

Are You Born Again?

John 3:7

A U.S. News & World Report (April 4, 1994) article on the spiritual status of America reported, "Forty-six percent of Americans described themselves as born again." In other words, almost one of every two people in America claims a committed relationship to God by following Jesus! Millions.

"What Must I do to be Saved?"

When the Roman jailer asked this question, Paul's answer was simply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..." (Acts 16:30, 31) Is this believing merely a one-time assent to 'Jesus died for me'? No, Paul explains himself throughout his own writings, "...ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:2). Nothing we can do will save ourselves from the condemnation of death. However, after that "foundation" is laid, then build we must with "gold, silver, precious stones" of character and service to gain salvation (1 Cor. 3:11-15). Likewise, the Apostle Peter says that after we have escaped "the corruption that is in the world through lust," we must add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and "agape" love to our faith. Only then, he says, "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:4-11).

Jesus himself said, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22). First we are saved from condemnation because of Adam's sin. Nothing we can do can pull us out of that "horrible pit" (Psa. 40:2) of just condemnation. But after He sets "our feet upon a rock," Jesus' atoning merit, we are admonished to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

"One-Hundredfold in this Life..."

In exchange for a sense of guilt and undone emptiness, the Christian experiences peace because of the precious blood of Jesus. In exchange for a restless grasping for the material "things of earth," he or she experiences a peaceful contentment. "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus." (Phil.4:19) In exchange for friends or family who may forsake us, the Christian finds a new family in the household of faith. The true Christian does not aspire to "getting ahead in the world." Why? He does not accumulate his treasure on earth, but in heaven. Even so, the spiritual rewards a Christian obtains, even in this life, are one-hundredfold more than compensating. (Matthew 19:29)

The Truly Committed Christian Life

What does a real Christian's walk look like? Has the truly committed Christian stopped stealing, quit drugs, left off smoking, swearing and drinking? Yes, but there are a lot of sincere, smart people who do "none of the above" without being Christians. Does a real Christian's walk include a ministry of helping people, such as, flood or disaster victims, AIDS babies or unwed mothers? A lot of good, altruistic people have devoted their lives to helping people in this country—and other countries. Many of these fine people are not professing Christians.

What are the true terms of discipleship, following in Jesus' footsteps? Jesus said, "I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19). Can so many millions of Americans all be true Christians? Jesus called his followers a "little flock" (Luke 12:32). His invitation is, "If any will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). What about all the good people who go to Church on Sunday and are pleasant to their neighbors during the week? "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name and in thy name...done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you..." (Matt. 7:22,23). To live a life of self denial and loving the Lord with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength is the truly committed Christian walk. That is why Jesus said, "But the gate to life is narrow and the way that leads to it is hard, and there are few people who find it" (Matthew 7:14).

The New Mind

Those who heed the call to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" experience a gradual transformation of mind. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:1,2). This New Mind is the new identity that begins to think of things from God's standpoint—that is, spiritually. The New Mind feeds on God's Word and grows stronger and stronger. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels..." (2 Corinthians 4:7). The mind of the "flesh," however, wars against the New Mind. Even the Apostle Paul said, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of the mind—*who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*" (Romans 7:22, 23)

The new-minded Christian today struggles with the old mind of the flesh. The flesh has a hard enough time trying to be "good"—let alone sacrificing legitimate human needs and denying self, to follow Jesus. When the Christian wants to set aside time to study the Scriptures, the flesh wants to relax and watch TV. On a free Saturday afternoon when the New Mind would like to witness or do Christian service, the "flesh" wants to go to a mall or go boating or skiing.

Paul, like us, was not "at home in the body" (2 Corinthians 5:6). He well understood, "If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1). Knowing that "flesh

and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50), he longed for the time when the New Mind would be given a "spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44).

"Born of the Spirit"

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, Jesus explained that to understand the Kingdom one must have this New Mind. The Master further was pressed on to say that to actually enter the Kingdom, one must be "born of the Spirit." "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born (Gk. 'begotten') again, he cannot see ('know, understand') the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nicodemus then wanted to know how he could "enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus continued to explain, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:4,5).*

Jesus then plainly elaborates that someone who is "born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." In other words, if one is born of the flesh, he is a fleshly being. And if one is born of the spirit, he is a spirit being. Jesus also compared someone who is born of the spirit to the wind. The wind is invisible, powerful. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Someone who is "born again" is a resurrected spirit being with a spiritual body.

First, the Christian is begotten of the Word, through the Holy spirit. The Apostle James explains, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18). He or she then develops, grows stronger and more mature.... In the human process, the body develops for nine months and when the baby is born, the mind develops. With the New Creature, the mind develops first, then at the resurrection, the spirit body is given. "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him...So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:38, 42).

But one might ask, don't the Scriptures talk about a babe in Christ who should grow into "manhood" in Jesus?

Many figures are ascribed to the Christian: He is a soldier. He is to be like sheep. He is part of the bride of Christ, and he is also a branch on the True Vine. The symbols are not to be confused—each has a lesson. The point of Jesus' lesson for Nicodemus was that one who is "begotten" understands spiritual things. One who is "born" can come and go like the wind.

The important idea is that once a Christian is saved from condemnation in Adam, he is begotten to a new life. He must be nurtured to grow and develop—or else he will be a "castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27), "cast forth" (John 15:6). "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" says Paul (Philippians 2:12). But the prospects of a spirit birth—being born again—are glorious.

Since faithful Christians as part of the true Church are the "firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18; Revelation 14:4), who are the later fruits? The later fruits of God's creatures are the *millions* of Americans, Africans, Chinese, Moslems, and Indians, who will come to know Jesus under the loving reign of Jesus and his resurrected Bride.

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