

That Other Experience with God

Jesus made it very plain, “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” ⁽¹⁾ He gives us no choice— “You must be born again.” ⁽²⁾ What did he mean by “born again?”

Humans are more than physical. We are not mere material creatures made up of countless cells and molecules. We are human spirits temporarily housed in these bodies. In fact, our physical life depends on the presence of this other part of us the Bible calls “spirit”.

Jesus’ insistence on the new birth didn’t refer to the body, the mind or the soul. He alluded to the human spirit, the only eternal part of human beings.

In Genesis 2:17 the Lord told Adam, “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” What happened? When Adam ate the fruit, he didn’t fall dead! He continued living for hundreds of years. Did God’s prediction fail?

No, God’s prediction came to pass. At the moment Adam rebelled against God, his human spirit perished. His body continued functioning, standing upright, and hearing, seeing, thinking and feeling. But his spirit was totally inactive. He was “dead in...transgressions and sins.” ⁽³⁾ Since Adam’s time, “death came to all men because all sinned.” ⁽⁴⁾

Jesus’ term “new birth” directs our attention to the moment when his Spirit enters the human spirit and makes it alive. Paul described it this way: “God...made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.” ⁽⁵⁾

Although Jesus taught us about the new birth, the new birth isn’t the only experience with God he emphasized.

That Other Experience with God

After his resurrection Jesus often met with the apostles. “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.... In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’.” ⁽⁶⁾ In other words, he pointed his followers to another experience with God in addition to the new birth. Jesus used John the Baptist’s term “baptism with the Holy Spirit” ⁽⁷⁾ when describing this other experience.

Jesus’ Pre-resurrection Promises of Another Experience with God

During his 3 1/2 year ministry, Jesus often promised to bring his followers into an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. ⁽⁸⁾

One day Jesus urged his followers to believe that Heavenly Father desires to answer their prayers. He reminded them that imperfect human parents enjoy granting good gifts to their children. He then pointed out that a perfect Heavenly Father can be depended on to grant good gifts to his children. Jesus ended this teaching by promising that Heavenly Father will “give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.” This statement

introduces us to the idea of asking for an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit even though we previously experienced the new birth.

As the end of his life on earth approached, Jesus spoke more frequently about his follower's new relationship with the Holy Spirit. He made an announcement to the apostles that saddened their hearts. "It is for your good that I am going away."⁽⁹⁾ The thought of losing the Jesus they admired grieved their hearts.

Jesus proceeded to explain why it was good for him to depart. "Unless I go away, the counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." Here Jesus explained that his departure from earth opened the way for his followers to enter into that other experience with God.

Jesus' Post Resurrection Predictions of That Other Experience

After his resurrection Jesus twice assured his followers they would experience the promise of the Father. "I am going to send you what my Father has promised."⁽¹⁰⁾ Later, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised."⁽¹¹⁾ What did he mean by "promise of the Father?"

"The promise of the Father" signified God's intense desire to bring all his children into partnership with the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament records many incidences when God sent an unusually powerful presence of the Holy Spirit on selected individuals. This intimacy with the Holy Spirit equipped them to perform divine feats that served divine purposes. This experience with the Holy Spirit was only available to a few people like prophets, priests, military leaders or kings. Most of God's people never knew this closeness to the Spirit of God.

The prophet Joel lived about eight hundred years before Jesus. Through him God revealed his intense desire to send the Holy Spirit on all his children. "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."⁽¹²⁾ The resurrected Jesus foretold the soon coming fulfillment of God's promise to make the Holy Spirit's abiding presence available to all his children.

Jesus' followers had experienced the new birth. Nevertheless, he wanted to take them a step further in their relationship with God and their service for God. No one asked him, "Jesus isn't the new birth enough? Why do we need another experience with God? Isn't salvation sufficient?" No, they didn't ask such questions, because they regarded the new birth and the baptism with the Holy Spirit as complementary.

These two experiences with God fit together perfectly. Through them, God brings us into his family and equips us for service to humanity. The new birth must precede the baptism with the Holy Spirit, but the new birth does not exclude our need for this other experience with God.

Footnotes:

1. John 3:3
2. John 3:7
3. Ephesians 2:1
4. Romans 5:12
5. Ephesians 2:4-5
6. Acts 1:4-5

7. Matthew 3:11
8. Luke 11:13; 24:40; John 7:37-29; 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:7
9. John 16:7
10. Luke 24:49
11. Acts 1:4

