

What is a born-again Christian? *Origin & Warning, 8 pgs*

¹ In the beginning God [who had always existed] created [brought into existence] the material universe ... ²⁷ God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created mankind. [an entire race of people] ²⁸ **God blessed them** and said Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over [all the other creatures]
Gen.1:

¹⁵ God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to be its caretaker. ¹⁶ And **warned** [testing] **the man**, saying, You may eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ except the tree in the midst of the garden because if you do, you will die, **2 :**

¹ Now **the serpent** was slyer than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He questioned the woman about the prohibition, created doubt, stirred up confusion, and directly contradicted GOD, You will not die **Gen.3:** So she ate, and her husband ate.

Consequences & results [from this point on]

As a consequence of their disobedience, Adam became unrighteous and thus no longer belonged in God's presence. They were evicted from the Garden of Eden and no one was allowed access to the "tree of life" [metaphor for "eternal life," **Gen.3:22-24**] until the Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, opened the way.

so all people became sinners, ¹⁰ God's enemies [a basic change in the relationship between people and God] ... ¹² sin came into the world [as a contaminate] through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned [in Adam because he was the head and representative of our race] ¹⁴ ... death reigned from Adam to Moses [from the fall to the giving of the Law] ... the result of one man's sin: ¹⁶ **The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation** ... ¹⁷ ... by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man ... ¹⁸ Consequently ... one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people ... ¹⁹ For ... **through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners** ... ²¹ sin reigned in death ... **Rom.5:**

The rest of the OT chronicles the infection and spread of sin and death as men seized power, built armies, killed each other, and justified it. They enslaved other men and nations grew powerful and full of wickedness: there was Egypt during the time of Moses, later, the Assyrian empire, then the Babylonian empire, and finally the Roman empire during time of Jesus and the NT. This isn't just a malady of the wealthy and powerful. We all abuse those we are supposed to love, who are closest to us. We lash out physically and psychologically to hurt and demean others.

NT - A New Beginning

Jn.1:1 In the beginning [of the material universe] the Word already existed. He was with God, and was God ... [here is one of the places where the Trinity is implied] ³ God brought everything into being [a change of state, status, or condition] through him, ⁴ The Word gave life to all creatures and his life brought light to everyone. ⁵ The light [not the physical phenomenon but a metaphor for truth and righteousness] shines in the darkness, and the darkness [not the absence of light, but the prevalence of ignorance and wickedness] can never extinguish it ... ⁶ God sent John the Baptist ⁷to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony of ⁹The one who is the

true light, who gives light to [enlightens] everyone, was coming into the world.

Lk.1:77 John came to give people knowledge of salvation through forgiveness of their sins ... ⁷⁸Because of the tender mercy of our God, his light from on high [Jesus] has visited us, ⁷⁹to shine on those who sit in darkness and in death's shadow. [like the light of a new day as the sun rises and chases away the darkness]

Jn.1:10 [Jesus] came into the very world he created, but the people didn't recognize him. ¹¹He came to his own people [Hebrews], and even they rejected him [the Jews are the ones that demanded his crucifixion. They are the ones he fed when he multiplied the loaves and fishes. They knew the paralytic Jesus healed, and the lepers he cured, and the blind he gave sight to ... and the man with the withered hand that Jesus restored right in front of them]. ¹²But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right [authorization, lawful entitlement] to become children of God [who may exercise all attendant rights and privileges], ¹³who were born, not of bloods [plural] nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but [by the will] of God.

Phillips paraphrases: ¹² these were men who truly believed in Him, ¹³and **their rebirth** depended not on the course of nature, nor on any impulse or plan of man, but on God.

1 Cor.15:50 flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God [it is spiritual in nature]

Jas.1:18 He brought us forth [Gk., gave birth to us] of His own will

Jn.1:14 So the Word became human [the incarnation] and made his home among us [tented, dwelt with us temporarily as Abraham and his descendants did]. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son ... God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us ... ²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! [that is, the sacrificial lamb that God had prepared is right here in this location and he walks among us]

Phil.2:6 For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, ⁷but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave and being born as mortal man. ⁸And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying as a common criminal. ⁹That is why God has now lifted him so high, and has given him the name beyond all names [position of highest authority], ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow [lit, bend], whether in Heaven or earth or under the earth. ¹¹And that is why, in the end, every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord ...

2 Cor.5:21 God made Christ who never knew sin to be sin for us, in order that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 Pt.3:18 Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

1 Jn.2:1 But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Rom.5:6 at the right time Christ died for the ungodly ... ⁸God shows his love for us in that while we

were still sinners, Christ died for us ...

Rom.5:16 Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! ¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Being Born Again

Jn.3:1 **Nicodemus, a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews** ²came to Jesus by night and said 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. ³ Jesus answered him, unless one is born again [or from above] he cannot see the kingdom of God. ⁴How can a man be born when he is old? ¹⁰ Jesus answered Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ⁵unless 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 [ie, the kind of birth I'm speaking of is effected by the Spirit of God, it is not a physical process] ...

¹⁴ as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness [so anyone bitten by a snake (brought by God's anger) might look at it and be spared, **Num.21:8**], so must the Son of Man be lifted up [referring to being raised up on a cross at his crucifixion] , ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him [referring to himself in the 3rd person] may have eternal life [which encompasses more than merely living forever] . ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him [not just Hebrews] should not perish [a change of destiny] but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already [has already been found guilty] , because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God ... ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey [equivalent to believe] the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains [continues to reside] on him [where it has always been]

Adoption

Rom.8:8 Those who are in the flesh [ie, are not alive to God spiritually] cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, your spirit lives because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you ... ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ ...

Col.1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered [rescued] us from the domain [and dominion] of darkness and transferred [relocated] us to the kingdom of his dear son.

Rom.8:19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For it was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves ... groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for [the fullness of our] adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Why is faith in Christ the only way to come to God?

What about all those people who never heard the gospel of Christ - are they all going to hell? I admit that these are some of the few questions I am uncomfortable with, but not for the reasons you might think. It's not that I consider these illegitimate questions, but they are questions for which I haven't found argument to be the appropriate way to address. It's like asking a friend of many years why I should trust him. The reasons are embedded in who I know him to be and our relationship through the years. To even ask the question amounts to an insult. To raise such an issue with God seems prideful, demanding, and challenging - pressing Him to justify Himself to me for showing me selective mercy. This I am not comfortable doing. It is ultimately a matter of God's government, so my trust is in Him and His ways. This is sufficient for me.

Human beings are not God's only servants and witnesses. Here in John's vision is his interaction with an angel. ¹⁰ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God (**Rev.19:**).

Consider the relationship between 2 passages. **Mt.28:16-20** is appropriately known as THE GREAT COMMISSION. The commission begins with a declaration of Jesus' right to make it, *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me (v.18)*. This declaration is followed by the conclusion of what is the proper course for His disciples as they are scattered by persecution *therefore (v.19)* and the principle verb, *disciple all nations. Going, baptizing, and teaching* are all participles modifying the principle idea of bringing people to Christ and training them what it means to follow Him.

There is a close relationship between this passage and **Mt.11:25-30**. Jesus begins by praising the Father, *Lord of heaven and earth (v.25)* for: (1) hiding the truth from the wise and learned [referring to the way they saw themselves] illustrated by the miracles Jesus performed (11:2-6) and by the coming of John the Baptist (11:7-19) which form the basis for Jesus' curse *woe to you* upon the unrepentant cities (v.20-24); and (2) revealing the truth about Himself *to children [v.25 - not referring to age, but humility]*. *For this was Your good pleasure. All things have been committed to Me [Jesus] by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him (v.26-27)*. The very next words describe the proper course of true faith and repentance, *Come to Me ... (v.28)*

WHY ALL THE SUFFERING?

Why doesn't God prevent violence from ruining people's lives? Why does he take years and years to

heal broken hearts and injured bodies? Why must we suffer from sickness, and why does it go on so long sometimes? These are the kinds of questions that plagued a friend who came to my house 2 or 3 times a week for Bible study and to watch movies. It was easy to see that he was frustrated with God and that he even held him responsible because God is after all the only one who could do anything about these calamities, isn't he? Well why doesn't he? *[Wait a minute, didn't we have a perfect world like that once? I seem to remember a paradise in a place called Eden made to be mankind's home. What happened to that?]* So coupled with what might have been legitimate questions was an accusatory attitude that held God responsible for evil and suffering. *[My friend never seemed to consider man's accountability.]*

One day I asked my friend to write down his question and bring it next time so we could work on it. Well he didn't bring it next time. So I pressed him on that - spent at least a half hour arguing with him over why writing down the question was important. I began to think he didn't know how to write. Well during the movie he finally wrote out his question. *[I outlasted him. I don't normally answer back to someone who is riled up about something. I usually let it pass without comment. But this time my friend's adamancy was founded in his ignorance of language and the benefits of the written word that directly impacted his question/problem. It was time to dig out his assumptions, reveal his self-righteous attitude, and force the issue. See Adamant Certainty]*

Almost every time someone asks such questions, they state them too broadly to be answered. Questions require narrowing to bring the real issues into focus and expose the mix of assumptions and misconceptions that have become entangled in their minds confusing the subject. It is much easier to pick out these and other flaws from a written statement. Let's take a look. His basic assumption was that God is able to do anything. Is that true? A similar question was posed by some of those who watched Christ's crucifixion.

³⁷ A sign was fastened above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews ... ³⁹ The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. ⁴⁰ Look at you now! ... You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days [a misunderstanding of Jesus' meaning]. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross [they confused what Jesus wouldn't do with his ability to do it] ... ⁴¹ The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. ⁴² He saved others ... but he can't save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! ⁴³ He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, I am the Son of God. ⁴⁴ Even the thieves who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way. (Mt.27:)

Let's tackle the question, Can God do anything? The answer is yes and no. **Yes**, Jesus could have come down from the cross and been delivered from that ignominious death. *⁵³ Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? ⁵⁴ But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now [that he had to die] ? (Mt.26:)* So **no**, he could not avoid dying on the cross - would not, for his mission was to redeem his people and that could only be accomplished by his own death. He was bound by the very purposes and promises of God. Asking too general a question created a linguistic conundrum or paradox by its lack of specificity. After the Passover Jesus went to a place called Gethsemane.

³⁹ He ... bowed with his face to the ground, praying, My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine ... ⁴² Then Jesus ... prayed, My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done ... (**Mt.26:**)

As to the questions of why God allows suffering and evil to run their courses in the world, Let us turn to C. S. Lewis [author of The Chronicles of Narnia and The Problem of Pain]. God uses pain to **awaken** us to himself and then to **refine** his people for himself. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. Pain is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. Pain and suffering are also necessary to refine us because we are fallen, selfish creatures. **Pain, not pleasure works to correct that.** Suppose God were to thwart every evil or immoral choice we made so no one ever experienced pain or suffering. There would be no consequences – everyone would be indestructible through the days of his existence. Life would become trivial and we would become more reckless and self-centered than we already are.

What would you become if you got everything you wanted immediately. People who get everything they want without delay are **spoiled** because their character is never challenged to grow. Pain, suffering, and difficulty are antidotes for they tend to prevent spoilage.

⁵ And have you [believers] forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (**Heb.12:**)

Many people have a wrong view of **God's purposes** and so they are disappointed with him when their comfort and ease is disturbed. God's work in the universe is complex and involves building character. That is almost impossible in our fallen state without some pain and suffering. Certain virtues seem to require it. As the Scriptures teach and experience proves, it is difficult to develop courage without danger, perseverance without obstacles, patience without tribulation, compassion without suffering, character without adversity, and faith (or trust) without need. **Soul-making is indeed painful.**

LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

⁶ Now **Satan** presented himself before the **LORD** ⁸ And the LORD said to him, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, **a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil** ? [God deliberately provoked Satan] ⁹ Then Satan said sure because you bless everything he touches ¹¹ But take away all that he has, and he will curse you to your face. ¹² And the LORD said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your hand. (**Job 1:**)

There came a messenger to Job and said, The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them [ie, life was proceeding peacefully and normally] ¹⁵ and **the Sabeans** took them and struck down the servants. ¹⁶ Then another said, **fire fell from heaven** and burned up the sheep and the servants [recognizable as supernatural events]. ¹⁷ Then another said, **the Chaldeans raided** the camels and took them and killed the servants. ¹⁸ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ and behold, **a great wind came** across the wilderness and struck the four cor-

ners of the house, and it killed the young people. ²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return [to the earth from whence I came]. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. ²² **In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. (Job 1:)**

Again Satan presented himself before the LORD. ² And the LORD again extolled Job's virtues to him. He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason. ⁴ Then Satan answered saying, ⁵ stretch out your hand and touch his bone and flesh, and he will curse you to your face. ⁶ And the LORD said to Satan, Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.

⁷ So Satan struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. ⁸ And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes [Who is responsible for Job's suffering, Satan or God?]. ⁹ Then **his wife said to him**, Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die. ¹⁰ But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive benefit from God, and not hardship? In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

¹¹ Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come **to show him sympathy and comfort him** [good intentions].

¹² And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they wept, and tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. **They sat with him on the ground seven days and nights, and no one spoke a word to him**, for his suffering was very great. (Job 2:)

The Jews weren't the only ones to misunderstand God. Many people of those days including Job's friends and even Satan himself thought in simple terms, that God would prosper you if you were good and punish you if you were bad. Yet we see in Job that this is not the case. The universe is more complicated than that. God's plans are known only to him and are full of wisdom.

After this Job cursed the day of his birth in the bitterness of his circumstances.

Job's friends began by sharing his grief, supporting, and comforting him by sitting with him in silence. They acknowledged the help and counsel he has given others but end up accusing Job of wrongdoing based on their simplistic view of God and the way he works. In their minds, Job needed to repent and God would forgive him. Job responds, *I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all (16:2)*. He points out that what his friends are saying is not what he has observed in life. The wicked do prosper, spend their days in peace, live long, and die in comfort (chap.21). A younger man (**Elihu, chap.32-37**) joins the discussion and speaks more correctly than his elders. Finally, God speaks and rebukes Job where he has gone too far in his own defense.

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: ² Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ³ Dress for action like a man I will question you, and you make it known to me. ⁴ Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? (**Job 38:**) ... Shall a faultfinder contend with the almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it. (**Job 40:2-**)

Then Job answered the LORD and said: ² I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of

*yours can be thwarted. ³ Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know ... ⁵ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; [I really didn't know you at all!] ⁶ therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (**Job 42:**)*

The book ends with God's rebuke to Job's 3 friends and a restoration of Job's status and fortunes, children, and years of life. What lessons do you carry away from Job? How should a man approach God? You'd better come with your hat in your hand. After all what do you really know about such things and who are you to criticize God? Believe the Scriptures, search their mysteries, and trust God. Hasn't he earned your trust? Review the lives of Joseph (**Gen.37-**) and Daniel and put away your reservations.

*Oh give thanks to the Lord; for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! (**Ps.106:1; 107:1; 136:1**)*