
Spiritual Formation Part 2

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Barriers to Knowing Christ Part 2

John 3: 1-21

GOD AS OUR SAVIOR

John 3-5; 14-15 Barriers??

What God Desires

Verses

Others ↑ ← ← ME → → ↓ Self

Our Environment and Experiences

What would happen if a pastor went to seminary to only study the commentaries and what others have said about the Bible, and never ventured for themselves into the Word of God? These pastors would read into the Bible what they want it to say, and not exegete what His Word actually says. You might think, and rightly so, that this would be foolish. Nonetheless, many seminaries, especially the liberal ones, teach that way. The point I am trying to make here is, each of these groups set up so many barriers and walls in front of the original source that you could not see the original source over them. This is the common practice in Law, most seminaries, and even what Nicodemus the Pharisee thought and taught with. We have to be able to see over these obstructions and receive the Truth as revealed in Scripture and through the Holy Spirit. If not, we stay behind the barrier. Nicodemus was able to see, whereas his fellow Pharisees were not willing to. The first main barrier is the acceptance of Christ's work on the cross so we can be redeemed, as in being *born again*.

Jesus is telling us that a new birth is absolutely essential to enter the Kingdom of God. It literally means in the Greek, *again (anōthen)*, which has three meanings associated with it: 1. To do it a second time; 2. To begin radically and completely new, or a new beginning; and, 3. It also means from above, that God must do this. Thus, we are to understand this term to mean a radical, new beginning from God. It is God who gives us this gift of love and salvation; it is something we cannot earn for ourselves or inherit from someone else (Eph. 2:8-9).

And, this is the contention of debate. It is why Nicodemus had such a hard time with it, and why so many people have a hard time with it. Why? We do not *earn* it! The whole Pharisee system was about earning God's approval through works, contrary to Deuteronomy, chapter 6, where we are called to love God. This is also principle in the

minds of most people, perhaps the biggest and most successful lie Satan has ever come up with (1 Peter 1:22-25; 5:5-11)! Jesus sensed in Nicodemus a deep hunger and emptiness. We need to all ask ourselves, *is there a hunger in me for more out of my relationship with Christ?* If so, what do you need to do to get there? If not, what is holding you back?

This was John Wesley's favorite text, which he preached throughout all of England, Wales, and Scotland, and then here in the US. God used it to start the great English and American revivals of the nineteenth century. It is a simple message of truth; "You must be born again." Someone once said to him, "Why do you preach so often on 'you must be born again?'" Wesley's answer was, "Because—you must be born again." That is what Jesus is saying.

Nicodemus misunderstood Jesus and immediately jumped to gynecology. He took the word "again" (*anōthen*) to mean *a second time*. Hence his cynicism by saying: "*How can a man be born when he is old?*" Nicodemus asked. *Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!*" "How can I do that?" he says!

Mark Twain once said, "It is not what I don't know about the Bible that troubles me, it is what I do know!" He was not doing what he knew. This is the real problem. Most people know what is right, but they do not want to do what is right. The lights feel good when they are off, and we can sleep through life content and comforted in our beliefs, regardless of truth and conviction or faith. The reason they do not do what is right is because there is something wrong about whom they are. You know, that is true of us all. It is called sin, and that is our hardened will refusing to surrender over to God. We want to do and live our way with a "who cares" attitude; who cares what anybody else thinks, including God!

I have been in pastoral ministry as a profession since 1982 and in lay ministry years prior. I can absolutely tell you that the one thing that keeps most people from accepting Christ as their Savior, to be born again, is that they do not want to admit their need. They do not want to admit that there is something basically wrong with them; they still cling to the idea that there is some good thing about them that God should accept, and if they do more good than bad, He will have to let them into heaven. I do not think anything has been more destructive in the whole realm of theology and what is preached in a lot of our churches than that we are O.K. as we are; no repentance is necessary! Come one, come all. But, the Bible says we cannot come; He comes to us. Christ saves us, if only we acknowledge our need and accept Him as our Lord and Savior; yet so few will. Despite our best efforts, we are not fulfilling God's law. We are not able to do so. We desperately need a Savior! Admitting our need is the first barrier we need to cross!

And, what happened to our friend Nicodemus? Just read John 7: 50-51. He kept sneaking to see Jesus in the night, curious and conflicted. And, at some

point, prior to Jesus' crucifixion, he believed, and he provided the expensive burial ointments (John 19: 39-41). At some point, those penetrating words of Jesus got across his barriers; Jesus got through to him. The Pharisees conducted their scrupulous attempts to observe the Law and thus please God. That is the kind of man Nicodemus was until he met Christ, and until that meeting penetrated his heart and will. Has the Word of the Lord gotten through to you?

What are some of your barriers to growing, beyond where you are now, in character and maturity? Here are some thoughts:

- Perhaps what happens is, we get ourselves so comfortable in the life of the church, and we forget what the church is all about. We think, *I go to church, I serve on a committee, my kids are in Sunday school; what more could there be?*
- Perhaps, we were born into it—the church that is—and grew up hearing all there is to know; yet, it never sank in and transformed us.
- Perhaps, we got turned off from the pious frauds we may have observed on TV or in the walk of life, “pseudo” Christians, who *talk the talk* but do not *walk the walk*.
- Perhaps, we see the radical commitments of some of the born again Christians and think they are crazy.
- Perhaps, there is a fear of commitment or a fear of conversion; we do not want to be convicted of sin; we do not want the lights turned on because we do not want to see what is hidden in the dark.

Discovery Questions

Read John 3:1-21 and make some observations:

1. What are some of your barriers to growing in Christ? Can you predict some possible future ones? What will you do about them?
2. How is Nicodemus like you? How is he not?
3. What are the barriers that Nicodemus may have had to overcome to accept who Christ is?
4. The question we have to ask ourselves is, *what barriers do I place in the way of knowing Christ as my Lord?*
 - a. Barriers from knowing Christ?
 - b. Barriers from growing in Christ?

- c. Barriers from following His will?
5. How is this like coming to Christ?
 6. What did it take for you to realize, if you did, the reality of Christ in your daily life? How can that help fuel you to further persevere in your faith and spiritual growth?
 7. Is there a hunger in you for more out of your relationship with Christ? If so, what do you need to do to get there? If not, what is holding you back?

We cannot reach verse 16 until we overcome the barriers we place over verses 4-15! There has to be a wakeup call, a light to be tuned on, and a realization of who Christ is; this can happen suddenly or it can take a lifetime. We cannot make chapter 15 real, and a lifestyle, until we grow from 3:16!

Make sure you carefully check out the: [Barriers to Discipleship Chart](#)

In the following studies we will be continuing our look at reasons that block our spiritual growth, next month “Barriers from growing in Christ” and the following month “Barriers from following His will.”

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