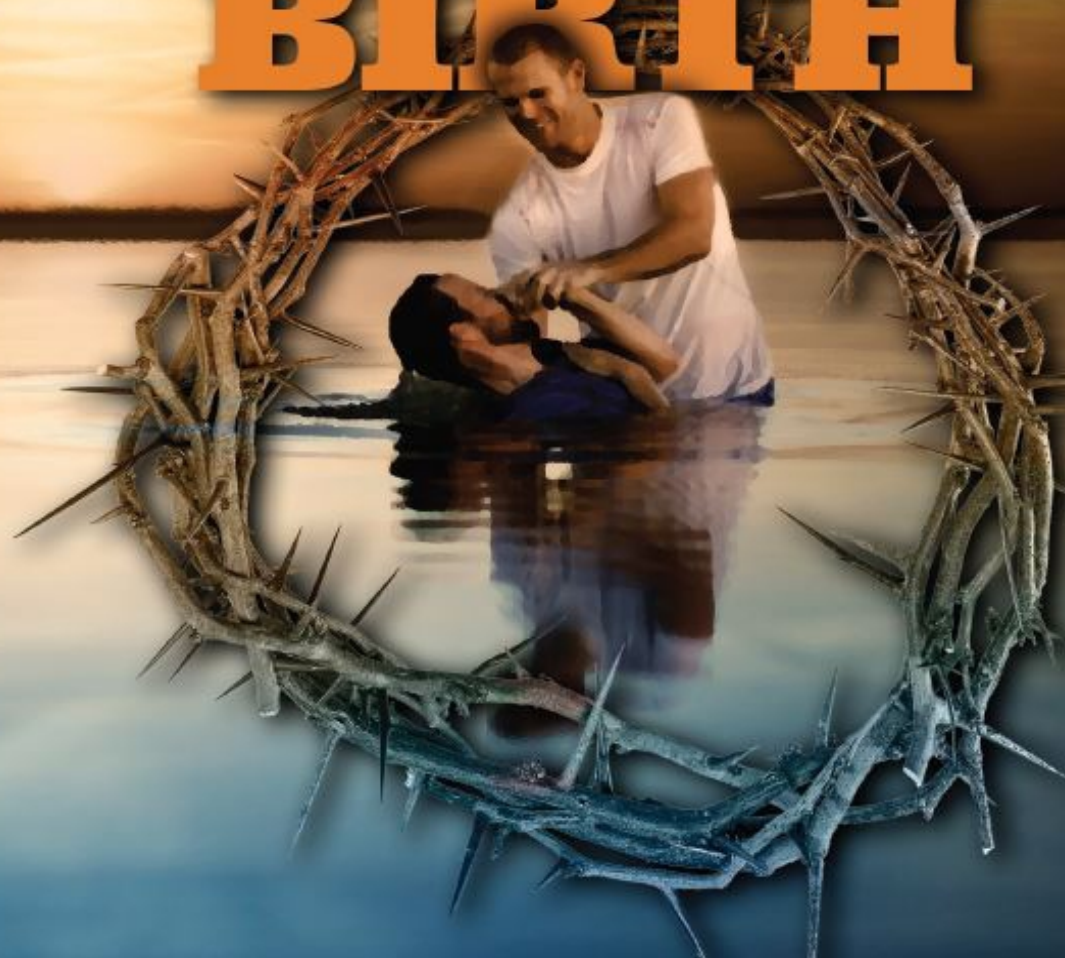


The **NEW BIRTH**

WATER BAPTISM STANDS BETWEEN

SINNER → BEING SAVED	Mark 16:16
SINNER → THE KINGDOM OF GOD	John 3:3-5
SINNER → REMISSION OF SINS	Acts 2:38
SINNER → WASHING SINS AWAY	Acts 22:16
SINNER → CALLING ON THE LORD	Acts 22:16
SINNER → THE DEATH OF CHRIST	Romans 6:3
SINNER → BURIED WITH CHRIST	Romans 6:4
SINNER → RAISED WITH CHRIST	Romans 6:4
SINNER → NEWNESS OF LIFE	Romans 6:4
SINNER → DEATH & RESURRECTION	Romans 6:5
SINNER → BODY OF SIN DESTROYED	Romans 6:6
SINNER → DEAD TO SIN	Romans 6:7-12
SINNER → FREE FROM SIN	Romans 6:17-18
SINNER → A CHILD OF GOD	Galatians 3:26-27
SINNER → PUTTING ON CHRIST	Galatians 3:26-27
SINNER → BEING IN CHRIST	Galatians 3:27
SINNER → CHRIST'S BLOOD	Ephesians 2:12-13
SINNER → CLEANSING	Ephesians 5:26
SINNER → SANCTIFICATION	Ephesians 5:26
SINNER → PUTTING OFF SINS	Colossians 2:11-12
SINNER → THE OPERATION OF GOD	Colossians 2:11-12
SINNER → BODY OF CHRIST	1 Corinthians 12:13
SINNER → NEW CREATURE IN CHRIST	2 Corinthians 5:17
SINNER → SALVATION	1 Peter 3:21
SINNER → GOOD CONSCIENCE	1 Peter 3:21

**DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?
LET'S TALK ABOUT IT.**



A Study of John 3:1-8

"Except a man be born again... born of water and of the Spirit"

PERRY B. COTHAM

1912 – 2013

THE NEW BIRTH

or

HOW AND WHEN IS ONE BORN AGAIN?

(Second Edition)

by

Perry B. Cotham

1912 – 2013

John 3:1-8

A Discussion of —

The Conversation of Christ with Nicodemus 3

The New Birth Explained and Examples 13

The Operation of the Holy Spirit in Conversion 20

FOREWORD

In offering this tract to the public, I do so with a keen desire that a sincere study of its contents may lead some soul to see the simplicity of the Lord’s teaching, and to the enjoyment of “all spiritual blessings” in Christ Jesus.

These Bible truths have been preached many times by gospel preachers for many years; I claim nothing new but the arrangement. It is an humble effort on my part to teach the truth.

To my readers, I offer this suggestion: This tract has been published to be used in teaching the truth on this important Bible subject. If you believe that it will do good whenever and wherever it is read, that it will enlighten many on this long-misunderstood Bible theme, then why not order a number of copies and distribute them?

— *THE AUTHOR*

This booklet is not to be sold

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THE NEW BIRTH

Perry B. Cotham

CHAPTER ONE

One “*born of water and of the Spirit*” is a penitent believer immersed in water and brought forth therefrom according to the teaching of the Spirit. When we are thus baptized we enter into the kingdom of God. One hears the voice of the Spirit speaking through inspired men, receives that word into the heart and obeys it, and is born of the Spirit, is “born of water and of the Spirit.”

The Text Examined – Christ and Nicodemus John 3:1-8

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him. How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again. 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.”

There are many hurtful errors taught in connection with the subject of the new birth. To many people, it is a deep mystery; a

theme that can neither be explained nor understood. Let us give the language of the Bible on this subject a thoughtful study and learn what the new birth is. Let us take the language of John 3 and study it carefully; study it in connection with other scriptures on the same subject and see if there is anything so difficult about it.

The Man Nicodemus

“*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*” Is there anything hard to understand about this verse? I think not. “*There was a man*” – we can understand that. His name was “*Nicodemus*” – this is easy to understand. He was a “*Pharisee*” – this refers to his religious belief. In his day there was a religious sect known as the Pharisees, and he was a member of it (Acts 23:7). Then, too, he was “*a ruler of the Jews.*” This means that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court, a council made up of seventy-one men, whose purpose it was to try people who had violated the Law. This suggests that he was a man of some reputation and ability among the Jews. His position must have been one of honor and responsibility. By John’s references to him later (John 7:50-52; 19:39), he must have been a very kind man, willing to investigate, and these are commendable traits of character.

Nicodemus “*came to Jesus by night.*” Why, we do not know; the Bible does not say. The truth Jesus gave him that night is the important thing for us to consider. When he came to Jesus, he opened the conversation by saying: “*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*” Whether Nicodemus was truly honest in this noble confession or using a little flattery to get on the good side of Jesus, we do not know. Anyway, he expressed a vital truth concerning the miracles of Jesus. They were to convince any honest person that God was with Christ. But Jesus passed by his compliments and went directly to the thing Nicodemus had in mind; namely, entering the kingdom of God. Since Jesus “*knew what was in man*” (John 2:24-25), He knew what Nicodemus had in mind, therefore, went directly to the subject of how to become a citizen of the kingdom. “*Jesus answered and said unto him. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of god.*”

The thought of the Saviour's language is this: "Nicodemus, the miracles do testify of me, but if you think because you are a Jew and a prominent man among them that you are entitled to a place in my earthly kingdom when it is established, you have it all wrong. The kingdom that I am soon to inaugurate is not an earthly, fleshly kingdom, and YOU will have to be BORN AGAIN to get into it. Your birthright will give you no membership in the kingdom soon to be established."

The Kingdom Of God

By the expression, "*the kingdom of God*," Christ meant the church – that spiritual institution soon to be set up by the Lord among them. The "church" and the "kingdom" mean one and the same thing (Matt. 16:18-20; Heb. 12:22-23, 28).

A fleshly birth introduced Nicodemus into the old Jewish kingdom, a fleshly kingdom; but the Lord's kingdom was to be a spiritual kingdom, and it would take a new birth to put him into this kingdom. One cannot enter this kingdom, the church, unless he is born again, for the condition of entrance as given by Jesus is that "you must be born again." The Jews expected the Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom, one like David's, and reign on the earth as the king; this is the kind of kingdom Nicodemus had in mind.

By the expression, "*see the kingdom of God*," Jesus meant not to see with the natural eye, but to experience or enjoy the blessings of the Lord's kingdom by entering into it.

The Kingdom Established

The kingdom was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. It is NOW in existence and Christ is reigning in Heaven as "*King of kings and Lord of lords*" (cf. Mark 9:1; Acts 1:6-8; Acts 2; Dan. 7:13-14; 1 Cor. 15:25-26; Rev. 14:14; Heb. 12:28). Some today claim that the kingdom has not been established. If so, the new birth is not a reality; people are not being born again. But Paul wrote to people who had been "*translated into the kingdom*" (Col. 1:13), and John said he was a brother "*in the kingdom*" (Rev. 1:9). The kingdom was in existence in the days of the apostles, and

people were members of it. The kingdom is now in existence, and men and women are entering into it.

This refutes the theory that there is no kingdom in existence now and will not be until Christ comes again.

The New Birth A Necessity

Since we must be born again to enter into the kingdom, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the new birth. No one will ever be in the kingdom until he has been born again, for this is the ONLY way to enter into it. It is not that you should be born again, or that it would be better for you if you were born again, but you MUST be born again. The rich and the poor, the high and the low, the educated and the uneducated – all alike, must be born again or find no place in the kingdom of God. This subject is one of vital importance!

What The New Birth Is

"*Born again*" is figurative language. There is a similarity in some respects to a natural birth. Since one enters into new life in a new realm, or becomes a new creature spiritually, this process is called a birth. In other places in the Bible the change is called "*conversion*," "*creation*," "*forgiveness of sins*," etc. (Matt. 18:3; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 2:13; Eph. 2:10). To be saved or to become a Christian, is what Jesus meant by being "born again."

The language of Jesus puzzled Nicodemus. He could not understand how it was possible for an old man, such as he, to experience another physical birth. Hence, he said: "*how can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*" Jesus explained by saying: "*except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*" He told Nicodemus what the new birth was – HOW it could be possible. (In verse three Jesus expresses the NECESSITY of the new birth; in verse five He tells of what it CONSISTS). It is a birth of "water" and of "the Spirit." There are not two births – only one, but a man must be born both of "water" and of "the Spirit" to be born again.

Born Of Water

What does “*born of water and of the Spirit*” mean? Let us take the first: “born of water” – what does this mean? The word “water” means water. If not, why not? The way of entering the kingdom of God may be given under the figure of a birth, but that does not mean that the word “water” is figurative. The words “water” and “Spirit” are used literally, they mean what they say – water and Spirit. If “water” does not mean water, then does “Spirit” mean Spirit?

Nearly all scholars understand the word “water” to refer to baptism. This is correct. In fact, BAPTISM IS THE ONLY THING TO WHICH IT CAN REFER! It is the only religious act pertaining to salvation in which water is used. In the Christian system water is NEVER used in any ordinance or ceremony except in the act of baptism. Then this makes baptism necessary to the obtaining of all blessings in the kingdom, and that, by the authority of Jesus Christ, the highest authority in Heaven and earth. Also, this makes the ACT of baptism immersion, a burial and a resurrection (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). One is dipped in, and comes forth out of the water. Therefore, the expression, “*born of water*” may be applied to baptism. But a thing cannot be born of that which is smaller than itself. So, how can a man be born of a spoonful of water? The man who has had water sprinkled or poured upon him cannot truthfully say he has been BURIED with Christ in baptism. The man who has not been immersed (born of water) is not in the kingdom, for this is a part of the new birth, and one must be “born again” to get into the kingdom.

Paul used a similar expression in referring to the resurrection of Christ. He said Christ was “*the firstborn from the dead*” (Col. 1:18). Christ was buried in the grave and from it he came forth – hence, “born from the dead.” He was the first to come from the grave to die no more and is, therefore, “the FIRST-born from the dead.” If to arise from the grave means to be born from the dead, then the burying in water and the arising therefrom is a birth of water. It cannot mean sprinkling or pouring water ON a person. Hence, one must be BURIED with Christ in BAPTISM that he may be born of water.

To be born of water and to be immersed and raised to walk in “*newness of life*” are identical. “*Born of water and of the Spirit*” in John 3:5 means baptism!

The reason some say that the word “water” does not mean water is because it would make baptism essential to salvation, and they think baptism is not a condition of pardon.

According to Wm. Wall, a reliable church historian, John Calvin was the first man to ever say that “born of water” in John 3:5 did not mean baptism, and Calvin confessed that his interpretation was a new one.

“There is not one Christian writer of any antiquity in any language but what understands it of baptism. And if it be not so understood, it is difficult to give an account how a person is born of water, any more than of wood.” *Wall’s History of Infant Baptism*, Vol. 1, p. 92.

“All the ancient Christians (without the exception of one man) do understand that rule of our Saviour, John 3:5. VERILY, VERILY, I SAY UNTO THEE, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN OF WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT, HE CANNOT ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD; of baptism. I had occasion in the First part to bring a great many instances of their sayings: where all that mention that text, from Justin Martyr down to St. Austin, do so apply it: and many more might be brought. I believe Calvin was the first that ever denied this place to mean baptism. He gives another interpretation, which he confesses to be new.” *Ibid.*, p. 443.

Therefore, it may be regarded as a settled fact that from the days of Christ to the time of Calvin, to be “born of water,” when referred to by all writers, meant to be baptized.

Many quibbles have been made by people in order to get around the obvious teaching of Jesus. Some say the word “water” means the “word,” others tell us it means “grace” or “Spirit,” and others say, “I do not know what it means, but I know it does not mean water.” A common error is the idea that the “birth of water” occurs at the natural birth, and the “birth of the Spirit” is the second birth. But this theory does violence to the language of Jesus. Christ said: “*except a MAN be born again, born of WATER AND of the Spirit, he – the man already born physically – cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*” The natural birth is NOT the birth of water in John 3:5. Nicodemus had already been born of fleshly parents – natural birth – and now Christ tells him he must be born again, not physically, but

of water AND of the Spirit (both), in order to become a citizen of the kingdom of God.

Born Of The Spirit

What does the phrase, “*of the Spirit,*” mean? This refers to the Holy Spirit. When one becomes a Christian it is according to the Spirit’s instruction. One is baptized according to the teaching of the Spirit after he has been made a believer by hearing the Spirit’s message, the word of truth, as contained in the New Testament. Hence, one “*born of water and of the Spirit*” is a penitent believer immersed in water and brought forth therefrom according to the teaching of the Spirit. When we are thus baptized we enter into the kingdom of God. One hears the voice of the Spirit speaking through inspired men, receives that word into the heart and obeys it, and is born of the Spirit, is “born of water and of the Spirit.” (The work of the Holy Spirit in conversion will be noticed more fully later).

The Human Spirit Begotten By The Holy Spirit

“*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*” Here Christ is still trying to convince Nicodemus that the “new birth” is not a “fleshly birth.” Christ was not talking about a birth of the flesh, a natural birth. He had in mind a spiritual birth. Watch carefully the reading: “that which is born of the Spirit” (capital S) “is spirit” (small s) – meaning, that which is born (begotten) of the Holy Spirit is the human spirit. It is an inward or spiritual change that takes place. The mind is renewed. The flesh remains the same; our bodies will not be changed until the resurrection (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15).

Consequently, Christ said: “*Marvel not (do not be surprised) that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again*” (John 3:7). The trouble with this ruler of Israel was his failure to realize the existence of the “inner man” dwelling in the body. This is the subject of the change contemplated by the new birth.¹ The SPIRIT of man is born anew.

¹It has been argued that the entire man (body included) participates in the new birth, and that it is not completed until the entire man has participated. This is true. The BODY is immersed in water, yet it is the changed spirit in man obeying

the command of the Lord in this overt physical act. Technically speaking, baptism is not just a mere physical act. If this were so, to force a man under the water and bring him out would constitute baptism. (A good way to baptize some if this is all it takes). But scriptural baptism requires faith and repentance on the part of the one baptized. (This is the reason a baby cannot be scripturally baptized; the infant is lacking in the prerequisites of baptism). It is the spirit of man (the inner man) that hears the Gospel, believes, and turns to God with a sincere desire to serve Him. Two things are accomplished: (1) The mind is renewed, the heart is changed, faith is produced, and (2) the individual is immersed – baptized into Christ.

After the spirit of man has been changed by the Holy Spirit – the message of the Spirit containing God’s thoughts and ideas – it should maintain the mastery over the body, consecrating it to divine service. The converted man should bring his body into subjection – use it as a holy instrument to the glory of God (1 Cor. 9:27; 1 Cor. 6:15,20; Rom. 12:1; Rom. 6:12-13, 19; Rom. 8:12-13; Matt. 15:18-20).

The Wind – An Illustration

Jesus gave this illustration: “*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.*”

This is the hard verse of the whole story. It is thought to teach the direct, incomprehensible, mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion, and that the new birth is a deep mystery, a thing brought about all of a sudden in some way unknown, and the experience of it is better felt than told.

Please note that Jesus did NOT say: “So is the DIRECT OPERATION of the Spirit.” The comparison is between “hearing the wind” and “hearing the Spirit.” One must HEAR the Spirit.

Jesus did not use the illustration concerning the wind to give an example of the MYSTERY of the new birth, or to show that it is brought about in some incomprehensible manner, but to point out that we are “born of the Spirit” by HEARING the Spirit’s message. Our Lord often used things in nature to teach something concerning the kingdom. The wind cannot be seen, yet we HEAR its sound and

we see the effects of it. This is true of the Holy Spirit. We HEAR the Holy Spirit – hear Him as He speaks through inspired men. We see the effects of the Spirit’s message as it produces obedience in man.

Before the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, many things concerning the Spirit were not known; now they have been explained. Hence, Nicodemus did not know where the Spirit cometh or goeth; we do today. The Holy Spirit came to the apostles (John 14:16-17; 16:7-14; Acts 2:1-4), and they spake “*as the Spirit gave them utterance*” (Acts 2:4). The people heard the apostles – HEARD THE SPIRIT SPEAK THROUGH THE APOSTLES – and this message, when believed and obeyed, produced the new birth. Then the real point of the comparison is simply this: Just as we hear the sound of the wind, we hear the voice of the Spirit speaking through the apostles, and a man is born again by HEARING and OBEYING the voice of the Spirit.² There is nothing mysterious or miraculous about it.

² Some claim that the Greek word “*pneuma*”, translated “wind” in John 3:8, should be translated “Spirit.” The word “Spirit” is given in the footnote of the American Standard Version. This word is found many times in the New Testament, and in practically all instances it is rendered “Spirit,” or the equivalent, “Ghost.” There is not another case in all the New Testament where the word is rendered “wind.” (The word is found in the Greek New Testament 386 times, and 384 times it is rendered into English either by the word “Spirit” or “Ghost,” once by the word “life” and here, “wind.”) By the word “*pneuma*” translated “Spirit,” the correct meaning of the verse would be: “The Spirit breathes (speaks) where he pleases, and you hear his voice, but cannot tell where the Spirit comes or where he goes (but you can HEAR him); so (an adverb, meaning: In this way, or in such a manner: that is, by HEARING the voice of the Spirit) is every one (born) that is born of the Spirit.” (This is the commonly accepted meaning of this passage of Scripture.)

But if the word in the original, here rendered “wind,” should be translated “Spirit,” the thought would not be changed. We would then have a literal statement of the fact that BY HEARING THE SPIRIT’S MESSAGE WE ARE BORN (BEGOTTEN) OF THE SPIRIT (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 5:1; Rom. 10:17); now we have an illustration of exactly the same idea. It would

still be the spirit of man, not his body, begotten by HEARING the voice of the Spirit, the words of the New Testament: and by HEARING Him, faith is produced in the heart.

Hence, people are “born again” today by hearing, believing, and obeying the Spirit’s teaching. This is the only way the Spirit brings about the new birth. This is the way people were “born again” in the days of the Apostles. (I will refer you to a number of cases of conversion later). The word of God was first spoken by the Spirit through inspired men, and afterwards written down by men guided by the Spirit. Now, we have the inspired BOOK. We hear the Spirit today when we hear the Gospel message. Thus we see why this change in man resulting from hearing, believing, and obeying the truth, is represented as a birth of the Spirit.

A New Life Begins

A birth means a translation, a change of state or relationship, and results in a new life in a new realm. By the new birth one is translated into a new environment.

When does this new life begin? Where is that realm?

“*Therefore if any man be IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATURE; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*” (2 Cor. 5:17). Since we are new creatures in Christ, we enter into the new life when we enter into Christ.

But, when does one enter into Christ?

“*Know ye not, that so many of us as were BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in NEWNESS OF LIFE*” (Rom. 6:3-4). “*For as many of you as have been BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST, have put on Christ*” (Gal. 3:27). The man IN CHRIST is born again.

Therefore, baptism is a part of the new birth.³ One is not a “new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17) – born again – until he gets “into Christ,” but according to the Bible, one is not “in Christ” until he has been baptized into Him (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). The new birth translates one from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ where he obtains the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14).

³ The expression, “the WASHING OF REGENERATION,” shows that baptism is a part of the new birth (Titus 3:5). “The washing of regeneration” – the washing that pertains to or is connected with regeneration – is admitted by all scholars to refer to baptism. (See Acts 22:16; 2:38; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:22; 1 Cor. 6:11). It will be noticed from Rom. 6:4 that one is buried with Christ in baptism; and not only this, he is raised from the watery grave to “walk in newness of life.” If one is saved before he is baptized, why is it that he does not walk in “newness of life” until after he is baptized? Hence, “baptism doth also NOW SAVE US” (1 Peter 3:21).

This verse also teaches that baptism is NOT a work of righteousness – man’s righteousness. It is placed in contrast to self-righteousness. Baptism is a work of God’s righteousness, not our righteousness (cf. Matt. 3:15; Rom. 1:16-17; 10:1-3; Acts 10:34-35; Psa. 119:172). Too, we see how we are saved by grace. Titus 3:6-7 is in perfect accord with Eph. 2:8-9. In being baptized, we are saved by grace.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW BIRTH EXPLAINED

I. The Great Commission of Christ Explains the New Birth

During the Lord’s personal ministry He taught in figures, symbols, and parables; but after His resurrection He gave plain commands. Before He went back to Heaven, He said to his apostles: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). In stating the terms of salvation upon this occasion, He stated exactly the same truth that He had announced to Nicodemus early in His public ministry, only this time, in plain commandments. Mark 16:16 and John 3:5 are identical in their teaching – they both mean exactly the same thing. For the sinner today to obtain salvation, he MUST believe AND be baptized.

After the church was established, the apostles always considered the person who had believed and had been baptized a Christian.

Believe – Begotten Of God

In every natural birth there must be the father who does the “begetting.” In order to have a natural birth, two things are necessary: (1) begetting, and (2) birth, or deliverance. In the spiritual realm, we are “begotten” of God, our Father, through the Gospel, the Spirit’s message; then, after being “begotten” or made a believer, we are “born” of water (immersed) according to the teaching given by the Spirit.

Note these scriptures which show we are begotten by the Father through the word:

1. “Of his (God’s) own will begat he us WITH THE WORD OF TRUTH, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures” (James 1:18).

2. “Being born again” (having been BEGOTTEN AGAIN – ASV), “not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, BY THE WORD OF GOD, which liveth and abideth forever. ... And THIS IS THE WORD WHICH BY THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED UNTO YOU” (1 Peter 1:23, 25).

3. “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have BEGOTTEN YOU THROUGH THE GOSPEL” (1 Cor. 4:15). This means: “have made you believers by preaching the gospel to you.”

4. “The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11).

But the Holy Spirit gave the word of God through inspired men. Therefore, when one is begotten by the word in believing the Gospel, it may also be said to have been done by the Holy Spirit. “The WORDS I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). To be begotten and to believe are one and the same thing. “Whosoever BELIEVETH that Jesus is the Christ is BEGOTTEN OF GOD” (1 John 5:1, ASV) The word (seed) is planted in the heart by hearing. Faith comes by hearing God’s word (Rom. 10:17). Being begotten by the Spirit through the word is necessary to being born again.

How is a person begotten by the Spirit?

By hearing the Spirit’s voice – the Spirit’s message.

In Paul's sermon at Antioch in Pisidia, he spoke of *"the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day"* (Acts 13:27). These people heard the prophets; they heard the VOICES of the prophets. How? By hearing the law read aloud every Sabbath day in their synagogues – by hearing the WRITINGS of the prophets. And so today we hear the voice of the Spirit by hearing the word of God – the word given by the Spirit through inspired men. This is the way we hear the Spirit today, and this is the only way we hear His voice.

The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles to guide them into all truth, and when they preached, it was the Spirit's message. The people heard and believed – were begotten; and in obedience to the Spirit's command, they were baptized (immersed), and thus became the children of God. *"Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized"* (Acts 18:8).

After one has been begotten, he may then be born. *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"* – that is, of the will of God (John 1:11-13). When one believes, he has the power (the right or privilege) to BECOME a son. A person does not become a child of God (saved) the very MOMENT he believes. If he were THEN a son, power could not be given him TO BECOME A SON! We are not saved by "faith only" (James 2:24). The believer becomes a son when his faith, working by love, leads him to repent and be baptized as the Holy Spirit commands (Acts 2:38; Gal. 5:6; 3:26-27; John 14:15; John 12:42-43).

So, when one believes with the heart that Jesus is the Son of God, he is begotten of God; and when he is baptized (immersed in water according to the Spirit's teaching), he is then *"born of water and of the Spirit."* The new birth is then completed and the individual is in the family of God.

II. The New Birth Is Explained in Acts of the Apostles

The apostles of Christ explained the new birth in a very simple way in their preaching. When we study the cases of conversion under the guidance of the apostles, we learn exactly what the new birth is. One thing is worthy of note concerning their preaching; namely,

when they told sinners what to do to be saved, they NEVER said: "Ye must be born again;" but they preached its equivalent. People were told in PLAIN LANGUAGE how to enter the kingdom. Therefore, the best way to find the new birth explained, is to go to the divine records in the book of Acts and learn what sinners did under the preaching of the apostles.

(1) The Three Thousand On Pentecost

The first example is on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit, on this occasion, came upon the apostles to guide them into all truth, as the Saviour had promised (John 14:16-17,26; 15:26-27; 16:7-13; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4). On this day people were convicted – "pricked in their heart." What did the work? The Holy Spirit, but not in a direct manner. The Bible says, *"When they HEARD THIS they were PRICKED in their heart"* (Acts 2:37). Not when they FELT this, but "WHEN THEY HEARD THIS." The Spirit, by the words preached by Peter, made believers out of them – convinced them that they had taken the Christ and killed Him, and that God had raised Him from the dead. Hence, as believers, they cried out, *"men and brethren, what shall we do?"* What were they told to do? Now Peter did not tell them to be born again. He said: *"REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"* (Acts 2:38). He told them in PLAIN LANGUAGE what to do to enter the kingdom of God. Three thousand obeyed and were saved. *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls"* (Acts 2:41). The chapter closes by saying: *"And the Lord ADDED TO THE CHURCH daily such as should be saved"* (Acts 2:47).

Here is the new birth explained. The church (kingdom) is now established, and people are told exactly how to enter into it. The second chapter of Acts is the best commentary ever written on John 3:5!

ALL COULD have been saved that day, and WOULD HAVE BEEN, had they done what the three thousand did. There was no direct operation of the Spirit upon the sinners. The people did not receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit; it came to the apostles. The

people who were saved received the Spirit's MESSAGE when they obeyed the command to repent and be baptized.

Years later, Peter wrote to Christians scattered *"throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia"* (1 Peter 1:1); and told them they had been "born again" (1 Peter 1:23). In Acts 2:9-10, we read of people being present on Pentecost from these places Peter mentioned in his letter. These Christians who had been "born again" were the very people who were saved on Pentecost. Peter, standing up with the eleven, preached the word, the first Gospel sermon ever preached – sowed the seed of the kingdom – and they heard it, believed it, received it into their hearts, and were "begotten." When they cried out to know what to do to be saved, they were told to repent and be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins; and they gladly received the word and were baptized. Then years later, Peter wrote to these Christians: *"seeing ye HAVE purified your SOULS in OBEYING THE TRUTH through the Spirit. ... Being BORN AGAIN, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever"* (1 Peter 1:22-23).

Some claim that the phrase, "born again," means "born from above." Some translations give it this way. In a sense this is true. The Gospel, the word by which we are begotten, comes from above, not from man. The Gospel preached was by *"the Holy Ghost sent down from HEAVEN"* (1 Peter 1:12). The commands to repent and be baptized are from above, not from man; they are God's commandments. Therefore, when one hears the Gospel, believes, repents, and is baptized, he is born from above. The three thousand on the day of Pentecost were born from above.

(2) The Samaritans

Let us take another example (Acts 8:5-12). Philip went to the city of Samaria and preached Christ (the Gospel); the people HEARD, BELIEVED, and were BAPTIZED. *"But WHEN they BELIEVED Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were BAPTIZED, both MEN and WOMEN."* When these people believed and were baptized, they were saved (Mark 16:16)! Were they in the kingdom? Yes, the saved are added to the church, and the church is the kingdom of Christ. Then they had been born again, born of water and of the Spirit.

Friends, if it took that to put people into the kingdom THEN, how do you expect to get into the kingdom by doing LESS than that NOW? Has the law of entrance been changed?

(3) The Eunuch

A similar story is related in the same chapter concerning the conversion of the eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). He heard the same old Gospel story, believed it, confessed his faith in Christ (cf. Rom. 10:10; 1 Tim. 6:12-13), was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing. See him as he goes down the road – he is happy! He is now a child of God, a saved man. (The eunuch rejoiced because of sins forgiven AFTER he was baptized). This is the new birth explained. Is there anything hard to understand about it?

If the language of John 3 seems to be difficult to understand, then study it in connection with the plain and easily understood cases of conversion, for after all, these are but examples of people being "born again." The first law of Biblical interpretation is that "passages which are obscure or difficult to understand must be interpreted in the light of those scriptures which are clear and explicit."

(4) Saul Of Tarsus

Let us take one more example – Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul. He was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians; saw Jesus; was convinced of his disobedience to the Lord; and in faith cried out, *"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"* Jesus answered, *"Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou MUST DO"* (Acts 9:6). Saul went to Damascus and for three days waited to be told what to do (Acts 9:6). Ananias, who knew the plan of salvation, was sent to him. And to this believing, sorrowing, praying, penitent man, Ananias said: *"And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:16). As soon as Ananias came to Paul, the "altar services" (his praying) ceased, and he arose and was baptized. Ananias told him what he MUST DO, and he did it. Paul did not obtain forgiveness until he was baptized. In baptism, his sins were washed away (forgiven) by the blood of Christ. Years later, Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13-14 – God *"hath delivered US"* (that included

Paul) *from the power of darkness, and hath TRANSLATED US INTO THE KINGDOM of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins*” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27).

The Lord appeared to Paul, not to save him, but to qualify him to be an apostle (Acts 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:5-8). Before Paul could be an apostle, he had to see Jesus after His resurrection. He was saved by obeying the Lord’s law of pardon, the same law that you must obey if you are ever saved.

Summary

In all the cases of conversion, we do not read that it took a direct operation of the Spirit to convert ONE sinner. The people were converted by the power of God’s word, the Gospel. It is true that many were not converted, but it was not because of some power withheld; it was because of their own decision in the matter. The people that were saved heard the word, believed, repented, confessed their faith in Christ, and were baptized. This put them into the kingdom of God. This is the way we enter the kingdom today!

WE HAVE LEARNED, THEREFORE, THAT:

1. We are begotten of God by the word. (James 1:18)
2. The Holy Spirit has given the word. (John 15:26; 1 Peter 1:12)
3. The word is the seed of the kingdom. (Luke 8:11)
4. By the word, sinners are begotten. (1 Cor. 4:15)
5. We are begotten when we believe. (1 John 5:1; Rom. 10:17)
6. Then when we are baptized – brought forth from the water – according to the Spirit’s instructions, we are “born of water and of the Spirit.”
7. When we are “born again,” we are in the kingdom, saved, pardoned, a new creature, a child of God, a Christian.

Please note these scriptures relative to entrance into the kingdom:

1. John 3:5 – born again, enter the kingdom.
2. Matt. 18:3 – converted, enter the kingdom.
3. Matt. 7:21 – Do God’s will, enter the kingdom.

If one cannot understand “*born of water and of the Spirit,*” then maybe he can understand “conversion.” It is the same thing, for it brings the same results – entrance into the kingdom. If “conversion” (a sinner turning to the Lord) cannot be understood, then doing the will of God can be. This is the same; this also results in entrance into

the kingdom. A person cannot be a citizen of the kingdom who does not obey the will of God. All three are equal to the same thing, and must, therefore, be equal to each other.

CHAPTER THREE

The Operation Of The Holy Spirit In Conversion

The Bible nowhere teaches the direct, mysterious, miraculous, operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion. John 3:8 does not teach it. “THE GOSPEL” is “THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION”(Rom. 1:16).

Does God work a miracle today every time one is born again? If so, this makes God responsible for sinners not being converted – that God withholds the divine power necessary to save them. This means that God is a respecter of persons if He withholds converting power from some, and on others He sends it, and they are converted. But the Bible plainly says that “*God is no respecter of persons*” (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; 1 Peter 1:17). When Jesus said, “*ye must be born again,*” He put the responsibility on man. If a man were wholly passive in the new birth, it would be impossible to tell him he must be “born again.”

No Direct Operation Of The Spirit

No direct operation of the Spirit is needed. The word of God is “*able to save your souls*”(James 1:21). Then why do some people say that the WORD is not able, that it takes additional divine power to save? The Gospel is THE power of God – God’s ONLY power – to save (Rom. 1:16). No case is on record where anyone ever received a direct operation of the Spirit for his salvation. The apostles did not teach that this was essential to be saved, neither did they ever pray for the Holy Spirit to come directly into a sinner’s heart to regenerate him. Christians are not found where the word of God has not been preached. Missionaries are sent to preach the Gospel to the lost that they, hearing the word, may believe it and be saved (Col. 1:5). Where did any inspired man ever call any thing else “THE

POWER OF GOD” to save the lost, save (except) the Gospel? If a direct operation of the Spirit is necessary in conversion, and God does not operate on all, then is He not showing partiality?

There is an influence exerted by the Spirit in conversion, but the point is, HOW does He operate? Is it directly or indirectly? What does the BIBLE say on the subject? THE SPIRIT OPERATES THROUGH THE WORD:

Must one be begotten? It is by the word. – 1 Cor. 4:15

Must one be quickened? It is by the word. – Psalms 119:50, 93; Eph. 2:1

Must one be converted? It is by the perfect law. – Psalm 19:7

Must one be saved? It is by words. – Acts 11:14; James 1:21

Must one have light? Understanding? It is by the word. – Psalm 119:105, 130

Must one have faith? It is by the word. – Romans 10:17; John 20:30-31; Acts 15:7

Must one be made free? It is by the word, the truth. – John 8:31-32; 17:17

Must one be called? It is by the Gospel. – 2 Thess. 2:14

Must one be born again? It is by the word. – 1 Peter 1:23, 25

GOD’S WORD IS FULL OF POWER (Heb. 4:12).

There is no power in the paper and the ink of the Bible. The power is in the ideas expressed in words. The Bible contains God’s ideas and thoughts revealed to man.

THE GOSPEL, AS IT IS, IS ABLE TO SAVE MAN, AS HE IS.

(1) God is the author of the new birth, (2) the Holy Spirit is His agent, and (3) the Gospel is the Spirit’s instrumentality employed.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit, “*when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin*” (John 16:8 ASV). If you know that you are a sinner, the Holy Spirit convicted you of this fact. But HOW did the Holy Spirit convict you of sin? “*By the law is the knowledge of sin*” (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). There is no other way to convict of sin. The Holy Spirit, a person, uses law, an instrument, to convict of sin.

This example will enable us to better understand the point: “Mr. Jones cut down the tree with the ax.” (1) Mr. Jones cut down the tree. (2) The ax cut down the tree. (3) Jones, the man, cut down the tree with the ax, the instrument. Now apply this illustration to the word of God. The word of God is the “*sword of the Spirit*” (Eph. 6:17). In conversion it is the Spirit that pierces the heart. But does the Spirit pierce without His sword? No, the Spirit does not throw the sword away and jump into the sinner. Remember the example on

Pentecost (Acts 2:37)? On this day, hearts were “pierced” (people were convicted) and three thousand souls were turned to the Lord. The Holy Spirit did this work, but He used His sword. It was the word of God, preached by the Spirit through the apostle Peter, that “pricked” these people “in their heart” and led them to become Christians.

To those who had been born again, Paul said: “*BECAUSE YE ARE SONS, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father*” (Gal. 4:6; Acts 5:32)? To become a son one must (1) hear the Gospel, (2) believe the Gospel, (3) repent of his sins, (4) confess his faith in Christ, and (5) be baptized.

It is not “water regeneration” as some say who are opposed to the teaching of the Bible on baptism (cf. John 9:1-7, 30). The life begins in the generation, and that which has been begotten is born. So the sinner is begotten by believing (John 1:11-13; 1 John 5:1), then later born – baptized according to the spirit’s instruction.

The word of God is to the spiritual realm just what the grain of wheat is to the material kingdom. In nature, seed is absolutely necessary for a crop. In the spiritual kingdom, seed is necessary to the making of Christians. “*The seed is the word of God*” (Luke 8:11). No seed, no harvest; no Gospel preached, no Christians. The human heart is the soil and the seed enters the soil by hearing (Luke 8:15). The devil knows the way people are converted, and when he can, steals “*the word out of their hearts, lest they should BELIEVE AND BE SAVED*” (Luke 8:12).

If the Holy Spirit operates directly, then it cannot be said that the Gospel is THE power of God to save. If it takes both, then the Gospel is “a” power for salvation; and if God holds back the other power when the Gospel is preached, he is responsible for sinners not being converted. When the Gospel is being preached, the Spirit is operating through the Word on those that hear; they can obey the teaching and be saved, or reject it in life and be lost in eternity (Acts 7:51; 28:27). Man has the moral freedom to accept or reject the Gospel (John 5:40).

There is no theory of a special operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion that does not make God an unfair, unjust respecter of persons. At the judgment the sinner would be damned for not obeying; but after all, God would be wholly responsible for his damnation, for He withheld the Spirit from him. How unjust!!!

Conversion Is Not A Miracle

A miracle would rob the sinner of all moral responsibility.

Miracles were performed at times by the apostles to CONFIRM the word and cause sinners to BELIEVE THE TRUTH, but no miracles were performed IN sinners to enable them to believe and be saved (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Heb. 2:3-4).

The miraculous theory of regeneration is not taught in the Bible. It does not record ONE case of conversion by a DIRECT operation of the Holy Spirit in the sinner's heart! There was no mourner's bench in the church during the days of the apostles. Man is not a machine, and conversion is not a miracle; the Bible is not a "dead letter," and visions and dreams are not assurances of pardon. The word of God is the sinner's assurance of pardon (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38)!

The truth, as formulated in the Gospel, is the medium through which the Holy Spirit begets, quickens, and regenerates the sinner. He who believes in Christ by being taught the Gospel, repents of his sins, and is baptized, is a Christian and entitled to all the promises of God, and if faithful unto death, his shall be the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

Conclusion

Many today are saying just what Nicodemus said: "How can these things be?" How can the birth of water and of the Spirit make me a child of God? How can water have anything to do with my salvation? Yet, our Lord plainly said: *"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"* (John 3:5). Hearing the Gospel, believing the Gospel, sincerely repenting of sins, and being baptized in the name of the Lord, constitutes the "new birth," and makes one a child of God. When one does these things, he enters into the kingdom of God. Christ said it; it must be true!

Ye MUST be born again! You MUST believe (Heb. 11:6), you MUST repent (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), and you MUST BE BAPTIZED (Acts 9:6; 22:16). In the days of the apostles, people who did these things were "born again," "born of God," "born of water and the Spirit." It is true that we may not be able to understand everything concerning the new birth, any more than we do some of the

mysteries of the natural birth, but we CAN understand what has to be done and what is necessary to be "born again." People today do what is called "joining the church," but in reality they are not in it. They have "joined," because they were told they "ought to belong to some church." The struggle for "numbers" has placed the names of thousands on church rolls who have never been "born again." Our Lord's statement – "ye MUST be born again," "born of water and of the Spirit" – puts the new birth between every sinner and the kingdom of God!

Baptism is certainly a condition of salvation. JESUS said: *"he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). Will any one affirm, "He that believeth and is NOT baptized, shall be saved?" The HOLY SPIRIT, through the apostle Peter, told convicted sinners to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). These Scriptures clearly make baptism a condition of pardon. It is the final step in obtaining forgiveness. When one is baptized, he is initiated into the kingdom of God; but this does not make water our saviour. Baptism in water is a command of Christ, our Saviour, in order to obtain the remission of past sins, to one who has been taught, who believes the Gospel, and has repented of his sins. This is the reason why infants are not proper subjects of baptism. Baptism ALONE is not for salvation. The language of Jesus is not: "He that believeth is saved, and may be baptized later if he desires." Jesus SAID: *"He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved."* Therefore, some ruin the figure of the new birth in their doctrine by putting baptism before faith (as the birth before the begetting, in baptizing infants), and by changing immersion (the birth of water) to sprinkling water ON a person.

Have you been born again? Are YOU in the kingdom of God? If not, will you not accept the truth and be saved? *"Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again"* (John 3:7).