

What is a Born- Again Christian?

Even though I'm now somewhat beyond the allotted three-score and ten, I'm only a new 3½-year-old born-again Christian. Thus, in spite of my very young age, or perhaps because of the exuberance that is characteristic of that age, I am most eager to share my wonderful discoveries along with the knowledge and belief that transforms the soul, spirit and heart, and thereby clears the path to eternal life. What I have learned is the foundation and purpose of all creation, and how, through faith and love, anyone can become saved into eternal life with our Creator.

First where did the term, the idea, "born-again" come from, and what does it mean? In the Gospel of John 3:3 Jesus tells Nicodemus that "except a man be born-again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus, a wealthy old Pharisee and "ruler of Jews," had apparently become a secret convert to Jesus, but had some questions that needed answering. In this instance he came to Jesus to seek the answers. In response to these words from Jesus he asked, "How can a man be born-again, when he is old? Can he enter the womb and be born?" Jesus then repeated the essence of his first statement and added in part "that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." This means born of the Holy Spirit. In the original Greek, the word "again," is "another" which also, and more appropriately, translates "from above." Thus the English translation would be a more accurate message if it were to say "born again from above." Nevertheless, the Lord adds the necessary clarity when he speaks of being born of the Spirit. Thus a born- again Christian is one who has received in him the Holy Spirit which is in effect a spiritual birth independent of the original physical birth. This is the first and only birth of the spirit which in essence is until then dead, unborn. The Holy Spirit sparks it into life. This occurs only through the acknowledgement of the power of the Cross and belief and faith in the resurrection and in the deity of Jesus Christ.

Now, I suppose, unless you are a born from above Christian, this dogmatic one-way-only-to-heaven view may be offensive to you. I know that we live in a secular world of

relativism where your right is as good as mine and nothing is absolute. Of course, you are free to believe as you will; God gave you that sovereign choice. As a true Christian I have no right to be your judge or to twist your arm. My only right, no my obligation, is to love you and pray for you and if you choose to let me, to tell you about my faith. This matter of judgement in the Christian context is often confusing and misunderstood. Christians have no right to judge others, or even each other, in the sense of the Greek “krino,” meaning to judge, decide, and by implication to try, condemn, punish, avenge, etc., or even in the sense of Hebrew “shophat” to pronounce sentence, condemn, punish. They do, however have the right to judge in the sense of the Greek “anakrino,” to judge so as to examine, determine, and discern. Because true Christians are admonished to avoid sin and sinful situations, it is necessary that they make this latter form of judgement, or discernment, but not the kind that leads to a lack of love, condemnation or attempt to punish or avenge. That form of judgement belongs only to God, and under certain conditions, the courts to which He has ordained that authority.

Furthermore, born from above Christians do not consider themselves better than anyone else. For to believe so would first be incorrect, but would also be a form of pride, a sin that if left uncorrected would be a cause to question the very validity of their faith. Born-again Christians are probably even more acutely aware of their own many weaknesses and deficiencies, and especially of their sinful natures. Thus they have no basis for feeling superior or better than anyone else. What they do feel, however, is that they are most fortunate to have been blessed with the Grace of Faith. This is never something of which to be proud, but only of which to be most grateful. Anyone expressing any signs of superiority, of betterness or of pride because of their faith, has taken a very wrong path away from the true Christian Walk.

What really happens when one is born again, or born from above? I know that I have already described this, but it is so important that I must say it again. The instant one acknowledges as a deep and permanent commitment, the truth of the Gospel, and wholeheartedly, without reservation, accepts Jesus as one’s Savior, one receives a new heart and an awakening of the spirit, through the actions of the Holy Spirit. Thus one

receives a spiritual heart, or it could be said, a new internal control center, never before experienced. This born from above individual is never again the same, because this new control center, manned by the Holy Spirit, directs the host along a higher plane in terms of thoughts, values, priorities and emotions. He or she still has the same old sinful soul and body, however, with the new spiritual control center, his or her whole existence takes on a new perspective. One becomes progressively more discerning of sin and never again feels comfortable in its presence or in any sinful thought or action. Unfortunately, the natural sinful nature has not changed; the change is in the attitude towards it, how one chooses to deal with it, and the manner of one's attempt to reduce and hopefully eliminate it from one's life.

This new heart, this spiritual control center, must always be kept clean. But how can it be kept clean when our natural self is repeatedly dirtying it with sin? Only the spiritually clean, the sinless, may enter heaven, because it is impossible for sin to enter heaven, much less reside there. When Jesus died on the cross it was a universal, forever payment and cleansing of all sins of all believers who are born from above Christians. This is the key to everything! The instant one became born from above, all sins were washed away and thus the one and only qualification for entry into heaven has been attained. This is probably the only true instance where believing something actually makes it so. The very instant that a person truly believes that Jesus died in order to purge our sins, they are purged! If one's faith in Jesus is a genuine, true, saving faith, one's life is forever changed. While one may yet sin occasionally, these too are forgiven as long as one chooses to:

1. Cultivate and maintain an awareness and sensitivity to sin,
2. Strive at all times to avoid sin, and
3. When a sin nevertheless slips in, be aware of it, admit it, be sincerely sorry for having committed the sin, confess it to the Lord, and resolve to avoid it in the future.

As long as this process is sincerely applied, the soul remains clean and acceptable to God. As one can see, this is a moment-by-moment, day-by-day process, because our mortal selves cannot at all times refrain from sin. This is especially true for the truly faithful Christians, because as we proceed along the Walk our sensitivity to sin increases and we, therefore, recognize as sins, actions and thoughts that would have previously been dismissed as normal, natural and wholly defensible. While they may be all those things, we now notice that they are also sins to be recognized, admitted to, and removed from our lives.

The born from above Christians are aware of the power of prayer, and so communicate with the Lord more and more frequently as they progress along the Christian Walk. Having each handed back to the Lord his or her free will and asked that He henceforth guide their lives, the true Christians now place their total reliance on the Lord, and, therefore, must seek through prayer, the guidance they need in order to continue their earthly lives. Along with their reliance on prayer, believers are also dependent on the written Word of the Lord as their daily bread. Thus the Scripture also becomes a vital aspect of their lives, one for which they develop an insatiable hunger which requires daily satisfaction. Through the Scriptures, believers continue to learn more of God's ways and desires and purpose, which further add to their ability to understand and better live the way He wants us to.

Through careful and loving study of the scriptures, the born from above Christians, (I'll henceforth call them True Christians.) learn many truths, which seem to be hidden, ignored, or despised by most of the world. They see clearly from their studies that this book, The Holy Bible, the combined Old and New Testament, is a single integrated inerrant message authored by the Holy Spirit from outside of time and space. Soon it becomes the sole source of all relevant knowledge and the guiding light by which they choose to continue their journey through life. True Christians see themselves not as citizens of any place on earth, but only as sojourners, here for a while on their way home.

True Christians, as their faith matures, seek to approach their ultimate goals not to hate or hold grudges, to always be forgiving, to speak no ill of others and to avoid sinful situations and temptations. This is but a sampling of the full Christian's Walk. The true Christians have no hate in them; they hold no animosities towards anyone or any group. Because of their careful and inspired reading of the scriptures, they learn many truths that seem to escape most others. They recognize the proof of the authorship of the Bible. This proof is discovered in many places, the most obvious being the accuracy of the prophecies or little excerpts from history written long before the event occurred. From these for instance, they realize that the Lord still has an unfulfilled destiny for the Jews. This is partly evidenced by the return of these people to the promised land on the exact day, May 14, 1948, that, through Daniel, 2500 years earlier that the Lord said it would occur. They know that the Jews did not kill Jesus, that this was preordained as evidenced in Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 and in several other places in the Old Testament. The true Christians know that they, through their own sins and not the Jews, were responsible for His physical death. For even before the beginning of the world, He chose the shedding of His own blood, the blood of His innocent, incarnate manifestation, Jesus, as the means by which sin could be forgiven. Thus it was a handful, probably not more than a dozen Jewish leaders and high priests who instigated the crucifixion through the authority of the Romans, unknowingly fulfilling prophecy.

As did Jesus, the true believers shun ritual and formalized religion. Jesus was, in fact, against religion, because no matter its good initial intentions, religion by its nature grows ever more rituals, and these subordinate faith, love and worship, the real and only expressions the Lord wants from us. True Christians will, of course, do good works, that is, good deeds, and will strive to obey the commandments. They will do these, however, out of love for the Lord, not out of obligation or as perceived requirements for salvation. Salvation is a free gift given to all true Christians. Jesus gave this gift on the Cross. His last words were "Telelestai," "It is finished" (John 19:30), better translated from the Greek as "Paid in full." These last words were the most profound words ever spoken. They were the culmination and summation of the entire Scripture and of his brief three-year ministry. They express the whole purpose of His First Coming, that is, to take away

the sins of the world, to provide all humankind the means through which heaven is obtainable. His time on the cross did that. When that time was at an end, as he died, his mortal life finished, it was at that moment that our sins, the sins of those who believe were “paid in full.”

I have tried here to summarize the beliefs and qualities of a true born again Christian. I sincerely and totally believe as I have written. However, I must confess that I am some distances from the qualities here described. Three score and ten years make for very deep ruts that are difficult to climb out of. Nevertheless, I have worked myself out far enough to at least see the path I want to travel, and I will, with the help of the Lord, surely get there, not for the sake of salvation, for that is already mine through faith in Jesus. What I seek is perfection of my Walk, and this out of gratitude and love, and the belief that it is right.

If you like what you have read, confess to the Lord; accept Jesus as your Savior. That’s the cue for the Holy Spirit to implant your new heart, take over your spiritual control center, and change your life. It’s never too late nor is anyone too wicked. If He would accept me, He will accept anyone.