

The New Birth

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO STUDY OF THE NEW BIRTH

There is no more important doctrine in the Bible than that of New Birth. It is that requisite experience in order to the realization of the kingdom of GOD. There can never be a perfect rule of GOD over intelligent creatures until there is a rule of GOD in such creatures. And the connecting link between these two things is the New Birth, impartation of the life of GOD to men so that they will be perfectly qualified to constitute the realm of GOD's rule and respond to the function of GOD's rule.

Little is revealed in the Old Testament concerning this ministry of the Holy Spirit. But there is still sufficient to arrest the attention of the careful student as to the importance of the New Birth. Not until one advances into the New Testament is he alerted to the full significance of the Old Testament revelation. In fact, no less a teacher than Nicodemus had to have this called to his attention by the Lord JESUS CHRIST (John 3:10). If his oversight aroused concern, then the situation among theologians today who possess also the New Testament is criminal.

It is this state of affairs within the church that provides the occasion for this study.

The president of a well known theological seminary writes in a leading daily newspaper of a large city: "Worship services everywhere are filled to overflowing and church support is better than ever, but great reticence is shown about translating the Gospel into ethical terms. Consequently civil affairs have been passing by default into the hands of unscrupulous men. Bribery and corruption are almost taken for granted in every city across the country. Our streets are not safe after dark. Muggings, knifings, dope addiction, prostitution, murder, teenage sex orgies, obscene literature - these are now the order of the day, to be casually perused in the daily newspapers, or half listened to on the 10 o'clock news."

It will be noted that it is the church that is being held responsible for this shocking situation in present day society. And perhaps the blame is being placed on the proper group. But perhaps there is also a more underlying reason for the failure of the church. Perhaps it lies in the fact that church roles are today overflowing with an unregenerate membership.

Never having experienced the New Birth, it is impossible for them to express the moral and spiritual virtues of GOD. They are indeed exhibiting all the externals of religion, "**having a form**

of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (II Timothy 3:5).

And though it is being affirmed that the church simply fails to correct the evils of society, yet of this unregenerate membership the Bible declares it joins in promoting such evils. **"For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God"** (II Timothy 3:3-4).

Surely this is sufficient reason to justify emphasis upon a doctrine of the Scriptures that has almost entirely disappeared from the preaching and teaching of the church today.

In its place there has appeared an empty formalism on the one hand or a superficial social gospel on the other. Since this corresponds so remarkably with the state of religion at the time JESUS came, it seems reasonable to confront professing Christians with the solution to which JESUS called the attention of a great religious leader of his day.

A few things need to be said by way of introduction, however.

1. GOD's purpose to regenerate.

From the very beginning of creation it was GOD's purpose to impart himself to men that there might be a perfect kingdom of GOD. This act of impartation is known as the New Birth. It is a work of GOD through which the believer is ushered into a new life, with new relationships, new tendencies, new desires, new adjustments, and a new character. This new life is none other than CHRIST formed in one by the operation of the Spirit of GOD. This new life is the Spirit of GOD dwelling within one, and New Birth is the act by which He took up His residence. The New Birth is not to be interpreted as a change of the old sinful nature. It is the introduction of new life, a new nature, the Spirit of GOD Himself. The Spirit of GOD effects certain changes because He takes over sovereign control, but the old sinful nature remains and is now held in check.

2. Adam was not regenerated.

Adam did not possess this new nature by creation. As he came from the creative hand of GOD he was perfect. He was not only without sin and innocent, but he was also created righteous. He was capable of weighing issues and making right decisions. It was in this state that the mystery of iniquity operated, and with his eyes wide open, he deliberately chose to disobey GOD's command (I Timothy 2:14), and as a result fell in nature, the effects of which he passed on to all his progeny (Romans 5:12). Had he made the right choice, GOD would no doubt have communicated His own nature to him in the order of His plan. But by sin, he passed from the natural state at creation to the unnatural state at the fall. This introduced a new problem into GOD's relation with men. Sin had now separated between GOD and man, thus making it impossible for GOD to enter into vital and living relationship with man until the sin question was settled and GOD's own righteous character was vindicated (Romans 3:25, 26).

3. No regeneration in Old Testament.

Thus the plan of GOD to communicate Himself to men in immediate and vital relationship was interrupted. Nor during the long Old Testament period did any man ever experience the New Birth. This does not mean that there was not a ministry of the Holy Spirit to men during the Old Testament dispensation. It does mean that this ministry was not the same experience men have had since the coming of CHRIST. As far as can be determined, the ministry of the Spirit had to do with function and office of the person involved. Joseph was such a one (Genesis 41:38). The craftsmen in Israel were others (Exodus 28:3; 31:3; 35:30-35). The seventy elders in Israel and Joshua also stood in this relationship (Numbers 11:17,25; 27:18). This included the Judges, and Saul, and David, and Daniel (Judges 13:25; I Samuel 10:9; Psalm 51:11; Daniel 4:8). But in all the Old Testament revelation it seems quite evident that the experience of Old Testament Saints is not to be equated with the New Birth which initiates the permanent indwelling of the Spirit. This alone explains the fact that the Holy Spirit departed from Saul (I Samuel 16:14), and the cry of David, "**Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me**" (Psalm 51:11).

There may seem to be implied in CHRIST's statement to Nicodemus, "**Except a man be born again,**" that this is an experience for men before the Cross. But this does not necessarily follow. It is more reasonable to believe that CHRIST was calling Nicodemus to witness the relation of this experience to the Mediatorial Kingdom so clearly set forth in the Old Testament, and which he should have known (John 3:10). The King is now here with His Kingdom.

But the Kingdom and the means of entrance to the Kingdom is contingent upon the response to the King. The response of rejection from the human side produced the Cross. But from the divine side the Cross provided the necessary preparation for the experience of New Birth.

Nor do the words of CHRIST uttered near the close of His public ministry as set forth in Matthew 19:28 change this fact. These are words of assurance for those who have followed Him "**in the regeneration.**"

The words which follow immediately, however, qualify the phrase, by saying, "**when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory.**" This makes the phrase eschatological in significance and relates it to the kingdom. This seems to refer to the regeneration of material creation. But in case it also includes the regeneration of the individual, it must be remembered that it cannot be separated from the Kingdom, and redeemed and regenerated people since the Cross are being prepared for that Kingdom which CHRIST will establish when He comes to sit upon the throne of His glory.

4. Regeneration prophesied in the Old Testament.

Nevertheless, the plan of GOD for New Birth was clearly anticipated in Old Testament revelation and predicted as a future experience.

- David gave voice to his own longings in the penitential Psalm, "**Create in me a clean heart, a God; and renew a right spirit within me**" (Psalm 51:10).
- Joel predicted an amazing outpouring of the Spirit upon Israel with just as amazing effects in His people (2:28-29).
- Isaiah foresaw when the Spirit would be poured out upon the seed of Jacob with attendant

blessing (Isaiah 44:3).

- Ezekiel declared to the stiffnecked people of Israel that GOD would put a new spirit within them and make them walk in His ways (11:19-20; 36:24-30).

At that point in Israel's history when human failure was only too evident and certain destruction was upon the nation,

Jeremiah cried out, "**Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people**" (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:38-40).

5. Regeneration dependent on the Cross.

Clearly enough, this work of GOD depended upon CHRIST's dealing with sin at Calvary. As long as sin separated between GOD and men, He could not in holiness enter into immediate and vital relationship with sinful creatures (Isaiah 59:1-2). Once GOD had dealt with sin, and vindicated His own righteousness, He would then be free to justify men (Romans 3:25-26). And once men were justified, that is, could be treated as righteous men, then GOD was set free to enter into immediate and vital relations with them. He could then take up His residence in men by the Holy Spirit and impart to them all the moral and spiritual fulness of His being (Jeremiah 31:33-34; cf. Hebrews 8:10-12). In His sovereignty, He might confer upon men blessings without number, and even empower for service and encourage by His presence. But He could not violate His own essential holiness by entering into a permanent and immediate relationship with men until the sin problem had been settled.

6. Pentecost is the result of Calvary.

At last, in the fullness of time, GOD sent forth His son and dealt with sin at Calvary and there came the fruits of this at Pentecost. At Calvary the penalty was fully paid and GOD's absolute holiness was satisfied. Death no longer could hold this righteous Person, so He came forth from the grave (Acts 2:23-24). Exaltation to the throne of GOD on the day of ascension confirmed CHRIST's person and work, and then exercising the authority of Lord and CHRIST, He sent forth the Holy Spirit to perform that ministry in believing men which had so long been promised and so desperately needed.

The promise to Israel had its first realization in the experience of the church. Men were then born again by the Spirit of GOD. GOD now took up His permanent residence in men (John 14:16-23). And then being partakers of the divine nature, they possessed all things that pertain to life and godliness (II Peter 1:3-4). In type, the Day of Pentecost was token of the full harvest to come. In fulfillment it was more than men had ever dreamed.

7. The crucial issue in the New Birth.

The crucial issue from that day to this hour and into the future is the experience of New Birth.

Relation to GOD before Pentecost produced no essential or permanent change in men. But since that day, salvation is something other than mere judicial relationship to GOD. It is that, but it is more than that. It was this fact that led the apostle Paul to examine carefully the twelve disciples at Ephesus. To determine the kind of disciples he asked them, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" (Acts 19:2 ASV). If they could have answered in the affirmative, he would have known immediately that they were saved and Christians. But their answer indicated that they knew only the imperfect message of John the Baptist. News had never yet reached them that CHRIST had died, been resurrected, had ascended, and had sent forth the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 19:2 ASV). To them Paul gave the good news. They believed it, were baptized, and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:4-6).

This is still the crucial question today. "**Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?**" (Acts 19:2).

The importance of this experience dare not be minimized. It makes all the difference between life and death, Heaven and hell, joy and sorrow, service and impotence. For this reason the remaining pages of this discussion will be given over to the one chapter in the Bible that is almost wholly devoted to the subject of New Birth. That chapter appears in the Gospel of John and relates the story of the meeting of the teacher from GOD and the most popular teacher in Israel. Nicodemus, searching for something, was graciously introduced to something that had escaped him and his people. In this respect he stands as a representative of mankind, and most certainly represents the need in the church today. For "**Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God**" (John 3:3).

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