

Have You Been Born Again?

Q. How does the Holy Spirit apply to us the redemption Christ bought?

A. The Spirit applies to us the redemption Christ bought by producing faith in us and so uniting us to Christ in our effective calling.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #30)

“...no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

(1 Corinthians 12:3b)

If you've grown up in the church or if you've been around the church long enough, you're sure to have heard Christians talk about being "*born again*". In 1974 Chuck Colson, one of the advisers of President Richard Nixon, pleaded guilty on counts of being involved in the infamous Water Gate Scandal, and proceeded to serve seven months in prison. While incarcerated, Colson was converted to Jesus Christ. And during that time Colson wrote a book that became an instant international success titled, "*Born Again*". From that point on countless numbers of believers began referring to themselves as "*born again*" Christians. Even later-president Jimmy Carter came out as saying that he was a "*born-again-Christian*". But what does that phrase mean? What does it mean to be "*born-again*"? The phrase "*born again*" is actually one that is used by Jesus in His well-known discourse with a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus in John chapter 3. Jesus begins this discourse by telling Nicodemus, "*Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3). In theology we refer to the concept of being "*born again*" as the doctrine of regeneration.

In order to understand the doctrine of regeneration there are three truths that we must comprehend. First of all, we need to understand that being "*born again*" or regenerated is **necessary** in order for a person to be saved. Jesus said, "*unless one is born again he cannot see...and he cannot enter...the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3,5). Jesus is saying that unless a person is born again, they are living in spiritual darkness! And not only is it impossible to SEE the Kingdom of God unless we are born again, verse 5 tells us that we cannot ENTER the Kingdom of God unless we are born again. Being born again, is necessary. No one can hope to attain eternal life with Jesus Christ unless they are born again. Being born again is a universal necessary condition for access into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Not only is regeneration, or the new birth, necessary, it is also **spiritual**. That phrase "*born again*" in the original Greek is the phrase "**γεννάω ἄνωθεν**" (*geh-nah-oh-an-no-then*) which literally means to be "*born from above*". In other words, being "*born again*" is a *spiritual* change that needs to take place. It's not a physical change that needs to occur, but a spiritual rebirth that a person needs to go through. It can't be initiated by human hands

or by human will or by human exertion. Being “*born again*” means that a person is literally born from above, spiritually reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s not an external change. It’s not a physical change, it’s not a change in how we dress, how we speak or how we look...it’s a fundamental transformation of a person at the spiritual level bringing someone from spiritual death into spiritual life (Ephesians 2:1-9).

Finally, not only is regeneration necessary and spiritual, but it is also **monergistic**. The word “*monergistic*” comes from two Greek words, the word “*mono*” meaning “*one*” and the word “*erg*” meaning energy. So when we say that being “*born again*” is “*monergistic*” we mean that it is not something that happens as an act of cooperation between us and God, but something that God the Holy Spirit does in a person’s life on His own. When someone is “*born again*” it’s not our work...it’s God’s work and God’s work alone! It’s here that many evangelical Christians confuse what being “*born again*” really means. Being born again is not something that we experience AFTER our conversion to Christ...it’s something that occurs BEFORE our conversion to Christ! The Holy Spirit causes us to be “*born again*” BEFORE we place our faith in Jesus by bringing us from spiritual death into spiritual life and by giving us the gift of faith. Regeneration *precedes* faith! As Paul writes in Romans 8:30, “*whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*” Notice what Paul says takes place before a person is justified (*saved by faith*): first a person is “*called*” or regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit. As our catechism tells us, “*The Spirit applies to us the redemption Christ bought by producing faith in us and so uniting us to Christ in our effective calling.*”.

My friends, your salvation didn’t begin with you. It began with the Holy Spirit. It began with God the Holy Spirit calling you from spiritual death to spiritual life. It began with the Holy Spirit causing you to be “*born again*” and giving you the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8). Take a moment to pray that the Holy Spirit would cause those in our lives who are not currently believers in Christ to be born again!

Dig Even Deeper into God’s Word!

Romans 10:17

1 Corinthians 2:12-16

Ephesians 2:8