

The New Birth and Loving Your Brother

a sermon in the series
Life in the Son

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I John 5:1

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

Every preacher wants their audience to listen, but I want you to pay close attention to this message today, especially those of you whose faith in Christ is described as I shall describe in a few moments. When the Apostle John wrote these words the problem was that the majority of the Roman Empire did not believe that Jesus was the Christ. The word *Christ* means *God's anointed one*, or *Messiah*. So, therefore, in the days of John, most people did not believe in Jesus as the Son of God coming into the world to save sinners.

Even worse, by the end of the First Century there were men who entered leadership positions in some of the churches and did not believe Jesus was the eternal Son of God but was just a man who was, at His baptism by John, anointed with the Spirit of the Son of God. He wasn't deity; He was just a man who had a special anointing from the Son of God. Oh, they claimed to believe in Jesus but what they believed was heretical and attacked the very heart of the Gospel.

Therefore, the Apostle John is making it absolutely clear here that only those born of God believe that the man Jesus was the eternal Son of God who has come into the world to save. He is both God and man. In a generation when most people did not believe that fact, for you to believe and embrace it then live in accordance meant something supernatural had happened—you had been born from above.

The problem today, and this is where I really want you to listen closely, is the American religious scene the opposite and yet it is the same problem of John's day. A majority of American's believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and during this Christmas season many of us will be talking about Jesus being born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem.

In fact, statistics state that nearly 80 percent of the American population believes Jesus is the Son of God and claim to be Christian. That is our problem. How could that be a problem? I answer you saying because the faith they have is not the faith that is the result of the supernatural act of God in transforming a sinner. Their faith is merely intellectual. Today, the belief in Jesus is an inferior believing which leaves the person deceived into thinking they are a Christian, and that is

a serious problem.

Let's look at some hard facts that prove what I'm saying. According to the PEW Research of US religious survey of '08, just four years ago, of the 80 percent who claim to be Christian, only half of them attend church weekly. Not that attending church makes you a Christian, of course, but if you really believe in Jesus you would want to do what pleases Him, you would want to obey Him. In fact, John says that in the verses following our text. He says in verse two and three,

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” (1 John 5:2-3)

And one of the commandments of God is that we are to meet frequently together. We have been warned in Scripture not to forsake the time when Christians come together. Therefore, based upon the Bible, when half of professing Christians do not attend church it proves there is a serious flaw in their faith. As bad as that is, the data gets worse.

Nearly 26 percent of American's claiming to be Christians says they are evangelical. What does Evangelical mean? Well, we would be classified as evangelical. It's a person who believes new birth and conversion are necessary to become a Christian. It means you do not believe your good works merit you eternal life. You're not saved because you followed a religious rite like baptism, or you're a member of a church or that you're saved because you have religious or a biblically based morality. No, you believe you are a sinner saved by grace, justified by faith in Christ Jesus alone.

“For by grace have you been saved through faith that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

That is what it means to be an evangelical. So today, only one-fourth of people claiming to be Christians say they believe that fact. But, it's more startling when you discover that 57 percent of those claiming to be an evangelical believe that many religions can lead to eternal life. Almost 60 percent of evangelicals do not agree with Jesus when He said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through Me.” I don't even know why they call themselves evangelical.

When you do the math, which I did this week, it means only 10 percent of the American population hold biblical views concerning salvation and what it means to be 10 Christian. But that doesn't mean that all ten percent are true Christians, since the Bible tells us that one can be orthodox, correct in their doctrine and still not a Christian. There are some in this room who are accurate in theology but adrift in true spirituality. Clearly, we have a problem about what it means to believe in Jesus and what true Christianity really is. It's the same problem of John's day only manifested in a different way.

I. THE NECESSITY OF THE NEW BIRTH

You must be born again. You cannot be a Christian without the new birth.

A. Explanation of the Terms

I want to make sure everybody understands. When the Bible says the new birth, regeneration, born again, these are all biblical words to describe the same event. It is the act of God of giving spiritual life to a sinner, and we're all born in that condition of sin therefore we are all sinners. So, the new birth, regeneration, being born again, those are all terms meaning that God imparts, grants the gift of grace—something you do not deserve—and that gift is so life-changing and powerful that you are different as a result. Let me let Jesus explain it to us.

Please follow along and listen because to be deceived requires you not know you are deceived. That's why it's called deception; you truly believe that you are one thing when you are in fact not.

“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This 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.” ³Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:1-3)

It's interesting that Jesus would respond this way to a religious leader. Jesus knew Nicodemus had not experienced the new birth, which is why He said you must be born again. He made it personal. Listen to me, I know that I am a mere man, but I believe that something holy takes place at this time when Christians gather, and when a man has sought God all week opens the Word of God, I believe God speaks through him. Well, my goodness, He used a donkey to speak to Balaam, surely He can use me to talk to you. I want you to hear me; God is saying to some in this room, *you must be born again.* Well, Nicodemus of course did not understand.

“⁴Nicodemus 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?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:4-6)

He's talking about an actual event, not water baptism. He's not talking about being born physically. It's all Old Testament terminology to talk about this act of God to save a sinner and He says unless that has happened, born of water and the Spirit you cannot enter the kingdom of God. You can't get in. And if you haven't been born again today you are not in the kingdom of God, you're on the outside looking in. You've learned the terminology, the outward behavior patterns and can mimic them but you cannot enter, it is impossible to you. Jesus explains in verse six,

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh but that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.”

In other words, the best you and I can do in our own strength is be religious. We can mentally agree with religious truth and to adopt some religious lifestyle, at best, but that is flesh. God is Spirit and there is no way you can commune and have fellowship and relationship with God who is Spirit until something spiritual has happened to you. That's why, if you have a dog, your dog doesn't really understand you. She might act like she understands you, you say certain words and she seems to know exactly what you mean, but friends, that's just rogue behavior patterns just learned by doing the same thing over and over. Pavlov's law. That dog does not have a human spirit therefore it cannot know what's inside of you, what you think and why you do what you do. Why? Because it has the spirit of a dog. You have the spirit of a human being. God is spirit and there is no way you can know God intimately and personally and have relationship with Him until His Spirit is in you and then you can relate to Him on His level. That's what the new birth does.

B. The New Birth is the Work of God

It's not the work of denominations, religious institutions or clergymen. No one can cause you to enter into the kingdom of God; you can't even get in yourself. You need God to do this for you and in you and He will. I am much assured that God this morning will birth somebody into His family today. Why? Because He can and He longs to do so. The Bible says He's not willing that any should perish. He doesn't want you to die and go to hell and be separated from Him forever. He made you, He sustains you and He sent His Son to die for you, to pay the penalty of your sins. For you see, your sins separate you from God, that's why the Bible says every person that's born is dead in trespasses and sins. Which simply means you are spiritually dead and not in harmony with God—you can't understand God, hear God or receive God. Again, God is Spirit—a Holy Spirit. Our spirit has transgressed and turned from God and does not love God nor understand His ways so you're like a dead man, spiritually speaking. I've never been to a funeral home where the dead calls themselves to rise.

Lazarus was dead four days the Bible says in John 11 when Jesus wanted them to remove the stone from his tomb. They objected and they said, "But Lord, He's been dead four days, he stinks by now." Natural corruption had started the deterioration process and of course the stench must have been terrible. But Jesus told them to remove the stone and then He spoke these words, "Lazarus, come forth!" And only one dead body came out of that tomb and it was no longer dead but alive. It was Lazarus. Lazarus couldn't resurrect his own body, no more than you can make yourself a Christian. It's an act of God. You must be born again.

C. Which Comes First-- the New Birth or Faith?

Be careful how you answer because you might just contradict John here. Look at 1 John 5:1a,

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,"

In other words, the Apostle John is saying the proof someone has been born again is that he or she believes. Therefore the answer to our question is that the new birth comes first. Belief is a product of regeneration. Do you see that? Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. The person born of God will believe and you believe because you've been born of heaven. That means the new life of God in the sinner is the origin of faith. In fact, the Bible says to every believer God has given a measure of faith. Faith is the gift given to us by God at the new birth.

The way I illustrate this is simple. Which is first—the birth of the baby or the crying and breathing, the exhaling and inhaling of air? Well of course the birth comes first. In fact, sometimes the doctor has to swat the behind to get the breathing process begun. If there is life there will be breathing.

Listen closely. If God has reproduced Himself in you, through the new birth—what it means to become a Christian—there will be faith. Just like breathing—where there is life there will be faith. Faith is the inhaling and exhaling of the spiritual lungs. You will trust in Jesus and you will believe that He is. If you will notice, the new life of God focuses itself on Jesus Christ. He who believes Jesus is the Christ. Every Christian's heart is focused on His. He is God incarnate, meaning in the flesh, He is the revelation of the God of our creation and therefore since He has come and died for us—it is by His penalty we are now justified and pardoned—we love much.

Remember the parable Jesus told to a prostitute whom He had forgiven of sins? He asked Simon, a religious Pharisee, "Who will love much? The one who has been forgiven of a small debt or the one who has been forgiven of a large debt?" The preacher had enough sense to know the one who has been forgiven of the most will forgive most. Jesus said, "Listen, this woman loves much because she's been forgiven of much. You are so wrapped up in your good works that you are a decent human being and better than most persons, in fact you think you're better than her, you don't love Me at all. You have as much sin to be forgiven of as she does."

Listen to me, when God saves you, you realize what He has done for you, which triggers a response of love from your heart. A love that will trust Jesus. That's why John says those that believe have been born of God. They wouldn't have been able to believe unless God had done something in them.

I want to be very clear before I move on to the second and final point this morning: We're not asking any of you today to say you believe in Jesus, pray a prayer or raise your hand. We're not asking if you made a profession of faith in Sunday school, Children's Church, Bible School or in a revival meeting years ago. I'm not asking if you've been baptized or if you have certain religious beliefs that you try to guide your life by.

I'm not asking if you read your Bible or pray, I'm asking if you have a faith in Christ that has changed you, that causes you now to be different? Namely, to despise your own sin. The greatest proof you've been born again and that God's grace and life are now infused into you, is this hatred for your own sin. You judge yourself more harshly than you judge anyone else because your heart

has been changed. You don't want what you once were, you now trust Christ with your life. Has that happened to you? Has there been such a transformation in your heart that you're willing to surrender and sacrifice all dreams and ambitions in order to follow this One who died for you?

That's the kind of faith that John is talking about. It's not just intellectual ascent or agreement that Jesus is the Son of God who came to the earth, no. It's supernatural. It's so powerful that it always makes a difference. How big of a difference? The Bible describes it as light from dark. That's how big a difference. Without that I don't care how religious, how orthodox, how doctrinally and biblically sound they may be, you are yet to be born again and I pray that God will do that today.

You say if God must do this, then how can I be held responsible? Dear friend, the logic is twisted. If He was willing to give His own Son that none would perish but all would come to everlasting life. Why are you asking that question today? How do you defy the shed blood of Jesus with your question? The Bible is absolutely clear that God is longsuffering and commands men everywhere to repent and turn from their control of their life and to surrender with a faith that will trust Him with the entirety of their life. You ask today how can I know He would do this for me? Look at the cross! See the Savior bleeding. Do not see Him bleeding for mankind at large, look at Him and make it personal and say, "There God died for me."

Today I can only ask you to be concerned about what God commands you to do—believe and repent. Turn from the control of your life and to trust the Savior and say, "Here is my life and the remainder of it." Oh, my friend, if God has the power to change you it only seems logical to me that you should, without delay, go to Him right now and seek Him for this new life. If He's the One who has the power to change your life and to instill something that is so contrary to the natural course of this world and your own natural affections—if He is the only one that can so literally transform your life and cause you to know peace and joy and contentment—then it seems to me you ought not to go to other sources.

You ought not to come to preachers and say, "Please, would you bless me so that I can be saved," or ask for some religious rite to confirm you or change you, no sir. God is the One with the power to transform your life, why will you not yield this moment? Why do you continue to try by your morality to impress God? Do you think you can impress a holy God with your goodness? Let me tell you how impressed God is with your goodness. The Bible says that all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Bloody rags, to be exact.

You need God and His life in you. Go to Him.

II. THE NEW BIRTH GENERATES LOVE FOR OTHERS

I want believers to listen now because the Bible here tells us in our text that the new birth generates love for others. That love doesn't just change me and gives me a love for God, it generates a love for others, look at the last part of verse one.

“ everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.”

In other words, everyone who loves the Father loves everyone who has been born by the Father. We love our brothers and sisters in Christ. That's what that means. Because you've been born of God, you love other brothers and sisters. That was the testimonies we've heard today. Because we come from the same Father, spiritually speaking. We love one another because we are related. We love those who have been born again like we have. We have something in common, much more in common than even the physical relatives. Death will separate physical, nuclear families until they are no more.

My mother and father are deceased, my grandparents are deceased, I have only one living uncle left and I called him the other day on his birthday. He's 73 and when he's gone I will have no family other than my blood sister, and one day death will separate her and I and that family will be history, gone. But the family of God lives forever. We will spend forever together. We will eat at our Father's table and will recline on His bosom and never shall we be separated. Even death will never rip asunder these relationships. Together we shall forever be with God.

A. We Are One Family.

We love each other. Some of you test that love, but we love each other because we have the same Father. Even as a husband and a wife have love in their hearts for each other the tendency of time is to become complacent about expressing that love. So John tells us that love has to be cultivated. You have to work and practice loving, because if you don't, with time, it will be something you will take for granted. So, what I want to do for our last few moments is give you some biblical suggestions on how to love God's children.

How to Cultivate Love For One Another:

If you are born again you will want to do these things. There are plenty of things I could share with you, very practical things, but I don't need to be that practical. Surely you know if there is someone in our church who is in need you need to go help. You drop whatever you're doing and you go help them. If you call upon them to pray, what do you do? You stop what you're doing and you pray for them. If they are sick and cannot keep themselves in body and soul, what do you do? You volunteer to take them food, mow their grass or take care of them as best you can. That is practical love and I shouldn't have to explain how to do each and everything.

General principles by which you can cultivate the love of God in your heart and do practical things:

1. Love your heavenly Father

If you want to love men you begin by loving your Father. When I'm not loving God supremely I'm not only failing God and myself, I'm failing you. You need me to be so full of God that I will not be full of Michael, because you don't need Michael, you need God. It is every Christian's responsibility to be so full of the presence of God that when people come into your presence they are lifted up, encouraged and strengthened, and that cannot happen unless you are pursuing God because you love Him. So the way you help us is by loving God supremely and pursuing Him.

If you are struggling with someone today in your heart, your attitude toward them, it's not because of what they have done to you. No, it's a lack of love for God.

2. Think about your brothers and sisters

How can you love someone you never think about? Listen to what Paul says in Philippians 1:3,

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you."

He was thinking about the Philippians. Now beloved, if you think about your brothers and sisters only when you're gathered with them, then we surely are not cultivating love, as we ought, because when you're gathered here we don't really think that much about them. Why? Because you're paying attention to what I'm saying or someone else is saying, you don't really think about these folks. You're watching to see what God is doing, watching to see His activity. No, thinking about one another and remembering one another should happen when we're not together. The way you begin to cultivate that love is by thinking about people. And when you start that, God can lay people on your heart to pray for them, maybe to call them. You have no idea what's going on, you just know God is moving you to love this person. Start thinking about your brothers and sisters.

You say, *Well, I have so much to think about. I have jobs and family and a home and problems and paying the bills.* Oh, dear friend, those are very important, but you know what Jesus said about those things, don't you? He said don't worry about those things, just seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you. We don't use our brains enough and when we do use them we waste them on things Jesus told us not to be concerned about.

3. Pray for your brothers and sisters

I wonder how many of you actually in your daily devotions pray for people here in this church.

Let me stop you. At this point I'm sensing something and I want to address it. These are not just practical suggestions; this is the Word of God. You ought to pay attention to what I'm sharing with you and try to hear what God is saying to you because this is real Christianity. Coming to

church, you don't even have to be a real Christian to do that, do you? You can pretend to be, but this is real Christianity.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12,

“Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹² that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

He prays always for the Thessalonians. That's a great prayer to follow. This is a good example and outline on how to pray for one another.

4. Humble yourself before your brothers and sisters

It goes back to the beginning of the service, lowliness. Humble yourself. I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to see an illustration of what I'm trying to communicate this morning. Anyone who is familiar with John 14 knows this is the story of Jesus after the supper, taking a towel, girding it around His waist, getting a basin of water and washing the disciple's feet.

The Bible says in verse 12 of John 13,

“So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

Jesus is saying this is the role of the servant, “I, the Lord God, your teacher am serving you. You then ought to do this to others. Serve others!” That's the point.

Can I paraphrase? If you will serve one another you will be blessed. If you will so love one another more than a greeting but you serve them, you open up the window of heaven so that God can pour blessings in your life. For it is more blessed to give than to receive. Humble yourself before your brother and sister.

5. Remember love is not easy

In 1 John 3:16, we've already covered this,

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us and we also ought to lay down our

lives for the brethren.”

Love requires death to self. That's why love isn't easy. To love someone else means you have to die to your own self-centeredness and reach out and serve someone else without expecting anything in return. Now let me ask you, do you love like that? Husband, wife, if you could start loving your spouse like that it would revolutionize your marriage because love is not easy.

Some people are just easy to love. You want to know why? Because they always give more to you than you give to them. Don't you like to be around those kind of people? They just charge your heart, their personality is one of being concerned and conscious of you and you get more out of being with them than you give them. Those folks are easy to love.

But then on the other hand, there are some people who are difficult to love. They take more from you than they give and they can drain you. And what happens with time in a church, it happens in every church including ours, you stop loving those kinds of people and gravitate to those who reciprocate. You stop loving those kinds of people because you don't see any success from loving them.

Our problem is we have redefined love to be fixing somebody. Did you hear me? We define loving somebody as success in fixing him or her, making him or her the way they ought to be, at least the way you think they ought to be. And when you try and pour into them and invest in them and they don't change, or don't get fixed, what do you do? You stop trying to love them and you go somewhere else. Let me remind you that God didn't call you to fix anyone; He called you to serve them. Why, you can't even fix yourself. Only God can fix you and only God can fix me. We're not called to fix one another; we're called to love one another. You serve them by dying to self.

Imagine if Jesus defined love as fixing the disciples the night He washed their feet. Imagine what that would have looked like. Just imagine you're Jesus and Peter starts to resist once again. What would you do? Pick up the basin of water and dump it on his head and then stomp out of the room? Jesus didn't do that because the purpose of what He did that night was not to fix any of them but to serve them, to love them. Listen, I am convinced after 26 years being a Christian and living 52 years, I am convinced that God allows difficult people to remain difficult to prove how selfish you and I are. Or, in other words, to prove how much God has to serve and sacrifice in order to love us.

If you've got somebody in your life that is difficult to love, God's letting him or her remain difficult to prove to you how selfish and self-centered you are. That might be hard to swallow and it won't digest very well, but it's nonetheless the truth. It's the appropriate medicine for this moment. Let's receive it from the Lord, that God is allowing some people to be hard to love, difficult to serve so that you can learn how much God really loves you, because you're not so easy to love either.

The fact is, all of us are difficult to love, but this amazing God of love does love us and He does it so well. He serves us so amazingly. His astonishing love can so transform you that you're new beginning can happen today, called the new birth. God's love can so change your life. Why are you not let God love you? Why do you reject His love and His overtures of kindness?

There are only two people in this world that I know beyond a shadow of a doubt they loved me just because of who I was. My grandmother and my wife, they are the only two. I miss my grandma; she's been gone now for 13 years. It's good to have a wife that will accept me and not try to fix me; she's learned she can't do it anyway. It's impossible. But as awesome as the love of those two women have been in my life, let me tell you something, the love of God makes them look like amateurs. God's love is so awesome.

My wife is an expression of God's love to me. It's God loving me through her so let me tell you, I plead with you in the name of Christ, why do you not let God love you His way? Why do you insist that God has to love you your way when you don't even know how to spell love? Let God love you today by first transforming your life and making something new out of you. Let Him take the broken pieces of your life and put it together in a way that will make sense, maybe not at first, but with time you will begin to see a story that God is writing with your life and it all can begin right here and right now if you will swallow your pride, humble yourself and say, *I can't change me. I'm so bankrupt I need Your mercy and grace.* It will be astonishing to watch what God will do with you. Amen.