

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER --- ISAIAH 55:10 --- FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGE
FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

CONCERNING "BORN AGAIN"

The phrase "born again" has suddenly become one of great popularity. This, to a great extent, has resulted from the present President of the United States declaring that he is a "born-again Christian." From his use of this descriptive term it seems that he means that he is a Christian whose commitment to Jesus Christ has made a definite change in his thinking and way of living. This is good, and I applaud it. However, in spite of the popularity of this term, permit me to say that I would not want to hang one minute of my almost sixty years of Christian life and experience upon it. I could easily adopt it, as so many have done, and could apply it to myself as well as anyone to signify a higher quality of Christian life and commitment than that of the average run-of-the mill church member. But if I did I would have to cease all study of this term, for I know that Biblical research would cause it to vanish into the realm of meaningless, ritualistic terminology.

We are exhorted by Paul in 2 Timothy 1:13 to "**hold fast the form of sound words,**" or, as it could be more accurately translated to "have a pattern of sound words." It is my conviction after careful study that the words "born again" are not sound words, that they do not truly represent any words in the original Greek, and since they have no real foundation in Scripture, anyone can take them and make them to mean anything he wants them to mean.

After hearing one of my radio messages on the importance of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, a woman wrote to me and said: "I am a believer in the Lord Jesus, but I want to be born again. I am so dissatisfied with myself and so unhappy. Please help me." Of course I would very much like to help this lady, but it is evident that someone has caused her to think that there is some experience that will produce within her a new personality

with which she will be quite satisfied and happy. There is no such experience set forth in the Bible, even though thousands are now claiming to have experienced it. However, I wonder what it will be like for them if they ever truly get into the Word and find in their own lives that "tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word. Will they still want the difficulties that involvement in the truth will bring?"

As a result of careful investigation I am convinced that the words "born again" were forced into the *King James Version* in order to lend support to a gross and profane misrepresentation of truth called "baptismal regeneration." It was to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, one of the rulers of the Jews, that the Lord declared, according to the translators of the *King James Version*, "**Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God**" (John 3:3).

It is strange indeed how many people quote this verse, and claim to have been "born again," yet they do not "*see* the kingdom of God," they have no definition of this term, and no understanding of what it means. The criticism of many Jews today is justified when they charge that the Christians took the Old Testament concept of the kingdom of God and twisted it into a concept of "the church in heaven." The very purpose for which one is "born again" has not been realized in the lives of most professing Christians. Tell them God's truth concerning the kingdom of God, and they will say, "I cannot see it," or, as one said, "It leaves me cold."

The exact wording here in the Greek for "born again" is *gennahe anothēn*. Since President Carter reads his New Testament in the Greek, he should be able to see at once that this means "generated from above," and not "born again." The root word is *gennaō*, and it is not too far out of line to translate it by the word "born," if it is understood that "born" is the past participle of "bear" and means to produce. However, *gennaō* means to generate, and in all honesty this is the way it should be translated.

The word *anōthen* does not mean "again," not by any stretch of the imagination. It means "**above**," and I doubt if this word would ever have been translated "again" in this verse if it had not been for the determination of some translator who wanted it to mean this. He was probably a spiritual descendent of Humpty Dumpty and paraphrased his words to say: "When I consider a Greek word it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less." This translator revealed that he knew the true and exact meaning

when he rendered it "above" in the thirty-first verse of this same chapter. Such discordant translating is inexcusable, and while no one today can say why it was done, we do know that these translators were all ministers in the *Church of England*, and were completely subservient to that Church and the King who had appointed them. One of the most important doctrines and practices in that denomination was that of "baptismal regeneration."

This doctrine held that every child born by natural generation belonged to the fallen race that started with Adam, and that Adam's sin must banish it to the torments of hell, unless by regeneration it is brought within the family of God. However, by the simple ritual of sprinkling a few drops of water upon the child's head, he was relieved of his guilt and brought into the family of God, providing of course that this ritual was accompanied by the utterance of a few cabalistic words.

There is good reason to believe that these translators wanted to render this in some fashion so that the generating work spoken of here could be removed from the absolute divine realm and lowered to be something that one human being, properly accredited of course, could do for another. They wanted this work to be something that a clergyman could do for an infant, thus securing the child's salvation if death should seize upon it. This self-assumed power gave the church and its clergy an unwarrantable hold upon the parents, especially upon the mother, to whose Biblical illiteracy was left the direction of religion in the family. Since there was very little Scripture that could be twisted into support for this idea, they laid hold of this portion because "born of water" could be made to mean the water ritual which they performed. But they could not do this if *ani5then* were translated "above," so, some other meaning must be given to it. Thus, it was translated "again," which is contrary to all reason.

The Greek word that means "again" is *palin*. This is found 142 times in the Greek New Testament, and it is translated consistently "again" in every occurrence. This is the word the Spirit of God would have led John to use if He had intended to set forth the idea of "again," or, "a second time." But He did not use *palin*, He used *aniathen*, which means "above" and is so translated in every occurrence except the two found in this portion.

There are those who insist that *aniathen* is translated "again" in Gal. 4:9 where, they say, "again" is its evident meaning. But this is totally wrong. The word translated "again" in the Galatian passage is *palin*, and the word

aniathen which follows it is left untranslated. Most translators since the KJV have followed this example, except Rotherham who renders it, "the weak and beggarly elementary principles unto which over again ye are wishing to come into servitude." However, this occurrence of *palin* and *aniathen* together shows clearly that *aniathen* does not mean again.

Compilers of lexicons have earnestly sought to find evidence that *aniathen* can mean "again," hoping to justify the translators of the *King James Version*, but they have failed. Moulton and Milligan cite certain examples from the papyrus of which they somewhat feebly say, "the meaning 'again,' 'a second time' seems best to suit the context." However, a student with no axe to grind will see that the rendering "above all this" best suits the examples they have given. In view of all this evidence, I repeat, I do not want to hang one moment of my Christian life and experience on the words "born again." I say it is not a sound expression, that it defies any exact definition that can be backed up with Scripture, so it is useless so far as declaring any exact Christian truth is concerned.

From past experience I suppose that this leaflet will bring letters declaring that I am a lost soul, and that I am barred from the kingdom of God since I have never been "born again." Some will even charge me with having committed an unpardonable sin because I have denied the validity of this term. I will answer these in advance by a word of personal testimony.

It has now been fifty-nine years since I became related to God through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. I stand firmly upon the divine declaration that "As many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become the children of God." I do not believe that this act of receiving Him consists in "going to the front," "praying the sinners' prayer," or being worked over by some personal worker. To me this receiving of Him has been defined by God as "believing on His name" (John 1:12). Today, I know that fifty-nine years ago God moved in relationship to my life. I did not at that time understand what He was doing, and I do not fully comprehend it even now, but I do know that He moved in relationship to my life to make Himself a part of it. I was a sinner, and He was the Savior of sinners, and He was seeking sinners in order to become their Savior. He wanted me to be saved. As a result of His efforts, I became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, starting out by believing the small amount of truth concerning Him that was available, but seeking every day to add to my faith.

I know that from the day I became identified with Him, strange and miraculous changes began to take place in my life. My interests, my motives, my purposes, my desires, my likes and dislikes, my language and conversations - yes, almost everything that made up my life began to move in a strange new direction. All this was because I was living a new life in Christ Jesus, and was living it as a confessed believer in Him. Therefore, I fully believe in the metamorphosis that takes place in one when he enters into relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. However, I do not believe that this should be called a "new birth" or that it is wise to refer to it as being "born again."

I know that in evangelical circles many would describe my experiences as being "born again," but I reject any such description. I am a child of God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because I received Him I have the authority to say, "God is my Father and I am His child." Because I am a believer I have received from God the sealing of the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of my inheritance until the day comes that God redeems His purchased possession. (Eph. 1: 13, 14). I believe that this portion of God's Spirit is the possession of all who believe. I will not seek for it, neither will I pray for it, since I feel this would be a lack of faith in His Word upon my part. I believe that this was given to me, not to get me worked up or excited, but in order that I might know the things freely given to us of God.

ISSUE NO. SB093