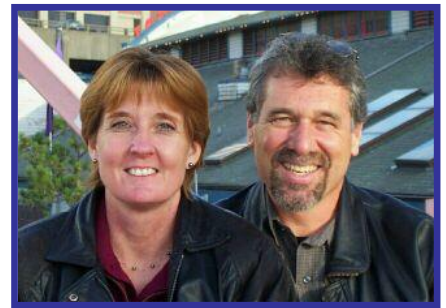


Hal and Cheryl Large

Ministering in El Salvador

August, 2008



Have you been born again by the Spirit of God? Almost everyone who goes to church would immediately answer in the affirmative. I know I would. However, there are some verses in the Bible that are very unsettling to our quick affirmation of rebirth. Paul declares real proof of the presence of Christ in a life is not what I say but how I live: "For the Kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power" (1 Corinthians 4:20). What I do is what I actually believe. John declares flatly: "Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin because His seed abides in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God" (1 John 3:7-9).

Who, in fact, has been 'born of God'? How *is* one born again? Jesus warns: "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." He then gives us the key to rebirth from above: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5). In no way is he talking about the flesh having a part in this new birth: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (v. 6). What does it mean to be 'born of water and the Spirit'?

I would like to focus on the first of these two elements. Does this general reference to water have a Scriptural interpretation? I believe it does. In Titus 3:5, Paul makes reference to "the washing of regeneration and the renewing by the Holy Spirit". This idea of washing is associated with baptism in Acts 22:16 when Ananias challenged Saul to "arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name." What happens at baptism; or rather, what is supposed to happen? What does it mean? Scripture makes it very clear: Baptism is an act of repentance. Everywhere in Scripture it is associated with repentance. "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:4, 5). Jesus announced unequivocally the need of repentance for salvation: "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). Unless there is repentance, there can be no faith. Jesus condemned the Pharisees: "For John came unto you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe; but the publicans and the harlots believed him; and you, when you had seen it, repented not afterward, that you might believe" (Matthew 21:32).

Our churches are filled with members who have never been born again. The willfulness of the prideful heart has never been submitted and the unrighteousness life has never been admitted nor confessed to God. Repentance is an acknowledging and turning away from sin and it is necessary for saving faith. That was why Jesus, even after the woman at the well had asked Him for living water, answered her not with an exhortation to believe but for her to call her husband. He first provoked her to repentance that she might then believe (John 4:13-19). We have been told since our childhood that all that is needed to go to Heaven is to believe in Jesus and yet Scripture does *not* present the path to salvation in that way. Listen to the clear and plain words of Scripture: "And He said to them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46,47). "Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God" (Hebrews 6:1). "Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you will receive the gift of the

Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). "Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Gentiles of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). "That they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:20). Was *that* the Gospel you believed? Is it any wonder there is so little difference between the lives of the members of our churches and those in the world who do not profess to know Christ?

The message of repentance of sin and faith in Christ is as much for the church as it is for the world. Over and over, Christ calls His church to repentance: "Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at the first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place - unless you repent" (Revelation 2:5). "Repent, therefore; or else I am coming to you quickly and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth" (Revelation 2:16). "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; and keep it and repent. If, therefore, you will not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you" (Revelation 3:3). "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous, therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19).

In the Family of Faith Church and in my own life, the message of repentance has brought and is bringing about profound changes in the way that we relate to Christ. We take seriously (after months and months of the same message) God's warnings of judgment (Minor Prophets), the evidence of having been truly born again ("the one who practices sin is of the devil . . . No one who is born of God practices sin" 1 John 3:8, 9) and the wretched sinfulness of our flesh (Romans 7:18-21; Jeremiah 17:9). It has led us to confession, true brokenness before God and profound and permanent changes in our lives. Not a few have expressed their conviction of having been truly born again. And this is the purpose of death and repentance: Eternal Life. Christ sets us free from the practice of sin. Satan's way of thinking in us is first acknowledged, then bound and broken in the name of Jesus and our every thought is taken captive to obedience in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:3-5). That is true freedom, power and life.

This may seem to be a strange prayer letter; however, I am sharing with you what Christ is doing with His bride, the church. He is cleansing, purifying and preparing us that He might fill and use us as His instrument for His glory. God has His purpose in rebuke, correction and discipline: "Turn to my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my Spirit on you; I will make my words known to you" (Proverbs 1:23).

So, this is our prayer request to you: Pray that God will give us a heart to hear His word, to treasure it and to humble ourselves before Him in truth. Pray we will not turn away or justify ourselves as did the Pharisees. Pray for our cleansing that we might be filled with God's Spirit in power and love. This is such a hard message and we need God's strength to preach and proclaim it both in the services and in the homes. Pray we will be covered by the authority of Christ. Enter into spiritual battle with us.

During these past months, we have seen people saved and baptized. We have gone out to different communities with medical teams preaching the Gospel. We have seen a church building erected in a refugee camp in which we are ministering. The Gospel is being carried into the hospitals of our city. It is being preached in the schools. We are counseling couples, teaching in the Bible Institute and training the leaders of the church. Those are events we like to talk about and that we enjoy reading about. However, our desperate need is for you to pray God will give us a tender and contrite heart before Him. We desperately need Him. We can't hide behind our religious appearances and pasted on smiles. Pray God will continue to cleanse us and free us as we repent before Him of our sins. We are not content with words; we want spiritual power, life and holiness. We want Jesus living in us. We are

Yours for souls,

