

## **Being Born Again**

### **1 Peter 1:22–25 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, <sup>24</sup> because “*All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away,*” <sup>25</sup> But the word of the LORD endures forever.” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

I remember back in 1976 when a new president took the White House and the term Born-Again became a big thing.

It was like the media had just discovered something that Christians had experienced for almost 2000 years.

So that should tell you a lot about the media.

Being born again is not something that is easy to explain or understand.

Jesus explained it this way to Nicodemus.

John 3:5–8 (NKJV)

5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 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.”

There are other terms used for being born again.

1 Peter 1:3 (NKJV)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 John 2:29 (NKJV)

29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

1 John 4:9 (NKJV)

9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

1 John 5:1 (NKJV)

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

- I. The New Birth is compared to the natural birth.
  - A. The first birth
    1. Is a fleshly birth.
    2. Regardless of what they would want, you have to have mother and a father.
    3. The mother and father come together and a new life is conceived.
    4. Life begets life.
    5. This is what Jesus is referring to when talks about the watery birth.
      - a. Baptism has nothing to do with the new birth.
      - b. Several people are born again, saved, without baptism.
        - (1) The thief on the cross.
        - (2) The Ethiopian eunuch was a believer before baptism and only a born again person is a believer.
        - (3) Lydia's heart was opened and she believed before baptism.
      - c. Many people are definitely saved before baptism.
        - (1) The household of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit before baptism and only born again people receive the Holy Spirit.
        - (2) Baptismal regeneration, the idea that baptism is what regenerates or causes a person to be born again, was one of the first errors that crept into the early church.
        - (3) Baptism is only performed on believers in the New Testament, no babies.
  - B. The Spiritual Birth
    1. This is of course a spiritual birth.
    2. The Word of God and the Spirit of God come together to produce spiritual life.
      - a. James 1:18 (NKJV)
        - (1) 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.
      - b. Psalm 119:50 (NKJV)
        - (1) 50 This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life.

- c. Ephesians 5:26 (NKJV)
    - (1) 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,
    - (2) It is not the waters of baptism that cleanse us but the Word of God.
  - d. Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)
    - (1) 12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
3. A few weeks ago I told you about that TV show, Queen for a day.
- a. Well the contestants were all part of a national group of egg layers who raised chickens and sold eggs by the thousands.
  - b. The host asked the contestant how many hens they had and she responded so many thousands.
  - c. And then he asked how many rosters they had and she replied none.
  - d. Now even back then they knew that you need a mommy chicken and a daddy chicken.
  - e. But they were not raising chickens but they were selling eggs.
4. It is a spiritual birth because it takes the Holy Spirit to make it happen.
- a. John 1:13 (NKJV)
    - (1) 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
  - b. 1 John 3:9 (NKJV)
    - (1) 9 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.
  - c. 1 John 4:7 (NKJV)
    - (1) 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
  - d. 1 John 5:1 (NKJV)
    - (1) 1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him

who is begotten of Him.

- e. 1 John 5:4 (NKJV)
  - (1) 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.
- f. 1 John 5:18 (NKJV)
  - (1) 18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

C. In the New Testament two elements are necessary for the new birth.

1. The Holy Spirit of God.

- a. We receive a part of God, His Holy Spirit when we are born again.
- b. John 3:5 (NKJV)
  - (1) 5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
- c. John 3:8 (NKJV)
  - (1) 8 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."

2. The Word of God.

- a. Titus 3:5 (NKJV)
  - (1) 5 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,
- b. 1 Corinthians 4:15 (NKJV)
  - (1) 15 For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.
- c. Surveying these terms, we notice that they all indicate a drastic and dramatic change which may be likened to birth, rebirth, re-creation or even resurrection. Several of the terms in their context indicate that this change has permanent and far-reaching effects in its subject. *M. R. Gordon, "Regeneration," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., New Bible Dictionary (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1005.*

Man is born a sinner. He is dead in sin and cannot bring life to himself. But God in His mercy has given us His word to convict of sin and show us what and how to believe.

God's Spirit uses the word to create Spiritual life in us by giving us the Holy Spirit and making us a part of God's forever family.

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This doctrine must be considered in the context of man in sin (Jn. 3:6; Eph. 2:1–3, 5). The effects of sin on human nature are considered to be so serious that, without the new birth, the sinner cannot see, let alone enter into, the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3, 5; cf. 1 Cor. 2:6–16).

The initiative in regeneration is ascribed to God (Jn. 1:13); it is from above (Jn. 3:3, 7) and of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5, 8). The same idea occurs in Eph. 2:4–5; 1 Jn. 2:29; 4:7; etc. This divine act is decisive and once for all. Aorists are used in Jn. 1:13; 3:3, 5, 7. The use of perfects indicates that this single, initial act carries with it far-reaching effects, as in 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18. The abiding results given in these passages are doing righteousness, not committing sin, loving one another, believing that Jesus is the Christ, and overcoming the world. These results indicate that in spiritual matters man is not altogether passive. He is passive in the new birth; God acts on him. But the result of such an act is far-reaching activity; he actively repents, believes in Christ, and henceforth walks in newness of life.

Jn. 3:8 serves to warn us that there is much in this subject that is inscrutable. Yet we must inquire what actually happens to the individual in the new birth. It would be safe to say that there is no change in the personality itself; the person is the same. But now he is differently controlled. Before the new birth sin controlled the man and made him a rebel against God; now the Spirit controls him and directs him towards God. The regenerate man walks after the Spirit, lives in the Spirit, is led by the Spirit, and is commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Rom. 8:4, 9, 14; Eph. 5:18). He is not perfect; he has to grow and progress (1 Pet. 2:2), but in every department of his personality he is directed towards God.

**We may define regeneration as a drastic act on fallen human nature by the Holy Spirit, leading to a change in the person's whole outlook.** He can now be described as a new man who seeks, finds and follows God in Christ.

### III. The means of regeneration

In 1 Pet. 3:21 baptism is closely connected with entry into a state of salvation, and in Tit. 3:5 we have the reference to the washing of regeneration. 1 Pet. 1:23 and Jas. 1:18 mention the Word of God as a means of new birth. Many, from such scriptures, contend that these are the necessary channels by which regeneration comes to us. With 1 Cor. 2:7–16 in mind, we must question whether the Word of God is a means of regeneration in this way. Here we are clearly taught that the natural man is in such a state that he cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. A divine intervention which makes the natural man receptive to God's Word must be antecedent to hearing the Word in a saving manner. When this has occurred the Word of God brings the new life into expression. It is clear that the new birth of 1 Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18 is conceived more comprehensively than in John. John distinguishes between regeneration and the faith which results from it (e.g. Jn. 1:12–13; 1 Jn. 5:1); Peter and James, by including the reference to the Word as the means, show that they have in mind the whole process whereby God brings men to

conscious faith in Christ.

We can also think of the issue in terms of conception and birth. The Holy Spirit plants or begets new life by a direct action on the soul. It is subsequently brought to the birth (apokyeo, Jas. 1:18) by the word. gennao (1 Pet. 1:23) can have the meaning of birth as well as begetting.

There are further biblical objections to the idea that baptism itself conveys regenerating grace. To look at baptism in this *ex opere operato* manner is contrary to other scriptures, especially the prophetic protest against the abuse of priestly rites, and Paul's strictures on Jewish views concerning circumcision (cf. Rom. 2:28f.; 4:9–12). We actually have incidents of conversion without baptism (Acts 10:44–48; 16:14–15). The latter case is especially interesting, for the opening of Lydia's heart is specifically mentioned before baptism. If it be argued that things are different concerning Christians of subsequent generations, Paul's attitude to similar views with regard to circumcision ought to settle the issue. Regenerating grace comes direct by the Spirit to lost sinners. The Word of God brings it into expression in faith and repentance. \*BAPTISM bears witness to the spiritual union with Christ in death and resurrection through which new \*LIFE is conveyed, but does not convey it automatically where \*FAITH is not present.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Articles on Regeneration by J. V. Bartlet (HDB), J. Denney (DCG), A. Ringwald et al., NIDNTT 1, pp. 176–188. Most works on systematic theology deal with this subject—especially note Hodge (vol. 3, pp. 1–40) and Berkhof (pp. 465–479); T. Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, 1720, pp. 131–168; B. Citron, *The New Birth*, 1951.

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M. R. Gordon, "Regeneration," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1005–1006.

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BORN AGAIN. The new birth is a creative life-giving operation of the Holy Spirit upon a lost human soul, whereby in response to faith in Christ crucified (John 3:14–16; Gal. 3:24), the believing one, "dead in . . . trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), is quickened into spiritual life and made a partaker of the divine nature and of the life of Christ Himself (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:27; 1 Pet. 1:23–25; 2 Pet. 1:4). The complete necessity of this spiritual transaction is the result of fallen man's state of spiritual death, his alienation from God, and his consequent utter inability to "see" (John 3:3) or "to enter into" the kingdom of God (3:5). No matter how moral, refined, talented, or religious the natural or unregenerate man may be, he is blind to spiritual truth and unable to save himself (3:6; cf. Ps. 51:5; 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7–8). It is clear, therefore, that the new birth is not the reformation of the old nature but the reception of a new nature. See *Regeneration*.

M.F.U.

Merrill F. Unger, "Born Again," ed. R.K. Harrison, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).