

"Born of God"

You've heard that people need to be born again. Well, what does that mean? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study, In SEARCH of the Lord's Way. And today we're examining what the Scriptures say about being born again.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way, we're here to search the Scriptures to find the Lord's way to be saved and to live the Christian life. Thanks so very much for letting us be in your busy life. We really appreciate hearing from you that you are watching or listening. And we want to be a regular part of your life each week.

Today we're asking: 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 inner miraculous event that causes us to change, whether we choose to or not? Or, is it a response to the Lord after hearing the gospel? Some 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. And since there's lots of confusion about what it means to be "born again," we need to go back to the Bible and see what God says about being "born again."

Born again...Within the heart of most people is the desire to start over. We see our sinful mistakes and regret our past. And we wish we could start over and do things differently. You know some people even despise the person they've become and wish they could be someone else. Well, the Lord gives us that opportunity, an opportunity to put away the old sinful person and to put on the new man in Christ. Ah, we can change our lives, our attitudes, and our behavior. We can start down a new path with a good conscience and worthy goals. We can become children of God who have the promise of a home in heaven when we follow what God has to say. And today we're going to explore what this means and how this happens.

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Larry Owsley is going to lead us now, as we sing. Then we'll read from John 3:1 to 7 and examine what it means to be born of God.

Our reading today comes from the gospel according to John chapter 3 verses 1 through 7. And here Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews and a Pharisee is talking with Jesus about being 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 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.'

Well those are good things for us to consider as well. Let's pray together. Father we are grateful for Your word that gives us the information we most in order to be right with You. Help us to be good students and follow the things that You teach and do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.

Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, said, "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." The Lord Jesus is indeed the Son of God, but what He told Nicodemus was unexpected. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The repeated words "truly, truly," show He is serious. The word "truly" in Greek is "Amen."

Nicodemus questions, "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 verse 4) Well, Nicodemus, as a ruler of the Jews, should have understood what Jesus was talking about. Gentiles who became proselytes were thought to be "born again" when they were baptized. Nicodemus was not a proselyte. He couldn't imagine being compared to one of them.

But Jesus makes it clear, "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 to 7). Now even a ruler of the Jews needed what Jesus required for eternal life.

Jesus said, "You must be born again." That little word "must" means it's necessary, if you want to please God. "Must" refers to a "moral necessity." Now Jesus later 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" (Matthew 16 verse 21). You see Jesus saw the cross as necessary. And if you or I enter the kingdom of heaven, we must first be born again of water and the Spirit. And 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 water and the 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 this in 1 Peter 1:22 to 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 must 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. And as a seed, what it produced in the first century, it will produce today. And that's how we know that we're Christians today like they were in the first century; we have obeyed the same gospel that they did.

The gospel produces faith in us. The Bible says in Rom. 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (or the word of God)." And the more we listen to God's Word, the greater our faith will become. One who listens, then, because of faith wants to obey the gospel. It's when that word works in our heart that it brings about change in the life and we become a new person—truly born of the Spirit by His seed, the Word.

The Bible explains this new birth, where we came from, and how God has blessed us in Titus 3:3 to 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!

And God’s grace and mercy saved us. We didn’t earn it; God gave us His grace 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, that is, “born again.” Now 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.

Well, how do we get this new life? Well, the Bible says in Romans 6 verses 3 to 7. “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.”

So, to be reborn, one must first die to self and die to sin. Now you’re either a servant of sin or a servant of the Lord. And it’s only when you’re 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 to 24 that, “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.”

Now the new life starts at baptism but it lasts our whole life. When you’re baptized, you’re born into the family of God. Jesus said in John 1:11 to 13 that, “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 our obedience to the truth.

Again, 1 Peter 1:22 to 25 says, “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 (no) but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the LORD endures forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you.” You see the seed that causes our new birth is the word that was preached to us. We don’t question if we should be baptized, because the word of God tells us to do so. We do it out of love for God.

When you’re born again in baptism, you have newness of life and become a new creature. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 17 says, “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, 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.

The new birth changes hearts, attitudes, desires and purposes. The new person wants to be like the Lord in all holiness. Ephesians 4:25 to 32 describes this new life and this new way of life, "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."

You see, Christians leave the fleshly ways and turn to the beautiful of character, because they become like Christ. Paul said in Galatians 5:22 to 24, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." A person who is born of the Spirit walks by the Spirit by following the teaching of the Spirit found in the New Testament.

When a person is born into the family of God, God is his Father. As a Father God protects, provides, guides, instructs, and corrects. God gives His children the privilege of prayer, listening to every request and concern. He not only listens; He answers. In Christ we are deeply blessed. Ephesians 1 and verse 3 says, "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 God's family, the Lord adds him to the church and writes his name in the Lamb's book of life. God says in Ephesians 2:19 to 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." My friend, you can do nothing more important today than to be born again!

God wants you to be born again and to come into His family. So put your trust in Him, turn away from sin. Publicly confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. And out of love obey Him in baptism. And in baptism you'll crucify the old man of sin and rise to walk in newness of life, freed from sin. Oh yes, that's God working in you. And in Christ you can truly be born again as a child of God!

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're so thankful that through Your gospel we can become Your children. That we can be added to Your family, the church, and that we can be an heir with Christ. And Father help us always love You and serve You from our hearts. In Jesus name, Amen.

Being born again changes us entirely. 1 Peter 2 verses 9 to 10 say this about Christians, "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." Oh we turn from being a "nobody" to being "somebody" with God. We turn from darkness to light. We turn from lost to saved.

Some people ask, “Can God really make me over?” You know, they’re ashamed of their past and they don’t believe they can live the Christian life or change. But there’s good news. If you really want to become a child of God—there’s room for you in God’s heart. The apostle Paul was once Saul of Tarsus, who blasphemed Christ and violently persecuted Christians. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15 to 16, “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.” Oh, 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 will also show you patience. You can be saved from all your sins and live eternally. You can go to heaven. How? Well 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 (that is immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins). Now that opportunity is yours if you’ll take. You’ll receive that blessing. Don’t just believe, act on your faith—you must be born again.

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Show God your love by worshiping at church. You need a church family. And if you can attend, don’t neglect worshiping at church. There’s probably a church of Christ near you. If you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll gladly help you find one. We’ll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God’s Word with us and tell a friend about this program. Let them know that you’re watching. And as always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.