

Are You Born Again? by J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

This is one of the most important questions in religion. Jesus Christ says, "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" (John 3:3)

Are you born again? It is not enough to reply, "I belong to the church; and I suppose I am." Thousands of nominal Christians have none of the marks and signs of being born again which the Scripture has given us.

Would you like to know the marks and signs of being born again? Give me your attention, and I will show them to you out of the first epistle of John.

First of all, John says,

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;" and again, "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not." (1 John 3:9; 5:18.)

A man born again, or regenerate, does not commit sin as a habit. He no longer sins with his heart and will and whole inclination, as an unregenerate man does. There was probably a time when he did not think whether his actions were sinful or not, and never felt grieved after doing evil. There was no quarrel between him and sin; they were friends. Now he hates sin, flees from it, fights against it, counts it his greatest plague, groans under the burden of its presence, mourns when he falls under its influence, and longs to be delivered from it altogether. In one word, sin no longer pleases him, nor is even a matter of indifference; it has become the abominable thing which he hates. He cannot prevent its dwelling within him. If he said he had no sin, there would be no truth in him (1 John 1:8). But he can say that he cordially abhors it, and the great desire of his soul is not to commit sin at all. He cannot prevent bad thoughts arising within him, and short-comings, omissions, and defects appearing, both in his words and actions. He knew, as James says, that "*In many things we offend all*" (James 3:2). But he can say truly, and as in the sight of God, that things are a daily grief and sorrow to him, and that his whole nature does not consent unto them.

**I place this mark before you. What would the Apostle say about you?
Are you born again?**

Secondly, John says,

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." (1 John 5:1)

A man born again, or regenerate, then, believes that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour by whom his soul can be pardoned; that He is the divine person appointed by God the Father for this very purpose, and that beside Him there is no Saviour at all. In himself he sees nothing but unworthiness, but in Christ he sees ground for the fullest confidence, and trusting in Him he believes that his sins are all forgiven. He believes that for the sake of Christ's finished work and death upon the cross, he is reckoned righteous in God's sight, and may look forward to death and judgment without alarm. He may have his fears and doubts. He may sometimes tell you he feels as if he had not faith at all. But ask him whether he will rest

his hopes of eternal life on his own goodness, his own amendments, his prayers, his minister, or his church, and see what he will reply. Ask him whether he will give up Christ, and place his confidence in any other way of religion. Depend upon it, he would say that though he does feel weak and bad, he would not give up Christ for all the world. Depend upon it, he would say he found preciousness in Christ, a suitableness to his own soul in Christ, that he found nowhere else, and that he **must** cling to him.

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Thirdly, John says,

"Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him." (1 John 2:29)

The man born again, or regenerate, then is, a holy man. He endeavors to live according to God's will, to do the things that please God, to avoid the things that God hates. His aim and desire is to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love his neighbor as himself. His wish is to be continually looking to Christ as his example as well as his Saviour, and to show himself Christ's friend by doing whatsoever Christ commands. No doubt he is not perfect. None will tell you that sooner than himself. He groans under the burden of indwelling corruption cleaving to him. He finds an evil principle within him constantly warring against Grace, and trying to draw him away from God. But he does not consent to it, though he cannot prevent its presence. In spite of all shortcomings, the average bent and bias of his way is holy—his doings are holy, his tastes holy, and his habits holy. In spite of all this swerving and turning aside, like a ship beating up against a contrary wind, the general course of his life is in one direction—toward God and for God. And though he may sometimes fall so low that he questions whether he is a Christian at all, he will generally be able to say with old John Newton, "I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be in another world, but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the Grace of God I am what I am."

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Fourthly, John says,

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:14)

A man born again, or regenerate, then, has a special love for all true disciples of Christ. Like his Father in heaven, he loves all men with a great general love, but he has a special love for those who are of one mind with himself. Like his Lord and Saviour, he loves the worst of sinners, and could weep over them; but he has a peculiar love for those who are believers. He is never so much at home as when he is in their company. He is never so happy as when he is among the saints and the excellent of the earth. Others may value learning, or cleverness, or agreeableness, or riches or rank, in the society they choose. The regenerate man values Grace. Those who have most Grace, and are not like Christ, are those he most loves. He feels that they are members of the same family with himself. He feels that they are his fellow-soldiers, warring against the same enemy. He feels that they are his fellow-travelers, journeying along the same road. He understands them, and they understand him. He and they may be very different in many ways—in rank, in station, in wealth. What matter? They are Jesus Christ's people. They are his Father's sons and daughters. Then he cannot help loving them.

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Fifthly, John says,

"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." (I John 5:4)

A man born again, or regenerate, does not make the world's opinion his rule of right and wrong. He does not mind going against the stream of the world's way, notions and customs. "What may will say?" is no longer a turning-point with him. He overcomes the love of the world. He finds no pleasure in things which most around him call happiness. He cannot enjoy their enjoyments: they weary him: they appear to him vain, unprofitable, and unworthy of an immortal being. He overcomes the fear of the world. He is content to do many things which all around him think unnecessary, to say the least. They blame him: it does not move him. They ridicule him: he does not give way. He loves the praise of God more than the praise of men. He fears offending Him more than giving offense to man. He has counted the cost. It is a small thing with him no whether he is blamed or praised. He is no longer the servant of fashion and custom. To please the world is quite a secondary consideration with him. His first aim is to please God.

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Sixthly, John says,

"He that is begotten of God keepeth himself." (I John 5:18)

A man born again, or regenerate, is very careful of his own soul. He endeavors not only to keep clear of sin, but also to keep clear of everything which may lead to it. He is careful about the company he keeps. He feels that evil communications corrupt the heart, and that evil is for more catching than good, just as disease is more infectious than health. He is careful about the employment of his **time**: his chief desire about it is to spend it profitably. He is careful about the **friendships** he forms: it is not enough for him that people are kind and amiable and good-natured; all this is very well; but will they do good to his soul? He is careful over his own daily habits and behavior: he tries to recollect that his own heart is deceitful, the world full of wickedness, and devil always laboring to do him harm; and, therefore, he would fain be always on his guard. He desires to live like a soldier in an enemy's country, to wear his armor continually, and to be prepared for temptation. He finds by experience that his soul is ever among enemies, and he studies to be watchful, humble, prayerful man.

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Such are the six great marks of being born again. Let everyone who has gone so far with me, read them over with attention, and lay them to heart.

I know there is a vast difference in the depth and distinctness of these marks in different people. In some they are faint, dim, feeble, and hardly to be discerned. In others they are bold, sharp, clear, plain, and unmistakable, so that any one may read them. Some of these marks are more visible in

some, and others are more visible in others. It seldom happens that all are equally manifest in one and the same soul. All this I am quite ready to allow.

But still after every allowance, here we find boldly painted six marks of being born of God. Here is an inspired Apostle writing one of the last general epistles to the Church of Christ, telling us that a man born of God, **Does not commit sin, Believes that Jesus is the Christ, Does righteousness, Loves the brethren, Overcomes the world, and Keeps himself.** I ask the reader to observe all this.

Now what shall we say to these things? What they can say who hold that regeneration is only an admission to outward church privileges, I am sure I do not know. For myself I say boldly, I can only come to one conclusion. That conclusion is, that only those persons are born again who have these six marks about them; and that all men and women who have not these marks, and not born again. And I firmly believe that this is the conclusion to which the Apostle wished us to come.

*Reader, have you these marks? Are **you** born again?*