

How to Become a Child of God

by H. A. Ironside

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13).

HOW does a man become a Christian? The verses of the text, I believe, answer the question, and they do so first negatively and then positively. There are three ways indicated by which one cannot become a child of God, and only one way by which he can. Look at verse 13, "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man."

Not of Blood

Observe, it is not of *blood*. You may inherit a great many natural characteristics from your parents that men may admire; you may inherit tastes, features, and dispositions in some measure at least, but you cannot inherit the grace of God. It is just as true of the children of Christian parents, as it is of any other people born into this world, that they must be born again.

I remember a few years ago my wife and I and our children were on our way West. We were passing through Colorado. My eldest son, who was just a little boy at the time, was fond of going through the train, playing that he was the news agent. He said, "Father, have you any tracts I could give out?" I had some, and so handed them to him.

They sometimes stop me when I go through the train giving out tracts, but I thought they would not stop the little fellow. He handed everybody one of these gospel tracts, and soon most of the people were reading them. A little later I was passing through the car and a lady occupying one of the sections stopped me, and said, "I beg your pardon, sir, but I think it was your child who gave me this tract, was it not?"

"Yes," I said, "it was."

"Won't you sit down a moment?" she asked.

So I introduced my wife, and we sat down. "You cannot imagine," she said, "how pleased I am to know that there are other religious people

on this train."

"You are interested in these things?" I inquired.

"Yes indeed," she said, "I have been religious all my life."

"When were you born again?" I asked.

"Oh," she replied, "my father was a class-leader, and an uncle and two brothers of mine are all clergymen."

"That is very interesting," I said, "and may I ask again, have you been converted yourself?"

"Why, you don't seem to understand; my father was a class-leader, and my uncle and two brothers are earnest clergymen."

"But you don't expect to go to heaven hanging on their coat-tails, even if they are born again, do you? Have you been truly converted to God yourself?" I asked.

"Not at all," she replied, "but I thought if I put it that way you would understand that religion runs in our family."

"Religion may run in your family, but religion and Christianity are two very different things," I said. "There are a great many people who are intensely religious, but they are not saved. Our blessed Lord was speaking to a very religious man when he said, 'Ye must be born again.'"

I had great difficulty getting that lady to see that salvation is not of blood. She could scarcely understand how a family such as hers needed regeneration. Perhaps you have rather prided yourself in the fact that you too came from a line of Christian progenitors, and have taken it for granted that because your parents were Christians, you are. "Which were born, *not* of blood." You are not a Christian simply because you were born into a Christian family.

Not of the Will of the Flesh

Then we read, "Nor of the *will of the flesh*." What does that mean? It just means that you cannot make yourself a Christian by any self-determination. Suppose that you said to yourself, "I have made up my mind that from tonight on I am going to be a Christian," that would not make you one. It is very good to come to a decision like that, to come to the place where you make up your mind to become a Christian, but that will not make you a child of God. If I were born in some country

where they have a hereditary monarchy, I might say, "I am tired of being just one of the commonalty; I have made up my mind that from now on I am going to be a member of the royal family." I might go to a tailor, show him a picture of a royal person, and say to him, "Now, dress me up like that." And I might begin to sign myself as a royal highness, or some other high-sounding title, but I would only be a fraud, for no man ever became a member of the royal family by the will of the flesh; he has to be born into the family.

No one ever became a child of God by simply making up his mind that he would be a Christian. You could do that according to your own standards, if Jesus had never died on the Cross. You could make up your mind that from a given time you would call yourself a child of God, try to live as a child of God should live, even as though Jesus had never suffered and bled and died for your sins upon the tree. Why did He go to the Cross, if simply by an act of your will, you could make yourself a Christian?

You have no more power to make yourself a Christian than I have to make myself the President of the United States. If I should go into politics, no matter how favorably the people might look upon me, nor how able I might be, I could never become President of the United States, because I was born on the other side of the line. I was born in Toronto, Canada, and the Constitution of the United States says that no man can be President who was not born in this country. I might make up my mind to become a politician, and do my best to ingratiate myself with the people, but I never could become President of the United States, because although I am a naturalized citizen, I was born an alien. No man can ever become a child of God by making up his mind to be a Christian. You have to be born a child of God, and it is too late to be born that way the first time; but thank God, you can be born again.

Not of Man

In the third place, we read, "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the *will of man*." From the humblest clergyman up to the pope of Rome, or, if you want to turn it around the other way, from the pope up to a Protestant parson, there is no man on earth so holy and so closely in touch with God that he can make a Christian of you by anything he can do for you. He might baptize you, he might confirm you, he might recommend that you be received into church membership, but he could not make a Christian of you by voting you into the membership of the church. If you came in without being born again, you would be just a poor lost sinner with a false profession.

I remember some years ago when that mighty man of God, Henry Varley, was in California having meetings in a large church. One night he said to me, "I want you to come downstairs with me; they are going to have a church meeting, and they have some applicants for membership. I would like to get a line on them, see how careful they are about receiving people, for this will help me to know how to preach." There were four candidates for membership. The minister said, "We are glad to have our brethren here to apply for membership in this church, and we want them to give us a word, and then they will be voted on."

The first man stood to his feet, and said something like this: "My friends, you all know me; my father and mother have been members of this church for years. I have often felt I should join the church, and so I made up my mind that if you would accept me, I would like to feel that I am a member of the church of my parents."

A gentleman spoke up, and said, "May I ask the young man a question?" and the minister said, "Well, if it is a proper one, you may."

"I would like to ask if you have ever been born again."

The minister jumped to his feet, and said, "I object; I do not want our brother to attempt to answer that question. That is downright impertinence; that matter is entirely between the individual and his God."

And so they voted him in; but I remembered that my Bible said, "Not of blood."

The second young man stood to his feet, and spoke somewhat as follows: "Well, friends, you know me. I haven't always been what I ought to be, but last New Year I made up my mind to turn over a new leaf, and try to do better. I think it would help me to join the church, and so I have applied for membership." And they voted him in.

My friend had found it did not pay to ask questions, so did not try it again. I remembered then that my Bible said, "Nor of the will of the flesh."

The third young man arose, and with choice English accent said, "You know, my friends, I haven't been in the habit of attending a church of this nomenclature. Over in England I attended the state church. When I was a little child, I was baptized by the Archbishop of Canterbury. But since coming to America, I have enjoyed coming down here, and thought I would like to join with you." So they voted him in.

But I remembered again that my Bible said, "Nor of the will of man."

There were the three of them. One of them thought he was a Christian because his parents were, the second because he had turned over a new leaf, and the third because he had been baptized by a great church dignitary.

There was one other man sitting there, older than these others, and I could see the marks which sin had left upon his brow. When he was introduced, he spoke with great fervency: "My friends, I do not need to say very much; you know my story. My dear wife and children have been members with you here for a number of years. You know what a life I have led; I have been a drunkard, a poor sinner; I alienated my wife and children from me so that they had to leave me. I was going down, down, down in my sins, and it seemed there was no power to stop me. About six months ago, I made up my mind there was no help for me, and started down Market Street toward the water front, intending to jump in and end it all; but as I got to Seventh and Market, the Salvation Army were having an open air meeting. I went over and they were singing of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ."

"Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

"I listened! They sang it over and over, until they sang the words right into my soul, and I said: 'I wonder if it is true if there is hope for a sinner like me'; and then I listened to one and another tell how they too had been lost in sin, and Jesus had saved them, and when someone invited any poor sinner to come and kneel with them at the old drum, I threw myself down, and cried, 'O God, if there is hope for a sinner like me, save me tonight.' Something happened that night; I trusted Christ; He took me in; He made me a new creature; I was born of God; and all has been different ever since; we have a happy home now" - and then he burst into tears. Well, they voted him in, but I could not help but wonder why he wanted to get into an ice-box like that.

There you have three ways by which you cannot become a child of God, and there is the way and the only way, by which you can become a child of God. This getting converted is a divine thing; it is a divine work - something that the Spirit of God does for the poor sinner who comes to Christ. How is it all brought about?

The One Divine Way

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

You see that is very different from simply making a lip confession of Christianity; that is a very different thing from turning over a new leaf, joining a church, being baptized, or something like that. "*As many as received him*" means just this, that the poor sinner comes to the place where he gives up all hope of saving himself, and says, "O Christ, come in and dwell with me alone." No one ever invited Him to enter who was disappointed. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Is your heart's door bolted against Him? Have you lived up to the present moment with Christ outside? Will you open the door?

You say, "How can I receive Him? I cannot see Him. In what way can I receive Him?"

"As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Do you believe on His name? What does it mean to believe on His name? It means to put your trust in Him. His name speaks of all that He is. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

John Hambleton used to say, "There are just five letters to our English word, Jesus, and they mean just this: *Jesus Exactly Suits Us Sinners*." We are poor, lost, guilty men and women, but He is the holy One, God's blessed Son, and He went to Calvary's Cross and died for us, bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and now God says, "Will you receive my Son? Will you trust Him? Will you believe on His name?" If you will, He will save your precious soul, and will give you the right to call yourself a child of God. No one has that right unless he is born again. Peter says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever... And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." (I Peter 1:23, 25).

What is it then that you need to believe in order to be saved? "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). What is the gospel? It is God's "good news" about His blessed Son. He tells us that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (I

Corinthians 15:3, 4). And again: "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. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9, 10).

The sinner who addresses you was once hurrying down in his sins to a lost eternity, but when Jesus called, he came to Him, put his trust in Him, and He saved his soul forty years ago. He is waiting now to save you. There is no reason why you should go on longer without settling this vital matter. When I write to you about being saved by believing, I do not mean that you are simply to credit the gospel story in an intellectual kind of way, and go right on in the same life; but if you realize you are a lost sinner, and want to be saved from the guilt and power of your sins, I beseech you to yield to His entreaty, and put your trust in the One who died for you. God will work the miracle of regeneration in your soul, and you will know that you are born again.

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