

## 6: What Does It Mean To Be Born Again?

We have seen that because of his sin man is dead: separated from God, under His judgement and unable to do anything about it. Nevertheless, God has a plan. He has appointed Jesus as the mediator between God and man. As man's representative Jesus has satisfied the demands of God's justice and paid the price for man's redemption. Now He is actively engaged in the business of saving those whom God has given to him: those for whom He died.

But how does this work out in the lives of individual people? What happens to a man when he is saved? In what way does he change and how does it come about? These are the questions we turn to in this study.

### You Must Be Born Again

Man, in his sin, is dead: lifeless and unresponsive to the Word of God: he cannot understand it, he cannot receive Christ, he cannot believe in Him. If there is to be any hope of him being saved from the judgement he deserves he must first be given new life. That is why Jesus said:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

John 3:3

### You Must Be Born Again Of The Spirit

No man can cause himself to be born again for only God can give life. So Jesus went on to say:

"Unless one is born of water<sup>1</sup> 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."

John 3:5 – 6

For a man to be born again is an act of the Holy Spirit: it depends entirely on His intervention.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, 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."

John 1:12 – 13

### All Those God Calls Are Born Again

But how does it happen? That is a question we cannot fully answer — there is an element of mystery just as there is with the birth of an infant — but we do know part of the answer.

The Bible tells us that God ordinarily calls those who will be saved by His Word.

"...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever."

1 Peter 1:23

---

<sup>1</sup> It is unclear exactly what is meant by being born "of water." Different possibilities have been proposed. Some suggest it is a reference to physical birth or Christian baptism. Others understand the word water to be a metaphor: it could stand for spiritual cleansing, the Holy Spirit or the Word of God.

“It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

1 Corinthians 1:21

“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth.”

James 1:18

At the same time as God's Word is declared, the Holy Spirit works the miracle of regeneration, breaking the power of sin over them, enlightening their minds to understand the things of God, bringing conviction of sin, giving them receptive hearts, renewing their wills and putting within them desires for what is good so that they come to Christ not forced against their wishes but freely.

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

2 Corinthians 5:17

When God calls someone to salvation in this way it is sometimes called the effectual call of God because it is always effective: all who are called by God are saved. That does not, of course, mean that everyone who hears the gospel will be saved: many hear God's Word but they are not all effectually called.

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.”

John 6:44

### **There Will Be Evidence That You Are Born Again**

Beyond these things we do not know how God works the miracle of regeneration. When Nicodemus inquired about how a man is born again Jesus answered him:

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

John 3:8

We know that someone has been born again only by the effects it produces in him. Having a new nature he will begin to respond to God's Word in repentance, he will begin to exercise faith, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and he will begin to obey God, demonstrating a desire to do what is right and turn away from what is evil.

“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.”

1 John 3:9

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

1 John 4:7

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.”

1 John 5:1

It is clear that regeneration has to come before repentance and faith — that is before conversion — but the new birth does not occur a long time before conversion: the response to God's effectual call is immediate and it is not a gradual process: it occurs in a moment of time.

It is also clear that regeneration takes place at God's time and by God's choosing so is entirely by God's grace: nothing in the person who is born again brings it on.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”

Ephesians 2:8

**Question:** How should this understanding of what it means to be born again affect the way we go about evangelism?

## **Key Words**

Propitiation	To make propitiation is to appease wrath. Jesus satisfied God's righteous wrath against sin by sacrificing Himself.
Redemption	Redemption is payment of a price to release someone from slavery. Jesus redeemed us by paying the price to secure our freedom from sin and its consequences.
Regeneration	Regeneration literally means "new birth." It is the once-for-all change that is spoken of in other places as being born again; passing from death to life; being quickened; becoming a new creature in Christ; renewal of the mind; resurrection from the dead.
Conversion	Conversion is the conscious change that occurs when a person who has been born again turns to the Lord in faith and repentance.
Repentance	To repent is to turn away from sin and live in obedience to God.
Faith	To have faith is to believe what God has said. The reality of faith is demonstrated by living as if what God has said is true.
Salvation	Salvation is the whole process by which sinners are delivered or saved from the effects, power and consequences of sin.

## **Memory Verses**

- ☺ John 3:3
- ☺ John 3:8
- ☺ 1 John 3:9