



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

From the Superintendent: **SPIRITUAL EXILE**



The dictionary defines exile as the state or a period of forced absence from one's country or home: the state or a period of voluntary absence from one's country or home: a person who is in exile or being held captive.

In the Bible there are numerous occasions when people and nations were in exile or captivity. Israel was sent into exile or held in captivity multiple times for their disobedience. King David went into exile while fleeing from King Saul. Jeremiah was taken to Egypt against his will. Jesus even had to be taken to Egypt to save his life. These were all cases of physical exile or of being in captivity. We Christians are sometimes living in spiritual exile or spiritual captivity. Have you left our spiritual home with Jesus?

Spiritual exile is a land that has many names: self-pity, arrogance, greed, anger, resentment, bitterness, sadness, grief, emptiness, doubt, meaningless to name a few. We find ourselves in exile, estranged from the love of God whenever we no longer feel and trust the love of God. Exile is where we sit around mopping around and arguing with God. Exile is where we grab all we can for ourselves and ignore the needs and wants of others.

Exile is determined by our relationship with Christ. If we are in love with Christ so that our lives are lived in obedience to him, then we are home no matter where we may go. However, if we are distanced from Christ, if we are separated from the love of Christ by some event, some action, some deed, some thought or feeling, then we are in exile even in the house of God. Exile is where we lose our joy, our hope, and our love for our Lord and life.

Jesus tells us that, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free." (Luke 4:18) If you want to leave exile and go back home to Christ, you must go with the spirit of repentance. We don't like to talk about repenting, because it requires us to do something we are uncomfortable with. But whether we like it or not, without repentance we will stay in exile. The way home is the way of repentance, the path of acknowledging that we are far less than we should be---even on our best days---and who has that many best days. Repentance is often confused with remorse and regret, and though these may accompany repentance, they are not the same. Remorse is emotional grief over our actions, and regret is wishing that we had not done them--or that we had been caught. Repentance is turning around in our beliefs and our actions, committing not only to think differently but act differently as well. Repentance is giving up that which has become so near and dear that it is our god. Repentance is not just feeling bad about being wrong but seeking to restore and renew, to live differently because of our sin.

"When we come home to Christ, we realize again--for the first time--that we are loved not because we are beautiful, smart, wealthy, or good, but because we are God's. Will we come home? Christ waits for us to come home." --Robert U. Ferguson Jr.

By: Rev. Jerome Nelson



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

Part 2: We affirm the necessity of the new birth.

Amanda Olson is pastor of Grace ECC in Chicago, an intentional gathering of unfinished people seeking and sharing Jesus' transforming love.



"Have you been born again?" If you are anything like me, you may not like that question. Evangelicalism and being "born again" brings negative images to mind for many, even me. I'm not a fanatical "holy roller". And yet...

I "roll" with holy (albeit imperfect) people.

I am fanatical about Jesus.

I am an evangelical.

I am born again.

Jesus says new birth is necessary for anyone who follows him. "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born again... no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:3,5).

Jesus speaks these words to Nicodemus, a Pharisee who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus was a bible-believing, bible-living man. Jesus refers to him as one of "Israel's teachers." And yet, it seems that he doesn't have eyes to see the workings of God as they are playing out right in front of him, in the person of Jesus.

The hard thing about being born again (and seeing God's kingdom) is recognizing the conditions of our "first-birth" life. It can be difficult to acknowledge that our lives keep us from living according to God's will and way. Human beings are born self-centered. It is a survival mechanism. Our culture encourages us to build our own kingdoms. It's security. Natural tendencies and evil powers work so closely to the core of our very selves that we have trouble seeing them.

But once we see how our first-birth lives keep us from having a right relationship with God who is the center of the universe and the one and only true King, we recognize that we need some help in getting our lives aligned with His. We need more than help. We need Him! And God gives us himself, most fully and clearly in the person of Jesus.

Jesus is God-Redeemer. Through God-Redeemer's sacrificial death, God-Creator forgives us of our first-life faults. And through God-Redeemer's resurrection, God-Creator introduces us to our new life with Him - a life that is characterized by love, joy, hope, justice and peace! In this, we are born again.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17, TNIV). Some point to a date where they were made new in Christ. Others experience a season of transformation into their new life in Christ. Thankfully, as we read on in the Gospel of John, we discover that Nicodemus must have been reborn at some point. It is Nicodemus who provides a generous portion of embalming spices and assists Joseph of Arimathea in Jesus' burial (John 19:39-42).

No matter how new life in Christ begins one thing is the same for all. It never ends. I find myself being reborn in Christ every morning I wake, recommitting myself to God's will and God's ways. So the next time someone asks, "Are you born again?" I won't cringe. I'll nod and say, "Every moment of everyday."

Bible Study

Ephesians 4:1-32

The Apostle Paul writes a letter to the church in Ephesus, not to confront a heresy or problem, but to strengthen and encourage the churches in the area. Paul had spent over three years with the people in Ephesus. He had a close relationship with them. In Ephesians 4, Paul writes Instructions to them for mature Christian living, which includes unity in the church.

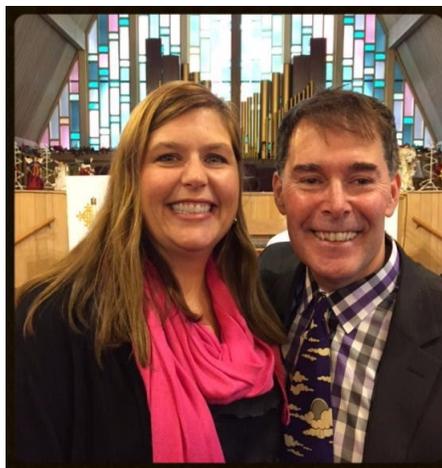
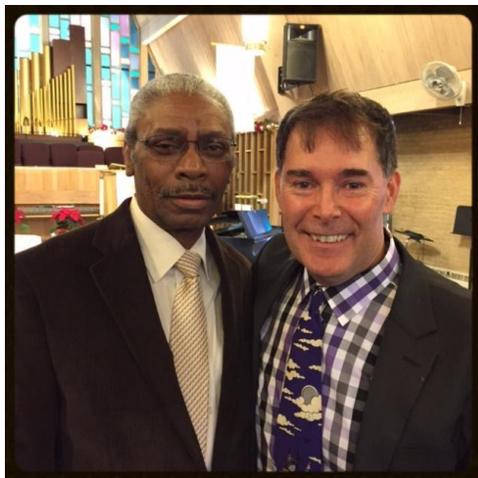
Questions:

1. Share your story of initial new birth. Was it on a particular day or over a period of years?
2. What "first-birth" life characteristics did you need to acknowledge before being reborn?
3. What 1-2 characteristics of mature Christian living is God calling you to develop? What are concrete ways you can live into new birth?
4. How are you being reborn, even today?



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

Mission Covenant Church in Blue Island, IL Installs Their Senior Pastor



Mission Covenant Church in Blue Island, IL installed Rodney Shiflett as their senior part-time pastor on Sunday, December 27, 2015. Rev. Jerome Nelson, Superintendent performed the installation and Pastor Rodney preached. His sermon topic was "The Church Awaken." The congregation was joined by his family and friends to celebrate his call. Pastor Rodney's wife, Rev. Dianna Shiflett was also there to support him. Pastor Rodney and the congregation made commitments to one another and the service was followed by a cake reception in the fellowship hall. It was a wonderful, festive service and the church is excited and looking forward to the future. Rev. Rodney Shiflett's is quoted saying "Please pray for us. We need the leading by the Holy Spirit. I need to be led by the Spirit. And the church needs to get in line and follow." Please remember to pray for them.

By: Joanne Nelson



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

Developing a Deborah



In an ongoing effort in the Central Conference to ensure women are being offered opportunities to Preach and Teach the Gospel, Dr. Kara Davis on November 22nd, and Rev. Dr. Debbie Blue on December 20th shared the Word of God at Fellowship Christian Church in Oak Park.



Dr. Kara Davis is an author of many books on self-care graciously took time to offer a book signing on her latest book entitled "Timeless" focusing on aging gracefully.

Dr. Kara preached from Psalm 100 Sermon title "An Attitude of Gratitude". Rev. Dr. Debbie Blue Executive Minister Compassion Mercy & Justice Emeritus of the Evangelical Covenant Church preached from John 4:4-30 and 39-42, Sermon title "From Hospitality to Hope." Was kind enough to offer words of comfort to many of the members and attendees, one on one! Still praising God for His goodness!

By: Rev. Debbie Griffith Samuels