

Chapter One

Born Again

What does it mean to be born again, to be saved? What does it really mean to be a Christian? Does it mean that we believe certain things in the Bible about God and Jesus Christ and about life? Yes, it does. We take God at His Word that what He reveals to us in the Bible about Himself and about sin and life and salvation is true.

But to be a Christian means more than believing certain precepts and promises. When you accept what God says about your need to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior something **happens** to you. You are changed in a fundamental and qualitative way. Here is how the apostle John put it in the beginning of his gospel.

But as many as received Him,
to them He gave the right to
become children of God, to
those who believe in His name
(John 1:12)

Everyone who receives Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior from sin, all who believe in him are given the privilege of becoming the children of God. Now, this doesn't mean a child of God in a general sense in that God is the Creator of all humanity. The Greek word translated "children" is teknon which refers to a child by natural descent.

And so, just as a natural child has qualities received from his or her parents, so we as children of God receive something of the life of God in us. There is a special DNA connection if you will between us and God. Once we were not children of God. But a change has taken place and now we are. And here is another thing that happens to us when we trust in Christ for salvation.

And of His fullness we have all
received, and grace for grace.
(John 1:16)

Placing our faith in Christ we receive of his fullness. The Greek word for "fullness" pleroma was used in classical Greek for a ship filled with cargo, sailors, soldiers and a captain. The ship had everything it needed to set sail and do its task. And so when we are saved and born again we are filled with the presence and power and riches of the life of God in Christ. And always coming to us is one

wave of God's grace after another. What it means to be a Christian is that we have the nature and life of God in Christ in us. This is the supreme glory of the Christian life.

There are so many people in our world who are longing for something to happen to them to improve their lives. Perhaps they feel frustrated, dead and empty inside. Or perhaps they feel pretty good about themselves, but somehow know that life could be better. Something more is needed, something is missing.

Someone who was very much like this was a man named Nicodemus. In the world's opinion Nicodemus was a good and successful man. He was a good religious man. He was a Pharisee, a man devoted to God's law. He was a master teacher of the Bible. But Nicodemus had heard Jesus teach and he had seen the miracles. And he felt there was something about Jesus that he needed in his life. So one night he went to meet Christ.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."
(John 3:1-3)

Nicodemus was a deeply religious man. He was highly educated and held a powerful position in society. But he lacked one thing. And Jesus Christ cut to the chase in the conversation.¹ Jesus said, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The kingdom of God is what Nicodemus hoped for all of his life.² But without being born again Nicodemus would never see it.

This brings me back to where I started. What does it mean to be a Christian? Does it mean you were raised in a Christian family and went to

¹ "Cut to the chase" is an American figure of speech derived from the car chase scene in movies. The figure of speech indicates the most exciting or crucial part of something

² The Kingdom of God upon this earth is the ultimate biblical hope of God's people. It is the time when the history of sinful man is over and the Lord Jesus Christ and God rule this earth forever in righteousness. God's people will live forever in peace, in intimate fellowship with their Creator on an earth restored to paradise. See Mark 1:14, 15. See also Psalm 2, Isaiah 2:4; 11:6-9; 9:6, 7,27; 35:6, 7; 41:18, 19, Daniel 7:13, 14, Matthew 19:28, Luke 1:33-35, Acts 3:20-21; Romans 3:17, Colossians 3:4. Revelation 5:9, 10; 21, 22

church? Does it mean that you have accepted certain beliefs or that you strive to live a moral life? The answer is no. To be a Christian means that you have new life has been given to you. Something of the quality and character of the life of God is in you. You have been changed at the very core of who you are.

You are still you only new and improved. Your life can now be lived differently than before, with more faith, hope, joy and peace and moral fortitude. There is a common assumption about Christianity that it only involves ideas and morals and points of view and various doctrines. But before you can really grow in Christian knowledge and behavior you need life. This is because naturally, on our own we are dead in sin. The apostle Paul elaborated on this.

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
(Ephesians 2:1-3)

This is such a sobering statement! Before our faith in Christ, before being born again, we are physically alive, but spiritually we are dead in trespasses and sins. So we need to be given spiritual life—new life, we need to be born again, born of God.

All of us are born physically with a nature or temperament inclined to sin. We don't all commit gross sins, but we all sin, we all fall short of the glory of God.³ In Psalm 51:5 David wrote,

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.

This does not mean that the manner in which David was conceived was sinful. In this psalm David was confessing his own sin. The New Living Translation of the Bible gets to the heart of the matter. It reads,

³ Romans 3:23

For I was born a sinner—
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.

You do not have to teach a child to lie or to be selfish or to do any other bad thing. It is our nature received from our first father, Adam.⁴ But in love, mercy and grace God brought forth another man, Jesus Christ, who loved God and lived a righteous life. Then he gave his life as a sacrifice for our sins.⁵ Then God raised Christ up from the dead to prove that our sins were forgiven.⁶ And just as Adam brought forth generations of sinners, Jesus Christ brings forth people who are saved from sin, whom God regenerates and makes new. Here is what the apostle Peter says.

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, ²³ having been born
again, not of corruptible seed but
incorruptible, through the word of
God which lives and abides forever,
(1 Peter 1:22, 23)

When we obey the truth of God's Word and receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior new life is planted within us. This is a new nature that enables us to rise above our sinful nature. Again, let's allow Peter to explain.

Grace and peace be multiplied to
you in the knowledge of God and
of Jesus our Lord, ³ as His divine
power has given to us all things that
pertain to life and godliness, through
the knowledge of Him who called us
by glory and virtue, ⁴ by which
have been given to us exceedingly
great and precious promises, that
through these you may be partakers
of the divine nature, having escaped
the corruption *that is* in the world

⁴ Romans 5:12, 17, 18, 19. Every person receives from Adam physical life and a sin nature. We are all born with an anti-God, self-centered, corrupted nature. This is designated in the Bible as the carnal mind or the mind set on the flesh (Romans 8:7), the old man or old self (Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9), and the flesh (Romans 7:8; 8:8; Galatians 5:18-21)

⁵ Isaiah 53:4-6; Romans 5:6-11

⁶ Romans 4:24-5:1

through lust.
(2 Peter 1:2-4)

When we believe the great and precious promises in the Bible about Jesus Christ God performs the great miracle of giving us a new birth. We are no longer just flesh with a sin nature. We are partakers of the divine nature.⁷ The life of God is in us and we become His children. We do not become little gods, but 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares that we have become a new creation. God's Spirit is in us and our new inclination in life is to live for God. The apostle John wrote,

If you know that He is righteous,
you know that everyone who
practices righteousness is born
of Him.
(1 John 2:29)

When we are truly born again of God's Spirit, when we are partakers of the divine nature, we will strive to live a righteous life. We will sin from time to time, because we are not yet fully perfected (and we will see this more clearly in another chapter). But the bent or new inclination of our lives, because of our new nature, is to live for God. Again from John.

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. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. ³For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

⁴For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

⁵Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?
(1 John 5:1-5)

⁷ This is the fulfillment of the great promise of God concerning the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:40; Ezekiel 36:25-27).

How do we know that we are born again or born of God?. The answer is we strive to live a righteous life. We believe that Jesus is the Christ, our Lord and Savior. We strive to love all other believers and we follow God's commandments. We have the power to overcome the temptations and deceptions and delusions of the world. To be born of God is to have the very life of God with in you!

The Greek word "of" in "born of God" is the preposition ek. And it means out from the very center of something. If God were represented by a large circle and a line was drawn from the center of the circle into you that would be the representation of the Greek preposition ek.

When we are born again of imperishable seed, the life of God renews who we are. Being born again we can overcome the sinful habits of our old nature. We can overcome the pressures and temptations of the world. Those who are born again can understand and believe God's Word to experience His love, peace and joy. And those who are born again will receive everlasting life and glory in the coming kingdom of God.