

“Born Again” Christians

Dub McClish

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 a 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 several 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.

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) 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 no others are.

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