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What Does it Mean to be "Born Again"?

John 3:3: (NASB) *Jesus answered and said to him, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

...unless one is born again. This phrase carries great meaning no matter what Christian denomination you come from. The meaning of the phrase certainly changes depending upon your particular belief system but the power of the phrase remains intact. To be "born again" in all cases implies one of the most significant spiritual changes that any person can ever experience. When does being "born again" happen and what does it really mean? Does this spiritual change happen when one is baptized as an infant or when one commits their life to God through Jesus or when one is baptized as an adult or when one dies? Is this spiritual change a prepaid one-way ticket to heaven or an opportunity for power and control in your present life or is it a sober and humbling opportunity to sacrifice all that you have and all that you are?

To find the meaning of "born again" we need to start with the context beginning at the end of the previous chapter of John: **John 2:23-25:** Jesus was drawing large crowds and many believed in him, but Jesus did not entrust himself to them. Why? **Their belief was just a beginning that would need the test of time:** **John 8:30-33:** See the doubt? They tried to fit their belief in Jesus into their preconceived ideas. They were watching how Jesus interacted with others and how he drew people in.

"Born Again" Lesson: Faith is the foundation upon which discipleship built. To be a disciple means to follow and to follow means to leave things behind - especially our preconceived ideas!

John 3:1-3: Nicodemus needs to talk with Jesus and comes to him by night. Jesus responds to him with truth. Why? Jesus saw Nicodemus' faith as one that was looking for nourishment and he fed it! Jesus chose Nicodemus because he had genuine faith of the heart and mind which is important in understanding what it means to be born again.

The process is not yet at the born again point. Similar to our conversation with Todd Alexander on how God touches our hearts, the road to being born again is a process. **Please see CQ episode from August 7, 2017, "How Does God Touch Your Heart?"** Jesus here is beginning to unfold how to understand what this whole idea of being born again is and as we will shortly see, what we typically think it means might be very different than what Jesus taught.

Born: Strong's #1080 to procreate (properly, of the father, but by extension of the mother); figuratively, to regenerate

The following examples translate this word in the sense of begetting (conceived) - not giving birth. This would be *the masculine* use of the word. In the Greek language, there is a *masculine* and *feminine* use of the same word, and they have a significantly different shade of meaning.

Matthew 1:2: (KJV) Abraham **begat <1080>** Isaac; and Isaac **begat <1080>** Jacob; and Jacob **begat <1080>** Judas and his brethren; Abraham did not give birth to Isaac, but he conceived him so that later Isaac could be born. **Matthew 1:20:** ...*fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is **conceived <1080>** in her is of the Holy Ghost (Spirit).* This is the same Strong's' word for *born*, but it is certainly not talking about when Jesus was born. It is talking about when he was begotten (conceived), which is the masculine form of the word. There is a big difference between being conceived/begotten and being born, as shown by these examples. **Philemon 1:10:** ...*whom I have **begotten <1080>** in my bonds:* Apostle Paul is talking about Onesimus to Philemon, whom he was able, by God's grace, to plant the seed of spirituality within. There is a theme here with the word *begotten*. It is from the male perspective and always focuses on the conception, not the birth. In the ancient Greek language, they used both a masculine and feminine use of the word to describe two phases of the same process.

The following examples translate this same word in the sense of giving birth. This would be *the feminine* use of the word: **Matthew 2:1:** Now when Jesus was **born <1080>** in Bethlehem... Jesus was born of a woman. Again, this same word is used for two different phases of the creation of life. **Luke 1:13:** ...*and thy wife Elisabeth shall **bear <1080>** thee a son (she shall give birth to a son), and thou shalt call his name John.*

Spirit begetting is now and is subject to our faithfulness: **1 Peter 1:3:** ...*which according to*



his abundant mercy hath **begotten <313>** (conceived) us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Begotten: Strongs #313, from #303 and #1080, to beget

"Born Again" Lesson: Discipleship is the pathway that brings us to the opportunity for spirit life. This spirit life begins with a begetting process (now) that awaits an actual spiritual birth (later).

We are differentiating between spirit begetting and spirit birth. We are suggesting spirit begetting is what happens now and spirit birth happens later. Our first two Born Again Lessons show us that faith is the foundation upon which discipleship is built, and discipleship is this pathway that brings us to the *opportunity* for spirit life. It does not *guarantee* us spirit life. We can know by further looking at Scriptures that verify the masculine and feminine uses of the word as well as looking even more deeply into our phrase in question. We have talked about the word for *born*, but what about the word *again*? This is where our discussion gets fascinating!

Born again - focusing on the word *again*.

Again: Strongs #509 from above; by analogy, from the first; by implication, anew

The word literally means "from above." How could "again" mean "from above"? Think of our English expression "take it from the top."

Nicodemus' question on the surface seems to support the thought of "again" and not "from above," but Jesus' words are pointing in a different direction. We suggest Jesus intended this word to be "from above" and he was saying, "A man needs to be begotten from above," which is a totally different meaning.

A few other uses of the word: Luke 1:3: (KJV) *It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the **very first <509>**, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus. Same word #509 - the word "very first" means "from above" or "take it from the top."* This gives the sense of a chronological unfolding.

John 3:31: (KJV) *He that cometh from **above <509>** (from heaven) is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. The word "again" does not fit or make sense. You would not say, "He that cometh from again is above..."* James 1:17: (KJV) *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from **above <509>**, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. What are we saying? We are suggesting the verses in John 3:1-7 read very differently than their typical interpretation.*

- ✦ Jesus is teaching Nicodemus that faith is a foundation on which to build discipleship. Faith is not the end of it, it is the beginning.
- ✦ True discipleship - seeing/perceiving the kingdom (verse 3) is not a natural event - it requires a begetting, a conception to a new life through God's spirit or power working in your everyday life.

John 3:3-7: (A Conservative Version) ³*Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to thee, **if any man is not begotten from above**, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This translation is not one we typically use, but we chose it because it was the simplest version that captured what we believe Jesus was teaching. **Nicodemus challenges this new, strange and spiritual thought, but he still wants to learn:** ⁴*Nicodemus says to him, how can a man be begotten, being old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's belly, and be born?* Nicodemus was thinking with a natural mind so it did not make sense to him.*

- ✦ Entering/being part of the kingdom (verse 5) requires the actions of life (the symbol of water baptism) built on faith and provoked by God's spirit.

The symbol of baptism (a full immersion) is when you are lowered back into the water - symbolically buried - and then raised back up to the newness of life. Baptism is a symbol of what takes place in your heart and mind - your begetting. It is the giving up of your will to become a true disciple. When you become a true disciple, you must leave things behind.



⁵Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to thee, if any man is not begotten from water and Spirit (God's power and influence working in your everyday life), he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Being begotten from water and Spirit does not guarantee entrance into the kingdom of God but it positions you or gives you an opportunity.

✚ Jesus now tells Nicodemus this spiritual begetting is a NEW and DIFFERENT life: ⁶That which is begotten from the flesh is flesh, and that which is begotten from the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Marvel not that I said to thee, ye must be begotten from above.

"Born Again" Lesson: To be begotten from above is to actually have a new spiritual life conceived within you. This life when proven faithful will be born to its heavenly home.

It is important to understand "begotten from above" instead of "born again."

Are we saying that the Christian phrase "born again" is commonly misapplied?

Yes, we are saying that as we critically examine the words and intentions of Jesus, his lesson points to a spirit life built upon the foundation of faith and constructed with the actions of discipleship. All of this merely *conceives* a new spiritual life that has not yet been born but has begun to develop.

When a Christian asks, "Have you been born again?" we are suggesting that the wrong idea and words are being used. None of us have been born again, but we may have been "begotten from above," in hopes of living faithfully so in the future we can be born to the spirit realm.

The next verse is just plain confusing. Who or what is it talking about? John 3:8: (KJV) *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* **It is important to understand that "wind" and "spirit" are exactly the same word. Another translation:** John 3:8: (Concordant Version) *The blast (spirit - Greek word pneuma) is blowing where it wills, and the sound of it you are hearing, but you are not aware whence it is coming and where it is going...* Jesus is saying that *the blast* - the spirit - breathes its influence where it will. None of us are privy to it. God can send His power and will wherever He chooses. You can discern the effects of the spirit but you do not know where or who it will affect next. Remember, Jesus himself was speaking to Nicodemus according to God's spirit - God's influence in Jesus' life right then! Nicodemus had no idea when he sought Jesus out to question him that the power of God's influence was going to confront him with this truth. ...*Thus, is everyone who is begotten by the water and the spirit.*

And so it is with those who have taken action as disciples and are begotten by the spirit now - you do not know who will be affected next or what you will be directed to do.

"Born Again" Lesson: Begetting by God's power and influence conceives a life that is driven by that which is above and counteracts our fallen nature. Begetting does not equal birth!

Here is what the spirit looks like in our begotten lives: There is new life! 2 Corinthians 5:17-18. **This new life is conceived through God's own power. His power helps us with all things:** Romans 8:26-27: God's spirit intercedes because God's will must be done in the life of one who went down in baptism and became a disciple of Christ and came up in that newness of life. **This newly conceived life must be sought in our decisions for we are still fallen humanity:** James 4:13-15

Back to Jesus teaching Nicodemus: John 3:9-12

"Born Again" Lesson: Begetting by God's spirit gives us all necessary spiritual sustenance to prepare for actual spiritual birth.

**Most Christians believe that being "born again" is our spirit birth.
How can we be sure that it is just the start?**

This is the core question in our discussion. We are convinced that *true spirit birth* is only attainable after the completion of a sacrificial life and we will frame this next part of our conversation in the biblical concept of regeneration. Many of our Christian friends see regeneration happening at the moment of accepting Jesus or at baptism - for some as infants, for others as adults.



Romans 6:4: There is no great euphoria here. It is talking about death and being buried with Jesus. Is this *newness of life* actual "regeneration"? No!

Regeneration: Strongs #3824 (spiritual) rebirth (the state or the act), i.e. (figuratively) spiritual renovation; specifically, Messianic restoration

This word is only used twice in the New Testament.

Matthew 19:27-28: ... in the **regeneration <3824>** when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, **you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.** THE regeneration is clearly a future time of glory when all of the faithful are in heaven with Jesus. This is spirit birth - not begettal!

If this is the case, then what is the newness of life from the previous Romans' Scripture?

Titus 3:4-7: ... by the washing of **regeneration <3824>** (this washing of regeneration is now) and **renewing <342>** (renovation) by the Holy Spirit, *whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.*

Renewing: Strongs #342 renovation

Many of our Christian friends, especially those of the Catholic persuasion, baptize infants and look at that as *washing of regeneration* to a new life with God. We see this as a tremendous error in scriptural understanding! The newness is the privilege to be called to and prepared for the hope of a spiritual life based on grace, faith and the actions of discipleship. Washed for the end purpose of THE regeneration. *so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

Ephesians 1: 13-14: The gift of God's spirit is *the earnest of our inheritance*. This is like an engagement ring. When you have an engagement ring you are not actually married. Marriage is a guarantee of what will happen as long as you stay faithful to that promise. *This washing of regeneration* is the preparation for us to be clean for the work in heaven. Revelation 2:10: (KJV) *...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* A surgeon washes his hands *in preparation* before operating. The washing is not operating, but operating should not happen if washing and preparation does not take place first. The washing of regeneration is the *preparing* of our lives for our future heavenly work. We also need our minds renovated to handle such work. We are not born again now. We are begotten from above. We are preparing to be part of the ministry of reconciliation. Everyone who believes in the name of Jesus does not end up being part of that ministry. You must put yourself in a position so God can trust you with eternity. Romans 12:2: (NASB) *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing <342>** (renovation) of your mind....* The transformation happens after the begettal of God's spirit. The embryo is growing and developing over time. Our job now is not to be born again but is to be begotten from above. Being born again was not the point Jesus was making to Nicodemus. The point is that we are "begotten" from above.

This work can only be completed when we have completed our transformation:

1 Corinthians 15:50,53: What we are is not what we will be. *The old things are passed away and all things will become new.* This new creature is begotten from above with the capacity to be born into the spirit realm. **We are now children of God running to be chosen sons of God - thoroughly transformed and crystallized in character to live with Jesus:** 1 John 3:2-3: Spirit birth is a hope, not a guarantee. Being begotten from above is the beginning of a process.

"Born Again" Lesson: Begettal by God's spirit is God's merciful and loving way of making us ready for the extraordinary mantle of responsibility of heavenly birth and fellowship with Jesus

God gives us the opportunity for this incredible work. This work must be done by someone who is trustworthy. You do not become trustworthy unless God calls you, you answer the call, and then God begets you with His spirit. We are begotten from above - *not* born again - so we can work our way toward being faithful unto death to then be born again.

So, what does it mean to be "born again"?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!