

**Are You**

**REALLY**

**Born Again?**

**A Five-Lesson Series for Home Groups**

## **INSTRUCTIONS:**

This series of lessons has been designed for use in biblical home groups. At the meeting when the series is introduced, each group member should be given this booklet containing all five lessons. In this meeting, the group leader should explain that the members will be asked each week to read in advance the lesson that will be discussed the following week. For example, the members should all read Lesson 1 during the upcoming week in preparation for next week's meeting. It should also be explained that each lesson contains Questions or Reflection Points which the members should think about and prepare to discuss. Space is provided in the booklet where they can record their thoughts.

When lessons are being reviewed and discussed, the leader can do all the reading or he can share it, allowing different members to read different portions. Whenever the group comes to a Question or Reflection Point, the leader should read it to the group and initiate a discussion. The final lesson is a review of the material covered in the first four lessons.

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Rosh Pinnah means 'Chief Cornerstone' in Hebrew.

# Are You REALLY Born Again?

## Lesson 1. The New Birth Experience

### John 1:10-13

*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

This passage equates “receiving Christ” with “believing in His name.” It then connects both of these phrases to the idea of being “born of God.” The word translated “receive” (Greek *lambano*) means “to accept, to take hold of, to have, or to obtain.” In other words, it means that receiving Christ is more than merely accepting the fact that He died for you and me; it means taking hold of Him, becoming joined to Him, actually having Him.

According to this passage, we do this by “believing in His name.” This phrase refers to water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. We know this because in the Bible, to believe involves an active response to truth, not merely a passive acceptance of it. For example, in Mark 16:16 Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved.” Notice that salvation was promised to those who believe and act upon that belief by being baptized, not to those who believe but fail to act. As James wrote, “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20).

We see this actually happening in Acts 18:8, which says, “And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.” They heard the truth of the gospel, and they showed that they believed it by being water baptized.

In Acts 8:36, the Bible says, “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’” At

that point there was only one thing that would hinder this man from being baptized: Did he believe? So Philip replies, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

In a similar situation, the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Their answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” So what did this man do when he was told he must believe on the Lord? “And immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:30-33).

**Reflection Point:** Tell about your own baptism experience and how you see the connection between your baptism and your faith.

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There is another reason why we know that the phrase “believe in His name” refers to baptism in the name of Jesus. It is the word “in.” In the original language it is the word *eis*, which actually means “into.” Strong’s Dictionary says that this word means “to or into (indicating the point reached or entered).” This word always suggests forward movement, such as a person entering *into* a room.

The Bible provides only one way for a person to enter *into* the name of Jesus, and that is by water baptism. Acts 19:5 says, “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” The NIV translates this verse more accurately when it says, “They were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.”

John 1:10-13 is clearly speaking of the Acts 2:38 plan of salvation. “Believing in His name” refers to being “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.” And “receiving Christ” refers to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Jesus Christ Himself. As Paul says to the Spirit-filled believers in Corinth, “Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

This analysis of this passage shows why John would equate these phrases with the idea of being “born of God.” This divine birth is contrasted with being born of blood, of the will of the flesh, and of the will of man. Or as the NIV puts it, “Of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will.” In other words, John explains that he is not speaking of the natural child birth process but of a spiritual birth, what a few chapters later he calls being born again—a spiritual birth that Jesus said includes “water and the Spirit” (i.e. water baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit).

Look up the following verses in your Bible and answer the questions:

Mark 16:15-16	Who was Jesus speaking to?
James 2:14-26	What does works do for faith that is similar to what a spirit does for a body?
Acts 18:8	What was it that these people heard that resulted in their believing and being baptized?
Acts 8:26-40	Why did Philip tell this man that he must believe with all his heart that Jesus is the Son of God?

Acts 16:25-34	Verse 34 says that this man had “believed in God” along with his whole household. What did they do that enables us to know that they had really believed?
Acts 2:38 and Acts 19:1-6	Explain why the passage in Acts 19 is a good example of people obeying Acts 2:38.

## Lesson 2. The Right to Become

### John 1:10-13

*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Notice what John says about those who receive Christ, believe in His name, and are born of God. He says that Jesus gives them “the right to become children of God.” The word “right” is the Greek word *exousia*, which is often translated power or authority. This word means *the freedom to choose*.

This tells us that being born again does not automatically make a person a child of God; it only sets him free to choose to become a child of God. This means that those who have not been baptized in Jesus name and filled with the Holy Spirit do not have the freedom to make this choice. This is because they are still in spiritual bondage. Their will is oppressed by sin, and they cannot choose to be a child of God even if they want to. But they can choose to be born again. And once a person is born again he is then free to choose to become a child of God. But he must make a definitive choice to become one of God’s children, otherwise his new birth experience will benefit him nothing at all—he will be cut off from God just like everyone who was never born again.

Many people have responded to the gospel and submitted to water baptism in the name of Jesus. Many have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and spoken in other tongues. They have been born again in perfect accord with John 3:5 and Acts 2:38. But they have not exercised the freedom God gave them to make the choice to become a child of God. Instead they have continued to live as a child of humanity.

This would be like the children of Israel passing through the Red Sea and receiving the law at Mount Sinai, then refusing to continue on to the Promised Land but instead continuing to live as Egyptian slaves. What a waste of a great opportunity!







It's as if he is saying, you are supposed to be at the north pole. But if you don't deliberately work at getting to the north pole, you may find yourself standing squarely on the south pole. The reason for this is that if you don't make a decision in favor of truth and righteousness, you are ultimately making a decision against it. There is no middle ground. You can't be saved being lukewarm, by sitting on the fence, or by being half-hearted. Each of us must either move toward God or we will find ourselves drifting away from Him.

In light of this understanding, in the next lesson we will begin a personal spiritual inventory.



## Lesson 3. Becoming the Children of God (1)

### John 1:10-13

*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

It is vital to remember what John said about those who are born of God. He said that Jesus gives them “the right to become children of God.” In other words, He gives them *the freedom to choose* to become children of God. It is not automatic. It requires a definitive choice. Let’s now look at what the book of First John has to say about people who profess to be born again. First of all, let’s take note of who he is writing to:

### 1 John 2:12-13

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

John is writing to people who have been forgiven (by being baptized in Jesus name), who know God, and who have overcome the devil. In other words, these are people who have progressed into a strong place in the Lord. They are well on their way to becoming mature believers. John’s reason for writing to them is to keep them from being deceived and falling short of the glory of God. To do this he describes the attributes of those who are born again (born of God) and are living as His children.

### **Attribute 1. The children of God practice righteousness.**

#### 1 John 2:29

If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Those who practice righteousness are born of God—born again. Can we say, those who are born again are practicing righteousness? We like to say that we are born again because we are baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Spirit. But John says that this definition is not enough. It may be what gets you started, but if you are truly born of the water and the Spirit, you will also learn to practice righteousness.

What does it mean to practice righteousness?

Acts 10 describes a man named Cornelius. It says that he feared God enough that it affected his entire household. It also says that he prayed to God continually, he fasted, and he gave alms generously to the people. One day an angel appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter who would tell him what he should do.

**Acts 10:34-35**

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works [practices] righteousness is accepted by Him."

What did Peter know about this man? He knew that he feared God, he prayed, he fasted, and he was generous with his money. But Peter didn't mention all that. Instead he simply said that Cornelius feared God and worked (or practiced) righteousness. This agrees with the teaching of Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount He said...

**Matthew 5:20**

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus then went on to say, When you give alms...(6:1), When you pray...(6:5), and When you fast...(6:16). Now the Pharisees did these things, but they didn't do them for the right reasons. Instead of doing them unto the Lord, they did them to be seen and admired by men. This is why Jesus said that we must practice a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees. In other words, a righteousness that is bigger than theirs, more noble than theirs, more spiritual than theirs.

When John said that those who are born again practice righteousness, he meant that they have a consistent prayer life, they fast regularly, and they are generous with their money.

In contrast, those who do not practice these things may in reality not be truly born again. That is, they are not the children of God because they are not acting like the children of God.

Self-Evaluation: How are you doing in each of these three areas?

Giving (generosity):
Prayer (consistency):
Fasting (regularity):

## **Attribute 2. The children of God do not sin.**

### **1 John 3:9**

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

This states clearly that if you are born again, you do not sin. At first glance this does not seem realistic. What does it mean? First of all, what is the seed that remains or resides within the born again believer?

### **1 Peter 1:23**

Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever....

If we are born again, then we have the ever-living seed of God's word living within us, like a seed planted in the soil.

### **1 Thessalonians 2:13**

When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

This seed has power within itself to produce the attributes of the children of God in our lives, but we must yield to it. We must let it do its work. This seed was planted when we heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is strengthened and perfected every time we learn more of God's Word. But we must allow it to grow to maturity. If the soil of our inward man is hard, the devil will steal our seed by deceiving us. If the soil of our inward man is stony, the seed will die because it doesn't have any depth. If the soil of our inward man is thorny, the seed will get choked out by the cares and pleasures of life or by the deceitfulness of riches. So we must work hard at being good ground, which is a heart that is humble and submissive and obedient to the Word.

This Word within us will always tug us in this direction. But it is easy to resist this tug. This is why Peter said that we must work hard to prove that we really are among those whom God has chosen. John's statement that those who are born again "do not sin" must be understood in context. Keep in mind what else John said to these very same people...

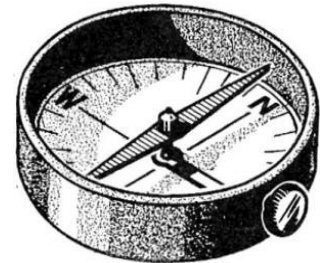
### **1 John 1:9**

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This means that if we confess our sins, God counts it as though we have not sinned at all. Those who are truly born again will always be tugged in this direction. Yes, we may sin, but the seed within us will tell us, "Confess your sin, for by His blood we are cleansed." As one man put it: *The magnetic needle, the nature of which is always to point toward the pole, is easily turned aside, but always re-seeks its natural orientation.*

When we were born again, God put a seed within us that will always orient us toward confession of sin and the practice of righteousness. But we must cooperate with this seed.

Group Discussion: How are we doing cooperating with the seed?



## Lesson 4. Becoming the Children of God (2)

### John 1:10-13

*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

When we were born again, God put a seed within us that will always orient us toward confession of sin and the practice of righteousness. But we must cooperate with this seed. We must continually make the definitive choice to go wherever the seed is wanting to take us. This is how we become the children of God.

### **Attribute 3. The children of God love one another.**

#### 1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

This passage tells us that those who are truly born again will love their brothers and sisters in the Lord. The love being described here is specifically love between the members of God's spiritual family—those who are His children.

#### 1 John 5:1

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

If we love the Begetter (Jesus), then we must also love those He has begotten (our brothers and sisters). This is just another way of saying that we must love God with all of our heart, soul, and strength, and love our neighbors as ourselves. And notice that John connects this with believing that Jesus is the Christ. This indicates that the ultimate expression of genuine faith in Jesus Christ is actively loving both Him and His children.



**Reflection Point:** What are some things you have done in the past month or so that demonstrate the genuine love you have for God’s people?

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#### **Attribute 4. The children of God overcome the world.**

##### **1 John 5:4**

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith.

Those who are truly born again are overcomers. But what is it that they have overcome? The answer is: the world. And what is it about the world that they have overcome? Again, let’s interpret this in context. John has already described what is in the world.

##### **1 John 2:15-17**

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

So those who are truly born again have overcome the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The NIV interprets “the pride of life” as boasting about one’s accomplishments in life. Have you overcome these three spiritual killers?

**1 John 4:1-6**

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. 4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Have you overcome the false prophets who are in the world—those who deceive people by teaching them false doctrines and the doctrines of demons. We need to strengthen the seed that God has put within us. This seed is ultimately our protection against the spirit of error, which can be very subtle—just like the serpent was in the garden of Eden. It may sound so good. It may sound so right. But is it? We all need good spiritual discernment so we can protect ourselves. Pastors can teach you, but they can't monitor everything you read and hear. In the end, you are responsible for protecting yourself and overcoming the spirit of the antichrist.

Overcoming the lusts of the world and the deceivers of the world go hand in hand. If you don't overcome your pride and worldly lusts, you will eventually believe some deceiver who is telling you what you want to hear. If you do not overcome the influences of those who are not speaking the truth, eventually your lusts will be inflamed and you will fail to practice righteousness.

**Reflection Point:** How could the lusts of the flesh prevent you from being able to practice righteousness?

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## **Attribute 5. The children of God guards themselves.**

### **1 John 5:18**

We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

The word “keep” means to guard or protect something valuable by keeping an eye on it. It doesn’t say that God guards the born again person. It doesn’t say that pastors protect the born again person. Yes, they can help and so can God. But this verse says that the born again person is guarding and protecting himself.

And what is he protecting himself from? His adversary the devil, who roams about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Do you know that he is seeking to devour you? But if you have the seed residing within you, and...

If you are practicing righteousness, and...

If you are praying, fasting, and being generous with your money, and...

If you are not giving ear to deceivers and false brethren, and...

If you have crucified your flesh with its passions and lusts, and...

If you are committed to fervently loving your brothers and sisters in the Lord...

Then the wicked one, the devil, the adversary, the dragon, the serpent, Satan himself cannot take hold of you.

This is because you are truly born again and you have definitively chosen to become one of the children God.

**Reflection Point:** Are you effectively guarding yourself against your adversary?  
Explain your answer:

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## Lesson 5. Review of the Five Attributes

### John 1:10-13

*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

The new birth experience was designed by Jesus to make a powerful spiritual impact in our lives. But some people, after being born again, seem to be able to continue on living as they were, with very little change in their lives. The reason for this is that they have never exercised their right to become a child of God. They have failed to make a definitive choice to be different.

The book of First John shows us some of the important ways that we should be different from those who are not born again. These five attributes define what it looks like to become a child of God. Consider each of these attributes and describe in your own words what they should look like in your own life. Find one passage of Scripture outside of First John that supports your description of each attribute. Note what specific choices you may need to make in order to move more deliberately toward this attribute.

Attribute 1. The children of God practice righteousness.

Attribute 2. The children of God do not sin.

Attribute 3. The children of God love one another.

Attribute 4. The children of God overcome the world.

Attribute 5. The children of God guard themselves.