

How Do I Know That I am Born Again?

Christianity is the only religion based on physical evidence. All others believe in belief, which is circular reasoning. So, when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit, about being born again, Jesus expected him to understand based on the well-known predictions in Joel 2:28, Isaiah 44:3, and Ezekiel 39:29. Each of those prophets had already proven, through their 100% success rates at predicting the future, that they spoke for God. So, being born of the Spirit, or spiritual re-birth should have been obvious to him.

So, what is this re-birth? Separation from God is called spiritual death. Reconnection with God is called spiritual birth or spiritual life. Nicodemus, and we, should understand that unbelief kills one's spirit. A clever way to put it is in Revelation 20:6, "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power." Our first resurrection is from spiritual death to spiritual life. Our second resurrection is on judgment day. Later in the chapter, the second death is defined as the lake of fire. So, being born again makes one "blessed," like in the Beatitudes, which means "above the cares of this life in this broken world."

Interestingly, the other Greek word that unfortunately is also translated "blessed" is used in 1 Peter 1:3, where born again also appears. This one means "to say good things about." Here it is, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

How did we manage to become born again? Peter wrote that it was through His mercy. Mercy is one step beyond compassion, including an intense desire to fix what ails someone. Jesus has an unquenchable desire to fix us, which happens through the indwelling Spirit, that same Spirit Jesus mentioned to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit." The water part is easy, baptism. The Spirit part is given by God to those with His version of faith. As Romans 8:9 says, "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."

In this promise that we will be born of the Spirit if we have Biblical faith, there is a living hope, a confident expectation. Why are we confident? Because of evidence, in this case, the resurrection of Jesus.

So, we know that God has promised the indwelling Spirit to those with Biblical faith. He has promised to cause the spirits of those who develop Biblical faith to be re-born. Further, in 1 Peter 1:23, we learn that this happens through the

word. So, being born again happens through the mercy of Jesus, our faith, and the word, all mixed together.

But how do we know that it happened? A disheartening number of people are taught a cheap, knock-off faith instead of the faith in the New Testament. Biblical faith is not defined in just a verse or two. Biblical faith has eight characteristics. Before we can have even the beginnings of hope that God has accepted us and given us the Spirit, we must have all eight characteristics. Here's the short version of those characteristics:

1. Understanding the resurrection of Jesus as evidence. I place it first because Paul said that it was of "first importance" in 1 Corinthians 15. In six places, Paul cites the historical truth of the resurrection as essential to faith. It's not just a story. It really happened. But why do we believe it? Because it is in the Bible? No, that would be circular reasoning. We cannot prove the historical validity of the Bible using the Bible. We need to teach people the physical evidence that the event really occurred, such as the reports written by Roman security forces who followed Jesus during His whole career and filed reports that were deposited in the archives in Rome, which later were examined and reported by others who published their findings.

2. Recognizing the need for a sacrifice and knowing what a Biblical sacrifice is. The Law of Moses was put together by God so that certain illustrations would be available to explain what this Messiah was all about. Of course, every pagan god required sacrifices, but those sacrifices were about manipulating your god, either to get your god off your back or to bribe your god to do something for you. That is the common understanding of sacrifice. But Biblical sacrifice is a celebration of forgiveness with family and friends in the presence of God. That is how it is explained in the Law of Moses, although, most of the time, the Israelites reverted to the pagan understanding. But, why do I need a sacrifice? Because justice is part of God's character. God cannot just sweep our misdeeds and excuses under the carpet and pretend they didn't happen. Justice must be satisfied. Unfortunately, sins do not happen in isolation. Whenever we miss the mark (which is the literal meaning of sin) or side-step the truth with an excuse (which is the literal meaning of trespass), that error spreads out and affects others. We cannot undo it. We cannot make it like it never happened. Further, sin often damages our character as we try to rationalize our behavior, that what we did was really OK. Since we do not have the ability to undo all the repercussions of our sin and satisfy justice, God had to do it for us. Therefore, God came to earth. One of the reasons He came was to pay off that debt, once for all. He did not pay off one debt at a time over the last two thousand years. He paid off the justice system, so that no one could be condemned for their misdeeds. So, the question at judgment shifted from "what did you do wrong" to "faith or not."

3. Acceptance of the Word of God as true. Again, we cannot prove the Bible using the Bible. If that were appropriate, we could prove any religion to be acceptable. What makes Christianity different from all other religions is that it is founded on physical evidence, not wishful thinking. In 22 places, the various inspired writers emphasized this point. Without an understanding of the physical evidence, it's not Godly faith, rather human faith. The accuracy of the text has been proven. There are no historical or geographic errors. The various prophets really did predict specific events well in advance, 100% of the time. They were not like those who claim to be prophets today who conveniently forget about their missed predictions, and make things so general that just about anything would fit. If we do not teach those impossible historical predictions, our hearers cannot have Biblical faith.

4. Trust in the promises of God (implying that we know what those promises are). My list has 884 promises. I put them on a spreadsheet. Some people have more, some have less because sometimes you split one paragraph into about six or seven promises, and someone else just calls it one big promise. However you do your counting, the result will be many hundreds of promises. We are supposed to make our decisions in life based on those promises. If we do not know what they are, we cannot trust in them.

5. Taking on the divine nature, also called the obedience of faith. One of those promises, repeated several times, is that those who develop faith will be transformed by the indwelling Spirit. We are not hapless failures. We are not defective. We are not trapped in the flesh, never to overcome. Rather, as part of the promises of God, we are promised that, while still on earth, we will be taking on the divine nature. We will be able to be obedient without even thinking about it.

6. A realistic hope of heaven. People who have been poorly taught fall into several categories. There are those who are confident that they are going to heaven because the preacher told them that they were, but they have no idea why. They are hoping in hope – and that is not realistic. Others doubt themselves, that they will ever be good enough, so they never gain that confident expectation, so they do not have Biblical faith. How are they supposed to have physical proof? The answer is quite clearly given in the Scriptures, and we will get to that in just a minute.

7. Evangelism. In five different places, the inspired writers connected evangelism with faith. If we are not telling others about this faith, we do not have Biblical faith. The most succinct is 2 Corinthians 4:13, quoting Psalm 116:10, “I believed, therefore I spoke.”

8. And, lastly, Growth. In five different places, growth of faith is said to be required. We cannot just get inside the door and hunker down. As in 2 Peter 1:8 – 9, “For if these things [faith and its by-products] are yours and increasing, you will

be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”

Many people have been told that they have the indwelling Spirit. But without evidence, they cannot be confident. We cannot tell God that He must accept us. We cannot tell God that we are acceptable because we reached the end of a checklist taught by some preacher. Rather, we need to see the action of the indwelling Spirit in ourselves. Some groups have very weird ways of seeing the evidence of the indwelling Spirit, but the Scriptures give us three very plain answers to that question:

(1) 1 John 3:18 – 19, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.” When you shock yourself that you have started being consistent, that you are actually doing what you know to be right, when you no longer need those convenient excuses, then you know that the indwelling Spirit is in operation, and you have your proof.

(2) 1 John 4:12 – 13, “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been made consistent in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He is us, because He has given us of His Spirit.” When you suddenly become so selfless that you are stunned by your own choices, then you know that the indwelling Spirit has poured the God’s version of love into your heart, as described in Romans 5:5.

(3) Romans 8:13, “For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” When you are suddenly able to overcome yourself to a degree that you had never been able to accomplish before, then you know that the indwelling Spirit is at work, remodeling your character. As John wrote in 1 John 5:4, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.”

In each case, the change is obviously superhuman. Why do I say that the change is superhuman? Here is an example from 2 Corinthians 4:7, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.” This verse is in the middle of two chapters about evangelism. So, 4:7 is describing the reaction of outsiders to the gospel. The outsiders completely bypass praising you for your outstanding explanation of the gospel, and go straight to praising God. Why? Because, from the point of view of the outsider, what they just heard was obviously well beyond anything you could have come up with. Obviously, you are just a tool of God; the power is with God, so He needs to be praised.

Different passages call this character development by the indwelling Spirit a transformation or a new person, or conformed to the image of His Son. All through the Bible, God has expected people to do what people are able to do. God, throughout history, has chosen to do the things that people cannot do. No matter how much we try, no matter how much good we do, we are limited. But, we have a large set of promises from God about what this indwelling Spirit does, and all of the things the Spirit does are beyond human ability. As it says in 2 Peter 1:4, “By which [by His divine power] have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Note that this set of promises is for our time on earth, not after we leave. This superhuman character development makes us able to take on the character of Jesus and be masters of living in this broken world, as He was.

When we shock ourselves with our newfound, superhuman consistency and selflessness, when addictions and excuses fall away, then we know that the Spirit really dwells in us.