

## [Rebirth](#)

When Jimmy Carter was elected [president](#) of the [United States](#) he described himself as a “born-again Christian.” Then Charles Colson, former hatchet man in the Nixon White House, wrote a best-selling book by the title *Born Again*. In it, he chronicled his own experience of conversion to Christianity. Since these two famous personalities popularized the phrase *born again*, it has become part of the currency of modern speech.

To describe someone as a born-again Christian is, technically speaking, to be guilty of redundancy. There is no such thing as a non-born-again Christian. An unregenerate (non-born-again) Christian is a contradiction in terms. Likewise, a born-again non-Christian is a contradiction.

It was Jesus who first declared that spiritual [rebirth](#) was an absolute necessity for entering the kingdom of God. He declared to Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The word *unless* in Jesus’ teaching signals a universally necessary condition for seeing and entering the kingdom of God. Rebirth, then, is an essential part of Christianity; without it, entrance into God’s kingdom is impossible.

*Regeneration* is the theological term used to describe rebirth. It refers to a new generating, a new genesis, a new beginning. It is more than “turning over a new leaf”; it marks the beginning of a new life in a radically renewed person. Peter speaks of believers “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which [lives](#) and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23).

Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit upon those who are spiritually dead (see [Ephesians](#) 2:1-10). The Spirit recreates the human heart, quickening it from spiritual death to spiritual life. Regenerate people are new creations. Where formerly they had no disposition, inclination, or

desire for the things of God, now they are disposed and inclined toward God. In regeneration, God plants a desire for Himself in the human heart that otherwise would not be there.

Regeneration is not to be confused with the full experience of conversion. Just as birth is our initiation, our first entrance into life outside the womb, so our spiritual [rebirth](#) is the starting point of our spiritual life. It occurs by God's divine initiative and is an act that is sovereign, immediate, and instantaneous. An awareness of our conversion may be gradual. Yet rebirth itself is instantaneous. No one can be partially reborn any more than a woman can be partially pregnant.

Regeneration is not the fruit or result of faith. Rather, *regeneration precedes faith* as the necessary condition for faith. We also do not in any way dispose ourselves toward regeneration or cooperate as coworkers with the Holy Spirit to bring it to pass. We do not decide or choose to be regenerated. God chooses to regenerate us before we will ever choose to embrace Him. To be sure, *after* we have been regenerated by the sovereign grace of God, we do choose, act, cooperate, and believe in Christ. God does not have faith for us. It is our own faith by which we are justified. What God does is quicken us to spiritual life, rescuing us from darkness, bondage, and spiritual death. God makes faith possible and actual for us. He quickens faith within us.

## Summary

1. All who are truly Christians are born again.
2. All who are truly born again are Christians.
3. [Rebirth](#) is a necessary precondition to entering the kingdom of God.
4. Regeneration is the sovereign, gracious work of the Holy Spirit.
5. Regeneration precedes faith. It is God's divine initiative in salvation.

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