

The New Birth

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF THE NEW BIRTH

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goest: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:6-8).

If there is any key word in this passage of Scripture surely it is the word "**must**" in verse seven. It speaks of necessity, "*It is necessary.*" The great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon was once asked by an irate listener, "Why are you always preaching upon the subject, '**Ye must be born again**'?" To which Mr. Spurgeon replied, "Because, ye must be born again." No dearer or more pointed answer could have been given. New birth is necessary in order to experience the rule and reign of GOD. This was not an arbitrary insistence on the part of CHRIST. In the very nature of the case the New Birth is an absolute necessity.

This word of authority is sufficient for many people, perhaps for most people. It is a word in the final analysis that must be received by all people. But there are many thinking people who desire further information, if such information is available. Nicodemus was a man like this.

That was the thing that prompted him to ask the question "**How?**" (John 3:4). Nor was this the last time he would ask this question. Yet once more he will voice the same insistent inquiry (3:9). Recognizing the honest search of this man after truth, with divine patience JESUS meets the problems of this mind with supernatural information. He made the explanation of the New Birth, as recorded in verse 5. Then CHRIST supplements this explanation with safeguards, as recorded in verses 6 through 8.

CHRIST undoubtedly knew that this man needed this supplementary information.

- as a member of society Nicodemus had been confronted with the problems of life, personality and sin.
- as a student of the Scriptures the issues of life became more acute.
- as a member of the Sanhedrim there was committed to him a responsibility from GOD to deal with these very problems within his own nation.

He could join in making judgments and inflicting penalties. But there was without doubt a longing in his heart to get at the source of the difficulty and solve the problem of personality for good. He undoubtedly made proposals based upon his study of the Old Testament. He did so with the hope of seeing men rise above the level of sin and crime to be like GOD. But not until this moment had anything ever been proposed, not even thought, like the unworldly proposal of CHRIST. JESUS had proposed a birth as the solution to the problems.

While JESUS has announced the fact of New Birth (3), and has enumerated the elements that combine to bring it about (5), to a man like Nicodemus other problems would immediately confront him. So JESUS goes further to satisfy this inquiring mind. Four more principles are set forth to safeguard the truth He has already presented. These appear in verses six through eight.

I. THE PROCREATIVE PRINCIPLE IN THE NEW BIRTH WITH ATTENTION ON THE OUTCOME

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

1. The Scriptures clearly teach this principle of procreation.

"And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: . . . And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so" (Genesis 1:21, 24). The same was true for man, for Adam **"begat a son in his own likeness, after his image"** (Genesis 5:3).

Nicodemus was thoroughly familiar with this principle, but perhaps he had forgotten it. The questions he raised, as recorded in verse 4, rather indicate though that he was thinking purely on the human level. He was thinking of flesh in its fulness as comprising all the aspects of human nature, spirit, soul and body with their potentialities. Being earthbound in his thinking, he was interpreting the words of JESUS to mean birth in the realm of flesh finally issuing in the Kingdom of GOD.

But he should have known that the lower cannot possibly culminate in that which is higher, and therefore there should not even have been a hint of it in his speech. Nicodemus was ignoring the principle so clearly taught in the opening chapters of Genesis, with all subsequent history to substantiate it. So JESUS reminded him that that which is born of the flesh is flesh; nothing more, nothing less, nothing else than flesh. The flesh produces its kind on the level of flesh. Moreover, the principle is uniform, namely, that like begets like. Therefore, it is just as true on the spiritual level as on the level of flesh. For that which is born of the Spirit is spirit; nothing more, nothing less, nothing else than spirit.

2. At this point it is in order to insist that the error of Nicodemus was a Satanic invention.

At the time that Satan fell, he said in his heart, **"I will be like the most High"** (Isaiah 14:14). In this statement of ambition, there was expressed his determination to attain the highest level by his own efforts, and in this case by using the method of imitation or counterfeit. Through all the

succeeding ages and dispensations he has been trying to accomplish this feat. He suggested this course of action to Eve in the Garden of Eden. "**For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil**" (Genesis 3:5). This was all Eve needed. She adopted this Satanic proposition and ate of the forbidden fruit. She also gave to her husband with her and he ate of the fruit.

From that day to this, the human family has been trying to lift themselves to the level of GOD by starting with elements on the human level. Neither Satan nor men have known the full import of the principle initiated by Satan and later adopted by mankind. There is a sense in which creatures have become god-like by pursuing a forbidden course. They have entered into the area of independent action like GOD but without rising higher; and into experiential knowledge of good and evil like GOD, but by doing evil. And in each case the ultimate result was to produce within the creature-level of nature both deterioration and confirmation.

3. This Satanic invention of long ago has developed into a theory and practice that has saddled itself down on human society in every realm of knowledge and activity.

It is known as evolution.

This theory in its wider scope teaches that the lower levels, by means of powers and forces resident within themselves, finally reach the higher levels. It is true that there is development within limits, but those limits are always defined by each level, and development does not progress beyond those boundaries. But in spite of the testimony of Scripture and experience, men are determined to see things that have never existed and never will. To this day, this Satanic error is flourishing.

In the realm of religion it amounts to man's powers, efforts, and activity finally producing in himself the likeness of GOD. This very cleverly undermines the authority of the Scriptures. It destroys the truth concerning the fall of man. It very conveniently minimizes the stigma of sin. And it utterly obliterates any need for supernatural aid. It produces in men the spirit of independence and self-sufficiency. Once this spirit has reached its fulness in men, it will produce the Antichrist of the end time.

4. Therefore it was necessary for JESUS to safeguard the truth He has already declared in verses 3 and 5.

How easily false interpretation could enter in and destroy the full force of those amazing statements. By declaring that the product of flesh is still flesh, and that the product of Spirit is spirit, JESUS sweeps away every false hope of men resting upon a foundation or source in men. At this point it seals every level within its own sphere. Flesh is always flesh, and can never be anything else other than flesh. And Spirit is always spirit, and can never be anything else other than spirit.

No doubt the Lord JESUS had sensed in the language of Nicodemus what He had encountered everywhere, namely, the disposition to regard the culture, morality, and the better things of life as spiritual. The same attitude persists today. These things, it is believed, are the secret for rising from the level of lost humanity to the plane with GOD. It is even suggested that by means of these one may experience New Birth. But the facts are wholly contrary to this false conception.

All of these things are in the realm of flesh. Exercise in these things do not change the level, they are merely motions within this level. It may be that there is movement upward within the level of flesh, but there is not movement from within the level of flesh to a level that is outside and above flesh. The end-product is still flesh.

II THE SUPERNATURAL SOURCE OF THIS NEW BIRTH WITH ATTENTION TO THE ORIGIN

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).

1. The assertion in verse 6 leaves Nicodemus and mankind utterly helpless.

Every level of existence is sealed within itself, and it may generate itself, produce itself, but it cannot rise higher than itself.

- plant life can produce plant life, but it can never produce anything but plant life.
- animal life can produce animal life, but it can never produce anything but animal life.
- human life can produce human life, but it can never produce anything but human life.
- spirit life can produce spirit life, but it can never produce anything but spirit life.

In larger proportions this principle can be stated to mean that the human level can produce the human, but it is always confined to the human. The natural can produce the natural, but it is always confined to the natural. The unholy can produce the unholy, but it is always limited to the unholy. No movements of the human, natural or unholy will lift this level to that of the divine, supernatural, and holy. It is therefore a foregone conclusion that the works of the flesh can never produce a deliverance from flesh to the level of spirit. No fullness of works; no frequency of repetition; no frenzied performance will effect salvation for the sinner. He must face the fact that he is helpless.

2. But though men are helpless, the situation is not hopeless.

For this reason JESUS said, "Do not marvel, do not be surprised." Then CHRIST repeats for the third time what He has already asserted twice in verses 3 and 5, "**Ye must be born again.**" The emphasis is upon the word "**again**" (*anathen*), which means "**from above.**" In this word everything is said that needs to be said and emphasized at this point. Though every level is sealed within itself, and no level can rise higher than itself, the higher level can always reach down and impart something to the lower level.

Herein lies the help for the hopeless, and the hope for the helpless. The divine can reach down and impart something to the human. The supernatural can bend low and communicate itself to the natural. The holy can shed itself abroad within that which is unholy. Light can shine from above and bathe the whole landscape with the beauty of Heaven. Life can enter the caverns of death and dispel the gloom of the night.

3. This means that where mankind was once helpless within themselves, the situation is not hopeless.

For from above GOD accomplishes by grace what men could not perform by works from below. This suddenly transforms the whole scene. It reverses the entire order in the consciousness and experience of men. It flashes like lightning through the intelligence of Nicodemus. Instead of the earth reaching up to grasp Heaven, the Heaven is bending low to pour out its riches of grace upon men. Suddenly all the cleverly constructed theories of men, all the ingenious devices of religion, and all the senseless struggles of the human soul to achieve New Birth are swept away. In their place is the heart of GOD overflowing with super-abundant grace, offering to men for their miseries an eternal life that is ministered through the event of New Birth.

4. Most important of all, it must be remembered that this whole operation is one that has its origin from above.

Men have long realized that there is something better than what they had. Within a narrow and limited vision they have wanted to see the Kingdom of GOD established. On the one hand they have not been able to realize nor willing to recognize that the cause of human sorrow and suffering is due to sin. Nor on the other hand have they been willing to admit that any change in the present scene below must come from above. It must have a supernatural source. The kingdom of GOD itself must move upon the souls of men. In this Nicodemus is called to attention. **"Marvel not, that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again"** (John 3:7).

III. THE MYSTERIOUS MOVEMENT IN THE NEW BIRTH WITH ATTENTION UPON THE OPERATION

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

1. As these words read in the KJV they are intended to explain on the earthly level the mystery of the New Birth.

The mysterious movements of the wind, it is held, provide an illustration of the mysterious movements of the Spirit. One commentator suggested that at that moment of long ago, while Nicodemus and JESUS were holding intimate discourse on the roof of a Jerusalem home beneath the stars, a breath of night air from the sea bathed the cheek of these two teachers.

This gentle movement of the wind gave JESUS an idea by which to explain to Nicodemus the mystery of this amazing event of New Birth.

Since flesh cannot rise beyond its own level, and is therefore utterly dependent upon the descent of Deity to bestow life, it is not to be imagined that the explanation of New Birth can go beyond that which had already been stated. It is a miracle performed from above. The Word of GOD and the Spirit of GOD combine to communicate new life. New life comes from the plane of life, the Spirit of GOD. But after this is said, Nicodemus needs to be reminded that there is a mystery about the New Birth which cannot be unfolded. The New Birth is a miracle and is therefore surrounded with mystery. The movements of the Spirit in New Birth are like the wind. Beyond that the explanation cannot go.

2. But it is the opinion of the writer that this statement of JESUS is even stronger than any illustration could present it.

One commentator explains this verse thusly: "The Spirit breathes on whom he wills, and you hear his voice, but you do not know from where he comes or where he goes: it is in this manner that everyone has been born of the Spirit." The word "**wind**" is never translated this way in any other passage in the New Testament. Except for this once, it is always translated "**spirit**." Even within the immediate context of this chapter the same word is always translated "**spirit**" (verses 5, 6). This fact gives pause to the student of this passage of Scripture.

When the idea of wind appears in the New Testament, another word in the Greek is used to present it. This may be explained by the fact that the Spirit has a will, but the wind does not. The Spirit has an articulate voice, but the wind does not. This articulate voice can be recognized by men, but the wind cannot. And as for the movements of the wind, delicate instruments can chart their course. But no instrument has ever been invented that can detect the direction of the comings and goings of the Spirit of GOD.

It is a reasonable assumption that CHRIST is in no sense trying to make illustration to help Nicodemus understand this mystery. To the contrary He is trying to make a straight forward description or explanation of the movements of the Spirit. The conclusion of the statement is simply that "It is in this manner that everyone is born of the Spirit." All those who have experienced New Birth must agree with this. The mystery of the movements of the Spirit in the miracle of New Birth make it ever the object of amazement and the cause for thanksgiving. While the Spirit moves according to well defined moral and spiritual principles, yet His movements must ever remain beyond the complete observation and analysis of men.

3. In this statement JESUS is asserting that the New Birth is something that rises above sense experience.

In that a soul visited by the Spirit can recognize His voice, but does not know from whence He comes or where He goes, there is sufficient reason to conclude that this is a warning to Nicodemus and all others about erecting elaborate systems for detecting the movements of the Spirit. This safeguards men from any resort to the physical or soulical to assure them that they have experienced the New Birth.

This completely excludes the physical or material, such as ordinances of baptism or the like as communicating or being contemporaneous with this experience. It excludes the soulical or psychical, such as emotional experiences, praying through, and many other such things as indicative of this experience. This statement draws a boundary line about the Spirit for Nicodemus, insisting that there is no experience of sense that can trace out His comings and goings. The Spirit is in a sphere all His own. That sphere is not material, physical, or psychical.

The believer is thus left with but one thing upon which he can depend for assurance in the event of New Birth. He is absolutely dependent upon faith in GOD's word.

If the believer has fulfilled the condition of GOD's word, that of accepting CHRIST as Saviour, and GOD's word declares that upon this basis he is born again, then GOD's word gives clear testimony upon which the believer may rest. Any dependence upon physical or psychical experiences is dangerous.

For such experiences may arise from another source, a source that might easily deceive an unwary soul. Then on the other hand there may be no special phenomena associated with turning to CHRIST. There may be no physical or psychical experiences at the time of conversion. In either case therefore, there is just one sure thing upon which to rest one's faith and that is the clear declaration of the Word of GOD.

4. But implicit in this declaration of mystery beyond the limits of human intellect, there is insistence upon New Birth as a definite operation of the Spirit.

Because the New Birth partakes of the qualities of the miraculous and operates in the realm of the mysterious does not in any sense mean that the human mind should not receive the event as valid for faith and contemplation. It does mean that faith is the point where the understanding begins its consideration of New Birth. For "through faith we understand" (Hebrews 11:3). This word of caution was no deterrent for Nicodemus. In his sincerity he had followed the movement of thought from the mind of CHRIST through every rising spiral. Now at last, CHRIST has confronted him with the mysterious in the New Birth into which the human mind cannot enter. But this did not disturb him as subsequent events reveal. It does serve as a caution. It brings to the attention of Nicodemus the fact that mystery does not imply unreality, nor does it exclude from the realm of rational understanding. For where the mind cannot penetrate, faith can reach, and the heart and spirit of man can experience. To this point, CHRIST has skillfully directed the course of this conversation. And now, at last, He has reached the citadel of the human heart.

IV. THE REASONABLE REALM OF NEW BIRTH WITH ATTENTION UPON THE OUTWORKING

"So is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8b). Though CHRIST has carefully guarded Nicodemus from concluding that the New Birth is entirely comprehensible to the human mind, He is not trying to convey to him that there is no area about this New Birth that is not comprehensible. Nicodemus might go to the dangerous extreme of believing that the origin and outcome of New Birth and the goings and comings of the Spirit leave no effects that are open for examination. This is not true. For the work of the Spirit produces an effect in men who are born again, and this person can be examined. Therefore in the final clause of verse eight, He declares, **"So is every one that is born of the Spirit."**

1. In this statement, CHRIST is affirming that this action of the Spirit is limited to people.

There is no evidence in the Word of GOD, either in the Old Testament or the New Testament, that GOD has designed New Birth for creatures other than men. Animals fall completely outside the pale of this provision. And there is no intimation that angels are included within it. Only those creatures who were made in the image of GOD and suffered the fall in the Garden become proper objects and centers for the display of the New Birth. The Spirit is immaterial and intangible to sense experience, but His effects can be observed and examined. Those effects are centered in people who have experienced the New Birth. If evidence for the workings of the Spirit are to be sought after, they must always be found in people in whom the Spirit of GOD has wrought this miracle of regeneration.

2. Again it must be asserted on the basis of this text, that the action of the Spirit is centered in people.

For this reason CHRIST stated the fact in the words, "**So is everyone that.**" New birth does not operate in a vacuum. It always takes place in people. Hence this excludes that which is merely mystical. The New Birth has geographical location, historical situation, and personal identification. Qualities are present that make it possible for investigation and verification. This experience in the Apostle Paul made it possible for others to study the effects in him. As a result, his conversion has become one of the pillars upon which the validity of Christianity rests. Almost half of the New Testament may be traced to the experience of this man. Covering more than 1900 years now, the experiences of men and women in New Birth constitute an unanswerable argument for reality of this event.

3. Furthermore, in this statement CHRIST declared that this action of the Spirit involved the entire person.

"**Every one that is born**" is a way of centering attention upon the individual in his completeness. It is not a nature that is born again, but the person that is born again. This person now possesses two natures: the old nature which is the disposition to sin (I John 1:8), and the new nature which is the Spirit of GOD himself (Romans 8:9b). But still, there is just one person. In this statement CHRIST is guarding against an error early introduced into Christianity to make provision for the flesh. There is no dividing between the natures of the person. There is no separation into the various elements of the person, such as spirit, soul, and body.

There is no analysis of the person into the material and the immaterial. The New Birth extends just as far as the person. Just as spirit, soul, and body are coextensive, so also is the Spirit in the event of New Birth. There is therefore no provision made for the flesh by rationalizing sin in the body, but insisting that the action of the Spirit makes a course of sin impossible for the soul and spirit. Since regeneration extends to the whole man, a man who is born again is enabled and therefore obligated to display the effects of the Spirit in every part of his being. He is therefore responsible for the manner in which he lives. He is responsible for sin, and doubly so, because he has been provided with all the enabling power of the Spirit of GOD to walk in righteousness (I John 2:29).

4. Finally, in this statement CHRIST also insisted that New Birth was a permanent experience of the Spirit.

"**Is born**" renders a perfect tense, meaning, "**has been born.**" This denotes an act in past time, the effects of which continue to the present and remain permanent. In this statement, Nicodemus is being informed that the experience of New Birth is not to be equated with the experiences of the Spirit on the part of Old Testament saints. There was a ministry of the Spirit to Old Testament saints. But it was not New Birth. It was promised to Israel for the future and in relation to the Kingdom (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). But no Old Testament saint had ever entered into this amazing provision. Into the lives of the Old Testament saints, the Spirit came and went. The possibility of departure led David to cry out, "**Take not thy Holy Spirit from me**" (Psalm 51:11). But now, at last, CHRIST announced an experience of the Holy Spirit that would abide. It would never need to be repeated. It would remain permanent.

What amazement this must have produced in the mind of this teacher in Israel. Here is sufficient information concerning this event to solve every conceivable problem for the rule and reign of GOD among men.

The information is sufficiently complete to convince Nicodemus.

- he was convinced that there must be another birth.
- he was convinced that this birth must be from a divine source.
- he was convinced that the Word of GOD and the Spirit of GOD combine to produce this in men.
- he was convinced that the movements of the Spirit in New Birth will never be completely comprehended by men.
- he was convinced that once it is experienced, it will remain a permanent possession.

His mind was satisfied. But there was one thing that remained to trouble him. That was a longing in his heart. How is it possible for this thing to come to pass? By what procedure or process could one enter into this experience? May this be the longing of every heart to whom the information of this amazing miracle of New Birth finally comes.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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