

Born a Christian?

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Perhaps there has been no more recognized figure in denominationalism than Billy Graham. For the past half century, Graham has preached over the radio and television airwaves. He is famous for his “Crusades” wherein stadiums are rented and filled with people wanting to hear him preach. Over the past 30+ years he has had access to the highest elected office of our land, the Presidency. In the book *Decision Points*, George W. Bush recalls one of Graham’s visits with his family. George H. W. Bush asked Graham whether or not a “conversion experience” was necessary in order to become a Christian. Graham’s answer was that some people are just born Christians, no conversion necessary.

The answer flies in the face of what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3 “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Jesus explained that he was not talking about physical birth. This new birth consists of being born out of water and spirit. Jesus has reference to baptism, what Paul referred to as the “washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5). No one can see the kingdom of God without having gone through this process. Individuals simply are not born Christians, regardless what Billy Graham says.

Jesus also said, “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:45). Christianity is a taught, heard, and learned religion. If someone were simply born a Christian, there would be no need for such a process. Jesus would have been wrong to say what he said.

Someone might object and say, “Oh, but what about Hebrews 8:11: ‘And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest?’” This passage is contrasting the situation under the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. Men were physically born into the Old Covenant as citizens of the nation of Israel. They had to be taught to “Know the Lord.” However, those who are born again do not need to be taught to know the Lord, because they have already been taught to know the Lord prior to conversion. Upon entering the kingdom they already have God’s word in their hearts and minds.

There are no cases in the New Testament where an individual is born a Christian. You can search until the proverbial cows come home, and you will not find it. The New Testament teaches that individuals are converted by hearing of God’s word (Romans 10:17), believing it (Hebrews 11:6), and being obedient to it (Hebrews 5:9). Billy Graham’s message of salvation does not come from the Bible, but from John Calvin’s theology. Calvin believed that God personally predestined all individuals to either heaven or hell, and that there is nothing anyone can do to change it. Graham’s answer is

consistent with Calvinism, but not with the Bible. Let's believe the Bible and relegate Graham's opinions (along with all human opinion on this subject) to obscurity.