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Born Again

The term “born again” is a very common term among the Christian community. Generally, the experience is explained as the beginning of a new life serving Jesus Christ. The born again process, however, is not taught the same way by every group. I went through the process twice: The first time I was 13. All I did was answer an altar call and then I was baptized by immersion the same day. The second time was at a different church and I was 17. Only this time I received Bible studies first, which were the Church’s creeds, then I was baptized by immersion. One popular concept is for one to get on their knees and say a certain sinner’s prayer and then, and then just believe they are born again. Other churches have similar teachings but use baptism by sprinkling instead of immersion. (Note: baptize is a Greek word which means “immerse”) All these different groups use the Bible to support their “born again” theory.

The disciples were with Jesus over three years and they baptized people, probably following the tradition of John the Baptist (Mk 1:4). However Jesus never literally baptized anyone (Jn 4:1-2). Why? Because literal baptism is a symbol of being inwardly immersed in the word of God. John said: **Mt 3:11:** *I indeed immerse you in water unto repentance: but the [one] coming after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear [take up & wear]: he shall immerse you in a Holy spirit, and fire:* (Greek) [supplied] It is a Bible teacher who shares with a person, the water of the word (Eph 5:26) and his personal experiences with God to bring them to repentance. Repentance in inward concerning the direction of a person’s thinking, and it is “words” that do the cleansing (Jn 15:3). So, where does the “born again” experience fit in the process?

It is in John chapter three where the “born again” is mentioned by Jesus in answer to the inquiry of Nicodemus. Jesus told him, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,* (Jn 3:3). Was Nicodemus serving God at the time he came to talk with Jesus? Of course he was. He was a ruler of the Pharisees, who were religious people serving God according to the way they understood Jewish teachings from the law (today = Old Testament). So, he had been through the repentant stage, but he was not born again. Jesus was actually giving him the next steps to finish the process of spiritual completion.

Go back to the disciples - they walked with Jesus over three years, and were sent to preach the gospel, to cast out unclean spirits, heal the sick and to preach that the “kingdom of heaven” is at hand (Mt 10:1-8), but were they born again? According to what Jesus told Peter, they were not: Right before his fall Jesus warned him: **Lk 22:31-32:** *31. ... Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: 32. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted ⁽¹⁹⁹⁴⁾, strengthen thy brethren.* The Greek word for “converted” is the same here as in Acts 3:19, discussed below under Kingdom of God. This was a real eye opener when I realized the Peter, as well as the other disciples, were still in the conversion process. After the cross, Peter followed the Lord’s admonition to strengthen his brethren: **1 Pet 1:22-23:** *22. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the spirit unto unfeigned (undisguised) love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: 23. Being born again ⁽³¹³⁾, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides for ever.* The phrase “born again” literally should be “born in the midst” - i.e. in the mind, heart. The proof of being born inwardly is the manifestation of love toward each other. The corruptible and incorruptible seed are

another way of comparing the earthly and heavenly.

Consider more closely the Greek translated born again. The words literally mean *born from above*. The International Standard, New International Standard, Young and New Jerusalem Bibles use the term “born from above.” Nicodemus, in his mind, was thinking of the literal first birth when he asked the question, *How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?* (Verse 4) He totally missed the word “from above.” The Greek word for “again” is *another* ⁽⁵⁰⁹⁾, the proper meaning is *from above, from a higher place*. By implication, it means *anew* (some translations), *again, from the beginning, from the top* (temple veil rent). Out of 13 appearances, five of which appear in John’s writings, the word is used three times in this chapter. Note verse 31: *He that cometh from above* ⁽⁵⁰⁹⁾ *is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaks of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all* (and speaks of the heaven - implied). Jesus said: **Jn 3:13:** *And no one has ascended into the heaven, but he that came down out, the Son of man, who is in the heaven* (Greek Interlinear). Jesus was standing on the earth in front of Nicodemus, so it can be seen here that, when he referred to himself in the third person as being in the heaven that he referred to his mental state - i.e. he was hearing and doing what his Father told him. (Cf Jn 8:26-27, 29, 38; 12:49-50)

This agrees with Jam 1:17: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights...* Here are others verses from James that go with John 3:31: Jam 3:14-17: *14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. 15 This wisdom descends not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. 16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy (compassion) and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy - i.e. to be born from above is to have God’s character of love, with which no one starts in their Christian walk.*

As did Jesus, James also makes a distinction between earthly and heavenly wisdom: “Earthly” wisdom is devilish (demonic) versus “heavenly” wisdom which is from the Father of lights and which manifests the attributes of love, described in 1 Corinthians 13. When these verses are connected with John 3:3, the “new birth” experience is from above, from the Father of lights, the result of a change taking place in the heart and which brings forth the character of love. I can testify from experience that when I committed to following Christ there was a change in my life. But did I immediately have a spirit that was *peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*. **No**, I did not, and neither does anyone who first comes to Jesus. So, to be born from above is not instant, but a process of growing into the attributes listed above - seeing and entering God’s ways and His way of thinking (cf Isa 55:6-11). Go back to John 3 and we will more closely examine the words of Jesus.

Actually, Jesus divides the born from above experience: **Jn 3:3, 5:** 3. *...Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* 5. *...Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* Are seeing the kingdom of God, and entering the kingdom of God the same? Absolutely not! Considering the story of Adam and Eve having been literally removed from the Garden of Eden, and cherubim and a flaming sword were placed at the entrance, they could see the garden, but they could not enter (Gen 3:23-24). What is the kingdom of God?

Kingdom of God: Compare what John the Baptist and Jesus said in these two verses: Mt 3:2: *...Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Mk 1:15: *...The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.* First, “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are interchangeable terms. Next, a person has to “repent” and “believe” the good news (gospel). The original for “repent” is *metanoeo* ⁽³³⁴⁰⁾, which means *to think differently, reconsider*. Here is the word in **Acts 3:19:** *Repent* ⁽³³⁴⁰⁾ *ye*

therefore, and be converted ⁽¹⁹⁹⁴⁾, *that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.* Since “repent” has to do with the thinking, then “be converted” has to do with changing the way you think about God, your life and your relations with others. Therefore, the kingdom of God has to do with God’s way of thinking. Repentance is the beginning of conversion, and conversion is a process whereby the thinking is changed from man’s (earthly) to God’s (heavenly). THIS comes before seeing the kingdom of God. Therefore, a new Christian who has just accepted Christ is just beginning the conversion process, and is not born from above.

Four things happen in the overall process: 1) repentance - turn from our worldly ways and thoughts (deliverance from Egypt a type); 2) conversion - the time as a spiritual child when a person is under the law (wilderness experience a type); 3) see - i.e. understand that God’s thoughts are not like man’s thoughts (enter the promised land, Jericho falls {a type for a mind-set governed by the law}); 4) enter the way God’s thinks, and keep His ways (deliverance from Babylon a type). Sin begins with a thought, so sins are NOT blotted out of a literal book in heaven, but reconsidering and thinking differently blots out your sin. Therefore, as your way of thinking is changed into God’s way of thinking, your sins are being blotted out of your mind and your outward actions change.

Born of water and spirit: *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* Peter connected seed with being born again (1 Pet 1:23). God uses people to plant seed and to water it. Paul used this analogy: **1 Cor 3:5-6**: *5. Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? 6. I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.* Paul planted seed, Apollos watered it and the Spirit of God gave the increase by confirming in their hearts that what Paul and Apollos were teaching was true. We are cleansed by words (Eph 5:26; Jn 15:3) and the words spoken to the heart is the Spirit (Jn 6:63) of the Father through the Son (Jn 8:26).

Summary: Nicodemus, a Pharisee serving God according to his Jewish upbringing, was in the conversion stage. Jesus simply met him where he was and gave him the steps to complete the spiritual birth process. **Jn 3:6-8**: *6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh (man’s thoughts); and that which is born of the Spirit (Christ’s thoughts, Jn 6:63) is spirit. 7. Do not wonder that I said unto you, it is needful for you to be born from above. 8. The Spirit breaths where it desires, and you hear the voice of it, but know not from where it comes, and where it goes: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* (Greek Interlinear)

Jn 3:14-15: *14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* Under the law (Moses a type) self (serpent a figure of) is lifted up by keeping the law according to a man’s understanding. To me at first, obeying God was to stop drinking, swearing, go to church on a certain day, etc. But now, must the Son of man (Jesus) be lifted into the heavens. Being baptized by the Spirit is to enter the understanding the Son of God and the cross, which enables us to see the serpent in self, and follow God’s ways. To be baptized in fire (cf Jer 23:29) is to allow the word of God burn away the iniquity in our hearts. Water cleanses but fire destroys, and we want to be completely rid of our sinful thoughts and worldly ways.

Jn 3:16-17: *16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* **2 Tim 2:7**: *Consider what I say (water); and the Lord give thee understanding (spirit & fire) in all things.* Amen!