

“Born of God”

John 1:12-13

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

John the apostle in the introduction of his gospel (1:1-11) speaks of Jesus Christ as the eternal and divine Word of God who was with God the Father before the foundation of world (vv.1f). He also was the divine creator of all things (v.3). But when He came into the world He created, the world did not recognize its creator (v.10). And when He came to His own nation as its Messiah, most of the Jews rejected Him (v.11). But some, especially among the Gentiles, received Him through believing in His name (which is Himself). They became children of God*. They received Him and believed in Him and became God’s children because they had been “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (v.13). That is, they were “born of God” before they received Jesus and believed in Him and became God’s children. For life precedes faith.

The phrase “born of God” in the Bible is strictly Johannine. The apostle uses the phrase or a variant such as “born of Him” or “begotten of Him” once in his gospel (1:13 – but see “born of water and the Spirit” in 3:5) and nine times in his first epistle (2:29; 3:9 [twice]; 4:7; 5:1 [twice]; 5:4; 5:18 [twice]).

In this message we will observe what John says regarding being “born of God”: 1. its *necessity*; 2. its *manner*; 3. its *results*.

I. The necessity of being “born of God”. We through our first birth are not “children of God”, but rather “children of men” incapable of understanding or knowing God (as in, e.g., Psalms 14:2f & 53:2f): “Jehovah looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.” (See also John 3:3, 5.)

II. The manner of being “born of God”.

1. *Negatively*, being “born of God” is in no way attributable to man’s natural descent or will:

- “not of blood” – not of natural generation or physical descent;
- “nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man” – not of man’s supposed “free will”, nor of any decision he makes (as in so-called “decisional regeneration”) nor of any deed he performs (as in so-called “baptismal regeneration”).

2. *Positively*, being “born of God” is being regenerated by Him.

i. Being “born of God” is being “born again” after being “born of the flesh” (John 3:3-8).

ii. Being “born of God” is being born of all three Persons in the Holy Trinity: God the Father (1 Peter 1:3), Jesus Christ (1 John 2:29; cp. John 5:21), and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5, 6, 8).

iii. Being “born of God” is also being “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). Note the two aspects of what is here said:

First, the terms “born of God” and “born of the Spirit” (3:5, 6, 8) are synonymous. For the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3f). God in the person of the Holy Spirit regenerates spiritually dead sinners.

Second, the term “born of water” speaks of the spiritual “water of life” and “living water” (John 4:7-14), which both gives and sustains life.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the *agent* in regeneration, the water of life is His *instrument*, and He dispenses it through the preaching of God’s Word and Christ’s gospel. Accordingly:

- “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” (John 6:63).
- Paul the apostle told those who were converted under his ministry “in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15).
- “Of God’s own will He brought us forth [i.e., gave birth to, begat] by the word of truth” (James 1:18).
- The regenerated “have been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23).
- Salvation is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy [i.e., God’s *unmerited favor*] He saved us, through the washing of regeneration [when born of water] and renewing of the Holy Spirit [when He regenerated us]” (Titus 3:5).

Being “born of water” is not being “born of baptism”. If regeneration occurred in the laver or water of baptism, Old Testament saints died unregenerated, for they were unbaptized.

3. Furthermore, being “born of God” is incomprehensible to the natural man (John 3:1-12). When Jesus told Nicodemus, “the teacher of Israel” (v.10), that “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (v.3), “Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’” (v.4). Jesus informed that very knowledgeable man that being born of God was beyond his mental abilities (v.8): “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

We therefore conclude that anyone speaking of “how to be born again” is ignorant of the subject. Regeneration is an act of God’s free and sovereign grace. It does not occur through something we do. We are as passive in our *second* birth as we were in our *first* birth.

III. The results of being “born of God”. As we have already observed, they who were “born of God” were given the ability to receive Jesus Christ through believing in Him and the privilege of becoming God’s children. But we here will observe the results of being “born of God” as cited in John’s First Epistle.

1. *God’s children practice righteousness* (2:29): “If you know that He [Jesus Christ, the subject of the preceding v.28] is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is *born of Him*.”

If you know Jesus Christ, you know also that He is righteous, and therefore “Jesus Christ the righteous” (2:1). You also know that Jesus Christ is divine, and that therefore everyone “born of Him” is “born of God”. Since everyone “born of Him” is like Him who begot them, they practice righteousness like He did. Indeed, “He who practices righteousness is righteous, *just as He* [‘Jesus Christ the righteous’] is righteous” (3:7). Therefore:

2. *God’s children do not sin* (3:9a): “Whoever has been *born of God* does not sin, for His seed remains in him”

Having just read John’s *positive* declaration that one “born of God” “practices righteousness” (2:29), we should not be surprised that he now makes the *negative* declaration that this same one “does not sin”. The meaning is not that he who is born of God *never* sins, for he does indeed sin (see 1:8-11). Rather, the meaning is that he who is born of God does not *continue* in sin and does not sin *habitually*. God’s child does not continue in sin because “God’s seed remains in him.” He has become a “partaker of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). While the *human* nature with which he was born continues to influence him to sin, the *divine* nature given to him in his regeneration influences him to not sin – and the divine nature prevails over the human nature. And in the latter part of this verse we read ...

3. *God’s children cannot sin* (3:9b): “... and he cannot sin, because he has been *born of God*.”

John here appears to have anticipated that some would object to what he had just written. He adds that the one “born of God” “*does not sin*” because he “*cannot sin*”, and he “*cannot sin*” because He was “born of God”! Again, the meaning is not that God’s child is sinlessly perfect and incapable of sinning – for indeed he is very capable of sinning. Rather, the meaning is that God’s child cannot sin *habitually*, as was his manner of life before he was born of God.

“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not

of God, nor is he who does not love his brother” (3:10).

4. *God’s children love each other and know God* (4:7): “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is *born of God* and knows God.”

“God is love” (v.8), and “love is of [or from] God” (here). God gives His love to all who are “born of God”, and they in turn “love one another”, thereby proving they “know God”. Conversely, “He who does not love does not know God” (v.8).

5. *God’s children believe Jesus is the Christ* (5:1): “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is *born of God*.”

“Jesus” is the virgin Mary’s Son, born to be the Savior of God’s people (Matthew 1:18-25). “The Christ” is Jehovah’s “Son” and “His Anointed” (which is the meaning of *Christ*), begotten of God in eternity by an eternal generation (Psalm 2:1-9), and anointed to be the mediatorial Prophet, Priest, and King of God’s people. To “believe that Jesus is the Christ” is to acknowledge that God’s Son has come in the flesh as Mary’s Son in the person of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:2f), and to trust in Him for salvation (as in Acts 16:30f) and to submit to His Lordship (as in Psalm 2:10-12). All God’s children will do so.

6. *God’s children overcome the world* (5:4): “For whatever is *born of God* overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.”

To “overcome the world” is to be victorious over everything associated with it: especially to “overcome the wicked one” (2:13, 14) and the “many false prophets [who] have gone out into the world” (4:1-4). This “victory” is through “our *faith*”, not our power or works. “Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (v.5).

7. *God’s children do not sin* (5:18a): “We know that whoever is *born of God* does not sin;”

There must be a good reason why John makes this statement twice. He here gives another reason why all who are “born of God” do not sin:

8. *God’s children keep themselves* (5:18b): “... but he who has been *born of God* keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.”

God’s children are kept by Him. They keep themselves to God by obeying the exhortation “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (v.21). These “idols” are anything contrary to Christ and the truth, including not only graven images but also false doctrine. He who does so is assured that “the wicked one does not touch him.”

* The KJV speaks of them as “sons of God”. But the Greek text identifies them as “children of God”. God speaks of His children as including both “My sons” and “My daughters” (e.g., Isaiah 43:6).