

Religion

What does it mean to be 'born again'?

Many churches today do not teach what it means to be born again. Jesus said it is essential to have the experience if one wishes to enter His kingdom. (1)

Only recently did I fully understand what happened to me many years ago as I sat in a Bible study group and the following verses leaped from the written page to change my life:

"COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST. TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU AND LEARN FROM ME, FOR I AM GENTLE AND LOWLY IN HEART, AND YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. FOR MY YOKE IS EASY AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT." (2)

At that instant, I became a new person (3) and my life's priorities began to change. For the first time, I felt the warm glow of His presence.

The reason the experience is so little understood is because people try to reason it with their sense knowledge. The human mind cannot comprehend that it is God's Spirit entering into the human heart which does the work. (4)

THE DECISION WE MAKE IS TO ALLOW JESUS' SPIRIT TO LIVE IN US; IT IS NOT MERELY A HUMAN DECISION TO LIVE A BETTER LIFE.

This is the reason it is impossible to force another into a born-again experience. It is also the reason that churches who think it is a human decision eventually die spiritually. It is a miracle performed by God, not man!

Hope for Tomorrow



To the extent that we are willing to place God's interests ahead of our own is the extent that the living Jesus can take up residence within use.

Many avoid the experience because they have watched those whom Paul terms "carnal" (5) claiming a 'born again' experience but living no differently than the unsaved. These people interpret scriptures with sense knowledge rather than through God's Spirit, and still live in the flesh rather than in the realm of the spirit.

When a person's heart is fertile soil and ready for planting, God's Spirit plants an "incorruptible seed" (6) within it. The seed is eternal and cannot decay. It is not human in origin nor can it be understood by human reason.

When God planted the seed in Mary's womb, it gave birth to Jesus. When God plants a seed in our hearts, Jesus' life begins there also - a spiritual birth rather than a physical birth. It means that Jesus can live in many people throughout the world at the same time.

Christians sometimes make the error of thinking they can create a born-again Christian by a super-selling job, but all it does is annoy. We must remember you and I can only sow seeds; we cannot give

them life. Humans are incapable of creating either physical or spiritual life! God alone is the Creator.

If we have truly given our hearts to Jesus, we will keep His commandments (7) especially the commandment to "love one another." (8) Just as we can tell the type of tree by its fruit, Jesus said of Christians, "by their fruit you will recognize them." (9) Paul mentions the kind of fruits one might expect a Christian to produce: "love, joy,

peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." (10)

The born-again experience helps one produce good fruits, but the production of good fruits doesn't give one a born-again experience! Only God's Spirit can birth one into the spiritual life but, once born, each baby chooses how much of himself he is willing to leave behind.

If we claim the miracle of new

birth into the world of the Spirit, we must produce good fruits to prove it. Otherwise, our claim does not ring true.

NIV - Jn 3:3; Mt 11:28-30; 2 Cor 5:17; Jn 3:8; 1 Cor 3:3; 1 Pe 1:23; Jn 14:15; 13:35; Mt 7:20; Gal 5:22-23

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Can the law save?

This writer does not wear clerical garb, but somehow when he visits a church away from home, someone is apt to step up to him and ask: "Are you by any chance a minister?"

Acts 13 tell how this once happened to Paul and Barnabas. They had entered a synagogue as strangers and simply sat down to listen. After "the reading of the law and the prophets," however, the leaders of the service sent someone to ask them: "Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on" (Vers. 14 and 15). Somehow Paul and Barnabas had been recognized as men of God.

The custom at that time was to read a passage from the Law and then some passages in which the prophets urged the

TWO MINUTES

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people to observe the Law. This was followed by an exhortation by one or more of the religious leaders present.

Well, Paul did have a word of exhortation for the people, but it would be somewhat of a surprise. Getting to the point of his message, he preached to them Christ and the resurrection, and closed his talk with the words: "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that *through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*" (Vers. 38 and 39).

This was the gist of his "exhortation." Don't trust in the Law for salvation—trust in Christ, who fulfilled the Law

and died for your sins. This makes sense, and it agrees with the Bible as a whole. "By the Law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20): "it was added because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19): "for as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse" (Gal. 3:10); but "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law." (Rom. 3:28).

It should be obvious that the Law can only condemn sinners, but it is also a fact that Christ died for sinners, to save them from the condemnation of the Law. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

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