

“Born Again – the Means”
John 3:1-18

July 22, 2012

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^A John 1:12-13

^B Colossians 1:14, John 1:13

^C Hebrews 10:14, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 5:23, Ephesians 2:10

^D John 1:13, John 3:5-6, 8, Titus 3:5, Ephesians 2:4-5

^E Romans 8:29, 7:22, 2 Peter 1:4, 2 Cor. 5:17, Ephesians 4:24

^F Romans 10:17

A. Introduction

1. 'Born Again'

- a. it is a familiar term
- b. familiar not only to us who are worshipping together this morning
- c. but familiar to many people who seldom, if ever, attend church
- d. there was even a popular song a few years back
 - (A) written by three songwriters—{2}.
 - (B) made popular in the duet by Maria Carey and John Legend
 - (C) "With You I'm Born Again" – but it has nothing to do with the Scriptural term, 'born again' but merely of the fulfilment found in a relationship between a man and a woman
- e. so neither is the way that 'born again' is popularly used by the world
 - (A) as describing the recovery from some trauma or depression
 - (B) or a psychological term for reformation
 - (C) which have a loose relationship to its use in Scripture
 - (D) but are quite misleading if we use them as its definition
- f. the world at large uses it to brand a certain group of Christians
 - (A) those who are vocal about their faith
 - (B) those who are fundamental, evangelical, or conservative
 - (C) those who are seen as 'far right', as extremist, or as proclaiming a 'holier than thou' attitude
- g. and even we Christians use the term sometimes in this fashion when we refer to someone as being a 'real, born-again Christian'
- h. but as our Scripture reading this morning shows,
 - (A) to be 'born again' in a Biblical sense, is to be a Christian;
 - (B) and to be a Christian, is to be 'born again' –
 - (C) you cannot have the one without the other –
 - (D) as we just read a few moments ago, 'Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again (or, born from above) he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" (John 3:3) –

and I think the Bible shows us that both meanings of the word apply.

- i. being born again can be referred to as the new birth, as being made alive, as being a new creature, or very frequently by the Latin word, regeneration which simply means rebirth or re-begetting

2. The Means of Being Born Again

- a. for some months now, I have been burdened to speak on this subject

(A) to teach about the means and the effect of being born again

(B) we cannot really be adequately deal with this subject in just two messages, but nevertheless

(1) today we shall look at the means: the meaning of being born again and how it is realized or appropriated by a person

(2) and, Lord willing, in two weeks we shall look together at the effect being born again has; at how it is recognized

(C) because, if it has no visible effect, then the world is right to speak with scorn and a sneer about 'born-again Christians'

- b. being born again, therefore, is not a theological abstraction but an aspect of salvation that is vitally important to everyone.

B. A Distinct Aspect of Salvation

1. we believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures

a. inspiration is God's truth spoken through human personality

b. that means that quite apart from the subject matter, the books written by Paul do not sound like those written by John; nor that by Mark, like that by Matthew; nor Isaiah, like Ezekiel

c. the Holy Spirit moved each of these to write using his own idiom or manner of expression, in language familiar to himself

d. however, we believe also that the Scriptures are verbally inspired; inspired in each and every word used

e. this means that every word used in the original Greek or Hebrew was the word that the Holy Spirit moved the writer to use

f. therefore, when we make distinctions in God's truth based on the words used, we are not merely splitting hairs, but honouring the work of the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate Author of Scripture

- g. that is why, for example, it is important to distinguish between righteousness and holiness; between forgiveness and cleansing; and between the various aspects that together are described as salvation
2. with that thought in mind, let us talk for a moment about some of the various aspects of salvation and their relation to being born again – doing so may help us to clarify in our minds what being born again means
- a. being born again is not the same as conversion
- (A) conversion has the meaning of turning around, and it is the 180° turn from sin to God
 - (B) the Bible refers to the turning from sin as repentance
 - (C) and to the turning to God as faith, whereby a person casts himself upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus for salvation
 - (D) conversion – the combined experience of repentance and faith, or, as sometimes it is put, repentant faith – involves action by the person himself; although, of course, this take place at the moving or impetus of the Holy Spirit in a person's life
 - (E) on the other hand, being born again, is the direct work of God, not involving action on man's part: John 1:12-13, '[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, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.](#)' – receiving Him involves man's part, but being born does not
- b. being born again is not the same as justification
- (A) justification is judicial: God looks upon the sinner and accounts or imputes Christ's righteousness to the sinner's credit, so that in Christ the believer is considered righteous; it is positional, where we stand in position to the law and to God the Judge
 - (B) being born again is a concrete act of God which effects a real change respecting a Christian's nature; it is a transformational work of God that enables practical righteousness in the believer
- c. being born again is not the same as forgiveness
- (A) forgiveness is the discarding by God of the debt that has been incurred by our sin, deliberately remitting of the penalty that we should be paying, because Jesus Christ has paid that penalty
 - (B) '[in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.](#)' (Colossians 1:14) – forgiveness dissolves the creditor-debtor relationship that exists between sinful man and a righteous God
 - (C) but being born again enables and establishes a new and positive Father-child relationship between

man and his God – ‘... to them He gave the right to become children of God, ...’

d. being born again is not the same as sanctification

(A) sanctification is also a work of the Holy Spirit in the establishing of believers as God’s own holy people; it is a work

(1) that has taken place at a definite time in the past, Hebrews 10:14, ‘For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.’ (Hebrews 10:14)

(2) but also taking place in the believer’s life, ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification ...’ (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

(3) and which should continue to take place in future, as in Paul prays in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, ‘Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, ...’

(B) in contrast, being born again is uniformly described in Scripture as taking place at the inception of salvation; it is a one time act by the creative word of God, Ephesians 2:10, ‘For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.’ and as such it can be seen that it is preparatory for sanctification.

e. however, all these, and other, aspects of salvation are related and work together so it is fruitless to try to assess their relative precedence

(A) so let us now turn and look at ...

C. Being Born Again – The Scriptural Description

1. The Process

a. as I have already noted, being born again is just one expression of a number in Scripture that we describe together as ‘regeneration’

b. other words used are those meaning ‘to beget, to beget again, to bear or give birth’, as well as ‘to create’ (as in Ephesians 2:10 which we just read) as well as ‘to make alive with, to quicken with’

c. it is carried out according to the will of God, not the will of man

(A) that was the message of John 1:13, ‘... who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.’

(B) none of us had any say in our being born; in their rebellious times I have heard my children say, ‘well I didn’t ask to be born!’

- (C) this is likewise true to of this spiritual birth, being born again
- (D) Jesus made this analogous truth clear, 'Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'" (John 3:5-6)
- (E) the two types of birth are similar yet very distinct
 - (1) birth by water, that is of the flesh, is natural
 - (2) birth by the Spirit is spiritual; so we note that ...
- (F) our human parentage does not determine our spiritual one
- d. being born again, though a invisible act of God manifests itself in its effects; this is clearer in the Greek (and Hebrew) where the same word means both spirit and wind; John 3:8, "'The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'"
 - e. It is not the result of works, but of God's mercy: 'He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration (literally, the being born again) and renewing by the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5) – and note again one more time that it is the specific work of God the Holy Spirit
 - f. it is by this being born again, that takes a person who is dead in sin – that is every one of us in the world ever since Adam and Eve – and makes them now spiritually alive: Ephesians 2:4-5, 'But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)'

2. The Product

- a. so being born again: the new birth or the birth from above, has the product of imparting the new, spiritual life into a person; a new life that affects a radical change in the governing disposition of the soul
- b. why is it so radical? ... it is the first step in our becoming '... conformed to the image of His Son ...' (Romans 8:29) , of our becoming '... partakers of the divine nature ...' (2 Peter 1:4)
- c. and the Bible has a number of ways of naming that nature in which that new, spiritual life resides, such as
 - (A) a new creation or creature: 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new

creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.'

(B) a new man or self, 'and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.' (Ephesians 4:24)

(C) or the inner or inward man, Romans 7:22, 'For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man'

d. as before noted, Lord willing, in two weeks we will look some more at the effect of this new, spiritual nature brought about by being born again, and in particular in contrast with our persisting old nature, also referred to as the flesh or being carnal; among other places, we shall look particularly to Romans 7-8 and 1 John on this subject.

D. Being Born Again – How Is It Achieved?

1. A Great Paradox

- a. the Bible says on the one hand that it is by the will of God and not the will of man – that being born again is totally outside the will and purpose a man or a woman
- b. on the other hand, Jesus told Nicodemus of his need to be born again – and Nicodemus evidently listened, because in the most difficult hour, the time when alliance with Christ meant being thrown out of the synagogue or even death, this ruler in Israel forsook his own safety and allied Himself with Christ, together with Joseph of Arimathea giving the Lord Jesus a proper burial
- c. how do we reconcile these two?

2. The Wrong Means of Being Born Again

a. Water baptism will not bring the new birth

- (A) as important as it is, you could be baptized with water – be it by sprinkling, pouring or dipping – every day of the week and twice on Sunday; and never, ever be born again
- (B) the teaching of baptismal regeneration is an ancient heresy that is found even in supposedly evangelical churches today
- (C) rather it takes the Holy Spirit's washing of regeneration of which we read in Titus 3:5

b. Partaking of the Lord's Supper will not bring the new birth

- (A) that ordinance preaches the gospel but does not impart it

- (B) it is a means of grace only to the extent it teaches the gospel
- c. The church or church membership will not bring the new birth
 - (A) neither this church nor any other church
 - (B) nor its pastor, nor its evangelist, nor its priest, nor anyone else
 - (C) can make a person born again
 - (D) it is by the will of God; not the will of man
- d. Good deeds will not bring about being born again
 - (A) those are merely exercises of the will of man
- e. so let us turn to ...

3. God's Means of Being Born Again

- a. the paradox we stated can be somewhat reconciled by the fact that the various aspects of salvation are intricately interwoven the one with the other; they do not exist nor operate in isolation
- b. in this passage we read, as well as some of the verses that we have quoted, the answer is given – that answer is repentant faith
- c. when God's Holy Spirit lays upon a person a conviction of their sin
- d. when they see themselves as lost and unable to stand before Holy God
- e. and through the hearing of the gospel, the preached word of God
- f. [`So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.`](#) (Romans 10:17); and with that faith
- g. regeneration takes place; a person is born again by the will of God
- h. let us read again those closing verses, John 3:16-18; [`For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.`](#)

E. Conclusion – believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, in His work accomplished for us on the cross: that is the step necessary, the God-given means whereby a person may be born again and become a child of God.

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On the subject of regeneration, the following are useful references

- *Systematic Theology*, by Louis Berkhof, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1959
- *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, Everett F. Harrison, Editor-in-Chief; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1981; article by James I. Packer.
- *In Understanding Be Men*, by T. C. Hammond as revised and edited by David F. Wright, Inter-Varsity Press, 6th Edition, 1968
- *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, 4th Edition, 1935 (*although this confuses regeneration with conversion, &c., it has a clear summary of the various aspects of regeneration itself. I know that the late Colonel (Dr) Earl Robinson and others were involved in revising this Handbook, but I do not have a copy to see if this distinction was clarified in this later edition.*)

2. “*With You I’m Born Again*” by Rudy Amado Perez, Carol Connors, David L. Shire; Lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group, EMI Music Publishing