



What Does It Mean To Be Born Again?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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What does it mean to be born again? It is common to hear religious people say they have been “born again.” But, is this a Scriptural idea – and what exactly does it refer to? Let’s investigate.

You Must Be Born Again

The idea of being “born again” is directly from the Bible. In fact, the Bible speaks of being “born again” in more than one passage. Let’s consider two specific Bible references.

First, the more well-known of the two passages is John 3:3-6. “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, 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, ‘Most assuredly, 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....’”

The second of these passages is 1 Peter 1:22-23. “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.”

In the first passage, Jesus plainly states (in teaching Nicodemus) that you must be born again. Then, in the second passage, Peter has been addressing Christians (even speaking about the hope they have for salvation in Heaven, see 1:3-12). Then, notice that these who were in possession of such a great hope had “been born again.” Now, given the necessity of this new birth, let’s begin to consider some basics of being “born again.”

Why You Must Be Born Again

Why must you be born again? The obvious answer is because the Bible commands you to be born again (in John 3:3-6). Still, as you search the Scriptures, you can observe some definitive reasons why a new birth is needed.

First, let's observe the fact that Jesus said this new birth is necessary because "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). As Jesus lived on this earth, He taught concerning the coming of His kingdom. In fact, Jesus promised that there would be some who were living at that time who would not die until they saw the kingdom of God (Luke 9:27).

Repeatedly in the Scriptures, the kingdom of God is seen to be the church Jesus promised to establish. For instance, you can notice how the terms "church" and "kingdom" are used interchangeably in Matthew 16:18-19. The church of Christ fulfills all of the prophecies that were made concerning the kingdom of God. Then, after this church was established in Acts chapter 2, the apostle Paul wrote concerning those who had been conveyed "into the kingdom" of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:13). So, the fact is that you cannot be part of Jesus' kingdom and church until you are born again. This is significant because God's kingdom is composed of those who are in a "saved" condition. For instance, Acts 2:47 says that the Lord was adding "to the church daily those who were being saved."

Second, this new birth is necessary because the old man is corrupt with sin. This point explains why the one who is *not* born again cannot enter the kingdom of God. He is still living in sin. For instance, Galatians 5:19-21 speaks concerning the works of the flesh (the sinful things that are done whenever you live to please your own fleshly desires). These works of the flesh include the sins of adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, jealousies, selfish ambitions, envy, murders, drunkenness, etc. Then, the passage clearly states that "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Therefore, those who are living in sin are not fit for God's kingdom who will inherit eternal salvation in Heaven.

Ephesians 4 pictures the matter in this way. Verses 22-24 instruct, "that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." Colossians 3 contains the same kind of language. In that chapter, Paul instructs that the old man of sin must be put to death and the new man of righteousness must be put on.

As long as you live according to the sinful ways of this old man of sin, you are separated from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 states that your sins separate you from God. This is because God is completely holy and He cannot be in fellowship with anything that is evil (see 1 John 1:5-7). This is a condition of being spiritually "dead" (see Romans 6:23). And, if you die physically while you were living in sin, you will be eternally separated from God by being cast into Hell fire (the "second death," Revelation 21:8).

Therefore, since the ways of the “old man” are contrary to the ways of God and result in spiritual death, you must put off the old man in order to put on the new man who is patterned according to God’s ways of holiness and righteousness. But, how do experience this new birth?

Two Elements Involved In This New Birth

Jesus identifies two elements that are involved in this new birth. In response to Nicodemus’ question about how a man can be born when he is old, Jesus said, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Let’s consider both of these elements.

First, consider what it means to be born “of water.” This is a reference to being baptized (immersed in water). Baptism is repeatedly identified in the Scriptures as being necessary for salvation. For instance, Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). In Acts 2:38 (in response to the question, “what shall we do?”), Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 22:16 records how Saul was instructed to “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Galatians 3:26-27 says that you are baptized “into Christ.” And, 1 Peter 3:20-21 says that baptism now saves you.

The Scriptures could not be more clear in the fact that baptism is required for salvation and is an essential part of the new birth. In comparison with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Paul wrote that the one who is a Christian has put the old man of sin to death, been buried with Christ in baptism, and has been raised to walk in newness of life (see Romans 6:3-4). Therefore, you cannot be born again and live in newness of life without being baptized for the forgiveness of your sins!

Second, consider what it means to be born “of the Spirit.” Upon investigation into the teachings of the Scriptures, it is revealed that the Holy Spirit was responsible for revealing the will of God to mankind (see 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; Ephesians 3:3-5; John 16:13). He accomplished this by revealing God’s will to the apostles and prophets. Then, these apostles and prophets wrote the things revealed by God’s Holy Spirit (the words now contained within the Bible). This is the reason why we can understand what the will of God is whenever we read the Scriptures (see Ephesians 3:3-5 and Ephesians 5:17).

Notice the passage about being “born again” in 1 Peter 1:23: “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” How were they “born again”? It was through the incorruptible seed of God’s word (that which the Spirit revealed). Peter’s instruction here is not different from Jesus’ instruction in John 3. Instead, being born of God’s word is the same as being born of the Spirit. Whenever you obey the teachings revealed by the Holy Spirit in the pages of God’s word, you are born of the Spirit and born of the word of God. Therefore, this involves believing and doing everything God’s word teaches you to believe and do in order to be saved. Namely, God’s word teaches that you must hear God’s word

(Romans 10:17), believe in Jesus (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Acts 17:30), confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38).

The Results Of This New Birth

Finally, not only should you understand why you need to be born again and what is involved in being born again; but, you also should understand the results of this new birth. The Bible teaches that this new birth will have a tremendous impact on your future.

First, this new birth means that you will live in a transformed way. As we have already seen, you must put on the new man that is patterned after God's holiness and righteousness after you put the old man of sin to death. Therefore, 2 Corinthians 5:17 calls the Christian a "new creation" because old (sinful) things have passed away and all has become new. Furthermore, 1 John 3:9 says that whoever "has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." Now, this does not mean that it is impossible for a Christian to sin (see Galatians 5:4 and Acts 8:14-24). Instead, it means that as long as the Christian chooses to live according to the instructions of God's word, he/she will be living in ways that please God and will not be living for sin.

Second, this new birth means that you will be saved. This is the ultimate hope that is produced by the new birth. 1 Peter 1:3-9 describes how that the Christian has been born again through the mercy of God and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ to "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (verse 4)!

Conclusion

If you want to be part of God's kingdom and be saved eternally, you must be "born again." If you want to be "born again," you must be born of the water and the Spirit. Then, if you are born again, you will live in a transformed way that is patterned after God's holiness and you will be saved eternally in Heaven!

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