

## **The Miracle of Regeneration**

### **John 3:1-10**

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, 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? 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 where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”

*The New King James Version. (1982). (Jn 3:1–10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.*

## Introduction

Many mainstream denominations believe that all human beings have complete control over their salvation. Basically, the belief is as follows: Every single human being can just decide to follow Jesus – and can therefore be saved – without God getting involved at all.

In other words, the idea is that God is not part of the salvation process at all. That is, the belief is that every single human being can just “decide” to be saved – all on his own.

There are a word that is used through out the New Testament that has had significant impact on our understanding of Salvation of the sinner and What God does to accomplish this.

It is the word “called”

### **klétos: called**

**Original Word:** κλητός, ή, όν

**Part of Speech:** Adjective

**Transliteration:** klétos

**Phonetic Spelling:** (klay-tos')

**Short Definition:** called, summoned

**Definition:** called, invited, summoned by God to an office or to salvation.

1. There is the **General call** that goes out to everyone
2. There is the **Effectual call** that is issued only to the elect.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). **(Ro 8:28–30)**.

among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:

*The New King James Version.* (1982). **(Ro 1:6–7)**. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls)

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Ro 9:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Ga 1:15–16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (2 Th 2:13–14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (1 Pe 5:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

1 Peter 2:9 (ESV):

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

## **2 Timothy 1:8-9 (ESV):**

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

The clearest verse on God's drawing to salvation is John 6:44 where Jesus declares that "no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." The Greek word translated "draw" is *helkuo*, which means "to drag" (literally or figuratively). Clearly, this drawing is a one-sided affair. God does the drawing to salvation; we who are drawn have a passive role in the process. There is no doubt that we respond to His drawing us, but the drawing itself is all on His part.

*Helkuo* is used in John 21:6 to refer to a heavy net full of fish being dragged to the shore. In John 18:10 we see Peter drawing his sword, and in Acts 16:19 *helkuo* is used to describe Paul and Silas being dragged into the marketplace before the rulers. Clearly, the net had no part in its being drawn to the shore, Peter's sword had no part in being drawn, and Paul and Silas did not drag themselves to the marketplace. The same can be said of God's drawing of some to salvation. Some come willingly, and some are dragged unwillingly, but all eventually come, although we have no part in the drawing.

Why does God need to draw us to salvation? Simply put, if He didn't, we would never come. Jesus explains that no man can

come unless the Father draws him (John 6:65). The natural man has no ability to come to God, nor does he even have the desire to come. Because his heart is hard and his mind is darkened, the unregenerate person doesn't desire God and is actually an enemy of God (Romans 5:10). When Jesus says that no man can come without God's drawing him, He is making a statement about the total depravity of the sinner and the universality of that condition. So darkened is the unsaved person's heart that he doesn't even realize it: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Therefore, it is only by the merciful and gracious drawing of God that we are saved. In the conversion of the sinner, God enlightens the mind (Ephesians 1:18), inclines the will toward Himself, and influences the soul, without which influence the soul remains darkened and rebellious against God. All of this is involved in the drawing process.

There is a sense in which God draws all men. This is known as the "general call" and is distinguished from the "effectual call" of God's elect. Passages such as Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:20 attest to the fact that God's eternal power and divine nature are "clearly seen" and "understood" from what has been made, "so that people are without excuse." But men still do deny God, and those who acknowledge His existence still do not come to a saving knowledge of Him outside of His drawing them. Only those who have been drawn through special revelation—by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God—will come to Christ.

There are tangible ways in which those who are being drawn to salvation experience that drawing. First, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sinful state and our need for a Savior (John 16:8). Second, He awakens in us a previously unknown interest in spiritual things and creates a desire for them that was never there before. Suddenly our ears are open, our hearts are inclined toward Him, and His Word begins to hold a new and exciting fascination for us. Our spirits begin to discern spiritual truth that never made sense to us before: "The man without the Spirit does

not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Finally, we begin to have new desires. He places within us a new heart that inclines toward Him, a heart that desires to know Him, obey Him, and walk in the “newness of life” (Romans 6:4) that He has promised.

One of my favorite little bits of church history is to go back to Charles Wesley. Charles Wesley denied this doctrine essentially. He was an Arminian in theology. That is, to follow an early theologian named Arminius who denied that salvation is all a work of God. He saw it as a synergistic work between God and man. Not only did, of course, does that view have problems with John 3 and everywhere else in the New Testament, and the whole idea of calling, but nonetheless it developed into a full-blown theology which still exists.

**Charles Wesley** had some issues with the theology, even though he espoused it and affirmed it along with his brother, John. But, you know, when you got to the heart of Charles Wesley, I think he found something different. Listen to what Charles Wesley wrote, and you know these words, listen to this: “Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature’s night, Thine eye defused a quickening ray, I woke the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth to follow Thee.” The guy is a closet Calvinist!

You can’t say it any better than that.

Jim Boice,, now with the Lord, wrote a little story about John Newton. I’ll close with this. Newton was raised in a Christian home in which he was taught verses of the Bible, but his mother died when he was only six years old, and he was sent to live with a relative who hated the Bible and mocked Christianity. So John Newton ran away to sea. He was wild in those years and was known for being able to swear for two hours without repeating

himself. He was forced to enlist in the British navy, but he deserted, was captured, and beaten publicly as a punishment. Eventually Newton got into the merchant marine and went to Africa. In his memoirs wrote that he went to Africa for one reason only, quote: "That I might sin my fill."

Newton fell in with a Portuguese slave trader in whose home he was cruelly treated. This man often went away on slaving expeditions, and when he was gone his power passed to his African wife, the chief woman of the harem. She hated all white men and vented her hatred on Newton. He says that for months he was forced to grovel in the dirt, eating his food from the ground like a dog. He was beaten mercilessly if he touched it. In time, thin and emaciated, Newton made his way to the sea where he was picked up by a British ship making its way up the coast to England. When the captain of the ship learned that the young man knew something about navigation as a result of being in the British navy, he made him a ship's mate. But even then Newton fell into trouble. One day when the captain was ashore, Newton broke out the ship's supply of rum and got the crew drunk. He was so drunk himself that when the captain returned and struck him on the head, Newton fell overboard and would have drowned if one of the sailors hadn't quickly hauled him back on board. Near the end of one voyage, as they were approaching Scotland, the ship ran into bad weather and was blown off course. Water poured in and the ship began to sink. The young profligate was sent down to the hold to pump water. The storm lasted for days. Newton was terrified. He was sure the ship would sink, he would drown. In the hold of the ship as he desperately pumped water, the God of all grace whom he tried to forget but who had never forgotten him, brought to his mind Bible verses he had learned in his home as a child. The way of salvation opened up to him. He was born again, totally transformed.

Later, when he was again in England, he began to study theology, eventually became a preacher in a little town called Olney and later in London. His story is contained in these words: "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

## **Review**

### **I. The Sinner's Worry**

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

### **II. The Saviors Way**

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

## **Lesson**

### **II. The Saviors Way**

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

**dunamai: to be able, to have power**



Can he

**Original Word:** δύναμαι

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** dunamai

**Phonetic Spelling:** (doo'-nam-ahee)

**Short Definition:** I am powerful, am able

**Definition:** (a) I am powerful, have (the) power, (b) I am able, I can.

**Cognate:** **1410** *dýnamai* (a primitive verb) – to show *ability* (power); *able* (enabled by God), *empowered*. See the cognate-noun, **1411** /*dýnamis* ("ability, power").

Nicodemus picks up on the analogy of birth with Jesus and in the third person has the theological discussion on how can a man after so long in a failed religion start over again.

How can he do something that is impossible for him to do.

## **Matt. 19:16**

Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”

So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

He said to Him, “Which ones?”

Jesus said, “ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?”

Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”

But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

*The New King James Version. (1982). (Mt 19:16–26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.*

### **III. The Spirits Work**

- 5** Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
- 6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
- 7** Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

- 8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Jn 3:5–8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**5** Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Traditional interpretation says this is physical birth  
water = physical birth i.e. water breaks

Jews did not use this terminology  
He is not saying you have to exist first

Not baptism either

### **Ezekiel 36:25**

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

**26** I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

**27** I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.

**28** Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Eze 36:25–28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **Ezekiel 37:3**

- 3** And He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”  
So I answered, “O Lord God, You know.”
- 4** Again He said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’
- 5** Thus says the Lord God to these bones: “Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Eze 37:3–5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **Eze 11:19–20**

- 19** Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh,
- 20** that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Eze 11:19–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- 7** Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I *am* the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Je 24:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **Je 31:31–33**

- 31** “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—
- 32** not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.
- 33** But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Je 31:31–33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**(Ps 51:7–10)**

- 7** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8** Make me hear joy and gladness,  
*That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.
- 9** Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.
- 10** Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Ps 51:7–10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and  
that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

What He's basically indicting Nicodemus for is a failure to understand the Old Testament doctrine of sin, the Old Testament doctrine of total depravity, the utter inability and unwillingness of the sinner to do right.

(Ge 6:5)

5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Ge 6:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”

*The New King James Version.* (1982). (Jn 3:9–10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“So what happened to Nicodemus? What happened to him? Well, for now he disappears. But he showed up again. Go to chapter 7 of John. Chapter 7, Jesus is in Galilee and the Jews want to kill Him. And the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, is near; so

they migrate down and He is confronted again by the Sanhedrin. They want Him dead. He's preaching and teaching in the Temple, according to verse 28, and people are listening and, wow, they're saying all kinds of things. Some think He's the Messiah. Some think He's the prophet, down in verse 40. "This is the prophet; this is the Messiah." And there's a division, according to verse 43. Well, the rulers want Him dead, so they get some Temple guards to go seize Him and arrest Him so they can kill Him. But they wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him. When they got there, they couldn't...they couldn't lay their hands on Him. So the officers come back to the chief priests and the Pharisees of whom Nicodemus was one, and they said to them, "Why didn't you bring Him? We sent you to arrest Him, why didn't you bring Him?"

The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." We couldn't get past what He said. He paralyzed us with His words. The Pharisees then answered them, "You've not also been led astray, have you? No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he?" So now we know that Nicodemus hasn't become a believer; this is a year later. And he was in the Sanhedrin. But verse 50, Nicodemus steps up. Nicodemus, he who came to Him before being one of them, one of the Pharisees and chief priests on the Sanhedrin, said to them, "Our law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he's doing, does it?" Point of order, the lynch mob isn't right. You can't do this. Even the Romans gave due process. Hmm, that's a bold step to take. When the whole group wants Jesus dead, and you step up in defense of the law because you want to protect Jesus, not a believer yet.

The people in leadership looked at Nicodemus, *the* teacher in Israel, "Oh, You're not also from Galilee, are You?" Mockery, sarcasm. "Search and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee." They rebuke with sarcasm and mockery this their most illustrious teacher. He served notice that he's leaning toward Jesus. And they mock him. They mock the one they had revered and elevated. This is, by the way, actually two years after the meeting

at night; two years have passed. So there is only one year left until the death of Christ. Let's go to chapter 19.

So two years later, Nicodemus is still a Pharisee, still on the Sanhedrin. But he steps up in a point of order in favor of Jesus. Come to chapter 19; Jesus is dead, verse 38, "After these things, Joseph of Arimathea being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus. Pilate granted permission, so he came and took away His body." Oh my, look. "Nicodemus who had first come to Him by night also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes." That's a resin, powdered resin that they used to spread out on the body to diminish the smell of decaying flesh. And aloes has a kind of a sandalwood fragrance. He brought 75 pounds. That's a massive amount because that's one way they showed honor to an illustrious person. This is an honorable act on the part of Nicodemus; it's also a bold act. Nicodemus joins his companion, Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a believer but hadn't been willing to confess it openly. And now Nicodemus is bold and he comes and we know now that he has identified himself with the Lord Jesus and he is there, and he took the body of Jesus. You can imagine this. Nicodemus handling that body that he had spent that night talking to in his own arms, binding the body of Jesus with linen wrappings and putting in the spices in between all the wrappings as the burial custom was, and along with his friend, Joseph, they laid Jesus in the garden in a new tomb which no one had ever been laid in. There he is with the body of Jesus in his arms.

What happened to Nicodemus? I'll tell you what happened. God came down, gave Him life, gave him a new heart, a new soul, washed him, regenerated him. What about the rest of the story? Well, the rest of the rest of the story, you mean? Tradition says that he was the only person who stood up at Jesus' trial before Pilate and defended Jesus. Tradition says he was baptized by Peter and John. Tradition says that his confession of the Lord Jesus was so bold that it led him to being deprived of his office, deprived of his position as a teacher and deprived of all of his



entire fortune, all his property, all his possessions, and he was banished from Jerusalem by the Sanhedrin he had served. He was reduced, living outside the city, and his family left inside the city to abject poverty. There's a wonderful little traditional story that his daughter was so poor that she reached the shame of digging in the dung piles for pieces of grain to eat and survive. And a rabbi came by and saw her and felt compassion for her and said, "Who are you?" And she said, "I'm the daughter of Nicodemus." And the rabbi said, "Whatever happened to your father?" And she said, "He came to be a follower of Jesus and was banished." And the rabbi refused to help her.

Some centuries later a man named Photius refers to an ancient document that records that Nicodemus was martyred in the first century for his devotion to Christ. How he was beaten to death by a mob. And that's the full story. He lost everything in this world, gained everything in the world to come. What can you do? I give you **John 6:37**, "Him that comes to Me I will not cast away." You can plead with God to give you life; it's His prerogative. But you can pray and He doesn't reject that honest prayer. You can say with the publican in Luke 18, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

John MacArthur John 3