



*Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

*John 3:7*

### **What does it mean to be born again?**

“Ye must be born again” were the words of the Lord to Nicodemus, a Pharisee well learnt in the scripture. Yet the man was confused by what the Lord said. ‘Born again’ is a familiar phrase to most people, often used in conversation to convey a change of mind. But that, however, was not what the Lord meant. Like Nicodemus, we, too may be ignorant of its true meaning. Thanks to Nicodemus, he asked this of the Lord,

*“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”*

*(John 3:4)*

We know what Nicodemus is implying is impossible. The Lord was not speaking about a physical birth here, and that is clear in His response,

*Verily, I say unto thee. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit. He cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

*That which is born of the flesh is flesh. And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

*(John 3: 5 &6)*

Let us analyse the Lord’s response, starting with the latter two sentences and then moving to the former. Here, the Lord uses the word ‘flesh’ twice (flesh is flesh). The corresponding Greek terms are ‘sarx’ and ‘sarkos’. Both carry the same meaning, translated as body, flesh, or human nature, except that one is a noun (sarx), and the other is a possessive noun (sarkos), conveying ownership. The sentence can be paraphrased as: “that which is born of flesh belongs to the flesh”. To clarify the statement in this sentence, let us examine the two nouns used here. One is talking about our body (born of the flesh), and the other is about the nature of our body (flesh). The same goes for the word Spirit. The Greek words used are ‘pneuma’ and ‘pneumatos’; the former is a noun and the latter a possessive noun of the word Spirit. The subjects here are the two natures of man, namely the flesh and the Spirit. The sources of the two natures are different. The flesh comes from our body, received at birth, and is controlled

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by enzymes, hormones and instincts. The spirit comes from the Spirit. Notice that the word Spirit is a proper noun, implying God the Creator.

The Lord here is talking about the two natures in us. One is the fleshly nature obtained at birth. The presence of this nature is evident because no one needs to teach us to tell lies. The other is the spiritual nature that originates from God. One must know the true and living God to receive the spiritual nature. Our existence, therefore, is preserved by these two separate systems (flesh and spirit). This is much like a biological, physical, or social system. They all rely on two different sub-systems, usually referred to as positive and negative feedback loops. Like these systems, humans, too, need two sub-systems to supply positive feedback (by the flesh) and negative feedback (by the spirit). The spirit is responsible for providing negative feedback to restrain the flesh, thereby staying in a state of equilibrium or homeostasis.

Homeostasis is crucial for optimising the operation of any system. This is possible only when the two feedback systems (positive and negative) are fully functional. For example, we can push our bodies to achieve in sports. However, when the body works beyond a level (excessive positive reinforcement), the balance tips causing a breakdown. Knowing our limits and stopping is crucial, which is possible only when the negative feedback system kicks into action. Thus, a well-operating negative feedback system is vital for restoring homeostasis and keeping life balanced. This is true for all systems, be it an electrical circuit (bulb, computer, battery), biological entity (body temperature, blood glucose, clotting) or our society (traffic lights, public policies, social norms). Likewise, our existence needs the influence of the spiritual nature (negative feedback system) over our fleshly nature (positive feedback system) to produce life's choicest outcomes (love, joy, peace, happiness, etc.). When the spiritual nature is not functioning, we become self-destructive, just like any system in which the negative feedback system is not working.

Back to our topic, Nicodemus was missing the spiritual nature that supplies the negative feedback, which is fundamental for our existence. Without the spiritual nature, like Nicodemus, we are a broken system that needs fixing. How did this happen? The Bible tells us how it happened. Going back to the start of creation, God made man with dust. The Word of God explains it in the following way:

*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.*

*(Genesis 2:7)*

Notice the origin of the two natures, the flesh is from the body (made from dust), and the spirit is from the Creator Himself. The Word of God defines man as a living soul created with perfect homeostatic balance.

We also see in the scripture that God created man with free will. God created us with the freedom to choose what we want, but we must bear the consequences of our choices. The Word of God explains free will in the following way, which is simple and easy to understand:

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*...And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

*(Genesis 2: 16 and 17)*

Adam and Eve, our first parents, disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit. Note that the consequence of disobeying was death. The death mentioned was spiritual. We know that because Adam and Eve continued to live in their flesh after this incident. It is reasonable to say that Adam fell from grace and was ex-communicated from having fellowship with God. The scripture explains that this way -

*Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man, and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*

*(Genesis 3: 23 and 24)*

We are the generation born, figuratively, outside the garden. Hence, we do not know the true and living God from whom the spiritual nature originates (Genesis 2:7). Receiving the spiritual nature is what the Lord refers to as being born again (John 3:5). The Word of God refers to this as the quickening or bringing to life our spiritual nature (1 Corinthians 15:45). Nicodemus did not have his spirit quickened; hence, he needed to be born again.

Like Nicodemus, we need to be born again. We need fixing, which is by the quickening of our spiritual nature. This is achieved by acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and then believing He died on the cross for your sins. Think about this: the Lord did not have to die because of His sinless nature, considering that death is the consequence or wages of sin (Romans 6:23). A fully functional spiritual nature because of His deity explains His sinless nature. His death, therefore, was not for His sins as he had none. Hence, we can credit His death towards paying the wages of our sins. But we must claim His death by accepting Him as our redeemer, that is, as the one who pays the debt we owe. The Word of God puts it in simple terms...

*...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

*(Romans 10:9)*

By knowing the true and living God, revealed through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, we receive the spiritual nature – Amazing! This is the true meaning of being born again. The Lord can fix our broken self, and the Word of God is our guarantee.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

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*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

*For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*

*But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

*(John 3:16-21)*

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