



A Quiz on Regeneration (‘Born Again’)

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(Some multiple choice questions may require more than one answer)

1. The terms 'regeneration', 'born again', and the 'new birth' are all synonymous terms for the same spiritual event as described in the scriptures. **True False**

2. We are born again when we are baptised. **True False**

3. The word 'born again' literally means: **A.** To be begotten from above. **B.** To be made a new creature in Christ. **C.** To be begotten from above when we made a decision for Christ. **D.** To be baptised in water.

4. Being born again is entirely a heavenly work, a work of God alone, not earthly. **True False**

5. When we are born again this is **A.** a work by God within the heart of man. **B.** a work done by God within us with the help of our will.

6. Man, in and of himself, can choose to be born again **A.** By receiving Christ as Saviour. **B.** By being baptised. **C.** By attending a church. **D.** None of the above.

7. The new birth is a new creation in the spirit of man. **True False**

8. One must be born again to enter Heaven. **True False**

9. Being born again is said to be a mystery **A.** That occurs within us which we cannot see. **B.** That is known by its effects only.

10. When we are born again **A.** The act is instantaneous at a point of time. **B.** Is enacted over a period of time as we come to understand the Gospel.

11. We can be born again **A.** By praying a prayer of salvation. **B.** By our will making a decision for salvation. **C.** None of the above.

12. God cannot regenerate us until we first believe Christ according to the Gospel. **True False**

13. The scriptures command us to be born again by accepting the Gospel. **True False**

14. In regeneration the order of salvation is **A.** Faith first and then afterward we are regenerated (born again). **B.** Faith and regeneration occur at the same time. **C.** Regeneration occurs first and then faith follows.

15. The ‘instrument’ through which we are born again is **A.** Baptism. **B.** The word of God. **C.** A decision to have Christ save us. **D.** A prayer for salvation.

16. The proof that one is born again is **A.** Jesus becomes the Christ as Lord and Saviour. **B.** The person does not continue in a practise/habit of sinning and shows a continual repentance. **C.** They will seek holiness of living. **D.** They will become sinless after a time. **E.** They will have a new distinctive love for other Christians.

(Answers are on the next page)

If you do not score 16/16 we encourage you to read the article that follows ‘*The New Birth - The Mystery of and Misunderstandings*’.
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Answers to Questionnaire on Regeneration ('Born Again')

1. **True.** (Tit.3:5; Jn.3:3,7; 1Pet.1:23)

The Greek words for 'regeneration' (*'paliggenesía'*) and 'born again' (*'ánothen'*) have the same idea of 'again' (*'pálin'*), a rebirth, and '*ánothen'* having the idea of 'from above' (*'áno'*). John chapter 3 clearly has this as a 'second' birth (vs.4 '*deúteron'*') and it being '*of God*' (Jn.1:13; 3:5,6,8).

2. **False.** Being born again is not any *outward* work, but rather an *inner* regeneration. It is a sovereign *spiritual* work of grace, *from above*, and '*of God*', not earthly from any human act, '*nor of the will of man*' (Jn.1:12,13; 3:6,12).

3. **A & B.** See Qs.1 ('*from above*'). It is also a 'new creation' (2Cor.5:17). We cannot create ourselves. God has to create and 'quicken' (make alive) a new spirit (Jn.5:21; 6:63; Eph.2:1,5; Col.2:13; 2Cor.4:6).

4. **True.** It is a sovereign *spiritual* work of grace, *from above* and '*of God*', not of any human act, or of the will (Jn.1:12,13; 3:6,12). Our first birth is '*earthly*', the second '*heavenly*' (Jn.3:12).

5. **A.** Regeneration is entirely a work '*of God*' (Jn.1:13); '*of the spirit*' (Jn.3:6,8). No scripture ever says we do anything to be born again of ourselves. When the Bible speaks of the born again event, the Greek 'voices' for the verbs are *passive* on mans part (Jn.1:13; Jn.3:3,5,6,7,8). It is God alone who opens the heart to be made alive to His truth, as with Lydia '*whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul*' (Acts 16:14). Paul states that God has '*made us alive together with Christ*' (Eph.2:5; cp. Col.2:13). James says '*of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth...*' (James 1:17,18). Peter says it is God alone who '*according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*' (1Pet.1:3).

6. **D.** See No.5 above. ‘Receiving Christ as Saviour’ and other acts or works following salvation may be the *fruit* or the *effects* of being born again, but not the things we need to do to be born again, which is an inner sovereign work ‘*of God*’ (Jn.1:13).

7. **True.** The new birth is when a person is made a ‘*new creature*’ (2Cor.5:17). We cannot create ourselves when ‘*dead in sins*’ (Eph.2:1,5; Col.1:13). God has to create and quicken (make alive) a new spirit. ‘*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*’ (2Cor.4:6).

8. **True.** (Jn.3:3,5,7)

9. **Both A&B.** Regeneration or being ‘born again’ is a secret inner act of God in which He imparts new spiritual life to one who is ‘*dead in sins*’ (Eph.2:1,5; Col.2:13). Jesus described this mystery: ‘*The wind (‘pneúma’) blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or where it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit (‘pneúma’)*’ (Jn.3:8). The mysterious working of the Spirit in this new birth is only known by the *effects* upon a person.

10. **A.** Although most would not know the time the new birth occurs, the Greek tenses in John 1:13 show Greek aorist ‘indicatives’, referring to a snapshot of something done *once* in time. Other passages also show perfect and perfect *indicatives*, something done *once* in time in the past, with results (effects) to the present (Jn.3:8; 1Pet.1:23; 1Jn.3:9; 5:1).

11. C. None of the above. There is never a command in scripture to do anything to be born again. When one is born again it is *'not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God'* - the work is entirely *'of God'* (Jn.1:13). The Greek 'voices' for the verbs are *passive* (Jn.1:13; Jn.3:3,5,6,7,8). It is God alone who opens the heart to be made alive to His truth. The classic example of this was Lydia *'whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul'* (Acts 16:14). Paul states that God has *'made us alive together with Christ'* (Eph.2:5; cp. Col.2:13). James says *'of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth...'* (James 1:17,18). Peter says it is God alone who *'according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'* (1Pet.1:3).

Ezekiel chapter 36-37 also has regeneration entirely a work of God. *'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them'* (vs.26,27).

A person dead in sins cannot and will not seek or receive spiritual things unless the Spirit of God regenerates him. *'The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be'* (Rom.8:7); *'the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'* (1Cor.2:14); *'no one can come'* unless *'drawn'* (Jn.6:44). John says *'Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is [has been] born of God'*, not *'will be born of God'* (1Jn.5:1).

12. **False.** See above. The unsaved person being *'dead in sins'* (Eph.2:1,5; Col.2:13) cannot do anything any more than a dead person can come back to life. The unsaved heart is depraved (Jer.17:9), and cannot and will not seek or receive spiritual things unless the Spirit of God regenerates him (Rom.8:7; 1Cor.2:14; Jn.6:44). Again, John says *'Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is [has been] born of God'*, not *'will be born of God'* (1Jn.5:1)

13. **False.** Nowhere in scripture when the Gospel is spoken of, is there any command to be born again. (John chapter 3 and Jesus telling Nicodemus that he '*must be born again*' is not an imperative, but an indicative - a statement of fact only). The Gospel message is first *believe* in Jesus Christ and you will be saved. When one truly believes in Christ and what He has done for them *they are born again*. But they were not born again because of anything they did, but only as the Spirit has quickened them. We cannot desire, will or do anything to be born again of ourselves any more than a baby cooperates in child birth.

14. **B or C.** Most theologians in history have regeneration *before or at the same time* as any response to any call to saving faith. The '*dead in sins*' (Eph.2:1,5; Col.2:13) cannot do anything any more than a dead person can come back to life, the heart being depraved and unable in and of itself to respond to God (Jer.17:9; Rom.8:7; 1Cor.2:14; Jn.6:44). Arguably Scripture is not clear as to the exact order as to whether a person is born again *first and then has faith*, or whether at the *same time*.

Some cite passages that connect regeneration with the Word of God preached in the Gospel: (1Pet.1:23; James 1:18; Acts 10:44), and see people being born again *in response* to faith. However, a closer look at any such passages does not clearly show any such order of faith. If faith is before regeneration then who gave the person the ability to believe when they were 'dead in sins'? Where would that gift of faith come from? One would have no need of being regenerated and made alive if one was already capable of believing without aid.

The example of Lydia may be the closest the scriptures come to an order of salvation. She did *not respond until the Lord 'opened her heart'* (Acts 16:14). In conversion as the Word is preached the Spirit applies it to a heart opened in regeneration. (The Greek tenses and voices show this is by God either at the same time as faith or after (this author leans towards the former).

15. **B.** The word of God. *‘Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever’* (1Pet.1:23). As the Word is heard, we pray that the Spirit unlocks the heart as He did for Lydia (Acts 16:14), and gives the willingness, the power to respond.

16. **A,B,C,E.** (A) Jesus becomes ‘the Christ’ as Lord and Saviour (1Jn.5:1; Matt.10:37); (B) The person does not continue in a practise/habit of sinning and shows a continual repentance (1Jn.5:18); (C) They will seek holiness of living (1Jn.2:15,16; 3:3); (E) They will have a new distinctive love for other Christians (1Jn.3:14).

If you do not score 16/16 we encourage you to read the article that now follows: *‘The New Birth - The Mystery of and Misunderstandings.* Page 10

The New Birth - The Mystery of and Misunderstandings

Ask Christians today what ‘born again’ means and one will get a variety of answers. Some say we are born again when baptised, others say when we make a decision for Christ, and some give a list of things to do before one can be regenerated. Is there an order of salvation for being born again?

The term ‘born again’ is one of the most misunderstood and wrongly taught terms in modern Christian vocabulary. Yet the scriptures are clear in what it is, is not and its effects (Jn.1:12,13; 3:1-21; 1Pet.1:23; 1Jn.5; Tit.3:5). However, there is a certain *mystery* in the concept of being regenerated or born again. It is entirely a spiritual event effectual by the Spirit of God deep within a person. Thus it is not something we can easily describe except by *its effects* on the person regenerated.

What Does ‘Born Again’ Mean?

The meaning of the Greek words for ‘born again’ (*gennethe anothēn*) are literally translated ‘*born*’ and ‘*from above*’. It is a new or second *birth* and *from above*. It is entirely a spiritual and celestial rebirth, not anything earthly (Jn.3:12).

The Reformers and Puritan literature have many helpful definitions which accurately describe the scriptures that use the word ‘born again’ and its synonym ‘regeneration’. *Regeneration is a mighty and powerful change, wrought in the soul by the efficacious workings of the Holy Spirit, wherein a vital principle, a new habit, the law of God, and a divine nature, are put into, and framed in the heart, enabling it to act holily and pleasing to God, and to grow up therein to eternal glory*. (1) The above theologian saw faith and regeneration occurring at the same time. Others simply described regeneration as an act of God giving faith to the sinner. In their literature many Puritans used other words interchangeably with the regeneration. Indeed, the Westminster Confession often uses the terms conversion and regeneration interchangeably.

Regeneration or being ‘born again’ is a secret inner act of God in which He imparts new spiritual life. Essentially when one is born again, they are supernaturally regenerated in heart from being *dead* in

(1) Charnock, ‘*Regeneration*’, P.89

sin to their spirit being *made alive* to God. This affects their very soul, mind, will and emotions. Some when they are regenerated seem to be aware of this immediately, others more slowly, even though it is an instantaneous work of God. (2)

In this second birth we are made a '*new creature*', in a new creation, with a new life (Gal.6:15; Rom.6:14). '*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away behold, all things are become new*' (2Cor.5:17). This new life is no longer under captivity to the law but in a new life of the Spirit (Rom.7:6).

What Does Born Again Not Mean?

Being born again is not being baptised in water or any *outward* work, but rather an *inner* regeneration. It is a sovereign work of *grace*. '*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*' (Jn.1:12,13). The scriptures never teach man can choose to be born again. The work is entirely '*of God*' (vs.13).

The new birth here is '*not of blood*' - it is not human, not from race or religion.

The new birth is '*not of the will of the flesh*' - it is not of personal desires. Within the heart of man is the sinful nature, the '*agent*' to which man's will is tied. Our best state in the flesh is '*filthy rags*' (Is.64:6). We were '*dead in sins*', '*slaves*' to sin and carnal in motives (Eph.2:1,5; Col.2:13; Rom.6:16-22; Mk.7:21-23).

The New Birth is '*not of the will of man*'. Man's unsaved nature cannot will or make a decision to choose God when it is '*dead in sins*' (Eph.2:1,5; Col.2:13).

Regeneration is a *spiritual* thing, not a physical thing, not from any outward ordinance. When Jesus instructed Nicodemus '*you must be born again*' He pressed the distinction between the physical and the spiritual. Yet Nicodemus mistook the *spiritual* language for *physical* childbirth: '*How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*' (Jn.3:4).

(2) The Greek tenses in John 1:13 show aorist indicatives, referring to a snapshot of something done *once* in time. Other passages show perfect and perfect indicatives, again something done *once* in time in the past, with results (effects) to the present (Jn.3:8; 1Pet.1:23; 1Jn.3:9; 5:1).

Jesus answered, *‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’* (vs.6). One birth is *‘earthly’*, the other *‘heavenly’* (vs.12).

Nothing man can do can bring about regeneration to life in Christ. It is a sovereign act of grace by God alone. This creation of God makes the will willing to respond to God and his message. The new birth is a *‘new creation’* (2Cor.5:17). We cannot create ourselves. God has to create and quicken a new spirit. *‘For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’* (2Cor.4:6).

The Necessity of the New Birth

Jesus stated *‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...You must be born again’* (Jn.3:3,7). The phrase *‘verily, verily’* (or *‘truly, truly’*), is stating the *necessity* of this regeneration. The pronoun *‘you’* is plural - Jesus was speaking to more than just Nicodemus. It is necessary that all people be born from above to enter Heaven. Jesus then repeated the same: *‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God’* (vs.5). (3)

The urgency here is because man is *‘dead in sins’* and must be *‘made alive’*. *‘And you has he quickened [made alive], who were dead in trespasses and sins...Even when we were dead in sins, has quickened [made alive] us together with Christ, by (grace you are saved;)...For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God’* (Eph.2:1,5,8).

(3) The phrase *‘born of water’* is interpreted by many commentators as spiritual cleansing from sin which Ezekiel prophesied: *‘Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you I will cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you...’* (Ezek.36:25-27). The water symbolizes spiritual cleansing, as the new heart and new spirit shows new spiritual life.

Another interpretation of *‘born of water’* is that it refers to the waters of child birth (vs.4-6). A third view is that it refers to water baptism. However, this introduces a physical act which contradicts much scripture and arguably the verse following: *‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’* (vs.6).

This corruptibility in unregenerate man cannot go into an incorruptible Heaven where there is no sin and a perfect holy righteous God. *‘Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever’* (1Pet.1:23). The spirit of the person must be regenerated and be as the *‘spirits of just men made perfect’* (Heb.12:23). The Puritan William Whately (1583-1639) in describing the new birth, stated *‘If Christ should come, and die, for one man, ten thousand times; all those deaths should profit that one man nothing at all for his salvation, unless he be made a new creature’*. (4)

The Mystery of the New Birth

Exactly what happens in regeneration is mysterious to us, but not to God. God’s intentions are clear in scripture - to open the persons heart, regenerate them in spirit and so justify, sanctify and raise them to glory (Rom.8:28-30).

Although we know that we who were spiritually dead have been made alive to God and ‘born again’ (John 3:3,7; Eph.2:1,5; Col.2:13), yet we don’t understand the spiritual nature of how this happens except that which we experience and read in Scripture as to its *effects*.

Jesus himself described this mystery: *‘The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or where it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit’* (Jn.3:8).

The words *‘spirit’* and *‘wind’* here (vs.8) are the *same Greek word* (*‘pneúma’*). The ‘wind’ here is clearly referring to the Holy Spirit and this new birth. Similar references are found in Job 33:4 and Ezekiel 37:9-14. Ezekiel was told to *‘speak to the wind’* and the breath of God then made dead bones come alive (vs.9,10).

No one can tell where the wind comes from and where it goes. But you hear and see the *effects* only. Sailors know how strong the wind is by the effects upon the waters. Scales of wind velocity have been developed by the various visual effects upon water. So too, no one can explain the mysterious working of the Spirit in this new birth except by the *effects* upon a person.

(4) Whately *‘The New Birth’*, 13

Because regeneration is entirely an act of God, it occurs (as the Greek tenses show) in an instant of time and happens only once. As with child birth, the new birth occurs at a definite time. Yet most people do not know exactly the time when it happened. This is so because often there is a 'drawing' time when God sovereignly induces the person to come. *'No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day...no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father'* (Jn.6:44,65).

The mystery of regeneration is also that the action is *passive* on mans part. In the key passages when the Bible speaks of the born again event, the Greek voices

for the verbs are *passive* (Jn.1:13; Jn.3:3,5,6,7,8). Indeed it is God alone who opens the heart to be made alive to His truth. The classic example of this was Lydia *'whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul'* (Acts 16:14). Paul states that God has *'made us alive together with Christ'* (Eph.2:5; cp. Col.2:13). James says *'of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth...'* (James 1:17,18). Peter says it is God alone who *'according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'* (1Pet.1:3).

The famous hymn *'And Can It Be'* well expresses this mystery of regeneration. *'Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night; thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee...'* Indeed the unsaved person's heart is 'imprisoned', 'bound in sin', and *willingly so*. But when God sends a *'quickenning ray'*, a life giving call, the person 'wakes' from the deadness of sin, now with a heart and will 'free' to receive the things of God and salvation!

Sadly in modern evangelism, new techniques, invitation systems and an emphasis on what man can do, have attempted to produce the new birth by mechanical means. Yet the new birth is a spiritual, sovereign act, a monergistic work of God to the one who is dead in sins.

When Jesus addressed Nicodemus He gave no commands or methods to be born again, but simply stated a fact - that no one can

enter the kingdom of God unless this regeneration is given to him. Again, the verbs in this passage are all Greek *passive* voice on mans part and active on God's part.

The Modern Confusion With The New Birth

Every Christian denomination has a doctrine of regeneration, yet most teach it with a *backward order of salvation*. Many teach it as a plan of acceptance of salvation by praying certain prayers or performing certain actions. Yet none of these new modern measures have anything to do with the scriptures that refer to being born again. None of the scriptures that teach regeneration and being born again detail anything about how this is accomplished, except that the instrument is through the Word of God. *'Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which live's and abides forever'* (1Pet.1:23). Again, *'being born again'* here is a Greek perfect passive - an act entirely of God once in time, with man passive.

It seems to be lost on modern evangelism that this work is all *'of God'* and passive on mans part. No doubt in many aspects of salvation we are co-workers with God - in sanctification and perseverance, etc. But in the work of regeneration we play no active role. As in Ezekiel chapter 36-37 when God gave life to dead bones, so regeneration is entirely a work of God. *'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them'* (vs.26,27).

Theologians refer to an *'ordo salutis'* (Latin for *'order of salvation'*). Most theologians in history have regeneration before or at the same time as any response to any call to saving faith. The logic of this should be apparent - the *'dead in sins'* (Eph.2:1,5; Col.2:13) cannot do anything any more than a dead person can come back to life. The person *'dead in sins'* is physically alive but spiritually a corpse with no spiritual life in him whatsoever. His heart is depraved, *'deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?'* (Jer.17:9). Such a person cannot and will not seek or receive spiritual things unless the Spirit of God regenerates him. *'The carnal mind is enmity against*

God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Rom.8:7); *‘the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned’* (1Cor.2:14); *‘no one can come’* unless *‘drawn’* (Jn.6:44). John says *‘Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is [has been] born of God’*, not *‘will be born of God.’* (1Jn.5:1) (5)

However, scripture is not as clear as to the exact timing of this and theologians

vary on whether a person is born again *first and then has faith*, or whether at the *same time*. Arguably any order does not preclude the regeneration taking place at the same time as our response to the Gospel and receiving faith. Thus some cite passages that connect regeneration with the Word of God preached in the Gospel: *‘Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever’* (1Pet.1:23); and *‘of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures’* (James 1:18); *‘the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word’* (Acts 10:44).

Though many read these scriptures as faith and regeneration occurring at the same time, yet others cite these passages as people being born again *in response* to faith. Many evangelicals see the person is born again after they believed because they see the *effects* of this and conclude that regeneration must therefore have come after saving faith. But a closer look at any such passages arguably does not clearly show any order of faith. If faith is before regeneration then who gave the person the ability to believe when they were ‘dead in sins’? Where would that gift of faith come from? One would have no need of being regenerated and made alive if one was already capable of believing without aid.

The example of Lydia may be the closest the scriptures come to an order of salvation. She was hearing the message of salvation but did *not respond until the Lord ‘opened her heart’* (Acts 16:14). She *‘heard’*; then the Lord *‘opened her heart’*; and she responded to the preaching. Whether the act of God opening her heart was *beforehand*

(5) Here a perfect indicative passive - literally *‘have been born of God’* - a past one time event with results (effects) to the present and the person passive to an action by God.

or at the *same time* as the response may well be a mute argument, since the opening of any heart is a mystery as to how and when it occurred.

A study of the Reformers, the Puritans and great preachers of last centuries will show that the orthodox and scriptural position was that a person must be born again before any faith, or at the same time, but never the reverse. The reverse violates the very necessity to be born again and the scriptures that speak of the unsaved man being ‘dead in sins’ (Eph.2:1,5; Col.2:13).

It must be understood that some can hear the Gospel over and over again, but unless the Spirit of God arrests them, opens and regenerates their hearts, they will be left in the deadness of their sins. But in conversion, as the Word is preached, the Spirit takes the Word of God and applies it to a heart opened in regeneration.

What Do We Do To See People Born Again?

Nowhere in scripture when the Gospel is spoken of or represented, is there any command to be born again. Some will point to John chapter 3 and Jesus telling Nicodemus that he ‘*must be born again*’ as an imperative. Yet the Greek has no imperative but an indicative here - a statement of fact only. The Gospel message is first *believe* in Jesus Christ and you will be saved. It is this author’s view that to emphasise the concept of ‘born again’ in the Gospel may well confuse what the person must do - *believe* in Jesus.

When one truly believes in Christ and what He has done for them *they are born again*. But they were not born again because of anything they did, but only as the Spirit has quickened them. We cannot desire, will or do anything to be born again of ourselves any more than a baby cooperates in child birth.

So, what do we do to see people born again?...*Preach the Gospel!* - Preach Christ crucified for sin to satisfy a righteous holy God who demands justice; that God has punished Christ as our substitute instead of us for sin. We call on the person to believe in Him. The Gospel is not about doing anything to be born again. The born again experience is God’s mystery of creation in His own time.

Our work in seeing people born again is to preach the Gospel and thus use the instrument God has provided. ‘*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever*’ (1Pet.1:23). As the Word is heard, we pray that

the Spirit unlocks the heart as He did for Lydia, and gives the willingness, the power to understand and respond.

This work of the Spirit is not done by outward man made decisional methods. It is an inward call of God. Our work is to present Christ and what He has done for a great dilemma - the man dead in sins; *that Christ has died in our place as a substitute to pay the penalty of our sin and satisfy the wrath of God upon our sin. God has been propitiated by the sacrifice of Jesus for us.* Salvation is *believing and receiving* him by faith. *‘That if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation’* (Rom.10:9,10).

Proofs of Being Born Again - The Effects

There are many proofs of being born again as described in scriptures. When Lydia had her heart ‘opened’, she showed the effects of this when she *‘attended to the things spoken by Paul’* (Acts 16:14). Other results of regeneration will be seen in the *‘fruit of the Spirit’* - *‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control’* (Gal.5:22,23); and that *the born again will suffer and survive persecutions, trials, testings and temptations’* (Matt.10:22).

More effects of being born again are especially found in the epistles of John:

The born again will have a heart to put Christ first. ‘Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...’ (5:1; see also Matt. 10:37).

The born again do not practise sin but show repentance. ‘Whosoever is born of God does not commit [habitual action - practise] sin...because he is born of God’ (1Jn.3:9); *‘We know that whosoever is born of God sins not; but he that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not’* (1Jn.5:18).

The born again Christian no longer has a heart to sin. He hates it, fights and groans under it. The power and lordship of the practise of sin is broken.

The new birth produces holiness. The born again seek holiness in living. The born again do not accept the worlds standards. ‘Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world...’ (1Jn.2:15,16); ‘Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure’ (1Jn.3:3).

The born again love the brethren. ‘We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren...’ (1Jn.3:14). The born again have a distinctive love for the brethren. Fellowship will be a priority.

The born again will ‘know’ Christ in a personal way. However, there will be many who will claim to know him from works done but who were never regenerated. They will say *‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity’* (Matt.7:22,23).

Regeneration, being a sovereign work of God alone, is a teaching hard to accept by many today. Many will try with logic to reconcile this sovereign act of God with the responsibility of man to believe and repent. Yet both are true. Sadly, this failure to accept both truths and to add man’s logic has led to a reversal of theologies including in the order of salvation, and with new practises to match.

The biblical teaching of regeneration will not tolerate the pride of man. No one can boast that they had anything to do with this act of God and salvation (Eph.2:8,9). Charles Spurgeon once said *I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence on my mind to make me seek Him...I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me...I desire to make this confession, ‘I ascribe my change wholly to God’.* (6)

Regeneration is a work of amazing love. There can be great joy and security in knowing that God has started a work which He will complete in us. He loved us first before we loved Him (1Jn.4:19).

The doctrine of regeneration truly gives all glory to God!



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