

Born Again

The term “Born Again” seems to spark controversy. Some will ask, with a smirk, if I’m a “Born-Again” Christian. The answer is there are no other kind. I’m not sure why there is an elitist condescension toward “Born-Again” Christian.

Perhaps this attitude comes from the zealous evangelistic efforts by those Christians to make others follow Jesus as they do. Maybe their zeal makes others feel uncomfortable. For whatever reason, it may be time to rethink the idea of being born again in the light of scripture.

To my knowledge, the first time the term “born again” is found in the Bible is in the gospel of John. Jesus is meeting with a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. He came to meet with Jesus at night. The opening conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus contains the words “born again.”

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 have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs (Or *miracles*) that You do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into 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 be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:1-8 NASB)

The idea of being born again seems to be of importance to Jesus. In fact, what does Jesus say about it? **I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.** As someone claiming to be a Christian, failing to be born again will cost them the **kingdom of God**. Many of us may be like Nicodemus. We hear the term but we’re not sure we understand.

Nicodemus drew a picture of a literal birth. He understood that a grown person cannot re-enter the womb and actually experience birth. So, he asked Jesus for clarification. Jesus answered. **I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** For Jesus, this new birth is by or through the presence of water and the Spirit is on hand. We see this on the Day of Pentecost when Peter first proclaimed the good news of Jesus. Those that heard his message were moved and asked what they should do.

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 NASB)

There we have both elements mention by Jesus as found in the 3rd chapter of John. Water for the baptism and the Holy Spirit is given. In baptism we find the symbols of death burial and resurrection. Paul clarifies this in Romans the 6th chapter.

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. (Romans 6:3-7 NASB)

The image used by Paul is a death. Dead to our old self. In fact, the word translated as self is the Greek word anthropos (ἄνθρωπος) and means human. Paul is telling us that we are to put our human (or worldly) side to death like Jesus died on the cross. We are buried symbolically in our baptism and we rise to walk in a new life. It should also be noted that when Paul tells us we are **freed from sin**, it literally means that we have been acquitted.

It is not a stretch to picture coming out of the waters of baptism as traveling through the birth canal to start a new life. We are baptized in the likeness of Christ death and then we begin a new life. A new life in Christ Jesus.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3:26-27 NASB)

All of the blessings we receive are found in Christ Jesus. We just read how we get into Christ Jesus **all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us that being in Christ requires that we become new. We have a new life.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.* (2 Corinthians 5:17 NASB)

How can we recognize someone who has been born again and is living a new life in Christ? Are there visual signs? How can we know that we have truly put the old self to death and are walking in the new life? An excellent indicator is found in Colossians the 3rd chapter.

Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, (Colossians 3:5-9 NASB)

Paul is telling us the things that are evil practices of which even Christians were guilty. He calls for us to put aside the old person with the evil deeds and life style.

He doesn't leave us without instructions. He tells us to take up the attributes of being a new person in Christ

and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— *a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.*

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (Colossians 3:10-14 NASB)

When we are born again, we look and act differently. Notice that it is not a light switch that instantly causes a person to be perfect. Salvation is quick but the transforming is a process. Paul tells us that we are **being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.**

We lay aside some of our actions our passions and desires. Some of these are deeply entrenched and don't surrender easily.

Earlier today, we read Peters words as he mentioned baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit. Peter wrote two letters that we find in the New Testament. As He begins the first letter, he addresses it to several different groups of Christians and then offers a blessing.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5 NASB)

Peter exalts God and tells us that God, through His mercy, **caused us to be born again**. This new birth is a birth that brings us an imperishable reward. It gives us eternal life. Those who were in the Bible study about fear may remember the concept that “If we are born once, we die twice; but if we are born twice (born again), we die once.” Our salvation is secured by God through the sacrifice of Jesus. Peter says we **are protected by the power of God**. This is the same God that spoke worlds in existence and will bring judgement on those who are outside of Jesus Christ.

Peter takes a rather broad stroke at the history of God’s plan by reminding the reader that this salvation was mentioned by the prophets in detail. Picking up again in the first chapter beginning at verse 17, we will again see the phrase “born again.”

If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 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 enduring word of God. (1 Peter 1:17-23 NASB)

This morning, we have seen that Jesus calls for us to be born again. When we are buried with Him in baptism, we rise up to live a new life. Peter tells us that when we are in Jesus, God causes us to be born again. Are you a born-again Christian?

Let us pray.