

2014-0906

Being Spiritual vs Being Christian #1

Hi all,

Barb and I have wildly differing practices concerning bars of soap. Barb uses soap until it is the size of a coin. Often several of these tiny fragments will congregate around sinks and showers like a herd of animals at a watering hole. One may have been a deodorant bar, another a moisturizing bar, and still another a no-perfume bar. But they all end up the size of a coin and gathered together at faucets just waiting for someone to have mercy on them and end their lives by tossing them in the trash.

That person would be me. About the time a bar of soap is small enough I keep dropping it or it breaks apart, I pull the shower curtain aside and underhand toss it in a long sweeping arc into the waste basket sitting next to the toilet. Have a nice flight, you're history little bar of soap, you gave it all but now you are done!

Soap Christians, what fragrance are they?

Years ago it was easy to know who was a Christian or not. Back in the charismatic renewal days of the 1960's and '70's, the Christians were the ones going to the home prayer meetings, Bible studies, got excited that Charles & Francis Hunter were coming to town for healing meetings, frequented Christian bookstores, and listened to this new Christian 'rock' or young women singers with names like 'Honeytree' and 'Evie'.

If you didn't do any of that, we were 90% sure you weren't born again. If you had to ask if a guitar in a church service was ok with God, you probably weren't born again. If you had to ask "What is an autoharp?" you probably weren't. You certainly weren't Charismatic. But other than that, it was easy to figure things out.

Then the lines became blurred in the 1980's and '90's, like little soap bars you squish together to form one larger bar and you aren't sure which scent or what kind of soap you now have. People asked if you were Evangelical or Charismatic, and if charismatic were you word of faith or Pentecostal? Still later you started seeing more bars of soap, like prophetic, apostolic, personal prophecy, a TACF, Brownsville or Lakeland Christian, or maybe 'an intercessor' or 'prophetic worship' scent of Christian.

But today, like so many bars of soap of every type, we have "Christians" of every flavor, fragrance, and appearance. Some present themselves like brand new 'look at me' bars and some are like little coin-size "I'm a _____ Christian." (Fill in the blank with some sexual orientation, political affiliation, alternate culture name, or other identifier).

Whatever happened to "I'm a Christian" with no modifiers to tell us what kind of Christian you are? Sometimes I just want to toss them aside like a coin-sized bar of soap and say 'Either grow up in Christ and stop sinning, or stop calling yourself a Christian!'

Why does a believer in the New Testament look so different than many believers today?

In the days the New Testament was being written, disciples of Jesus, not just believers in Jesus, and yes there is a definite difference, met in homes as most Christians do today world-wide, gathered together as families, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and often a non-born again person who was 'a person of peace' would join them.

The gospels were just being written and many of the eye-witnesses of the events in the gospels were still alive and would thrill households with stories of their time with Jesus. By the end of Paul and Peter's life, Peter considered Paul's letters to these home based gatherings of the church to be scripture, for he said in his last letter in the closing lines,

"And remember the writings of our beloved brother Paul...some things are hard to understand, which the unstable wrestle with, as they do also the other scriptures..." (II Peter 3:15-16)

Their excitement was all about the new birth and learning what this new life was about. The fact God moved out of the temple and into man at Pentecost amazed them and fill them with wonder. God living in man, who would have thought it!

Culture of the day

There were a total of 10 Roman Caesars who persecuted believers. These Caesars wanted to be acknowledged as gods, setting disciples of Jesus in direct conflict with a life or death decision to acknowledge Christ and die, or recant Christ and live.

Besides that, there was a common practice of sealing business contracts by making an offering to a god in a temple, and then having sex with a temple prostitute to seal the deal.

Thyatira was the most famous city for this practice, for the guilds, ancient types of labor unions, controlled all commerce in Thyatira. It may have been a contributing factor as to why Lydia from Thyatira moved her clothing material business from Thyatira to Philippi. The purple dye and clothing from Thyatira was the highest quality and most fashionable in that day. (Acts 16:14-40)

In the church at Thyatira, a woman nicknamed by the Lord, "Jezebel", in Revelation 2:20 told the people as a prophetic word, that you could still be a Christian and have temple sex and make offerings to gods because God wanted you to be able to earn a living...(I have a series on the real Jezebel spirit if interested, but this gives you a good lead - it isn't a woman stirring up trouble for some pastor)

Christians were in a difficult place. How were they to earn a living other than a low paying job, for to make business contracts or secure a supplier of say, leather, or copper or even purple material for your dress shop that 'deal maker' had to offer a sacrifice to a god and have sex with a temple prostitute?

Enter gnosticism

Somewhere towards the end of Paul and Peter's lives around 66AD but before John died roughly 40 years later, a belief called Gnosticism arose (Greek, 'learned'), probably in part due to the cultural pressures to be part of society and business like in Thyatira. Christians wanted to be like the world but still be Christian. They didn't want to die for their faith if they didn't have to. Jezebel said it was ok to be a Christian and be part of the culture, so people could 'know' God in their mind but didn't have to separate themselves from culture.

The essence of Gnosticism is the body is from the earth and will return to dust, therefore it is inherently sinful and evil. But the spirit has been born again, with Christ in you, so your spirit is holy and going to heaven. Therefore because the body is of the earth anyway, you can live how you like because inside you are a believer in Jesus and will go to heaven. Over time this belief system meant people could be 'believers' in Jesus without actually being 'disciples' of Jesus, or even know Him in their heart.

Know the Holy Spirit but not born again

And this is why we have so many 'soap fragrances' of "Christians" today. They know God in their mind, they are Gnostics, agreeing that Jesus is God, but living like the world. If they do know Him, shouldn't they be leaving sin and progressing towards holiness? Consider this:

Jesus told the disciples in John 14:17 of the Holy Spirit: "You know Him, because He lives with you. But He shall be in you." The disciples knew the Holy Spirit because they were hanging around Jesus, saw Him do amazing miracles, and they even healed people and cast out demons by the Spirit. So they knew Him.

Remember, these disciples were not born again - yet **they knew the Holy Spirit**. In our day, many people have genuine experiences with the Holy Spirit. They hang around church, the altar call, and so forth. Some know Him by virtue of the fact they have a relative in the same home who is a disciple, or growing up they spent a lot of time in a Spirit-filled church. But they don't have Him in them. And THAT is what makes a person a Christian.

Next week - more about 'Christians' who say they are believers in Jesus, but continue in sin. Stay tuned!

Blessings,

John Fenn

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2014-09-13

Being Spiritual vs Being Christian #2

Hi all,

"John, my friend Sarah who didn't know the Lord, came with me to church and went forward last month for prayer. The Holy Spirit came all over her and she was crying and said she felt such peace. But now, it doesn't seem like she has changed at all and she doesn't want much to do with me."

"I brought my friend to the service, and he raised his hand and we talked about the Lord afterwards, but today nothing seems to have changed."

I'm not talking about once saved always saved, I'm asking if they were ever saved at all. Before He went to the cross Jesus told the disciples that they knew the Holy Spirit for He was with them, and they had even healed the sick, cleansed lepers and cast out demons - all before they were born again. So it IS possible for people to know the Holy Spirit, to even take part in ministry, yet not be born again.

Collecting stickers like children

Our church culture counts hands raised and the number of people at the altar call and says "These were born again, see what we did with your money, please give us more." Whole ministries are validated by counting the numbers of people saved like reward stickers children get in kindergarten.

Yet I know from being in some of these places and knowing the people in charge, many of these same people 'got saved' last month for that ministry event, and the month before that for another ministry event, and last year for another ministry - yet the vast majority remain unchanged, living their normal sinful lives. But it sure looks good in a ministry newsletter.

As a result of church culture that says a hand raised and prayer prayed is being born again, there is confusion in the body of Christ when these same people remain unchanged. WE raised our hand and we were truly born again, but what about THEM? They went forward at an altar call with tears and repentance, and felt 'something' from God - but now they want nothing to do with you and think you are weird.

First thing first: God is always does good no matter who they are

The first thing we have to do is break out of the auditorium church thinking to become Bible thinking, by realizing that just because someone experiences God they aren't automatically born again. Our Father is so much larger than that, for He causes the sun to shine and rain to fall on the just and unjust equally. He will help all who call out to Him even if they have no intention of walking with Him, but are just crying out for His help for that moment.

For every person who tells you, "I was on the verge of dying but I called out to the Lord and told Him if He got me out of this I'll serve Him, and I've been walking with Him ever since.", there are thousands more who make that same promise and then don't keep their vow. Yet He is always faithful to do good to all.

The brief version

In a time of prayer my eyes were opened to His realm, I was as the apostle John says, 'in the Spirit'. My angel stood before me and after telling me what the Father had for me, said He had been given permission to receive questions from me. I asked, "How do you think of the Father?". Immediately we were flying away very fast, and landed in what he told me was somewhere in east Africa.

We were standing about 4' (1m) off the ground, looking at a man with a vegetable cart loaded with a harvest that I could see came from the plot of ground around his house. His wife was saying goodbye to him in a language I didn't understand, and he pushed his cart with vegetables down the road on the way to market.

As we walked along unseen at the man's pace, still 4' (1m) off the ground, the angel explained those vegetables on the cart and in the field at home represented most of the man's income, and he was hoping to find someone in the market to buy his crop. He said the wife wanted but didn't tell her husband, yet my Father knew her heart, 3 things for herself from the money: A hairbrush, comb, and hand mirror. The husband too wanted enough money to buy some goats to start a herd to better care for his family.

I will cut to the point - The angel told me, "Now watch what your Father has done" just as he made contact with someone at the market who bought all his crop. He came rejoicing back to his wife and the angel reported to me the Father was gracious enough not only to allow him to sell his whole crop, but He arranged the price so the man could afford to buy his goats and the wife her brush, comb and mirror.

When he got home and told his wife they started rejoicing and suddenly the manifestation of the Spirit called interpretation of tongues happened and I understood what they were saying - they were praising Allah for his kindness and blessing in allowing them to sell the crops and make that money.

I thought immediately of Hosea 2:7-8 where the Lord talks of idolatrous Israel praising Baal for giving them their grain, wine, oil, silver and gold, not realizing the Lord says, it was He who was giving them all those things that they might turn and realize He was the Source of all their good things, but they turned not.

I was shocked that my Father was blessing Muslims in the same way, and was both amazed and confused. My angel looked at me in a sort of how don't you get it look and said, "Have you not read that your Father causes the sun to shine on the just and unjust alike, and the rain to fall on the just and unjust alike, and aren't you commanded to be just like Him?"

I replied, "This is amazing, this is wonderful. I had no idea (how big and good He is). This should be on TBN, this should be in Charisma magazine!" He replied with a quizzical look, "Your Father does things like this multiplied millions of times all over the earth, every single day. How is it you think these things can be contained in a TV show or magazine? Only the ages to come will reveal the goodness of your Father!"

And with that I was suddenly all alone in my living room, totally in awe of my Father even more.

He will touch all who call on Him

When Jesus said in Matthew 5:44-48 to do good to your enemies He said it is because the Father does that - He causes the sun to shine and rain to all on all people equally - and we are to be like Him. So if a person the Father knows needs help, even if an enemy, He will give it, even when He knows they have no intention of walking with Him. As James said, Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, and there is no variableness or turning in His character. (1:17-18)

Jesus said He only did what He saw the Father do, so what was said of Jesus is first true of the Father: "Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." (Acts 10:38) The Father goes about doing good. So does the Lord. So should we - to all, as we can.

Think for a minute; When a Buddhist couple get married, or a Muslim, or an atheist, don't you realize our Father will honor that covenant of marriage they made even if made to another god or no god/God, because the Father tries to do good to all mankind? He will try to grow them in love, to keep them from unfaithfulness and sin even if they don't know Him, because He always does good.

Do you realize when anyone no matter whether they are a citizen of the kingdom of light or darkness, does good, does kindness, the Father does His best to honor and work with that good action?

Bible culture versus church culture

All that means is that if a person raises their hand or goes forward at an altar call, or even calls out to God in the midst of a crisis, the Father will respond to do good to them whether they walk with Him or not - and they will be accountable for that on the last day. But that doesn't mean they are born again though they experience God mightily at that moment. Maybe they will return to Him, maybe not, but He did good so on that last day He will not be blamed.

Paul defined a false brother and false prophet quite differently than modern church culture, and if we look at what scripture actually says are the traits of a true believer and a false believer, we can determine pretty closely who prayed that prayer and were actually born again, and who just had an experience with the Holy Spirit but remain unchanged.

And that is where I'll pick it up next week, until then, blessings,
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2014-08-20

Being Spiritual vs Being Christian #3

Hi all,

Here is something to think about - All disciples of Jesus are believers, but not all believers are disciples. A disciple is by definition, a 'learner' and is rooted in 'discipline'. A believer requires no growth, no learning, but allows a person to remain in spiritual neutral.

Does that make sense? Yes, if you understand what Jesus taught when He said, "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Many will say to me, Lord, Lord - so many misunderstand Jesus here

"Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of the Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? And in your name cast out demons? And in your name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess to them, I never knew you: Depart from me you who work iniquity." (Matthew 7:21-23)

Many Christians tremble at Jesus' words, not realizing the subject is false brothers, not them. Jesus' teaching actually starts in v15: "Beware of "false ones who speak openly" (translated prophets in most English Bibles) who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. And after explaining how grape vines don't produce thorns, nor do figs produce thistles, He repeats, "You will know them by their fruits."

THEN He says, still speaking of them, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord will enter heaven." Jesus says He will confess to them: "I never knew you! Depart from me you who work iniquity!" Unfortunately many pastors and people believe what these false believers say to the Lord rather than what the Lord says.

Now I ask you - if Jesus said He NEVER knew them, is He telling the truth? Of course. These people were never born again, they continued in their sin, so He will admit to them, "I never knew you."

So relax disciples, He isn't talking about you. If He said He never knew them, then He never did nor did they.

But He does give us guidelines how to judge believers who call Jesus Lord and make claims of doing things in His name, yet still live in sinfulness. We are not to judge the heart, that is God's realm, but we are to judge the fruit of a person's life.

These people called Jesus, Lord. They claim to have prophesied, cast out demons, and done many wonderful things in His name. The truth is as Jesus said, they are workers of iniquity and He never knew them. The word 'iniquity' involves more than mere sin. In the Greek, 'anomia' means 'lawlessness' (nomos = law) and unrighteousness. Meaning their lifestyle is that of the unrighteous and sinners, thus thorns where fruit should be.

We shouldn't judge their heart, but we can't ignore the fruit of their lives. Judge that and use common sense to avoid such people, or withdraw from such.

Paul's experience with false brethren

Acts 15:1-2 says this: "And certain men who came down from Judea taught the brethren saying, Except you be circumcised according to the law of Moses, you cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small argument and debate with them, they determined Paul and Barnabas and certain others should go to the apostles and elders about this question."

This is in keeping with how Jesus said relationship based faith (house church) should be done, out of Matthew 18:15-20. One person goes to another they think is in sin, then if they won't receive them they take 1 or 2 others, and if still not received take it to leaders. This is what happened with Paul, who wouldn't repent of what the others called sin by not requiring circumcision, so off to the leadership in Jerusalem they went.

Of course Paul was found to be correct and these men from Judea were found to be wrong, but later Paul would write of this experience and say: "Then 14 years later I went again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus, and I went up by revelation and shared with them the gospel I preach among the Gentiles, but did so privately at first with leaders, lest by some means I was in error."

"But neither did Titus who was with me, being Greek, feel compelled (of the Lord) to be circumcised. But because false brethren secretly slipped in who came to spy out the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage..." Galatians 2:1-10

Paul called them false brethren in Galatians, but in Acts 15:1 they came up from Judea, and went willingly and eagerly to the apostles to settle who was right, them or Paul. They were false brethren!

So that person sitting next to you in church...

These men were sitting with everyone else listening to Paul in every home meeting. They were in the homes with the disciples, eating with them, hanging around, talking to people, but with a hidden agenda - Paul said they came in secretly, the term is that of a spy, a traitor.

Anyone who has been around house church awhile can attest to the fact sometimes people will visit with a secret agenda. They may have a pet doctrine and think they have a captive audience, or they want to start their own 'group' and are looking to see who they can pick off to be their disciples, or worse. But that doesn't make them false brothers.

Paul calls these men who accused him false brethren, never false believers. The men who accused Paul and went to the apostles to see if they were right or him, mentally believed in Jesus, but were living a lifestyle Paul described as spies and traitors. As Jesus pointed out, people like them call Him Lord - they no doubt know the Holy Spirit, but He isn't in them. How are we to find these false brothers and sisters in our day and age? Obey Jesus and judge the fruit of their lives!

The works of the flesh are clearly stated in Galatians 5:19-21 and include (as one example) sexual sins ranging from promiscuity and adultery to sexual perversion. So based on Jesus' definition, can a person be a disciple, one who knows the Lord yet lives and intends to continue living a perverted sexual lifestyle? No.

That doesn't mean someone coming out of sin, making progress out of sin with stops and starts as they grow in Christ. We are all in a process of cleaning up our act and becoming more Christ like. But some who are mental believers have no intention of growing in Christ. They boldly proclaim they are a _____ Christian and have no intention of changing.

Based on what Jesus said, and what I'll show you more next week, these people may have had an experience with the Holy Spirit, maybe felt Him, maybe know Him, maybe hang around where He is moving - but that doesn't mean they are truly born again, Spirit filled disciples of Christ who know Jesus.

Remember what Jesus said back in Matthew 7 - many will call Jesus Lord, but live a lifestyle of unrighteousness. Remember what I said in part 1, the Gnostic spirit tells people as long as they are spiritual they can live how they like for the body is evil anyway. They are self-deceived. So listen to their words, but do what Jesus said - look at their lifestyle, the fruit of their lives. Do you see grapes and figs or thorns? Jesus used thorns as an example because if you get too close to a thorn it hurts. Stay away!

There are believers, and there are disciples. Not all believers are disciples. But all disciples are believers. More next week as we renew our mind to what Jesus and the Word actually says, and away from popular church culture. We will know them by the fruit of their lives. So if the mouth says one thing but the fruit of their lives is the flesh, run don't walk to the nearest exit! More next week, until then, blessings,
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2014-09-27

Being Spiritual vs Christian #4 (spouses?)

Hi all,

I've been talking about how it is possible for people to know the Holy Spirit yet aren't born again, using Jesus' statement to his not yet born again disciples in John 14:17: "...you know Him for He lives with (among) you, and will be in you."

They worked with the Holy Spirit to heal the sick and cast out demons

The disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit and sent out by Jesus in Matthew 10:1-4 to heal the sick and cast out demons, so they knew Him by the healings and demons they cast out, as well as being with Jesus and watching His ministry and life. But all that was before the cross so He wasn't yet in them.

So it is possible today for people to know the Holy Spirit because of Him being around them, or them being around Him, or the fact someone in their lives DOES know the Lord.

This could include an unsaved spouse. The other spouse is a Spirit filled Christian so the unsaved spouse knows His presence, His peace, and even answered prayer, yet He isn't in them.

It could include non-Christian children in a home where 1 or both parents are disciples of Jesus. The kids may be church-wise, know how to pray, raise their hands and bow their heads, yet have absolutely no interest in the God of their parents - yet they recognize the peace of the Holy Spirit, answered prayers of their parents, and His presence in their home and youth meetings, but He isn't in them.

I know of several businesses owned by Christians who have morning devotions for their staff, staff prayer meetings, Bibles laying around and Christian music playing in the background, yet I also know non-Christians who work there - they know the Holy Spirit because He is with them at work - but He isn't in them.

This could also include any number of church-goers who participate week in and week out, and recognize the peace they find in church as being the Holy Spirit, and are believers mentally, but He isn't in them. And I've known a few pastors/priests/ministers who were full time in ministry yet He isn't in them.

Are these charismatic's?

Last week I shared Jesus' statements about false prophets/brethren of Matthew 7:15-23 where He said many will come to Him on the last day claiming they had prophesied, cast out demons, and done wonderful things in His name, yet He will admit to them that He never knew them, and they were workers of unrighteousness.

Did you notice that their claims of having prophesied and cast out demons are charismatic traits? What stream of the faith prophesies and casts out demons but we charismatic's? So we see there are false brothers and sisters in our midst, even though they claim to move in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Makes you want to look around the room or church auditorium next time you gather doesn't it?

Examples of believers but not disciples

In Acts 8 we have the example of Simon the Sorcerer from Samaria. Philip came to Samaria, preached Jesus, and many in Samaria were healed and delivered and many believed in the Lord.

Simon the Sorcerer also believed and was baptized 8:13 tells us - he believed in Jesus and was baptized! Yet when Peter and John came from Jerusalem and laid hands on the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit, Simon offered money to Peter for the ability to lay hands on people so they'd receive the Holy Spirit.

Peter told him this: "May your money perish with you because you thought the gift of God could be purchased with money. You have no part in this matter because your heart isn't right before God! Repent therefore and perhaps God will forgive the thought of your heart, for I perceive you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." (Acts 8:20-23)

Simon the sorcerer believed and was water baptized - yet Peter said his heart wasn't right before God and he was still captive to sin. He told him he had no part in the matter. Yet he believed and was baptized. Have you ever known anyone who said they believed, was baptized, but nothing in their life ever

changed? Did they know the Holy Spirit because they'd been around you, around church, but He was never actually in them?

Worshippers

In John 4 Jesus talks to a Samaritan woman, so allow me a little background on Samaritans as it is important to understand what the Lord told her. After King Solomon died Israel was split into 2 kingdoms; Israel and Judah. The 2 southern tribes called "Judah", made up of Judah and Benjamin plus remnants from the other 10, lived in Jerusalem and Judea and continued to worship according to the guidelines of Moses.

The 10 northern tribes called "Israel" didn't want to go to Judah to worship in Jerusalem, so they set up their own priesthood in their capital city, Samaria. Years later the 10 northern tribes were captured by Assyria, and they relocated many of the Jews to elsewhere in their empire while importing people from other nations in their empire into Samaria. Over time, the Jews who remained married these foreigners, and by the time of Jesus the half-breed Jews of Samaria were hated by many of the pure-blood Jews of Jerusalem and Judea.

Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4:22: "You worship you know not what, we worship what we know; for salvation is of the Jews." Notice - she was a worshipper of what she thought was God, but she wasn't born again. Do you know people who worship 'they know not what'? They are spiritual, but aren't born again.

Consider the other religions of the world filled with worshippers; they know not what they worship, for salvation as Jesus said, comes of the Jews. Jesus clearly didn't think just because people worshipped and were good people they are saved. They don't know what they worship, so He isn't in them.

Lydia

In Acts 16:14 Paul goes to Philippi and joins several Jewish women at the river outside of town where they were praying. One received Jesus. Of Lydia it says '..a seller of purple from Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened so that she listened to the things Paul spoke of...and when she was baptized...'

Lydia was Jewish and worshipped God. She was a praying woman it says - but she was not born again until she listened to what Paul said of Jesus and responded. But she wasn't born again until she responded after Paul told her about Jesus. So just because a person prays and worships the God of Israel doesn't mean they are born again.

We must ask why the Bible clearly shows people who are spiritual, worshippers even of the God of Israel yet the Holy Spirit doesn't live in them, and why our modern church culture refuses to clearly teach these things?

Part of the reason is church culture focuses on getting a person born again when in fact, Jesus never told us to get people born again! He said to make disciples. What is the difference? That's next week. Until then, blessings,

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2014-10-04

Being Spiritual vs Being Christian #5

Hi all,

How did we get to the place church culture focuses on being 'born again' rather than making disciples?

I made a statement last week that Jesus never told us to get people born again. That is true. He had a private conversation one night with a man named Nicodemus, recorded in John 3, in which Jesus

explained what happens when a person believes with the intent to become a disciple, likening it to being born a second time, but by the Spirit of God not regular birth. That is true.

That was one private conversation between Jesus and 1 man, not a teaching. There is no parable to the masses about a born again mustard seed. There is no 'Sermon on the Born Again Command'. It was a private conversation late at night between 2 people and never was that conversation repeated or enlarged upon as a general teaching or command, nor seen in the other gospels nor epistles.

Yet a whole church culture has been built around the efforts to get people born again with the goal of 'closing the deal' by getting someone to "pray the prayer of salvation" with us. WRONG! THAT ISN'T IN THE BIBLE.

What did Jesus really say?

"All authority is given to me both in heaven and in earth. Go therefore to all nations...teaching them to observe and to do all things I've commanded you..."

In Acts 2, when Peter preached at Pentecost, did he ask everyone 'with every head bowed and every eye closed' to pray a prayer (along with the 120 so no one would feel embarrassed) so they'd be born again? When Peter went to Cornelius' house in Acts 10 to tell them about Jesus, did he ask for a show of hands for all who wanted to pray a "prayer of salvation" so they'd be born again?

No where do we see any of the apostles preaching being born again, nor leading them in a seeker friendly non-embarrassing "prayer of salvation." The prayer of salvation is one of those man-made doctrines that people assume is in the Bible, but isn't.

The reason you don't see it in the Bible is the apostles were obeying Jesus. Jesus said "...teaching them to observe and do all things I've commanded you", and within Jewish culture of the day, it is automatic that the discipleship process is relationship based. In other words, they can't observe and do all things Jesus commanded me unless they observe me doing all things He commanded me!

THAT is the Great Commission, to let others see Christ in us so they may learn from us. Paul said imitate me as I imitate Christ, and when people express amazement over that statement it reveals they don't understand the culture of the kingdom of Jesus. Paul was merely restating the Great Commission - observe and do what I observe and do. (I Corinthians 4:16, 11:1, Ephesians 5:1, Philippians 3:17, etc)

Oriental culture - Israeli culture

Israeli culture is oriental. That is why Israel is said to be in the Middle East. China and Japan are called the Far East, but Israel is still in the east, it is oriental. Thus we see customs like bowing at the waist from Abraham through the gospels, in some cases people meeting Jesus by falling to the ground in obeisance to Him just as we see in Oriental royal court protocol. Ancient Chinese art shows their leaders seated on a chair carried on poles on the shoulders of servants, and we see the Ark of the Covenant carried on poles on the shoulders of the priests in the Old Testament. Israel is Oriental.

Another part of being Oriental is the honoring of parents and elders, this honor flowing outward from home and family to others through multiple generations. The older are expected to train up the younger, and having a meal at one's house is the highest form of fellowship there is.

Gnosticism revisited, the making of false brethren

Greek culture however is not based on relationships, it is idea based, concept based, mental ability based.

When Paul was in Athens, Greece in Acts 17 he preached Jesus just as he had done elsewhere, but this time they laughed at him when he brought up Jesus being raised from the dead, while others asked him to return the next day to share more about his concepts and ideas.

They had no intention on believing in Jesus, they just wanted to hear new ideas, new teachings, filling their itching ears and journals with revelations from this new teacher. As a result we don't find a strong group of believers in Athens. There is no letter to the Athenians. They just wanted to hear ideas.

A little history

As the church became more Gentile/Greek in culture in the late 200's and early 300's AD and less Jewish/Oriental, it became more intellectual and less relationship based. The church met in homes for the first 300 years, not due to persecution as some would suppose, but because the first church in the house was Adam, Eve, and the Lord, for where 2 or more are gathered He is in their midst. He invented home and family. The early synagogues were meetings in homes with several families, so at Pentecost they just continued what they had been doing, meeting in homes. God has never left the home and family as His primary and preferred way of bringing revelation and the knowledge of God into the earth.

By the 300-400's AD Christianity had been legalized and Christians were called out of home meetings to meet in former pagan temples along side existing pagan temples still in operation, which were auditorium and podium structured. In those structures a single priest had to be in charge to lead the people, thus the function of pastor was elevated for the first time in history to be the lone voice of God week to week.

Rather than being participatory in nature as the home meetings where, the auditorium requires just 1 person to speak, sharing concepts and ideas with the masses assembled. Ideas from the pulpit require no relationship with anyone, for they are just principles, concepts, thoughts on how to tackle this or that problem. Notes are taken, journals filled, but they are merely 'new revelation', not something lived out in relationship with others.

That is the point where an emphasis on being 'born again' separated from being a disciple. Up until that point being a disciple meant you were born again. But when Greek thought started dealing with ideas and concepts from a pulpit rather than in home and family based demonstrations of how to live and walk with God, the concept of being born again came to stand alone as its own doctrine, now separated from the process of discipleship.

First relationship is with the Lord, and it flows from there

When the gospel gets dissected into ideas and concepts alone rather than ideas and concepts imbedded within the discipleship process involving multigenerational relationships, we end up with an anemic body of Christ that is used to being spoon fed ideas, but with little practical knowledge on how to walk with God in those concepts. People who are hungry for God find themselves hungry for more but don't know why. Their heads are filled with God's concepts, why aren't they happy? Why do they feel so empty?

Today many in the body of Christ are discovering they are hungry for God though they go to church. They are tired of being fed principles and concepts they've heard many times before; they are looking for relationships and real 'meat' in their faith.

"Teaching them to observe and to do all things I commanded you" requires you see in me what He commanded me. The Great Commission is about walking with God within relationships, flowing from the individual in the home and outward to naturally existing spheres of relationships - family, friends, neighbors, co-workers - which are seen throughout the gospels and New Testament letters.

Next week I'll share prophetically some things the Lord has told me this year about what He is doing in the body of Christ, and what we'll see in the coming years, which will tie this series together. Until then!

Blessings,
John Fenn

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2014-10-11

Being Spiritual vs Being Christian #6

Hi all,

I'll summarize this series first, then share some things the Lord has told me for the body of Christ.

In this series I've talked about spiritual people: People who call themselves Christians, yet really aren't. Jesus said on the last day there would be many who call Him Lord and claim to have moved in charismatic gifts like prophesying and casting out demons, as well as claims of doing things for Him, yet He will admit to them He never knew them, and in fact they lived unrighteous lives.

I shared about Gnosticism which we see all around us today. It is the demon inspired belief that a person can be spiritual, believe in Jesus, yet live sinful lives because the body is inherently evil and the spirit is inherently good and saved, therefore you can live sinfully because you are a born-again Christian. This means we have people among us claiming to be charismatic, claiming to prophesy and cast demons out and doing good things for the Lord, yet He doesn't know them, as per Jesus' teaching about false brethren in Matthew 7:15-22.

I shared a bit of history how the Great Commission is relationship based about others observing and doing what He commanded us to do, and how when the church moved out of homes and into the auditorium, Greek thought took over which turned relationship based knowledge into mere concepts and principles. And that is how we ended up with 'believers' who aren't truly born again disciples of Jesus.

If a person is truly born again, the New Testament indicates there will be a change in their lives as they become more Christ-like. If you look at the sins listed in Ephesians 4 they were struggling with, ranging from sexual to stealing, it is clear a person can be a Christian while struggling with sin. The key indicator is progress and growth in the struggle to overcome these sins.

When a person claims to be a Christian yet lives a sinful lifestyle is where Jesus said to judge people by the fruit of their lives. Not judge their heart, but judge the fruit of their lives.

In I John 1:1-3 it says "Now are we the sons of God and it isn't revealed what we shall be, for when He comes we will be like Him and see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself..."

There are many who are spiritual, claiming to know the Lord, yet are not purifying their lives because they don't have that hope in them - their lifestyle and their growth as people and as Christians isn't motivated from wanting to see Him, they love the world and all that is in it, and want to be more like it, not Him.

People are wondering and wandering...

About 10 years ago during one of our house church meetings we were in the midst of worship and suddenly the Lord came walking through the closed sliding glass door to my right. He stood next to me as I was seated during the worship.

He started talking immediately about what I'd see in the body of Christ in the coming years, but while He was talking to me a woman stood up and began singing a worship song at full volume out of her heart, but her voice was as finger nails on a chalkboard - horrible! She had the kind of singing voice that only her shower should hear, and it was very distracting.

I interrupted the Lord and asked if He would tell her to be quiet so I could concentrate on Him. That may sound either incredibly callous or maybe bold, but when you are in the Spirit things seem so natural and normal that you don't realize you are in the Spirit, and being around Jesus is as relaxed as being around your best friend. That is why Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration suggested they build shelters for Moses, Elijah, Jesus and the 3 with Jesus - It all seems so normal you don't realize you are in the Spirit.

The Lord replied, "I will not, for you don't know what she has come out of and been through, and is worshipping me from her heart. Her voice sounds wonderful to me, and I suggest you adjust your heart so her voice sounds wonderful to you too." Ouch. "I'm sorry Lord, you're right, go on."

And He continued talking about how people were going to be leaving the churches, many that considered themselves cutting edge because those people are looking for fulfillment in Him and not finding it. He said friendships would be broken as some stayed and some left, but He said many of those who left their (traditional/auditorium) churches were going to leave without knowing what to do next, just that they could not continue where they were.

Over the last 10 years we've seen that happen with many Christian headlines talking about how the traditional church is losing membership and so forth, and my email in box certainly fills up with people searching online for what to do next and hearing about us and house church in general.

So far in 2014 the Lord has visited me 6 times, 3 of those in ministry situations in which others also saw or felt or knew He was there ministering to them, and 3 that were direct to me. In each of those 3 visitations

and 1 of the other that was in a home church/ministry situation, He spoke of the body of Christ now. The first time this year He said this below, and has repeated the same general message each time, meaning it is important. By repeating the point to me it is like the gospels when he said 'Truly, truly', the double 'truly' meaning it is especially important. He reminded me of that visitation of 10 years ago and then said:

"Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. The time is coming and now is, for my people to know to whom they belong." I asked for an example in scripture to know what He meant, and He said "In Acts 4:23 when Peter and John were released they went to their own. They knew to whom they belonged."

"The season now is for my people to know to whom they belong. They have had time (these last 10 years) to wander here and there, to examine fads that rise and fall only to discover they are not lasting, to discover in many cases by process of elimination, what is not for them. Many have wandered, searching where to belong, only to learn more where they do not belong than where they do."

"Many of those who have wandered some or most of these past 10 years or more are now ready for the real, for what I told you that February; 'As it was in the beginning so it must be now, I am moving in relationships'. This means it is time for my body to grow up and know faith, know me, know who they are what they believe. This is a season of growth for many in my body, for times are coming in the west when those who thought they knew what faith is, will discover they knew nothing of faith, but only formulas and ritual. For those who have an ear to hear, they will be ahead of the times and be prepared, others will have difficulty because they have lagged behind in what they've known they were supposed to do."

I'll share more in my e-newsletter around the 20th of the month, plus another word He gave me, but for now...

Being spiritual versus being Christian

It is time in the body of Christ to drop the spirituality and become real, humble, certain in Christ but always willing to learn and adapt and change. When Jesus said in Matthew 25 that at His return He is looking for a church who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, visited the sick and imprisoned, the context was us - home based, family based, real people - He wasn't saying a church prison ministry did it, or a church hospitality program did it, or a church clothing drive did it. He said WE do those simple tasks of taking care of the needs of those we are in relationship with. It is simple, humble, and very much like our Lord as we lay down our lives for each other.

Being spiritual puts people above all that, for they know too much, they are too spiritual and will argue their point endlessly and make great claims, and never apologize nor take the higher ground for the sake of peace. Disciples of Jesus will back away from arrogance refusing to join in, in order if needed to be poorly thought of by the super spiritual that they may become more like Christ.

The season is upon us, as the Lord has told me now consistently this year, to know to whom we belong, to be serious about our faith, and to be serious about our relationships. Make disciples by teaching them by our lives to observe and do all things He commanded us.

New subject next week, until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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