

# Born to Sin, or Born Again?

*By Charles Finney*

In the course of time important words and concepts can lose their precise meaning with frequent use by careless users or adherents. Even the very word ‘*God*’ has so often been repeated in discussion that multitudes of theology students or church-goers have unconsciously forgotten all that is meant by the term and Person of the all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely holy King of Heaven. Likewise, the term *Christian* has been so often used, and so many different kinds of sinners have called themselves one, that the average person, even in America, could not tell you the real meaning of the word. The word *Christian* is generally understood as merely an ethical heritage, social preference, or as a person who only verbally agrees that the Bible has the truth. Thus, people largely assume that there are different *kinds of Christians*—with completely different theologies and hearts. It therefore becomes necessary to give more details to show that the Founder, Leader, and focus of Christianity insisted that: “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me *cannot* be My disciple... So then, none of you can be My disciple, *who does not give up all he possesses.*” (Luke 14) We can all see that the common use of the term *Christian* is not as limited as Jesus Himself demanded, so that multitudes are supposed to be *Christians* who do not in fact give up all their sins and live for God’s will as He has revealed it. ( See 1 John 2:15-17)

The phrase ‘*born-again*’ has suffered the same hypocritical wear that *Christian* has endured. Even though the former is more limited than the later, it still claims so many godless members that we were compelled to print up a careful Biblical exposition of the phrase so that it might be rescued from these fanatical and sinful associations. We will grant that most definitions of the phrase are right in that there is a great change that takes place in one’s life and heart; and that this change is altogether at once. But *how much* of a change takes place? Or *what kind* of change occurs? Again, it is generally believed that there is at least a noticeable change in the person’s views and opinions about sin, and that they stop doing certain things after this *born-again* experience because they then know they are wrong. But is this change or reformation limited to a few outward actions and opinions about doctrines?

We notice that in the first and most common reference to being *born again* in the Bible (John 3), we find Jesus comparing this experience, which he was insisting upon Nicodemus, with a natural birth. Nicodemus stumbled at Jesus’ statements and

supposed He was referring to being naturally born again. So Jesus corrected him and showed that the second birth was not two experiences of being born of the water and flesh, but that man had to have two *similar* births: one natural of the water, and one spiritual of the spirit. The first is necessary for natural life on earth; *the second is necessary for life in heaven*. In the first birth we have all things necessary for living a natural life; in the second we gain all things necessary to dwell with God in heaven (and on earth). We are thus born *children* of God in holiness and purity.

**T**he term *born-again* can be translated *born anew*, and so means a totally new change of heart. The chapter reveals that this change is like starting over again, as if we became like infants who had not sinned yet. The context of the Bible teaches that this concept, which is also loosely called *being justified, conversion, a new creature, in Christ, children of God, born of God, sons of God, beloved children, Light in the Lord, children of Light, etc.*, is a complete change of heart and relation to God through Jesus Christ.

**T**here is no proof of this being a partial change which gives up sin in incomplete amounts; or of being merely a new desire and effort to improve ourselves by resolutions and self-efforts that leave us without being pure *as He is pure*. God *continually* insists that repentance is necessary before we are accepted of Him and justified (Lk. 13:3-9; 15:7 17:3; Acts 3:19; Rom. 2:13). We are thus required to turn from *all* of our sin and receive all His grace to become all that He expects of us. Because He has commanded us to be righteous as He is righteous, we have the highest evidence that we can be righteous just as He is righteous. And if there is no sin in God's heart and choices, who could suppose that there could be any in ours if we are "righteous *just as He is righteous*" when we are born of God? People who measure their definitions of being *born-again* by their own experience, and suppose therefore that it must be only positional righteousness before God--which is in name only and not free of sin--have not considered the very words they use, or what God actually can do for them by His perfect grace to save!

**C**onsider for a moment: How could a perfect God use such terms as *born of God, children of the kingdom, or a new creation* to refer to an imperfect work marred with sin and a contrary will not prepared to bless heaven with its example? To suggest such is to deny what He says, that "everything created by God is good" and to suppose the new birth is only *partially good*--and the rest is to be worked out by our own self-righteous efforts! Who will dare say it!

**P**eople often get confused on this subject because Christians can, and often do, fall into sin again and again. They therefore think being *born-again* is the same as what

people call being a Christian from the first moment till death (and all the obedience and disobedience in between). They suppose themselves still Christians while in momentary sins, because they still *profess* to be Christians. In the same way people still *profess* to be a *'born-again'* person while they sin (because they generally live holy). But in this they fail to see the Biblical teaching and use of the words they employ, and thus contribute to the disintegration of the true meaning and righteousness of the new birth or salvation.

**T**he fact is, that all these words and concepts of the *born-again* experience in the Bible ARE NOT about *the first time* we have faith, but *to those moments when we are walking with God as He requires us* in true faith, love, holiness, righteousness, and purity. We are *born of God* when our hearts and actions are born of God according to His will, and as He taught us to pray: *'as it is done in heaven'*. Who supposes a partial or sinful obedience to His will there? We therefore can hardly suppose that He accepts such here when *'He appeared to save us from our sins!'* "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness and *transferred us* to the kingdom of His beloved Son." (Col. 1:13)

**B**ut let us conclude by examining the first Epistle of John to see how He taught further on the subject of being born of God that we saw above in the third chapter of his Gospel. Take note of just *when* people are born of God and *when* they are not; and see that it has nothing to do with a person's mere profession or history, but a heart presently free from sin:

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and *walk in darkness*, we lie, and do not the truth. (1:6)... My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. (2:1)...He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. (2:4-6)...he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. (2:17)...If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him. Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. ***Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not:*** whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man

deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil:* whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother....He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. (3:14)...love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God....If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is *perfected* in us...Herein is our love made *perfect*, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world...(4:7, 12, 17)...For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world...We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” (5:4, 18)

**I**f you find these words different than your experience then consider what the apostle also said: “...*he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.*”

*“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” –John 3:7*