

“You must be born again” John 3:7

What does it mean to be ‘born again’?

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

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. John 3:5

First--what does it mean to be human?

Then God said, “**Let us make man in our image**, after our likeness...” Genesis 1:26a

Being made in the image of God, **humans are triune beings**. God is three persons, one essence (Trinity); we are each one person but three essential parts (body, soul and spirit).

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23

And the LORD God formed man **of the dust of the ground [physical body]**, and breathed into his nostrils **the breath [spirit] of life**; and man became **a living soul**. Genesis 2:7

Salvation is three-fold: past, present and future

Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who **delivered us** [past] **from so great a death**, and **does deliver** [present]: in whom we trust that **He will yet deliver** [future] us. 2 Corinthians 1:10-11

And these three tenses correspond to spirit, soul and body.

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God:

righteousness and **sanctification** and **redemption**. 1 Corinthians 1:30

Righteousness has to do with the spirit.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to **the spirits of the righteous made perfect**. Hebrews 12:22-23

Sanctification has to do with our desires, our habits, our thinking, our choices—ie. the soul.

For this is the will of God, your **sanctification**; that is, that you **abstain** from sexual immorality [and every other kind of sin]; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel [σκεῦος *skeuos* : ‘vessel’, container, jar] in sanctification and honour. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4

Redemption is normally to do with our full bodily resurrection.

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, **the redemption of our bodies**. Romans 8:23
(see also Luke 21:28, Ephesians 4:30)

We have been saved from the **penalty** of sin – our spirits have been justified by faith;

we are being saved from the **power** of sin – our souls are being sanctified;

and we will be saved from the **presence** of sin – our bodies will be glorified when Jesus returns.

Since the Fall, people are Spiritually Dead

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you shall not eat, for **in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.**"
Genesis 2:16-17

"Therefore, just as **sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin**, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law [of Moses] was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like **the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.**"
Romans 5:12-14

And **you were dead in your trespasses and sins**, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, **of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.** Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath**, even as the rest.
Ephesians 2:1-3

Since the Resurrection, we can be Born Again

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who by His great mercy has caused us to be **born again** to a living hope **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.** 1 Peter 1:3

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of **regeneration** and renewal of the Holy Spirit...
Titus 3:5

And **God raised us up with Christ** and **seated us with him in the heavenly realms** in Christ Jesus.
Ephesians 2:6

...He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced **when they saw the Lord.** So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**" Jn 21:20-22

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made **a living soul**; the last Adam [ie. Jesus] was made **a life-giving spirit.**
1 Corinthians 15:45

Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.** The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
2 Corinthians 5:17

But he that is joined to the Lord is **one spirit** with Him.
1 Corinthians 6:17

This was prophesied in the Old Testament...

Jesus answered him, "**Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?**"

And **I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.** And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.
Ezekiel 36:26

I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart."
Jeremiah 24:7

"Moreover **the LORD your God will circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live." Deut. 30:6

Some of the benefits we receive through being born again were available before the resurrection (eg. justification by faith):

*"For this commandment which I command you **today** is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach...But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it."*

Deuteronomy 30:11,14 (quoted again by Paul in Romans 10:6-8)

*For what does the Scripture say? "**Abraham** believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."...**David also** speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works...*

Romans 4:3,6

But the fullness was not available until now, after the resurrection:

*By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were **later** to receive. Up to that time **the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.***

John 7:39

And not only since the Resurrection can we have the Holy Spirit welling up within us, but since Pentecost we can have the Holy Spirit poured out upon us!

NB: Note the difference between John 21 (regeneration) and Acts 2 (baptism of power).

How do we know if someone is born again?

*...**no one** can say "Jesus is Lord" **except by the Holy Spirit.*** 1 Corinthians 12:3

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God... 1 John 5:1

***If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.*

Romans 10:9-10

We can have personal assurance:

***The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit** that we are God's children.* Romans 8:16

And we can have confidence in others too:

*For **we know**, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and **with full conviction**...* 1 Thess. 1:4-5a

How does someone become born again?

Through the Holy Spirit

*"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is **born of the Spirit** is spirit..."The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but **you do not know where it comes from** and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

John 3:6,8

Through people like us

*"WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." 14How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And **how will they hear without a preacher?***

Romans 10:14

*For **we are God's fellow workers**; you are God's field, God's building.* 1 Corinthians 3:9

Through the word of God (specifically, the gospel)

***He chose to give us birth through the word of truth**, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.*

James 1:18

For you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, **through the living and enduring word of God**. 1 Peter 1:23

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to **dividing soul and spirit**, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

For I am unashamed of the gospel, for it is **the power of God for salvation** to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from **faith to faith**... Romans 1:16-17

Through the receptivity of the person

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**. John 1:12

Don't overthink it!

See to it that no one takes you captive by **philosophy and empty deceit**, according to human tradition... Colossians 2:8

Too often Christians get caught in philosophical tangles about which of these is logically primary. Is it ultimately the sovereignty of God or the free choice of the person? Wesley and Whitefield disagreed on this question – both saw incredible revival break out through their ministry. Biblically, we need both—and we see that the process began with whichever was forthcoming!

And after he [the Philippian jailer] brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."...Acts 16:30-31

And Jesus said to him, "'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." Mark 9:23-24

Follow-up is Good but not Necessary

Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." Philip ran up and heard [the Ethiopian eunuch] reading Isaiah the prophet...and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. 36 As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, **the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him**, but went on his way rejoicing. Acts 8:29-39

Transformation is Guaranteed

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and **he cannot sin, because he is born of God**. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. 1 John 3:9

Consider the example of Nicodemus. There is no record of Jesus ever personally meeting him again, but in John 7:50 and John 19:39 we see his steady transformation into an extravagant lover of God.