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Born Again Christians A Bible concept or man's concept?

By Dennis R. Smith

The expression "born again Christian" has been used so much today that people are beginning to make fun of it. It is sad to think of such an IMPORTANT subject being led down the gutter of mockery and ridicule. When a public figure such as our president has openly expressed his opinion on such a matter it is only natural (in these vulgar times) that he throws himself open to criticism by every gutter character throughout the land. This is one reason that I say the subject of "the born again Christian" has become commonplace throughout the land. Now it is not my intent to pass judgment on our president (his opinion is as good as anyone else) or to ridicule any person for their religious convictions, but it is my intent to tell what is meant by "being born again" as far as the Bible concept is concerned.

There are only two places in the Bible where the two words "born again" are used. They are as follows:

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be BORN AGAIN, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old; Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be BORN OF WATER AND SPIRIT, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must BE BORN AGAIN." (John 3:3-7).

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; Being BORN AGAIN not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." (1 Peter 1:22-23)

In all of the Bible the two areas that I have mentioned above are the only places where the words "born again" are used. In between these two there lies a vast area of opinion which has been brought on by theology. This subject is highly sensitive and tragically misunderstood in view of what little is said about it in the Bible. Let us throw away "theology" and approach this subject in a sensible, knowledgeable and intelligent manner.

The common opinion on the subject varies slightly but generally it is thought of as follows: "To be born again one must have experienced an overwhelming sensation that could not be misunderstood as being anything other than the Spirit of God working in your heart and life." One writer says: "It is necessary to experience in his own soul that new birth." So often these opinions are totally accepted by individuals without any Biblical research whatsoever.

Should one be born again? The answer to this question is a MOST DEFINITE YES if he wants to be saved eternally and if he wishes to stay in harmony with the scriptures. Anyway that we want to look at it, the Bible still affirms, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The question then is not "whether we should be born again" but rather "how are we born again?" As we look at John chapter three, there is one thing that is very evident: In order to be born again, one must also be born of "water and of the Spirit" for the passage is very clear. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of **water** and of **the Spirit** he CANNOT enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5). One is not complete without the other. To these things there has to be an explanation (for God is not the author of confusion) and this explanation MUST be scriptural in content.

Let us look at other related scriptures:
"He came unto his own and his own

received him not. But as many as did receive him to them gave he power to become the SONS of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were BORN, not of Blood (flesh) nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, BUT OF GOD." (John 1:11-13).

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he SAVED US, by the washing of REGENERATION, and RENEWING OF THE HOLY GHOST." (Titus 3:5).

From these two related scriptures we can see several things. (a) To be born again is to be born of God, THAT IS on God's terms and according to God's instructions. (b) A man's work will not save him. (c) It is by the Mercy of God. (d) It is by WASHING of regeneration. (e) It is by the renewing of the Holy Spirit. It is interesting to notice that in each case where the subject of the New Birth is concerned the words "water" and "spirit" also enters in.

Another very interesting scripture that bears evidence upon the subject:

"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by WATER and BLOOD, even Jesus Christ; not by WATER ONLY but by WATER AND BLOOD. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and THE HOLY GHOST: and these three ARE ONE. And there are three that bear witness in EARTH, the spirit, and the water, and the blood. And these three agree in one." (1 John 5:5-8).

Question: How do these scriptures fit in with the subject of the NEW BIRTH? First, let us simply look at the three words - water, blood, spirit. These words are used twice in this series of verses, but they (at least two of them) are used in

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BORN AGAIN CHRISTIANS

A Bible concept or man's concept?

connection with BEING BORN AGAIN (water and spirit). The scriptures state, "this is he that came by WATER AND BLOOD." Most writers agree that this has reference to two episodes in the life of Christ - his baptism and his death. Finally, the word SPIRIT is used in connection with Christ. How does this fit into the subject of the new birth. To answer this let me also ask another question? What does it mean to be a Christian? It means to be a follower of Christ. Since this is true and since Christ came by three elements; "the water, the blood and the spirit", then is it any less to think that a CHRISTIAN follow Christ in the way that he CAME . . . through the water, the blood (of Christ), and the Spirit of Christ. Look now at the following:

"Repent and be BAPTIZED (water) everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins and ye shall RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT." (Acts 2:38) (Water and Spirit). *"For by one SPIRIT are we all BAPTIZED into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one SPIRIT."* (I Cor. 12:13) (Water and Spirit again).

The application: It was Christ's baptism (in water) that John refers to in the terminology of "came by water;" it was Christ's death that John refers to in the terminology of "came by blood"; it was Christ's spirit that led him to both of these acts. It is then through our OBEDIENCE to baptism that we come by water it by baptism that we obey a likeness of Christ's death (Rom. 6:1-6), thus, in baptism we also come by blood (Christ's

and it is through baptism that we come into the Spirit. (Acts 2:38, I Cor. 12:13). When it is all said and done, (like Naaman of old - II Kings 5) the simple, trusting, faith of man leads him to a simple act of obedience in baptism where all the pieces come together. One is born again; One is born of water and the spirit; One comes into the blood of Christ; he then becomes a new "creature in Christ Jesus" (II Cor. 5:17), a "child of God" (Gal. 3:26-27), and where (as a Child) he is born again. (John 3:3-5, I Peter 1:23).

There is no EXAMPLE of a "born again Christian" in all the book of Acts that has not complied with this scriptural directive on BEING BORN AGAIN. Let the Bible serve the purpose that God intended - let it be the *"lamp unto your feet and the light unto your pathway."*

" . . . if the prophet had bid thee do some GREAT THING, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, WASH and be clean." (II Kings 5:13). God does not bid us do great things but rather He asks us to have simple, trusting faith in His word. Does it not take more faith to accept just what the Bible says than some great and "mysterious" feeling?

When you speak of being "a born again Christian" be sure you are "born of God" - according to his terms and according to "His Word" - for we are indeed to be BORN AGAIN, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible seed, by the WORD OF GOD which liveth and abideth forever," OR we will have been born by man's concept and not the Bible concept.

Would Jesus Cleanse the Temple Again?

By Workman

On the Monday before Jesus' crucifixion he entered into "the temple of God" (Matt. 21:12) where he found sacrificial animals for sale. He then physically ejected the buyers, sellers and moneychangers and threw their possessions to the floor. This second cleansing of the temple was preceded by a similar action three years earlier, prompted by his zeal for the Lord's house (John 2:13-18).

What was it that so outraged the Lord? The answer is clear - it was their perversion of God's purpose for the temple. The temple was designed to be "a house of

prayer" (Isaiah 56:7). But by turning it into "a house of merchandise" (John 2:16) they, in effect, made it "a den of robbers" (Matt. 21:13)! And God himself was their victim (Jer. 7:8-11).

The buying and selling and money-changing was not wrong in itself, but the temple was *not the place to do it*. They failed *"to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane (common) place"* (Ezek. 42:20). But Jesus would not even allow anyone to carry a container through the temple (Mark 11:16). Their usage of the temple was convenient, and even helpful in providing for worship but it was wrong!

In like manner, more and more congregations today are profaning the current "house of God, which is the church" (I Tim. 3:15), that spiritual temple which must not be desecrated (I Cor. 3:16). We speak not of what someone might do in the meeting-house, but of a perversion of the church's rightful *purpose* and *work*.

The church is to carry on with the unfinished work of Christ (John 14:12). His mission was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), and that must be our mission, too (John 17:18). We are a special people called for a special purpose (I Peter 2:9-10), a spiritual house commanded to do spiritual work (verse 5). And just as Jesus carried out his mission in three ways - preaching, teaching and healing (Matt. 9:35), so *all church work* must likewise be limited to *evangelism, edification* (including worship), and *benevolence*. The church is authorized to work in *no other areas*. But these are enough.

Our preachers need to dust off those sermons of yesteryear that are not used much nowadays and teach with renewed fervor about the authority of the Scriptures and their application to the church's work. And elders need to firmly insist to a sometimes uninformed membership that the church has no business dabbling in the secular pursuits of politics or playrooms. The Spirit-anointed work of Jesus (Luke 4:18-19) is also that which was given to the church (Rom. 12:6-8). And we must not be diverted from our task.

There is a biblical distinction between the action of Christian individuals and that of the church, itself (I Tim. 5:16). This is because there is a difference between what is God's and what is the government's (Matt. 22:21) or an individual's. Everything ultimately belongs to God, but he chooses to give to us (Acts 14:17, James 1:17). Ananias' money was

“his own” until he gave it back to the Lord (Acts 5:4). Such failure to distinguish between the secular and the sacred caused the Corinthians to pervert the Lord’s Supper (I Cor. 11:20 - 22, 34).

Remember that Jesus’ kingdom is “not of this world” (John 18:36) and must not be improperly entangled in “the affairs of this life” (II Tim. 2:4). The church is a divine organism with a two-fold trust: to guard the truth (I Tim. 3:15) and proclaim it to all men (Eph. 3:8-9). This was God’s “eternal purpose” for the church (verses 10-11), and we must not violate its glory (verse 21). Let us not, therefore, rob God by profaning its mission.

If Jesus were here on earth today, would he cleanse his temple again?

What God Hath Joined Together . . .

By Mike Pace

God joined man and woman together in the God-given institution of marriage as one flesh, not to be put assunder by man (Gal. 2:18-24, Matt. 19:6). This honorable, holy, sacred union is compared by the apostle Paul to the relationship of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:23-33). Thus God joins together two of His people in love. Such a union for the purpose of fleshly lusts only, worldly gain, or any other immoral reason, or unworthy reason, usually shipwrecks upon the rocks of the divorce courts or unhappy lives.

Thus, through the joining of men and women of God in the proper marriage relationship, there can be a true happiness of peace and bliss in a Christian home, and a faithful harmony where the sins of the flesh are avoided (see Heb. 13:4). Followers of God are not to be yoked with heathen and unbelievers (Deut. 7:3-4; II Cor. 6:14-16).

God joins a convert to New Testament Christianity to Christ through obedience to the gospel. The steps in this divine union being faith in Christ, repentance of sin, confessing Christ before men, and being baptized into Christ. Baptism is the last step putting men into Christ (Gal. 3:27). Therefore, no one can be joined to Christ or become a part of the Christian system by heathen false religion or man-made doctrine (Matt. 15:9; II Tim. 4:3-4). We have to follow the word of God as the divine standard (I Peter 1:23), and be joined together by the unity of the Spirit

climbing heavenward adding Christian virtues along the way.

A Christian wife cannot be completely true to her husband and to the Lord without proper submission in the Christian walk. Neither can a follower of the Lord be joined to Him as Lord and Master without being in His church and submitting to His authority (Eph. 5:22-23; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:38).

Christian wives should be subject to Christian husbands, even as the living stones that make up the church be subject to Christ. Husbands should love their wives. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:24-25). Thus we can see the essential factors of God joining man and wife and Christ and the church. If man and wife are not joined together by God’s divine standard of love, they may be just staying together in confusion and strife. And if those claiming to be members of the body of Christ are not joined to Him as part of His church through obedience to His gospel and walking in the faith, they are bound to be following a system of strife and confusion, the doctrines and commandments of men.

Christ gave Himself for the church that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle. Thus men ought to love their wives as their own bodies, and seek to nourish, cherish, help to save them, even as the Lord does His church (Eph. 5:26-29).

As members of the body of Christ, we become disciples of His, part of Him, Christians. On the same basis a man leaves his parents and becomes joined to his wife and the two become one flesh. (Eph. 5:30-31).

But we are living in a world today in which there are many marriages not based on love. People unite just to satisfy fleshly lusts, for social and political reasons, etc. Sometimes members of the blood-bought church of Jesus Christ depart from the faith and enter a false religious system in order to marry a party belonging to that religion. Christians should marry Christians, uniting in harmony and love as one. Cleaving to, loving, helping, cherishing one another, until separated by death. After death the survivor is free to marry again, but for the Christian, it should be only in the Lord (Rom. 7:2-3, I Cor. 7:39). Marriage is a holy thing, of divine origin, not to be treated with contempt and trampled under foot by a sinful perishing world.

Israel had the right to be joined to God through Moses and the law of Moses until Christ died. Then the law of Moses was abolished in Christ (Eph. 2:15-16), nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14-17), thus it became necessary to be married to another even Christ. The church Christ died for is a blood-bought institution (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). Christ is the foundation of it (Matt. 16:18). He has the authority in it (Matt. 28:18-20; Matt. 18:17). It wears His name (Rom. 16:16). The church and Christ are joined together. Christ is the head of it. The church should be loyal to Christ and His gospel. It should not follow the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt. 15:9). The church should not refuse sound doctrine and secure teachers who would turn one from truth to fables (II Tim. 4:3-4). “*The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the later times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils*” (I Tim. 4:1).

Let us not forget: What God has joined together, let not man put asunder!

Third Annual Denton Lectures Planned

The Pearl Street Church of Christ in Denton, Texas will host its third major annual lectureship November 11-15, 1984. The Third Annual Denton Lectures will be devoted to a study of the book of Revelation. A wide variety of material will be covered by 30 speakers from all parts of the nation, delivering 39 lectures. The Pearl Street elders aim for these lectures to provide all who come with fundamental and sound Biblical teaching to help combat the profusion of doctrinal error both within and without the church. A book of these lectures will be published (orders are already coming in). The book of the First Annual Denton Lectures *Studies in I Corinthians* was sold out in the first edition in less than five months and has gone into a third edition. *Studies in Hebrews* (Second Annual Denton Lectures) is also much in demand as a classic and standard reference work. *Studies in Revelation* is expected to be in more demand than its predecessors. All of the Third Annual Denton Lectures will also be available both on audio and video cassette tapes.

A special feature of these lectures on Revelation will be the daily (Monday - Thursday) two-hour “*Discussion Forum*”

in which four subjects of controversy will be discussed. The subjects will be: "Eternal Punishment - Extinction or Conscious Torment?"; "The Great Judgment - A.D. 70 or Future?"; "What Constitutes Scriptural Baptism?" and "Who are 'In the Lord?'".

Questions will be allowed and encouraged from the audience on these topics. Exhibit space is available for both commercial and non-commercial interests, subject to invitation and/or approval by the Pearl Street elders. Housing in the homes of local Christians will be provided as long as it lasts. Hook-up for RV units will be provided on the church parking lot. For further information, inquiries may be addressed to: Dub McClish, ADL Director, 312 Pearl Street, Denton, TX 76201; (817) 387-3531, or 387-1429.

FALL BIBLE LECTURESHIP AT HARDING UNIVERSITY

SEARCY, ARK. - "Amazing Grace, How Sweet The Sound", has been selected for the theme of the fall Bible Lectureship at Harding University September 30 through October 3. Lectureship Director Eddie Cloer said several changes will be included in this year's series.

The program will begin on Sunday night rather than later in the week as has formerly been the schedule. Classes, lectures, luncheons and dinners, special events for both men and women and musical programs will be on the agenda for Monday through Wednesday and the series will close on Wednesday night.

The Lectureship, longest running tradition of the school, was for many years a week-long even held at Thanksgiving time. In recent years the Lectureship has been held during selected weeks of the fall.

A team of about 25 church leaders will be among the speakers and teachers for the week. Further information and details, along with a complete schedule, will be announced.

CONTRIBUTIONS

INDIVIDUALS

Clyde and Delphia Smith	\$32.00
Amanda B. Taylor	10.00
Paul and Mary Garland	10.00
Boyd and Evelyn Anthony	15.00

CONGREGATIONS

Church of Christ, Marionville, MO	\$10.00
Elizabeth Church of Christ	20.00
Dellhalf Church of Christ	25.00
Gamaliel Church of Christ	10.00
Jeff Church of Christ	10.00
Big Pond Church of Christ	12.00
McFadden Church of Christ	75.00
Viola Church of Christ	5.00
Garfield Church of Christ	15.00

How To Become A Christian

The most important question ever asked is: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Then, the **HOW** becomes equally as important. Notice the step by step process. First, we must have faith in the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ. (Heb. 12:2). This faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God. (Rom. 10:17). "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. 11:6). With the belief and trust that Jesus is the Redeemer, we must repent of sins. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30). In repentance, we turn from sin, **STOP** serving Satan and **START** serving the Lord. (Matt. 3:8,

Luke 13:3). With this new attitude we are ready to confess our faith, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:9-10). Read Matthew 10:32-33. Acknowledging our faith, repentance and confession, the last step into Christ is baptism. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). Read Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38. Now that our past sins have been forgiven, the Lord has added us to His church and we are Christians. (Acts 2:47; Acts 11:26).

BECOME A CHRISTIAN

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