

God's Answers to Life's Questions

514 Born of God

John 3:1-7

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What does it mean to be “born again” or “born from above”? Is it some kind of “better felt than told” experience? Is it some feeling one gets at the “mourners’ bench”? Some people speak of “born again” Christians as if they were a special kind; but, the fact is, one must be “born again” to be a Christian at all. Since there is a lot of ideas and a lot of confusion out there about what it means to be “born again,” I thought it might be worth our while to go back to the Bible and clear up the misunderstandings people have about being “born again.”

Within the heart of most people is the desire to start over. We have sin and regrets in our past and wish we could just begin again and do things differently. Some people even despise the person they have become and wish they could be someone else. The Lord gives us that opportunity, an opportunity to put away the old man and to put on the new man in Christ, to change our lives, our attitudes, and our behavior. This wonderful change also allows us to change our spiritual status with God. In the new birth we become a child of God, born from above.

In the gospel of John, chapter 3) is an interesting story told about a man who came to Jesus at night, a man who should have understood what Jesus taught. “Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” [Jesus is from God] Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” When Jesus says, “truly, truly,” he means what He says. The word “truly” in Greek is “Amen.”

Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:1-4) Nicodemus, as a ruler of the Jews, should have understood what Jesus was talking about. He knew of John’s baptism and knew that baptism among the Jews was compared to a new birth. Jesus makes it clear: Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ (John 3:5-7) Jesus said, “You *must* be born again.” That little word “must” is a powerful word. What “must” be is never an option if one is to please God. The word refers to a “moral necessity.” Jesus said that he “must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (Matt. 16:21). We “must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10). If you or I enter the kingdom of heaven, we must first be born again of water and the Spirit. No matter who we are—even Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews had to be born again in baptism to go to heaven.

The baptism of Jesus was a birth of water and the Spirit. Both elements, water and Spirit, were involved. Water is involved, of course, in that baptism is a dipping in water, an immersion. The Holy Spirit is involved through the Word. Peter explains it in 1 Peter 1:22-23: “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.” Without the preaching of the gospel, we would not believe or know what we should do to obey the truth. But it is in obeying the truth that we purify our souls and are born again of the word. The Word is an *imperishable* seed. It is for all generations. As a seed, what it produced in the first century, it will produce today. That’s how we know we are Christians like they were; we have obeyed the same gospel they did. The gospel

produces faith in us. Paul said in Rom. 10:17, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” The more we listen to God’s Word, the greater our faith will become. One who listens, then, because of faith wishes to obey that gospel. It is when that word works on our heart that it brings about change in the life and we become a new person—truly born of the Spirit by His seed.

Paul explained this new birth, where we came from and how God has blessed us in Titus 3:3-7: “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” We needed God’s grace; we needed saving!

The grace and mercy of God saved us. We did not earn it; we were given mercy and grace. It came through “the washing of regeneration” and the “renewing by the Holy Spirit.” The phrase “washing of regeneration” refers to a washing that causes one to be regenerated, “born again.” This “washing” is a clear reference to baptism as the time of the cleansing from sin and being born from above. Let me emphasize that it is God who washes us and the Spirit who renews us. We are washed in the blood of Jesus, who died for us. Some people think baptism is a work of men; but in baptism God does the work of cleansing, regenerating, and renewing.

Another passage that helps us to understand how this new life comes to be is Romans 6:3-7.

Paul said, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”

To be reborn, one must first die to self and to sin. As long as you are running your own life, you can never be a servant of the Lord. It is only when you are crucified with Christ in baptism that you die to the old man of sin and then can be raised to walk in newness of life—reborn!

This is the real meaning of bearing a cross. Jesus said in Luke 9:23-24, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”

The new life starts in baptism but lasts our whole life through.

When you are baptized, you are born into the family of God. Jesus said in John 1:11-13, “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” *By faith* in God’s word, we obey Christ. We purify our souls by obedience to the truth (1 Pet. 1:22). This is why we don’t question if we should be baptized, we do it out of love to obey Him and to be pure. It is the word, the seed, that causes us to be born again.

When you are born again in baptism, you become a new creature. Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:17, “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold,

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new things have come." In Christ the old man of sin has been put away, and a new man in Christ has come to be. Paul describes this change in Eph. 4:17-24, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." The new birth changes hearts, attitudes, desires and purposes. The new person wants to be like the Lord in all holiness.

Here is the kind of life a Christian should live when he is born again. Eph. 4:25-32 says, Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one *of you* with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and *yet* do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a *word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Christians leave the ugly and turn to the beautiful of character, because they become like Christ. Paul said in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." A person who is born of the Spirit shows these things.

As a child of God, I am blessed to have God as my Father. As a Father He protects me, provides for me, guides me, instructs me, and corrects me. As my Father I have the privilege of taking every care to Him in prayer, knowing that He will hear me and answer. In Christ we are deeply blessed. Paul said in Eph. 1:3, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ." Being born into the family of God gives us all the privileges of God's favor and an inheritance. We are fellow-heirs with Christ.

When a person is born into the family of God, the Lord adds him to His church; his name is written in the Lamb's book of life. Paul describes being a Christian this way in Ephesians 2:19-22, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Being born again means that one changes his life entirely. Peter said of Christians in 1 Peter 2:9-10, "But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." From a nobody to a somebody with God, from shame to a saint, and from darkness to light. That's what it means to be born again. It is indeed the greatest blessing of life to be a child of God!

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Some people ask the question, "Can God really help me?" They feel so ashamed of themselves and their lives, they don't believe they can ever live the Christian life. There's good news for you. If you want to change—really want to become a child of God—there's room in the heart of God for you. The apostle Paul wasn't always an apostle. He was once Saul of Tarsus, a man who blasphemed Christ and persecuted Christians. He described himself as the chief of sinners, since he had violently persecuted them. Paul said in 1 Tim. 1:12-16, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*." The Lord loves every person on this earth, and the people He died for were all sinners.

Paul continues, "Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." The Lord can have patience with you too. You can go to heaven. You can be saved from all your sins and live eternally. How? You *must* be born again, by believing with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, repenting of your sins, confessing the name of Jesus, and by being baptized (immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins). That opportunity is yours if you will take receive it. Don't just believe, act on your faith—you must.

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