becoming more of a new life *style*? We had meetings to go to, books to read, studies to follow and yes, we even had a new circle of friends. A new subculture.

As a young teenager in the 1960s, I already had some hobbies, but soon 'Christianity' became one of the important ones. The more I read and heard about missionaries and other 'full-time' Christians, the more I felt that perhaps this 'hobby' would become my own life direction. Older Christians – some of them, anyway – seemed to be impressed by my ideas of becoming a missionary. Others urged caution, and may have been relieved when I decided on a career as a doctor. At least, once this over-enthusiastic phase of my life had passed, I might have some reasonable prospects in medicine! In my own mind, I was going to be an effective witness in some far-off country, with my medical skill opening the doors as it had apparently done for other missionaries.

My early interest in 'nature' had led to a desire to study biology for A Level and I distinctly remember being told "There's no point in studying biology unless you are going to become a doctor." "Right, then! I'll become a doctor!" Not the best way to choose a career, but the wheels turned on and I was eventually admitted to medical college, with the developing idea of serving as a missionary doctor overseas.

Living in lodgings with a daily 45-minute commute to college each way made me a bit isolated. I needed to get back to my 'digs' for my evening meal each day and so did not spend much time socialising with my fellow-students or joining in with Christian Union activities. I started to become involved with a local church but inwardly I was drying up. Sharing both a bedroom and a study room with another student lodger meant that I had no time on my own, so Bible study and prayer time became almost non-existent.

I was recommended to some new lodgings in the same area, which would cost a little more but would provide me with my own study bedroom and so I arranged to move there for the next college year. Within a short while, it was as if the Lord had me cornered! I started to read the Bible without slavishly following a system of study notes as I had been doing for years – and began to hear what God was saying to me.

I also started to read Watchman Nee's *The Normal Christian Life* again. I had bought a copy about 4 years earlier, when an older believer had said to me "Don't you think that might be a bit old for you?" It probably *had* been at age 14, but now the Lord was speaking to me through it and started to show me that my old life was dead and gone because I had been *joined to Jesus*.

The biggest direct result that I remember from that time was that I became aware of legalism, and specifically that I had been living under it for years! All my rigorous 'Christian' activity – or much of it, anyway – had sprung from my trying to follow rules. Mostly rules that I had made up for myself, ways to comply with the expectations that I thought other Christians had of me, ways to satisfy my own self-imposed standards. I began to discover that I was free, dead to sin and dead to law, and that there really *was* a new life inside me, the life of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Seven years after my initial contact with the gospel, I was beginning to find out in practice how my life was being re-shaped, how I had been really re-born.

# Never . . . Until . . .

Looking back on those years of evangelical legalism, one verse of a hymn that we often used to sing in Bible Class comes clearly to my mind:–

*But we never can prove  
The delights of His love  
Until all on the altar we lay.  
For the favour he shows,  
And the joy he bestows,  
Are for those who will trust and obey.*

What were we all telling ourselves as we sang those words? Were we challenging ourselves to ‘lay everything on the altar’ or were we claiming that we had already done so? Or were we somehow in a sort of in-between state, feeling perhaps that we had tried to lay everything on the altar but there was sure to be something else that we had left out, which we would need to lay on the altar sooner or later?

Were we smug with self-commendation, or wracked with self-condemnation? Almost always the latter, because if we ever allowed ourselves to become self-satisfied, we would soon realise that was wrong and give ourselves a hard time!

We might not think of this as legalism, trying to please God by obeying rules and following codes of practice, but it **was** legalism none the less, because it was **performance-orientated**. The whole of this hymn (‘When we walk with the Lord’) is framed in the same way by its repeated exhortation to ‘trust and obey’, even saying things like ‘While we do his good will, he abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey’, making the presence of the Lord in our lives conditional upon our performance. Fortunately, this is NOT how the Christian life works!

The combination of ‘never’ and ‘until’ guaranteed that we would not be at peace because we knew that there was sure to be a situation coming along which would show us again that we had **not** ‘laid everything on the altar’ – another dose of self-condemnation!

‘Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.’ No wonder I could never be quite sure! Was I ‘happy in Jesus’? Was I trusting and obeying? Had I laid everything on the altar? Did I need to rededicate my life? Or re-dedicate it? Again? Would it ‘work’ this time?

And so the vicious circle of aspiration, failure and self-condemnation continued . . .

. . . Until I began to see that it was not all down to me and my performance. God was not waiting for **me** to ‘really dedicate my life’. I didn’t need to ‘lay it all on the altar’. He had already done it all! He had put an end to my old life by including me in the death of Jesus. The standards that I had been trying to live up to, by which I judged myself (and other people!) were external, man-made things, even if they were closely based on Bible truth. God’s acceptance of me was entirely on the basis of his own grace, including me in his Son!

What a clear shaft of light that was!

# The Word of the Cross

Why is it that so many of us get tied up in the trap of legalism and self-condemnation? Why do we effectively give up on ever living the sort of life that we can see portrayed in the New Testament and settle for compromise? Knowing that we are not living in the good of much – let alone **all** – of what our Father has already given us in his Son, and yet making excuses for ourselves because of all sorts of plausible ‘reasons’.

Gnawing away, deep down and usually well out of sight to others (and perhaps to ourselves as well) is the desperate frustration which Paul expresses in the second half of **Romans 7** : *“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practising what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?” (v. 15,24)*

As Watchman Nee has written *“Well, we must admit that some of what he describes here is not a **Christian** experience, but none the less many Christians do experience it.”*<sup>1</sup>

One of the reasons may be that we have only heard fragments of the real gospel. First of all, we may have been told that being ‘born again’ is all about sin and forgiveness – and not much else. Then we have been told that the Holy Spirit lives in us, so we can (and *should* !) live a life of victory. It is absolutely true that we can know the real forgiveness of sins *and* experience the reality of the Holy Spirit living inside us, but it is as if Paul had jumped from **Romans 5** to **Romans 8**, missing out **Romans 6**. The result is too often that we end up in **Romans 7** !

Let me explain what I mean.

In simple terms, our spiritual growth can be tracked by looking at what we have begun to appreciate about what the old theologians called ‘the finished work of Christ’. In other words, all that has been accomplished through the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. I say ‘begun’ because, however much revelation we may have received already, rest assured that there is more! And I say ‘appreciate’ because this is not just a matter of absorbing information, filling our minds and memories with correct theology, but personal interaction with that truth in a transactional way, a way that has impact on who we are and how we live and order our lives.

So, firstly, where most of us start: The death of Jesus on the cross. Much has been written and sung about the power of his death, taking my punishment, my burden, my guilt and paying off my enormous debt by taking the judgement on himself and, by that, opening up a relationship for me with God as my Father. In the words of the old hymn: *“At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away! It was there by faith I received my sight and now I am happy all the day.”* There is no other way that we can know true forgiveness. As it says in **Hebrews 9:22**, *“without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”*.

Gruesome as it may appear to many, the foundation of our relationship with God as our Father depends on the shedding of Jesus’ blood as the price for our forgiveness. We affirm that fact as we drink the wine to ‘proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Normal Christian Life*, chapter 9: ‘The Meaning and Value of Romans Seven’

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:26

# Joining Up the Ends

Four years after I had begun to see that I had been joined to Jesus, those realisations were further developed. In those years, I had left medical studies and enrolled in practical training for Christian ministry. I had seriously considered the possibility of going to Bible College to train for 'full-time ministry' but, in the end, had opted for a more practical, 'hands-on' approach and had travelled to India to work with evangelistic teams there.

I had come to love India. After 2 years there, it felt like home. The work was tough sometimes, but the teams had many keen young men in them who, like I did, wanted to grow as believers and become as effective as possible in sharing the good news of Jesus with their fellow-countrymen. We studied together, prayed together, ate together, learned together, worked together, travelled together, slept out under the stars together and generally encouraged each other to 'keep pressing on'.

But there was still an ache for more, which led to 10 months of desperation on my part followed by the most transforming of revelations. I had been seeking a personal experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, not simply 'an experience' but a deep, fundamental *knowing* that the Spirit not only lived *in* me but was also poured out *upon* me. Quietly and without anyone else being aware that anything was happening, he opened my eyes.

The truth that I had begun to see in my attic bedroom in north London, that I had been joined to Jesus, now became supremely relevant to me as the answer to my aching void. There, in a quiet corner of a bustling south Indian city, I took hold afresh of the fact that I was *in Christ*. Not only joined to his death and resurrection and therefore free from sin, condemnation and law and with the new life of the Spirit *inside* me. Now I started to see that I had also been joined to him in his ascension and that, as a result, I was already included in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit *upon* me.

Results have followed, of course. Both in my immediate situation there in India, as I became more able to function in the work and more confident of the Lord's hand on my life, but also in the whole direction of my life and the things that he has put on my heart to share in the 50+ years that have followed. Time and again I come back to that central fact: "*By his doing you are in Christ Jesus . . .*" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**)

So, have I strayed away from thinking about being 'born again' ? Yes and no, and you will see why . . .

It is only in recent years that I have come back to that verse from **1 Peter** which had puzzled me as a choirboy and have started to join up the ends of my puzzlement then with the revelation that started to dawn on me in India and has been with me for the fifty years since.

Over these years, I have been learning to take hold of my inheritance in Jesus on a daily basis, thanking him and appropriating for myself what my Father has already given to me in his Son. Freedom from guilt and condemnation because Jesus shed his blood and paid the penalty for me. Being really 'dead' to the power of sin and failure, dead to any hint of legalism, dead to the world system and the ways of man because I have been joined to his death and burial. Having the new life of the Holy Spirit living *in* me because I have been joined to him in his resurrection from the dead and knowing the power of the Holy Spirit *upon* me because I am joined to him in his ascension and glorification. I have written about all these in greater detail elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> but I want to come back to the resurrection question and join up that 'loose end' from the early 1960s . . .

<sup>1</sup> *No Mere Remembrance* (2017) and *First Steps to Maturity* (2018/19), both from [www.justonecandle.uk](http://www.justonecandle.uk)

# Raised to Life

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has re-fathered us into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance – imperishable, undefiled and unextinguishable – reserved in the heavens for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:3-5)

So there it is: God’s plan in a nutshell! Our Father’s plan to include us.

We can see his purpose flowing right through it, always looking forward to that final revelation ‘in the last time’. The revelation that Paul tells us is exactly what the whole of creation is waiting for and longing to see – the revealing of the ‘sons of God’, his heirs and those who share his life.<sup>1</sup>

That is what we have been brought into ‘through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead’. And, as we learn day by day to take hold of our share in his resurrection and so enable the new life of the Holy Spirit to flow through us, so we shall discover the working out in practice of that re-fathering. We find that our nature **has been** changed and **continues to be** changed. Not just a change of performance but a radical change of nature, who we actually *are*. It’s as if we had been re-started from scratch. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, ‘fathered from the very beginning’.

Peter calls it a ‘living hope’. Hope looks forward, but living is **now**, so being re-fathered into a living hope means that we have the hope for the end result of the process but are intimately involved in the process as it unfolds in our lives day by day.

And it is a *process!* It does not all happen at once. Of course, when we first begin to realise what our Father has done for us, there will be a rush of fresh eye-opening revelation and we shall be conscious of change taking place. Probably, other people around us will notice something different, too.

Yes, I said ‘*begin* to realise’ because, however great that rush of initial revelation, the process is designed to continue. Something momentous happened to me in India, but the task was certainly not completed in one shot – not by a long way! Fifty-odd years later, and I am still learning. Very much so!

It is not great effort and self-control that changes our lives in this way, but the real transforming power of the Holy Spirit who now lives in us to change us from the inside. And, despite the apparent contradiction, it’s a process that needs our co-operation. Not that our Father needs any help, but rather that he will not transform our lives without our permission.

Revelation and response to revelation are the keys. Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers “*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.*”<sup>2</sup> It is that growing knowledge of Jesus – and specifically what the Father has given us in him – which enables our spiritual progress, our growth. The more we see, the more we can take hold of to make our own, and the more that clears the way for the Holy Spirit to transform us. “*We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:19-25

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:17

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18

This is not some sort of spiritual make-believe. It really happens. The results, says Peter in his second letter, are little short of incredible. *“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that his divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence. For through these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises, so that through them you may become partakers of divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.”*<sup>1</sup>

Again Peter, like Paul, puts the emphasis on ‘knowing’ God and the Lord Jesus Christ and says that everything for life and godliness has been granted to us through that knowledge. Also that God has given us ‘precious and magnificent’ promises through which we can become sharers in God’s own nature. Wow! He then goes on to say how it is our responsibility to take hold of these promises and so add qualities to our lives and that, if these qualities are present in us *and increasing*, they prove that our ‘knowledge of God’ is ‘neither useless nor unfruitful’.<sup>2</sup>

A life that is increasingly being filled with aspects of God’s own nature; good, practical, down-to-earth qualities. Not by trying hard, not by following rules or external codes of behaviour (whether from other people or ourselves), but by the simple, ‘naturally supernatural’ process of the Holy Spirit changing us from inside as we take hold of the inheritance that our Father has given us in his Son.

*“Abide in me, and I in you”* said the Lord Jesus.<sup>3</sup> It is the same process; the life of the vine flowing into the branches and producing the fruit. *“Without me you can do nothing”* he said. Many of us have tried that out and find it to be true. As has also been said, anything that we do without him **is** nothing, too!

Born again? Yes, and more! Fundamentally re-made and re-fathered, with our spiritual DNA increasingly being aligned with the nature of our Father!

Not just a one-off experience but the start of an ongoing process which has results, both visible now and to be revealed later – the visible manifestation on this earth of the kingdom of God and of his Christ!<sup>4</sup>

*Jesus answered and said to him,*

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

*Nicodemus said to him, “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?”*

*Jesus answered, “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.*

*Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ”*

Dave Taylor

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1:2-4

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 1:5-9

<sup>3</sup> John 15

<sup>4</sup> Revelation 11:15