



Conducted by
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“Quite recently I have heard one or two well known public figures say that they are ‘borne-again’ Christians. Could you please explain what they mean?”

This is a phrase in the modern idiom which has been imported into this country from abroad. I rather suspect that its use is associated with the so-called charismatic groups. Implicit in the statement is the fact that if one can be described as a 'born-again' Christian then there may be others who could be described as 'non-born-again' Christians; whatever the description, it would seem to indicate that they were, in both cases, Christians. This idea I would object to, and I intend to show why.

'Ye must be born again'

It is perfectly true that Jesus taught that a person should be born again. John chapter 3 records a conversation between Jesus and one Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus made a very perceptive statement concerning the relationship between God and Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God". To this Jesus replied, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v3). Nicodemus seemed to think that Jesus meant a *physical* rebirth, but Jesus disabused his mind of this by insisting, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (v5). So the teaching of Jesus is perfectly plain and unambiguous; it is necessary for a person to be born of water and of the Spirit before entry can be gained into the kingdom of God.

Why is re-birth necessary?

We can argue logically that re-birth would become necessary if a person had suffered either physical or spiritual death. The Bible teaches us regarding physical death that it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgement, so as regards physical death we are thinking not of *re-birth* but of *resurrection* at some future time. This, then, leaves us with spiritual death, and it is this type of death which Jesus had in mind when He spoke to Nicodemus, and which is reiterated time and again in the subsequent N.T. writings.

Re-birth is necessary because of SIN. This is a very unfashionable word these days. People are very fond of talking about 'moral degredation', or 'environmental maladjustment', or even trying to explain away anti-social behaviour by saying that a person is suffering from 'social deprivation'. No matter how we may try to adorn the phraseology, the basic problem is SIN. Sin causes spiritual death, and it affects all, "There is none righteous, no, not one"; and, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10,23). Writing to the Ephesians Paul says, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (eph.2:1). Commenting on the transition which takes place, John says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

We are saying, then, that a person can be physically alive but spiritually dead, that is, he has no communication with the Eternal Spirit. It was Professor Drummond who argued that a tree has a form of life but it cannot communicate with man, nor man with it; in other words, even though alive, it is *dead to man*. I think the sinner must view himself as being without hope and without God in the world; he is alive, but he is spiritually dead so far as communion with God is concerned; he is held in the thralldom of Satan.

How are we born again?

It is Peter who points us the way. After commenting that our faith and hope should be in God, he goes on, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet.1:21-23). So the process is quite clear; the soul must be purified by obedience to the truth; that truth comes through the incorruptible Word of God and results in us being born

again. It is the *living* Word, and it abides for ever. Peter then says, "And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (v25).

Shortly before Jesus left the earth, Matthew records Him as saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto me; Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (matt.28:18-20, N.I.V.). They were to preach the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus; that He had been crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. This gospel was to be first preached in Jerusalem, and in that city on the Day of Pentecost when Peter first preached it, three thousand souls obeyed and were baptised. These were three thousand *disciples*; many more were to follow in obedience to the Gospel. They were given life by obedience to the Living Word. As James put it, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (James 1:18 R.S.V.). These first disciples, and every disciple since, has been granted a new life in Christ Jesus through obedience to the Gospel, and Acts of Apostles records, "The disciples were first called *Christians* at Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

Therefore, we do not need any such designation as 'born-again' Christian; a Christian is *only* a Christian *because* he has been born again. When I became a Christian, I, along with many other Christians, became a member of the Lord's Body, the Church; I became a willing subject in the Kingdom of God's dear Son, and because I received the gracious in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit when I was immersed into Christ I also became a partaker of the Divine nature. Such is the status of a Christian.

A further thought

Some people try to explain the spiritual re-birth by a direct analogy with the physical birth, and this is not really possible. Physical birth is the bringing into being of a completely new individual which before conception had no existence whatsoever. The spiritual regenerative process is not like that; it is rather a renewing of a personality which *already exists* but which sin has marred to such a degree that communion with God is not possible. To the Ephesians Paul wrote, "Ye hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph.2:1). "Even when *we* were dead in sins, hath quickened *us* together with Christ, And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (vv 5,6). A new bias is given to our thinking, actions, behaviour, and orientation, in fact *we* become new *persons* in Christ Jesus. I do not know of any spiritual foetal period similar to the physical foetal period.

Furthermore, I believe it is a mistake to think of the Christian as having two separate and distinct personalities; the personality inherent in the flesh, and the new personality as given by the Spirit. Such dualism leads us to the dangerous thoughts that the personality of the flesh will always and inevitably go on sinning, while the personality of the Spirit can and should co-exist with it. Such a view, to my mind, does despite to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and gives us licence to go on sinning. Responsibility attaches to the individual Christian, and God will hold him accountable for those things done in life. While it is true that sin *can*, and *does*, invade the life of the Christian, the accountability will be such that we will be expected to resist and subdue the sin, and yield to and be regulated by the Spirit. John seems to indicate that the subjugation of sin is desirable, for he says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, *that ye sin not*. And *if any man sin*, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). And who

would be bold enough to say that Paul is indicating a split personality in Romans chapter 7? No, I believe that Paul was speaking about his pre-conversion experience.

So, then, I conclude that when people say that they are 'born-again' Christians they are indicating that they are looking for charismatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, and are somehow dissatisfied and unfulfilled by just being a Christian.