

# **CRISIS IN THE CHURCH**

## **Part 1**

### **THE REDEFINING OF BEING BORN AGAIN**

**By**  
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The evangelical church in the west is experiencing a major crisis; a crisis that goes to the core of its identity and the majority of people involved don't even know it exists. What is the crisis I am speaking about? – The redefining of what it means to be Christian. More specifically, how a person becomes a believer and then how one is to live in this world. Through a slow process of redefining what it means to be “Christian,” we have forsaken the faith defined in the Scriptures. Instead, we have substituted a pop cultural, politically correct version that advocates a deceptive form of tolerance and an unbiblical concept of inclusiveness. This is another gospel, an anti-Christian religion.

Let me give a couple of examples. After 15 years of pastoring the Lord called my wife and I to be evangelists. Since the end of 1996 we have traveled the country speaking at churches, conferences and ministries. To help pay some bills my wife, Jessica, took a seasonal job in a southern, Bible-belt town during the Christmas season of 1997. She was excited to find that most of the women in the business claimed to be Christian. However, as time went on she learned the ugly truth that many of them were either living with their boyfriend or practicing other immoral behaviors. Either way, they were in blatant rebellion against God by living in fornication and willfully sinning. When Jessica tried to share the true Gospel with them they were not interested.

A few years ago I was preaching at a church that ran a homeless shelter. As Jessica and I ministered to the homeless we found that most of them were very hard to the Gospel. Why? They had once said the “sinner’s prayer” and then were informed that this prayer made them Christian. Now they could no longer see any problem with being a “Christian” while strung out on drugs or living a sexually immoral life – after all they did say the prayer. They had been lied to and chose to believe the lie.

Thirty, fifty or a hundred years ago it would have been unthinkable for people living in fornication or doing drugs to be considered Christian or to regard themselves as one. But through a relentless series of small compromises the very definition of Christianity has been changed. We are building churches without Christ, offering salvation without a cross and calling people to a discipleship without cost. Rather than depopulating hell to populate heaven we are allowing hell to infiltrate the church and entrench itself into our very heart and doctrine. Much of the so-called-church is inviting people to join their club and pay their weekly dues so they can receive the benefits and rewards such membership offers. Their slogan could easily be: “Join our club and live as you want.”

The spiritually bankrupt condition of the church at large compels me to proclaim that we are in desperate need of another Great Reformation; a spiritual revolution that will take us back to our Biblical roots where we will recover once again the true Christian faith. To do this we have to abandon all the religious baggage we have accumulated from both the church and the world. We need men and women of God who will lovingly, yet boldly proclaim the Reformation battle cry; “Sola Scriptura,” – that faith must be based upon Scripture alone. For too long we have allowed our religious beliefs to be defined by modern day Protestant popes that pontificate their doctrinal errors for their own selfish agenda. Multitudes within the visible church freely embrace aberrant views of Scripture because they want practice their sin.

With all this said, I think it imperative that we begin our search for the Biblical faith by examining Christ’s simple, yet revolutionary phrase that we must be “born again” to enter the kingdom of God. The phrase “born again,” has been horrendously abused and carries with it a lot of unscriptural baggage. Nonetheless, we need to restore Christ’s beautiful phrase to its pure and rightful place in helping to define true conversion, faith and practice.

Salvation, from God’s point of view, is absolutely radical, both in the price Christ paid that we might be saved and the cost for those who genuinely want His salvation. Jesus used the phrase “born again” to paint a graphic picture of the revolutionary nature of conversion. When a child is born he goes from the darkness of his mother’s womb to the brightness of new life in a new world. It is an absolutely radical change for the child, and is no less radical when a person is authentically born again.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council, went to Jesus one night honestly inquiring into the way of salvation. Jesus immediately addressed his true need, “I tell

you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (Jn. 3:3). Nicodemus, not understanding what Jesus meant, questioned how a man can be born a second time (Jn. 3:4). Jesus responded, “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (Jn. 3:6). The new birth is a spiritual birth, no less radical and obvious than its natural counterpart.

When a woman gives birth to a baby there is verifiable proof that a child has been born. This means that there is objective evidence—a new born baby rests in the arms of the mother. The birth of a child is never subjective, existing only in the woman’s mind. This stands true in the spiritual realm. When a person is genuinely born again there will always be objective, verifiable evidence. That proof consists of a radical change of life that will be seen through the transformation of a person’s heart, mind and character. If there is not a radical change of character, then no matter what the person claims, he has not been born again.

The birthing process is a painful ordeal for both mother and child. As the birth pains increase in intensity and frequency it becomes obvious that the time of delivery draws near. Jesus used the illustration of child birth to show how traumatic it can be to go from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. It can be an excruciating experience to come to the knowledge that we are sinners by nature and by choice, that our sin is always a deliberate act of rebellion and that we deserve eternal damnation as a result. When a person nears the time where he can be born again the emotional pain of the sin can increase in intensity and frequency. Yet without the pain that would bring them to the new birth they would die in the womb of the world.

As the crowds went out to be baptized of John he confronted them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Lk. 3:7-8a). Most of the people didn’t want to hear such strong words, especially those that were religious. They would have liked John to preach positive messages that lifted them up. Since they thought their problem was low self-esteem, all they needed was encouragement, not rebukes. But the path from darkness to life is painful. We must come to a true knowledge of our spiritual condition or we will not flee from the “coming wrath.” If preachers, or lay people, keep from the unsaved the message that can bring them to the point of being born again, they are committing spiritual abortions by killing the people in their spiritual womb. Love warns! It is not love that does not warn! Salvation is radical! So the process of coming to salvation is also radical.

The womb is a necessary environment for a child to grow until he or she is ready to be delivered. If a child does not come forth at the proper time it means death for mother, child or both. The womb then becomes a tomb. So it is with being born again. The world is the womb that allows us to come to the point where we can be born again. If we rebel against the consequences of our sins and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit (birth pains), the very world that we seek to find refuge and happiness in will kill us.

Imagine if a child communicated from the womb that she did not want to leave the warm, comfortable world she had grown so familiar with. Since she didn't know what was on the other side of the womb she decided to stay right where she was. Besides, she did not want to go through all the emotional and physical pain involved with child birth. Would it not seem reasonable for those outside the womb to try to convince the infant at all costs that she would die if she stayed in the womb? Not just that, if she stayed in the womb she would kill the mother she claimed to love. Yet how many people will inflict pain and suffering on their loved ones and then spend an eternity in hell because they did not want to forsake the world to be truly born again. Some people may think that if they go to church, pray a sinner's prayer, are baptized or do some good works that they are born again. But if people will not take God's ordained path to life, even though they hang around the cross, they will never enter the kingdom of God.

It is impossible for those who come out of their mother's womb to ever live the life they once lived in the womb. Nor can anyone share both worlds at the same time. Yet a host of self-proclaimed Christians try to mingle the kingdom of heaven with the kingdom of hell and think that God does not have a problem with it. Oh, what depths of deception! Jesus used the illustration of being born again so we could see the absolute difference between the two kingdoms. He wanted us to know that we could forsake one kingdom for the other, but we could not have them both. Those who choose to love this world will find themselves enemies of God (Jam. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-16). While those who are born again will forsake this world for new life in Christ.

Unconverted people, both in the church and the world, live lives that are contrary to Christ. They are filled with lust, pride, rebellion, fornication, homosexuality, greed, contention and a host of other sins. We cannot expect those who have not been authentically born again to live the Christian life. Only when we have the living and incarnate Christ dwelling in us,

transforming our lives to be like His own, will we manifest the verifiable proof of a person that has been born again.

Without fail, Biblical Christianity produces the Biblical results of salvation, life and character transformation. Unbiblical Christianity also produces Biblical results; however, here the Scriptures tell us that the results are only death and damnation. Dear reader, this is not a game! Your eternal destiny depends upon whether or not you have been truly born again. Religion cannot save you! Your church or denomination cannot save you! A sinner's prayer cannot save you. Baptism cannot save you! Good works cannot save you! Only Jesus Christ can save you! But know this: that He will only save you if you choose to totally abandon the womb of this world, with all of its wicked ways. To do so you must be born again into His kingdom that will produce the verifiable proof of a genuine Christian life.

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