

Reborn . . . The Demonstration

Part III

John 3:19-21

Introduction

We have discovered, in our study of John, chapter 3, some of the most important things from the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

First, we have uncovered the meaning of Jesus' declaration concerning salvation.

Then, we came to the decision that salvation demands. You are not saved by degrees, by moral reformation, by works, by baptism, or church involvement. Salvation is free – but you have to ask for it. I personally believe that there are a lot of people who think they are saved, who, in reality, have never asked for the gift of eternal life.

The declaration, the decision, and now, we conclude our study, of the first twenty-one verses of this chapter, with something critically important. We will see the demonstration, or the evidences, of true conversion. That is, how do you know, for yourself, whether or not you have been born again. And that is a question only you can answer.

It is a lot like asking someone if they are in love. As an observer, you cannot really know for certain. They alone know, but there are symptoms, or evidences, of love that are unmistakable.

That is what Jesus had in mind when he said, in verse 8,

The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Early this morning, I was awakened by a storm. I looked out the window and could hear the wind howling through the bare trees and see the limbs bending and swaying. I could not see the wind, but I could see the effects!

The Demonstration

Now let us look at the remainder of their conversation. Look at John, chapter 3, verse 20.

For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds could be exposed.

In other words, “Leave me alone. I like myself just the way I am. Besides, what you are saying makes me feel uncomfortable, it hurts my eyes! Continue to verse 21.

But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

Notice, Jesus did not say, “He who practices good deeds comes to the light.”

No! He said, “He who practices the truth comes to the light.”

Now, “truth” is a broad term with various shades of meanings. What does it mean in this verse?

Well, in this context, the truth is simply the truth that Jesus has been teaching, which is the truth about salvation. Go back to verse 3.

Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

And that is the truth!

So, what happens when a person personalizes or practices that truth? He comes to the light! Then what? Verse 21b tells us,

. . . that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

Oh, I do good things not so that I can go to heaven, but because I am already going to heaven. I live the way I do not so that God will accept me, but because He has already accepted me in Christ.

Well then, the next question is most important. What are those deeds that are manifested in my life that reveal that I have, indeed, been born again? What are the ways the Spirit of God bends a believers life?

The writings of the apostle John provide a clear, down-to-earth, practical test of genuine Christianity. While this list is not comprehensive, it is critical for the purpose of evaluation. John gives at least three evidences that distinguish the believer from the unbeliever.

The Evidence Of A Resilient Love

John gives us the evidence of a resilient love.

Look at chapter 13, verses 34 and 35.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Now, I find it interesting that Jesus tells his disciples this is a new command. Is it? I thought the greatest command was already given.

In the book of Matthew, chapter 22, the Pharisees came to trap Jesus. They tried to do it by asking him, in verse 36,

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?

Now, you need to understand that this was a really loaded question.

Over the years, the rabbis had supposedly determined that, just as there were 613 separate letters in the Hebrew text of the Ten Commandments, so also were there 613 separate laws in the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses.

The rabbis had then divided those 613 laws into affirmative and negative groups. They held that there were 247 affirmative laws, one for every part of the human body, as they knew it, and 365 negative laws, one for each day of the year.

Furthermore, the laws were also divided into heavy and light. The heavy ones were absolutely binding and the light ones were less binding. They had never been unanimous as to which laws were heavy and which were light, so the rabbis and scribes spent countless hours proudly debating the merits of their particular divisions and the ranking of laws within the division.

So, they come to Jesus and ask Him, “Which one law is the ultimate, greatest law or commandment?”

Notice Jesus’ answer in verses 37 through 39.

And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

The interesting thing is that, after he gave that answer, the Pharisee who asked said, “You’re right,” and no debate followed!

So, this is the greatest commandment of all commandments – and it is certainly not new, right? How can Jesus then say, “I’m giving you a new commandment”?

I want you to notice, by way of comparison, the subtle difference with this verse. Notice the key phrase in John, chapter 13, verse 34b.

. . . that you love one another . . .

(not as yourself – sometimes you may not love yourself)

. . . even as I have loved you . . .

Jesus’ love . . .

And what is Jesus’ love like for you?

- Consistent,
- self-sacrificing, and
- independent of a loving response (think of the rejection from the disciples!).

So, the question is not, “Are you born again, evidenced by the fact that you say you love God?”

but, “Are you born again, evidenced by what you do toward others?”.

If you walk into a boiler room, it is impossible to look into the boiler to see how much water it contains. But, running along beside it is a tiny glass tube that serves as a gauge. As the water stands in the little tube, so it stands in the great boiler. When the tube is half full, the boiler is half full. When the tube is empty, the huge boiler is empty. How do you know you love God? You believe you love Him, but do you want to know? Look at the gauge. Your love for your Christian family is the measure of your love for God.

The Evidence Of A Responsive Lifestyle

John also gives us the evidence of a responsive lifestyle.

A hunger that reaches for . . .

1. First, responsiveness will manifest itself in a hunger that reaches for the written Word.

My friends, let me say that your relationship with God will never be intimate as long as your relationship with the Bible remains casual. In fact, if your relationship with this Book is non-existent, then your relationship with God is non-existent!

Why? Because a hunger for the Bible and the re-birth experience are inseparable.

Look at I Peter, chapter 2, verse 2.

like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.

This verse tells us at least two things.

The desire will be like . . .

1. The first is that those who have been born again will desire the Word, just as a newborn babe desires milk.

By the way, the word “babe” is the Greek word denoting the nursing baby. In other words, you, who have been born again, will long for the milk of God’s Word, just as a newborn, nursing baby longs for his mother’s milk.

Now, I had forgotten what the words “long for” really meant, but I have held it in my hands recently. Several times, during the day, my four-week-old

daughter is going to long for milk. This is not a prophecy, because it is based on history! And, there is not one shred of diplomacy in my daughter. Have you ever noticed that babies are not diplomats?! They do not ask, they demand. If my daughter could talk, she would not say, “Hey Dad, it’s eleven o’ clock, what do you say we go down the hallway and nudge Mom awake and suggest to her that I get fed, huh? By the way, Dad, thanks a million for walking the floor with me and trying to keep me occupied.”

No! She has got one message for me, and I do not need an interpreter to translate – it is, “Waaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

Her face will turn red and she will cough and cry and flail her arms. She is demanding to be fed, and she is not getting what she wants!

One author wrote that, if a baby’s strength could match their frustration, they would kill to get their way.

She is longing for milk!

The author of this verse, Peter, writes, “Just like that baby, as proof that you also are newly-born, you will long for the milk of the Word – you must have it!”

This passage tells us another thing.

The growth will be like . . .

2. Secondly, those who have been born again will grow by the intake of the Word, just as a newborn baby will grow by the intake of milk.

What this passage is telling us is that the Word of God is the primary method for spiritual growth!

Without it, you remain an infant. Without it, you will stay in the crib and be dependant upon someone else for food!

In fact, milk is to be replaced, eventually, by the meat of the Word. Look at Hebrews, chapter 5, verses 12 through 14.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who

because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

What is the writer suggesting? He is implying that the spiritual nursery is overflowing with babies who, by now, should have moved on to the toddler room, and then to the adolescent room.

Now notice this very important principle! What is the distinguishing mark that keeps them in the nursery? Note verse 14 again.

But solid food is for the mature, . . .

(who are the mature?)

. . . who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

What are they practicing? The oracles or commands of God.

The mark of maturity is not how much of the Bible you know, but how much of the Bible are you putting into practice!

Note that this is personal. You can read good books, go to Bible studies where someone teaches you what they have learned, take Bible classes, and come to Sunday services. They are all great. The distinguishing mark of the maturing individual, however, is that he or she can chew on their own, digest it, and live it!

The relationship between the Bible and spiritual life

Now, I want to be a little more obvious with these observations. Let me give several principles on this subject before we leave it. I will simply headline it as, "The relationship between the Bible and spiritual life."

Principle #1

1. Principle number one is that a personal interest and intake of the Bible is a primary evidence of spiritual life.

Let me be as frank as I possibly can. People who are physically dead do not want nor need to eat physical food, and people who are spiritually dead do not want to eat spiritual food.

My friend, your lack of spiritual appetite may be revealing a lack of spiritual life!

Principle #2

2. Principle number two is that a personal diet in the Bible is the primary method of spiritual growth.

Principle #3

3. Principle number three is that personal obedience to the Bible is the primary assurance of spiritual health.

Paul wrote, in II Timothy, chapter 3, verses 16 and 17,

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for . . .

(most things in life?!)

. . . every good work.

The Word performs functions in the believer's life

The Word performs four functions in the believer's life.

Function #1

1. Function number one is doctrine. This tells you what to believe.

The original word refers to the apostolic teaching in general. These are the things we are to believe. And ladies and gentlemen, what you believe will determine how you behave. It is impossible to behave biblically unless you believe and think biblically.

Function #2

2. Function number two is rebuke. This tells you where you are wrong.

The original word referred to refuting error and rebuking sin. This means that the Bible tells you where you are wrong; that is, it acts like an umpire or a referee who blows the whistle and shouts, "That's out of bounds. That ball is in play."

There are many people who do not mind the Bible telling them that they are right, they just choose to ignore it when the Bible tells them they are wrong.

Function #3

3. Function number three is correction. This tells you what is right.

The original word actually refers to setting someone back upright on their feet. The Bible does not just say, "That's wrong," it also tells us, "That's right and godly and pure."

Function #4

4. Function number four is training. This tells us how to do what is right.

The Bible is a manual on how to live a godly life. You do not live a holy life by accident! You are not walking in purity by coincidence! That kind of life is a product of biblical influence and submission to the movement of Holy Spirit.

Now, the evidence of a responsive lifestyle will manifest itself in a hunger that reaches for the written Word. Those who are true believers will reach for the written Word with a hunger that persists.

A personality that conforms to . . .

2. Secondly, that responsiveness will manifest itself in a personality that conforms to the Living Word.

Look at I John, chapter 4, verse 13.

By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

Also look at Galatians, chapter 5, verses 22 through 23a.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control . . .

And, look at Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 8 through 10.

for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in . . .

(is revealed by)

. . . all goodness and righteousness and truth), . . .

(I love Paul, who, by the Spirit's inspiration, reveals the struggle by adding.)

. . . trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

"Trying to learn," or "dokimazo" in the Greek, is a word that refers to the learning process of experience. It means, "to accept and learn from the results of a test."

Now, if that is not the Christian experience, nothing is. You and I fail the test, but, by God's help, we learn from it and we grow from it. The evidence of salvation in a person's life is not that he never fails, but that he never stops learning from his failure.

That is the responsive lifestyle!

We were sitting at the dinner table recently and one of my boys piped up and said, "Hey, Dad, I think our music teacher is a Christian."

His twin brother chimed in, "Yea, we think he's a Christian."

I thought, "My second grade sons are showing some spiritual discernment here."

I asked them, "How do you know?"

One of them said, "Well, we were all sort of acting up in music class today, and our teacher went over in the corner and we could tell he was praying."

My friend, one of the ways you reveal your spiritual birth is that you, over the process of growth, begin acting like your Father.

You might say, "But I so often fail; I sin. How can I be saved," or, "Do I need to be saved again?"

Well, let me give you another demonstration of true spiritual life.

The Evidence Of A Repentant Heart

John gives us, as well, the evidence of a repentant heart.

Do you remember the promise of the angel who came to Joseph and told him that Mary would bear a son? The angel said, in Matthew, chapter 1, verse 21, that he, Joseph, was to name him, "Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their" – what? – "sins".

Jesus is the Greek counterpart of the Hebrew name Joshua. They both mean, "deliverer or savior".

Luke made it clear, in chapter 19, verse 10, that Jesus came, "to seek and to save that which was lost".

Some people prove they have never been saved simply because they refuse to believe that they need to be saved from anything, much less their own sins.

Many people refuse to believe that they are what the Bible calls all of us – sinners. Look at:

- Romans, chapter 5, verse 8b,
. . . while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
- Romans, chapter 3, verse 23,
for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
- Jeremiah, chapter 17, verse 9,
The heart is . . . deceitful . . . and . . . desperately sick; who can understand it?
- Romans, chapter 7, verse 18a,
For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh . . .

Two biblical confessions

There are two confessions in the Bible.

Comprehensive confession

1. One is the initial confession of myself as a complete sinner – that happens at salvation.

When I became a Christian, I asked God to forgive my sin, or my sinfulness; the fact that I am a sinner, past, present, and future. I was laying, before God, the confession that I am sinful and I needed a Savior who would pay the penalty for my sin.

I vaguely remember, as a six-year-old, kneeling with my mother in the living room. Perhaps, in the mind of God, that was indeed the moment of my salvation. Yet, as an eighteen-year-old, I was living anything but the Christian life. No, I was not a drug addict, in trouble with the law, or the lead singer for a rock band. I was a missionary kid who was in church every Sunday, but who could care less about the things of God. My mother would come into my room and sit on the edge of the bed, it seemed every night, and ask, “Stephen, are you really a Christian?”

“Yessssssss.”

“Well, I just don’t see the evidence. I love you. Goodnight.”

Now, if I want to know whether a bill is paid, I do not go to an easy chair to sit and wait for a comfortable feeling. I go and look for the receipted bill that is stamped, “Paid in full”.

Whether I feel saved or not, I go to that night and remember, that is when I gave my sinful heart to Christ.

That is what John meant, when he wrote, in I John, chapter 2, verse 12,

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.

Now, let me say that there are many Christians who agonize over what they have already confessed and what God has already forgiven.

So, that is the first, and what I will call, “comprehensive confession”. I have confessed to God my sinfulness, and He has forgiven me. In that, I find eternal security. There is nothing I have done in the past, nor is there anything I can do in the future, that will “unsave” me.

Someone says, “Well, hey, if that’s the case, I’ll just go out and sin all I want to – I’m forgiven!”

Just because you have car insurance, does not mean you drive like a maniac. Just because you have health insurance, does not mean that you drink hydrochloric acid and chew on razor blades. Likewise, just because you are eternally secure in Christ, does not mean you go out and live like a hog.

One of the evidences of salvation is that sin really bothers you!

Specific confession

2. For the Christian, there is the practice of “specific confession”. That is, there is the confession of my acts of sin – that happens continuously.

Why? Because when I became a Christian, I did not stop sinning.

The apostle Paul lamented, in Romans, chapter 7, verse 19,

For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.

So, John writes, in I John, chapter 1, verse 9,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Well, you might ask, “If it’s not possible for the Christian to lose his salvation, what can he lose?”

I will show you. The Bible makes it clear that something precious can be lost by the lack of confession and obedience, and by a lack of spiritual growth. Look at:

- Matthew, chapter 6, verse 1,
Jesus said, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with you Father who is in heaven."
- Matthew, chapter 10, verse 42,
And whoever . . . gives . . . even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward.
- II John, verse 8,
Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

What can a Christian lose? His full reward!

John MacArthur found, written in the front of his grandfather's Bible, this prose,

When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and He shows me His plan for me, the plan of my life as it might have been, and I see how I blocked Him here and checked Him there and would not yield my will, will there be grief in my Savior's eyes, grief though he loves me still? He would have me rich, but I stand here poor, stripped of all but His grace, while memory runs like a hunted thing down a path I cannot retrace. Then my desolate heart will well nigh break with tears I cannot shed. I will cover my face with my empty hands; I will bow my uncrowned head.

Well, the apostle John was always up front with the purpose of his writing. Many of the New Testament authors were not so clear. In fact, a debate is raging, in academic circles these days, as to the purpose of the book of Romans.

But this is not so with John. He wrote the Gospel of John for one primary reason and the Epistle of I John with three reasons in mind. This is what God, through the writer John, wants us to be certain of, wants us to experience, wants us to have.

Why John's Gospel?

Look at John, chapter 20, verses 30 through 31.

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Why John's Gospel? So that you may be born again in Christ.

Why John's Epistle?

Now look at I John, chapter 1, verse 4, amplified.

And we are now writing these things to you so that our joy may be full - and your joy may be complete.

Also look at I John, chapter 2, verse 1.

My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not

(habitually practice)

sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

Then look at I John, chapter 5, verse 13, amplified.

I write this to you who believe in, trust in and rely on the name of the Son of God . . . so that you may know with settled and absolute knowledge that you already have life, yes, eternal life.

Why John's Epistle?

1. So that you and I will live on earth with absolute joy!
2. So that you and I will practice purity and run from sin!
3. So that you and I will absolutely know that we have life forever in heaven!

Conclusion

Now, here again, in conclusion, are the evidences that give that assurance.

1. The evidence of a resilient love.
2. The evidence of a responsive lifestyle,
 - with hunger for the written Word and
 - with conformity to the Living Word.
3. The evidence of a repentant heart,

- with an initial, comprehensive confession for my sinfulness, at salvation, and
- with ongoing, specific confession for daily sin, giving fellowship.

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