

Born Again by Faith?

By Steve Pruitt

If you have been a church goer for very long you most likely have heard a sermon proclaiming that a person is born again by having faith in Jesus Christ. However, this idea finds no support in the Holy Scriptures. It is true that a person must have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved or justified (Romans 3:22, 25, 26; Galatians 2:16). However, a person must be born again before he can have faith to be saved. And we played no more a part in being born again of the Spirit than we did being born initially of the flesh. How then is a person born again? The answer: A person is born again by a sovereign act of God's grace.

To arrive at that conclusion we must first look at the state of our souls prior to being born again. Jesus said that those who do not believe in him (eat his flesh, drink his blood) have no life in them (John 6:53). The apostle Paul wrote that prior to the new birth (being born again) we were dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 2:13). In other words we had no spiritual life in us; we were not breathing, we were corpses. We were not dying, we were dead. We did not need to be rescued, we needed to be resurrected.

So, prior to being born again we were absolutely void of any capacity for faith. We could no more conjure up the faith to be born again than a person can raise himself from the dead. In fact, we had no capacity to understand anything of a spiritual nature (1 Corinthians 2:14). Our only hope was for a source of power outside of ourselves to give us life. God is that only source, he is the giver of eternal life.

Consider these passages from Peter and Paul:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has **caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

1 Peter 1:3 (ESV)

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive** together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.*

Ephesians 2:4-5 (ESV)

*And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God **made alive** together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.*

Colossians 2:13 (ESV)

Paul also wrote that God chose and predestined us to adoption as sons before the foundation of the world according to the purpose and counsel of his own will, not according to foreseen faith on our part. (Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11). God did not look outside of himself to decide whom he would adopt as sons. God himself said, *I will be gracious on whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.* (Exodus 33:19 ESV) Paul wrote, *So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.* (Romans 9:16 ESV) *So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.* (Romans 9:18 ESV) God fashions the hearts of man (Psalms 33:13-15). The potter does not ask the clay what it desires to be (Romans 9:21). [We should understand that it is man's willing choice to sin that damns him. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). God is ultimately responsible for the hardening of a man's heart in that he sovereignly chooses to leave the heart unchanged. God does not predestine to eternal damnation in the same manner that he predestines to eternal life.]

In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said, *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.* (John 3:6-8 ESV) The absence of faith in Jesus' words is glaring. The Holy Spirit (who is God, 2 Corinthians 3:18) gives new birth as he chooses.

This truth totally eliminates the idea of "inviting Jesus into our hearts" to be born again. A person doesn't "invite" Jesus into their heart. God says, "See!" and they see. He says, "Come forth!" and they live. And he does so according to the purpose and counsel of his own will apart from the will of man (John 1:13). The Holy Spirit needs no invitation to give life to a dead soul. The idea that the Holy Spirit is a gentleman and doesn't go where he isn't invited is simply not a biblical concept. If the Holy Spirit

waited for an invitation before he changed a human heart (gave new birth), no one would be born again. A dead soul can neither make that choice nor give an invitation.

A person is born again when God by his grace and mercy sheds light into the darkness of their heart (2 Corinthians 4:6), through the preaching of the gospel (1 Peter 1:23) and work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8), causing them to be born again (making them alive). He then gives them the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8) that enables them to believe upon Jesus Christ and receive him as Lord and Savior. Though they are somewhat simultaneous events, the new birth precedes faith unto salvation and is a direct result of God's sovereign act of grace. Being born again requires no prior act of faith on the part of the person. By no work of righteousness (having faith) can a person be born again unto salvation. The new birth only comes by the work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Why does this matter? Are we straining out a gnat to swallow a camel? Absolutely not! If a person possessed the faith to raise his soul from the dead, he would possess the power attributed only to God. If a person is born again by faith, his new birth becomes an earned reward for his faith and grace would cease to be grace (Romans 11:6). And maybe the most important matters are that of sovereignty and glory. If a person is born again by choosing to act on faith, their choice to believe becomes the decisive sovereign factor in their new birth and they have earned the right to be praised. However, if God, by an act of his own purpose and will causes a person to be born again, he maintains his sovereignty in the new birth and is worthy of the most glorious praise (Ephesians 1:6, 12).

Conclusion: Having faith in Jesus Christ is not a condition to being born again. Faith to believe in Jesus Christ is a free gift given to those whom God causes to be born again. Praise be to God for his indescribable gift!