

BORN AGAIN TO WHAT?

Today's Text: 2 Cor. 6:1-18

Extracts:

We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain...Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ... And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. ...Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."[2 Cor. 6: 1, 14, 16-18]

On Sunday, 12 January 2014, Southwest Airlines Flight 4013 (with 124 passengers and 5 crew members on board) left Chicago's Midway International Airport for Branson Airport in Missouri.¹The captain of that flight had already clocked 16,000 flight hours and worked with Southwest for 15 years. That was his second trip to Branson. But the Boeing 737-700 aircraft landed at the wrong airport, Taney County Airport, which was 7 miles (11 km) away from Branson! The pilots told investigators that they did not realize that they were at the wrong airport until they had landed. They mistook the bright runway lights of the smaller Taney Airport for their intended destination at Branson Airport.

Believers who pride themselves in being called "born again" face a similar predicament on their journey to salvation. They fly different airlines (denominations or congregations) and rely on experienced pilots (church leaders). But are they actually heading for the true destination or being flown to a wrong "airport" far from heaven?

In this week's Bible verses, Paul addressed the church at Corinth on such issues. He pleaded with the worshippers there not to receive the grace of God in vain because the day of salvation is already here, not in the future. Could they afford to continue to conform to the world instead of separating themselves from it? Paul is asking us the same question today. You and I are born again to what? Let us find out from this week's challenging piece. Welcome to Volume 15 of our Bible Study series.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: "Southwest flight lands at wrong US airport," Posted on Mon., Jan. 13, 2014; <http://www.king5.com/news/business/239864391.html> ; and Eric Beach, "Southwest pilots confused by lights of wrong U.S. airport," *Reuters*, Fri., 17 Jan. 2014, <http://news.yahoo.com/southwest-pilots-confused-lights-wrong-u-airport-023221173--finance.html>

1. Background: To conform to or separate from the world? That's the question!

When Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, walked secretly into Jesus Christ's presence that fateful night, little did he know that he was giving the Lord the opportunity to open the eyes of all believers through history to what the new birth is all about. Jesus made the following two points:

- Unless a person is born again, s(he) CANNOT SEE the kingdom of God
- Unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, s(he) CANNOT ENTER the kingdom of God [**Jn 3: 3,5**].

“Cannot” implies impossibility. *The kingdom of God* has to do with “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” [**Rom. 14; 17**]. Therefore, it *is a spiritual state or consciousness that true believers on earth should share with believers already in heaven.*

By the power of the Holy Spirit, a believer can see the kingdom of God. Such a feat is manifested in the form of spiritual gifts, such as casting out demons, speaking in new tongues or laying hands on the sick to make them recover- all in the name of Jesus [**Mk 16: 17-18**]. But that is analogous to Internet access. For example, from your laptop or *iPad*, you can surf any part of the world to see or watch anything. To enter is a different matter! It is the hard part of being born again. You will have to move from here (conforming to the world) to there (keeping yourself separate from the world). But, *until you can remain born again for the rest of your life on earth, you cannot claim to be yet truly born again!* That means *total commitment on a routine basis*, which is a big deal.

That was what Paul brought to the attention of the Corinthian church and it is also of much interest to us, especially in a rapidly deteriorating world where the right to sin is being equated with a fight for civil rights. How can we remain faithful to Christ Jesus when we are being told that we are old fashioned and an endangered species? *Can we conform to acceptable worldly standards and still claim to be born again? How can we become separate from the world and still be able to live among the lawless? These and more are the issues that Paul will help us to deal with in this week's study.*

The key points that Paul made can be summarised as follows:

a) *Salvation is nearer than you think*

Paul pleaded with the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain because, contrary to their world view, “now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” [**2 Cor. 6: 1, 2**].

Believers tend to measure eternity with a time piece. When they are young, they behave as if it is still too early to think of death or hell or heaven. Salvation is not their priority or even a thought. There is still time to go out there and sow wild oats! Unfortunately, we do not die by age. Some people die in the womb or as mere babies or as young adults or as old people. There is no chronological order to it. Therefore, each day that we are still alive is a rare opportunity to work for heaven. Can we afford to miss such a rare chance?

In the *Parable of the Rich Fool*, Jesus tells the story of a man who thought that his life consisted in the abundance of the things he possessed. When his ground yielded much, all he thought of was how to pull down his barns and expand his storage facilities, relax and enjoy himself. At no time did it occur to him that his life would be taken away from him that night [**Lk 12: 15-20**]. In the end, he missed salvation because it did not occur to him to prepare for it.

b) *There is much you can learn from your predecessors in faith*

If salvation should be our primary concern, what can we learn from our predecessors in faith on the matter? Paul commended his hard life and that of his fellow ministers to the believers at Corinth. Why did they think that Paul and his colleagues remained patient in the face of such undeserved hardships as tribulations, imprisonment, sleeplessness and fasting? Why did they stick to the truth when they were dishonoured and treated as deceivers? Why did they make others rich when they themselves actually possessed nothing? Well, it was because *the Holy Spirit empowered them on a routine basis to exhibit purity, knowledge, patience, sincere love and righteousness, among other virtues*. They did not give room for anybody to blame their ministry for their personal failures [**2 Cor. 6: 3-10**].

There is nothing new under the sun [**Ecc. 1:9**] and, if you think that you are passing through worse lawless times today than in the past, you may have to think again. In Faith's Hall of Fame, we have read of believers who faced trials of mocking and scourges, who were stoned or sawn in two, or who were destitute, afflicted or tormented. Yet, they held on to the end [**Heb. 11: 35-39**]. Therefore, there is so much that we can learn from our elders and predecessors.

c) *Then you can go about it in a transparent way*

Paul wrote, "O Corinthians! We have spoken *openly* to you, our heart is *wide open*. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same, ... you also be open" [**2 Cor. 6: 11-13**]. In other words, *be born again in an open and transparent way*.

The best place to hide, they say, is in the open. That is because you can never know in full those who are watching you, apart from God Himself. The self that you exhibit in public may be quite hypocritical because you may be trying to keep away in confidence (from public view) who you truly are. Sometimes, what others see of you may not be what you are trying to portray! So, be yourself both in secret and in the public.

The transparency that God expects from you is measured in your heart. You can deceive others by drawing near God with your mouths and honouring Him with your lips and yet your heart is far away from Him because your fear of Him is actually taught by the commandment of men. That is Christ's definition of hypocrisy [**Is. 29: 13; Matt. 15: 8-9!**]
Therefore, being truly born again must show in you in secret and in the open. Paul gives the following examples as evidence of transparency [**2 Cor. 6: 14-16**]:

- Darkness can never be a shade of light. Therefore, you are either for righteousness or for lawlessness, for Christ or for Belial (the spirit of evil personified; Satan himself)². You cannot eat your cake and have it. In the words of Christ, you are either hot or cold; but if you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, He would spew you out of His mouth [**Rev. 3: 14-16**].
- Your body is the temple of God and of the Holy Spirit [**1 Cor. 3: 16**]; otherwise, you may soon begin to treat religious symbols in your place of worship as gods and that is idolatry. For example, a famous school is measured more by the success of its alumni than by the hallowed halls of its buildings. That is why the body of Christ, the Church, is measured by the aggregation of true worshippers in ALL the Christian denominations. Therefore, ***God expects every born again person to be Spirit-led in all things.***

d) *Then God will dwell in you on a permanent basis*

By their fruits we shall know them. When we refuse to compromise and instead separate ourselves from the world and avoid touching unclean things, then God will receive us and, as He has promised, "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters" [**2 Cor. 6: 17-18**]. That suggests that ***you must remain born again always if you want God to dwell in you on a permanent basis.*** There is no vacation or sick leave to go and sin and then come back to resume being born again- again!

It is decision time!

2. How to successfully fly to your salvation destination

² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Belial?s=t>

In an earlier letter to the Corinthians, Paul urged them not to keep company with sexually immoral people. He qualified it as follows [1 Cor. 5: 9-13]:

*Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, **since then you would need to go out of the world.** But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother [or sister] who [does those things] - not even to eat with such a person... [T]hose on the outside God judges. Therefore, put away from yourselves the evil person.*

Most of us have little or no problem relying on principles and morality when it comes to dealing with total strangers or those who are unlike us by skin colour, gender or kindred. The problem arises on familiar territory- in the family or place of worship. But can you compromise at the risk of losing your salvation? That is the challenge that Paul has thrown at us from the foregoing verses.

A good guide is to examine conduct that is allowed (by law or tradition) against what is morally right in the sight of God. After all, the whole duty of man on earth is to “fear God and keep His commandments” because He will ultimately bring every work into judgment, “including every secret thing, whether good or evil” [Eccl. 12: 13-14]. The following may assist you to successfully navigate your way to safety (salvation destination):

a) *Conform to the world where it is morally right to do so*

Cultures and societies may differ on the object of worship but may share their abhorrence of evil. For example, adultery, murder and stealing are considered abominable in virtually every society of the world. Where it is morally right for the born again to conform with the rest of society on such matters, conformity to the world is acceptable, that is, not injurious to your spiritual health.

In His conduct and sermons, Jesus demonstrated this principle. For example, even though He had harsh words for their hypocrisy, Jesus taught His listeners, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do” [Matt. 23: 1-3]. Even though the Roman rulers were brutal to the people, Paul taught every soul to be subject to the governing authorities [Rom. 13: 1-2]. Peter added that we should submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake “whether to the king as supreme, or to governors [delegated by him] for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God” [1 Pet. 2: 13-15]. That is why you must pay your taxes to the state, no matter who is the head of state [Rom. 13: 7]!

b) *But fight for your faith in exceptional cases!*

However, there are exceptional cases where believers must draw the line. One such case is where law or tradition puts an obstacle in the way of true worship of the God that we profess. For example, Paul openly challenged Peter's hypocrisy at Antioch. Before the men sent by James from Jerusalem arrived, Peter ate with the Gentiles. But as soon as they came, Peter "separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision." Even Barnabas fell into the same trap. Paul stood up and upheld the superiority of his faith to the Jewish tradition "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" [Gal. 2: 11-16].

We may also face another case where law recognises practices that are repugnant to the righteousness of God. Examples are legal recognition of same-sex marriages (now prevalent in Europe and America) or mandatory mode of worship (in states under strict Islamic law). In such cases, to conform is to deny your faith. Jesus has warned, "Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" [Matt. 10: 32-33].

From the foregoing, it is clear that *you need more than will power to face the world*. You must remain spiritually sober and vigilant "because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." You must resist him. *You must be steadfast in faith*. You must realize that your experience is not unique but shared by your brotherhood in Christ all over the world [1 Pet. 5: 8-9]. That is Paul's message for us all.

3. Conclusion: Jesus is your only reliable Pilot to salvation!

Jesus has warned that you cannot call Him Lord if you do not do what He commands you to do [Lk 6: 46]. But no one can *genuinely* call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12: 3]. Jesus has told true believers, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [earthly things] shall be added to you" [Matt. 6:33]. That message is for the truly born again.

So, as you embark on that inevitable journey to eternity in heaven, make Jesus your only Pilot. *Human pilots, by way of your church or their leaders, no matter how much you think you can trust them, can land you in the wrong destination as in the case of Southwest Airlines Flight 4013! Even worse, they can land you in hell fire and there is no room for correction. Jesus has prepared a mansion for you in His Father's house in heaven. He will soon return to take you there so that you will be where He is [Jn 14: 1-4].* Isn't that exciting?

Be born again to salvation.