

# The Call To Holiness: Part 3

## Begotten Again

*1 Peter 1:3*

### **Preface: Two Occupations**

I was a coach of high school and intercollegiate sports for about twenty years. I have been in full-time ministry for about fifteen years. In both occupations I find myself spending a great deal of time trying to inspire other people to think and perform a certain way.

### **Athletics**

In athletics I would seek to put together a pre-game talk where I remind the team of the skills they practiced, the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents and the enjoyment of playing hard, playing well and leaving the game knowing -- win or lose -- that you did your best. I found coaching to be a wonderful venue to practice life. Thomas Jefferson said, "You can learn more about a person through an hour of play than through a year of conversation." I tell young women, before they decide to marry their sweetheart, to watch him play basketball for a couple of hours. In sports you can practice working on pride, humility, patience, selfishness, anger, injustice, etc. all in a fake environment. It's just a game. It doesn't really matter if you win or lose. Life goes on. You go to the same home and eat the same meals with the same family whether you win or lose. Nobody dies.

### **Ministry**

The ministry is quite different. It is not fake. It is ultimate reality. The responsibilities that you and I take on as Christians have eternal ramifications. The things Christians say and do will have an effect, not merely on families and relationships, but to a level of life and death -- even eternal life and death. You and I, as Christians, are Christ's ambassadors. We represent Christ to a fallen world. It is not something so trivial as an athletic contest (even though there is great speculation as to how the retirement of Michael Jordan will affect the world economy). As ministers (and you are a minister) of the reconciliation of God with His people what we say and do is eternally significant. Heaven and hell hang in the balance. No understanding of God's sovereignty relieves us of this responsibility.

### **Review**

### **The Call To Holiness**

In verse thirteen through seventeen Peter is calling Christians to a certain behavior. I won't go over this again since I discussed it in detail two weeks ago. In short, Christians are called to holiness.

## **Peter's Approach**

As Peter sits across from you and me in his study seeking to spur us on to holy living what is his approach? Prior to sending us out into the battle, what does Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God Himself, determine to be the necessary things for us to know in order to be as prepped as possible for our engagement with life? (Some may wonder why I am harping on this being Peter's approach. The reason I harp is because it has been my own experience that the modern Christian community tends to think that the things that Peter writes about in his first twelve verses are not that important. They are thought of as lofty theological subjects for seminary students. But they would not fall under the category of practical theology. Peter obviously disagrees.) So far we have covered two subjects, election and sanctification.

## **Election**

For Christians to begin to properly live a holy life they must understand they are included in Christ's salvation by the choice, plan, purpose and power of God alone. If anything less is taught and understood it less than the gospel, takes glory away from God and does much damage to the church.

## **Obedience And Sprinkled Blood**

Secondly Christians are to understand that they are sanctified by the Holy Spirit for obedience and the sprinkled blood of Christ. In other words the Holy Spirit exercises His energies to instill in Christians a will to obey the law of God and to ever trust in the blood of Christ since we continually fall short in that obedience. This brings us up to date.

## **Verse Three (and a little four)**

This morning I will cover only verse three. Verse three contains messages on: The Sonship of Christ, the mercy of God, the resurrection, eschatology and regeneration,

**“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).**

## **I. The Sonship Of Christ**

Peter extols the Father of Jesus for the gift He has given us in His Son. First, touching on the significance of God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the first three verses we read of the trinity. God the Father who elected us, God the son whose sprinkled blood is applied to us and God the Spirit who sanctifies us. God is not merely some higher power who has left His creation to define Him as they see fit or as they have need. In a special way (versus a general way) God has always revealed Himself through the representation of a people or person. In the Old Testament He was the God of Abraham. He represented Himself to the human race through the nation that would proceed through Abraham, namely Israel. In the New Testament He is the

Father of Jesus. To think of a God apart from Jesus is not to think of God at all. Anyone who seeks the true God must regard Him as the Father of Jesus.

Jesus is not the Son of God in the respect that He was created by the Father. Jesus was in the beginning with God and He was God (John 1:1). But you and I must recognize the essential distinction between the Father and Son for many reasons. Not the least of which is that God the Son became a man and completely identified Himself with the elect to the extent that he calls them brothers (Hebrews 2:11).

## **Friend Of Gardener Or Son?**

If you and Jesus are (in some sense) brothers, how important is it for you to know who His Father is? It's one thing to walk into a house of the rich and famous because you know the gardener. It is quite another thing to walk into the house because you know the son. The security level increases still more when the son considers you a brother and further still when we know that this is a consideration that is in complete accord with the Father.

## **II. Abundant Mercy**

It is a gift given to us in accordance with His abundant mercy and through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In other words, God, the **Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3)** has a disposition of abundant mercy toward us. It has been said that grace is God giving us what we don't deserve and mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve. In a certain sense this may be true. But in more direct terms mercy is the outward manifestation of pity and it assumes two things: It assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it. As fallen creatures it is essential for us to acknowledge both of these conditions in order to properly understand and appreciate what the Christian faith means.

## **III. Resurrection**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was a demonstration that God has the resources adequate to meet our needs. Jesus Christ went to the cross, took upon Himself the sins of the world and died. Then, in a demonstration of power hitherto unknown to the human race, He rose again. He also promises that all those who are born again will have a similar resurrection as Himself

**“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20,21).**

**“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).**

#### **IV. Living Hope -- Eschatology**

So far we have learned that God the Father of Jesus, According to His abundant mercy and by the power of the resurrection has done something. What has he done? He has begotten us again to a living hope. That “living hope” is described in verse four and is of such great value that Peter, ironically, can describe it only in negative terms. Unlike the land that Abraham was promised to inherit, this inheritance would be imperishable, undefiled and unfading. This, by the way, falls under the category of eschatology (last things).

Our living hope is imperishable in that it is not subject to death or destruction. It is eternal. It is not like the fragile treasure of my own family that I simply know (at least on this earth) cannot last forever. Our living hope is undefiled in that it can never be spoiled, corrupted or polluted. It is not like the first time I bought a new car only to find (living close to the ocean) that within a few months it was showing rust marks. Our living hope is unfading in that it, nor our appreciation of it, will ever ebb in the slightest. In eternity we will never stop, reflect and say to ourselves, “I am kind of tired of this.”

#### **V. Begotten Again -- Regeneration**

God the Father of Jesus, according to His abundant mercy and by the power of the resurrection grants His elect an imperishable, undefiled, unfading living hope. Finally, how is this bestowed upon us? God has the disposition of mercy, the power and the gift but until something else happens, all of this means nothing to you and to me. What must happen? Or in this case what did happen? He has “begotten us again.”

#### **Jesus And Nicodemus**

The idea here is that of regeneration or being born again. In verse twenty-three of this very chapter we see the translators actually using the term “born again”. This may bring our minds to the conversation in the third chapter of John between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus said to Nicodemus except a man be born again, he cannot see (let alone enter) the kingdom of God.

#### **Born Again -- Not Something You Do**

This critical doctrine is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in Christianity. When Jesus told Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again” the voice (in terms of grammar) was passive. In other words being born again is not something you do. It is something that happens to you. When Jesus said those words to Nicodemus He wasn’t telling Nicodemus to do something. He was merely telling Nicodemus what must happen in order for someone to enter the kingdom of heaven. They must be born again.

#### **Spiritual Birth**

Jesus, John and Peter, when they speak of a second birth, are obviously referring to a spiritual birth. People are spiritually dead and need to be made spiritually alive. It is nicely put in Ephesians.

**“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4,5).**

### **What We Do And Why**

Even before John recorded Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus he brought forth the idea of spiritual birth in a very common passage. In this passage in the first chapter of John we are told what people, in fact, do. Then we are told why they do it.

**“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12,13).**

People receive Jesus. Why? It is not because of their nationality, or because it is the natural thing to do or something they simply decide to do. People receive Christ because they are born of God. Also in James.

**“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:18)**

### **For Believers**

We often use the phrase “born again” as an injunction for unbelievers to do something when the more appropriate application is an injunction for believers to understand something that will inspire them to holy living. That God, according to His rich mercy and through the power of the resurrection and not because of anything we have done, has begotten us again to an imperishable, undefiled, unfading, living hope. Peter seemed to think that it was important for us to know this.