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The Born Again Christian Uncovered

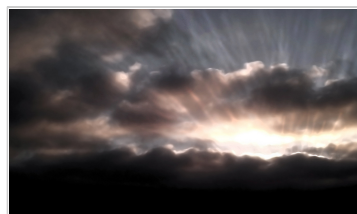
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1 John 5:1-5

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1976 was a turning point in Christian history, in some respects. In his bid for the presidency, Jimmy Carter expressed to the public that he was “a born again Christian.” It was such a monumental statement that the other candidates quickly followed suit. Supposedly, everyone in the race was a born again Christian. And virtually every president since has made a similar claim.

1976 was also the year Chuck Colson published his first book which described his journey from being a Watergate conspirator to becoming a Christian. The book was entitled, “Born Again.”

Some have even said that 1976 was the year of the Born Again Christian. And ever since the term “born again” has been bandied about quite a bit. The thing is that virtually anyone can call themselves a born again Christian now.

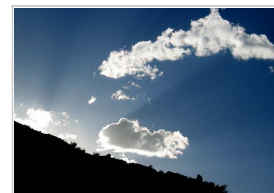
I once was speaking with a lady and she made the remark that she wasn't just any Christian, but she was a distinct kind of Christian. She was a “born again” Christian. The fact that she was living with her boyfriend at the time did not make any difference whatsoever. She was adamant about the fact that she was a born again Christian.

As of late, certain things have come to light regarding Jimmy Carter. He has recently broken with the Southern Baptist denomination because of their stance on what may be deemed certain “conservative social issues.” What's more he is on record as supporting same sex marriage.

With the liberal use of the word today, it might be good to come back to the original sources and discuss what makes for a born again Christian.

That's essentially what John does in the passage that is before us today. It may very well be that the people of his day were making much use of this “born again thing.” You may remember that John had written about it in the third his gospel. He tells the story of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. There you remember that Jesus told Nicodemus that he “must be born again.”

It may be that people latched onto the whole notion and were running around calling themselves born again Christians, when in reality they were not.



Heaven is a World of Love, by
Jonathan Edwards



The Mental Agonies of Hell, by
Robert Murray McChesney



The World Ripe To Harvest: Reap or
It Perishes

Whatever the case may be, in this passage John gives us some definition to the whole notion. He indicates how we can tell if we are truly born again or not. He lays out three basic truths that we can use to determine if someone is really and truly born again.

To determine if someone is truly born again the first thing you must ask yourself is if you have a Christian's convictions.

I. Does he have Christian convictions? [1a]

A born again person will be convicted that Jesus is God's appointed Savior. Look at verse 1. John here says, *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God."*

How will you know if you are truly born again? Well, it's going to be your conviction that Jesus is the Messiah. You are going to believe that He was the one God sent to be the savior. And you are going to put your faith in him and no one else.

Now, young people, I want you to understand what John is saying here. He's talking about the true conviction that Jesus is the Messiah. He's not talking about just knowing some information about Jesus. He's not talking about someone who simply believes that Jesus lived a long time ago. For instance, I believe in George Washington. In other words, I believe that George Washington lived some 200 years ago. And I think that some of you children may think of Jesus in the same way. Sure, you know that he existed. Yeah, you know some things about Jesus—how he was born in a manger, how he was God in the flesh, and that he was crucified and put in a tomb. You may even acknowledge the fact that he rose from the dead. But you might not really have believed in him in the sense that John is talking about here. You still might not have the personal conviction that he is your savior and Lord.

Back in 1988 there was a segment on NPR that I think really helps to illustrate what I am talking about here.

In 1958, America's first commercial jet air service began with the flight of the Boeing 707. A month after that first flight, a traveler on a piston-engine, propeller-driven DC-6 airliner struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger. The passenger happened to be a Boeing engineer. The traveler asked the engineer about the new jet aircraft, whereupon the engineer began speaking at length about the extensive testing Boeing had done on the jet before bringing it into commercial service. He recounted Boeing's experience with engines, from the B-17 to the B-52.

When his traveling companion asked him if he had yet flown on the new 707 jet airliner, the engineer replied, "I think I'll wait until it's been in service for a while."

Now you see what I mean? Here is a man who knew jets quite well. He knew so much about them that he could talk for a long time about the intimate details of the jet. But, despite his extensive knowledge, he did not yet trust it. He had not yet put his faith in the aircraft. He did not have the conviction that this plane could really carry him to his destination.

Some of you here today may be in that very same position when it comes to your faith in Jesus Christ. Sure you may be able to describe Jesus. You might be able to talk with some enthusiasm about his divinity or the nature of his death. But you have not yet truly trusted in Jesus.

Don't think that your knowledge alone is sufficient. It is not. Young people, the Lord does not care how much you know about Jesus. What really matters is whether or not you have personally acted on that knowledge. Have you really believed in him and accepted him as the Messiah (your Messiah)?

I want you to know that it is only this kind of person that is really born again. If you do not have this deep seated conviction, if you do not personally trust Christ and believe that he is able to bring you to your heavenly destination, then you are not born again.

And maybe this is the day you do. Perhaps right now God is speaking to you and convicting you that you need to put your faith in him. Perhaps you have known about Jesus for some time, but never actually put your faith in him. If you've grown up in a Christian home, that may be true. You've heard about him for a long time, but now you feel that Jesus is really calling you to rise to the deeper level. It is time to make that step and trust him. If you are here today and feel



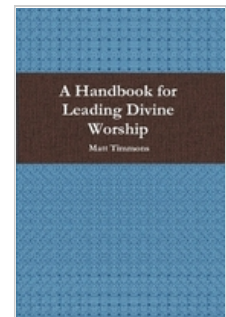
The Danger of a Life of Pleasure



How Shall We Escape If We Neglect So Great a Salvation?



Judgments, A Call to Repentance



A Handbook for Leading Divine Worship

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 1 Peter
 1 Thessalonians
 1 Timothy
 Acts
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 Romans

Archives

like you'd like to do that, then know that Christ welcomes you. He is more than happy to be yours, and he promises that he will take you to heaven to be with him.

If that's something you are convicted about today, I want you to talk to your parents about it. I want you to let them know that you took that step today. It's a big moment in your life, and they need to know about it.

Let it be understood though, that this is what makes for a true Christian. To be a born again man you first need to ask yourself if you have faith in Christ. Do you have the conviction a Christian must have? But you should not only examine your convictions, but you should examine your connections.

II. Does he have Christian connections? [1b]

Look at the next part of the verse. Verse 1 goes on to say, *"Everyone who loves the father loves whoever has been born of him."*

He's talking about what naturally happens to a Christian. He says, "Someone who loves God is going to love other people who love the Lord." Once you've become a child of God, you are going to associate with the rest of the family on a regular basis. Your connection to God is going to be verified by his connection to the rest of the family of God.

Do you understand what I'm talking about here? We've talked a lot about loving the brethren over the last few weeks. But I want you to understand what I'm trying to communicate here.

We have a lot of people out there who claim to be Christians, but they spend very little time with other people that are Christians. They have no real, vital connection with a local church or to the Christian community in general. Sure they will mingle with the Christians from time to time. They will talk about how much they love God. But they do not have a real bond with the church.

But think about it: To love someone or something, means that you spend a significant time with them. How do you know that I love my children? It's going to be by how much time I spend with them. I can talk with my neighbors about how much I love them, but if they rarely ever see me outside playing with them then they should have cause to doubt my words.

You know what, I love ice cream. Do you want to know how I can tell that I love it? It is because I keep coming back to it again and again. I just seem like I can't get away from it. As a matter of fact, I am happy to report that I have had ice cream almost every single day this week.

My love for it is shown by the time I spend with it.

We used to have neighbors with whom we were very much concerned. From time to time we worried about the state of their marriage. That's because we rarely ever saw them together. He hardly ever seemed to be home. We'd often see him going out with his friends in the evening. Or we'd hear how he had been gone all weekend on a special trip with the boys. And on those rare occasions when we did see him at home, we never saw him with her. When he was around she wasn't. She was off somewhere doing something.

We could have been wrong. But from our perspective, they didn't seem to have much of a marriage. And it was because it didn't seem like they had much of a connection with each other.

And that is how a lot of people are who claim to be Christians. They don't spend a lot of time with the church. They rather sit at home and watch TV than get together for Bible study. When it comes to getting up and going to worship, it's a bit of a chore for them. They're too tired; they've stayed up all night playing video games or chatting with their friends. And because their attendance is so spotty, you have to wonder if they really do love the brethren.

Now, I understand that there can be certain providences that prevent one from attending church or getting out to Bible studies. I just want you to think about your connection to the church though. Do you really have a yearning for Christian fellowship? Do you naturally associate with the body of Christ? Can you say that it is priority in your life?

James says that friendship with the world is enmity with God. And he's saying there what John is saying here. What you love will be proven by how much time you devote to them.

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I will tell you that this is one of the main reasons Elizabeth and I have always practiced morning and evening worship on Sunday's. Some people think we are crazy because we do church twice in one day. We've actually had people tell us, in so many words, that they think that's a bit overboard.

Yes, it is true, we want solid worship. We want good teaching. But what we really love about evening worship is the chance to be among the people of God. Even if the preaching is shoddy, it's not that big of a deal in comparison to having the chance to fellowship with other believers.

I'm not saying that the ultimate test of one's Christianity is how many times they go to church on Sunday. I'm simply trying to reiterate something of what John says here. Your connection to the church will tell you something of your connection to the Lord. And if you are not devoting a lot of time to the fellowship, then your love for the brethren ought to be questioned. And if your love for the brethren is not running all that deep, then you may want to question your love for the Lord. Because as John says here, the two are interconnected.

If you are born again, then you will have the conviction of a Christian; and you will have the connections of a Christian; and, as John goes on to say, you will have the compliance of a Christian.

III. Does he demonstrate Christian compliance? [2-5]

In verses 2-5 John talks about the law of God and the believer's devotion to it. Look at verse 2. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."

Do you see how compliant a Christian is? If you love God, you keep his commandments. How do you know you love God? You keep his commandments. You don't object. You don't make a big fuss over it. You willingly and happily comply with whatever he asks you to do.

This is what should make us doubt the validity of Jimmy Carter's profession of faith. Yes, he might have called himself a born again Christian, but he doesn't affirm certain things God has clearly said in his word.

A true Christian will not begrudge marriage as God defines it. He will delight himself in it. He will delight himself in all of God's law.

That's what makes the rest of verse three so amazing. It says, "His commandments are not burdensome." The Christian says with the Psalmist, "O how I love your law!"

Sure, the law can really get us down sometimes. When you study the commandments, you see your sin a lot more clearly. It really drives you to Christ. But ultimately, you don't think that these commandments are a kill joy. You don't see them as restrictive and oppressive. They are a joy to you. Instead of being burdensome, you find it to be a delight. You might not comply to the degree that you want to because of your sin, but you wish you could.

And there is a sense in which you do comply because you've overcome the world. That's what he talks about in verses 4 and 5. You've overcome the world. You have victory over those things that have kept you from obeying in the past. Now that you have been born again, there is a new freedom that you experience. Obedience becomes much easier and even enjoyable.

Roy Matthison has a very good illustration of this compliance in his commentary on this passage. He gives the illustration of two women. Both women are equal in most every respect. Both women are married and have the same number of children. Both women have the same amount of work to do in a day and pretty much have the same responsibilities at home. The difference lies in their attitude towards their chores. The first woman finds her duties a chore. When she does not like the fact that she has to prepare the meals each day and play with the kids. It is a burden to her that there are dishes to do and laundry to wash.

The other woman has a different attitude. Yes, it is laborious work at times. But it isn't as much of a burden to her. She doesn't mind that she has to get supper ready. She enjoys playing with the kids. And when it comes to the laundry is done with a more cheerful attitude.

When you consider which of these ladies loves her husband, the answer is rather obvious, isn't it? The first lady does her work, but her heart really isn't in it. And it's likely that her heart isn't all that warm to her husband either. The compliance of the second woman indicates something of her love for him. She finds the work a joy because she loves her husband and wants to serve him.

The same holds true for the Christian. The work God gives may be difficult at times, but it will not be a chore.

And we have to ask, which of these two ladies represents you? When it comes to the law of God, do you find it a burden? Is it something that repulses you? When the law of God tells you to honor your parents or love the brethren, do you find that to be a cumbersome thing?

Or do you delight in the law of the Lord?

Maybe the illustration of the two women hits a little too close to home for you. Maybe you are one who is convicted that you don't do your chores with a good attitude. And now you are saying, "Ok, I'll try to delight in the laundry." But you are saying it with a curmudgeon's heart.

Others of you might be saying, "You're right. I do need to change my attitude toward that mountain of dirty clothes." And as you say that, there is a spirit within you that really embraces it. You know it is going to be a challenge, but there is sense in which it's not just something you need to do, but it's something you want to do.

That would be a good indication that you are truly born of God. It is exactly the attitude of the righteous man in Psalm 1. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."

The one who has been born of God demonstrates a joyful compliance to what the Lord has commanded in his word.

Conclusion:

I entitled this sermon, "The born again Christian uncovered." It is because this passage helps us discover the real marks of a born again believer. John does nothing other than strip away the masks of false Christianity.

At my house we often like to play hide and seek. And sometimes my daughters like to pull one over on me. They will tuck their pillows down on their beds and cover them up with blankets so that it looks like a person laying under there. So when I come up, I tear the covers back only to expose a bunch of pillows.

That is exactly what John does in this passage. He pulls back the layers of in order to expose what lies beneath.

If you are here today and what you have found is nothing other than a true born again believer, praise God! Praise God that he has given you that firm assurance upon which you may stand.

But if you are here and you have found nothing but pillows (nothing but a false belief and imagined Christianity), then let this be the day that you are truly born again. Let this be your first birthday. You must be born again. And if you feel the Lord's hand upon you, do not refuse it. Receive and rest upon Christ today. He offers you peace and forgiveness. Though all your days up 'til now have been that of ignorance and false belief, today you can have salvation through faith in Him.

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