

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE REALLY “BORN AGAIN”

A Word To Professing Christians

by I. C. Herendeen

*“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;
but he that doeth the will of my Father.”—Matthew 7:21*

“Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”—Revelation 3:1

THIS is a day of great religious profession.¹ Multiplied thousands have joined churches who have never been “born of God” and become “new creatures” in Christ (2Co 5:17). Millions have put on the cloak of religion under the delusion that they are then saved, bound for heaven, and sure to enter the pearly gates of the celestial city when they die. They settle down complacently in their false profession with never a suspicion that they are deceived to their eternal undoing—unless the Lord in His grace awakens them from their sleep of death. Great is the danger of being deceived by the great deceiver of souls, Satan. This makes it vitally important that we “give all diligence” to heed the divine warning: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves,” i.e., put yourselves to the proof (Conybeare’s translation) (2Co 13:5). It is not enough to say “Lord, Lord” if we do not bow to Him as our *Lord* and *Master*, or if we are indifferent to His commands. Lip service is worthless where practical godliness is lacking. It is horrible mockery to call Him “Lord” while we do only that which is pleasing to *ourselves*. An outward profession of the most orthodox religion is useless or worse, if not joined with vital godliness and sincere obedience.

In a matter of such paramount importance as the eternal welfare of our soul, we should take nothing for granted nor give ourselves the benefit of any doubt—far too much is at stake. We have good reason to question the reality of our profession if we cannot answer honestly and sincerely in the affirmative such questions as, for example, the following: Have I *really* been “born again” (1Jo 3:9)? Is *sin* now a burden and a grief to me? Do I have a heart-longing to be done with sin, all sin? Do I “mourn” over my sins and “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Mat 5:4, 6)? Am I “pricked in my heart” (Act 2:37) when I sin? Do I humbly and broken-heartedly *confess* any and all my sins? Do I conscientiously endeavor to “obey the gospel” (2Th 1:8)? If we would never “fall,” how much we need to “search and try our ways” (Lam 3:40) by the unerring standard of the Word of God, and to make our “calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10).

It may be you have gone forward at some evangelistic service under the pleading of the evangelist, have shaken the preacher’s hand, signed a “decision card,” joined “the church of your choice,” been baptized, taken communion, etc., with the idea you were then saved—and thus are caught up in the toils of a false confidence. It is not “by works of righteousness which we have done” that we are saved, but “according to his mercy” and by “the washing of regeneration” (Ti 3:5). God says, “My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26). Unless the Lord has our heart, all else will be but mocking Him, and Galatians 6:7 tells us, “God is not mocked.”

Many attend church services with more or less regularity as a matter of duty and because it is expected of them, rather than out of loving obedience to the Lord Whose they profess to be and serve. And after the service is over, they greet their friends and talk with them about worldly matters rather than about the things of God. “Out

¹ **profession** – saying that you are a Christian, even practicing Christianity, but perhaps not having a new heart.

of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Mat 12:34). Then, too, they are very likely to spend the balance of the Lord’s Day dozing, watching TV, visiting their friends, or joy-riding with the godless, giddy, hell-bound worldlings—and conspicuous by their absence from the evening church service.

The fact does not disturb their consciences in the least that most likely they do not open God’s Word and read therein from one week’s end to the other, that they do not spend time each day in prayer as they should (if, indeed, they pray at all, other than when called upon to utter a few pious words and call it prayer), that they do not feel any obligation or manifest any heart’s desire to be present at the weekly prayer meeting. And yet in spite of all this, they try to make themselves and others believe that they are really Christians and on their way to glory. Alas, what rude awakening such will have when they are called away from this earthly scene to find themselves in “the everlasting burnings” instead (Isa 33:14). O reader, “take heed that ye be not deceived” (Luk 21:8).

Most likely there never was a time when there were so many nominal Christians and so few real ones. The profession of multitudes today is but an empty, lifeless, fruitless one, consisting only of external works of piety. This should greatly disturb us all and cause us to ask ourselves—“Is this true of me?” It is not enough to be moral, upright, honest, a good citizen, attending church services with more or less regularity, and the like. These things are good in themselves and ought to be practiced by all of us, but they will not save our souls. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: *Not of works*, lest any man should boast.” Hypocrites can and do pray loud and long as did the Pharisees (Mat 23:14), and “hear gladly” as Herod (Mar 6:20), but *all in vain* so far as salvation is concerned. To be accepted of God, all our works must be done out of fervent love, devotion, and a humble and obedient submission to the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master. As another has said:

“There are many who name the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who do not ‘depart from iniquity’ (2Ti 2:19); who profess that they ‘know God but in works deny him’ (Ti 1:16). If you or I are such, will God receive us as one of His converts? What! converts from sin while still living in sin? Perish the thought. That would be a visible contradiction.”

In Matthew 7:22-23, we find that not only professing Christians, but preachers and even wonder-workers will be rejected, because Christ says they are those who “work iniquity”—and to such He will say in that day, “I never knew you: depart from me.” What awful words to fall from the lips of infinite Love. God in His grace grant that He may never have occasion to say them to you or me.

“All have sinned” (Rom 3:23) is the divine verdict, and unless we are renewed by a thorough and powerful change by being made a “new creature” in Christ Jesus, we shall never escape “the damnation of hell” (Mat 23:33). “Be not deceived; God is not mocked” (Gal 6:7). I tell you plainly upon the authority of God’s Holy Word that whether it be baptism, taking communion, or any other such thing you are depending on for salvation, if you are not holy, strict, and self-denying, you *are not* and *will not* be saved (Mat 15:12; Heb 12:14). You may not be an adulterer, extortioner, blasphemer, unjust, etc., but you must have something more than this to justify you—more than a negative righteousness²—or a holy God will condemn you. Salvation is not to be found in moral righteousness. If it were, then “the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees” would have brought them into the kingdom of God (Mat 5:20).

Many think that because they have been troubled in their consciences for their sins that all must be well, miserably mistaking conviction for conversion. If such were true, wicked Cain might have passed for a true convert. He ran up and down the world like a man distressed under the rage of a guilty conscience. When conscience holds a whip over a man, he will pray, read, hear, and forbear his delightful sins, but should his conscience sleep, then he will be at his sins again—like “the sow that was washed” returned to her “wallowing in the mire” (2Pe 2:22).

A true Christian will always live under the searching eye of God and in “the fear of the LORD.” Psalm 139:7 asks, “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” If we are what we profess to be, then our every act will be performed in the light of our intimate relationship to God and “with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28). We will take holiness for our path, not out of necessity, but because “the love of Christ constraineth us” (2Co 5:14). We will say with the psalmist in 119:173, “I have chosen thy precepts.” All our affections will run in a new channel and our desires will no longer be after good [alone], but after grace. Our constant and earnest prayer will be, Lord, subdue mine iniquities and restrain the corrupt flesh in me...“lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa 139:24). We will constantly and earnestly beseech the God of all grace to constrain us to

² **negative righteousness** – supposed “being right with God” based on one’s not doing certain blatant outward sins.

“seek those things which are above” and strive to do all “heartily as to the Lord and not unto men” (Col 3:1, 23). Our anger will burn against sin, all sin, even so-called little sins, as we are wont to think them. Sin will be the object of our indignation. Whereas we once had light thoughts of sin, we will now see sin to be “exceeding sinful” (Rom 7:13). We will loath ourselves for our sins and be quick to run to Christ and cast ourselves into that “fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1).

We will bridle our tongue, be careful to “redeem the time” (Eph 5:16), not over indulge our appetite, abstain from all evil companions, and mourn when we neglect Bible reading, prayer, and the hearing of the Word. Worldly company will be most distasteful to us, especially worldly-minded religionists. The world and love of the things of the world will not be uppermost with us. If they are, we can have no surer evidence that we are in an unconverted state, regardless of our profession. Many a hypocrite can talk like an angel, speak the language of Canaan, converse of God and Christ and matters of the otherworld—while all the time his eye is filled with covetousness and his heart with rottenness. He is all for self, ever seeking his own advantage though it be at the expense or the detriment of his neighbor.

As another has so well said, “There is a vast quantity of religion in the world which is not true, genuine Christianity. It passes muster, it satisfies sleepy consciences, but it is not good money. It is not the real thing which was called Christianity 1,800 years ago. There are thousands of men and women who go to churches and chapels every Sunday and call themselves Christians. Their names go on the baptismal register. They are reckoned Christians while they live. They are married with a Christian marriage service. They mean to be buried as Christians when they die. But you never see any “fight” about their religion. Of spiritual strife and exertion, and conflict and self-denial, and watching and warring, they know literally nothing at all. Such Christianity may satisfy man, and those who say anything against it may be thought very hard and uncharitable, but it certainly is not the Christianity of the Bible. It is not the religion which the Lord Jesus founded and His apostles preached. It is not the religion which produces holiness” (J. C. Ryle, 1816-1900).

True Christianity is a “laying hold on eternal life” unto the end of life. It is not a life of sleepy indolence, religious ease, indifference, and carelessness. We cannot sleep or doze our way to heaven like one on a plane who depends upon the pilot to get him safely to his destination. True Christians, like soldiers, are meant to “fight,” but not with other Christians in a perpetual controversy. The Christian warfare is no light matter. To be at peace with the world, the flesh, and the devil is to be “at enmity with God” (Jam 4:4).

Many who profess to receive the Word “with joy” shortly after go back to their old manner of life (Mat 13:20), thus proving that “the root of the matter” is not in them (Job 19:28). To be a Christian only outwardly costs little. It entails no self-sacrifice or self-denial, whereas to be a Christian *in reality*, and not merely in name, will cost us *all* our darling sins, for we must be willing to give up every habit and practice that is wrong in the sight of God. We must hate all our sins, big and little, small and great, and “hate every false way” (Psa 119:104). All must be thoroughly renounced and forsaken.

To be a true Christian will cost us our love of ease. The Christian life is likened to a race in the running of which we are to stretch every nerve and so run as to obtain the prize: heaven (1Co 9:24). As John Bunyan (1628-1688) has so well said, “He who would have heaven must run for it.” As the hymn puts it:

*A charge to keep I have, A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save, And fit it for the sky.*

We must not expect to be carried to heaven on flowery beds of ease. To be a true Christian is no child’s play, but a daily conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil—so that we need to take heed to our behavior every hour of every day. We are commanded to “let our conversation [i.e., conduct] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ” (Phi 1:27), to be diligent about our prayers and our Bible reading, and how we use the Lord’s Day, for God is “acquainted with all our ways” (Psa 139:3). A religion that costs us nothing is worth nothing. A Christianity without a cross will prove a useless Christianity in the end, and one without a crown.

Many are convicted, but conviction is not conversion. All blossoms do not result in fruit. Many are hurried into making a profession of Christianity who have never seen the enormity and heinousness of their sins in the sight of a holy God. When the going gets hard, and the trials and difficulties great, they become weary of the “narrow way” of holiness and return to the “broad road” of worldly activity, and thus manifest the emptiness of their profession.

Present-day evangelistic procedure is both sickening and saddening. For example, many are urged to “Come forward,” and when they go, John 3:16 is quoted to them: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only be-

gotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The seeker is then asked, “Who does “the world” include?” He answers, “You, me, and everybody.” “Do you then believe that Christ died for you?” If the answer be, “Yes,” he may be assured that he is saved and will “never perish.” Such “converts” (?) are then welcomed into the hearts and homes of their new friends, frequent their meetings, and are addressed as “brother” and “sister”—and all this without *any* Holy Spirit conviction of sin, without *any* repentance and confession of sin, and without their being...aware that they are deserving of the wrath of a holy God to cause them to cry out with the publican in Luke 18:13, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Alas, alas, that this should take place with such sickening frequency. No wonder the sequel³ should be so disappointing, since there is no evidence that they have been “born of God” (1Jo 5:1) and have “the fear of God” on them. And after the emotion and enthusiasm is worn off, they go back to their old manner of life, yet under the delusion that “it is well with their soul.”

Dear reader, if you make any profession of Christianity, make sure that it is real and not a sham, a mere pretense. Real profession is not a mere outward show, not external piety only, but genuine and lasting. A matter of the heart, and not of the head and hands alone. You can determine the reality of your profession by the place it occupies in your inner man. You may know the truth in your head, assent to it, believe it, but if it does not govern and regulate your manner of life, your daily conduct will not be acceptable to God. True Christianity is wrought by the Holy Spirit, is a matter of the heart, and will produce in us a very deep view of the terribleness of sin. We will perceive it to be that abominable thing which God hates, which we ought to hate and shun—a thing which deserves God’s wrath and condemnation, that cursed thing which is the cause of all our misery, wars, contentions, quarrels, sickness, and death.

As we have shown above, it is not enough to be outwardly religious, for one can be religious without “life” and [nevertheless] “lost” (Luk 19:10), religious and yet “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). The heart must first be changed so as to be brought into conformity with God’s will and nature. To be acceptable to God, all our religious activities must spring from a heart that loves and delights in doing the will of God cheerfully and without repining.⁴

God is a holy God. The greater our profession, if it be unreal, the greater will be our judgment in the Day of Judgment. We may deceive others by a hollow and false profession, but we cannot deceive Him Who “looketh on the heart,” Who is “acquainted with all our ways,” and “understandeth our thought afar off” (Psa 139:2-3). A Christian in reality, and not alone in name, will have a low estimate of himself (Phi 2:3). Such will keep short accounts with God, be quick to “confess” his sins (1Jo 1:9), and seek God’s forgiveness. He will make an honest endeavor to “speak evil of no man,” but “be gentle, showing meekness unto all men” (Ti 3:2). He will be “easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (Jam 3:17), without “bitter envying and strife in his heart” (Jam 3:14). He will earnestly endeavor to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10).

Are you that kind of a Christian? *Are you?* God grant it for His name’s sake. ❧

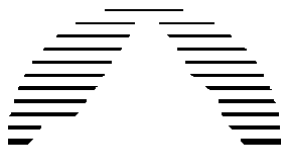
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³ **sequel** – that which follows their first profession of faith.

⁴ **repining** – complaining; discontent.



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