



What does being "born again" mean?

First of all, the term "born again" doesn't refer to a religious sect or group. We find Jesus saying that a man "must be born again" if he wants to see the kingdom of God in John

3:1-7. Jesus answered him (Nicodemus), "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? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ..."

Jesus said this during a conversation with a religious leader named Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night. Perhaps he was afraid of criticism or he had a desire for a private conversation, or maybe he wanted to know more before committing himself to Jesus Christ. In any event, he came and asked Jesus some questions. Nicodemus must have been stunned when Jesus said, "You must be born again." It wouldn't seem shocking if Christ had said that to Zacchaeus, the tax collector or to the thief on the cross or to the woman caught in adultery. But Nicodemus was one of the great religious leaders of his time. Still, he was searching for reality.

You may go to church, grew up in a religious household but perhaps you are still searching. There is an empty place in your heart, and something inside tells you that you're not really right with God. Nicodemus fasted two days a week. He spent two hours every day in prayer. He tithed. Why did Jesus say that Nicodemus must be born again? Because He could read the heart of Nicodemus. Jesus saw that Nicodemus had covered himself with religion but had not yet found fellowship with God.

The Root of Our Problems

What causes all of our troubles in the world—lying and cheating and hate and prejudice and social inequality and war? Jesus said, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man" (Matthew 15:18). **He said the problem is in our hearts; our hearts need to be changed.**

Psychologists, sociologists and psychiatrists all recognise that there is something wrong with humankind. Many words in Scripture describe it. Among them is the word transgression: "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). What law?



The Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments. Have you ever broken one of those Commandments? Then you are guilty of having broken them all (James 2:10).

The word **sin** carries with it the idea of missing the mark, coming short of our duty, failure to do what we ought to do. The Bible says, "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17, KJV). And yet before we can get to heaven, we must have righteousness. God says, "Be perfect as I am perfect, holy as I am holy" (Matthew 5:48, 1 Peter 1:16).

Where are we going to get that perfection? We don't have it now, yet we can't get to heaven if we don't have it. **That is why Christ died on the cross; He shed His blood and rose again to provide righteousness for us.**

Another word is **iniquity**, which means to turn aside from the straight path. Isaiah said, "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

The Bible says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin ... thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). **Every person needs a radical change.** We need to have our sins forgiven; we need to be clothed in the righteousness of God. To find fulfillment in this life we need to find something to commit ourselves to. Are you a committed person? What are you committed to? Why don't you make Christ your cause and follow Him? He will never let you down.

The New Birth

Nicodemus asked that question too: "How can a man be born when he is old?" He wanted to understand it.

I was born and reared on a dairy farm. How can a black cow eat green grass and produce white milk and yellow butter? I don't understand that. I might say, "Because I don't understand it, I'm never going to drink milk again." And you'd say, "You're crazy."

I don't understand it, but I accept it by faith. Nicodemus could see only the physical and the material, but Jesus was talking about the spiritual.

How is the new birth accomplished? We cannot inherit new birth. The Bible says that those who are born again "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Our fathers and mothers may be the

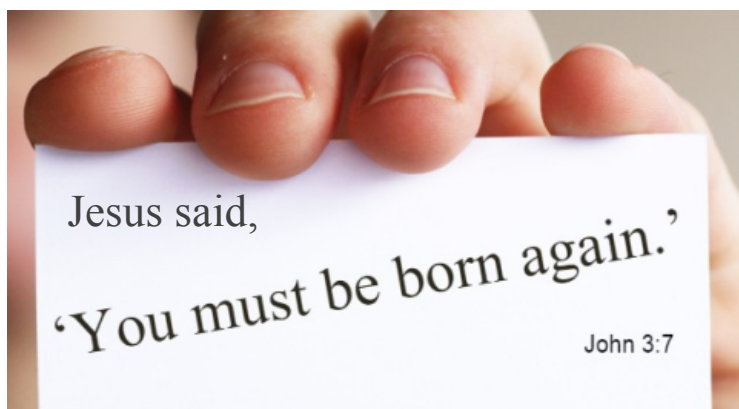
greatest born-again Christians in the world, but that doesn't make us born-again Christians, too. Many people have the idea that because they were born into a Christian home, they are automatically Christians. They're not.

We cannot work our way to God, either. The Bible says that salvation comes "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Nor is reformation enough. We can say, "I am going to turn over a new leaf," or "I am going to make New Year's resolutions." But Isaiah said that in the sight of God "all our righteousness are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

Some of us have changed on the outside to conform to certain social standards or behavior that is expected of us in our churches, but down inside we have never been changed. That is what Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about. He said, "Nicodemus, you need changing inside," and only the Holy Spirit can do that. Being born from above is a supernatural act of God. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin; He disturbs us because we have sinned against God. And then the Holy Spirit regenerates us. That is when we are born again. The Holy Spirit comes to live in our hearts to help us in our daily lives. The Spirit of God gives us assurance, gives us joy, produces fruit in our lives and teaches us the Scriptures.

Some people try to imitate Christ. They think that all we have to do is try to follow Jesus and try to do the things He did, and we will get into heaven. But we can't do it. We may know the religious songs. We may even say prayers. But if we haven't been to the foot of the cross, we haven't been born again. That is the message Jesus is trying to teach us.

To be born again means that "[God] will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" (Ezekiel 36:26). "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4); we have "passed from death into life" (John 5:24). The new birth brings about a change in our philosophy and manner of living.



The Mystery

There is a mystery to the new birth. Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes" (John 3:8). But you can see the result. Jesus did not attempt to explain the new birth to Nicodemus; our finite minds cannot understand the infinite. We come by simple childlike faith, and we put our faith in Jesus Christ. When we do, we are born again.

Have you been born again? Call it conversion, call it commitment, call it repentance, call it being saved, but has it happened to you? Does Christ live in your heart? Do you know it? Many people have thought a long time about religion and Christianity and yet have never made a commitment. Are you committed to Jesus Christ?

Are you sure of your salvation?

It happens this way.

First we have to hear the Word of God. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). That is the first step. "It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). It sounds foolish that words from a Bible have the power to penetrate our hearts and change our lives, but they do, because they are God's holy words.

Then there is the work of the Holy Spirit. He convicts: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). He changes us. He changes our wills, our affections, our objectives for living, our disposition. He gives us a new purpose and new goals. "Old things pass away, and everything becomes new" (Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). Then He indwells us: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" Does God the Holy Spirit live in you?

Jesus Christ says that we must be born again. How do we become born again? By repenting of sin. That means we are willing to change our way of living. We say to God, "I'm a sinner, and I'm sorry." It's simple and childlike. Then by faith we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master and Savior. We are willing to follow Him in a new life of obedience, in which the Holy Spirit helps us as we read the Bible and pray and witness.

If there is a doubt in your mind about whether you have been born again, I hope you will settle it now, because the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Now is the accepted time; ... [today] is the day of salvation."

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