

## What Does It Mean To Be Born Again?

Hardly a day goes by without hearing something on the news about someone who is a “born again Christian,” and often that reference is not complimentary. On occasion one hears the term used in a respectful way. So what does that mean? What are they saying when they use the term, *Born Again*?

*Born Again* is a term derived from the words of Jesus in the book of John, chapter 3, verse 3. The quote says this: “Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’” The above translation is from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

The King James Version renders the passage, “Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.’”

To someone unacquainted with Christian experience and teaching, the above passage might be just as confusing as it was to Nicodemus, the man to whom Jesus was speaking. His response was, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

### Born Of The Spirit

One of the things we notice about Jesus is how he would use terms that were at first startling to the minds of his hearers, and then would see if they were interested enough to find out what he meant. Here we see Nicodemus was indeed interested and asked Jesus to explain. According to verses 5 - 8 of this chapter, “Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is *born of the Spirit*.’”

Jesus here ties the concept of being “born again, or born from above” to an operation of the Holy Spirit. The words *Spirit* and *spirit* are renderings from the Greek word *pneuma*, which is also translated here,

“wind.” It is the word from which we get *pneumatic*, as in *pneumatic drill*. As the wind is invisible, and thus not perceptible except in its effect, so the work of the Holy Spirit is not observable by the human eye, but we can see the effect in the life of the person who is regenerated, born anew by the Holy Spirit.

### God Does The Choosing

Just as a son or daughter has no choice in one’s first birth, no choice in who the father or mother shall be, so the experience of rebirth into the Kingdom of God is not initiated or accomplished by human decision, but by the Spirit of God. Jesus said “No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Jesus also said, “No one comes to me unless the Father draws him.”

Peter, the Apostle of Jesus, also speaks of being born again. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a *new birth* into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:3-4) Whereas the verse in John 3 uses the term “born from above,” Peter here says “new birth” or “*born again*.” This shows that the terms are interchangeable.

### Jesus Does The Revealing

So what has happened to the *born again* person? A spiritual event has occurred, initiated by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and activated by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Father has drawn the heart of such a person by the work of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus has revealed the Father to that person. He declares in Matthew 11:27 “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Now there is a pretty audacious statement. According to that, you cannot come to know God the Father by learning from Buddha, or Mohammed, or Confucius, or any guru or spirit guide. Only one person can reveal the Father to you: Jesus Christ. When Jesus chooses to reveal the Father; when the Father chooses to draw to

Jesus the soul who is to be saved, it is initiated by God. The heart and mind of the chosen person are confronted with the reality of Christ, and given the opportunity to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. When that choice is made in the affirmative; when the individual humbles the will before God and accepts the work of Jesus on the cross as the full and only payment for the sins of which we are all guilty; when forgiveness is asked and Jesus is received into the heart, one becomes born again.

### Born Again By The Grace Of God

Paul describes what has happened in Ephesians 2:4-10. "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – *by grace* you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For *by grace* you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For *we are what he has made us*, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

*Grace.* What does that mean? It means God has done for us what we don't deserve, out of the goodness and love of his own heart. He has performed these things without regard to our own goodness. It is nothing we earn. It is the free gift of God.

Now we see fulfilled the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view. Even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

### Rebirth Denied

As strange as it may seem, there is at least one group which claims to be Christian and does not believe one must be born again. Their position is that only a small number is destined for heaven and that the vast majority are called to live forever on earth. Of course, one may believe whatever one wishes to believe, but

that does not change what the Bible is saying on this subject.

Once you understand that there is this definite spiritual event which occurs to change a person's nature and destination, other areas of Scripture become clear and congruent with this truth of being born again. Consider Paul's writings in Ephesians 4:22-24. "*Put off your old nature* which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and *put on the new nature*, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Paul is consistent in drawing this contrast and calling for our living in a new life in his letters to the various churches. Look at Colossians 3:1-3 and see how this is restated. "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things that are on the earth. For *you have died*, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Continuing on in Colossians 3:9,10, we see the contrast reiterated: "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have *put off the old nature* with its practices, and have *put on the new nature*, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." Paul goes on to describe what this new nature looks like in subsequent verses.

### Can't Have One Without The Other

Now the interesting thing is that while the groups that deny the necessity of rebirth want to withhold the relationship from their adherents, they call for them to obey the injunctions which are given to only those who have the relationship. They can't have it both ways. You must be born again to be given the capacity to obey the instruction to *put off* and *put on*. To ask anything else is to demonstrate one's inability to read with comprehension.

What could possibly be behind the effort to keep you from understanding your need for rebirth and receiving Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord? Well, 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." I submit

that such teaching which would turn you away from receiving Christ and laying hold of the hope of heaven is the work of your enemy, the devil, and your indication that one should follow the exhortation of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:5. He speaks there of people who are "holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!"

### Whosoever Will May Come

Contrary to such "doctrine of demons" which would deny you the fullness of the Christian life, the invitation in Scripture is "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Revelation 22:17) As Jesus said in John 5:24, "Very truly I tell you, *anyone* who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed *from death to life.*"

How about you? Are you feeling a need to bow your will, your heart, your knees before God and thank him for loving you enough to send Jesus to die for your sins? Do you sense a need to know Jesus intimately and be given a new start in life, one imparted by the Holy Spirit? You can be that new person you really want to be, in Christ. If you confess your need of forgiveness; and accept the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as the full payment for your sins; and ask God to live in you in the person of Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, you will be born again to a newness of life.

In Romans 10:9,10 Paul writes as led by the Holy Spirit, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved."

Perhaps you respond, "Well, I was raised up in a Christian church. I am already a Christian." Let me ask you this: Can you remember a time when there was a dramatic change in your life, when you saw your own personal need to be forgiven of your sins and have God make you into a new person in Christ? Was there ever a time when you just knew that God had done something new and fresh that had imparted power to you to live the Christian life. If that is the case, then praise God! If not, then there is no better time than right now to ask God to grant you that experience. *You must be*

*born again to see the Kingdom of God.* That means you must have this experience if you are to understand, to comprehend the realm of God's presence and power. You must be born again to be prepared to enter the realm of heaven when you leave this earthly plane.

This could be your day! Call out to God the Father through Jesus Christ his Son. Confess your own inability to live a godly life, and your need for a Savior to rescue you from the penalty for your sins. Declare your belief in the finished work of Jesus when he died on the cross to pay for your sins. Ask God to send Jesus in the person of the Holy Spirit to come and take up residence in your heart today, to save you and fill you with his holiness and love. Don't put it off another moment. Ignore the ringing phone. Ignore the distractions on TV. Ignore the knock at the door or whatever else the enemy of your soul is using to interfere. Give your heart to God through Jesus Christ and be born again.

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