

JESUS STYLE EVANGELISM – THE INSTITUTIONALLY RELIGIOUS

Introduction – The institutionally religious have always considered themselves a part of the family of God. From birth to the grave they are surrounded by religious traditions. Baptized as an infant, then confirmed later, they continue to be an involved participant in religious activities. Only someone who has a qualitatively different lifestyle centered on Jesus and empowered by the Spirit will cause them to question their position.

A. Jesus' encounter with institutionally religious Nicodemus

John 3:1-4

1. Nicodemus was a committed Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin.
2. He recognized the authenticity of the life and message of Jesus because he was open-minded and conscientious.
3. Jesus challenged his fundamental understanding about those who are included in the kingdom of God.
4. He was rooted by habit to an institutional approach to God and had difficulty understanding Jesus' new way.

B. Jesus explains and illustrates the nature of this radical change.

John 3:5-9

1. This is the second time Nicodemus is shocked and confused at Jesus' challenge to be born anew or from above.
2. The two elements of this new birth are water and Spirit.

Titus 3:4-6

3. This was clearly taught in Hebrew Scriptures where God led them through the waters to salvation and promised through the prophets a new exodus.

Zechariah 12:10; 13:1

Ezekiel 36:25-27

4. The nature of the work of the Spirit is like the wind. It cannot be institutionalized or controlled by fleshly religiosity.

C. Institutionally religious teachers must become students to experience eternal life.

John 3:10-16

1. Jesus on the cross will draw all open-minded people to repentance.
2. Institutionally religious people are burdened with activities and beliefs that cannot be questioned.
3. Do not expect them to make a quick decision. They must count the cost of publically renouncing the religiosity they have known.
4. Remember, not everything they have believed must be changed. But their life and relationships must be transformed

Conclusion – Nicodemus remained in his institutional position and was a secret disciple until after Jesus died on the cross. You must be patient with these conscientious but misguided religious people. We will have to pray for God to fill us with the Holy Spirit in order to reach them.

Acts 4:31