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## 21 - What does it mean to be "born again?"

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- SUBJECT: What does it mean to be "born again?"
- COMPLEMENT: To be regenerated ("born again") is to have been spiritually raised from the dead, released from slavery to sin and Satan, to live a completely new life in Christ. It is to experience God's total ability in the face of our inability.
- IDEA: "Born again" is the crux of the Christian experience.

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Immanuel Statement of Faith

##### Section 7 - Salvation

We believe that we are given salvation from sin and its penalty as a free gift from God (Romans 6:23) through faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone, unaided by human effort (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7).

The death of Christ is full payment for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3; Hebrews 9:11-15; 1 Peter 1:18-21) and satisfies the just requirement of God (Romans 3:23-26; Hebrews 10:1-10).

**Made alive by God (1 Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 2:4-7; 1 Peter 3:18), we are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6), but are children of God (John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26), disciples set apart to a life of spiritual growth, ministry, love, and good works (Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:10-14; Col 3:12-17; Hebrews 12:1-2; 1 Peter 2:2).**

We have forgiveness for every sin (Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:9) and rest secure in the reality of eternal life (John 5:24; John 6:39-40; John 10:27-30; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:9-13).

#### B. Order of Salvation - A survey of the Scriptures regarding Salvation yields an "order" or basic sequence, and it is helpful to understand where regeneration (being born again) fits into that order. The following is the order we present in the Fundamentals of the Faith.

##### 1. Election/ Foreknew/ Predestination - God's sovereign choice of certain people who are destined for salvation.

Romans 8:28–30 (ESV) - <sup>28</sup>And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those **who are called** according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he **predestined** he also **called**, and those whom he called he also **justified**, and those whom he justified he also **glorified**.

See also Ephesians 1:3-14.

**NOTE: The fact of God's election is clearly taught in the Bible.** For further study see: John 6:37, 6:44, 6:55, John 10, Acts 2:38-39, 13:48, Rom 1:6-7,

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9:11,23-24, 1Cor 1:2, 9, 24,30, Gal 1:6, 15-16, 2 Thess 2:13-14, 1 Tim 6:12, 2 Tim 1:9, Heb 3:1, 9:15, 1 Pet 1:15, 2:9, 5:10, Jude 1, Rev 17:14.

2. **Atonement.** This describes Christ's death on the cross, resurrection and ascension to accomplish substitution for sin, propitiation (appeasing God's wrath), redemption (purchase from sin, Satan, and death), and reconciliation.

1 Corinthians 15:3–4 (ESV) - <sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: **that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day** in accordance with the Scriptures,

3. **The Gospel Call** - The presentation and offering of salvation in Christ to sinners, together with an earnest exhortation to repent and accept Christ by faith, in order that they may obtain forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Note **the gospel call is necessary for salvation but is not always effective (can be rejected).**

Romans 10:13–17 (ESV) - <sup>13</sup>For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” <sup>14</sup>How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? **And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?** <sup>15</sup>**And how are they to preach unless they are sent?** As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” <sup>16</sup>But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” <sup>17</sup>So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

4. **Conviction** - That ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual by which he is convinced of the truth of the Gospel message.

John 16:8–11 – (Jesus speaking of **the Holy Spirit**) <sup>8</sup>**“And He, when He comes, will convict the world** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; <sup>9</sup>concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup>and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; <sup>11</sup>and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

5. **The Effectual Call** - God’s effectual calling or “saving grace” refers to the immediate and instantaneous work of God by the Holy Spirit, by which man’s mind is savingly enlightened to understand the Gospel, and man’s will is determinately empowered and moved to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The effectual call/ saving grace ALWAYS results in salvation. It would be wrong to see this as God “violently coercing” a person to believe as he reluctantly resists. Rather, it is the Spirit’s distinct calling of an elect person that unfailingly (efficaciously) compels him to accept Christ willingly and yield his will to Christ. In other words, a person is never saved *against* his will; his will is *changed* through efficacious grace.

2 Corinthians 4:3–6 (ESV) - <sup>3</sup>And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup>In their case **the god of this world has blinded** the minds of the

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unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup>For what **we proclaim** is not ourselves, but **Jesus Christ as Lord**, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup>For **God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"** has shone in our hearts **to give the light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

### 6. Regeneration - the subject of this topic.

7. **Conversion, inclusive of repentance/ belief.** Conversion is salvation from the human perspective, but even that assumes the primary actor in salvation to be God (note that "conversion" is often expressed in the passive voice – "one is converted"... by God). It also expresses the individual's role in salvation: to believe in the work of God accomplished through Jesus Christ. Terms such as faith, belief, repentance, turn, and receive/ accept Jesus as Savior are generally synonymous with conversion.
8. **Justification.**
9. **Forgiveness.**
10. **Adoption.**
11. **Union/ Identification with Christ.**
12. **Etc.**

## II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "BORN AGAIN?"

- A. "Born again" is a common (and synonymous) term for **regeneration**.

***Regeneration is the supernatural work of God through the Holy Spirit in which He instantaneously imparts eternal, spiritual life in people who are spiritually dead.***

Titus 3:5 – [It is] 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. **Synonymous terms.** The Bible uses the following synonymous terms for and in addition to regeneration:

### 1. **Born. (Born again; born of the Spirit.)**

John 3:3, 6-7 - <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"... <sup>6</sup>"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is **born of the Spirit** is spirit. <sup>7</sup>"Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be **born again.**'

***When you hear the phrase "born again," what comes to mind?***

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### 2. Resurrected in Christ. (Made alive; raised)

Ephesians 2:1, 4-5 - And **you were dead** in the trespasses and sins ... <sup>4</sup>But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup>and **raised us up** with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,

Romans 6:4 - <sup>4</sup>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**.

*Suppose you died today, and then by some miracle physically came back to life. How might your attitude change toward life? What would be important? Unimportant?*

### 3. New creation/ creature; new self

Ephesians 4:22–24 - <sup>22</sup> that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, <sup>23</sup> and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, <sup>24</sup> and **put on the new self**, which in *the likeness of God* **has been created** in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

2 Corinthians 5:17 - <sup>17</sup>Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* **a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

*What are some examples of the kinds of "old things" that pass away?*

### 4. Life in Christ

Galatians 2:20 - <sup>20</sup> "**I have been crucified with Christ**; and it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh **I live** by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

We must ALWAYS take these terms literally, NEVER metaphorically. When you read passages like Romans 6, it is not "as though you were alive from the dead," but "as those who are alive from the dead." (Rom 6:13)

Romans 6:1–13 - <sup>1</sup>What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup>May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup>Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup>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**. <sup>5</sup>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**, <sup>6</sup>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; <sup>7</sup>for he who has died is freed from sin.

<sup>8</sup>Now if we have died with Christ, **we believe that we shall also live with Him**,

<sup>9</sup>knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. <sup>10</sup>For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all;

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but the life that He lives, He lives to God. <sup>11</sup>Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**C. Regeneration is not effected with human assistance.** We were dead (Ephesians 2:5), incapable of raising ourselves. It is a sovereign work of God.

1 Peter 1:3 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

John 6:63 – “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

*Once you recognize that regeneration does not depend on you, how might that affect your current confidence as a Christian?*

**D. Regeneration is not a process, it is instantaneous.** Nothing in the descriptions of the new birth or any teaching on regeneration even hint that it is incomplete or needs to be developed. It is complete when God bestows it.

**E. Regeneration (spiritual regeneration) is not consciously experienced.** The method is invisible, and the act humanly indiscernible. It is not consciously felt or experienced, although its *effects* will be consciously experienced.

**F. Spiritual regeneration will consummate in physical regeneration (bodily resurrection).** The Bible refers to Christ’s resurrection as “the first fruits.” This is an Old Testament term that speaks of the first fruits of the harvest; these fruits were set apart for the Lord. When used in the New Testament, “first fruits” implies a pledge of more harvest to follow. Therefore, Christ’s resurrection holds the promise of resurrection for others also.

1 Corinthians 15:20–22 - <sup>20</sup>But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. <sup>21</sup>For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

**G. Eternal Security/Salvation – Regeneration is Irreversible.**

Philippians 1:6 – being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

1 Peter 1:3-5 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

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### III. APPLICATION

**Results of regeneration.** Although regeneration is instantaneous, non-experiential, and unaided by our own effort, its effects are the basis for change. Our growth in Christ is NOT instantaneous, it DOES require our own effort, and definitely IS experienced! Regeneration is the *source* of many experiences and abilities that follow. Among these profound results are the following.

#### A. We are "new." (New creatures/ creations/ self).

2 Corinthians 5:17 – Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is **a new** creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become **new**.

Colossians 3:10–12 - (You laid aside the old self with its evil practices...) <sup>10</sup>and have put on the **new** self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— <sup>11</sup>*a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. <sup>12</sup>So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... (See also Eph 4:24)

*For example, how might you expect true regeneration to result in breaking down racial and ethnic barriers?*

#### B. We have new relationships with...

##### 1. God. We have a place in God's family as His child.

John 1:12–13 <sup>12</sup>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, <sup>13</sup>who were **born**, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but **of God**.

*Have you experienced a level of closeness with other Christians that you do not even have with your own family? Explain.*

##### 2. God's kingdom. We secure membership in Christ's Kingdom.

Colossians 1:13 - <sup>13</sup>For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and **transferred us to the kingdom** of His beloved Son,

##### 3. The Church. We have love for Christians.

1 Peter 1:22–23 - <sup>22</sup>**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**, <sup>23</sup>for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.

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### 4. Sin. We are no longer slaves to sin, but free from it.

Romans 6:6 - <sup>6</sup>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;**

Romans 6:17 - <sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ... <sup>19</sup>I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in *further* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

*Consider the sin that once enslaved you. Do you see yourself as set free? How do these verses give you hope?*

### 5. The World. We gain victory over the world.

1 John 5:4 - <sup>4</sup>For **whatever is born of God overcomes the world;** and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

### 6. Satan. We're assured of victory over the Devil.

1 John 4:4 - <sup>4</sup> You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

1 John 5:18 - <sup>18</sup>We know that no one who is born of God sins; but **He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.**

C. **New Experiences and Abilities.** Because of regeneration, which affects the whole person (i.e., intellect, emotions, and will), the Christian can:

#### 1. Receive, discern, and experientially know spiritual truth in its depth and glory.

1 Corinthians 2:14–16 - <sup>14</sup>But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. <sup>15</sup>But he **who is spiritual appraises all things**, yet he himself is appraised by no one. <sup>16</sup>For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

*Do you consider the Bible beyond understanding on your own? What do these verses say about that?*

#### 2. Have intimacy with God in prayer.

Jude 20 - <sup>20</sup>But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,

Galatians 4:6 - <sup>6</sup>Because you are sons, **God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"**



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### 3. Live a holy life for God, avoiding sin and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit.

Notice how in each of the following passages from 1 John the tense indicates a past action with continuing results. God's regeneration of a person *logically* precedes a person's righteousness, holiness, love, and belief.

1 John 2:29 - <sup>29</sup>If you know that He is righteous, you know that **everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.**

1 John 3:9 - <sup>9</sup>No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

1 John 4:7 - <sup>7</sup>Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

1 John 5:1-4 - <sup>1</sup>Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. <sup>2</sup>By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. <sup>3</sup>For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. <sup>4</sup>For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

1 John 5:18 - <sup>18</sup>We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

### 4. Become a completely different person.

Galatians 1:22-23 - (Paul speaking) <sup>22</sup> I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; <sup>23</sup> but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."

Ephesians 2:10 – For **we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

*Are there people in your life who see the difference? Have they ever noticed the change? What did they say?*

## III. CONCLUSION

What does it mean to be "born again?" To be regenerated (or to be "born again") is to have been spiritually raised from the dead, released from slavery to sin and Satan, to live a completely new life in Christ. It is to experience God's total ability in the face of our inability. To be "born again" is the crux of the Christian experience, since it shows the effects of the Father's sovereign election, Christ's atonement on the cross, the movement of the Spirit, and the conversion of a sinner to a saint.