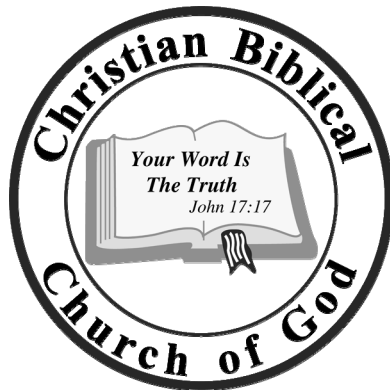


**What Do You
Mean—
Born Again
and
Born of God?**



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Chapter One

Overview of “Born Again”

Are Christians really “born again” at conversion and baptism?

According to Protestantism, one is “born again” at conversion, typically in conjunction with baptism, when one has “received Christ.” Catholic theology is similar, even extending the experience to infants via its practice of “infant baptism.”

Yet, most Christians have great difficulty explaining from Scripture what it means to be “born again” or “born of God.” Indeed, there is great confusion on this subject. The Scriptures are, however, straightforward. In John 3:2-12, Jesus taught that to be “born again” literally means to be born of the Spirit—to *become* a spirit being. As we will see, other passages show that this “new birth” to spirit life will take place at the first resurrection when Christ returns. According to the Bible, Jesus Himself is the *firstborn from the dead*. No one else has been resurrected from the dead to eternal life—no one else has been “born again” or “born of God.”

Pagan Origin of the Popular “Born Again” Doctrine

It may come as a surprise to many that the idea of a “second birth” as a religious experience is not unique to Christianity. In fact, the concept is quite ancient. In his epochal book, *The Two Babylons*, Alexander Hislop conclusively demonstrates that pagan religions, which had their roots in ancient Babylon, had a belief and practice of being “born again” or “twice born.” For example, Hislop wrote: “The Brahmins make it their distinguishing boast that they are ‘twice-born’ men, and that, as such, they are sure of eternal happiness. Now, the same was the case in [ancient] Babylon, and there **the new birth was conferred by baptism**. In the Chaldean [Babylonian] mysteries, before any instruction could be received, it was required first of all that **the person to be initiated** [into the mysteries of the religion] **submit to baptism** [as a] **token of blind and implicit obedience**” (p. 132, emphasis added). Note that the pagan teaching of being “born again” or “twice born” had nothing to do with being raised from the dead, and that it was linked to the rite of *baptism*.

But how did this false teaching find its way into nominal Christianity?

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False Teachers and Apostasy

Jesus Christ repeatedly warned the apostles and believers about false christs, false apostles and false teachers who would come and, if possible, deceive the very elect (Matt. 24:5, 11, 15, 24; see parallel accounts in Mark and Luke). The apostles likewise warned the true believers to be on guard against false apostles and teachers (II Cor. 4:11; I and II Timothy; Titus 1; II Pet. 2; I, II and III John; Jude; Rev. 2, 3, 13 and 17). The New Testament is replete with warnings against false apostles and teachers who would come in “sheep’s clothing” but inwardly would be “ravening wolves,” seeking to pervert and destroy the truth.

The Apostle Paul warned the Thessalonians in 51 AD that this apostate religious system, which he called the “mystery of lawlessness,” was beginning to penetrate the Church (II Thess 2:1-12). He warned, “Do not let anyone deceive you by any means because *that day* [of Christ’s return] *will not* come unless **the apostasy shall come first**, and the man of sin [the final anti-Christ] shall be revealed.... **For the mystery of lawlessness is already working**” (verses 2, 7).

Over time, this “mystery religion,” modeled after the ancient Babylonian “mysteries,” has developed into a great apostate “Christianity”—which Christ has identified in Scripture as **“Babylon the Great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth”** (Rev. 17:5). The early leaders of this religious system established numerous false teachings, among them the doctrine that one is “born again” at conversion (or, in Protestant-speak, when one has “accepted Jesus”). Just as in ancient Babylon, this “new birth” is associated with baptism, but has nothing to do with being raised from the dead to spirit life.

Compounding this doctrinal error is the unscriptural belief that humans possess an immortal soul. While rejecting the truth of the resurrection of the dead, false teachers adopted this teaching from the Babylonian “mysteries.” To this day, within Christendom most people are taught that at death the soul goes to heaven for doing good, or to purgatory or hell for committing various degrees of evil.

Yet, the Bible does not teach the immortality of the soul; rather, it reveals, “The soul that sins, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20). Neither does the Bible teach that when one dies, the soul goes to heaven or hell. Rather, it clearly shows that when one dies, he or she awaits the resurrection of the dead—both of the righteous and the wicked (Dan. 12:2; John 5:25-29; I Cor. 15; Rev. 20:14-15; 21:8). The apostles were witnesses that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead, a fact that is vital to a Christian being raised from the dead at His Second Coming (Rom. 8:11).

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The belief in the immortality of the soul fueled the doctrine of infant baptism, for if an infant were to die, what would happen to its soul? Therefore, this belief necessitated baptism or christening to remove the “stain of original sin” so that if the infant died, its soul would go to heaven; if the infant lived to adulthood, salvation and heaven was assured. This baptism was also the rite by which the infant was “born again” of water, showing a gross misapplication of John Three.

There is no scriptural example of infants or children being baptized. Jesus Himself was not baptized until He was thirty years old. From *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, there is the following entry on infant baptism: “Although from the first, baptism was the universal means of entry into the Christian community, the NT contains no specific authority for its administration to infants. But by a tradition at least as old as the 3rd century, and virtually universal until the Reformation, children born to Christian parents have been baptized in infancy. In the 16th century this practice (pseudo-baptism) was rejected by the Anabaptists and since the early 17th century also by the Baptists and later by the Disciples of Christ” (Infant Baptism).

The Catholic sacrament of infant baptism evolved into a religious “work,” and was rejected by Protestants during the Reformation. Subsequently, Protestantism developed a slightly different doctrine regarding being “born again”—based on a “no works” perversion of grace—that essentially teaches that all one has to do is “profess Christ” and they are then “born again.”

Quotations from the Early Latin Church Fathers

Rejecting the biblical teaching that being born again occurs at the resurrection from the dead—and accepting the pagan teaching of the immortality of the soul—early Latin church fathers adopted the Babylonian idea that one is “born again” through baptism. The following statements reveal that this false doctrine was formalized soon after the apostolic age ended.

St. Justin Martyr taught that converts to Christianity are to be “led by us to a place where there is **water**; and **there they are reborn** in the same kind of rebirth in which we ourselves were reborn” (*The First Apology* 61).

St. Irenaeus taught that Christians “are made clean, by means of the **sacred water** and the invocation of the Lord, from [their] old transgressions, being spiritually **regenerated as new-born babes...**” (*Fragment* 34).

Clement wrote that, in this present life, Christians “are **regenerated and born again of water**” (*Recognitions* 6:9).

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From these quotes, it is evident that contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the original apostles, the so-called ‘early church fathers’ believed that being “born again” was a religious “experience” of sorts tied to the rite of baptism.

The Latin Vulgate

One of the contributing factors which has obscured the true meaning of the phrase “born again” is the mistranslation of John 3:5 in the *Latin Vulgate*. Originally translated by Jerome in 383 AD, the *Vulgate* inserts the word “again” into verse five, making it read “born **again** of water.” Yet, no Greek manuscript has the word “again” added to the phrase “born of water.” By contrast, Erasmus’ Latin translation from the Greek is correct. In verse five, he translated the Greek as “born of water,” without the word “again.”

It is highly probable that the Latin church leaders—such as those quoted above—were influenced by an early, pre-*Vulgate* translation of the Scriptures with a corrupt rendering of John 3:5. At the very least, Jerome’s translation perpetuated the false “born again” teaching with its corruption of John 3:5. The faulty rendering has remained a part of the *Latin Vulgate* and is the basis of the Catholic “sacrament of baptism”—typically given to infants or children.

Biblical scholar William Tyndale, the first to translate the New Testament from the Greek into English, translated John 3:3, 5 correctly. However, in other writings he taught that when one is converted and receives the Holy Spirit one has already been “born again.” It is likely that Tyndale’s theology contributed to the Protestant “born again” teaching.

The True Meaning of “Born Again”

In order to fully comprehend the scriptural meaning of when one is born again, Jesus’ teachings in John 3:1-12 must be examined. The context of these verses proves that being born again does not mean a conversion or baptismal experience. Rather, it means a literal transformation from flesh to spirit: “Now there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher *Who* has come from God; because no one is able to do the miracles that You are doing, unless God is with him.’”

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, **unless anyone is born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man who is old be born? Can he

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enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, **unless anyone has been born of water and of Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which has been **born of the flesh is flesh**; and that which has been **born of the Spirit is spirit**. Do not be amazed that I said to you, “It is necessary for you to be born again.” **The wind blows where it will**, and you hear its sound, but you do not know *the place* from which it comes and *the place* to which it goes; **so also is everyone who has been born of the Spirit.**’

“Nicodemus answered and said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘You are a teacher of Israel, and you do not know these things? Truly, truly I say to you, We speak that which We know, and We testify of that which We have seen; but you do not receive Our testimony. If I have told you earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?’ ” (John 3:1-12).

It is clear that Jesus was not talking about a conversion or baptismal experience in this dialogue. Rather, he was comparing one’s physical birth—a fleshly existence—to that of being born anew or born again—to an actual spiritual existence. Jesus describes two births: one of water and one of the spirit—“unless anyone has been **born of water and of Spirit**” (John 3:5). In verse six, Jesus shows the comparison between a birth of flesh and a birth of the spirit: “That which has been **born of the flesh is flesh**; and that which has been **born of the Spirit is spirit.**”

When a human being is born, he or she is born of flesh—a physical being. Further, every human being has been “born of water” from the womb. One who has been *born of water* (via the womb) **has been born of the flesh—and is flesh** (John 3:5-6).

But Nicodemus missed the point when Jesus referred to a new or second birth of the Spirit—“**unless anyone has been born ... of Spirit.**” What kind of existence does one have who has been born of the Spirit? Jesus answered that question when He said “that which has been **born of the Spirit is spirit.**” Jesus clearly meant that anyone who has been born of the Spirit is, in fact, a spirit being. The new, spiritual birth means that one who has been “born again” is a spirit being, no longer composed of human flesh. Since one who has been “born of the flesh is flesh,” it follows, as Jesus said, that one who has been “born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).

Every human is limited by fleshly existence and physical environment. However, as a spirit being, one is not bound by the flesh or limited by the physical realm. Jesus stated that one who has been born of the Spirit cannot necessarily be seen, just as the wind cannot be seen: “**The wind blows where it wills**, and you hear its sound, but you do not

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know *the place* from which it comes and *the place* to which it goes; **so also is everyone who has been born of the Spirit**" (verse 8). Therefore, one who has been "born again," "born of the Spirit," must be invisible to the human eye, having the ability to come and go as the wind. That is hardly the case of one who has been baptized and converted; he or she is still in the flesh and is limited by the flesh—subject to death. Jesus said that a fleshly human being "cannot see" or "enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5). Paul reiterated this when he emphatically stated: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit *the kingdom of God*" (I Cor. 15:50).

When is One Actually Born Again? Since one is not born again at baptism or conversion, when is one literally "born again" or "born anew"? It is through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the New Testament reveals when a person is born again. Matthew wrote that Jesus was the "firstborn" of the Virgin Mary (Matt. 1:25). Jesus' human birth was by water. He was flesh (I John 4:1-2), as any other human being, but He was "God manifested in *the flesh*" (I Tim. 3:16).

When Jesus was resurrected from the dead by the glory of the Father, He was the "firstborn from the dead." Therefore, Jesus was "born again"—born of the Spirit—at the time He was resurrected from the dead, exactly as He told Nicodemus, "That which has been born of the Spirit is spirit."

The apostle Paul clearly showed that Jesus was born again when he wrote: "Because by Him were all things created, the things in heaven and the things on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all, and by Him all things subsist. And He is the Head of the body, the church; **Who is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead**, so that in all things He Himself might hold the preeminence. For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell" (Col. 1:16-19). The apostle John also verified this when he wrote that **Jesus was "the Firstborn from the dead"** (Rev. 1:5).

After His resurrection and ascension to heaven to be accepted by God the Father as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, Jesus returned to the earth and appeared to the apostles who were assembled together in a room behind closed doors. Since a spirit being is not limited by the physical realm, the resurrected Jesus walked through doors and walls, suddenly appearing to the apostles and disciples: "Now as they were telling these things, **Jesus Himself** [suddenly appearing] **stood in their midst** and said to them, 'Peace *be* to you.' But they were terrified and filled with fear, thinking *that* they beheld a

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spirit [a demon]. Then He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts come up in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I. Touch Me and see *for yourselves*; for a spirit [a demon] does not have flesh and bones, as you see Me having.’ And after saying this, He showed them *His* hands and *His* feet. But while they were still disbelieving and wondering for joy, He said to them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ Then they gave Him part of a broiled fish and a *piece* of honeycomb. And He took these *and* ate in their presence” (Luke 24:33-43).

As a divine spirit being, the firstborn from the dead, Jesus was able to manifest Himself as a man, with an appearance that looked like flesh and bone.

Christ is the Firstborn Among Many

Not only is Jesus Christ the firstborn from the dead, He is also the “firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). The true body of believers is called “the church of the firstborn,” as Paul wrote: “But you have come to Mount Zion, and to *the* city of *the* living God, heavenly Jerusalem; and to an innumerable company of angels; *to the* joyous festival gathering; and to **the church of the firstborn**, registered in *the book of life* in heaven; and to God, *the* Judge of all” (Heb. 12:22-23). It is called the church of the firstborn because believers will be resurrected, or born again—born of the Spirit—in the first resurrection when Jesus returns (Rev. 20:4-6).

Paul wrote that the resurrected Jesus is also called “the firstfruit” of those raised from the dead. Furthermore, he explained that true Christians would be resurrected at Jesus’ second coming: “But now Christ has been raised from *the* dead; He has become **the firstfruit** of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by man also *came the* resurrection of *the* dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: **Christ the firstfruit; then, those who are Christ’s at His coming**” (I Cor. 15:20-23).

The apostle James, the brother of the Lord, referred to true Christians as “firstfruits” unto God: “Do not deceive yourselves, my beloved brethren. Every good act of giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation, nor shadow of turning. According to His own will, He begat us by *the* Word of truth, that **we might be a kind of firstfruits** of all His created beings” (James 1:16-18).

Paul continues in First Corinthians: “It is sown a **natural body** [that which has been born of the flesh is flesh]; it is raised a **spiritual**

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body [that which has been born of the spirit is spirit]. **There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body**; accordingly, it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam *became* an ever-living Spirit.’ However, **the spiritual was not first, but the natural—then the spiritual**” (I Cor. 15:35-46).

These Scriptures reveal that at the resurrection one will be born again of the Spirit and receive a glorious spirit body, shining as the sun. Paul continued his explanation of the resurrection of the dead in verses 47-55: “The first man *is* of the earth—made of dust. The second man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *is* the one made of dust, so also *are all* those who are made of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *one*, so also *are all* those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the *one* made of dust, **we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one** [at the resurrection].

“Now this I say, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**, nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all fall asleep, but **we shall all be changed** [born again of the Spirit], in an instant, in *the* twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for *the* trumpet shall sound, and **the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed**. For this corruptible must put on incorruptibility, and this mortal must put on immortality. Now when this **corruptible shall have put on incorruptibility**, and this **mortal shall have put on immortality**, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ”

In his First Epistle to the Thessalonians in 50 AD, Paul explained that the resurrection of the saints would not take place until the return of Jesus Christ to the earth: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in exactly the same way also, those who have fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him [because they will ascend into the air to meet Him in the clouds]. For this we say to you by *the* Word of *the* Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall in no wise precede those who have fallen asleep; because the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with *a* shout of command, with *the* voice of an archangel and with *the* trumpet of God; and **the dead in Christ shall rise first** [born again of the Spirit]; **then we who are alive and remain** [will be changed and] **shall be caught up together with them in the clouds for the meeting with the Lord in the air**; and so shall we always be with *the* Lord” (I Thess. 4:14-18).

In summary, the scriptural evidence clearly reveals that one is not “born again” or “born of the Spirit” until the resurrection at the return of Jesus Christ. Being born again has nothing to do with baptism or conversion. When one has been born again, he or she will be a spirit being—composed of spirit. The resurrected saints will inherit the glory

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of Jesus Christ, Who will transform their bodies to be like His glorified body: “But for us, the commonwealth *of God* exists in *the* heavens, from where also we are waiting for *the* Savior, *the* Lord Jesus Christ; **Who will transform our vile bodies, that they may be conformed to His glorious body**, according to the inner working of His own power, *whereby He is able* to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).

This is an overview of the true meaning of “born again.”

Chapter Two is an in-depth study of what it means to be “born again”.

Chapter Two

An In-depth Study: What Does It Mean to Be “Born Again”?

It is apparent that the early Latin church fathers made a deliberate alteration of the text in John 3:5 that, to this day, has obscured the true meaning of the phrase “born again.” This alteration has remained a part of the *Latin Vulgate* and is the basis of the Catholic doctrine of the “sacrament of baptism.” During the Reformation, Protestants rejected the Catholic sacrament and developed a slightly different doctrine regarding “born again.” The teachings of what it means to be “born again” and “born of God” are perhaps some of the most misunderstood teachings of the New Testament. Tragically, this has resulted in millions of false conversions.

The Catholic sacrament of baptism evolved into a religious work while various Protestant versions led to a perverted, lawless grace that rejects Jesus’ teachings that a Christian is required to keep the commandments of God. Compounding these doctrinal errors is the unscriptural belief in the immortality of the soul and the practice of infant baptism.

There is no scriptural example of infants or children being baptized. Jesus Christ was not “christened” nor was He baptized when He was a baby; in fact, He was not baptized until He was thirty years old. Neither do the New Testament accounts show that John the Baptist or the apostles baptized infants or children. The New Testament teaches that when one repents of his or her sins to God the Father and by faith accepts the sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, one must be baptized by full immersion in water (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:35-36; Rom 3:23-25; 4:7-8, 24-25; 5:9-10; 6:1-6). Repentance and baptism are decisions and commitments that only an adult can make. The true New Testament teachings of what it means to be born again and born of God differ entirely from Catholic or Protestant beliefs.

The Babylonian Pagan Origin of a Counterfeit “Born Again” Doctrine

In his epoch book, *The Two Babylons*, Alexander Hislop conclusively demonstrates that pagan religions, which had their roots in ancient Babylon, had a counterfeit belief and practice of being born

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again, or “twice born.” Hislop wrote: “The Brahmins make it their distinguishing boast that they are ‘twice-born’ men, and that, as such, they are sure of eternal happiness. Now, the same was the case in [ancient] Babylon, and there **the new birth was conferred by baptism**. In the Chaldean mysteries, before any instruction could be received, it was required first of all, that **the person to be initiated** [into the mysteries] **submit to baptism in token of blind and implicit obedience**” (Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 132, bold emphasis added).

When God scattered the people from the Tower of Babel, dispersing them throughout the world, they took with them their idolatrous pagan religion. Instead of worshiping the true God, they continued to worship Nimrod and Semiramis and their son Tammuz. However, because God confused mankind’s language into many languages, these false deities took many names. Regardless of their various names in ancient and even modern languages, they are these three pagan deities: Nimrod—the father god, Semiramis—the mother goddess, and Tammuz—the son and false savior. The spiritual power behind these human deities is none other than Satan the devil, who deceives the whole world (Rev. 12:9).

In the ancient Chaldean mystery religion there was a perverted myth connected with the flood of Noah about being twice-born. The pagan priests twisted the truth to fit their religious beliefs as Hislop notes: “Whatever primitive truth the Chaldean priests held, they utterly perverted and corrupted it. They willingly overlooked the fact that it was ‘the righteousness of the faith’ which Noah ‘had *before*’ the flood that carried him safely through the avenging waters of that dread catastrophe and ushered him, as it were, from the womb of the ark, by a new birth, into a new world, when on the ark resting on Mount Ararat, he was released from his long confinement. They led their votaries to believe that, if they only passed through the **baptismal waters**, and the penances therewith connected, that of itself would make them like the second father of mankind, ‘Diphueis,’ ‘**twice-born,**’ or ‘**regenerate,**’ [and] would entitle them to all the privileges of ‘righteous’ Noah, and give them that ‘**new birth**’... which their consciences told them they so much needed. The Papacy acts on precisely the same principle; and from this very source has its doctrine of baptismal regeneration been derived, about which so much has been written and so many controversies been waged. Let men contend as they may, **this, and this only, will be found to be the real origin of the anti-Scriptural dogma**” (Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 137, bold emphasis added).

Infant Baptism: With the scattering of the people from the Tower of Babel, the Babylonian religion was spread around the world.

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Consequently, it is no surprise that infant baptism was practiced in Mexico thousands of years before the Spanish conquest. When the Spanish invaded Mexico, they were stunned at observing an infant baptism that mirrored the Catholic ritual. Hislop explains: “The same doctrine of baptismal regeneration [as the Babylonian Mysteries and Catholic practice] was found in full vigour among the natives, when Cortez and his warriors landed on their shores. The ceremony of Mexican baptism, which was beheld with astonishment by the Spanish Roman Catholic missionaries, is thus strikingly described in Prescott’s *Conquest of Mexico*: ‘When everything necessary for the baptism had been made ready, all the relations of the child were assembled, and the midwife, who was the person that performed the rite of baptism, was summoned. At early dawn [showing sun worship derived from ancient Babylon and Egypt], they met together in the courtyard of the house. When the sun had risen, the midwife, taking the child in her arms, called for a little earthen vessel of water, while those about her placed the ornaments, which had been prepared for baptism, in the midst of the court. To perform the rite of baptism, she placed herself with her face toward the west [the infant facing east], and immediately began to go through certain ceremonies ... After this she sprinkled water on the head of the infant, saying, “O my child, take and receive the water of the Lord of the world [who is Satan the devil II Cor. 4:4], which is our life, which is given for the increasing and renewing of our body. It is to wash and to purify. I pray that these heavenly drops may enter into your body, and dwell there; that they may destroy and remove from you all the evil and sin which was given you before the beginning of the world, since all of us are under its power” ... She then washed the body of the child with water, and spoke in this manner: “Whencesoever thou comest, thou [the evil spirit] that art hurtful to this child, leave him and depart from him, for he now liveth anew, and is BORN ANEW; now he is purified and cleansed afresh, and our mother Chalchivitlecue [the goddess of water] bringeth him into the world.” Having thus prayed, the midwife took the child in both hands, and, lifting him towards heaven [with the infant facing the rising sun] said, “O Lord, thou seest here thy creature, whom thou hast sent into the world, this place of sorrow, suffering, and penitence. Grant him, O Lord, thy gifts and inspiration, for thou art the Great God, and with thee is the great goddess.”’ Here is the opus operatum without mistake. Here is baptismal regeneration and exorcism too, as thorough and complete as any Romish priest or lover of Tractarianism could desire” (Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, p. 133, bold emphasis added).

In ancient Greece, the pagan Athenians made their baptismal waters holy by plunging a flaming torch, symbolizing the power of the

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sun god, into the water used for baptism. Likewise, the baptismal waters used in Romish baptisms are made holy by plunging a flaming torch into the water. Referring to Catholic justification of such practices, Hislop wrote: “Of what avail is it for Bishop Hay to say, with the view of sanctifying superstition and ‘making apostasy plausible,’ that this is done ‘to represent the fire of Divine love, which is communicated to the soul by baptism and the light of good example, which all who are baptised ought to give.’ This is the fair face put on the matter; but the fact still remains [sic] that while the Romish doctrines in regard to baptism is purely Pagan, in the ceremonies connected with the Papal baptism one of the essential rites of the ancient fire-worship is still practiced at this day, just as it was practiced by the worshippers of Bacchus, the Babylonian Messiah. As Rome keeps up the remembrance of the fire-god passing through the waters and giving virtue to them, so when it speaks of the ‘Holy Ghost *suffering* for us in baptism,’ it in like manner commemorates the part which Paganism assigned to the Babylonian goddess when she plunged into the waters. The sorrows of Nimrod, or Bacchus, when in the waters were meritorious sorrows. The sorrows of his wife, in whom the Holy Ghost miraculously dwelt, were the same. The sorrows of the Madonna, then when in these waters, fleeing from Typhon’s rage, were the birth-throes by which children were born to God [born again by water]. And thus, even in the Far West, Chalchivilycue, the Mexican ‘goddess of the waters,’ and ‘mother’ of all the regenerate, was represented as purging the new-born infant from original sin, and bringing it anew into the world.’ Now, the Holy Ghost was idolatrously worshipped in Babylon under the form of a ‘Dove.’ Under the same form, and with equal idolatry, the Holy Ghost is worshipped in Rome. When, therefore, we read, in opposition to every Scripture principle, that ‘*the Holy Ghost suffered for us in baptism,*’ surely it must now be manifest who is that Holy Ghost that is really intended. It is no other than Semiramis, the very incarnation of lust and all uncleanness.

“The reader has seen already how faithfully Rome has copied the Pagan exorcism [of evil spirits] in connection with baptism. All the other peculiarities attending the Romish baptism, such as the use of salt, spittle, chrism, or anointing with oil, and marking the forehead with the sign of the cross, are equally Pagan. Some of the continental advocates of Rome have admitted that some of these at least have not been derived from Scripture” (Ibid., pp. 137-138, 143-144). Hence, the doctrine and practice of infant baptism originated in ancient Babylon, and the belief that one is born again of water by baptism is derived from heathen paganism.

How did these anti-scriptural, heathen, pagan practices become part of Christendom?

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The Gnostic Connection, the Great Apostasy and the Early Latin Church Fathers

Jesus Christ repeatedly warned the apostles and believers about false christs, false apostles and false teachers who would come and if possible deceive the very elect (Matt. 24:5, 11, 15, 24; see parallel accounts in Mark and Luke). The apostles likewise warned the brethren to be on guard against false apostles and teachers (II Cor. 4:11; I and II Timothy; Titus 1; II Pet. 2; I, II and III John; Jude; Rev. 2, 3, 13 and 17). The New Testament is replete with warnings against false apostles and teachers who would come in “sheep’s clothing” but inwardly would be “ravening wolves,” seeking to pervert and destroy the truth.

Paul warned the Thessalonians in 51 AD that this apostate system, which he called the “mystery of lawlessness,” was beginning to penetrate the Church. He forewarned that some were writing counterfeit epistles in his name. Furthermore, he prophesied that this apostate system would grow and continue until the final antichrist would arise, whom Jesus would destroy at His second coming: “Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken in mind, nor be troubled—neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by epistle, as if from us, *saying* that the day of Christ is present.

“Do not let anyone deceive you by any means because *that day will not* come unless **the apostasy shall come first**, and the man of sin shall be revealed—the son of perdition, the one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is an object of worship; so that he comes into the temple of God and sits down as God, proclaiming that he himself is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And now you understand what is holding *him* back in order for him to be revealed in his own set time.

“**For the mystery of lawlessness is already working**; only *there is* one Who is restraining at the present *time* until it arises out of *the* midst. And then the lawless one will be revealed (whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and will destroy with the brightness of His coming); *even* **the one whose coming is according to the inner working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders**, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in those who are perishing because they did not receive the love of the truth, so that they might be saved. And for this cause, God will send upon them a powerful deception that will cause them to believe *the* lie; so that all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but who took pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thes. 2:1-12, bold emphasis added).

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Thus, Satan the devil inspired his ministers of iniquity to develop a great apostate “Christianity” that Jesus Christ also identified as “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Rev. 17:5). They preached a false christ, propagated false doctrines, wrote false letters, and even falsified and altered the holy Scriptures of God (II Pet. 3:16) in order to promulgate their pagan Babylonian teachings. The early leaders of this neo-gnostic Christianized apostate church established many false teachings, among them the doctrine of being born again, which is the focus of this Appendix.

The Latin Vulgate: When examining John 3:3-5 in the *Latin Vulgate* Bible—originally translated by Jerome in 383 AD—one finds a deliberate insertion of the word “again” into verse 5, making it read “born **again** of water.” No Greek manuscript has the word “again” added to the phrase “born of water.” What follows is the *Latin Vulgate* with an English translation. Note that the Latin syntax must be reordered into English syntax most of the time and punctuation added:

3. *Respondit Iesus et dixit ei amen amen dico tibi nisi quis **natus** fuerit **denuo** non potest videre regnum Dei*

3. Jesus responded and said to him, “Amen, amen, I say to you unless anyone be **born anew**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4. *Dicit ad eum Nicodemus quomodo potest homo **nasci** cum senex sit numquid potest in ventrem matris suae iterato introire et **nasci***

4. Nicodemus says to him, “How can a man be **born already** being old? Can he enter into his own mother’s belly again and be **born**?”

5. *Respondit Iesus amen amen dico tibi nisi quis **renatus** fuerit **ex aqua** et Spiritu non potest introire in regnum Dei*

5. Jesus answered, “Amen, amen, I say to you unless one is **reborn [born again] of water** and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

In verse 3 the Latin *natus* means “born” and *denuo* means “anew” or “again.” But, *denuo* is not found in verse 5, which reads differently. Instead, the prefix *re* has been added to *natus*, making it read *renatus*, which means “reborn” or “born again.” This addition makes the phrase read, “born **again** of water and Spirit.” This phrase is not found in any of the Greek manuscripts, which universally read: γεννηθη εξ υδατος και πνευματος, correctly translated, “born of water and of spirit.” Moreover, the Greek word *ανωθεν* *anowthen* “again” or “anew,” found in the Greek text in verse 3, is not found in verse 5.

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Since the Greek word *ανωθεν* *anōthen* does not appear in verse 5 in any Greek manuscript, the Latin text is not an accurate translation from the Greek. Also, the addition of the prefix *re* to *natus* changes the entire meaning of verse 5. It is likely that these changes were made in order to substantiate the mistaken belief that when one is baptized, one is “**reborn** of water,” or “born **again** of water.” From this doctrine the practice of infant baptism was developed.

Coverdale’s Latin and English New Testament: In 1538, Miles Coverdale published a side-by-side Latin Vulgate and English version of the New Testament. The Latin Vulgate he used in his day is different from the Latin Vulgate of today. The following is John 3:3-5 in Coverdale’s Latin Vulgate and his English translation printed in Southwarke, England by James Nicolson in 1538:

3. *Respondit IESVS, et dixit ei: amen amen dico tibi nisi quis renatus fuerit denuo non potest uidere regnum Dei*

3. Jesus answered, and said unto him: “Verily, verily I say unto you, without [unless] a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4. *Dicit ad eum Nicodemus: quomodo potest homo renasci cusit senex nunquid potest in uetrem matris suae iterato introire & renasci*

4. Nicodemus says to him, “How can a man be **reborn already** being old? Can he enter into his own mother’s belly again and be **reborn**?”

5. *Respondit IESVS: amen amen dico tibi nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu non potes t introire in regnum Dei*

5. Jesus answered: “Verily, verily I say unto you, without [unless] a man be **born again of water** and the holy ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

From Coverdale’s *Latin-English* version, it is clear that the *Latin Vulgate* of his day had *renatus* and *renasci*, making it read “reborn” or “born again” in verses 3, 4 and 5. Likewise, he translated the Latin *renatus* and *renasci* as “born again” in verses 3, 4 and 5 in his English rendition; whereas, today’s *Latin Vulgate* has *renatus* only in verse 5. Therefore, all the evidence from the *Latin Vulgate* and the English translations makes it apparent that John 3:3, 4 and 5 was altered to support the false doctrine that one is born again at baptism.

Erasmus’ Greek-Latin Version of 1535: With his final version of the Greek Text, Erasmo Roterodamo (Erasmus of Rotterdam) translated the Byzantine Greek into Latin. His purpose was to provide a new uncorrupted Latin version of the New Testament. In his translation, he

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did not incorporate the mistranslations and deliberate errors of the *Latin Vulgate* into his Latin translation. Erasmus’ Latin translation from the Greek, with an English translation provided, is as follows:

3. *Respondit Iesus, et dixit ei amen amen dico tibi nisi quis natus fuerit esuperinis non potest videre regnum Dei*

3. Jesus responded and said to him, “Amen, amen, I say to you unless anyone be **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4. *Dicit ad eum Nicodemus: Quomodo potest homo nasci cum sit senex? Num potest in uentrem matris suae iterato introire, ac nasci?*

4. Nicodemus says to him, “How can a man be **born already** being old? Can he enter into his mother’s womb again and be **born**?”

5. *Respondit Iesus amen amen dico tibi nisi quis natus fuerit ex aqua et Spiritu non potest introire in regnum Dei*

5. Jesus answered, “Amen, amen, I say to you unless one is **born of water** and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

Erasmus’ Latin translation from the Greek is correct. In verse 5, he translated the Greek word γεννηθη *gennethe* as *natus*, “born” of water, not as the Vulgate *renatus*, “born again” of water. Erasmus’ translation reveals that the *Latin Vulgate* was deliberately corrupted.

How Did It All Begin?

How did the false interpretation and teaching of John 3:5 develop into a deliberate mistranslation as found in the *Latin Vulgate*? The seeds of this teaching are rooted in one of the heresies that the apostle Paul had to address when he wrote to the Corinthians in 56 AD. Some within the Corinthian congregations were claiming that there was no resurrection of the dead, reflecting the pagan belief in the immortality of the soul. To counter this outrageous claim, Paul wrote: “**But if Christ is being preached, that He rose from the dead, how is it that some among you are saying that there is no resurrection of the dead? For if there is no resurrection from the dead, neither has Christ been raised.** And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching *is* in vain, and your faith *is* also in vain. And we are also found to *be* false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that He raised Christ, Whom He did not raise, if indeed *the* dead are not raised.

“For if *the* dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. But if Christ has not been raised, your faith *is* vain; you are still in your sins, and those who have fallen asleep in Christ have

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then perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most miserable. But now Christ has been raised from *the* dead; He has become the firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep” (I Cor. 15:12-20).

The apostles were witnesses that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead, which is the whole foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the Old and New Testaments teach about a resurrection of the dead, which will take place when Jesus Christ returns and establishes the kingdom of God on earth. At that time, the resurrected saints will reign with Him as kings and priests (Dan. 12:2-3; Rev. 5:9-10; 20:6).

While rejecting the truth of the resurrection of the dead, false teachers assumed the Babylonian antisciptural belief in the immortality of the soul. To this day, many, if not most, within Christendom are taught that at death the soul goes to heaven for doing good or to purgatory or hell for committing various degrees of evil.

The Bible does not teach the immortality of the soul; rather, it reveals, “The soul that sins, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20). Neither does the Bible teach that when one dies, the soul goes to heaven or hell. Rather, it clearly shows that when one dies, he or she awaits the resurrection of the dead—both of the righteous and the wicked (Dan. 12:2; John 5:25-29; I Cor. 15; Rev. 20:14-15; 21:8).

The belief in the immortality of the soul fueled the doctrine of infant baptism, for if an infant were to die what would happen to its soul? Therefore, this belief necessitated baptism or christening to remove the “stain of original sin” so that if the infant died, its soul would go to heaven; if the infant lived to adulthood, salvation and heaven was assured. From *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, there is the following entry on infant baptism: “Although from the first, baptism was the universal means of entry into the Christian community, the NT contains no specific authority for its administration to infants. But by a tradition at least as old as the 3rd cent., and virtually universal until the Reformation, children born to Christian parents have been baptized in infancy. In the 16th cent. this practice (pseudobaptism) was rejected by the Anabaptists and since the early 17th cent. also by the Baptists and later by the Disciples of Christ.

“Ireneus (*Haer.*, ii. 33) speaks of Christ as ‘giving salvation to those of every age’... who are ‘regenerated’ ... through Him, and expressly includes ‘infants and little children’ ... among these. Explicit statements concerning infant baptism are made by Origen, who refers to it as an established custom, which the Church has received from the Apostles (*Hom. In Lev.*, viii. 4, *Comm. in Rom.*, v. 9). In both passages he finds the practice justified by the need which infants, no less than

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adults, have for liberation from original sin. Opposition to infant baptism (implying the prior existence of the practice) is voiced by Tertullian, who urges (*De Bapt.*, 18) that the baptism of children be deferred (despite Mt. 19. 14) until they can ‘know Christ’. This advocacy of delaying baptism for infants, as well as spiritually immature adults, appears to spring from Tertullian’s ideas of the impossibility or great difficulty of the remission of post-baptismal sin. Such considerations led to a widespread deferment of baptism in the 4th cent., e.g. in the cases of Constantine and of St. Augustine.... On the other hand, by the middle of the 3rd cent. infant baptism was regularly performed, as is attested by Cyprian (*Ep.* 64), where it is stated to convey remission not only of actual sins but also of original sin. From then onwards evidence for the practice is ample” (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 701).

“In defending the propriety of Infant Baptism against the Pelagians, he [Augustine] also maintained that one of the chief effects of the Sacrament was the removal of the stain of Original Sin on the soul which bars even the new-born child from the Kingdom of Heaven [i.e., its immortal soul going to heaven], thereby developing earlier teaching from NT times, acc. to which the remission of Actual Sins, the infusion of grace, and the incorporation into the Church had been generally recognized as results of Baptism” (Ibid., p. 127).

Quotations from the Early Latin Church Fathers

In rejecting the simultaneity of the resurrection of the dead and being born again and accepting the belief in the immortality of the soul, the early Latin Church fathers thus changed the meaning of when one is born again to apply to one’s baptism. The following statements reveal that this false doctrine was formalized within fifty years after the apostolic age ended with the death of John in 98-100 AD.

St. Justin Martyr (inter 148-155 AD): “Whoever is convinced and believes that what they are taught and told by us is the truth, and professes to be able to live accordingly, is instructed to pray and to beseech God in fasting for the remission of their former sins, while we pray and fast with them. Then they are led by us to a place where there is water; and there they are reborn in the same kind of rebirth in which we ourselves were reborn: In the name of God, the Lord and Father of all, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they receive the washing with water. For Christ said, ‘**Unless you be reborn**, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ ... The reason for doing this, we have learned from the Apostles” (*The First Apology* 61).

Since the apostles of Jesus Christ never taught infant baptism,

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they never learned it from them. It is more likely that they were taught it by various false apostles, who were active even during Paul's ministry (II Cor. 11:13-15).

St. Irenaeus (c. 190 AD): "And [Naaman] dipped himself ... seven times in the Jordan [II Kings 5:14]. It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized, but [this served] as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the **sacred water** and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions, being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, even as the Lord has declared: 'Except a man be **born again** [*renatus*] **through water** and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven' " (*Fragment 34*).

Recognitions of Clement (c. 221 AD): "But you will perhaps say, 'What does the baptism of water contribute toward the worship of God?' In the first place, because that which has pleased God is fulfilled. In the second place, because when you are **regenerated and born again of water** and of God, the frailty of your former birth, which you have through men, is cut off, and so ... you shall be able to attain salvation; but otherwise it is impossible. For thus has the true Prophet [Jesus] testified to us with an oath: "Verily, I say to you, that unless a man is **born again** [*renatus*] **of water** ... he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" ' " (*Recognitions 6:9*).

St. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200-258 AD): "But afterwards, when the stain of my past life had been **washed away by means of the water of re-birth**, a light from above poured itself upon my chastened and now pure heart; afterwards through the Spirit which is breathed from heaven, **a second birth made of me a new man**.... Thus it had to be acknowledged that what was of the earth and was born of the flesh and had lived submissive to sins, had now begun to be of God, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit was animating it. (*To Donatus 4*).

"[When] they receive also the Baptism of the Church ... then finally can they be fully sanctified and be the sons of God ... since it is written, 'Except a man be **born again** [*renatus*] **of water** and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God' " (*Letters 71[72]:1*).

Seventh Council of Carthage (c. 256 AD): "And in the gospel our Lord Jesus Christ spoke with his divine voice, saying, 'Except a man be **born again** [*renatus*] **of water** and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' ... Unless therefore they receive saving Baptism in the Catholic Church, which is one, they cannot be saved, but will be condemned with the carnal in the judgment of the Lord Christ."

St. Ambrose of Milan (c. 333-397 AD): "The Church was redeemed at the price of Christ's blood. Jew or Greek, it makes no difference; but if he has believed, he must circumcise himself from his sins

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[in Baptism—Col. 2:11-13] so that he can be saved ... for no one ascends into the kingdom of heaven except through the sacrament of Baptism.... ‘Unless a man be **born again** [*renatus*] **of water** and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’ (*On Abraham* 2:11:79, 84)” (*This Rock* magazine, excerpts from August 1992 and October 1994).

From these quotes it is evident that the early Latin Church fathers had a corrupted Latin translation with the altered text of John 3:5, reading *renatus* instead of *natus*. Later, Jerome, who translated the Scriptures into Latin (383 AD), also retained the altered version of *renatus* and *renasci* in verses 3, 4 and 5, as evidenced by the *Latin Vulgate* of Coverdale’s day—1538 AD.

A Comparison of Other Early English Translations of John 3:3, 5

William Tyndale, a Bible scholar and the first man to translate the New Testament from the Greek into English, translated John 3:3, 5 correctly. However, in his other writings, he taught that when one is converted and receives the Holy Spirit, one has been born again. Perhaps he carried this misunderstanding from the *Latin Vulgate* into his theology, while rendering the correct translation of “born again” and “born anew” in John 3.

Tyndale rendered the Greek words *γεννωα ανωθεν* *gennao anothen* in John 3:3 as “born from above” and “born anew.” The Greek word *γεννωα* *gennao* means: Of a man, “to beget, to become a father”; of a woman, “to conceive, to bear.” In some cases, according to the context, *gennao* does mean “born.” However, *gennao* predominantly means “begotten” rather than “born.” The Greek word *anothen*, means: “from above, again, anew” (Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

From *The English Hexapla* (1841) we can compare Tyndale’s translation of the critical verses in John 3 with five other English translations. It is evident that other translators also had problems interpreting *gennao* and *gennao anothen*. The following four versions were translated into English from the Greek Text:

- 1) *Tyndale 1534*: “born anew,” verse 3; “born again,” verses 4, 7; “born,” verses 4, 5, and 6.
- 2) *Great Bible, Cramner 1539*: “born from above,” verses 3, 7; “born again,” verse 4; “born,” verses 4, 5, and 6.
- 3) *Geneva 1557*: “begotten again,” verses 3, 7; “begotten,” verses 4, 5 and 6.

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4) *KJV 1611*: “born again,” verses 3, 7; “born,” verses 4, 5 and 6.

The translators of the *1557 Geneva Bible* translated *gennao* as “begotten.” In many instances, “begotten” is a correct translation of *gennao*. However, in John 3 “begotten” is an **incorrect** rendering. The translators of the *1599 Geneva Bible* corrected this error to make it read “born” instead of “begotten.”

The following two versions were translated from the *Latin Vulgate* into English:

1) Wycliffe 1380: “born again,” verses 3, 7; “born” verses, 4, 6, and 7; “born **again** of water,” verse 5.

2) Rheims 1582: “born again,” verses 3, 7; “born,” verses, 4, 6, and 7; “born **again** of water,” verse 5.

It is reported that it was Wycliffe who coined the English phrase “born again,” but both Wycliffe and the translators of the Rheims version used the *Latin Vulgate* for their English versions.

The True Scriptural Meaning of “Born Again”

In order to fully comprehend the true scriptural meaning of when one is born again, Jesus’ teachings in John 3:1-12 must be examined. The context of these verses proves that being born again does not mean a conversion or baptismal experience. Rather, it means a literal transformation from flesh to spirit: “Now there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher *Who* has come from God; because no one is able to do the miracles that You are doing, unless God is with him.’

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, **unless anyone is born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man who is old be born? Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, **unless anyone has been born of water and of Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which has been **born of the flesh is flesh**; and that which has been **born of the Spirit is spirit**. Do not be amazed that I said to you, “It is necessary for you to be born again.” **The wind blows where it will**, and you hear its sound, but you do not know *the place* from which it comes and *the place* to which it goes; **so also is everyone who has been born of the Spirit.**’ ”

“Nicodemus answered and said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘You are a teacher of Israel, and you do not know these things? Truly, truly I say to you, We speak

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that which We know, and We testify of that which We have seen; but you do not receive Our testimony. If I have told you earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:1-12).

It is clear that Jesus was not talking about a conversion or baptismal experience in this dialogue. Rather, he was comparing one’s physical birth—a fleshly existence—to that of being born anew or born again—to an actual spiritual existence. Jesus describes two births: one of water and one of the spirit, “...unless anyone has been **born of water and of Spirit ...**”(John 3:5). Next, Jesus shows the comparison between a birth of flesh and a birth of the spirit: “That which has been **born of the flesh is flesh**; and that which has been **born of the Spirit is spirit**” (John 3:6).

Physical Birth: When a human being is born, he or she is born of flesh—a physical being. Further, every human being has been “born of water” from the womb. **The one that has been born of water has been born of the flesh and is flesh.** (John 3:5-6).

Spiritual Birth: Nicodemus missed the point when Jesus referred to a new or second birth of the Spirit: “...**unless anyone has been born ... of Spirit.**” What kind of existence does one have who has been born of the Spirit? Jesus answered that question when He said, “... that which has been **born of the Spirit is spirit.**” Jesus clearly meant that anyone who has been born of the Spirit is, in fact, a spirit being. The new, spiritual birth means that one who has been born again is a spirit being, no longer composed of human flesh. Since one who “...has been born of the flesh is flesh;” then it follows, as Jesus said, “that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit...” (John 3:6).

Every human is limited by fleshly existence and physical environment. However, as a spirit being, one is not bound by the flesh or limited by the physical realm. Jesus stated that one who “...has been born of the Spirit...” cannot necessarily be seen, just as the wind cannot be seen: “**The wind blows where it wills**, and you hear its sound, but you do not know *the place* from which it comes and *the place* to which it goes; **so also is everyone who has been born of the Spirit**” (verse 8). Therefore, one who has been “born again,” “born of the Spirit,” must be invisible to the human eye, having the ability to come and go as the wind. That is hardly the case of one who has been baptized and converted; he or she is still in the flesh and is limited by the flesh—subject to death. Jesus said that a fleshly human being “cannot see” or “enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5). Paul reiterated this when he emphatically stated: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit *the* kingdom of God” (I Cor. 15:50).

When Is One Actually Born Again? Since one is not born

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again at baptism or conversion, when is one literally born again, or born anew? It is through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the New Testament reveals when a person is born again. Matthew wrote that Jesus was the “firstborn” of the Virgin Mary (Matt. 1:25). Jesus’ human birth was by water. He was flesh (I John 4:1-2) as any other human being, but He was “God manifested in the flesh” (I Tim. 3:16).

When Jesus was resurrected from the dead by the glory of the Father, He was the “firstborn from the dead.” Therefore, Jesus was born again—born of the Spirit—at the time He was resurrected from the dead, exactly as He told Nicodemus, “That which has been born of the Spirit is spirit.”

The apostle Paul clearly showed that Jesus was born again when he wrote: “Because by Him were all things created, the things in heaven and the things on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or lordships, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him. And He is before all, and by Him all things subsist. And He is the Head of the body, the church; **Who is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead**, so that in all things He Himself might hold the preeminence. For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (Col. 1:16-19). The apostle John also verified this when he wrote that **Jesus was “the Firstborn from the dead”** (Rev. 1:5).

After His resurrection and ascension to heaven to be accepted by God the Father as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, Jesus returned to the earth and appeared to the apostles who were assembled together in a room behind closed doors. Since a spirit being is not limited by the physical realm, the resurrected Jesus walked through doors and walls, suddenly appearing to the apostles and disciples: “Afterwards, as evening was drawing near that day, the first *day* of the weeks, and the doors were shut where the disciples had assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace *be* to you.’ And after saying this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples rejoiced, *because* they had seen the Lord” (John 20:19-20).

As a spirit being, Jesus also had the ability to manifest Himself in human form, which He did when He walked with the two disciples to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31). Furthermore, Jesus was able to restrain their eyes, so they did not realize that it was He, until He broke and blessed the bread. Then He immediately disappeared. This account shows that as one born again—born of the Spirit—Jesus was like the wind, as He had said to Nicodemus. He went where He wanted to go, and no one could see Him, unless He made it possible for them to see Him by

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manifesting Himself as a man with flesh and bone.

After Jesus vanished, the two disciples went back to Jerusalem: “And they rose up that very hour *and* returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and those with them assembled together, saying, ‘In truth, the Lord has risen! And He has appeared to Simon.’ Then they related the things that had happened *to them* on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

“Now as they were telling these things, **Jesus Himself** [suddenly appearing] **stood in their midst** and said to them, ‘Peace *be* to you.’ But they were terrified and filled with fear, thinking *that* they beheld a spirit [a demon]. Then He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts come up in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I. Touch Me and see *for yourselves*; for a spirit [a demon] does not have flesh and bones, as you see Me having.’ And after saying this, He showed them *His* hands and *His* feet. But while they were still disbelieving and wondering for joy, He said to them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ Then they gave Him part of a broiled fish and a *piece* of honeycomb. And He took these *and* ate in their presence” (Luke 24:33-43).

As a divine spirit being, the firstborn from the dead, Jesus was able to manifest Himself as a man, with an appearance that looked like flesh and bone. A demon spirit may at times be able to manifest itself as an apparition to human beings, but it is not able to manifest itself with flesh and bone. It is little wonder that the disciples were afraid when Jesus first appeared to them.

What Is the Appearance of Christ in Glorified Form? When Jesus began to give the apostle John visions for the book of Revelation, He revealed to John how He appeared in His full glory, as a spirit being: “I was in *the* Spirit on the day of the Lord; and I heard a loud voice like a trumpet behind me, saying, ‘**I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last**’; and, ‘What you see, write in a book, and send *it* to the churches that *are* in Asia: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.’ And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands; and in *the* midst of the seven lampstands *one* like **the Son of man**, clothed in *a garment* reaching to the feet, and girded about the chest with a golden breastplate. And His head and hair *were* like white wool, white as snow; and His eyes *were* like a flame of fire; and His feet *were* like fine brass, as if *they* glowed in a furnace; and His voice *was* like *the* sound of many waters. And in His right hand He had seven stars, and a sharp two-edged sword went out of His mouth, and His countenance *was* as the sun shining in its *full* power [Matt 17:2]. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as if dead;

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but He laid His right hand upon me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last, even the one Who is living; for I was dead, and behold, I am alive into the ages of eternity. Amen’ (Rev. 1:10-18).

Jesus Christ Is the Firstborn Among Many Brethren to Be Resurrected at His Coming

Not only is Jesus Christ the firstborn from the dead, He is also the “firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). The true body of believers is called “the church of the firstborn,” as Paul wrote: “But you have come to Mount Sion, and to *the* city of *the* living God, heavenly Jerusalem; and to an innumerable company of angels; *to the* joyous festival gathering; and to **the church of the firstborn**, registered in *the book of life* in heaven; and to God, *the* Judge of all” (Heb. 12:22-23). It is called the church of the firstborn because believers will be resurrected, or born again—born of the Spirit—in the first resurrection when Jesus returns (Rev. 20:4-6).

Christ the Firstfruit: Paul wrote that the resurrected Jesus Christ is also called “the firstfruit” of those raised from the dead. Furthermore, he explained that the rest of the true Christians would be resurrected at Jesus’ second coming: “But now Christ has been raised from *the* dead; He has become **the firstfruit** of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by man also *came the* resurrection of *the* dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ **the firstfruit; then, those who are Christ’s at His coming**” (I Cor. 15:20-23).

The apostle James, the brother of the Lord, referred to true Christians as “firstfruits” unto God: “Do not deceive yourselves, my beloved brethren. Every good act of giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with Whom there is no variation, nor shadow of turning. According to His own will, He begat us by *the* Word of truth, that **we might be a kind of firstfruits** of all His created beings” (Jas. 1:16-18).

Jesus taught His disciples that the harvest of the firstfruits would be at the end of the age when He returns, as He explained in the parable of the wheat and tares: “And He answered *and* said to them, ‘The one Who sows the good seed is the Son of man; **and the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the kingdom;** but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*. Now the enemy who sowed them is the devil; and **the harvest is the end of the age**, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore, as the tares are gathered and consumed in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this age. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all

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the offenders and those who are practicing lawlessness; and they shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun** [glorified spirit beings, who are born again of the Spirit at the first resurrection] in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:37-43).

From these Scriptures it is clear that one’s soul does not go to heaven, purgatory or hell when one dies but after death awaits the resurrection. No one has ascended to heaven except Jesus (John 3:13; Acts 2:22-24), Who is at the right hand of God the Father to intercede as High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16; I John 2:1-2). At the appointed time Jesus Christ will return to the earth, and the resurrection of the saints will occur at His coming.

Because some in Corinth claimed that there was no resurrection from the dead, the apostle Paul wrote in great detail about it. He presented overwhelming evidence of the resurrection and proved the souls of dead people do not go to heaven, purgatory or hell when they die: “Nevertheless, someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what body do they come?’ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow *is* not the body that shall be; rather, *it is* bare grain—it may be of wheat, or one of the other *grains*; and God gives it a body according to His will, and to each of the seeds its own body.

“*Likewise*, not all flesh *is* the same flesh. Rather, *there is* one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another of fish, and another of birds. And *there are* heavenly bodies, and earthly bodies; but the glory of the heavenly *is* different, and the *glory* of the earthly *is* different. *There is* one glory of *the* sun, and another glory of *the* moon, and another glory of *the* stars; for *one* star differs from *another* star in glory. So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.

“It is sown **a natural body** [that which has been born of the flesh is flesh]; it is raised **a spiritual body** [that which has been born of the spirit is spirit]. **There is a natural body**, and **there is a spiritual body**; accordingly, it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam *became* an ever-living Spirit.’ However, **the spiritual was not first, but the natural—then the spiritual**” (I Cor. 15:35-46).

These Scriptures reveal that at the resurrection one will be born again of the Spirit and receive a glorious spirit body, shining as the sun. Paul continued his explanation of the resurrection of the dead in verses 47-55: “The first man *is* of the earth—made of dust. The second man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *is* the one made of dust, so also *are all* those who are made of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *one*, so also *are all* those

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who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the *one* made of dust, **we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one** [at the resurrection].

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit *the* kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all fall asleep, but **we shall all be changed** [born again of the Spirit], in an instant, in *the* twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for *the* trumpet shall sound, and **the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed**. For this corruptible must put on incorruptibility, and this mortal must put on immortality. **Now when this corruptible shall have put on incorruptibility, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”**”

It is evident that the resurrection of the saints has not yet occurred. All who have died in the faith will be resurrected as immortal spirit beings. But, when will the resurrection occur?

When Are the Saints Resurrected?

The prophet Isaiah foretold the day of the first resurrection for those who are Christ’s. He prophesied that it would be the birth of a nation out of the earth. At that time the saints would be born again, born of the Spirit: “Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such *things* like these? **Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day?** Or will a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she also gave birth to her children” (Isa. 66:8). The apostle Peter called Christians a royal priesthood and a holy nation: “But you *are* a chosen stock, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession *of God...*” (I Pet. 2:9). When the first resurrection occurs, a holy nation of kings and priests will be born in one day, and they will rule and reign with Jesus Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6) and live forever.

In his First Epistle to the Thessalonians in 50 AD, Paul explained that the resurrection of the saints would not take place until the return of Jesus Christ to the earth: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in exactly the same way also, those who have fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him [because they will ascend into the air to meet Him in the clouds]. For this we say to you by *the Word of the Lord*, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall in no wise precede those who have fallen asleep; because the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with *a* shout of command, with *the* voice of an archangel and with *the* trumpet of God; and **the dead in Christ shall rise first** [born again of the Spirit]; **then we who are alive and remain** [will be changed and] **shall be caught up together with**

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them in *the* clouds for *the* meeting with the Lord in *the* air; and so shall we always be with *the* Lord” (I Thes. 4:14-18).

Jesus Christ also taught that the resurrection of the saints would occur when He returned to earth: “For as the light of day, which comes forth from *the* east and shines as far as *the* west, so also **shall the coming of the Son of man be**....But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And **He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet; and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds** [from around the world and bring them up in the air to meet Christ] **from one end of heaven to the other**” (Matt. 24:27, 29-31).

Revelation 15 shows that the resurrected saints will meet Jesus Christ in the air, in the clouds, and stand on the Sea of Glass: “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and awesome: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is filled up. **And I saw a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having *the* harps of God. And they were singing the song of Moses, *the* servant of God** [symbolizing the righteous prophets and kings who were saved], **and the song of the Lamb** [symbolizing those who were saved from Christ’s first coming until the resurrection], saying, ‘Great and awesome *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty; righteous and true *are* Your ways, King of the saints. Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For *You* only *are* holy; and all the nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been revealed’ ” (Rev. 15:1-4).

After the pouring out of the seven last plagues and God’s judgment against Babylon the Great (Rev. 16, 18), the glorified saints will return with Jesus Christ to the earth: “And I saw heaven open; and behold, a white horse; and He Who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He does judge and make war. And His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns; *and* He had a name written that no one knows except Him. And *He was* clothed with a garment dipped in blood; and **His name is The Word of God**. And the armies in heaven [the resurrected faithful who were raised to meet Christ in the air on the Sea of Glass] were following Him on white horses; *and* they were clothed in fine linen, white and pure [which is the righteousness of the saints]. And out of His mouth goes a sharp sword,

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that with it He might smite the nations; and He shall shepherd them with an iron rod; and He treads the winepress of the fury and the wrath of the Almighty God. And on *His* garment and on His thigh He has a name written: **King of kings and Lord of lords.**

“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in *the* midst of heaven, ‘Come and gather yourselves together to the supper of the great God; so that you may eat *the* flesh of kings, and *the* flesh of chief captains, and *the* flesh of mighty men, and *the* flesh of horses, and of those who sit on them, and *the* flesh of all, free and bond, and small and great.’ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, gathered together to make war with Him Who sits on the horse, and with His army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet who worked miracles in his presence, by which he had deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Those two were cast alive into the lake of fire, which burns with brimstone; and the rest were killed by the sword of Him Who sits on the horse, *even the sword* that goes out of His mouth; and all the birds were filled with their flesh” (Rev. 19:11-21).

With the destruction of the beast and the false prophet and their armies, Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords, will return to the earth in great power and glory. In that day, he will once again place His feet on the Mount of Olives from where He ascended into heaven as the apostles watched, nearly two thousand years ago: “And after saying these things, *as* they were looking at *Him*, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. Now while they were gazing intently up into heaven as He was going up, two men in white apparel suddenly stood by them, who also said, ‘You men of Galilee, why do you stand *here* looking up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, shall come in exactly the same manner as you have seen Him go into heaven.’ Then they returned to Jerusalem from *the mountain* called Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem” (Acts 1:9-12).

Just as Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, the prophet Zechariah foretold that He would descend from heaven with all the saints to war against all the nations gathered at Jerusalem: “Behold, the day of the LORD comes, and your spoil shall be divided in your midst, for I will gather all nations to battle against Jerusalem; and the city shall be taken, and the houses plundered, and the women raped. And half of the city shall go into exile, and the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. **And the LORD shall go out and fight against those nations**, as when He fought in the day of battle.

“And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Ol-

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ives, which *is* before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall split in two, from the east and to the west, and make a very great valley. And half of the mountain shall move toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And you shall flee to the valley of My mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. **And the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with You.** And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark. And it will be one day which shall be known to the LORD, neither day nor night; but it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light. And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them shall go toward the eastern sea, and half of them toward the western sea. In summer and in winter it shall be. **And the LORD shall be King over all the earth;** in that day there shall be one LORD, and His name shall be one” (Zech. 14:1-9).

In summary, all the scriptural evidence presented clearly reveals that one is not “born again, born of the Spirit” until the resurrection at the return of Jesus Christ. Being born again has nothing to do with baptism or conversion. When one has been born again, he or she will be a spirit being—composed of spirit. The resurrected saints will inherit the glory of Jesus Christ, Who will transform their bodies to be like His glorified body: “But for us, the commonwealth *of God* exists in *the* heavens, from where also we are waiting for *the* Savior, *the* Lord Jesus Christ; **Who will transform our vile bodies, that they may be conformed to His glorious body,** according to the inner working of His own power, *whereby He is able* to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).

This is the true meaning of “born again.”

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Overview of “Born of God”

I John 3:9 implies that Christians never sin. How can this be true?

Just as there is great confusion about what it means to be “born again”—there are misleading interpretations and translations of “born of God.” In John 3:2-12, Jesus taught that to be “born again” literally means to be born of the Spirit, to become a spirit being, which will take place at the first resurrection when Christ returns. Jesus Himself is the *firstborn from the dead*. No one else has been resurrected from the dead to eternal life—no one else has been “born again” or “born of God.” (See *What Does it Mean to be “Born Again”?*)

Contributing to the confusion is the “born of God” passage in I John 3:9—a verse which is grossly mistranslated. Unfortunately, this mistranslation has led many to mistakenly assume that Christians who are “born of God” (or “born again”) cannot sin. But are Christians already “born of God”? Moreover, are Christians really immune from sinning?

A faulty translation of two Greek words in I John 3:9 in the *KJV*, as well as in other versions, is at the heart of the problem. The *KJV* reads: “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.” As translated, this verse presents irreconcilable contradictions with other verses within the Epistle of First John, as well as the rest of the New Testament.

Contrary to such incorrect translations, John wrote that even Christians who have the Holy Spirit **do indeed sin** at times—and that they need to confess their sins for forgiveness: “However, if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, *then* we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His own Son, cleanses us from every sin. **If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves**, and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our own sins**, He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar**, and His Word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. **And yet, if anyone does sin**, we have an Advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ *the* Righteous; and He is *the* propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*” (I John 1:7-10; 2:1-2).

It would be completely incongruous for John to write these

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passages about how converted true believers *do* sometimes sin and need forgiveness. Yet, at the same time to write in I John 3:9 that one who has been “born of God does not commit sin” and that such a person “cannot sin.” would be an irrational contradiction. Since the Scriptures cannot contradict one another, what is the solution?

Two Mistranslated Words in I John 3:9

This passage cannot be referring to those “born again” to spirit existence by a resurrection because *only* Jesus Christ has been “born again” as spirit by being resurrected from the dead. No one else has been or will be “born again” by a resurrection until Christ’s return. Thus, this verse can *only* apply to Christians *still alive*. Yet, the *KJV* translation contradicts numerous New Testament passages that show Christians do sometimes sin. A careful examination of this verse reveals two incorrectly translated Greek words.

“Born of God”: The first mistranslated word is found in the phrase “**born** of God.” The word “born” is translated from the Greek verb *gennao*. In the *KJV*, *gennao* has been translated as “beget, begat” or “begotten” 55 times; as “born” 37 times; and as “conceive, bear, brought forth, deliver or gender” 4 times. The scriptural contexts determine whether *gennao* should be translated “begotten” or “born” (Wigram, *Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament*).

With this understanding, the first part of I John 3:9 can be corrected by simply translating *gennao* as “begotten,” instead of “born.” As a result, the correct rendering should read: “Everyone **who has been begotten** by God...” The phrase “who has been begotten” is translated from the Greek participle *gegennemonos*, which is a perfect passive participle of the verb *gennao*. This participle means that the begettal had already taken place in a past time. As in human life, a begettal is not a birth. Begettal takes place *first*; then, after gestation, birth occurs.

“Doth Not Commit Sin”: The second phrase in I John 3:9 that has not been accurately translated in the *KJV* is: “doth not commit sin.” There is no question that a converted person does, at times, commit sin; but upon true repentance, through the grace of God and by the blood of Jesus Christ, those sins can be forgiven. The key to understanding this phrase is an accurate translation of the Greek verb *poiei*, translated “commit.” As used in verse 9, *poiei* is a third person, singular, present tense form of the verb *poieo*, which means: “*to do, generally, i.e., habitually, to perform, to execute, to exercise, to practice, i.e., to pursue a course of action, to be active, to work...*” (Berry, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 81).

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The context of John's epistle is not about a Christian's inability to commit sin. Therefore, *poiei* in this context means **habitually practicing sin**. When *poiei* in verse 9 is rendered "does not *practice* sin," the contradictions created by the *KJV* are removed. The correct translation of this portion of verse 9 reads: "Everyone who has been begotten by God does not practice sin." This is a true statement and conveys the original meaning of the Greek. Furthermore, this meaning of *poiei* is retained in the second part of verse 9 with reference to "cannot sin," which should read, "cannot *practice* sin." Consequently, the entire verse correctly translated should read: "Everyone who has been begotten by God does not practice sin because His seed of *begettal* [from God the Father] is dwelling within him, and he is not able to *practice* sin because he has been begotten by God." This rendering harmonizes with the rest of John's epistle and removes all contradictions.

The Conversion Experience

One of the reasons for confusion on this subject is that many fail to understand that conversion is an *ongoing process*. In one sense, a person is "converted" when they have repented, been baptized for the remission of their sins, and received the Holy Spirit (by which they are actually *begotten*). In another sense, however, their conversion has only *just begun*. As a process of change and growth, conversion takes place over one's lifetime. Only at the end of that period of growth, change and overcoming is the Christian finally "born again" at the resurrection into the spirit Family of God.

Repentance: The calling of God the Father and Jesus Christ goes out through the preaching of the Gospel and reading of the Word of God. Repentance is the first step toward responding to that call. Though it is the Holy Spirit of God that convicts and leads one to repentance (Rom. 2:4), one must choose to repent (Luke 13:1-5). When Peter powerfully preached the Gospel, speaking of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he made it clear to all those gathered at the temple in Jerusalem on Pentecost 30 AD that their sins crucified Jesus Christ. This moved three thousand to repent and to be baptized: "Therefore, let all *the* house of Israel know with full assurance that God has made this *same* Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.' **Now after hearing *this*, they were cut to the heart;** and they said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, '**Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for *the* remission of sins, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those who are afar off, as many as

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the Lord our God may call.’ And with many other words he earnestly testified and exhorted, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who joyfully received his message were baptized; and about three thousand souls were added that day” (Acts 2:36-41). True godly repentance leads to conversion: “Therefore, repent and be converted in order that your sins may be blotted out, so that *the* times of refreshing may come from *the* presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Baptism: The second step in responding to God’s call is baptism by water. As Peter preached, the repentant believer is to be baptized. Baptism is by full immersion in water, signifying that the repentant believer is conjoined into the death of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. The apostle Paul wrote of the true meaning of baptism: “We who died to sin, how shall we live any longer therein? Or are you ignorant that we, **as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death?** Therefore, we were buried with Him by baptism into death; so that, just as Christ was raised from *the* dead by the glory of the Father, in the same way, we also should walk in newness of life. For **if we have been conjoined together in the likeness of His death, so also shall we be in the likeness of His resurrection.** Knowing this, that our old man was co-crucified with *Him* in order **that the body of sin might be destroyed, so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin;** because the one who has died *to sin* has been justified from sin. Now if we died together with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him [at the first resurrection], knowing that Christ, having been raised from *the* dead, dies no more; death no longer has any dominion over Him. For when He died, He died unto sin once for all; but in that He lives, He lives unto God. In the same way also, you should indeed reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God through Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, **do not let sin rule in your mortal body** by obeying it in the lusts thereof. Likewise, do not yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin; rather, yield yourselves to God **as those who are alive from the dead,** and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:2-13).

Those who have been baptized are dead to *living in sin* as a way of life. They are to walk in newness of life and are not to let sin rule in their “mortal” bodies—but to fight against it, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 10:4-5). Since those who have been baptized still have **mortal bodies**, it is evident that they have not been “born again” as a spirit being. Rather, when they receive the Holy Spirit, they have been “begotten again”—God the Father’s “seed” lives in them, as the Apostle Peter wrote, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a living

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hope through *the* resurrection of Jesus Christ from *the* dead.” 1 Pet. 1:3.

Receiving the Holy Spirit: The third step in responding to God’s call is to receive the Holy Spirit, which comes after repentance and baptism. The apostle Peter said, “Repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins and **you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 2:38). The gift of the Holy Spirit is given by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-17; 19:5-6).

When one receives the Holy Spirit, he or she is *begotten* again and receives the “seed” of eternal life from God the Father. The apostle John wrote in I John 3:9, “Everyone who has been **begotten by God** does not practice sin because **His seed of begetting is dwelling within him**, and he is not able to *practice* sin because **he has been begotten by God.**” The Greek word for “seed” is *sperma*. This is the same word used in English for the seed of one’s natural father. The father’s sperm begets or impregnates the mother’s egg, and a new life is conceived—begotten, but not yet born. Likewise, when one receives the Holy Spirit, God the Father begets the repentant believer with His seed of eternal life and a new spiritual life is conceived—begotten, but not yet born. As long as the seed of eternal life from God the Father remains within, the believer will not habitually practice or live a life of sin. God’s Spirit will convict of sin in his or her heart and mind, leading them to repentance and restoration.

Conversion is a Process

God is perfecting a marvelous new creation within each true Christian through the power of the Holy Spirit: “Therefore, **if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation**; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (II Cor. 5:17). Paul also likens what God is doing within each begotten Christian as having “Christ formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). He wrote that the saints were given understanding of “the mystery that has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been revealed to His saints; to whom God did will to make known what *is* the riches of **the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (Col. 1:26-27).

Although God the Father and Jesus Christ are doing the perfecting work, each newly begotten child of God must submit in loving obedience. Spiritual growth takes place in the heart and mind: “I exhort you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy *and* well pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service. Do not conform yourselves to this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind** in order that you may prove what *is* well

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pleasing and good, and the perfect will of God” (Rom 12:1-2).

God continually renews the mind of the Christian through the power of the Holy Spirit by writing His laws and commandments in our hearts: “And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after He had previously said, ‘This *is* the covenant that I will establish with them after those days,’ says *the* Lord: ‘**I will give My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds**’ ” (Heb. 10:15-16). This operation can be compared to an actual reprogramming of the Christian’s heart and mind—the process of conversion.

True Christians who have been “begotten again” by the seed of eternal life from God the Father are thus being perfected. The old carnal mind and the body of sin must be put to death by the power of God’s Holy Spirit: “Therefore, **put to death your members** which *are* on earth—sexual immorality, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil desires, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, among whom you also once walked, when you were living in these things. But now, you should also put off all *these* things: wrath, indignation, malice, blasphemy, *and* foul language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, *seeing that* you have **put off the old man** together with his deeds, and have **put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge** according to *the* image of Him Who created him; where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian *nor* Scythian, slave *nor* free; but Christ *is* all things, and in all” (Col 3:5-11). And again, “For this reason, we do not lose heart; but if our outward man is being brought to decay, yet **the inward man is being renewed day by day**” (II Cor. 4:16).

In order to be overcomers, Christians must continually repent and confess their sins to God, asking for forgiveness through heartfelt prayer: “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, *then* we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His own Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our own sins, He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**” (I John 1:7-9).

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An In-depth Study: What Does It Mean to Be “Born of God”?

There is great confusion about what it means to be “born again,” and similarly, “born of God.” In John 3:2-12 Jesus taught that to be born again literally means to be born of the Spirit, to become a spirit being, which will take place at the first resurrection when Jesus Christ returns. Jesus Christ is the Firstborn from the dead. No one else has been resurrected to eternal life—no one has been born again. In addition, the phrase “born of God” is the result of two mistranslated Greek words, the result of the misinterpretation that one is born again when converted.

A Mistranslation of I John 3:9

The faulty translation of two Greek words in I John 3:9 in the *KJV*, as well as in other versions, is at the heart of the problem. The *KJV* reads: “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.” This verse as translated presents irreconcilable contradictions with other verses within the Epistle of First John, as well as the rest of the New Testament.

Contrary to this incorrect translation, John wrote that Christians who have the Holy Spirit do indeed sin, and they need to confess their sins to Jesus Christ for forgiveness: “However, if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, *then* we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ, His own Son, cleanses us from every sin**. If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our own sins**, He is faithful and righteous, to **forgive us our sins**, and to **cleanse us from all unrighteousness**. **If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar**, and His Word is not in us. My little children, **I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin**. **And yet, if anyone does sin**, we have an Advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ *the* Righteous; and He is *the* **propitiation for our sins**; and not for our sins only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*” (I John 1:7-10; 2:1-2).

In the same Epistle, John wrote that if anyone should see a brother sin a sin not unto death [a sin that is repentable], he should pray

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for that brother, and God would give him life; that is, God would grant him forgiveness: **“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *that is not unto death*, he shall ask, and He will give him life for those who do not sin unto death.** There is a sin unto death; concerning that *sin*, I do not say that he should make *any* supplication *to God*. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death” (I John 5:16-17).

Listed below are phrases that John wrote in the first, second and fifth chapters of his First Epistle, which directly contradict I John 3:9 in the *KJV*, which reads, “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.” The following verses *cannot* be reconciled with the above translation:

I John 1:7-10; 2:1-2 and 5:16-17:

- 1) The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin.
- 2) If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves.
- 3) If we confess our own sins ... to forgive us our sins ...
- 4) He cleanses us from all unrighteousness.
- 5) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar.
- 6) I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.
- 7) Yet, if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ.
- 8) He is the propitiation for our sins.
- 9) ... Not for our sins only, but also for *the sins of the whole world* ...
- 10) If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *that is not unto death*, he shall ask ...
- 11) He will give life for those who do not sin unto death.
- 12) There is a sin unto death: ...
- 13) All unrighteousness is sin.
- 14) There is a sin not unto death.

It would be completely incongruous for John to write in the first and last part of his short Epistle about how converted brethren do sin and need forgiveness, and at the same time to write in I John 3:9 that one who has been “born of God doth not commit sin” and “he cannot sin.” Since the Scriptures cannot contradict one another, what is the solution?

Two Mistranslated Words in I John 3:9: Only Jesus Christ has been born again by the resurrection from the dead. No one else will be born again by the resurrection from the dead until Jesus Christ’s Second Coming. Furthermore, verse 9 as translated in the *KJV* does not apply to Jesus Christ and cannot apply to Christians because none of them

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have been resurrected from the dead. A further examination of this verse reveals two incorrectly translated Greek words.

“Born of God”: The first mistranslated word is found in the phrase **“born of God.”** The word **“born”** is translated from the Greek verb **γεννωω** *gennao*. In the *KJV*, *gennao* has been translated as **“beget, begat”** or **“begotten”** 55 times; as **“born,”** 37 times; and as **“conceive, bear, brought forth, deliver,”** or **“gender”** 4 times. The scriptural contexts determine whether *gennao* should be translated **“begotten”** or **“born”** (Wigram, *Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament*).

In the genealogical table of Jesus Christ’s physical lineage, *gennao* is used 42 times and has been correctly translated **“beget”** because the lineage is reckoned from the father, who begets the son. In these verses, it would have been incorrect to translate *gennao* as **“born”** because fathers do not give birth; they **“beget.”** Conversely, in Matthew 1:20 in reference to the virgin Mary’s pregnancy by the power of the Holy Spirit, *gennao* has been translated in the *KJV* as **“conceived,”** with a marginal note reading **“begotten”**: **“But while he [Joseph] thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived [begotten] in her is of the Holy Ghost”** (Matt. 1:20). A more accurate translation of this verse would read: **“But as he pondered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife, because that which has been begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit.’ ”**

Luke also used the verb *gennao* in his account of the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary. Luke 1:35 in the *KJV* reads: **“And the angel answered and said unto her, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.’ ”** In this phrase, *gennao* is not in the future tense. Rather, it is in the present tense, passive participle, singular neuter **γεννωμενον** *gennomenon*. This would more correctly be translated as follows: **“And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you; and for this reason, the Holy One being begotten in you shall be called the Son of God.’ ”** The use of the present passive tense participle means that while the angel Gabriel was speaking these words to Mary, God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit was impregnating her. Therefore, it is incorrect to translate this present tense participle as a future event, as found in the *KJV*. While it was true that a future birth would take place, that is not the literal meaning of *gennomenon*.

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With this knowledge, the first part of I John 3:9 can also be corrected by simply translating *gennao* as “begotten,” instead of “born.” As a result, the correct rendering should read: “Everyone **who has been begotten** by God ...” The phrase “who has been begotten” is translated from the Greek participle *γεγεννημενος* *gegennemonos*, which is a perfect passive participle of the verb *gennao*. This participle means that the begetting had already taken place in a past time. As in human life, a begetting is not a birth. The begetting takes place first, then after the gestation period, the birth occurs.

“**Doth Not Commit Sin**”: The second phrase in I John 3:9 that has not been accurately translated in the *KJV* is: “doth not commit sin.” There is no question that a converted person does commit sin, but upon true repentance, through the grace of God and by the blood of Jesus Christ, those sins can be forgiven. The key to understanding this phrase is an accurate translation of the Greek verb *ποιει* *poiei*, translated “commit.” As used in Verse 9, *ποιει* *poiei* is a third person, singular, present tense form of the verb *ποιεω* *poieo*, which means: “to do, generally, i.e., habitually, to perform, to execute, to exercise, to practice, i.e., to pursue a course of action, to be active, to work ...” (Berry, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 81).

The context of John’s Epistle is not about a Christian’s inability to commit sin. Therefore, *poiei* in this context means habitually practicing sin. When *poiei* in verse 9 is rendered “does not practice sin,” the contradictions created by the *KJV* are removed. The correct translation of this portion of verse 9 reads: “Everyone who has been begotten by God does not practice sin.” This is a true statement and conveys the original meaning of the Greek. Furthermore, the meaning of *poiei* is retained in the second part of Verse 9 with reference to “cannot sin,” which should read, “cannot practice sin.” Consequently, the entire verse correctly translated should read: “Everyone who has been begotten by God does not practice sin because His seed of begetting is dwelling within him, and he is not able to practice sin because he has been begotten by God.” This rendering harmonizes with the rest of John’s Epistle and removes all contradictions.

The Conversion Experience and Process

Jesus said, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). Why are only few chosen? It is because the many do not respond to God’s calling. Although they hear the Word, they do not yield to God. The few, who do respond, yield to God, and He begins to work with them. Jesus clearly showed this in the parable of the sower and the seed: “Therefore, hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the

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Word of the kingdom and does not understand *it*, the wicked one comes and snatches away that which was sown in his heart. This is the one who was sown by the way. Now the one who was sown upon the rocky places is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy; but *because* he has no root in himself, *he* does not endure; for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, he is quickly offended. And the one who was sown among the thorns is the one who hears the Word, but the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But the one who was sown on good ground, this is the one who hears the Word and understands, who indeed brings forth fruit and produces—one a hundredfold, another sixtyfold *and* another thirtyfold” (Matt. 13:18-23).

As a person begins to answer the call, God the Father begins to draw him. Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father, Who sent Me, draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44). The drawing of God the Father continues as long as the person continues to believe and obey the Word of God as they learn it. However, if at any time one refuses the calling and drawing of God, at some point, according to God’s determination, He does not continue to deal with that individual.

Repentance: The calling of God the Father and Jesus Christ goes out through the preaching of the Gospel and reading of the Word of God. Repentance is the first step toward responding to that call. Though it is the Holy Spirit of God that convicts and leads one to repentance (Rom. 2:4), one must choose to repent (Luke 13:1-5).

When Peter powerfully preached the Gospel, speaking of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he made it clear to all those gathered at the temple in Jerusalem on Pentecost 30 AD that their sins crucified Jesus Christ. This moved three thousand to repent and to be baptized: “Therefore, let all *the* house of Israel know with full assurance that God has made this *same* Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ **Now after hearing *this*, they were cut to the heart;** and they said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘**Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for *the* remission of sins, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those who are afar off, as many as *the* Lord our God may call.’ And with many other words he earnestly testified and exhorted, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ Then those who joyfully received his message were baptized; and about three thousand souls were added that day” (Acts 2:36-41). True godly repentance leads to conversion: “Therefore, repent and be converted in order that your

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sins may be blotted out, so that *the* times of refreshing may come from *the* presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Baptism: The second step in responding to God’s call is baptism by water. As Peter preached, the repentant believer is to be baptized. Baptism is by full immersion in water, signifying that the repentant believer is conjoined into the death of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. The apostle Paul wrote of the true meaning of baptism: “We who died to sin, how shall we live any longer therein? Or are you ignorant that we, **as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death?** Therefore, we were buried with Him by baptism into death; so that, just as Christ was raised from *the* dead by the glory of the Father, in the same way, we also should walk in newness of life.

“For **if we have been conjoined together in the likeness of His death, so also shall we be in the likeness of His resurrection.** Knowing this, that our old man was co-crucified with *Him* in order **that the body of sin might be destroyed, so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin;** because the one who has died *to sin* has been justified from sin. Now if we died together with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him [at the first resurrection], knowing that Christ, having been raised from *the* dead, dies no more; death no longer has any dominion over Him. For when He died, He died unto sin once for all; but in that He lives, He lives unto God. In the same way also, you should indeed reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God through Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, **do not let sin rule in your mortal body** by obeying it in the lusts thereof. Likewise, do not yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin; rather, yield yourselves to God **as those who are alive from the dead,** and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:2-13).

Those who have been baptized are dead to living in sin as a way of life. They are to walk in newness of life and are not to let sin rule in their “mortal” bodies but fight against it, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 10:4-5). Since those who have been baptized still have **mortal bodies**, it is evident that they have not been born again as a spirit being. Rather, when they receive the Holy Spirit, they have been “begotten again”—God the Father’s “seed” lives in them.

Receiving the Holy Spirit: The third step in responding to God’s call is to receive the Holy Spirit, which comes after repentance and baptism. The apostle Peter said, “Repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins and **you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 2:38). The gift of the Holy Spirit is given by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:14-17; 19:5-6).

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The Parallels Between Physical and Spiritual Begettal

In the beginning when God created man He said, “ ‘Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of heaven and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that crawls upon the earth.’ And God created man in His *own* image, in the image of God He created him. He created them male and female. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of heaven and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’ ” (Gen. 1:26-28).

As recounted in the first chapter of Genesis, God blessed mankind with the ability to share in His creation by bringing children into the world—actually reproducing themselves—children made in their own image. He ordained that children would be the result of love and the one flesh union between husband and wife. Thus, the human family has grown great. Likewise, God is reproducing Himself in human beings through the spiritual process of conversion that begins with repentance, baptism and the begettal of the Holy Spirit—the seed of eternal life from God the Father. Those who are faithful to the end will be born again at the first resurrection into His spiritual family—recreated in His spiritual image to share His glory and live forever.

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Sealed by the Holy Spirit

How is a person “sealed” with the Holy Spirit? God the Father begets the repentant believer with the seed of eternal life through the power of the Holy Spirit, which unites with the spirit of his or her mind and they are sealed. Paul explained that the begetting of the Holy Spirit is only the earnest of the inheritance of God: “*Yes, in Him, in Whom we also have obtained an inheritance, having been predestinated according to His purpose, Who is working out all things according to the counsel of His own will; that we might be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in the Christ; in Whom you also trusted after hearing the Word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation; in Whom also, **after believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance** until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory*” (Eph. 1:11-14). And again, “*But He Who establishes us with you in Christ, and Who has anointed us, is God, **Who has also sealed us and has given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts***” (II Cor. 1:21-22).

Begotten Again: The apostle Peter also wrote of this new begetting: “*The elect ... Who have been chosen according to the predetermined knowledge of God the Father, by sanctification through the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you. **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead;** unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for us, who are being safeguarded by the power of God through faith, for salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time....**For you have been begotten again, not from corruptible seed, but from incorruptible seed,** by the living Word of God, which remains forever*” (I Pet. 1:1-5, 23). In the Scriptures cited, Peter used the Greek word **anagennaw anagennao** which literally means “begotten again.”

What Peter wrote concerning being begotten again is exactly what the apostle John meant when he wrote two additional comments about being begotten of God: “*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ **has been begotten by God; and everyone who loves Him Who begat also loves him who has been begotten by Him....**We know that **anyone who is begotten by God** does not practice sin; for the **one who has been begotten by God** keeps himself by the power of God, and the wicked one does not touch him*” (I John 5:1, 18).

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Salvation Is Creation

A newly begotten child in its mother's womb is the beginning of a new creation. During the nine-month gestation period, the newly conceived infant is continually being fashioned according to the pattern of the genes and chromosomes inherited from its father and mother until it is fully developed. The infant must grow physically to full term in order to be born. In the same way, a newly begotten believer must also grow spiritually in order to be born again at the resurrection. A Christian's spiritual growth produces godly character as he or she is being spiritually recreated in the image of God the Father. It is imperative for each begotten Christian to "... be growing in *the* grace and *the* knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:18).

Through a loving spiritual relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ by daily prayer, Bible study, and walking in the commandments of God, one grows spiritually. This new spiritual creation is the work of God the Father and Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The believer's spiritual growth is the result of the ongoing workmanship of God: "**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this especially is not of your own selves; it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto the good works that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them**" (Eph. 2:8-10).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Christian becomes a new person in the putting off the old carnal sinful self and ways of living and being renewed in the spirit of his or her mind. Paul wrote that God is continually at work within the heart and mind of each one He has begotten with His Spirit: "Concerning your former conduct, [that] **you put off the old man**, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts; and that **you be renewed in the spirit of your mind**; and that **you put on the new man**, which according to God is **created in righteousness and holiness of the truth**" (Eph 4:22-24).

God is perfecting a marvelous new creation within each true Christian through the power of the Holy Spirit: "Therefore, **if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation**; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (II Cor. 5:17). Paul also likens what God is doing within each begotten Christian as having "Christ formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). He wrote that the saints were given understanding of "... the mystery that has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been revealed to His saints; to whom God did will to make known what *is* the riches of **the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**" (Col. 1:26-27).

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Although God the Father and Jesus Christ are doing the perfecting work, each newly begotten child of God must submit in loving obedience. Spiritual growth takes place in the heart and mind: “I exhort you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy *and* well pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service. Do not conform yourselves to this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind** in order that you may prove what is well pleasing and good, and the perfect will of God” (Rom 12:1-2).

God continually renews the mind through the power of the Holy Spirit by writing His laws and commandments in our hearts: “And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after He had previously said, ‘This *is* the covenant that I will establish with them after those days,’ says *the* Lord: ‘**I will give My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds**’ ” (Heb. 10:15-16). This operation can be compared to an actual reprogramming of the Christian’s heart and mind—the process of conversion.

True Christians who have been begotten again by the seed of eternal life from God the Father are thus being perfected. The old carnal mind and the body of sin must be put to death by the power of God’s Holy Spirit: “Therefore, **put to death your members** which *are* on earth—sexual immorality, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil desires, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, among whom you also once walked, when you were living in these things. But now, you should also put off all *these* things: wrath, indignation, malice, blasphemy, *and* foul language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, *seeing that* you have **put off the old man** together with his deeds, and have **put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge** according to *the* image of Him Who created him; where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian *nor* Scythian, slave *nor* free; but Christ *is* all things, and in all” (Col 3:5-11). And again, “For this reason, we do not lose heart; but if our outward man is being brought to decay, yet **the inward man is being renewed day by day**” (II Cor. 4:16).

In order to be overcomers, Christians must continually repent and confess their sins to God, asking for forgiveness through heartfelt prayer: “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, *then* we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His own Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our own sins, He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**” (I John 1:7-9).

As stated, God the Father and Jesus accomplish the purification

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and cleansing of the believer through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus uses the Word of God to cleanse the whole Church because "... Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; so that He might **sanctify it, having cleansed it with the washing of water by the Word**; that He might present it to Himself *as* the glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it might be holy and without blame" (Eph. 5:25-27). The "washing of water by the Word" is accomplished through daily Bible study and prayer, coupled with the renewing of the Spirit. Paul wrote of the conversion process and renewing of the Holy Spirit: "For we also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving all kinds of lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful *and* hating one another. But when the graciousness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we practiced, but **according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration** [the washing of the water by the Word] **and the renewing of the Holy Spirit**, which He richly poured out upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior; so that, having been justified by His grace, **we would become heirs according to the hope of eternal life**" (Titus 3:3-7).

The results of the spiritual regeneration and renewal of a Christian's mind is to have the laws and commandments of God written and inscribed upon the heart (Heb. 8:10; 10:16-17) and to grow in spiritual character to have the mind of Jesus Christ: "Now then, if *there be* any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of *the* Spirit, if any *deep* inner affections and compassions, fulfill my joy, that you be of the same mind, having the same love, being joined together in soul, minding the one thing. *Let* nothing *be* done through contention or vainglory, but in humility, each esteeming the others above himself. Let each one look not *only* after his own things, but *let* each one also *consider* the things of others. **Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus**" (Phil. 2:1-5).

The Loving Correction of God: Through the circumstances of life, God the Father corrects all His begotten children. Just as children need to be corrected to learn the right way, so God corrects those whom He has received, so they may learn His way. Paul wrote: "And you have already forgotten the admonition that He addresses to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise *the* chastening of *the* Lord, nor grow weary of being reproved by Him; for whom *the* Lord loves He chastens, and He severely disciplines every son whom He receives.' If you endure chastening, God is dealing with you as *a* Father with *His* sons. For who is the son whom *the* Father does not chasten? But if you are without chastisement, of which all are partakers, then you are bastards and not sons.

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“Furthermore, we have had our fleshly fathers who chastened *us*, and we respected *them*; should we not all the more *willingly* be subject to the Father of spirits, and live *forever*? For in the first case, they chastened *us* for a few days in whatever way seemed good to them; but in the second case, He *chastens us* for *our own* benefit that we may be partakers of His holiness. **Now truly, no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those who have been exercised by it.** Therefore, lift up the hands that are hanging down, and *revive* the weakened knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which *is* lame be turned aside; but let it rather be healed. Pursue peace with everyone, and sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:5-14).

Correction is an important part of Christian growth and overcoming. Correction signifies God’s love. Yielding to the correction of God brings the peaceable fruits of righteousness to create holy, righteous character, enabling one to love God even more and to grow in grace and knowledge. This is part of how God redeems His spiritual family—making each of His begotten children into a new creation.

Trials in Overcoming the World: Christians live in the world but are not part of the world. As a result, they are confronted with trials or tests of their faith. The apostle Peter wrote: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you *which is* taking place to test you, as if some strange thing *were* happening to you. But to the degree that you have a share in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice; so that, at the revelation of His glory, you also may rejoice exceedingly. If you are reviled for *the* name of Christ, *you are* blessed because the *Spirit* of glory and the Spirit of God is resting upon you; on their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. Assuredly, let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil doer, or as an overlording busybody in other people’s lives. Yet if anyone *is suffering* as a Christian, he should not be ashamed; but let him glorify God because of this” (I Pet. 4:12-16).

The purpose of trials is to strengthen and perfect a Christian’s faith: “In this you yourselves greatly rejoice; though for the present, if it is necessary, you are in distress for a little while by various trials; in order that the proving of your faith, which is much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is being tested by fire, may be found unto praise and honor and glory at *the* revelation of Jesus Christ; Whom, not having seen, you love; in Whom, *though* at the present time you do not see Him, you believe, *and* rejoice with unspeakable joy, and filled with glory; *and are* receiving the end of your faith—even *the* salvation of *your* souls” (I Pet. 1:6-9).

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All the trials that Christians go through and endure are for the perfecting of their faith. In trials, Christians need to seek God and pray to Him, claiming His promises of deliverance and help and intervention. In spite of being faced with trials, God gives each Christian a comforting promise of deliverance, regardless of how severe a trial may be: “No temptation [trial] has come upon you except what is common to mankind. For God, Who *is* faithful, will not permit you to be tempted beyond what you are able *to bear*; but with the temptation, He will make a way of escape, so that you may be able to bear *it*” (I Cor. 10:13). Jesus Christ promised that He would always be with His own (Matt. 28:20), and never forsake them: “He has said, ‘In no way will I ever leave you; no—I will never forsake you in any way.’ So then, let us boldly say, ‘*The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*’ ” (Heb. 13:5-6).

The Persecutions and Suffering of William Tyndale

William Tyndale was the first man to translate the New Testament from the Greek into English which he published in 1526. He suffered terrible persecution at the hands of the religious and civil authorities. Finally, in 1536 he was burned at the stake for translating and printing the Word of God. As a result of his persecutions and sufferings, he wrote about the purpose of a Christian’s trials and tribulations: “This is written [the things in the Old Testament] for our learning: for verily he is a true God; and is our God as well as theirs; and his promises are with us, as well as with them; and he [is] present with us, as well as he was with them. If we ask, we shall obtain; if we knock, he will open; if we seek, we shall find; if we thirst, his truth shall fulfill our lust [desire], Christ is with us until the world’s end. Let his little flock be bold therefore. If God be on our side, what matter maketh it who be against us, be they bishops, cardinals, popes, or whatsoever names they will?

“Mark this also, if God send thee to the sea, and promise to go with thee, and to bring thee safe to land, he will raise up a tempest against thee, to prove whether thou wilt abide by his word, and that thou mayest feel thy faith, and perceive his goodness. For if it were always fair weather, and thou never brought into such jeopardy, whence his mercy only delivered thee, thy faith should be but a presumption, and thou shouldest be ever unthankful to God and merciless unto thy neighbour.

“If God promise riches, the way thereto is poverty. Whom he loveth, him he chasteneth: whom he exalteth, he casteth down: whom he saveth, he damneth first ... If he promise life, he slayeth first: when

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he buildeth, he casteth all down first. He is no patcher; he cannot build on another man’s foundation. He will not work until all be past remedy, and be brought unto such a case, that men may see, how that his hand, his power, his mercy, his goodness and truth, hath wrought altogether. He will let no man be partaker with him of his praise and glory. His works are wonderful, and contrary unto man’s works. Who ever, saving he, delivered his own Son, his only Son, his dear Son, unto the death, and that for his enemies’ sake, to win his enemy, to overcome him with love, that he might see love, and love again, and of love to do likewise to other men, and to overcome them with well doing?” (Parker Society, *Obedience of a Christian Man*, pp. 135-136).

The apostle Paul encouraged the brethren in Rome, in spite of any trouble or suffering, always to have the promise of God’s gift of sonship in their thoughts: “For as many as are led by *the* Spirit of God, these are *the* sons of God. Now you have not received a spirit of bondage again unto fear, but you have received *the* Spirit of sonship, whereby we call out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit itself bears witness conjointly with our own spirit, *testifying* that we are *the* children of God. Now if *we are* children, *we are* also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be glorified together with Him. **For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us**” (Rom. 8:14-18).

All the battles against sin, God’s correction, trials and tribulations, the sufferings and joys, the growing and overcoming are all a necessary part of Christian growth toward perfection in Christ: “Therefore, do not let sin rule in your mortal body by obeying it in the lusts thereof. Likewise, do not yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin; rather, yield yourselves to God as those who are alive from *the* dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not rule over you [cannot practice sin], because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? **MAY IT NEVER BE!** Don’t you realize that to whom you yield yourselves *as* servants to obey, you are servants of the one you obey, whether *it is* of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks *be* to God, that you were *the* servants of sin, but **you have obeyed from *the* heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you**; and having been delivered from sin, **you became *the* servants of righteousness**. I speak from a human point of view because of the weakness of your flesh; for just as you *once* yielded your members in bondage to uncleanness, and to lawlessness unto lawlessness, so now **yield your members in bondage to righteousness unto sanctification**” (Rom. 6:12-19).

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As an unborn infant must come to full term in order to be born, begotten Christians are to develop and grow to full term—perfected for the first resurrection. To this end, God has given the power of His Holy Spirit, His God-breathed Word and teachers. The whole assembly of brethren and elders is called “the Body of Christ,” which is the Church of God. God the Father and Jesus Christ use and inspire the ministry to perfect the saints unto the fullness of Jesus Christ: “And He gave some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers **for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edification of the body of Christ;** until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, **unto a perfect man,** unto *the* measure of *the* stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we no longer be children, tossed and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men in *cunning* craftiness, with a view to the systematizing of the error; but **holding the truth in love, may in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, even Christ** from Whom all the body, fitly framed and compacted together by *that which* every joint supplies, according to *its* inner working in *the* measure of each individual part, is making the increase of the body unto *the* edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:11-16).

The apostle John wrote that we are now the children of God—yet unborn. We are as babes in the womb, and it does not yet appear what we shall be, because the actual spiritual birth will not occur until Jesus returns—then we shall be like Him: “Behold! What *glorious* love the Father has given to us, that **we should be called the children of God!** For this very reason, the world does not know us because it did not know Him. Beloved, **now are we the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be;** but we know that when He is manifested [at His return], **we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him exactly as He is.** And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, even as He is pure” (I John 3:1-3). This is the reason and hope that gives Christians, who have been begotten again, the strength and inspiration, the love and determination to fulfill God’s purpose in their lives.

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