

“BORN AGAIN” CHRISTIANS

Once, while I was discussing the Bible with a man, he said that his wife had become a “born again” Christian awhile back. President Jimmy Carter claimed to be a “born again” Christian. “Born Again” is the title of a movie that was shown nationwide several years ago, tracing the alleged “conversion” of one of the Watergate principals. It is not enough to be a Christian anymore. Unless one is a “born again” Christian, he apparently is only second rate. Apparently, what most people refer to by “born again” is a claim to have been baptized in the Holy Spirit or at least to have had some sort of “spiritual experience.”

Not coincidentally, this description has emerged with the rapid numerical growth of the Pentecostal/Holiness phenomenon in the past three or four decades. Until then the claim of “Holy Spirit baptism” was largely confined to the Pentecostal sects. However, with its spread across denominational lines (including both Catholic and major Protestant groups), the claim of this subjective religious experience has become the “in” thing among small and great. It is not my intent to question the sincerity of any person who claims to have been thus “born again,” but sincerity has never been the arbiter of Truth and error. Rather, what does the Bible say?

Jesus taught that every person must be born again to see the kingdom of God (i. e., be saved, be added to the church) (John 3:3, 5). This simply means that **there is no other kind of Christian besides a “born again” Christian.** If one is a Christian or is saved, he is born again; if one is not born again (by Scriptural definition, of course) he is not saved or a Christian. The New Testament makes no distinction. To speak of a “born again” Christian is comparable to speaking of an unbelieving infidel. Both expressions are prime exercises in tautology (that is-- repetition of an idea, esp. in words other than those of the immediate context, without imparting additional force or clearness, as in ‘widow woman’—K.J.C.).

Jesus defined the new birth as being “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). In every birth there must be a begetting or implantation of seed (from which the new life springs) and upon germination, a coming forth of the newly formed life. In the new birth, the Holy Spirit does the begetting through His inspired Word, not through a “better-felt than-told” experience. The spiritual seed in the new birth is the Word of God (Luke 8:11; Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23, 25). When the Holy Spirit’s seed is “planted” in one’s heart and it begins to germinate, it produces (1) faith in Jesus as the Christ (Rom. 10:17), (2) the desire to confess one’s faith (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37), (3) and the determination to repent of one’s sins (Acts 17:30). At this point, one is ready to be born of water (i.e., baptized—immersed in water and brought forth from water) in order to receive forgiveness of sins and be in a saved condition (Acts 2:38; 8:36–39; 22:16; et al.). Jesus’ own explanation of the new birth is in Mark 16:16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” There is no miracle or mystery to the new birth; it is simply obedience to Christ’s plan of salvation. Everyone who has heard and obeyed the Gospel terms of pardon is a **born again Christian**, and none others are.

—Dub McClish
Denton, TX

BELVEDERE BEACON

“Ye are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14)

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Liberties Illicitly Taken

It always troubles me to hear of brethren taking liberties with His Word not granted them therein. Whether in the name of greater unity or (alleged) growth or with no *excuse* offered all too often these days we hear or read of those who have decided to abandon the Word Jesus gave us to do in quest of some “new” area of interest that promises to make all of the problems of the past disappear. Such unauthorized ventures *fix* nothing—but they do create a whole new genre of troubles to plague the faithful for generations to come.

The primary concern of the church Jesus built—that is, the one of which one may read on the pages of the New Testament—is the salvation of lost souls. Our spheres of operation include preaching the one, true Gospel to the lost (Mat. 28:10-20); preaching the one, true Gospel to the saved by way of edification (Acts 20:32); and engaging in benevolence (Jam. 1:27). There is no disputing these activities. The Bible plainly enjoins—not suggests—the three of them.

Where in these three spheres of operation—or, where in the Bible at all for that matter—do we find authority for entertainment? For exercise classes? For rummage sales? For ball teams? The answer is simple: we do not. It is not the work of the church to rear your children; that is your job. It is not the work of the church to provide a “family life center” to fill your bored hours—if you are doing the Jesus-authorized work of the church you will find that you have no boring hours.

How does it feel to be a member of a congregation that has forsaken the Jesus-authorized work of the church in preference for worldly and unauthorized pursuits? I do not know, myself, as I am not so attached. I would think that one’s conscience would bother him, seeing how he has affiliated himself with a group more concerned with entertaining each other than pleasing the One Who died on the cross to save him. While that may sound sarcastic (usually when I hit the nail on the head, the owner of the specific head makes such an accusation), it is not. Think about it: church is not about me or you or anything or anyone but Him and Judgment. Since He will Judge us, ought not we do His Will? His Will is revealed on the pages of the New Testament. If the congregation of the church of Christ you attend does not respect the Jesus-authorized work of the church, leave it immediately and find a sound group. Heaven and Hell hang in the balance for you—and your family.

Tim Smith, Webb, AL

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

SUNDAY:

Bible Classes for all ages 10.00 am.
Morning Worship 11.00 am.
Evening Worship 6.00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY:

Bible Classes for all ages 7.00 p.m.

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We had a little excitement at the church building Wednesday evening! Someone (who will remain anonymous – but he knows who he is!) – unlocked the door and proceeded to turn off the burglar alarm – at least that's what he thought he was doing. However, he put in the wrong code and the alarm sounded! Fortunately, I came in right behind him and was able to put in the correct code and turn it off – but not before the monitoring service had been alerted. We did find out how quickly they respond and that the sheriff's department came by to check. However, the alarm should not have sounded – after all he was only one number off! Surely that wasn't important? However, it was and is important, if the wrong code is entered, the alarm system will sound.

This principle is important in many areas of life and especially when it comes to doing God's will. If God is to be pleased and we are to be blessed of God, being one number off will not work. Man has no right to change what God has commanded in any way.

A good illustration of this principle is found in the story of Nadab and Abihu, recorded in Leviticus chapter ten: *“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace”* (Leviticus 10:1-3). It was only one number different – they used fire, but the wrong fire and we see that they perished because of their failure to honor God and do as He had commanded.

Another Old Testament illustration is found in II Samuel chapter six: *“And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God”* (II Samuel 6:6-7). Now what was wrong with that? Uzzah was only steadying the ark so that it would not fall. What was so wrong with that? Why did the Lord slay Uzzah? After all, he was only one number off! God had given instruction that when the ark was moved it was to be carried by the Levites (I Chronicles 15:2) no others were authorized to carry it or to even touch it. The Israelites did not have authority to move the ark in any other way and no Israelite other than the Levites were to touch or carry it.

Jesus said: *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth”* (Matthew 28:19). Jesus has *“all power”* or authority. Thus we cannot change what He has said – even by one number and be accepted by Him. It does make a difference whether or not we obey the teaching of God's Word. We have no right to change one thing with respect to the conditions that He has made regarding salvation and entry into His church. Neither do we have the right to change those things that God has authorized for the work and worship of the church or to add to or take away from that which He has authorized. One number off does make a difference!

Ken Chumbley

NEWS AND NOTES

Keep in your prayers the following: Helen Culpepper, Pam Gossett's mother, Kathy Treadway's mother and Bronwen Gibson's mother (Lavonne McClish) – who has continued health – related issues and who is undergoing pain management therapy; and Rachel Fitzpatrick's aunt (Eula Baker) who has cancer.

Jack Peebles is still in the Mattie C. Hall Care Center in Aiken, room 301. Continue to keep Jack and Jean and their family in your prayers at this difficult time.

It was good to have Helen Culpepper with us on Wednesday evening.

Justine Hall's new-born great granddaughter had surgery Wednesday at MCG to repair heart valves and, at last report, is doing well.

Pam Gossett had some issues with her heart and had a stress test Thursday. No problems were found and she is now home. Her scheduled surgery was postponed until later this month.

Myrtle Grimsley is doing some better but is not yet fully recovered.

Congratulations to Matthew Aaron and Xavier Mitchell for making the JV football team at North Augusta High and the football team at North Augusta Middle, respectively.

SHAPED FOR GLORY

During the Great Depression a good man lost his job, exhausted his savings, and forfeited his home. His grief was multiplied by the sudden death of his precious wife. The only thing he had left was his faith, it was weakening.

One day he was combing the neighborhood looking for work. He stopped by to watch some men who were doing the stonework on a church building. One of those men was skillfully chiseling a triangular piece of rock.

Not seeing a spot where it would fit, he asked, “Where are you going to put that?”

The man pointed toward the top of the building and said, “See that little opening up there near the spire? That's where it goes. I'm shaping it down here so it will fit up there.”

Tears filled this good man's eyes as he walked away.

“Shaping it down here so it will fit up there” gave new meaning to his difficult situation.

Some who read this may be going through terrible troublesome times. You may be experiencing some heart-breaking sorrow. Or perhaps you are enduring some painful physical illness. Or it may be something else – maybe even too excruciating to talk to anyone about. The blows of the hammer and chisel hurt.

But hold to your faith. Don't let difficulties get you down. They are only temporary. Glory is coming. It's the harsh blows to the outward man that often bring the greatest strength to the inner man. Keep praying. Keep believing. The Master has to do some shaping of us down here so we will fit up there.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 6:28).

Author Unknown