

A HOLE IN ONE

It is amazing how the game of golf can take over some men. They start playing for a little exercise and before long are addicts. They can't get enough of the little white ball. I was never like that but I did like to play this amazing game. Mind you I was never very good and my game varied between poor and pathetic. I remember once playing in Coventry and hooking three successive balls way off to the left and into a river. What with the price of golf balls that was an expensive round. I lined up to drive my fourth ball rather anxiously but it flew straight and all my hooks were forgotten. No wonder some people call golf a good walk spoiled by a golf ball.

I've never been a good golfer but I always used to enjoy playing. I could hit a few good shots, but at the same time I was no stranger to the rough. The rough is the part of the course just off the fairway and, as the name implies, the ground here is rougher and the grass longer than on the fairway. So if you're in the rough, you're in trouble!

Playing back home in Wales I was used to the rough, and it was all part of the fun of the game. But one day playing in California I saw a sign in the rough which read 'BEWARE OF RATTLESNAKES'! This rough was no fun, it was dangerous. If ever there was an incentive to hit the ball straight and keep on the fairway, this was it. The incentive was great, but unfortunately it wasn't matched by my skill at golf and a few balls did fly off into the rough. I made no attempt to retrieve them, but left them to the rattlesnakes.

On the same course we came to a 172 yard par 3 hole. This meant it was 172 yards from the tee to the hole and the chaps who were supposed to know said it should take three shots to get the ball in the hole. I never seemed to agree with these chaps who set the pars and par 3 for me meant about 5 shots. I mean, hitting a 4.25 inch target from 172 yards by smacking a small ball with a golf club is no easy task. Like all golfers I dreamt of getting a hole in one, but that would only be if pigs could fly.

That day my drive off the tee was unusually excellent and the ball soared off towards the 4.25 hole. When we got up to the green I was amazed to see my ball only 12 inches from the hole. I was exhilarated and disappointed. Exhilarated because it was the best golf shot I had ever hit, and disappointed because it was only 12 inches away from the rare hole in one. If only it had rolled another 12 inches but no it was no hole in one ... so near yet so far. A hole in two is good but not good enough. My very best was still short of the mark.

There are many people like that with God... so near and yet so far. They are not bad people and not atheists, but they are not Christians. There were some people in the New Testament like that. A man named Agrippa said he was almost persuaded to be a Christian. Sadly almost is not enough. He may as well have been a 100 miles away.

There was a young man who came to Jesus asking the right questions and in the right spirit. He was very near to God, but when Jesus confronted him with his obsessive love of money, he went away from Jesus sad. So near yet so far.

Paul had a helper named Demas. This man must have seen amazing tokens of the love and power of God as he travelled with the great apostle, but he turned his back on all that because he loved this world and its attraction too much. So near yet so far.

What about you? You may be very religious and quite a moral person, but are you a real Christian? Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your saviour? Jesus said that there is only one way to become a Christian and that is to be born again.

Jesus said in John 3, you must be born again.

The statement of Jesus is so important that it is worth our while to look at it word by word.

Take the first word YOU and bear in mind who it is that Jesus is addressing. Very often religious people will say, we can see that criminals and drug addicts and people like that need a new beginning because of the mess they have made of their lives. But we are not like that. We are honest, industrious, and respectable; therefore we do not need to be born again.

This is a very common response to the question of being born again. But Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus a religious leader of the Jews, a man admired and respected and probably quite rightly so. This man needed to be born again, as much as any drug addict or criminal, and so do we all.

There are no exceptions to this. Without this spiritual birth there is no spiritual life. There can be religious life and moral life but there will be no spiritual life.

Consider now the word MUST. Why must? Why is Jesus so insistent upon this? He does not bring new birth before Nicodemus, as an option for him to consider. The eternal Son of God said to this religious man, and says to everyone, you *MUST* be born again. The reason for this imperative is given in v. 6, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." Jesus is saying

that sinful human nature can only produce sinful human nature. J.C. Ryle wrote that, "Human nature is so utterly fallen, corrupt, and carnal, that nothing can come from it by natural generation, but a fallen, corrupt, and carnal offspring. There is no self-curative power in man. He will always go on reproducing himself To become spiritual and fit for communion with God, nothing less is required than the entrance of the spirit of God into our hearts. In one word, we must have the new birth of the spirit which our Lord twice described to Nicodemus."

The truth of this ought to be obvious to us all. Man is a sinner and left to himself will always remain a sinner. He cannot change himself or his offspring. Flesh is flesh. Educate it, cultivate it, put it in better surroundings but it will always remain human nature. It may be physically beautiful flesh or moral flesh but it is still flesh. That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

How Do We Become Born Again?

To answer this let us consider 1 Peter 1:23-25, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable' through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands for ever.' Peter also parallels physical and spiritual birth. How does physical birth come about? By the planting of man's seed in a woman. Peter calls this perishable seed. It will not last forever. Spiritual birth also needs a seed to be planted. This seed is the imperishable word of God, which (v. 25) lasts forever. The implanting comes via the preaching of the Word. This is how God works new birth. He brings sinners under the sound of the Word. "Faith comes through hearing the message" (Romans 10: 17). The Gospel shows us our true condition. All have sinned, the good respectable people and the moral outcasts. The Word convinces us that we need to be born again. Only in the Word of God are we shown what God has done in and through the Lord Jesus Christ to deal with our sin.

So if a man wants to be born again, he must go to the Word of God. He must read it, hear it preached and obey it. The Word will turn the seeker of new life in God, to Jesus the only Saviour.

YOU ARE NOT LIKELY TO EVER GET A HOLE IN ONE AT GOLF, BUT YOU CAN BE BORN AGAIN WHEN YOU COME TO JESUS IN REPENTANCE AND FAITH