

THE NEW BIRTH

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Part One

The scriptures have a lot to say about being born again and the consequent effects upon those who are born again. Many erroneous ideas have been put forth about what man must/can do to cause himself to be born again. One highly popular evangelist wrote a book on the subject of how man can be born again. The problem with such concepts are that they simply are not true. The plain biblical teaching is that God is sovereign in bringing about the new birth. By the term, sovereign, we mean "independent of all others." God is under no dependency on man to bring about the new birth. God does not cause anyone to be born again because of their actions of either belief, works, or following a prescribed course of action.

John 3:8 describes God's sovereignty in causing someone to be born again. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whether it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." Just as God is sovereign, the wind is also independent of the actions of man. "The wind bloweth where it listeth"- No man has ever had the power or knowledge to direct or control the direction or force by which the wind blows. Likewise man does not have the power or knowledge to bring about the new birth. "And thou hearest the sound thereof"-While we have the evidence of the wind's blowing, this knowledge is not a cause of the wind's blowing, but is an effect of the wind's blowing. Likewise there are many evidences of the new birth given unto us to assure us of that birth, but those evidences are an effect of the birth and not the cause. "But canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth"-I know of no man that ever has or ever will be able to pinpoint a place on earth and say the wind originates here, or pinpoint a place on earth and say this is the final destination of the wind. Thus we conclude the wind is totally independent of man in its blowing, its direction, its origination and its destination. Likewise the Holy Spirit is totally independent of man in bringing about the new birth. The new birth takes place when and where the Holy Spirit chooses. Likewise it is God's choice and not man's choice as to who will be born again and who won't be born again.

Likewise John 3:6 teaches us the sovereignty of God in the new birth and affirms that the new birth is not a cooperative endeavor between God and man: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." In our natural birth it is the actions of the flesh that brought about our natural birth into the world. Even here, it was not our actions, but our parents actions that brought about our natural

birth. By parallel, the spiritual birth is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Again it is the actions of the Holy Spirit that brings about this spiritual birth and not our actions. The Lord said in John 6:63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Now if I in my flesh could do something to help bring about the new birth, then there would be a profit in the flesh, but the Lord affirms that there is no profit in the flesh, but that the Holy Spirit does the quickening (new birth).

Similarly, John 1:11-13 teaches us that God is sovereign in bringing about the new birth: "He came unto his own...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." This passage teaches the sovereignty of God in causing us to be born again by first ruling all other possible causes. First man's belief is ruled out as a cause for the passage shows that the birth took place prior to man's belief. This leaves us with the only logical conclusion that belief cannot be a cause of the new birth. Secondly, the new birth is not the result of a blood relationship to Abraham or anyone else. Thirdly, the new birth is not the result of the will or desire of the flesh. Man, by nature, does not desire to be born again. Fourthly, the new birth is not the result of man's will or choice. Thus man does not choose to be born again and because of his choice the new birth comes about.

Therefore, having ruled out all other possible causes of the new birth, John simply states that the new birth is "of God." While there are other scriptures which show God's sovereignty in bringing about the new birth, these sufficiently prove God's independence of man in causing anyone to be born again.

The New Birth (Essay #2)

In our last installment we looked at the sovereign work of God in bringing about the new (spiritual) birth in an individual. In this installment we will look at the condition of man prior to being born again and see his total inability to do anything to bring about the new birth.

Eph. 2:1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins..." The word, "quicken," means to make alive." When we "were dead in trespasses and sins" we were "made alive" spiritually. Our condition prior to being born again was "dead in trespasses and sins." Verses 2 and 3 describe this condition of being "dead in trespasses and sins," "Wherein in time past (i.e., prior to being born again) ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath

even as others." When we "were dead in trespasses and sins," we "walked according to the course of this world." The course of this world is abomination to God. The scriptures say that whosoever is the friend of "this world" is the enemy of God. Thus we conclude that when we were dead in trespasses and sins that we were the "enemies of God." Secondly, we followed after the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Jesus is the "prince of peace." Satan is the "prince of the power of the air." We, being dead in trespasses and sins walked after Satan and had the spirit of Satan working in us as he now works in the children of disobedience. Thirdly, we had our "conversation" or life style "in the lusts of our flesh..." Paul said "that in me that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing." "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). For our life style to be after fleshly lust is to live selfishly and carnally. Fourthly, we "fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Thus we weren't just walking after them, but we were actually doing those things. Fifthly, our nature was the same nature that the children of wrath now possess, i.e., we "were by nature the children of wrath even as others." This was our condition before we were born again.

We have described in Rom. 3:9-18 our condition under the law of sin and death from which bondage we were delivered by the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2). It is said of man before the new birth that "There is none righteous, no, not one." Thus we conclude that before we were born again we were in our fleshly state totally unrighteous before God. Secondly, we are told that "there is none that understandeth." 1 Cor. 2:14 says that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned." Without the new birth we cannot discern spiritual things, we cannot know them and we cannot understand them. We must be born again to understand the gospel, to know God, and to discern spiritually the word of God. Thirdly, we read where "there is none that seeketh after God." Prior to being born again, no man will nor can seek after God. How foolish it is that men will say that seeking after God is a prerequisite condition for being born again. Contrariwise a man must be born again in order to be able to seek after God. Fourthly, "there is none that doeth good, no not one." Prior to being born again a man cannot do good. Is being baptized, or believing the gospel, or repenting, or believing on the Lord Jesus Christ doing good? If it is, then man must be born again prior to doing any of those things. Finally, we read that "there is no fear of God before their eyes." A man who does not fear God will not come to God. Therefore, a man cannot come to God prior to being born again.

Jesus said in John 6:63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they

are spirit and they are life." If I through preaching the gospel or you through believing the gospel can bring about the new birth, then there is a profit in our fleshly undertakings and the Lord was wrong. He never has nor will make a mistake. His spoken voice gives life, not our deeds!

We conclude with John 5:25, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." When we were "dead in trespasses and sins we heard the life giving voice of the Son of God speaking spiritual life into our very being and thus we now live spiritually. Having that spiritual life we can understand spiritual things, seek after God, know God, do good, worship God, fear God, believe the gospel, repent, and become the disciple of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!

The New Birth (Essay #3)

The new birth is compared to or said to be many things including: resurrection, circumcision, and creation. In this installment we will look at the new birth as a spiritual "creation."

First, the bible tells us that God is the only creator as follows:

a. Eph. 3:9, "...who created all things by Jesus Christ."

b. Col. 1:16, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by him, and for him."

c. Rev. 4:11, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Since God is the only creator, thus, by inference man has created nothing, nor is he capable of creating anything.

Secondly, while God completed his natural creation in six days and rested on the seventh, his creation of spiritual things continues as evidenced by Rev. 4:11 where it is said that for God's "pleasure they are and were created." The word "are" indicates a now creation whereas the word "were" indicates a past creation. Natural creation is past, spiritual creation continues.

Third, those who are born again are said to be the created workmanship of God in Eph. 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." In Eph. 4:24 we read, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Thus

we conclude that the "new man" is the creation of God. In the new birth the inner or new man is created in righteousness and true holiness by our faithful Creator.

Fourth, those who are born again are said to be new creatures as follows:

a. II Cor. 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature..."

b. Gal. 6:15, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

Furthermore, the use of the term, creature, in the new testament has reference to those who are born again in all but a few scriptures in which natural creation is indicated by the context.

Fifth, when we are born again (created) we are given a new set of senses. We are told in 1 Cor. 2:9, 14 that the natural senses and the natural man cannot discern spiritual things. It is only after we have been born again (created) that we are enabled to have senses that can discern spiritual things. Eight times in the gospels and eight times in the book of Revelation we are told, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear..." These verses have reference to spiritual ears for we cannot discern spiritual things through the natural man. Also we are told that "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Thus it takes spiritual eyes to perceive that spiritual kingdom. In addition, since God is a Spirit we must have spiritual feeling in order to "feel after him" (Acts 17:27). Furthermore, to "taste the heavenly gift" (Heb. 6:4) and to "taste the good word of God" (Heb. 6:5) and to "taste that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:3) takes spiritual taste buds that we come into possession of when we are born again (created). Finally, to perceive the odour of a sweet smell from Christian sacrifices (Phil. 4:18) we must possess a spiritual nose.

In conclusion, God alone and without the help or assistance of man creates us spiritually (causes us to be born again). We must have been created spiritually in order to perceive spiritual things. Thus to hear and respond to the gospel we must have been born again. For these reasons we may conclude that the gospel is for those already born again and not for those who haven't been born again.

Part 2 - The New Birth - Voice of the Lord

The 29th Psalm is all about the voice of the Lord. In verse 4 the psalmist states, "The 'voice' of the Lord is powerful..." From the very beginning of the bible we see the power in God's voice manifest as he said, "Let there be light: and there was light." By simply speaking, God created the natural universe in which

we live! Now that is power! In contrast, the voice of man can either hurt or soothe the eardrum, but it cannot bring anything into existence. Only God's voice has the power to create.

God's voice gives life to the dead. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, it was written that Jesus "cried with a loud 'voice,' Lazarus come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes..." Jesus with his voice spake the name of Lazarus and he came forth from the dead. In 1 Thes. 4:16 we read about the resurrection of our bodies from the grave, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the 'voice' of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with him in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Similarly this power of Jesus' voice in raising the dead bodies from the grave is written about in John 5:28, 29, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his 'voice,' and shall come forth..." Thus we must conclude that the efficient cause of the resurrection of the dead bodies in the grave is the "voice" of the Son of God!

Before we are born of the Spirit of God (born again) the bible describes us as being dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). When we were dead in trespasses and sins we had no spiritual life. As God is the creator of all things, it is He who has "created us in Christ Jesus unto good works." This creation is the new birth. Please note, as follows, that it is the 'voice' of the Son of God and not the voice of man that brings Spiritual life into the dead faculties of our heart and soul:

a. John 5:25, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the 'voice of the Son of God:' and they that hear shall live."

b. John 6:63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that 'I speak' unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

c. John 10:16, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear 'my voice;' and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

d. John 10:27, 28, "My sheep hear 'my voice' and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

To the above I make the following observations:

a. It is the "voice" of the Son of God that gives life to those who were before spiritually dead.

b. The flesh does not assist in giving spiritual life because "the flesh profiteth nothing." Thus the preacher, teacher, friend, or parent cannot give eternal life nor can my actions as a fleshly being help cause the new birth.

c. All those to whom the "voice" of the Son of God is spoken hear and are given eternal life.

d. All those that the Lord speaks life into are preserved from perishing.

Now we may ask ourselves the question, "Have I heard the voice of the Son of God and what did it sound like?" When Elijah the prophet fled from the wicked queen Jezebel, the Lord told him in 1 Kings 19:11-13, "And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a 'still small voice.' And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle..." A still voice would make no naturally audible sound. Yet the still voice of the Lord is more powerful than the great wind, earthquake, and fire! God brings forth the new birth with a still small voice that our natural ears cannot hear. Yet we can know we have been born again by the evidences in our lives. This we shall address in another essay.

Finally we read in Isa. 55:10, 11 of the certainty of the new birth to those to whom God speaks, "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." When God speaks his word into the dead faculties of the heart and soul, it does not return to God void, but it accomplishes what God pleases (the new birth) and it prospers in the thing whereto he sent it.

Praise God for his powerful still small voice that caused us to be born again.

The New Birth - Love in the Heart

When God causes us to be born again several things happen to us. One of the things that happened to us is that God wrote his laws in our heart and our mind. Several verses of scripture point to this which we quote as follows:

A. Heb. 8:10, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God and they shall be to me a people."

B. Heb. 10:16, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them."

C. II Cor. 3:3, "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."

D. Rom. 2:15, "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another."

From the above scriptures several conclusions can be drawn. First, the laws of God are written into both the heart and the mind. Secondly, it is God who does the writing and not man. Thirdly, these laws written in our heart and mind serve as the basis or foundation for our covenant worship of God. The foundation of the law worship or service was the ten commandments written on two tables of stone. The foundation of our worship under the gospel is the laws of God written in our hearts and mind. Fourthly, these laws written in our heart and mind along with the conscience God gave us serve as the basis for the self-examining courtroom of our heart and mind.

We may ask ourselves, "Just what laws did God write in our hearts and minds?" I Thes. 4:9 seems to be the key to answering this question, "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." Clearly God has taught us to love one another and not man. Clearly, this was a direct teaching from God to man without any inter-mediator (preacher). I John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Love for the brethren is a direct evidence of the new birth. Anyone who loves the brethren has been born again! Therefore, we know that God has written love into our hearts and mind in the new birth. Matt. 22:37-40 ties down for us that love toward God is to be manifest in our heart, soul, and mind, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Thus God writes these two great laws in our hearts and mind and as a result we are able to love God and our neighbor. Without these laws written in our hearts and mind we would be unable to love either God or our neighbor. James 2:8 says, "If ye fulfill the

royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well." Rom. 13:8 reads, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

Finally, we read in Rom. 2:14, 15 "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts. The basis of our love toward God and toward our neighbor is founded on the laws of love that God wrote in our hearts and mind when he caused us to be born again.

In our next essay we will look at the subject of repentance and its relationship to the new birth.