

# How and when exactly was I born again ?

## The sinner's prayer

All of us are probably familiar with something called the sinner's prayer. If we have been born again into The Kingdom of God then doubtless we have prayed the sinner's prayer both for ourselves and again many times with others. Almost all gospel tracts contain towards the end a version of the sinner's prayer. The two tracts that my wife (by the hundred) and I most frequently give away are "The four Spiritual Laws" from Campus Crusade for Christ (God used this one to bring my brother and his wife into the Kingdom) and "Bridge to Life" from The Navigators. The sinner's prayers in each tract are similar; the one in Bridge to Life reads:

Lord Jesus, please come into my life  
And be my Savior and Lord.  
Please forgive my sins,  
And give me the gift of eternal life.

At the close of evangelistic services when an invitation is given to the unsaved to come forward in an altar call, almost without exception someone will lead the congregation in the sinner's prayer.

It seems to be widely assumed that if this prayer is prayed sincerely by an unsaved person (a sinner) then that represents the moment when that person is born again. It is a fair question to ask, is this assumption true ? Let's consider some of the scriptures relating to the new birth:

## Scriptures relating to the new birth

I Peter 1:23      **Being born again, ... by the word of God, ...**

Ephesians 1:13   **In whom you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: ...**

James 1:18      **Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, ...**

These scriptures would seem to clearly indicate that we are born again (a) by the word of God and (b) when we first hear the word of God. In the early days of my Christian walk I have to admit I did wonder why, if salvation came through the sinner's prayer, God hadn't included a simple version of it somewhere in the Bible. Equally, with respect to the part of the prayer where I invite Jesus into my heart, my carnal mind stumbled over the mental picture of a physical Jesus somehow climbing into my mouth.

A well-known scripture sheds more light on the subject. Jesus Himself said:

Revelation 3:20 **Behold, I stand at the door**, - this can only be the door of my heart.

**and knock**:- not physically, but with the tapping of anointed words (spoken to me or that I read).

**if any man hears my voice**, not audibly with my natural ear, but with the inner ear of my heart.

**and opens the door**, to receive and believe the words of God that I have heard.

**I will come in to him**, God's Word, Jesus Christ, enters into my heart.

**and will dine with him, and he with me**. My heart will now feed upon the word of God.

This scripture is in fact written to believers because not only does it graphically describe the process by which a person is born again but also the ongoing daily process of growth and sanctification that God desires for us. Notice how the entry of Jesus Christ into the heart (both initially and on a continuing basis) is directly linked with hearing His voice. His voice of course being some portion of the written word of God brought to life by the Holy Spirit and spoken to each of us personally. This simple truth is at the very core of the New Covenant, as it says in II Corinthians 3:6:

**Who has made us able ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter** (the written word) **but of the Spirit for ... the Spirit gives life** (to the letter). With the result, according to verse 3 of the same chapter, that the

living words of God are thus **written by the Spirit ... on the heart**, making each of us a living **epistle of Christ**.

This foundational truth of hearing with the heart the “voice” of the word of God as the basis for salvation and sanctification, is the central theme of another familiar passage of scripture.

### **The parable of the Sower and the Seed**

This parable is set out three times respectively in Matthew chapter 13, Mark chapter 4 and Luke chapter 8. Jesus said it holds the key to all parables (Mark 4:13) and reveals the mystery of the Kingdom of God (Mark 4:11). In the telling of this parable the following statement is recorded four times: **He that has ears to hear let him hear**.

The parable presents a Sower that sows Seed into the ground. The Sower is God our Father. The ground is the human heart.

Luke 8:11 ... **The seed is the word of God**.

Matt.13:19 **When any one hears the word of the kingdom, ... which was sown in his heart. ...**

Matt. 13:23 **But he that received seed into the good ground is he that hears the word, and understands it; who also bears fruit, and produces, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.**

The mystery of being born into the Kingdom of God, and of growing in the Kingdom of God and bearing fruit, is in this parable revealed as simply hearing and continuing to hear with the heart as living seed, the word of God, and retaining those words that have been heard.

The moment of conversion for an unbeliever therefore occurs when the heart (as opposed to the head) hears for the first time the living word of God. This may happen at any time when someone is listening to an anointed sermon or song, while singing a Bible based hymn or gospel chorus, in the reading of a gospel tract, book or the Bible, or simply while reflecting at home on something heard or read during any of the preceding. Conversion therefore has frequently occurred before the sinner's prayer is prayed.

## **The conversion of the Apostles and the early church**

We do not read of the Apostles or the disciples praying the sinner's prayer to be converted. Nor do we read that the first converts in the early church prayed the sinner's prayer. What we do read though is this:

Acts 2:41 **Then they that gladly received the word were baptized .. about three thousand souls.**

Acts 4:4 **However, many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand.**

Acts 8:14 **Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:**

Acts 11:1 **And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.**

I Thess. 2:13 **For this cause also we thank God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which works mightily in you that believe.**

The message becomes quite clear, it is the entrance of God's words into my heart that gives both light and life. In the sixth chapter of John, Jesus made some statements that are impossible for the natural mind to comprehend and caused some of His disciples to walk away. The statements however make it plain that when we hear His words and eat them we are in fact partaking of the very life and nature of Jesus Christ.

John 6:54 **Whoever eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life;**

John 6:57 **...he that eats me, shall live because of me.**

John 6:58 **...he that eats this bread shall live for ever.**

John 6:63 **...the words that I speak to you, they are ...life.**

## Eating the Son of God

Jesus equates hearing the word of God to eating Himself.

**Taste and see that the Lord is good**                      Psalms 34:8

**How sweet are your words to my taste**                      Psalms 119:103

When we eat God's words, whether for the first time at conversion or currently in receiving our daily bread, just like natural food the words are assimilated into us and become part of us. In reality the only Bible we know are the words that we have eaten and that have become one with us. We know these words as well as we know our own names. It is these living words alone that conform us to the image of Jesus Christ and are the only words available in us for the Holy Spirit to call forth through our mouths as living seed to be sown into another person's heart.

## What about Gospel Tracts

Since we are born again when we first hear God's living words in our hearts and not by praying the sinner's prayer, why continue to pass out tracts ? The reason is that all good Gospel tracts contain several scriptures relevant to salvation, any one of which can be made alive by the Holy Spirit to the inquiring heart of a reader and so gain one more soul for the Kingdom.

I Corinthians 1:21                      **For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save (and to continue to save to the uttermost) them that believe.**

John 8:31                      (Jesus said) ... **If you continue in my word then are you my disciples indeed.**

John 16:13                      (Jesus said) ... **The Spirit of truth** (the Spirit of the word) **will guide you into all of the truth** (into all of the word of God).