

Q. Doesn't the Bible say we must be "born again" to be "saved"? Are Catholics "Born Again"?

Absolutely Catholics are "born again" -they are baptized! This "born again" question is based on John 3:3-5, where Jesus says to Nicodemus: *"I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above (some Bibles read, "born again", here)... no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."*

Both Protestants and Catholics agree that to be "saved" [i.e. to be able to enter Heaven], a person must be "born again". The difference lies in how Catholics and Protestants believe a person is actually "born again".

Most Protestants consider being "*born again*" to mean, "Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior" and confessed something called "the Sinner's Prayer". They also understand "*being born of water and Spirit*" to be two separate events. Being "*born of water*" refers either to the amniotic fluid of natural human childbirth or to the preached Word of God, and being born of "*spirit*" refers to accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

How do Catholics answer this? For starters, the phrase, "*born of water and Spirit*", in the grammar of the original Greek that St. John's Gospel was written in, is referring to a **single event**, involving both water and the Holy Spirit, not a separate baptism of "*water*", and then a second baptism of the "*Spirit*". And when St. John actually does speak about natural human birth in John 1:13, he refers to it as being "***born... of blood***", not as "*being born of water*"!

Additionally, since the time of the Apostles, the Church has always taught that John 3:3-5 unquestionably refers to baptism. Every Church Father in the first 1000 years of Christianity that has ever written on this passage has unwaveringly understood it to refer to baptism – they are resoundingly unanimous on this!

For example, in 151 A.D., St. Justin Martyr wrote: "*they... are led... to a place where there is water, and they are reborn: 'In the name of... the Father... and of... Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit,' they receive the*

washing of water. For Christ said, 'Unless you be reborn, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven'.

Similarly, St. Irenaeus (190 A.D., taught by St. Polycarp, who was taught by **St. John himself!**) would write: "*we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord... being spiritually regenerated as newborn babes, even as the Lord has declared: 'Except a man be born again through water and the Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven'.* If you want to believe what the early Church believed about John 3:3-5, you **must** interpret it as referring to baptism.

Thirdly, and perhaps most obviously, it just simply isn't what the text says! Now don't get me wrong, accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior is a good thing! And we shouldn't do this just once, but even several times a day! But the point is that John 3:3-5 speaks only of being born of water and spirit [i.e. baptism] as the means Jesus specifies for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. It says nothing about taking Jesus as Lord and Savior, good as it is. No one would deny that God-given faith and taking Jesus as Lord are necessary before baptism is given (see my earlier article on infant baptism) -but **both** faith **and** baptism are necessary to be "saved". That is just simply what Jesus says!

And this brings up yet a fourth point. The context all around John 3:3-5 is very much about baptism. In John 1:31-33, Jesus himself is baptized and the Holy Spirit descends upon him -clearly prefiguring the sending of the Holy Spirit at baptism. And in John 3:22 and John 4:1-3, we read about Jesus and the Apostles baptizing.

But the final and irrefutable answer comes from Scripture itself. What does the Bible say about baptism? Is it just a symbolic washing, as some Christians believe, or is it necessary for salvation, i.e. does it "save" us, as the Catholic Church teaches.

Unquestionably, the Bible teaches that baptism "saves you". This is literally what St Peter says in 1 Peter 3:20-21: *[In the ark]... eight persons were saved through water. **Baptism**, which corresponds to this, **now saves you**".* It doesn't get much clearer than that! Then, in Acts 2:38, St. Peter again says: "*Repent, and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins; and you shall*

receive ***the gift of the Holy Spirit.***” And in Galatians 3:27, St Paul confirms that “*all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*”

But ultimately, it is Jesus Himself who definitively answers the question. In Mark 16:16, He says, “*whoever **believes and is baptized will be saved.***” Need we say more?

If God has ordained water baptism as the means He chooses to convey the Grace of salvation, who are we to argue?

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