

A Born-Again Christian

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What Is It to Be “Born Again”?

One day, as I was traveling on a plane to New England, I entered into a conversation with a young stewardess sitting in the seat next to me. Most members of our Church know how to steer a conversation toward the gospel, and, before long, we were talking about religion. She told me that she had recently been converted from her former manner of living and was now “saved.” I congratulated her. Then she added that she was now a “born-again Christian.”

I asked her how she was born again, and she told me that she had accepted Jesus Christ as her personal Savior and now believed in him. I told her how wonderful that was, but explained that acceptance of and belief in Jesus Christ is normally called faith. She said, “But I have changed my former way of thinking and living. I am now on the path to eternal life.” Again I congratulated her and told her *that* change is normally called repentance. “But,” she said, “I have felt a marvelous spiritual change come over me which has purged all evil from my soul.” I then asked her if this were not a gift from the Holy Ghost. “I suppose it is,” she admitted, “but I mean I’ve had a sanctification experience, not through any work that I or any other person has done for me, but a work of grace whereby Jesus has

pardoned my sins and promised me eternal life. I don’t need any formal church organization to accomplish this. A person needs only that wonderful, spiritual experience, or feeling of grace.” She added that she had truly been reborn spiritually. From her words, I knew she did not understand what is meant by being “born again” nor what is termed the second birth.

I have observed that few people who profess to be Christians—even many within The Church of Jesus Christ—really understand some of the most basic principles of the gospel. Today I want to teach you a little about one of these basic principles or what it actually means to be “born again.”

“I Am the Door.”

Jesus was speaking of a basic concept when he related the parable of the sheepfold, as recorded in the tenth chapter of John. He called himself the true shepherd and said the sheep must enter in at the door, as does the good shepherd. He explained that those who try to

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climb into the sheepfold by some other way are thieves and robbers. The shepherd leads the way coming in or going out, and the sheep follow him, for they recognize his voice. They trust the shepherd and will follow him, but they will not follow a stranger. His hearers could not understand what Jesus meant by this statement, and so he explained:

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. [John 10:9]

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. [John 10:14–15]

What did Jesus mean when he said, “I am the door for the sheep”?

When Jesus said he was the door to the sheepfold, he meant that there is only one door or way by which one can return to God the Eternal Father. That door must be through Jesus himself and is a very narrow door which is designed and constructed to conform not only to his teachings but also to his works. If we enter in through that door, it must be in the Father’s way as Jesus demonstrated through his own life of instruction and service and not by some other way prescribed by man.

Symbolism of Baptism

Jesus had preached this doctrine before, as, for example, when he spoke with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a prominent Jew and a member of the Sanhedrin, which was the supreme council or tribunal of the Jews. When Nicodemus asked Jesus how he could personally enter into that fold as one of the chosen sheep or true believers,

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he

cannot [even] see the kingdom of God. [John 3:3; emphasis added]

Nicodemus could not understand how a person could be born again and asked how that was possible. How can a person again enter into his mother’s womb and be born a second time? Jesus explained that this new birth was symbolic in nature and thus different from one’s first birth. He explained that a person had to be born this second time both of water and of the Spirit. He was not referring to a spiritual experience only, but to an experience involving water also.

When Nicodemus still could not understand and questioned what was meant, Jesus chided him and asked, “Art thou a master of Israel [that is, a teacher of the people], and knowest not these things?” Jesus thus was asking how Nicodemus could fail to recognize that he had been speaking of baptism. After all, the Israelites had been practicing baptism for centuries and had carried a baptismal font with them through the wilderness, which they placed in front of the tabernacle as they set up camp in the wilderness. Even at that day the font or “brazen sea” stood before the temple in Jerusalem. Surely Nicodemus as a master or teacher of Israel should have recognized the teaching Jesus referred to and should have understood what Jesus meant. But Nicodemus did not understand, and many people today—even some within the Church of Jesus Christ—do not fully understand what occurs when a person is baptized. This lack of understanding was also evidenced by the words of the stewardess in the seat next to me on the airplane.

Baptism richly symbolizes many things. For example, Paul likened baptism to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus in the following words addressed to the Romans:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from

the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be [raised out of the water] also in the likeness of his resurrection:

Knowing this, that our old man [that is, our former unrighteous life] is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin [that is, the devil].

[Romans 6:3–6]

In other words, there must be a death to the type of life most people live. The wicked self must die. In my own thinking, I define wickedness simply as disobedience to God. Personal disobedience, or wickedness, must cease and die. *That* disobedience to the laws of God must not only die and be buried, but must remain dead and buried. Such a change of life for the better is normally called repentance. All personal disobedience to God must end and be replaced by a willingness to keep his laws and his commandments.

Repentance precedes baptism. And baptism itself is an ordinance to wash away former sins. So the washing in water symbolized the purification of our souls, just as bathing in water cleanses our bodies from the grime and dirt of everyday living and makes us feel refreshed again. But baptism symbolizes something more. It is the beginning of a new life. Just as the resurrection purges the dross and imperfections of mortality and renews and perfects the body, so baptism cleanses the soul from sin and prepares a person to lead a better, more perfect life in the future. We can see how apt Paul's simile was in which he compared baptism with death and the resurrection.

But this is only part of the concept and meaning of baptism. When Jesus referred to being born again, he was comparing this experience with our original birth. During gestation, the fetus is completely surrounded by the amniotic fluid in the womb. The fetus is nourished by the blood of its mother, which

provides the necessary food for the developing body. When the body is prepared and the spirit enters the body, a living soul is created ready for birth. Without that spirit, the child would be stillborn, and the creation process would not be complete.

Note now what the Lord told Adam and Eve to teach their children:

That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul [the creation process], even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory. [Moses 6:59]

That is why baptism is called a second birth. Note, too, how the Lord describes the results of baptism:

For by the water ye keep the commandments; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified. [Moses 6:60]

Baptism Alone Not Enough

Without the nourishment provided by the atonement of Jesus Christ, baptism would remain just a dead form. Baptism alone cannot save us. Works alone cannot save us. Baptism must be accompanied by the granting of the Holy Ghost which makes us spiritually alive just as God breathed into Adam the breath of life when he was created. Without the Holy Ghost, we would be spiritually stillborn and would not have power to enter the presence of God the Eternal Father.

As to the importance of confirmation following baptism by water, Paul recorded that he found some of the Ephesians had been baptized in the same manner of immersion

that John the Baptist had used. When Paul then asked if they had received the Holy Ghost, he was astonished to find that they had not even heard about it. He then explained:

John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus [not in the name of either John or Paul].

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. [Acts 19:4–6]

In other words, their original baptism was invalid, apparently because it had been performed by someone without proper authority as evidenced by their lack of knowledge of the complete ordinance. They were spiritually still-born, and the whole ordinance had to be performed again properly, in full, by one having authority.

Even if all the ordinances were carried out properly and with authority, we still could not be saved. The grace of Jesus Christ is also necessary. Mankind cannot be saved solely by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Only those ordinances coupled with the *atonement of Jesus Christ* and conditioned upon obedience to gospel truths can bring us back into the presence of God the Eternal Father. Thus, through the atonement of Jesus Christ together with the proper ordinances performed in the proper manner by proper authority and coupled with obedience to the laws and commandments of God, we can be saved from death and can be exalted even to live in the presence of God the Eternal Father. That is why all *three* of these concepts are mentioned in the Third Article of Faith, which we accept as truth.

A Second Birth

Let us return again to the symbolism of baptism as a second birth. John the Beloved knew and taught this same doctrine of comparing baptism with a birth process, leading to exaltation into the presence of the whole Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Referring to Jesus Christ, he wrote:

This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. [1 John 5:6–8]

Not only are the proper form and authority necessary, but one must have proper understanding of what is actually being accomplished in this baptismal ordinance. Note again the symbolism. Just as the three persons in the Godhead constitute a unity of purpose, so the three elements of baptism constitute a unity which can bring us back into the presence of those Three in heaven. The unity of this baptismal ordinance on earth mirrors in symbolism the unity in heaven.

Let us here pause a moment to explain the dual nature of Christ's atonement. Jesus Christ defined his work as follows:

For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. [Moses 1:39]

When people of the world speak of being "saved," they refer to being saved from death—that is, to rise in the resurrection. This is the first part of the atonement of Jesus Christ as he described it. It is a pure gift of grace which Jesus Christ gives to *every* person who

has lived on the earth and is independent of the works we do. But to be *exalted* to eternal life and to be able to live the kind of life that God the Eternal Father lives requires not only the gift of grace that Jesus gives to all mankind through his atonement, but that gift coupled with our own obedience and conformance to all the requirements of righteous living prescribed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Exaltation, or the eternal life Jesus spoke about, comes from a partnership with Jesus Christ which begins in the ordinance of baptism, as we accept membership in the family of Jesus Christ, and is developed through a life-time of righteous living.

Born into Family of Jesus Christ

Now, if we are born again, we must be born into a family. Into whose family are we born? Why, into the family of Jesus Christ! The scriptures refer to the Savior as the Bridegroom and to the church as the bride. Through baptism, then, we become children in that royal family, with Jesus Christ as our Father. Through the baptismal ordinance we take upon ourselves a new family name—the name of Jesus Christ. Paul states that we are thereby adopted as the sons and daughters of Jesus Christ. Note these words of Paul given to the Romans:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons [and daughters] of God.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him [that is, if we are obedient and serve as Jesus Christ has done], that we may be also glorified together. [Romans 8:14–17; emphasis added]

That the adoption process which Paul referred to is baptism is made clear in his message to the Galatians:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female [in other words, it makes no difference at all what you have been in the past; through this ordinance you are now all equally children of God]: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise [to receive the same promise and blessings as were given to Abraham]. [Galatians 3:26–29; emphasis added]

Baptism thus is an ordinance through which this adoption is effected and we take upon ourselves the new family name of Christ, in other words become *Christians*.

As the waters of baptism fit closely around the body as we are immersed in the water, note how narrow the door into the fold has become. By the ordinance of baptism and confirmation, a person is both physically and spiritually adopted as a child of Jesus Christ. You will remember that God the Father had but one physical son on this earth. That Only Begotten Son is Jesus Christ. The only way a person can come back or be exalted into the presence of God the Eternal Father and clothed with a perfected resurrected body of flesh and bone is through Jesus Christ, the only physical Son of God the Eternal Father. That is why the scriptures in so many places state that there is only one name given by which mankind can be saved, or, better stated, exalted into the presence of God the Father. That name is the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus correctly said, therefore, that he is the door to the fold.

King Benjamin, that great Book of Mormon leader, explained it clearly in the following words:

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.

And under this head ye are made free, and there is no other head whereby ye can be made free. There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ, all you that have entered into the covenant with God that ye should be obedient unto the end of your lives.

And it shall come to pass that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ. [Mosiah 5:7–9]

We can take upon ourselves this holy name only by means of a covenant with God to accept Jesus Christ as our adopted Father. We witness that covenant in the waters of baptism. We thus take upon ourselves a new and holy name by which we shall be called hereafter.

The Name by Which We Are Called

It bothers me a little to hear members of our Church speak familiarly of Jesus Christ. They often refer to him as “our elder Brother.” It is true that Jesus Christ was the Firstborn of all the spirit children of God the Eternal Father. In the spirit world he was known as Jehovah, the Firstborn. In that world, we were justified in referring to him as our elder Brother because we were with him there, and he was indeed our elder Brother in that existence. But that time has passed. We are now living in a new and a different world. Before we came here,

we accepted Jehovah to become our Anointed Savior, our God and King, even our covenant Father.

When we are baptized, we actually make a new covenant with God the Eternal Father to take upon us the name of his Only Begotten Son. Jesus Christ thus becomes by adoption our covenant Father. It is, therefore, in my opinion, wrong on earth after baptism to refer to him now as “our elder Brother.” He is *now* our covenant *Father*, and we have become his covenant sons and daughters. We ought to be more respectful and show our gratitude to him for the opportunity we have to become members of his royal family.

It was for this reason that Peter made his statement that we quote so often from his first letter:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. [1 Peter 2:9–10; emphasis added]

Through baptism we have become adopted members of the royal family of Jesus Christ, and that is the basic reason we now call each other “brother” and “sister.” We have indeed become members of the Church or family of Jesus Christ.

If we can keep that concept clearly in mind, that we are now children of Jesus Christ, it will change our lives. If we live righteously enough, we can even go into the temple and be sealed into the patriarchal lineage of the Melchizedek Priesthood. We then become the covenant children of Jesus Christ even *more* completely by taking upon us the name of Jesus Christ in its original meaning. We can become anointed saviors ourselves through vicarious work for the dead. In the temple we are given authority

to assist our covenant Father, Jesus Christ, in his redemptive work of sealing together all men, women, and children in family order who are worthy of such blessings. It is in this manner that the covenant family of Jesus Christ is put into proper patriarchal order of lineage for the eternity of family life to come.

If we can only understand the full stature of the name by which we then are called, we will live different lives. No longer will we do less than our best in class assignments. No longer will we be dishonest in paying our bills or in the treatment of our roommates or landlords, nor will we take unfair advantage of anyone in *any* way. Our word will be as binding on us as our bond. No longer will we be unkind to our associates, or be unvirtuous or immoral or selfish in any way, either secretly or openly. We will do nothing to bring dishonor or shame to that holy name we carry as children of Jesus Christ. We will respect and honor our covenant Father, Jesus Christ, and be righteously jealous and protective of the holy name we bear. We will judge everything we do on the basis of how it might reflect on him whose name we carry, not only on our lips but in our very hearts.

Peter stated clearly the importance of that name as he testified of Jesus to the Jews:

This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. [Acts 4:11–12]

Paul told how important this name becomes to us as he taught the Ephesians:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. [Ephesians 3:14–15]

Nephi, that great Book of Mormon prophet, told of the truth of this concept as he wrote:

Behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved. [2 Nephi 25:20]

This truth was also revealed in our own time to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the following words:

Behold, Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father, and there is none other name given whereby man can be saved;

Wherefore, all men must take upon them the name which is given of the Father, for in that name shall they be called at the last day;

Wherefore, if they know not the name by which they are called, they cannot have place in the kingdom of my Father. [D&C 18:23–25]

That Narrow Gate

To repeat Jesus' words:

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. [John 10:9]

Thus, through baptism we can enter through that narrow gate into the kingdom or family of Jesus Christ as heirs—joint heirs with Jesus Christ—to all the blessings of God the Eternal Father. Through righteous living we can receive all those blessing which God has reserved for those who are prepared to receive them. Thus, through the atonement of Jesus Christ and through obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel, we take upon us the name of Jesus Christ—in Hebrew, Yehoschuah Maschiach, which interpreted means, the Anointed Savior or Redeemer. Through this ordinance we can walk, at least

in part, in the very footsteps of our Lord and Savior.

I only wish I had been able to teach these principles to that stewardess before our plane landed and we were separated. Perhaps, though, I sowed a seed which will someday sprout and grow when a missionary later on contacts her and has an opportunity to explain the *true* meaning of being a “born-again Christian.”

Of Jesus Christ I testify, that he lives and directs this Church through chosen prophets. I testify also of the divine nature of the baptismal covenant and of its importance in our lives if we keep and respect that contract. I testify of the truth of these doctrines in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.