

The Spirit and You

BELIEVERS' BOOT CAMP

Acts 2:14-24, 32-33, 37-39

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When I first considered the idea of *Believers' Boot Camp*, I never dreamed that people would have to negotiate an obstacle course. Road construction has done just that. It has changed roadways and closed highways so that you already are tested and stretched before you hear a sermon. (Boot camp began when you got out of your house.)

Boot camp, as you remember, is not a sadist's idea of a good time. It is preparation for service. In this boot camp we've looked at three essential teachings for walking with Jesus. We've responded to the question, "Who am I?" and looked at *The Creation and You*. We considered, "What is going on?" and explored *The Fall and You*. We examined *The Savior and You*. Today we look at a key principle.

Remember, it was the breath of God that began human life.

The LORD God formed a man's body from the dust of the ground and breathed into it the breath of life. And the man became a living person. (Genesis 2:7, NLT)

It is also the breath of God, God's Spirit that births a Christian. Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. (John 3:5-8, NIV)

Just as all people are baptized in water, meaning that they are immersed in the water of their mothers' wombs until they are born, Jesus said they must be baptized or immersed in the

presence of the Spirit until they are born a second time. Through this birth you are a new creation with a new nature that desires to please God and honor Jesus. You have a new potential and a new destiny. God by the nature of the Spirit within you rules. You've entered the kingdom of God. His reign is within you.

Jesus also said that this birth will make you unconventional. You will be hard to predict. ***“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*** You will be known less for rules you follow and more for the God you honor. If your life is focused on rules, something is wrong.

I'm holding my Bible. It is precious because it is God's word. We must read the Bible, mark it, memorize and study its words. Having said that, this is not God's gift to guide you! This is not a guide! This is not God's guide for you! Whoever uses this book as a guide becomes conventional. They become like the Rabbis and religious scholars of Jesus' day who opposed him. Their lives become focused on rules. This Bible tells you that.

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:39-40, NIV)

With those words Jesus rebuked misguided religious leaders who studied their Hebrew Bibles as a guide. They thought they were guided by God because they read the Scriptures and followed its rules as they understood them. In contrast Jesus said to his followers:

It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you... When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. (John 16:7, 13; NIV)

Jesus was the guide and counselor for his followers. He opened their eyes. He helped them understand what God was saying in the Bible. He did not take the Bible and say to his

followers, “This will be my substitute. This will teach you. This will show you the way. This is your guide and counselor.” No he said:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-19, NIV)

The disciples had observed the work of the Spirit in Jesus and in their own ministry as they healed people and announced the kingdom of God. Now that same Spirit would come and live within them. They would be new people and that Spirit would counsel and guide them. Indeed, Jesus was replacing himself with himself. They wouldn't be orphaned. He would come to them in the Holy Spirit. That is why his last recorded words in the gospel of Matthew are:

I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20, NLT)

When we think that we must live by our deductions from Scripture, we are living like the Pharisees. We become rule-oriented people. Truthfully, we become just another religious sect. All we offer people is another path of impersonal rules and guidelines. Christianity degenerates into just another religion. People look at our sincerity and observe that same sincerity in those following other paths, and they conclude that there is no difference. Many who walk within the Christian community, including pastors and church leaders, believe that very thing. They see little reason to evangelize or displace any other belief system on the planet. They are Christian by tradition. In many cases they are Christian by physical birth. They were raised in the Christian community and have found some satisfaction in some of its teachings and practices. However, they have either not experienced the new birth that comes from being immersed in the Spirit, or once experiencing it, they have grieved the Spirit and quenched his fire. They have their Bible, traditions and rules, but they are not excited, awed or changed by what they are hearing right now from Jesus. They believe a Holy Spirit exists and is at work, but they don't

have a fellowship with this Counselor. In contrast, the book of Acts is full of what the Holy Spirit was saying and revealing to believers and also how the Holy Spirit was empowering believers to do amazing things. In fact, Jesus believed that the average Christian would do greater things than he ever attempted. He said:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these... (John 14:12, NIV)

Isn't it like a father and mother to want their kids to do more, experience more and succeed more than them? Jesus has that same kind of heart for you and me. He not only shares the heart of our Father, he also gave us his promise. If you have faith in him, you will do greater things than he did... Not by following rules, but through fellowshiping with, listening to and heeding the Spirit of truth.

Did you know that every kind of healing and deed Jesus did that is recorded in the New Testament is reported in the church today, and is happening through average Christians? Even stuff Jesus didn't do is being reported. I first became aware of this almost two decades ago. One amazing story was captured on videotape and presented to Pope John Paul by a professor from a Roman Catholic university in Steubenville, Ohio. The tape, full of interviews by people involved, shared how a small group of Catholic believers seeking the Holy Spirit's counsel witnessed God heal, multiply food through their hands and literally save hundreds of broken, hurting, and impoverished people who scavenged in a dump in Juarez, Mexico. Even government officials were radically and eternally changed through what they witnessed.

This type of activity is multiplying across the globe, and it is not exceptional Christianity! It is the basic, boot camp Christianity that Jesus taught. Listen, the initiation of the Christian church was through the filling of the Holy Spirit. People experienced spiritual birth and did

things that would be unnatural before such an experience, but could be expected if God resided within them. Hear Peter's explanation of what happened at Pentecost:

Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. Some of you are saying these people are drunk. It isn't true! It's much too early for that. People don't get drunk by nine o'clock in the morning. No, what you see this morning was predicted centuries ago by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God said, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit upon all my servants, men and women alike, and they will prophesy."
(Acts 2:14-18, NLT)

Who will prophesy? According to the promise, all will! If they are fellowshipping with God's Spirit, wouldn't many words they speak come from God? Isn't that prophecy?

In Christianity, believers call upon Jesus in repentance and ask him to forgive and change them. When he comes with his Spirit on them, they are changed from a believer to a witness. Now their lives are not just about what they believe. They are more about what God has done in response to their belief. That's the gospel. That's the good news. That's the Spirit and you.

Are you ready to accept the true guide Jesus offers you? Have you once accepted, but later grieved him? Peter counseled his audience to *repent* and *be baptized*. He wanted people to *repent*: to recognize their sin and unbelief and welcome Jesus. He wanted them also to *be baptized* in Jesus' name, because that is what would happen spiritually. Just as we are naturally born through immersion in water, they would supernaturally be born through immersion in God's Spirit. Jesus would reside within them and fellowship with them through the presence of the Holy Spirit. That is the gift God wants for everyone: to begin new with the Spirit and grow to maturity with the Spirit. Is that what you want?

I suspect that most here have been baptized in Jesus' name. That's a sign of the promise. Have we then actually repented and welcomed this spiritual immersion? Then let's pray.