More Divorce Among Believers?

Mark 7:6, Luke 6:46, Titus 1:16, James 2:14, 1 John 1:6, Rev 3:1
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Today's article is a follow-up to our previous post on this subject. Though it is several years old, it deals with an idea that is still widely held in some circles -- that the divorce rate among Christians is the same, if not higher, than among non-Christians.

Are born again Christians more likely to divorce their spouses than unbelievers are? Some recent studies say, "Yes." According to one widely reported survey, 27% of born again Christians have been divorced, in comparison to 24% of those who are not born again.

For the one who understands the life-changing power of the gospel, these findings raise a significant question: "What, in the mind of these pollsters, constitutes a born again Christian?" According to the research firm that conducted this survey, a born again Christian is an individual who (1) claims to have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important to him today and (2) believes that he will go to heaven because he has confessed his sins and accepted Jesus Christ as his savior.

To categorize an individual as "born again" because of his answer to two simple questions, however, fails to recognize a solemn truth—not everyone who professes eternal life actually possesses eternal life. Jesus Himself said that many would come to Him on the day of judgment, calling Him, "Lord, Lord" and fully expecting to inherit eternal life, only to be told that they never knew Him (Matt 7:21-23). In fact, Scripture is replete with warnings to those who confess Christ with their mouths but do not possess genuine, saving faith (e.g., Mark 7:6; Luke 6:46; Titus 1:16; James 2:14; 1 John 1:6; 2:4, 9; 4:20; Rev 3:1).

So what about the "born again Christians" in the divorce survey? Where does this group of individuals stand? According to a poll by the same research firm, 15% of born again Christians deny the resurrection of Christ; 28% believe that Jesus committed sins during His life on earth; 34% believe that if a person is good enough he can earn a place in heaven; 26% believe that it doesn't matter what faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons; and 45% believe that Satan is a symbol of evil rather than an actual being. In other words, many of these "born again Christians" are not born again at all.

The failure to make this distinction has severe ramifications, for it assaults the ability of God to transform lives. If born again Christians as a whole live no differently than their non-Christian counterparts, what does this say about the power of the gospel? What does this say about genuine salvation and the ability of God to bring about holiness in His people? Does conversion produce nothing more than a ticket to heaven?

According to Scripture, the one who is truly born again experiences an amazing transformation. At the point of conversion, the believer becomes a new creation and is set free from his bondage to sin. He receives a new nature and therefore walks in Spirit-enabled obedience as he submits to the will of God. This does not mean that it is impossible for a believer to file for an unbiblical divorce or to sin in other ways. But it does mean that the difference between the children of light and the children of darkness is a vast one. The gospel does indeed change lives, regardless of what the polls say.

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