

Come As You Are?

Ryan Goodwin

“You Must Be Born Again”

In John 3:1-6, Jesus meets a man named Nicodemus. The encounter is brief, but powerful, and a number of lessons can be learned by examining our Lord’s words. *“Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”* This statement obviously confuses Nicodemus, to the point that he wonders why Jesus wants him to be physically born again. But consider the explanation offered by the Christ, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and 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...”*

The idea that our Lord is conveying is that total spiritual rebirth is required of us to be truly converted. We must completely start over again if we want to make ourselves right with God. Many people, whether consciously or not, have no desire to make a full change when it comes to their lives. They want to change only as much as they need to skirt by. Even worse, the religious world in general is allowing this and even facilitating the poor attitude by allowing churchgoers to “come as you are” without making any real changes. Those who are addicted to worldly vices are given a pass instead of convicted. Church members who are blatantly sinning are not disciplined properly. Some churches seem to practice more of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy than anything else. This is not change, though. This is not rebirth or renewal.

In order for real, meaningful change to occur in our lives, we need to allow ourselves to be totally reborn. There is no desire for half-hearted change in God’s eyes, so how willing are you to let go of your old life completely and turn yourself over to God?

Rebirth Involves A Total Change

Christianity is a religion of conversion. We are expected by God to change ourselves, our nature, our attitudes, our habits, and every action that is contrary to the expectations He has for us.

- *“Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts”* (Galatians 5:24).
- *“But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self”* (Colossians 3:8-10).
- *“How shall we who died to sin still live in it?”* (Romans 6:2).
- *“Our old self was crucified with Him”* (Romans 6:6).

This is what makes our faith so unique from others in the world. While many religions require little or no change, and ask nothing from their members, God commands His followers to give everything over to Him, and render both body and soul to His service. Even beyond that, most religions that ask some changes in their members’ lives do not require any treatment of habits or lifestyles. “Come as you are” is

the prevalent mentality, and that lends itself to people who do not want to make a meaningful or lasting transformation. Contrary to the world's perception of religious conformity, the Bible makes it clear that change must be actively pursued and permanent:

- *"In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self"* (Ephesians 4:22).
- *"Put on the new self"* (Ephesians 4:24).
- *"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put aside from you, alone with malice"* (Ephesians 4:31).
- *"Let him who steals, steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good..."* (Ephesians 4:28).
- *"If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God"* (Colossians 3:1).