

Discovering
GRACE LIFE



Class 1
AM I BORN AGAIN?

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This booklet covers the same material as was covered in the first class of Discovering Grace Life. The purpose of the booklet is both for review and, more importantly for reflection. Please work through this prayerfully and thoughtfully. If you do choose to pursue membership, the Elders will walk through your responses to the reflection questions with you.

WHY ASK THE QUESTION, "AM I BORN AGAIN"?

Asking "Am I born again?" may seem like a strange question to start with. Isn't everyone who believes in God a Christian? If I once went forward at an altar call or repeated the sinner's prayer, doesn't this mean I am a Christian? I am a Christian because I grew up in the church, made a sincere decision, and still hold that decision as important to me, right? It might surprise you that the answer to all of those questions is "no". While those things may be the experience of a true Christian, the Bible never speaks of any of those things as being evidence of true salvation.

In Matthew 7:18-23, Jesus said some shocking things:

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"¹

We can take note of two main things.

1. *There are many who call Jesus "Lord" who will not enter the kingdom of heaven.* These people are not Muslims or Buddhists or atheists. These are people who believed themselves to be following Jesus and even call him "Lord", yet they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus teaches us to expect that *many* people will be deceived into believing they are saved when they are not. Therefore, we want to pay careful attention to his teaching.
2. *Only those who do the will of God enter the kingdom of heaven.* Yes, some may do many works that they believe were important, but they did not truly obey the commands of God. Jesus says that true believers are known "by their fruit". They are not known by their profession of faith alone, but by the evidence that Christ has transformed their life by the power of the Holy Spirit. True faith in Christ will always produce good fruit.

¹ All Scriptures are ESV.

One night a top religious leader named Nicodemus came to visit Jesus. If anyone thought they were entering the kingdom of God, it would be him! But listen to what Jesus says to him:

John 3:3, 5, 7

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God... 'You must be born again.'"

Nicodemus had to be born again. He had to become a whole new person. And so do we! A friend of mine was once proclaiming the gospel to a man he met in a coffee shop. After a while the man said, "It sounds like you are telling me that I have to become a whole new person!" Yes, that is exactly what is needed! The person who is truly saved has been transformed by the Holy Spirit of God. What we need is a new heart.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

We need to notice that this new heart changes how we live. Remember that the one who does the will of the Father is the one who enters the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21). In Ezekiel 36 the new heart results in us walking in obedience to God.

The questions we must ask is not "Do I believe in God?" or "Have I made a decision for Jesus?" or "Did I pray a particular prayer?". True salvation will certainly involve belief in God and making decisions to follow Jesus and prayer, but you can have those things and not be truly saved! The question we must ask is this: "Am I born again? Have I been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit?"

EVIDENCES OF TRUE SALVATION

We have already seen that merely professing faith, believing that we are saved, having certain emotions, being baptized, or even doing many religious activities are not necessarily evidence that we are born again. So then, what *are* some evidences that we are born again?

1. TRUE FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

The great and precious promise of the gospel is that everyone who believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. Hidden in this verse is some bad news. Without Jesus, we will perish. The Bible tells us that we have all sinned. We have all rejected

God and have loved other things more than we love him. We have rejected his rule over us and have made ourselves to be 'god' in his place. And because of this, we stand under the righteous judgment of God. The penalty for our sin is death, which is eternal conscious punishment in hell. In his love, God sent Jesus to die on the cross in our place. On the cross, Jesus paid the price of sin for all of God's people. On the third day, he rose from the dead, triumphing over sin and death. He ascended into heaven where he intercedes for his people before the throne of God, and he is coming back one day to judge the living and the dead. And we are saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus if we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus.

But what does it mean to believe? The Bible says that we can believe true things about God and yet not be any better off even than demons!

James 2:19

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder!

So then, what does the Bible mean by faith that saves?

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Here we see what it means to truly believe in Jesus. It means to come to him for the satisfaction of your soul. Remember that we are born in rebellion against God. In our sin, we do not come to him because we do not love him! But true belief is when the Holy Spirit makes us new, and we have a new desire to have fellowship with Jesus Christ. Saving faith is to see him as glorious and precious and more beautiful than anything else in this world. We want to be with him and to become like him.

Matthew 13:44

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

This little parable tells us what this looks like in a person's life. When someone truly believes in Jesus, he will see Jesus as a great treasure. He will value Jesus so much that he gives up everything else in life to have Jesus. He gives up his sins, he gives up his obsession with money and success, and he gives up his desire to be loved by the world, because Jesus is better to him than all of those things. And he does this with joy because Jesus is far greater than everything else in this world. True believing is not just to know facts about Jesus, but to treasure Jesus more than anything else, even your own life!

Questions for reflection

1. Does the parable in Matthew 13:44 describe what has happened in my soul? Do I consider it a joy to give up the things of this world that I might gain Christ?
2. Do I see Jesus as the food and drink that my soul desires, or do I find myself running to other things to make me happy (money, entertainment, food and drink, sexual immorality, being liked by others)?

2. TRUE LOVE FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Psalm 119:103

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Isaiah 66:2

But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Perhaps one of the clearest signs that someone has been born again is how they now desire God's Word in Scripture. Before the new birth, people are often not interested in the Bible. The words of Scripture do not affect their soul. Or, in other cases, they even hate the Word of God. There are many people today who identify as Christians and yet hate many things that they find in the Bible, especially if those things are considered offensive in today's world. They love a 'god' of their own invention, but they do not love God as he has revealed himself in the Bible. But the true believer will delight in God's Word, and they will find that the Word of God produces change in their hearts. The true believer longs for the faithful preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

Questions for reflection

1. Do I find that the Word of God in Scripture creates joy in my heart?
2. Is my heart inclined to trust God's Word in all things, even if it is unpopular today or if it exposes my sin?

3. TRUE REPENTANCE AND TURNING FROM SIN

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Many people believe that they are saved even though they continue in their sins the same way they did before. For this reason, the Bible often warns us to not be deceived into thinking that people who go on in sin can inherit the kingdom of God (see also Galatians 6:7; Ephesians 5:5). Those who truly belong to God will have changed lives. Such were some of you. True salvation doesn't mean that you will never sin again. Instead, it means that you are no longer at peace with sin. It means that you now grieve your sin and that you are now making war against the sin in your life. And the true believer will have true victory over sin.

Questions for reflection

1. Have I repented (turned from) known sin in my life?

2. Do any of the sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 define my life?

Sexual immorality (pornography, sex outside of marriage, lustful thoughts)

Idolatry (loving anything more than God in his place)

Adultery (sexual relations and lustful thoughts that violate a marriage covenant)

Homosexuality (sexual relations and lustful thoughts with members of one's own sex)

Thieves (stealing, cheating on taxes, dishonest business practices)

Greedy (being willing to sin to gain riches)

Drunkards (consuming alcohol or any other substance to a state of intoxication)

Revilers (speaking evil of others, could include gossip)

Swindlers (similar to thieves)

3. If I have committed those sins, have I truly repented of them? Have I had true sorrow for my sin because my sin was a rejection of God? Have I turned from those sins?

4. TRUE OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST

1 John 2:3-6

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Love for God and doing his commandments are not the same thing, but they are related. First, we must have a true love for Christ that we saw earlier. But true belief, which is a true love for Christ, will *always* produce true obedience in our lives. We cannot trust Jesus but still go on in sin like we once did. We cannot say that Jesus is our satisfaction but then keep running to the empty wells of sin to make us happy. We cannot say that Jesus is Lord but refuse to obey him!

Questions for reflection

1. Do I truly desire to obey the commands of God?
2. Do I submit myself the commands in the Bible, or do I ignore those and create my own standards of righteousness?
3. Would the people I'm closest to be able to see obedience to Christ in my life?

5. TRUE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:19-24

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

You could try to make an elm tree look like an apple tree by sticking apples to the branches. In the same way, some people like to do good things to make themselves look like changed people. But the Bible says that true good works grow on our lives like an apple grows on an apple tree. As we trust in God and his Spirit is at work in us, our lives are transformed, and we bear the fruit of the Spirit. Sometimes we will not be able see this fruit as clearly in ourselves as other people will, so it might be helpful to ask people if they can see the fruit of the Spirit in your life!

Questions for reflection

1. Read the "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit" again. What kind of fruit is growing on the branches of your life?
2. Can you see the Holy Spirit removing the works of the flesh from your life and replacing it with the fruit of the Spirit? Are you growing in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

6. TRUE LOVE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

1 John 3:10

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 3:17

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

1 John 4:20-21

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Some people may find that this is one of the more surprising signs of being born again. Many people say, "I love Jesus but not the church." God says that these people do not truly love God at all! But why is this the case? Remember that Jesus came into this world to suffer and then to be crucified on a cross under the weight of sin. Why did he do this? Because he loved the church and wanted to transform all of God's people into his glorious image (Ephesians 5:25-27). If the Spirit of Christ dwells in you, then your heart will desire the same things. Even though God's people are not perfect, we will love them, and we will want to spend time with them. The person who has no desire to gather regularly with God's people and to help them become more like Jesus does not have the heart of Christ.

Questions for reflection

1. Do I like spending time with unbelievers more than I do with Christians? If so, what might that tell me about my own heart?
2. Does gathering with the saints give me joy, even if there are hard things about it?
3. Do I desire to live my life to help God's people become more like Jesus?

EXAMINE YOURSELF

2 Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith.

To know if you are truly born again is the most important thing you can know about yourself. We have seen things that are not biblical evidences of true faith, and we have seen true evidences of faith. It is important that we consider these things carefully. Remember that there are *many* who believe that they are entering the kingdom of God but are not. If you are unsure about where you are at with the Lord, consider reaching out to a member of the church to ask them to help you. Feel free to ask one of the pastors to help you walk through this.

Am I truly believing in Jesus Christ?

Am I truly delighting in and trusting the Word of God?

Am I truly repenting and turning from my sin?

Am I truly (not perfectly) obeying the commands of Christ?

Am I truly putting off the works of flesh and growing in the fruit of the Spirit?

Am I truly demonstrating Christ's heart of love for his people?

Am I truly born again?