

## New Birth

Jonathan K. Dodson | 1 John 5:51-5 | May 29, 2022

I was standing in the driveway with my pregnant wife, as we waited for a Craig's List buyer. When the buyer walked up my wife said: this may be your strangest Craig's List purchase ever: I have to go to the hospital; my water just broke. Within hours Robie delivered a healthy Rosamund in record time. Joy filled the room like confetti. Every time my wife tells the birth story of one of our kids they're riveted; ask questions, beg for more detail. Christians experience a new birth, yet many of us are unfamiliar with the details. Let's lean in and learn about being *Born of God, Children of God, in the Victory of God*.

### Born of God

The idea of being born again is a bit strange, but we often use it to explain unique experiences: we birthed a new program; that's when our relationship was born! In 2006 a paper was published in the journal of *Psychopharmacology* which tracked the experiences of participants who took psilocybin. Each took this drug in a controlled environment. Afterwards they described their drug induced state as "one of the most spiritually significant experiences of their lives" *comparing it to the birth of a first child*. Christian new birth is a significant spiritual experience but not induced by drugs (!). Nor is it

a convenient way to refer to a new relationship. Spiritual birth presupposes spiritual death, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:1–2). We enter the world not spiritually confused but a spiritual corpse.

That’s why we need to be reborn. But how then do we do good? Because we were made in the image of God none of us act as bad as we could. However, we must also recognize that social good isn’t ultimate good. Volunteering over the years with many Austinites, quite a few of them have said me: I love doing this because *it makes me feel good*. In the end its about themselves. Or consider their ethical advice: *do whatever you want as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone*. So I can be as materialistic and sexually deviant as I want to be as long as it doesn’t hurt someone? A convenient, socially constructed view of the good. What a spiritually dead person won’t, can’t tell you is the truth: that humans are *not* the most important being in the universe, the measure of morality, God is. That we’re spiritually dead, deserve eternal judgment, but if we put our faith in Jesus, we can have new life. We’re not good people in need of spiritual advice but dead people in need of new birth. You may have heard someone describe salvation as Jesus throwing a life jacket to drowning swimmers, but our predicament is *actually far worse and far better*. We are spiritually dead, drowned at the bottom of the sea,

but Jesus dives in, resurfaces with our corpse and breathes new life into us! As Jesus said of the prodigal son, “[my son was dead but now is alive again!](#)” (Lk 15:24). His rebirth was accompanied with great rejoicing. The more we grasp the details of our spiritual death, the more we’re thrilled with new life in Christ! We need a new birth not a new take on life, an awakening not a revival. How do you **know** you’ve been born again? John says, [Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him](#) (1). You know you’re born again if you *believe Jesus is the Christ*. Seems easy enough but when we hear the word believe, a very modern, rationalistic idea springs to mind. We think “affirm” or “agree”: if I agree that Jesus is the Christ, then I’m, saved. But biblical faith is affirmation, yes, but also *affection*. Notice the parallel statement, [and everyone who loves the Father](#). Believing the Son means *loving* the Father and the Son. The prodigal didn’t return home just because it was logical but because he longed to. Peter says it like this: [Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.](#) (1 Pe 1:8–9). Belief rejoices in Christ; faith loves the Father. What are you loving most? Yourself? Family, friends? Comfort or Christ? Will

love do you need to repent of return home where the Father throws you a welcome party!

## Children of God

Those who have been born again, love not only the messiah but also his children. John says: everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. If you really love the Father, you'll love his kids. You'll love the church just as Jesus loves you—warts and all. How should we love one another? V2: By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. We love one another by loving God and keeping his commands. Now why is that the way to love one another? Because when we love God we love an unequal. God is greater than us in every single way: in love, patience, kindness, holiness, grace, which means if we devote ourselves to him, his perfect love, patience, kindness, holiness rubs off on us. But if we devote ourselves to one another, his character does not rub off on us. Sometimes a person will come to me and say I'm frustrated with my discipleship group. So I ask them: "Are you getting to God together?" Some will say no, all we do is talk about life. Well, church works best when people love God more than one another. If you're not getting to God regularly, devotionally together then you'll settle for social good. How does the CG make me feel? Relationships that are more devoted to one

another than they are to God eventually break down. But the relationships more devoted to God than to one another end up loving one another well. []When we love and obey God together, his character and presence rubs off on us; we become godly. So, get together regularly. Read God's word and follow Text-Theology-Life *not* Life-Theology-Text. Read the text: what does it mean? Theology: what does this tell us about God? Life: then let God rub off on your life. When you do that your holiness will be a gift to one another. And the wonderful thing about God's commands is they **are not burdensome** (3). The word means heavy, severe, cruel. God's commands are not punitive but from a pure heart; they're designed to make you flourish. You might think, well sometimes they feel burdensome, restrictive even. When a roller coaster attendant pushes the safety bar down until it clicks, it can feel uncomfortable even restrictive. But they do it so we can *have a great time*. You might *feel* more free without the safety bar, but with it you won't meet your demise. You'll have joy. God's commandments might *feel* restrictive at times, but they are there for true, lasting joy. So love one another by loving God and keeping his commands.

## **Victory of God**

Spiritual life presupposes spiritual death, but those *born of God* cherish God. We are born not into a private relationship but into a

divine family. *Children of God* love one another by loving God and keeping his commands. But how do we do it, especially when it's hard? Verse 4: **For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.** The world, as John discussed earlier, refers to the world system ruled by Satan. Although those born of God are no longer ruled by this system, we are oppressed, tempted, burdened by it. We must fight to overcome it together. That's why we need the church: brothers and sisters to help us overcome the world. Take *anger*. The world tells us: be angry if people don't treat you the way you deserve to be treated, but gospel says: be patient with people because though you deserved death Jesus died to give you life. *Victory through faith in Jesus*. Or *gossip*. The world says: cancel the people who are toxic. They're trash. But the gospel says: love and forgive those who hurt you, just as you have been forgiven. Jesus died for toxic, dead sinners. That's not easy, especially when the world around us justifies anger and gossip. But God says, you can **overcome**. How? The Greek word is *nikao*, we get *nike* from the word. It means to conquer, victory in the face of obstacles. Just like you won't improve running time without facing adversity, you won't improve in godliness without fighting temptation. You can't just sit at home reading Runners magazine. You have to get out there, with the church, and overcome! How? *By trusting in Jesus together*. In Revelation 3, Jesus places our present victory inside of his past

victory: “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne (3:21). Jesus already conquered sin, death, and evil and gave you new life. You are a child of God. A daughter of the king. An heir to the throne. You can conquer because he has conquered. Your victory is to claim his victory. Because Jesus has been so patient with you you are free to be patient with others. Because Jesus rejoices over you, you can be gracious not gossip about others. *Victory comes through trust in Jesus.* So love God and obey his commands. Don’t just believe Christ; cherish Christ. Contend with his power and rest in his victory. And if you fail, return to Jesus who always throws a party when his kids come home.