

## THE NEW BIRTH

### Background

The new birth is an absolute necessity for salvation. Jesus said, “*I tell you the truth, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3). Being born again involves a change of heart and life. There is real trust in Jesus’ having paid the penalty for my sin, believing on him as my only Saviour; there is surrender of my life to Jesus, accepting his ‘lordship’ (he is in charge of your life from now on!) I am now truly his *disciple*, beginning on ‘the Way’. The *new life* as a faithful and true believer and follower of Jesus now *begins*. The theological word ‘regeneration’ is used for this event. A child cannot conceive itself and humans cannot regenerate themselves! The Spirit of God is at work. A person who repents before God and believes in and receives Jesus as Lord and Saviour is ‘born of God’. (See John 1:13). It is a turning point; indeed it could be said to be the person’s second birthday!

### A New Relationship

A new relationship with God through Jesus Christ has now begun, and one result of this is a new outlook on life. The old outlook was marred and marked by sin, even if a person had previously been in some sense ‘trying to lead a good life’ in their own strength. There is real moral change, and this can often be very noticeable to the new believer and to others. The new birth implies newness of life in Christ Jesus – and this process is brought about by the gracious act (gift) of God (see Ephesians 2:8–9).

An unregenerate person is blind to the things of God. In fact the ‘problem’ is not so much that we cannot ‘see’ the things of God, it is much more serious than that. We are spiritually dead and need to be born again, and until we are born again we remain dead in our sins. Jesus came to restore sight to the blind (Luke 4:18–21) and this has an extra layer of meaning in this context: spiritual blindness would be dealt with, as well as physical blindness. Sin must be dealt with by repentance and the forgiveness won by Jesus on the cross; the old evil nature is then disarmed. (See Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:21–23; John 3:3–6; Romans 6:6 and 8:7–8; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:3.)

The decision to follow Jesus, as Lord and as Saviour (and to recognise him as Messiah – the Saviour sent by the Father) is a serious one and is an act of faith. After repentance and trusting in the blood of Jesus, a spiritual new birth follows which it is impossible for humans to describe adequately. A child of God has been given new birth, ‘... into a living hope through the resurrection... into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade (see 1 Peter 1:3–4; and note that there is also a future dimension: a ‘salvation that is ready to be revealed’, mentioned in v. 5).

The concept of ‘sonship’ here is applicable whether we are male or female – because in biblical times its meaning included inheritance. Sonship (by adoption and grace) is given once only to the new believer. Sadly, disciples of Jesus who have been born again can and do sin, and the New Testament recognises this and helps us to deal with it (see, for example, 1 John 1:8–9). There is still a battle between the ‘born again’ believer and the world, the flesh and the devil. But the regenerate Christian is now aware of the battle in a new way, and knows that the Lord is with him to help him to resist evil and overcome the assaults of the enemy. After any ‘backsliding’ or known sin, a disciple of Jesus must seek forgiveness – but this does not mean being born again a second or third time.<sup>1</sup>

See Matthew 18:3; John 1:12–13; 3:14–15; 5:24; Acts 3:19; 4:10; 16:30–31; Galatians 3:24–26.

Like any new born, a child of God will grow and mature as time goes by. ‘Sanctification’ is a process which continues throughout the rest of the believer’s life. There should be a progressive change, as a disciple becomes more like Christ. Have you made that first step of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ? When you have been born again, you know at the deepest level that, by the cross and resurrection of Jesus you were saved from the *penalty* of past sin. (See the note below on the other ‘tenses’ of salvation. See the separate study No. 13 on Assurance. See also 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10 and 4:24; Galatians 2:20 and 6:15; Colossians 3:1–10; 1 Peter 1:22–23; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 5:11–12.)

### <sup>1</sup> Note

Some have claimed that final apostasy is not possible for true disciples of Jesus. But there are many passages in the New Testament which indicate otherwise. Consider that Jesus’ teaching on hell was given in the Gospels to believers. Consider Jesus’ warning concerning those who will be unready for his Second Coming (see Matthew chapters 24 and 25). Consider the fate of Judas Iscariot. Consider Paul’s many warnings as to the need for perseverance. See also Hebrews 12:25. The believer is to be one who overcomes, not walking in sin and

disobedience. (See Revelation **21:7–8**). All Christians should prayerfully seek to understand the issues at stake here as they are extremely serious. From the New Testament we learn about having been saved from the penalty of past sin (which is one thing that happens when we repent, believe, and are born again), and of *being saved* from the power of sin (note the continuous present tense; we need to go on fighting the good fight against sin, and we have the help of the Holy Spirit in that fight); and of a future hope of being with Christ in a place where there is no presence of sin. So 'being saved' does not mean the same as 'safe'. To *begin* a new life is not the same thing as living it out faithfully and walking in obedience. The following book is recommended as a helpful study of the relevant biblical teaching: *Once Saved, Always Saved?* by David Pawson (published by Hodder).