

# What Does It Mean to Be Born Again and How to Know?

by Alan Barr

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*The sermon explores the meaning of being born again, the assurance of salvation, and the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.*

**Duration:** 31:05

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 18:36, Acts 16:31, Romans 7:15, Romans 10:9, Ephesians 6:11, 1 Peter 5:8

**Topics:** "Born Again"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of being born again and the longing for our true home in heaven. He emphasizes that one proof of being born again is the longing for home and the sense of being a stranger in this world. The preacher urges listeners to examine their lives and see if there is evidence of these four things: conviction of sin, ability to repent, belief in Jesus' sacrifice, and offering oneself to God. He also highlights the importance of experiencing a spiritual battle between wanting to please God and the pull of the world. The sermon concludes with an encouragement to seek God's salvation and surrender to Him.

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## Transcript

What does it mean to be born again? And what assurance can a person have that they are born again? These are two very important questions and I want to spend the next 30 minutes perhaps answering those two questions. What does it mean to be born again? And what assurance can a person have that they are born again? Whenever I was involved in door-to-door outreach people would often say to me you know you're being very presumptuous when you tell us that you know for certain that you're saved. And while the unsaved think it may be presumptuous to tell them that you know for sure that you're saved.

What concerns me more is that there are many of God's people who lack this assurance. They wonder if they are actually saved at all. Scripture makes it clear that we can know for sure if we're saved.

Look at 1 John chapter 5 verse 13. The apostle says these things have been written unto you that you may know that you have eternal life. That you may know, that's a certainty, that you have eternal life.

Now before I go on to deal with assurance for the Christian let me first of all look at what salvation is. How does one get saved in the first place? Whenever I was growing up in Belfast I was constantly bombarded

with scriptures that continually referred to believing. Acts chapter 16 verse 31 was a favourite one.

If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ then you shall be saved. While I was bombarded with scripture texts referring to salvation I never fully understood what the word believed meant. And to confuse things a little bit more I was often told well God says it, I believe it and that settles it.

Now there are many good people who believe in God but are not His, they're not saved. You see there is much more to salvation than simply believing God exists and Jesus exists. And that He died on the cross for our sins, He rose again the third day.

If all I am doing is affirming my belief that such a person exists then according to scripture I'm not saved. So what does it mean to believe? Nicodemus asked Jesus a similar question and he asked Him what He must do to inherit eternal life. And Jesus replied and said except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Now this idea of being born again is much more than simply believing. Jesus goes on to say that except a man be born of water. Now water is the natural birth and of the spirit which is a supernatural birth he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

So what he's saying here is that everybody is born of water that's a natural human birth. But not everybody is born of the spirit which is the second birth. So one must be born of the spirit of God to have eternal life, to be saved.

It's like being born all over again. Being born again requires a new nature. But how does this happen? How do we get this new nature? Well it happens through the act of what is called regeneration.

It's a work of the Holy Spirit. It's not a work of man. We don't make all the decisions.

We don't make the decisions here. The Holy Spirit is at work in us. Has to be at work in us before there is such a thing as regeneration.

And unless the Holy Spirit works on the will and the conscience then a person can't be saved. I love the illustration that Spurgeon gives concerning this. He says, and I'm going to use my own words in a sort of abridged version.

He says suppose a law was passed that declared that whatever men might do or be unless they were native born subjects of England they could not enter into Her Majesty's presence and could enjoy none of the privileges of citizenship. In other words they had to be born in England. Now suppose an Indian man came to the country and tried to obtain the privileges of citizenship.

He declared that he would give up his Indian name and call himself by an English name. And he asked the question, will that admit him? You see him coming to the palace gates and asking for admission. And he says, I've taken on an English name.

And the guard at the gate says, but are you an English man born and bred? I am not, he said. Then the gates must be shut against you for the law is absolute. And though you may have the name of even the royal family itself upon you yet because you have not been born there or born here you must be shut out.

Then declares the Indian, I am prepared to renounce my dress and to become an English man in fashion. I will dress myself with the latest fashion. I'll dress like a traditional English man and maybe that will let me

in.

And he comes to the gate again. He is not only an English man, an English name but he is dressed like one of his own countrymen, one of their own countrymen. But the gates are still shut in his face because the law requires that he must be born in the country.

And without that whatever his dress might be he could not enter the palace. Well says the Indian, I will not only adopt the dress and take on the English name. I know what I'll do, I will learn the language.

I will put away my brogue and my language that I once spoke in the wild prairies or the woods far away from my lips. I will take care that my new language will be grammatically correct. Will you then not admit me? I have become thoroughly anglicized, I can't say that word, anglicized.

May I not then be received? No says the keeper of the door, there is no admittance. For except a man be born in his country he cannot be admitted. I hope you get the point anyway that what Spurgeon is trying to make here.

Many people today you see do exactly what this Indian tried to do. They call themselves Christians, they dress like Christians, yes. They are even seen to be going to church with their nice suits.

Some even have a bible under their arm and they even sound like a Christian. They use the proper terminology. And they are perhaps even members of a particular denomination.

They might even be baptised as an infant, they take the Lord's supper. Some may even be deacons or elders. And they seem to be all that a Christian can be except the problem is they are none of his.

They are none of his. You know they may impress others about them but not God. And the tragedy of it all is that when they die and stand before God.

He will say to them depart from me for I never knew you. Why would he say that? Because God gave clear instructions that unless a man is born anew by the spirit of God. In other words a supernatural rebirth.

He or she cannot enter into the kingdom of God. You see salvation is not of man, it's of God. It's of God.

Unless a person is regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit. By the workings of the Holy Spirit. They can be none of God's.

And what happens then in this process of regeneration? Well first of all in regeneration there is a deep conviction of sin. The person's eyes are opened and they see their great need of forgiveness. They see themselves as sinners before God.

Before a Holy God. And there's no pride here, there's no self improvement here. All there is, is a contrite heart and a broken spirit.

All of this leads you see to the second stage of the process. First of all there is conviction of sin. The weight of sin is heavy on them.

They realise that before God they have broken his law. They realise before God they stand condemned. That leads to the second stage of the process and that is repentance.

Now repentance first of all is much more than saying sorry or being sorry. Oh yes there is sorrow, there is regret, there's remorse. But you see the word repent is an old army term.

And what it means actually is to turn around. To go in an opposite direction. Now at this stage, at the stage of repentance, the Holy Spirit will have begun to enlighten the sinner to the fact that not only are they sinners before a Holy God but they will be enlightened to the fact that Jesus died for them.

And their sins were dealt with on the cross. The price was paid in full by him. There is absolutely nothing they can do to earn or to warrant that forgiveness.

What they need to do is to accept the finished work of Christ for themselves and give their lives totally to him. Let me just give you an illustration here of this. Whenever I talk about being enlightened.

That the sinner becomes enlightened to the fact that they are sinners before a Holy God. That Christ died, rose again and paid the full price for their sins. There is nothing they need to do except the finished work of Christ.

When I say that the Spirit of God must enlighten. What I mean by this is, let me illustrate it. I was speaking to a friend of mine a while back and I had the opportunity of presenting the Gospel to him.

He was a member of a particular denomination and he would go to church regularly but as far as he was concerned, as long as he was a good person he went to church and he did what he was supposed to do, he was okay. His good works were enough, he believed, to get him into heaven. And I presented the Gospel in as clear a manner as I thought I possibly could.

And no matter how much I tried to convince him that our righteousness are as filthy rags before God. No matter how much I tried to convince him, he kept going back to his works. And I couldn't understand why he could be so pig-headed, so stubborn about this whole issue.

And then I began to realise, well hold on a second. If the Holy Spirit is not in this convicting the sinner and enlightening the sinner then all the words, the fancy words that I speak will be of no effect. No effect.

You know, let me speak for a moment to the Christian. You can set up your fancy performances and you can present the Gospel in as user-friendly a way as you possibly can. Or sorry, what is it? Seeker-friendly way as you possibly can.

And you can make it sound absolutely brilliant. But my friend, unless the Spirit of God convicts and enlightens that sinner, that person will never ever come to Christ. No matter how many persuasive words that you have.

No matter how well you present the Gospel, that person will never ever come to Christ. Now once they have been enlightened to the fact of Jesus dying and paying the price this is the stage where the person finally believes. And the result is that they give themselves to Christ.

And this of course is the third stage of the process. They offer themselves to God as instruments for His use. To be possessed by the Holy Spirit.

You have often heard about people being possessed by evil spirits. In other words, what it means is the evil spirits take hold of them. Well, for the Christian, for the person who has reached this stage, they offer themselves as instruments for His use and they are possessed.

They are taken over. They allow the Holy Spirit to take control of them. And they are prepared to acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour.

And to live for Him from that time forth. Now my friend, that's an important part. That's a very important part of salvation.

That a person realising their need turns to Christ and is prepared to acknowledge Christ not just as Saviour but as Lord. And to live for Him. Because what that person is doing is they are giving over their life to Christ.

Their whole life to Christ. And at this point they become a new creature in Christ. And a supernatural event has taken place.

Now there may not be an awful lot of external signs of this in terms of lights flashing or the person falling on the floor or any of those particular things or visions or whatever. There is simply a supernatural event that has taken place that the outsider would have no privy to, would not be privy to. Once that event takes place, as Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 5 and verse 4 Sorry 5 and verse 7 Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature.

That means a new person. All things are passed away. Behold all things are become new.

Now I want you to notice for a minute. Just to recap on that a bit. I want you to notice for a minute the process of regeneration.

Which is a work of the Holy Spirit. Begins with the realisation of our sinfulness before a Holy God. Now you may say to me, well hold on a wee second.

I lead a good life. I really don't sin that much. In fact I'm a very upright, clean living person.

How do I equate to, how am I like some of those people that are really sinful? Well let me again illustrate it by this. You take a piece of cloth that is white. Perhaps you've just washed it.

It's white. It's lovely and white. Lovely and clean.

Lovely and fresh looking. And surrounded by other things that are quite darkest, white cloth really stands out. And you think it's white.

Until, say on a winters day when there's a fresh fall of snow on the ground. You take that cloth out. And you put it against the fresh fall of snow.

The pure white snow. And you suddenly will realise how dirty and how filthy the garment looks. And so it is with God.

Compared to God's absolute holiness. We are the most vile, filthy, rotten sinners. Compared to the brightness and the radiance of an absolutely holy God.

And of course this realisation of our sinfulness leads us to repentance. And repentance is a complete turning away from the world. From the way you used to live and the turning to Christ with all that demands.

Now because the Holy Spirit dwells in the person they will be given the power to live the Christian life. Christian life is not about rules and regulations. Not about how we're going to brush up our act and do all

these different things to please God.

We can't do these things in our own strength. Because there's a new nature in us. Because the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

We have been given the power to live the Christian life. Jude chapter 1 verse 24 says. John 1 verse 12 it says.

The sons of God even to them that believe in his name. In fact also that once that person has become born again he or she has a new nature. And because they have a new nature they will not want to do the things that disobey God.

They will want to do the things that comes naturally to that new nature. And that is to obey God. Now that doesn't mean that everything then after this, after the person becomes a Christian.

They're saved, they're born again, they have a new nature within them. That doesn't mean now that everything is plain sailing. Not at all.

The Christian has now entered into a spiritual battle. A spiritual battle. At this point I want to look at the assurance of salvation.

You know I've already quoted this but 1 John chapter 5 verse 13 the Apostle says. This is assurance we're talking about. One of the signs that one is born again.

Is there any evidence? Now I could mention the fruits of the Spirit as signs. But what I want to do is I want to actually look at 4 different signs that would indicate that a person is born again. Born of the Spirit of God.

That they're a new creature in Christ. Firstly if we're new creatures in Christ we will not habitually commit sin. We will not habitually commit sin.

We will in fact have a hatred for sin. And let me say this if you do not have a hatred for those things that go against God and His will. Then you're none of His.

Sin itself shall not have dominion over you. Romans chapter 6 verse 14. So there is something wrong if you are continuing to live in sin.

Especially without a guilty conscience. There should be no desire to do the things you once did. Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature.

In other words a new person. All things are passed away and behold all things are become new. The second test or the second sign of one being truly born again of the Spirit of God is a hunger for God.

Psalms 63 says. O God you are my God. I shall seek you earnestly.

My soul thirsts for you. My flesh yearns for you. In a dry and weary land where there's no water.

Such is his desperation for God. Someone has said and I quote. You'll always get more out of a relationship with God than you put in.

In fact as you hunger for Him. As your hunger for Him comes to life. He will open your heart and mind to understand and desire Him even more.

What I'm saying is that as we spend more time in His presence. Does it create in us, does it create in you a desire to know Him more? If not then there's something wrong. Something seriously wrong.

The third piece of evidence of someone who is truly born again. Is the evidence of a spiritual battle. Is there evidence of a battle taking place with what you want to do.

Which is to please God. And the pull of the world that tries to get you to do what you do want to do. Now Paul knew all about this when he writes in Romans chapter 7 and verse 15.

I do not understand what I do for what I want to do I do not. But what I hate I do. So Paul was very conscious of this spiritual battle.

That was raging constantly. If sin doesn't bother you. Then the devil will certainly leave you alone.

Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 12 says. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood. But against principalities and against powers.

And against rulers of the darkness of this world. Against spiritual wickedness in high places. When you become a Christian.

When you become a child of God. Satan is not happy. And all the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this world.

Are against you. And therefore make no mistake about it. You will know that.

You will know that you are in a battle. No wonder in Ephesians 6 and verse 11. It says put on the whole armour of God.

That you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Be sober be vigilant because your adversary the devil. As a roaring lion walketh about.

Seeking whom he may devour. Verse Peter 5 and verse 8. You know. When you came to Christ first.

I want you to think back. If you claim to be a Christian. I want you to think back to the time of your conversion.

Where you were then of the battle. Now perhaps. Even now the battle is not as intense.

Because maybe you have gone back into the world. But if there was a time whenever that battle raged. Be sure.

That you are born again. If it is the case you are far away from God. Come back to him.

And restore that fellowship. And the fourth sign of being born again. Is the desire to fellowship with his people.

It says therefore encourage one another. And build one another up. Just as you are doing.

The complete unity that Jesus refers to. Is the oneness that Christians experience. In true fellowship.

Oneness with one another. With Christ and with the Father. And just as the Father is in Jesus.

So is Jesus in us. And we have unity with one another. Because of that unique relationship.

That can be found in 1 John 1 verse 3. You know this relationship must be the basis of Christian fellowship. We can have friendships. We can have relationships.

But true Christian fellowship. Can only occur within the body of Christ. And we are united to one another.

By a common belief. A common purpose and goal. Our hearts and our minds are other worldly.

They are out of this world. They are not off this world. Because we follow Jesus Christ.

And he said that his kingdom is not off this world. John chapter 18. Verse 36.

We know that we are strangers in this world. And we long for the time when we will be. In our true home in heaven.

And again. If you want to actually put another proof. Of being born again.

That is this longing for home. That is this sense of being a stranger. In a foreign land.

And heaven being our home. And the longing for Christ to return. My friend.

My time is gone. And I want to urge you. That if there is no evidence.

From the four things that I have mentioned. If there is no evidence in your life. Of any of those four things.

Then may I encourage you. And implore you. To go right back.

To the stages of regeneration. To the stages of salvation. And pray to God.

That he would enlighten you. And pray to God that you would have that conviction of sin. That you would have that ability to repent.

Pray to God that he would save you. While there is still time. Thank you for listening.

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