

The New Birth

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CHAPTER NINE

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THE NEW BIRTH

"He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:31-36).

There are some who believe that the words of this passage are the words of John the Baptist. They think that John's message to his disciples goes right on, finally concluding with verse 36. However, there seems to be ample reason for believing that his words end with verse 30, and that the apostle John takes up the thread of discourse in verse 31 and gives his own commentary.

This is supported by the fact that from this point on through the remainder of the Gospel of John, except for one brief reference to John the Baptist in chapter five, CHRIST is the central theme. Since the destination of this book is the Church at large, it is only reasonable to believe that the final message is this: that all who have gone before, - prophets, lawgivers, seers, kings, must decrease as the great Bridegroom increases, filling the eyes, and heart, and affections, and thoughts, and life of the bride.

Thus the old dispensation has receded from view and the voice of her final prophet is still. Now the new dispensation is in procession and the voice that heralds its advance begins to speak. It is the voice of John the apostle. What was old he is now to renew; what was hidden he brings into view; what was partial is now made perfect; he supplements, illuminates, discloses, reveals, explains. This new voice speaks with all the authority of the old, but with a new point of interest to the Church. What the believer would never have known from the message of John the Baptist, he now learns from the apostle John. In this paragraph the believer is not only to learn something of the wonder of the Bridegroom from Heaven, but he also learns something of the preciousness of the New Birth which brings him into this beloved relationship with the Bridegroom.

In this passage of Scripture the words of John the Baptist are realized, "**He must increase, but I**

must decrease."

John the Apostle wrote these words almost 60 years after the ministry of John the Baptist, and almost as many years after the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Through all of those years there was an ever enlarging comprehension of JESUS within his own mind and heart. Because of the experience of New Birth, even with the Lord JESUS CHRIST in glory, this beloved Bridegroom grew in his heart and mind to be everything. Aided by mature reflections, the apostle writes these words as the proper commentary and completion of the final message from the lips of the friend of the Bridegroom.

These words speak essentially and primarily of CHRIST, the great divine Son. Since the believer becomes partaker of the divine nature by means of New Birth, that is, CHRIST is formed within by the operation of the Holy Spirit, there are certain very vivid parallels which will be noted in the case of the believer. These things will mark out the preciousness of the New Birth. But especially should the New Birth lead the bride to see these things in her bridegroom. In this way He will increase.

I. HEAVENLY ORIGIN DETERMINES THE SOVEREIGN POSITION OF THE BRIDEGROOM

"He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all" (John 3:31).

In the statement of this passage the supreme issue then and since is at hand. Concerning CHRIST it is His origin and position. By origin I do not mean beginning in time or the beginning of existence. By origin I do mean the source from whence He came as indicated in this passage. The apostle John uses two phrases to indicate his meaning: "**from above**" and "**from heaven**." These stand in contrast with the phrase "**of the earth**." Being "**from above**" CHRIST is therefore supernatural. And being supernatural He is therefore sovereign. This is the witness of the Scriptures on this point.

1. The contrast between CHRIST and all others is being drawn at this point.

All who have prophesied or in any way have been instrumental in bringing the revelation of GOD to men are separated from CHRIST by infinite distance. He is "**from above**." They are "**of the earth**." Being from above He is therefore up over all, while they are earthly. The infinite distance between the person of CHRIST and the person of the prophets establishes the value of each revelation. For the prophets, there were limitations because they were "**of the earth**" and were therefore "**earthly**."

The prophets had a beginning in time, a beginning of existence, and a beginning that was natural. But for CHRIST this was all different. With Him there were no limitations. Being "**from above**" or "**heaven**" He was therefore supernatural in nature and eternal in time and existence. Since He is supernatural in the absolute sense He is therefore "**above all**." This is John's way of stating the fact that He is sovereign and therefore speaks the full and final word of revelation.

2. It was His origin, then, that was the matter of supreme concern.

He came "**from above**," which John defines when he uses the phrase "**from heaven**." This phraseology was characteristic of the speeches of JESUS (John 6:33, 38), by which He meant that He came from GOD and was GOD (John 6:33, 36, 38; 8:23-24), and by which the people understood Him to mean this very same thing (John 6:41, 42; 8:25). Over this matter CHRIST was in constant controversy with the Jews throughout His entire public ministry. This was the point at issue in chapter 5 (23, 30, 37).

Months later CHRIST faced the Jews again over the same issue (John 6:29, 33, 38, 62). Chapter eight records another open clash over the same problem (18, 23, 58). Again, near the close of His public ministry, the Jews contended with Him over this matter (10:30, 36). At the last, in those dark hours before crucifixion, it remained the same issue (Matthew 26:63-65; John 18:36-37; 19:7, 11).

3. His position was also established by origin.

Since he is from above, that is, from Heaven, then He is "**above all**." This means that He stands as the superior to all other intelligences: angels, spirits, or men. Twice it is asserted that He is up over all, as the original language suggests. This not only asserts the supremacy of His person, but also the sovereignty of His position and therefore the finality of His speech. In no sense is the apostle depreciating the person of those who were the agents of former revelation, nor the value of that revelation. But being "**of the earth**" they were therefore "**earthly**," and could not do more than speak "**of the earth**."

Their message was fragmentary, various, and never finished. This stands at infinite distance from Him whose message was full, finished, and therefore final.

4. This is "The Coming One."

"**He that cometh**" appears twice in this verse and assumes a form that is best translated by the words "**the coming one**." This does not refer to a fact of the past, nor to a fact of the future, but rather to an ever-present and progressive realization of His mission. Throughout the Old Testament He was ever "the coming one." When He came the first time, His coming unfolded into two comings. The first coming was in relation to sin. But His second coming will be apart from sin (Hebrews 9:28). But ever in Himself there will be the present and progressive realization of His fulness to those who are His own.

II. INEFFABLE EXPERIENCE QUALIFIES FOR THE TRUTHFUL MESSAGE OF THE BRIDEGROOM

"And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true" (John 3:32-33).

It is the fact asserted in these verses that guarantees to believers the reliability of the revelation in and through CHRIST. Otherwise, how could believers be sure of His testimony concerning GOD and Heaven, the infinite past and the unending future?

1. His experience of the eternal verities is personal.

He "**hath seen**" the eternal facts, and "**heard**" the divine message. From all eternity as the second person of the Godhead He "**was with God**" (John 1:1-2).

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18).

What no man has ever seen, the eternal Son has seen. He was not only "**with God**," face to face with the Father, but also on the same level and in intimate fellowship. This fellowship was more than being in the presence of the Father. It reached beyond this to identity of essence, and the intimacy of experience must be described as an ever existing one: vital, warm, tender, "**in the bosom of the Father**." Only He is properly qualified to bear testimony of GOD.

But His message is more than a testimony of His experience. For in addition to experience, He "**heard**" the message that became the substance of His mission. While "**being in the form of God**" (Philippians 2:6), He was invested with the eternal evangel for men.

"For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that this commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:49-50).

Thus, in a way beyond the complete comprehension of men He is the eternal "**Word**." He not only incorporates within Himself personal experience as GOD, but also as a counterpart He gives public expression of the very words of GOD.

2. His testimony is therefore enduring.

The tense of the verb in the phrase, "**that he testifieth**," indicates that this testimony is continuous. It "**began to be spoken by the Lord**" (Hebrews 2:3), when He was made flesh and dwelt among us. But it has continued to be spoken through the Bride with whom He has joined Himself in New Birth. Only those who are bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh, and with whom He has entered into the intimacy of vital relation can recognize His voice. The bride heard His voice in those early days, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit wrote it down. It is the New Testament records. The bride has continued to hear His voice through those records, and through her ministry, the great Bridegroom continues to bear testimony.

3. But the general response in those early days and since has been the rejection of His testimony.

For "**no man receiveth his testimony**" (32). It is not difficult to verify the use of this superlative expression. The vast host of the world, even among those who have had opportunity to hear this testimony, has not received it. This was true in the day that John wrote his Gospel. It has been true down across the intervening years to the present. As one views the population of the world today, and realizes how comparatively few there are who make any profession of faith, again he must agree with John. Realizing that within the sphere of profession an apostasy is on, and few there be in relation to the whole who genuinely receive His testimony, it must be agreed that the

statement of John is generally true. But this form of expression is characteristic of John. He used in it chapter one (11-12). Now he has used it again. It provides a vivid general background for the more specific statement he is to make.

4. There is a specific response to His testimony which shines like a brilliant light against the dark background.

"He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true" (John 3:33). Though there are few in comparison to all who have received this testimony, there are many when viewed as a group in terms of itself. This is the bride of CHRIST. In comparison with all, the bride must be the select one from among the many. Upon her He set His affections. And in true bridal fashion she has recognized the genuineness of His profession of love and has received His testimony. Yielding herself to Him, the Holy Spirit has fashioned her for Him by New Birth. Every member of the bride by reception of His testimony has thus set his seal of approval upon that testimony to the effect that GOD is true. Later JESUS had to say, **"My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he has seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true"** (John 7:16-18).

Therefore, those who believe the testimony of CHRIST learn that He received it from the Father. This is their seal of approval that GOD is true and that the one whom He sent is true.

III. DIVINE FULNESS GUARANTEES THE PERFECT REVELATION OF THE BRIDEGROOM

"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John 3:34).

The thread of thought continues on in verse 34. This is indicated by the logical connection with which verse 34 begins. Ineffable experience and infinite message do not explain the relation of revelation to divine essence. There is more on this same theme that must be said to guarantee to believers that the final revelation of GOD is in CHRIST.

1. The contrast between that long line of Old Testament prophets, through whom the revelation of the former economy came, and CHRIST is clearly implied.

For their task from time to time, the Spirit of GOD came upon them. For the ministry of the moment, the Spirit was measured out to them in sufficient quality and power to enable them to perform their task perfectly. But the revelation came in fragments, and it came in various ways. Each fragment was but a small portion of the whole, and each fragment added something to the portion preceding. But in all the fragments added together there was nothing to approach the whole of revelation. It always fell short of the fulness of GOD, because in these agents of revelation, to no one of them, nor to all combined, was the fulness of the spirit ever measured out.

2. But to CHRIST the fulness of the Spirit was given, "for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."

This is evident from the moment of His incarnation. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:35). From the beginning He was full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1). Thus in every detail of his ministry He was led of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1). In the power of the Spirit He performed every deed and spoke every word (Luke 4:14). At last He offered Himself in sacrifice to GOD through the eternal Spirit (Hebrews 9:14), and by that same Spirit was raised from the dead (Romans 8:11).

It is therefore correct to understand that in the person of the Holy Spirit "**it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell**" (Colossians 1:19). "**For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily**" (Colossians 2:9). In that in Him all fulness dwells, He is therefore "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), and GOD's full and final message to men. Through Him, therefore, the fulness of the Spirit without limit or measure has been given to His own.

3. This means that the final revelation in CHRIST continues to speak to men.

"**For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God**" (34). At the close of His earthly ministry, while closeted with the Father in prayer, He said, "**I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world**" (17:6); "**I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me**" (17:8); "**I have given them thy word**" (17:14); "**I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it**" (17:26). "**As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world**" (17:18).

Through them, His bride, He continues to speak. Not only is this true in the message of the New Testament, but also in some sense it is true in the person of the bride who by New Birth is made full in Him (Colossians 2:10).

IV. INFINITE LOVABLENESS PROVIDES FOR THE UNIVERSAL AUTHORITY OF THE BRIDEGROOM

"**The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand**" (John 3:35).

In logical progression, in the unfolding of the greatness of the Bridegroom, the apostle John has passed from origin as coming from Heaven to experience of divine realities in Heaven; from experience of divine realities in Heaven to fulness of divine nature; and now he moves from fulness of divine nature, in that in Him there has been poured the fulness of the nature and power of the Holy Spirit, to infinite lovableness. In origin from Heaven, and in experience and fulness, there is every quality to produce attractiveness to the Father. But there is more. In these qualities lie the grounds for investing the Son with universal authority.

1. The affection of the Father for the Son is infinite in dimension and eternal in duration. And this love grows out of two things.

On the one hand He loves Him for what He is in His own self. That is what John means when he says, "**The Father loveth the Son.**" In this place the word for love lays emphasis upon the value of this Son. In Him all fulness dwells. Quantitatively and qualitatively every attribute of GOD is

in the Son. To the Father nothing surpasses in value the infinite riches of the fulness of GOD. Therefore twice during the public ministry of CHRIST the Father made public declaration that **"This is my beloved Son"** (Matthew 3:17; Luke 9:35).

On the other hand, however, the Father loves the Son for what He does. CHRIST declared this was so upon a later occasion. **"For the Father loveth the Son"** (John 5:20). He used a word for love that emphasizes the attractiveness of the Son. In its context the Son is described as doing the same things as the Father. In an effort to establish His identity with the Jews on the basis of His deeds, JESUS said, **"When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him"** (John 8:28-29). **"Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again"** (John 10:17).

A love for such a person must be enduring, even as it is described in both instances. On the grounds of infinite worth the Father loves and keeps on loving the Son. The present tense of the verb is used in this passage (3:35), for no other would suffice. With GOD there is no past and no future. With Him it is one eternal present. Moreover the same tense of the verb is used in the second passage (5:20). As long as CHRIST is the eternal Son, there will be an eternal exhibition of His glory in deeds that will cast about him a halo of attractiveness that will arouse the abiding warmth of the Father's eternal love.

*2. The authority of the Father is therefore invested in the Son, making Him the final court of appeal in the whole universe, in that He **"hath given all things into his hand"** (3:35).*

The attractiveness of the actions of the Son induces the Father to **"shew him all things that himself doeth"** (John 5:20). But it is evaluation of the attributes of the Son that disposes the Father to give **"all things into his hand"** (3:35). This means that universal authority rests in the hands of one who is inherently capable of exercising this authority.

Since the Son is the eternal GOD, the same yesterday, and today, and forever, there is no higher court of appeal. There is nothing beyond. CHRIST is the final voice of authority, absolutely and universally sovereign. In His person there is a full and final revelation of GOD. In His actions there is a full and finished redemption. In His words there is a flashing of light and a voice of appeal to the bride. In Him she has found the one who is infinitely lovable and to whom she may tenderly entrust herself with no fear for the future.

V. HUMAN RESPONSE TO THE SON DECIDES THE FINAL AND ETERNAL DESTINY OF MEN

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 5:36).

With irresistible logic John the apostle now moves to the issues. These center in human responsibility toward the Son. Since there is no throne of authority above His; since there is no source of life beyond Him; then the tides of fortune, the turn of destiny, must be decided in response to Him. Contrary to the conclusions of the unenlightened mind, no man is the master of

his fate. There are only two possible issues, and these do not lie within the power of any man to create. All he may do is choose between them. Even here his choice is limited. It is narrowed down to one thing, namely, his response to a Person, and the Person, the One who has been invested by the Father with universal and sovereign authority.

1. To Him a man may make a positive response by receiving Him in faith.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." That John chose to use the word **"believe"** in the present tense is not without point. Genuine faith is ever the perpetual condition of life. It signifies a progressive mental assent to the goodness of CHRIST, a continuing spiritual appropriation of His benefits, and an abiding personal commitment to Him. The Spirit of GOD must have intended to emphasize this living quality in the repetition of this word in the present tense (3:15, 16, 18, 36).

In abiding faith there is also incontrovertible evidence of new life. Even in this verse faith and life are described as running parallel. He who is believing is having life. Later, in his first epistle John made it even clearer. **"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is (has been) born of God"** (5:1). The need for evidence of life was one reason for writing the first epistle. **"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life"** (I John 5:13). This conviction would serve as further encouragement to continue in faith. So John added, **"And that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God"** (I John 5:13b).

The essence of eternal life is the possession of the Son of GOD. For **"this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life"** (I John 5:11-12). It is the miracle of regeneration that brings one into possession of the Son by the operation of the Spirit. It is this that settles the destiny of the human soul in a condition of existence that is lived in eternal fellowship with GOD.

2. To the eternal Son, a man may make a negative response by rejecting Him.

"He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (3:36). Even though it may appear to be so in the English, the Greek does not describe this response as any mere passive, neutral movement of the soul. It describes a positive act of criminal disobedience. In this instance the present tense indicates that it is a constant state of criminal disobedience. Luke used this word to describe the implacable hatred of the Jews in response to the ministry of Paul in Iconium (Acts 14:2). Peter used the same word to describe the response of the people to the preaching of Noah before the flood (I Peter 3:20).

The issue for such people is not a matter of choice.

But it is a result of choice. They did not choose death. They chose to reject the Son. But in rejecting the Son it is determined that they shall not see life to experience it in any respect. Already the wrath of GOD is resting upon them. **"Being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them"** (Ephesians 4:18), they are **"without Christ . . . having no hope"** (Ephesians 2:12), and are **"by nature the children of wrath"** (Ephesians 2:3).

Thus are the eternal destinies of men decided.

For an apparent, harmless rejection of the Son of GOD, there is the awful present of abiding under the wrath of GOD with the prospect of the nameless agonies of the unending future. In the issue of rejection alone can the enormity of the crime be calculated. For the exercise of Faith in reception there is the enjoyment of life beginning with the experience of New Birth and extending through the ceaseless rolling of the ages.

In the experience of the Bride, the glorious Bridegroom will ever increase. She will grow in comprehension of His heavenly origin as coming to earth from Heaven. There will be ever enlarging horizons of His ineffable experience, and ever deepening understanding of His divine fulness.

As ever increasing visions of His infinite loveliness unfold before her eyes, unspeakable gratitude will fill her heart, that "**God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**" (II Corinthians 4:6).

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