

Teaching E-mail 77 When Are You A “Christian Degenerate?”

(November 2, 2015)

Introduction

Have you ever experienced a particular series of events in your life in which our Lord Jesus was connecting some spiritual DOTS for you? What we mean is, you realize that He’s giving you several interconnected insights to *really* pay attention to.



A few days ago I (Mike) used Sue’s appointment at the dentist to go “fishing” in the waiting room. Wearing my sweatshirt with the message, *Belonging to Jesus is a love-based relationship*, I walked up to the reception counter and engaged the two ladies there. They eagerly read both the front and then the back, which says, *If you don’t believe Jesus is the Son of God, just ask Him.*

These two women were thrilled to see the loving boldness of someone who’s willing to identify with Jesus in public. But one woman bemoaned that her church sells apparel with similar messages—but no one buys them! With pain

in her eyes she told me that the people she fellowships with are **ashamed** and **fearful** to represent Jesus publicly. I felt sadness not just for her but also as I pictured all these people complacently sitting together on Sunday morning but unwilling to “own” any relationship with Him when they walk out the door.

As we’ve gone “fishing” during our hikes in our favorite nearby park we’ve encountered a number of people who told us they too *believe in God*—but He’s not the God of the Bible. Rather, as they talk it’s pretty easy to recognize that their god is a deity they’ve constructed to their own liking. (Interestingly, most inform us that they were raised in “good, church-going families” but they just didn’t like the “narrow-minded rules” of the Bible.)

Many openly express that they believe in a doting “god of love” who puts no moral boundaries on people nor expects any personal responsibilities on their part toward him. The “god they designed for themselves” always lets them live their life the way they want to as long as they’re “a good person.” The concept of sin and repentance is totally foreign to them. Their response is more akin to Buddhists, sort of a self-effort pursuit of becoming a better person—with the focus always on ‘ME’ at the center of life and how ‘I’ can detach from earthly concerns.

We’ve joyfully used these conversations to speak about our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus with testimonies of divine encounters, interventions, miracles, and the wonderful changes His Spirit has made in us as we repented of our sins. While everyone listens politely, our descriptions of the reality of being

followers of Jesus are often met with blank faces—even from a number who call themselves “Christian.” We feel the kind of ache expressed by Jesus to skeptical Nicodemus: *“I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people **do not accept our testimony**”* (John 3:11).

Time and again we’ve found that so many who label themselves “Christian” can’t understand living in love-based obedient trust in our Lord. Maybe you can see why we leave these encounters saddened as our Lord is defamed and blasphemed by those who claim to belong to Him yet talk as if He’s irrelevant to their lives. Can you hear our Father’s grief over Israel as they violated Him in a similar manner?

*“My people have committed two sins: They have **forsaken Me**, the spring of living water, and have **dug their own cisterns**, broken cisterns that cannot hold water”* (Jeremiah 2:13).

In theological terms these people are **“degenerates”**—having forsaken our Father’s Covenant, or never entered into it.

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus”

(Acts 4:13).

Just before Peter and John were brought before the religious rulers, they healed a man who’d been crippled since birth. It isn’t that the leaders actually saw them with Jesus. Rather the two were *doing the same miracles* He’d done. They trusted the promises Jesus gave to His followers for all time:

*“I tell you the truth, **anyone who has trust in Me will do what I have been doing.** He will **do even greater things than these**, because I am going to the Father”* (John 14:12).

There is more behind the courage of the apostles that we need to review if we are to live with the same confidence in the promises of Jesus as they did. As our Lord has been connecting the DOTS for us, His Spirit has been revealing an understanding of the foundational truths that were trusted by the first followers of Jesus. It’s these same truths which the *degenerate Christians* we’ve met have missed from God’s Word. Let us explain:

Following our Lord’s transfiguration He pointed out a factor that’s overlooked in most of Christendom today:

*“The disciples asked Him, ‘Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?’ Jesus replied, ‘To be sure, **Elijah comes and will restore all things.** But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.’ Then **the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist**”* (Matthew 17:10-13).

John was the prophesied *“voice calling in the desert to prepare the way for the LORD”* (see Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3). And before John’s birth an angel told his father, Zechariah:

*“And [John] will go on before the Lord, **in the spirit and power of Elijah**, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”* (Luke 1:17).

Have you ever considered these thoughts?

- What was John supposed to restore in preparation for the Lord’s coming?
- Did he finish his purpose?
- Had he been killed before he could complete his purpose?

DOT 1

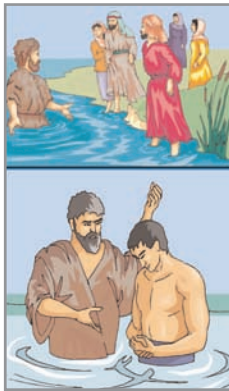
We know from the gospels that John called people to repent and confess—and then he baptized them:

*“John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a **baptism of repentance** for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. **Confessing their sins**, they were **baptized by him** in the Jordan River”*
(Mark 1:4,5).

Think of the drastic change John was proclaiming! No longer was the forgiveness of their sins dependent on the Day of Atonement each year in which an animal was sacrificed on their behalf. "Elijah," in preparing the way of the Lord, offered them a *“baptism of repentance.”* The people who came to John *readily understood their own depravity and willingly confessed their sins.*

To be immersed under water was understood to be like dyeing cloth. Just like the fabric being dyed took on the color of the dye water, through baptism the repentant could begin to take on the character and motives of God. They were experiencing a *spiritual birth* the way many rabbis from the Hebraic stream of Judaism had been preaching for centuries.

Because of their repentant hearts they asked questions of John so they would know how God wanted them to live (see Luke 3:10-14). They were following in the steps of their ancestor, Abraham, wanting to keep **the way of the Lord**: *“For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the*



LORD will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him” (Genesis 18:19).

Recall from our previous writings that before John’s coming a number of Hebraically-rooted rabbis taught that an individual must experience a **spiritual birth**, a response to God’s personal call on his life. Conversion equaled rebirth. In other words, being **“born from above”** was a shift from following the letter of the law and relying on religious rituals, to personally abiding in loving obedience to God as Abraham did.

The Jews who came to John to be baptized knew their need for spiritual birth. They willingly repented, confessed their sins and were immersed. The religious leaders, however, came to the Jordan just to observe (Matthew 3:7).

Today, *being born again is the point at which you understand your own depravity and then repent, confess your sins, and are baptized through trust in our Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit then takes up residence in you.* Just like dyeing fabric, through immersion you begin to take on the nature of your Lord, pledging to Him that by grace you will live your life with a clear conscience (1Peter 3:21). Your ongoing spiritual transformation is evidenced as you trust and obey Jesus as your LORD out of grateful love. Like Abraham who kept *the way of the Lord*, you walk the path of your spiritual father (see Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7) as did those who went out to John at the Jordan.

DOT 2

*“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come One Who is more powerful than I, Whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit and with fire”***
(Matthew 3:11).

John told the repentant who came to him at the river that the One soon to come would baptize them with the Holy

Spirit *and* with fire. Here, too, John was introducing a dramatic change in their understanding—an understanding many degenerate Christians miss in their own lives:

God would no longer be found in a man-made temple. Instead, the repentant would host His Spirit: *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, Who is in you, Whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body”* (1Corinthians 6:19; see also 1Corinthians 3:16; 2Timothy 1:14).

If you’re born again you’re not your own any longer; His Spirit dwells within you *to carry out the LORD’s will*. If you’ve been putting into practice the truths the Holy Spirit has been revealing to us over the years, then you’re well aware that not everyone who *claims* to be “Christian” actually belongs to Jesus (see Matthew 7:21-23) The authentic Jesus follower is born from above as evidenced by His indwelling Spirit. Their way of life flows with testimonies of divine encounters, interventions, and miracles. Like Abraham, who himself testified of encounters, interventions and miracles, we who are his spiritual descendants testify likewise.

It’s our testimonies that authenticate our relationship with our Father: that we are following Jesus as LORD of our lives, confirming that the Holy Spirit dwells in us!

DOT 3

“Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other” (Mark 9:49,50)

(see also Hebrews 6:4-6; 2Peter 2:20,21).

In Matthew 3:11, John had foretold that followers of Jesus would be baptized both with the Holy Spirit *and* with fire. The fire spoken of here is the trials our Father allows in our life to prove the genuineness of our childlike trust in Him, and in our loving obedience in following our Lord Jesus (see 1Peter 1:3-9). Think about this adage which has guided our own walk:

You can’t go anywhere or do anything for the Lord unless you’re willing to go *anywhere* and do *anything* for the Lord.

Taking these words seriously has not only led to serving our Lord in many capacities as He has directed us, but also into purifying fires He purposed to refine our character. Our Father’s “fires” *purify the salt* in people. In other words, His fires aid in our ongoing sanctification so we can become more and more like Jesus by His Spirit. As we’ve repeated so often,

*“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being **transformed into His likeness** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit”* (2Corinthians 3:18).

Mike: I’m not sure how many I’ve immersed over the years, but usually sometime afterward our Lord pulls us away from them to *test and refine them*. Sadly, some haven’t pressed on with Jesus. Most often their degenerate “Christian” friends have convinced them that our Father doesn’t bring trials or suffering on anyone. So when they accept this deceived counsel they become embittered and turn their back on our Lord.

“Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us... and opened the Scriptures to us?”

(Luke 24:32).

Through Spirit-guided insights into His Word as well as from the encounters we've recently had, we've more deeply apprehended what John *restored* both in the need for people to repent and in the immersion baptism of the fully repentant. It's been painfully clear that many of the degenerate Christians we've met each missed the foundation of what our Father began to restore through John, then through Jesus, and then through the apostles: the foundation of **true repentance** and **humble confession**, followed by **immersion**. Without this foundation which rests on authentic trust in the saving work of our Lord Jesus by grace, a person cannot be born again.

Why is this so? The unrepentant have failed to recognize *their own depravity* and how they've *grievously sinned* against a holy and righteous God. Rather than being humbled by this realization, they have no heartfelt devotion at all to love God by walking in *the way of the Lord*. Blind to their sin and any need to repent and confess, they follow a self-invented "god" who indulges them and commands nothing in their lives. Christianity is filled with what may be more appropriately called "**Buddhist-Christians**"—life is all about ME and how I choose to live *on my own terms*.

A word of warning. Entertaining degenerates in your worship gatherings is like trying to mix oil and water. Those who deny the biblical Lordship of Jesus by word and action don't belong to Him and therefore have no part with born again followers of Jesus. They need *spiritual rebirth*, not fellowship. If you're fearful of hurting people's feelings, we urge you to heed God's warning:

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness

have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2Corinthians 6:14,15).

Be careful. Degenerates, whether people who erroneously think they're Christian or who have left the faith but hide out in its social system, will rob you of your salt. Remember, your sin nature is always lurking inside you waiting to be aroused in any areas that are not fully yielded to the Spirit. And the degenerate will try to entice you to give way to it:

"For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other..." (Galatians 5:17).

We want to emphasize again the four criteria for biblical fellowship with others who love and serve Jesus as their Lord:

- 1. Your fellowship with others must spur you on to glorify our Father and Jesus through praise, worship, and living testimony** (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- 2. Your fellowship with each other must spur you to grow in Christ's likeness out of grateful love** (Philippians 2:12).
- 3. Your shared fellowship must spur you toward repentance and the narrow gate** (Matthew 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
- 4. Your fellowship as extended spiritual family must spur you to lovingly reveal Jesus to the lost in your daily lives** (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

DOT 4

"In your hearts set apart Christ as LORD. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so

that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander”
(1Peter 3:15,16).

If you're not under the influence of degenerate Christians and do wholeheartedly belong to Jesus by His Spirit dwelling within you, please take this directive from Peter seriously. You must *be ready* to testify of the reality of Jesus in you as you bear witness to divine encounters, interventions and miracles He has brought about. That's how our Hebraic father, Abraham, and the first followers of Jesus were recognized: *“You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard”* (Acts 22:15).

NOTHING ABOUT BELONGING TO OUR LORD JESUS IS A PRIVATE MATTER. THE PUBLIC NEEDS TO KNOW!

Do you have hold of this, especially for spiritually dark times such as this? You **MUST** have testimonies to the Spirit of our Lord in you and shine even more brightly as darkness increases in this land. Don't ever fear identifying with our Lord Jesus (see John 12:42). Be a fisher of men and women and watch the wonder of what our Lord will do in and through you as you serve His most important concern—the **salvation of mankind!**

Dot 1 + Dot 2 + Dot 3 + Dot 4 = Gracious loving service to the King of Kings.

Without Dot 1, the other dots can't exist.

If you're reading this teaching and don't have recurring testimonies of the presence of His Spirit working through you, please go back to the foundations which John preached: *repentance, confession and immersion*. You're likely missing one or all of these, and also missing out on how our Lord wants to use you!



And please look from God's perspective at those you fellowship with. A fellowship filled with degenerates has *many indicators*: •People who think too much of how necessary they are, or are busy running from one "Christian" venue to the next. •People who have never dealt with their bitterness, and are often angry. •Those who've found their "god" in pursuing worldly wealth and acclaim. •Many have no joy, and have never experienced the spiritual victory our Lord promises.

Surrounded by individuals like this in your faith community, you'll find it hard to either represent Jesus in public *or* to want to bring people into your fellowship group. Million of Christians in this nation have grown spiritually fruitful by leaving their lukewarm congregations. Now they are fully free to represent Jesus in the public arena so they can openly bear witness to ***what they've seen and heard.***

For further understanding, see:

- Lifebyte 52. *To Enter The Kingdom You Must Be Born Again*
- Teaching E-mail 29. *Are Your Friendships Spiritually Authentic? (July 19, 2007)*
- Hebraic Article: *The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*