

THE NEW BIRTH

the doctrine of Regeneration

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The MEANING of the New Birth

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Jesus said to Nicodemus, *the* teacher of Israel, when he approached him and remarked on the signs that He had done: “Truly, truly, I say to you that unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Jesus said the same thing in verse 7: you must be “born again”. What does it mean, however, to be born again? What does the Greek phrase refer to?

When Jesus told Nicodemus that a man must be born again to enter the kingdom, it behooves every reader to carefully study the text so as to know the divinely-given meaning of this most-important verse. To misunderstand this verse is of grave consequence. To rightly understand it thrusts one to the highest heavens in worship.

To be born again means that one receives the new birth from above. The word that occurs in this passage is ἄνωθεν [*anōthen*] which speaks of being born “from above.” It speaks of the Mercy Seat which sat *above* (on top of, ἄνωθεν) the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:21 LXX). The curtain of the Temple, at Christ’s death, was torn from top (ἄνωθεν) to bottom (Matt 27:51). Jesus’ tunic that the soldiers took at His crucifixion was seamless, woven in one piece from top (ἄνωθεν) to bottom (John 19:23). This means that the main way that this particular word is used throughout the gospels and especially in the Johannine literature is that it refers to something that is from *above*.

Thus, Jesus states that a person must be born *from above* in order to enter the kingdom of God. To be born from above speaks of a supernatural birth. It encompasses a divine miracle. To be born from above bespeaks to the fact that the person who is birthed is *receiving* the action. He is not the active participant but the passive receiver of the heavenly birth. To be born again defines what it means for God, by His initiative and by His grace, to speak life into spiritually dead sinners’ hearts. To be born from above means that it is beyond this space and time here. It far transcends human capacities and religious abilities. It goes beyond what humans can achieve by their own power and effort. It rests entirely beyond the initiative of the sinner. This birth from above (or, the re-birth, or the second birth) means that God alone is the giver of this new life.

When Jesus spoke to Pilate, He told him that he would have no authority over Jesus unless it had been given to him from above (ἄνωθεν; John 19:11). This authority from above speaks of the authority that *God* gives. This authority that comes down from above comes from God. Thus, the meaning of being born again is that the sinner is born from above; that is, from God. All of this points to the reality that the meaning of the new birth is that God is the initiator, the accomplisher, the grace-giver, the sufficient dispenser and the active operator of this new birth. It is a birth that comes from God. That means that in order for a person to see the kingdom of God, as Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, that person must be the gracious bestowing of new life from above — that is, from God Himself.

The NECESSITY of the New Birth

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As has already been seen, the new birth speaks of the birth from above, that is, a heavenly birth. This heavenly birth comes from God, given by grace, to the sinner in desperate need of supernatural intervention lest he perish in his sins. But the question then arises, *just how important* is this new birth. Is it really that important for a person to be born again? What if they merely know about God or have an intellectual assent to Jesus Christ? Will this save them? What if they've been baptized? Or what if they've gone to church and have remained faithful in a local congregation all their lives? What if a person prayed a prayer and was real sincere in uttering those words to accept Jesus into his heart? Don't these help? Contribute? Work? Save?

In the passage in John 3 when Jesus speaks with Nicodemus, Jesus unequivocally and most lucidly reveals the *necessity* of this new — heavenly, divine, God-given — birth. In other words, anything else will not save; indeed, anything else *cannot* save.

In John 3:7, Jesus says to the learned Jewish Nicodemus not to marvel that Jesus said: "it is necessary for you to be born again" [or, born from above]. The specific phrase that this essay hones in upon is: "it is necessary" [ἄξι; *dei*]. This underscores the absolute necessity of the new birth. The word ἄξι that is translated: "it is necessary" occurs elsewhere in the New Testament translated as "must". For instance, Jesus began to tell His disciples that he *must* [ἄξι] go to Jerusalem and suffer many things (Matt 16:21). In this very same context as Jesus speaks with Nicodemus, He says that just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so *must* [ἄξι] the Son of Man be lifted up (John 3:14). Later in this same chapter, John the Baptist declared: "He *must* [ἄξι] increase" (John 3:30). Later in John's Gospel, he wrote that the disciples did not understand the Scripture that Jesus *must* [ἄξι] rise again from the dead (John 20:9). All of this emphasizes the absolute necessity of something happening. In the context of John 3 and Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, He unswervingly, unashamedly, and unambiguously affirmed that Nicodemus (and all people, especially Jews in this context; as signified by the plural 'you' ὑμᾶς in John 3:7).

The words that come from Christ's own lips demand that a person be born again to enter heaven. He *must* be birthed from above. It is absolutely necessary for someone to receive God's gift of the re-birth to see the kingdom of God. If not, no one will enter. Unless God does the work, no one will make it to heaven. Unless God acts, and initiates, and imparts life, and grants the heavenly birth, no person *can* make it to heaven. It's not a matter of a person's will; it reveals the *inability* of a person to make it to heaven unless God, and God alone, acts. If a person has not been born again to a new and living hope by the supernatural working of God, then he shall never be saved. Salvation rests on God alone.

The redemption work is a *monergistic* work — that is, *the working of one*. It is God who must impart spiritual life to spiritually dead sinners so that they may live, be forgiven, be renewed, and able to follow Him as a way of life. It's not optional, it's essential. It's not up to a person's will, it's up to God's sovereign prerogative and decree. Truly, *it is necessary* [ἄξι] for you to be born again!

The IMPOSSIBILITY of the New Birth

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The very fact that Jesus told Nicodemus that in order for him to enter the kingdom of God he must receive the new birth shows that it is utterly impossible for *him* (or, for any man) to bring about this new birth by his own powers. Nicodemus heard Jesus speak and stood baffled at what the Son of God said. He couldn't wrap his self-righteous mind around this. How could a person be born again? In fact, Nicodemus asked the Savior: "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he" (John 3:4). Nicodemus is not a fool. He is extremely smart as he is the teacher of Israel (John 3:10). He wasn't being silly by asking how he could crawl back into his mother's womb. As a Jew of Jews, he affirmed that from the very beginning of his life, he endeavored to be as righteous as he possibly could be and he wondered how he could start over again. In other words, he wondered how he, such an old man, could begin anew and try again.

But Jesus spoke to the absolute impossibility of this new birth in John 3:5 when he said that "unless you are born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This speaks to the utter inability of Nicodemus (and thus, any other religious person) to attain eternal life by their own merit. These words from Jesus allude back to Ezekiel 36 in the context of the New Covenant and the work of God that He, and He alone, would do to His people.

For instance, God promised glorious promises to His people by stating: "I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean" (Ezek 36:25). Then he said: "I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols (Ezek 36:25b). Furthermore: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" (Ezek 36:26). Right after that he promised: "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26b). And finally: "I will put my Spirit within you and I will cause you to walk in my statutes and you will be careful to observe my ordinances" (Ezek 36:27). When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, he alluded to these verses by affirming all of the divine promises of redemption for His people — all found in the phrases: "I will..." (Ezek 36:25-27). This underscores the impossibility of humans achieving the new birth. No man can ever attain this salvation on his own. Nor can he be born again spiritually.

Even the illustration that Christ used in speaking with Nicodemus emphasizes the impossibility of giving oneself spiritual life. Christ speaks of the birthing process. That is to say, as impossible as it is for a person to birth himself the first time physically, so absolutely incomprehensible that he would be able to birth himself a second time spiritually. Just as the person was passive in the physical birthing process so he is passive in the spiritual new-birth. When God grants new life from above, the sinner receives life as a gift of God. He cannot earn it. He does nothing to achieve or contribute to it even in the slightest. It is utterly an impossibility. Just as the birthing process happens to the person so the spiritual birth from above happens to the sinner. This all shows that the new birth is an absolute impossibility *by human powers and capabilities*. But God, however, can do the impossible and He, He alone, imparts new spiritual life to sinners by grace!

The **GLORY** of the New Birth

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The *monergistic* working of God in accomplishing the new birth points to the unspeakable glory, the unfathomable grace, and the unrivaled character of God. Nothing in all the universe can compare with the mighty mercy of God in causing spiritually decaying and filthy corpses to rise to new spiritual life by the sovereign breath of the Spirit. Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. None can glory except in what God has done through Christ by means of the Spirit of life.

1) This glory of the new birth points to the **SOURCE** of the new birth. All glory goes to God alone. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The true nature of the new birth comes from God -- and it can *only* come from God. Flesh gives birth to flesh. But it is the Spirit that gives birth to spirit. What can revive *spiritually dead souls*? None but the Spirit Himself. Thus, the source of the new birth -- the Spirit of God -- highlights the glory of this supernatural process.

2) This glory of the new birth points to the **GOAL** of the new birth. All glory is directed ultimately to God through the entire process of the new birth. Regeneration does not end with *new life*. New life continues through the person's life and takes them to eternity. That is, the very moment that the Spirit imparts spiritual life, the newly converted sinner enjoys the blessings of eternal life throughout the entirety of his life as he battles for holiness and till he awaits the beatific vision in glory. All of this points to the ultimate goal: Christlikeness in the Christian that brings about glory to God!

3) This glory of the new birth points to the **RESULTS** of the new birth. Regeneration changes a man not only inwardly in his soul but outwardly as he now is *supernaturally enabled* and *miraculously willing* to obey God. Before regeneration, the natural man cannot obey God, nor does he want to. But when God has worked, the result of new life brings about growth, like that of a tree. Over the course of time, it grows, it strengthens, it bears much fruit, it's healthy and flourishing.

4) This glory of the new birth points to the **UNIQUENESS** of the new birth. No other creature in all the vast universe can bring about this new birth. Nothing in all the world can be likened to this instantaneous, God-worked, miraculous process. Only God can grant life. Only God can raise the dead. Only the Spirit of life can breathe the breath of salvation into rotten and abominable transgressors to make them beautiful and cherished possessions of the Master!

5) This glory of the new birth points to the **GRACE** of the new birth. The new birth comes to the sinner by the uninfluenced grace of God. None raise their hand and initiate this process. Corpses can't move. This glorious working exclaims the matchless and mighty grace of the God.

6) This glory of the new birth points to the **PRAISE** for the new birth. It is only those who are born again who see the kingdom of God. And it's in that kingdom where endless praise happens! Unrelenting, unmitigated, untiring worship occurs there! Let regeneration prompt praise to God.

The SOVEREIGNTY of the New Birth

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The new birth comes from God -- and God alone. No one can pick, choose, determine, plan, or resist the working of God as He accomplishes this act in the soul of a sinner. In a word, the new birth is a *sovereign work of God*. That means that it is a supernatural act, a royal act, a kingly act, an *exclusively-divine* act. None can resist when God brings the new birth. None can reject it. None can refuse it. And none can resist His power. This is the glory of the sovereignty of God's power as He puts it on display through the regeneration -- new birth -- of a soul.

James speaks of the sovereignty of this new birth when he writes: "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth" (James 1:18a). The Greek reads: βουληθεῖς ἀπεκύησεν ἡμᾶς λόγῳ ἀληθείας. This means that God *caused us to be born* [ἀπεκύησεν] all by the determined decree of God's sovereign will [βουληθεῖς]. And the means by which God brought this about was through the Word of Truth [λόγῳ ἀληθείας] -- that is, the Scriptures.

In this text, the absolute and unrivaled sovereignty of the new birth comes to light. Not only is it working from God alone (Ezek 36:25-27) but it also, from the James text, consists of an outworking of God's eternally, foreordained, unchanging and unfailing decree. James says that by God's will, He brought us forth. A few important concepts arise at this point.

1) The **WILL** of God. This will speaks of the decreed, unchanging, eternal, foreordained, uninfluenced purposes of God. This is not the desirous will but it speaks more of the decreed and supreme will of the sovereign over heaven and earth. The new birth happens, ultimately, because of the sovereign decree and eternal purpose of God. No one approaches the King and tells Him what to do, forces Him to act, or sways Him, or influences Him, to act in a particular way. He is unchanging, uninfluenced, perfect, eternal, and glorious. And yet, it is by this perfect decree that He imparts the new birth -- by grace, by His plan, through His purposes, for His glory.

2) The **WORKING** of God. The verb is singular in the original Greek. The Bible does not say that we birthed ourselves *with God's help*. It does not suggest that God brings about the new birth as we cooperate with Him. Rather, the verb is singular which underscores the *monergistic* work (= 'working-of-one') of God in the act of the new birth. He brought us forth. God causes people to be born again. It is God who starts the birthing process, who imparts the new life, and who sustains the new life -- all by His power and for His renown.

3) The **WORSHIP** to God. This sovereign act of the new birth must result in the praise of His glory. He elected His people and He predestined them to adoption as sons. And the bringing about of this in their lives is the wondrous act of regeneration. The newly converted sinner, then, worships His God. He has a new nature and cannot *not* praise His Savior. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above -- from the Father of Lights (James 1:19). The working of God in bringing about the new birth, by His doing and by His decree is brought to light and it propels the regenerated person to honor, worship, obey, and savor this Sovereign God!

The IRRESISTIBILITY of the New Birth

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When God chooses to rebirth a man, that person will most definitely be changed. None can resist the powerful working of God. God has ordained all things that will ever happen and all things will come about precisely and perfectly the way that He foreordained it to happen. Nothing will ever remain unfulfilled. No person will ever die unconverted if God has elected them. One who is born again -- or, born from above -- is drawn to Christ by God alone (John 6:44). Indeed, it is the power of God that draws sinners to salvation. All of this affirms the reality that the regeneration that God imparts to sinners is irresistible.

The irresistibility of the new birth is seen, proven, and extolled in the following headings.

1) The **picture** of regeneration. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus in John 3 and provided a very simple illustration of the new birth. The illustration was simple, straightforward, taken from nature, and one that Nicodemus certainly could understand. Quite simply, the “wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Many points come to the surface in a careful study of this verse. But, specifically, one should understand the simple picture that Jesus uses to illustrate regeneration. Jesus likens the new birth to wind. Wind blows wherever it wishes and none can resist it. Wind is invisible, it is powerful, it is irresistible, it is beyond human control. That is exactly what Jesus conveys with this image. In the same way that people do not know *where* wind comes from nor *where* wind is going, so it is with the new birth. No one can determine *where* it comes from nor *where* it is going. It is an invisible, powerful, divine, supernatural, instantaneous, beyond-human-control event. The picture of new birth is like the wind, something that is far beyond the reach and grasp of mere human hands as it far exceeds the human grasp.

2) The **perversion** of mankind. Jesus description of the new birth unveils, also, the perversion of mankind. If the new birth is an irresistible working of God that happens to the sinner, it emphasizes the utter perversion of all men. That is, men -- all humans -- desperately need this new birth to escape the wrath of God. But no man can do this to themselves. No man has the power or the ability to do it. Man is too perverted, too warped, too deceived, too in love with himself.

3) The **power** of God. That Jesus illustrates the new birth with wind blowing wherever it wishes also shows the power of God. Just as God brings the wind, directs the wind, controls the wind, removes the wind, commands the wind, and stills the wind, so it is the same power of God that brings this regeneration to spiritually dead sinners. The new birth comes from God and it glorifies the unrivaled, unequalled, unfathomable, and untiring power of God.

4) The **preeminence** of conversion. If the new birth is a gift from God imparted to the sinner, then it extols the preeminence of this miraculous event. The sinner does not want it; he's dead. But God, in grace and in power, brings the new birth to dead sinners irresistibly and gloriously!

The **CLEANSING** of the New Birth

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What Jesus told Nicodemus should have immediately brought Scriptures from Ezekiel to mind. Jesus told the teacher of Israel, who read and knew the Hebrew Bible, that he must be born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). To see the kingdom of God, Jesus clearly told Nicodemus that he desperately had a need. And that need was spiritual in nature. It was a new birth, a supernatural, God-given miracle, that would make him clean. But what is the nature of this cleansing that comes from the new birth?

To understand Jesus' phrase that unless one is born of water and the Spirit, one must turn back to Ezekiel 36. In Ezekiel 36, the prophet speaks to the house of Israel (v.22) and speaks on behalf of God and how He will act for His Name and for His glory among all the nations (vv.22-23). God clarifies what He will do to the people of Israel. He reveals that He will take Israel from the lands and bring them back to their own land and that God will sprinkle clean water on them and they will be clean (v.25). When God promises ("I will") to sprinkle clean water on the people of Israel this signifies cleansing, purification, consecration, and the washing away of past iniquities. God continues: "I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols" (v. 25b). God emphatically promises to Israel that in that day when they are regathered into their own land that God Himself will purify and cleanse them from their filth.

Speaking on behalf of the LORD, Ezekiel continues by declaring that God will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them" (v.26). Not only would God cleanse them from their iniquities by the washing of water but God would also give them a brand-new heart and a new spirit in them. Indeed, God will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and put in them a heart of flesh (v.26b). These verses from Ezekiel are the background for Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3 when He says that Nicodemus must be born of the *water* and the *Spirit* (going back to Ezek 36:25-26).

The new birth that God brings about for sinners is not only an exclusive work of God and a supernatural miracle demonstrating His power, but it also proves the sufficient cleansing that the sinner needs to stand righteous before this heavenly Judge. Ezekiel 36:27 promises that God will put His Spirit within those whom He regenerates and He causes them to walk in His statutes and they will be careful to observe His ordinances. All those whom God regenerates, he declares righteous and cleanses (justifies), and all those whom God regenerates and justifies, He performs the work of sanctification in them as they diligently obey His commands. Truly when Jesus tells Nicodemus that a person must be born of water and the Spirit, it is understood that He referred to the thorough cleansing, the divine cleansing, the supernatural cleansing, the instantaneous cleansing, the effectual cleansing; indeed, the perfect cleansing! Nothing else is needed. When God grants the new birth to a sinner by grace, that person is granted new life and cleansed from all his sin because he is washed clean by God's merciful grace and by His powerful doing. No wonder Paul wrote: "He saved us ... by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5). Jesus spoke of the new birth as a wonderful truth: a full, divine cleansing!

The AVAILABILITY of the New Birth

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Jesus came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him. But *as many as received Him*, He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:11-12). These glorious verses show that Jesus came into the world to save all who believe in Him (John 3:15). God makes salvation available to men as Christ came into the world! He preached the gospel! In John 3, Jesus conversed with Nicodemus, a prominent, very well-respected teacher of Israel. In John 4, Jesus chatted with an immoral woman, a lower, possibly shunned outcast in Samaria. The new birth is available to those who believe! Jesus promised: “all that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me *I will certainly not cast out*” (John 6:37). In proclaiming the gospel to people, let all Christians remember that the new birth is available to sinners. Men must be born again and they *can* be born again. A number of features can be explained in this regard.

First, the new birth is available *IMPARTIALLY*. Since all mankind has the same condition of being corruptly vile and unspeakably unclean because of sin’s dark nature, all need this new birth. And yet God, in His kindness, grants the new birth without partiality. God does not save *only* a certain class, or a certain people, or a certain race, or a certain nationality. He does not save only the rich, or the poor, or the outcasts, or the prominent. He saves men *impartially* for there is no partiality with God (Rom 2:11).

Second, the new birth is available *FREELY*. Come freely to Christ (Rom 8:32). Come without money and without cost (Isa 55:1). Come with no money and come to the Savior! He is available to all sinners who believe in Christ! Salvation is a free gift (Rom 6:23). This new birth is freely given to all who believe (Rom 1:16-17). No merits are needed; no ceremonies can contribute; no deeds can improve one’s acceptability. No! God grants the new birth freely, without cost, apart from works (Eph 2:8-9) which results in justification (Rom 5:16).

Third, the new birth is available *MERCIFULLY*. Just as human conception and the birth of a baby is a gift from the Lord (Ps 127:3), so the spiritual birth is also a merciful gift from the Lord. God the Father causes His own to be born again according to *His great mercy* to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3). Out of His sheer kindness and unexplainable grace, He gives life to sinners. By His own freewill and for His own pleasure, He gives the new birth. It’s available! It’s freely given! It’s mercifully granted! It’s available to sinners who believe in the Beloved Son!

Fourth, the new birth is available *SAVINGLY*. The new birth actually saves. It is available to sinners! And sinners must believe in Christ! And this new birth that God gives saves. It saves fully, it saves eternally, it saves perfectly! This new birth saves! This salvation is available!

Fifth, the new birth is available *IMMEDIATELY*. When God grants the new birth, that sinner is immediately converted, saved, changed, and everlastingly forgiven and irrevocably pardoned and adopted. This new birth is available at once! Come to Christ! Believe in Him! The new birth is not a multi-step process. Salvation is not a long list of requirements. It’s given at once! Believe!

The **NEED** for the New Birth

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No greater need exists in the universe than for sinful man to be born again! Jesus said it this way: “you must be born again” (John 3:7). This is not optional; it’s needed. The greatest need that sinful beings have is for God — by His power, in His love, through His mercy — to impart life. Why?

Man is **DEAD**. One must be re-born. Man is dead in his transgressions (Col 2:13) and desperately needs to be brought to life. Dead men cannot resuscitate themselves. Only divine power, supernatural, life-giving power can accomplish this.

Man is **VILE**. Before God intervenes, men indulge in abominable idolatries (1 Pet 4:3) and commit abominable deeds (Ps 14:1). Man is unclean because of her corrupt worship (Jer 13:27). Man is vile (Jer 11:15) before God and has sunk deep in depravity (Hosea 5:2; 9:9).

Man is **IDOLATROUS**. The heart of men exchanges the glory of God for the worship of creation (Rom 1:23). All the gods of the peoples are idols (1 Chron 16:26) and man’s heart longs for, earnestly desires, and pursues after gods that do not satisfy (Ps 106:36-38).

Man is **PRIDEFUL**. The exaltedness of man has corrupted him and has left him guilty before God who alone is exalted (Isa 57:15). The pride of man says that he needs no god and

Man is **UNWILLING**. Man does not want to come to God because in his natural state man loves darkness rather than the Light (John 3:19). Man *can not* come to God nor does man *want* to come to God (Matt 27:25).

God is **ABLE**. And yet, man is wholly unable to come to God, but God fully has the power and ability to bring sinners unto Himself. God *alone* can bring stinking corpses back to life and sovereignly make them precious and adopted children in His kingly family.

God is **WILLING**. Jesus never turns a sinner away. He promises to receive anyone who comes to Him by faith (John 6:37). He is not wishing that men would perish but that they would come to know Him (Matt 11:28-30). God is more willing to receive sinners than sinners are to receive Him.

God is **SAVING**. Out of His sovereign love and through His almighty power, God takes the initiative and saves sinners (Titus 3:4-5). He did not have to save rebels but He accomplishes what otherwise would be utterly impossible for a sinner to do -- save his soul from punishment.

God is **LIFE-GIVING**. The Spirit is He who gives life (2 Cor 3:6). Good news exists for those outside of Christ! Though one may be dead, there is a God who gives life, by His power, through His Son and through the preached Word to save sinners! God overcomes man’s dire need!

The INDIVIDUALITY of the New Birth

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No one enters heaven by the merits of another. None can walk into glory through the worthiness of a friend. Indeed, one must *personally* and *individually* come to Christ to be saved. As Jesus told Nicodemus: Truly, Truly, I say to you (σΟΙ; 'you' singular), unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). No one is born again because of a friend's merits or because he is born into the right family. A person must resolutely and personally come to Christ to be saved!

You must be born again. God does not simply throw a blanket out and see *if* anyone might be saved. He saves particular people. He rebirths His elect. He brings to life those whom He has predestined. Individuals are born again, by God's grace and through His power. A few things must be mentioned regarding the individuality of the new birth.

First, Families cannot save. A person born into a very pious family where Christ's headship reigns supreme in the home cannot save a person's soul. A family that regularly engages in family worship, instructing the children, and seeing that the little ones are taught the Word of God -- as good as all of that is -- it cannot *in and of itself* produce salvation.

Second, Ancestry cannot save. Being of the right nationality or having a certain background (or, ancestry) cannot contribute to one's salvation. Regardless of whether one is Gentile, Jewish, of a noble family, a prominent family, a wealthy family, or a powerful family, none of these features can save.

Third, Morality cannot save. As kind as people are one to another and as kind as people are to those whom they love, morality cannot save. Nice people cannot make other people righteous before God. Morality without Christ's righteousness are nothing but shiny chains that unstoppably drag a person to hell. The righteous merits of a person cannot contribute to another's redemption.

A few reminders are in place. You must be born again. It is a very individual, personal, name-specific regeneration that God imparts. You yourself must personally come. Do not depend on another or on the merits of another. You must individually, resolutely and confidently come. Indeed, you must believingly come. Come knowing that Jesus will not cast you away. Believe with confidence that Jesus is a glorious Savior, a willing redeemer, a tender shepherd, and a loving friend. Do not waver or hesitate. You must unreservedly come. Don't come with conditions. Forsake all to come to Christ! You must resolutely come. Come violently if needed. Come with resolve, with tenacity, with focus, with passion, with urgency, and with boldness. Storm the mercy seat of God in the holy of holies pleading for the blood of Christ to wash your sins away and cover you from impending wrath. And O, you must gladly come. Come with a joyful spirit because this new birth that God grants individuals is an unspeakably wonderful work. It grants comfort to the soul, hope to the wandering, heaven as the goal, and a sufficient Savior to forgive.

The HUMILITY of the New Birth

Geoffrey R. Kirkland

Christ Fellowship Bible Church

Without a doubt, the act of God in bringing about the new birth humbles the sinner. No Christian can boast at the cross. No one can co-mingle pride with humility or self-righteousness with Christ's righteousness in the gospel. It cannot happen. The monergistic act of God alone slaughters pride in the soul of man. When this essay speaks of the humility of the new birth, a few things should be explained.

1) A humility in the sinner's **HEART**. The Apostle Peter writes to believers and reminds them that God has *caused them* to be born again to a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). This verbage that Peter uses extolls the glory, grandeur, and exclusivity of God in bringing about and solely accomplishing the new birth on behalf of sinners. This must humble the sinner. Sinners cannot rebirth themselves. Sinners cannot accomplish new life in their own souls. Just as powerless as a person was in bringing about their *first, physical* birth so powerless is a person in bringing about a *second, spiritual* birth. This bare fact humbles the sinner's heart. The born-again believer glories that God has worked on his behalf and he understands that a proper understanding of the new birth humbles his own heart since it strips him of all pride, self-righteousness and worthiness.

2) A humility in the sinner's **PROCLAMATION**. When Jesus interacted with Nicodemus, a very religious, Jewish man, he proclaimed the doctrine of the new birth to him. *The* evangelistic message that the Lord Jesus uttered to *the* teacher of Israel (John 3:10) was the simple truth that Nicodemus must be born again (John 3:7). As the new birth was the very doctrine that Jesus evangelistically proclaimed to the lost so it must be a part of our proclamation as well! Christians should learn from Christ verbally proclaim the glory of the new birth!

3) A humility in the sinner's **LIFE**. When God, by His sovereign power and initiative, grants life to the sinner's soul, God puts His Spirit within the sinner and causes him to walk in His statutes (Ezek 36:27). So radical will this change of life be that the sinner will walk in God's statutes and be careful to observe God's ordinances (Ezek 36:27). That means that the newly regenerated sinner's *life* will be one marked by humility as he follows *God*, his new master. No longer will a sinner live for himself and for his selfish cravings but now he lives for God and for Christ's glory.

4) A humility in the sinner's **WORSHIP**. Christians who have been recipients of the saving and sovereign work of God in the new birth have one primary goal: to be conformed to the image of Christ and to worship the Lamb who was slain in his stead. When God saves a man, he changes that person's heart so that the born-again Christian *wants* to worship God, he *longs* to exalt Christ, and he *yearns* to be fully of joy in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's life in the soul of a man produces a deep humility in the person who lives and loves and worships Christ, alone, as Lord!

No one is so humble as is the Lord Jesus Christ. None stooped so low as did the Savior Himself. God has every right to be prideful and yet He is perfectly humble. The new birth brings about humility as the regenerated sinner gladly boasts only in the cross! Salvation truly is from the Lord! Nothing humbles as much as considering the new birth as *the* work of God, by the power of God, because of the will of God, through the Son of God, for the glory of God!

The PRODUCER of the New Birth

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The words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemus revealed that the only way to see the kingdom of God is unless “one is born again” (John 3:3; ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν). But the question must be asked and then biblically answered: *who produces this new birth?* How does it come about? Who works this process and accomplishes the task? In this brief essay, the Scriptures will be examined and brought to bear in showing *who* produces the new birth. This write-up will show that the Spirit of God is the producer of the rebirth. He works by His power, by His sovereignty, by His initiative, and by His working. Each will be briefly looked at in turn.

1) The **Spirit** of God. Jesus went on to tell Nicodemus in the conversation that unless one is born [ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ] of the water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5). The verbal form that is used here in John 3:5 (and earlier in John 3:3) when speaking of being *born again* [γεννηθῆ] is a passive verbal. That means that the subject is *not* doing the action but the action is *being done* to him; that is to say, he is receiving the action. Another is performing the work upon him. This means that Nicodemus — and all people — must be the *recipients* of the saving work of the Spirit of God. He must do the work. He, the Spirit, must produce this new life in people in order for them to be saved.

2) The **power** of God. In order to produce new life, spiritual resurrection from the dead must occur. None can do this in his own strength. No man is powerful enough to raise the dead (physically, much less spiritually). Only God can raise the dead and the Spirit of God is called the Spirit of Life (Rom 8:2) and He is *able* to give life to whomever He wills.

3) The **sovereignty** of God. None can force God to act and move. By God’s sovereign prerogative and by His perfect decrees, he works. He does according to His plan with no one who can ever thwart His plan. He produces the new birth in the souls of dead sinners with none who can resist, stay his hand, or refuse this all-sovereign, all-powerful working of God.

4) The **initiative** of God. The Spirit does not produce life in the *best* of people. He does not impart spiritual life to the most beautiful and lovely of people. Nor does He choose to save those who are the most moral and religious. No! Rather, it is by the sole, supreme, exclusive and sovereign initiative of God that the sinner receives the re-birth. God initiates it all. God awakens and God draws (John 6:44, ἐλκύση). No sinner, who is dead in his own sin, can initiate the salvation-process. No one picks or chooses or reaches for God. God initiates and produces the new birth in its entirety.

5) The **working** of God. The salvation event that God imparts in the souls of sinners is not a temporary working but a full, complete, entire, holistic re-birth. The producer of the birth from above is the Spirit of God who initiates the process, He gives life to the sinner, He saves Him to the uttermost, indwells in Him till glorification, and never comes up short and loses a soul. God the Spirit produces the new birth and He does so by His own working from first to last and completes the entire process by Himself, for the magnification of Christ, to the Father’s glory.

The MIRACLE of the New Birth

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That the new birth is nothing short of a miracle is clear because it is something that only God can do. A true miracle is something contrary to nature that only God can do. A miracle according to Scripture, is something that defies the laws of nature since God has brought it about by His power and for His purposes. When God says: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26, emphasis added), the miracle of the new birth has taken place.

1) An **instantaneous** miracle. The regeneration event is a mere instantaneous working of God in the soul of man. It is the life of God in the soul of man that the Spirit of God quickens by His sovereignty, for His glory, in a moment of time. Just as the Lord opened Lydia’s heart *in a moment’s time* as she heard the preached Word and then she believed, this is the working of the Spirit of God who instantaneously regenerates and gives life to dead souls (cf. Acts 16:14).

2) A **divine** miracle. The new birth happens because God *begins* and *accomplishes* and *perfects* the work. Human workings has no part nor does it have any contribution whatsoever to the salvation-event. It is all of God. James writes that it is by the exercise of His will that *He [God] brought us forth* (James 1:18). Peter says that *God* has caused us to be born again (1 Pet 1:3).

3) A **received** miracle. Regeneration is not merely something that people look at on others but for those who look to Christ and trust in Him they *receive* and *experience* the miracle of the new birth. Those whom God quickens, they are then enabled to believe and be justified! Regeneration is not merely something observed; it is *received* personally by God’s amazing grace.

4) A **radical** miracle. So radical is this new birth that God effects in the sinner’s soul that Peter describes it as being ‘born again’ to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3). The old nature, old habits, old cravings are gone. Moreover, God removes filthiness and idols and gives a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:25-26). Indeed, He now causes His own to walk in His statutes (Ezek 26:27). Truly, this is a miracle; indeed, a radical working of God!

5) An **eternal** miracle. The new birth does not fade away. None who receive the new birth can lose it. All whom the Spirit regenerates, He keeps, He preserves, He guards, and He glorifies. No person who has ever been given the second birth has lost it — ever! Paul says that believers have received the washing of regeneration ... so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs of the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7). This new birth lasts forever.

6) An **irreversible** miracle. What God gives life to, nothing can revoke that life ever again. It is an irreversible working of God. We are born again to a living hope *to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven* for believers (1 Pet 1:3-4). Such people are preserved by the power of God for a salvation to be revealed (1 Pet 1:5). This new birth cannot ever be revoked, reversed, taken away. Regeneration is the permanent cementing of new life in the soul of a man. This new life from God produces joy inexpressible and full of glory!

The FINALITY of the New Birth

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Salvation would be of little profit and it would impart no comfort if it could be reversible. Yet the Word of God clearly affirms that the work of God in the soul of man is a *final* work, an irreversible work, an unchangeable work, and a divine work. The Apostle Peter affirms that God has caused believers to be born again [ἀναγεννήσας] to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Pet 1:3-4). Unspeakable comfort, unfathomable mercies, and unquenchable consolations pour out from these verses. This brief write-up will further explain the *finality* of the new birth.

1) It is IRREVERSIBLE. God declares: “I act and who can reverse it?” (Isa 43:13). When God performs the rebirth in the soul of a man, it cannot be changed. No man, no power, no situation, no sin can alter what God has accomplished on behalf of His elect. As the process can’t be reversed when a human baby is born, so impossible is it spiritually to reverse the heavenly-birth. What God accomplishes is perfect and eternal. Let this comfort the believer’s soul!

2) It is IRREVOCABLE. Not only is the new birth irreversible (can’t be altered), but also is irrevocable. This underscores the promise that the heavenly birth cannot be taken away. All whom God rebirths are those whom He *Himself* carries to heaven. None that He saves can be lost. Salvation cannot be revoked from any of Christ’s blood-bought sheep. Those who are born again are “protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5). The sovereign, monergistic work of God cannot be altered, revoked, insufficient or inadequate. This reality of the irrevocable finality of the new birth must comfort God’s children!

3) It is UNSTOPPABLE. God does according to His will and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him: “what have you done?” (Dan 4:35). What God decrees and determines to accomplish, none can stop Him. None can thwart His ways. The LORD is a Warrior and none can stop Him (Ex 15:2). The glorious act of supernatural regeneration that comes upon a dead soul by the uninfluenced and unconditional grace of God cannot be resisted. Much comfort comes from this truth when God grants new life, none can willfully and blasphemously reject it. As Jesus said, the new birth must be compared to the wind, for people hear the sound of it but do not know where it comes from or where it is going. None can stop the wind. It’s invisible, it’s powerful, it’s unstoppable, it’s beyond human control. So it is with God’s working in the new birth.

4) It is UNEXPLAINABLE. Like the wind, man knows that regeneration is there but he cannot fully comprehend and explain it. This is only fitting since the new birth is a full, supreme, divine miracle. Miracles cannot be explained by finite, human creatures. The regeneration act is nothing short of a supernatural, instantaneous, unrepeatable miracle! Indeed, as a miracle performed by God and by Him alone, man cannot fully explain it. We receive it and believe it!

5) It is FINAL. All of this emphatically underscores the promise that the new birth can’t come up short. It can’t leave one dangling over heaven and then at last drop them into hell. The work of God in the soul of a man by the grace of Christ by the sovereignty of the Spirit is a final, saving, eternal, unstoppable, and glorious work. Let Christians rejoice and be glad in God!

The **PROMISE** of the New Birth

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In the discourse that the Lord Jesus had with Nicodemus, the topic of the new birth permeated the entire discussion. Nicodemus was not reborn and Jesus told Him that he must receive the new birth in order to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The new birth — a sovereign working of God, by His initiative, by His power, and for His glory — comes from God and comes to sinners! Only God can grant the new birth. Salvation is a *monergistic* act. God, and God alone, accomplishes *all* of the rebirth. None can help, contribute to, aid, or supplement the working of God in the soul of a man. There are some promises that exist in the discussion on the new birth. This essay will elaborate on a few of the promises of the new birth.

1) The **PRESENTED** promise. When Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, *the* teacher of Israel (John 3:10a) and one who knew the Hebrew Scriptures very well (implied in John 3:10b), Jesus presented Him with a promise. John 3:15 says that whoever believes will in Him [in Christ] have eternal life. Jesus presents Nicodemus with a promise, and it extends to everyone who would believe in Jesus Christ. The promise that Christ presented to Nicodemus was that whoever looks to the Son and beholds Him will certainly receive eternal life. None shall be turned away if they come to Jesus Christ by faith alone. The new birth is a working of God, by His grace and for His glory, and it is this that then permits a person's eyes to be opened to see his sinful condition, his eternal condemnation, and the complete salvation found in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. But the promise remains, whoever believes *will* have eternal life. The promise of eternal life is presented to whoever would come to Christ and believe in His name.

2) A **DIVINE** promise. None other than the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, provided this promise to Nicodemus. Human promises may come to fruition, but they may not. But when God makes a promise, He always remains true to His Word. He cannot lie for He always is faithful. The promise that Christ makes to Nicodemus and to all who believe in Christ is that he will have eternal life. This is no mere human wish. This is a divine, bonafide, unbreakable promise. God Himself declares that whoever believes will *in Christ* have eternal life. Nothing can be more sure than the promises that come from Christ's lips.

3) An **ETERNAL** promise. Jesus tells Nicodemus that whoever believes will have eternal life. This is not just life in this world and living it to the fullest, though it is! This is life eternal that begins at the moment of God's supernatural and sovereign working in the person's soul and continues even past the moment of physical death to endless eternities to come. Believing on Christ brings eternal life. The truest sense of life eternal, everlasting blessednesses, and unending joys in the immediate presence of the Triune God forever comes to the person who believes in Christ!

4) A **SURE** promise. The conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus covered the spectrum of the new birth. It is God alone who accomplishes it and when a person believes in Christ, that sinner most certainly, most definitely, and most assuredly possesses eternal life. The word of God is sure, reliable, trustworthy, dependable and faithful. O the blessed promise of Jesus Christ!

The TIMING of the New Birth

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Regeneration is perhaps the most wonderfully indescribable event that ever takes place. It is at the same time wonderfully supernatural and divinely mysterious and yet at the same time it is something personally experiential that every true child of God has experienced. But when does the new birth occur? Does one do something in order to become born again? How is one regenerated? What's the timing of the whole salvation-event like? Who does it? And when does it happen? This essay will present three helpful headings under the topic of the timing of the new birth to show that God is the one who initiates the entire act of regeneration so that the new birth is the first and necessary element in salvation coming to a sinner.

First, the new birth is the FIRST ACT OF THE SALVATION EVENT. The brother of the Lord Jesus, the Apostle James, writes in his epistle that, by the exercise of God's will, He brought us forth by the word of truth (James 1:18). Through James' pen, then, God reveals that the new birth is the bringing forth of a dead soul by God's sovereign will as he hears the word of truth. And this word of truth is the gospel of his salvation (Eph 1:13). The necessity of having a biblically sound anthropology comes to the surface here. If mankind is radically depraved and totally unable to come to God, then *it is only something outside the dead sinner* that can impart life to him. Dead people cannot give life to themselves. Spiritually dead souls need someone *external to them* to grant spiritual life to them. Paul writes that all are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) and that it is God who, even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ (Eph 2:5). The first act of the salvation event is not *man coming to God* but *God coming to man*. It's not man living in himself and reaching to God but it's God *graciously imparting life* to His elect and coming to them by His sovereign mercy. Thus, the new birth — sovereign regeneration — is the first act of the salvation event.

Second, the new birth is the SOVEREIGN ACT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. The Holy Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:6). None can make dead sinners alive except the sovereign working of God. The law of the Spirit *who gives life* in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2). It is the Spirit that gives life (John 6:63). So when sinners are born into this world, although alive physically, they remain walking zombies, as it were, and exist as spiritually dead men. But when the sovereign act of the Holy Spirit, by the Father's will, for Christ's glory, and by the His own quickening grace gives life to completely dead souls, that sinner instantaneously is brought to life by the *monergistic*, supreme, supernatural work of God.

Third, the new birth is GOD'S NECESSARY WORK TO AWAKEN DEAD SOULS. No one can come to God unless the sinner is drawn to God by God Himself (John 6:44). Darkness hates the light (John 3:19-20). None are good and none can come to God (Rom 3:10-20). In fact, none are able to please God (Rom 8:8). Therefore, no one can pick God, choose God, run to God, make a choice or decision for God, or ultimately, in the truest sense, decide to become a Christian. Regeneration, the new birth, is God's necessary work to awaken dead souls so that they behold their sin, see their condition, mourn over their vileness, tremble before God's holiness and His justice and who behold the Lamb who was slain for sinners. When God grants life, sinners are then enabled to run to Christ and flee to Him for salvation!

The RECEIVING of the New Birth

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Christ Fellowship Bible Church

How does a dead sinner receive this new birth? How does it come to the depraved soul? How does a person gain new life? In seeking to understand how the new birth is received, I will mention a few thoughts.

1) Personal. God gives the new birth to *individuals* that He has sovereignly elected. He does not save people generally; he regenerates individuals personally. The new birth is something that happens to *me*. It is a very personal, individual, God-given, sovereign, and glorious work to a soul.

2) Powerful. The new birth that comes from God is irresistibly powerful. It cannot be thwarted, resisted, rejected, or despised. Regeneration is God's working. Regeneration must be received like this. If not, no soul would ever be saved for no sinner, engulfed in sin and living in darkness, would ever want Christ, seek after Him, and run to Him for eternal salvation! O how regeneration must come from the powerful, unconquerable strength of the God of Jacob! It comes from the mighty hand of God to the dead soul of a man. It is a divine, powerful, unstoppable miracle!

3) Permanent. When God rebirths a person the life endures permanently in his soul. He can never lose the new life. He cannot exchange it, lose it, or forfeit it. God's working is permanent. Not only does God bring the new birth powerfully to dead sinners but he also permanently brings them new life. Dead sinners that come to life *never die again*. The life God gives is eternal.

4) Purifying. When God regenerates a soul he purifies and cleanses that soul. The life that God imparts to the deadened soul transforms the life from a stony heart to a beating heart. He changes that heart from a spiritually cold heart to a spiritually warm heart to the things of God. God regenerates and sanctifies. The new birth gives life and it purifies the soul by God's grace!

5) Pleasurable. Nothing in all the vast universe can compare with the life-giving pleasures that assuredly come from God's regenerative work. Nothing delights the soul like God's gospel, like the sweetness of Christ, like the fellowship of the Spirit, like the preciousness of the Word. The new birth brings the ultimate delight, the unending pleasures, and the eternal blessings to undeserving sinners. God's work in man's soul is sweet and joyous and full of divine pleasures. This is so because Christ is revealed to the sinner and he now rejoices in Christ and loves Him!

6) Preeminent. Perhaps the ultimate act in the working of salvation is the instantaneous, miraculous, supernatural, monergistic, irresistible act of God in giving life to vile sinners. Salvation truly is 'of the Lord' (Psalm 3:8). And it is by God's doing that believers are in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:30). The first act — and the ultimate, preeminent action — of salvation is when God alone breathes life, by His sovereign will, by His perfect power, for His eternal glory to sinners. Out of all the peaks in the vast mountain range of the doctrine of salvation, that which towers high above all the rest is that of regeneration!

The TRANSFORMATION from the New Birth

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As God performs the work of the new birth in the soul of a man, that sinner never remains the same. In fact, that sinner, from that moment on, is eternally changed. When God works in a man he transforms that man. When God grants the new birth he changes the way of life. He is a newly transformed man — entirely. Or, to use Paul's words: "he is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17).

In speaking of the *results* of the new birth, I want to show how regeneration transforms a person. In a sense, this discussion on the transformation speaks of the *sanctification* process rather than the *monergistic* regeneration act of God. Nevertheless, the two always go together. When God regenerates a person, that inevitably leads to transformation, or, what we may call sanctification.

1) An INTERNAL transformation. Just as a surgery takes place on the inside of a person so the work of regeneration occurs on the inside of a person. Regeneration transforms the whole person. God's life that He gives to dead souls happens on the inside of a man. It will, over time, inevitably affect his conduct [=sanctification] but it is an invisible, internal, soul-work.

2) A COMPLETE transformation. The new birth that comes from God transforms the soul entirely. God removes the entire old heart and replaces it with a radically new *and spiritually alive* heart. Salvation is not a partial work of God. Nor is it a potential offer. Regeneration completely transforms the person because God's imparting of life is a complete, instantaneous, miraculous, supernatural, and effective act of sovereign grace.

3) An ETERNAL transformation. God gives life and never revokes that life. There has never been a person who has received the new birth who has lost that salvation. Regeneration always is one-sided. It takes a man from death to life. But never can a man, at a later point, go from life back to death. The transformation work of God to the soul is an eternal work. God has caused His people to be born again to a *living hope* (1 Pet 1:3) in order to "obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet 1:4). Peter affirms that this life that comes from God is as eternal as God Himself is. It is as protected as God is Himself trustworthy. None who truly have been born again can lose, forfeit, revoke, or fall from this regeneration state. It is an eternal and transforming work in the soul.

4) An EVIDENT transformation. Regeneration is divine heart-surgery. He removes the old heart and replaces it with a new heart. It's internal, invisible, supernatural and instantaneous. It will *manifest* itself as the believer carefully observes (obeys) God's ordinances (Ezek 36:27).

5) A PROGRESSIVE transformation. The true work of God in salvation (regeneration/ the new birth) will *certainly* and *gloriously* transform the person's life. He will progressively grow in holiness, walk in Christlikeness. He is positionally in Christ and he'll progressively mature in his practice of Christlikeness. The work of God on the soul of a man changes his life. Regeneration always produces sanctification. Sanctification is always the fruit of the new birth.

The ASSURANCE from the New Birth

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Jesus states that whoever is born again will see the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3). If one receives the Spirit-given new life he will enter heaven. It is an absolute necessity (John 3:7). In the same context as Christ discoursed with Nicodemus, he announced that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life (John 3:15). Much assurance comes from Jesus' words. In looking at the new birth and the assurance that comes from God's regenerative work in the believer, a few things should be noted.

1) The assurance from the new birth is **divinely given**. As has been noted previously in the essays, regeneration comes from God. He works it and accomplishes it in the soul of the sinner. Regeneration is the life of God that comes to the soul of a man. It is given by God — and God alone. That which is born of the flesh is flesh (flesh only gives birth to flesh) but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (only the Spirit can give birth to new, spiritual life) (John 3:6).

2) The assurance from the new birth is **Spirit-confirmed**. Once regeneration has come to the sinner, by God's grace, the Spirit Himself testifies with the believer's spirit that he is a child of God (Rom 8:16). That is to say, true salvation and assurance comes from God and ultimately rests on the internal assurance that the Spirit of God effects in the believer's heart. Thus, the work of the Spirit in regenerating those whom the Father had elected and the Son purchased includes his confirming and assuring work in the believer's soul.

3) The assurance from the new birth is **eternally secure**. This salvation that the Spirit performs in the soul of the person lasts forever. No one and nothing can sever this life from the believer's soul. Titus speaks of believers being washed by regeneration and the renewing by the Holy Spirit ... *so that* we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7). Regeneration leads to the reality that believers stand justified by God's grace (Titus 3:7) and are heirs of eternal life. The inheritance certainly will come to the believer (Eph 1:13-14).

4) The assurance from the new birth is **eminently comforting**. Nothing can so uplift the heart than a person remembering that the Father has chosen him for salvation, the Son came to particularly purchase him, and the Spirit grants the new birth by His sovereign grace and by His irresistible draw. This comforts believers and assures the heart of a Christian because the new birth comes from God specifically to His own. Regeneration is a glorious work of God which stems from His eternal love that He set upon His elect.

5) The assurance from the new birth **stimulates holiness**. By the exercise of God's will God brings believers forth (=regeneration) by means of the word of truth (=hearing the gospel) *so that* believers would be a kind of firstfruits among all God's creatures (James 1:18). Believers who have new hearts and new natures progress in holiness as they continue to manifest the glory of Christ, just as firstfruits manifest in miniature what the full crop will resemble. As the believer reflects on the new birth, he finds his soul unstoppably warmed by the glory of Christ and he has a relentless passion to grow in holiness, imitate his Savior and savor divine things.

The PROCLAMATION of the New Birth

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Jesus proclaimed the gospel! He loved sinners so much that He ministered truth to their souls. He pleaded with them to repent. He cried out for sinners to come to Him to find rest for their souls. In conversing with Nicodemus, one of Israel's most foremost scholars, Jesus proclaimed the necessity and imperative of the new birth as the only way of seeing the kingdom of God (John 3:3). In fact, this particular encounter with Nicodemus underscores just how frequently Christ made reference to Nicodemus's need of being 'born again' (John 3:3, 7) and of being 'born of the Spirit' (John 3:5, 6, 8). Jesus proclaimed the new birth when interacting the lost. It would greatly profit believers today to grab hold of this doctrine and to include it in gospel conversations.

1) The new birth must be proclaimed because it emulates how Christ preached. The master evangelist Himself pleaded with a lost soul by incorporating this doctrine of the new birth in his message. He showed that one cannot enter the kingdom of God unless the Spirit of God Himself performs radical, internal, heart, life-giving work. No one can enter any other way. Christ, the man on mission from God and the supreme lover of souls, sets forth an example of pleading with sinners with the gospel and remarking how insufficient it is to depend upon one's good efforts. Christ pointed to regeneration's necessity: you must be born again (John 3:7).

2) The new birth must be proclaimed because it glorifies the sovereign, saving work of God. Rather than many manmade, human-exalting, anthropocentric [man-centered] evangelistic methods today exhorting people to choose Jesus, try Jesus, pick Jesus, pray to Jesus, accept Jesus, what Jesus proclaimed was the absolute inability of Nicodemus, one of Israel's most religious men, to save himself. He needed *the Spirit of God* to come, to save, to impart life, to regenerate. This proclamation of the new birth glorifies God rather than glorifies man.

3) The new birth must be proclaimed because it eliminates man's cooperation in the saving of his soul. After all, the Bible unequivocally affirms that all are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) and that the natural man cannot please God (Rom 8:7). Thus, man cannot cooperate in the least in the saving of his soul. Man can't pick God, believe in Him, unless *God first comes to the dead soul and gives divine life to it*. Man cannot cooperate; it's all by God's grace.

4) The new birth must be proclaimed because it comforts the evangelist who faithfully takes the hearer to Christ and Him crucified and leaves the results to God. No Christian can make another person believe. No gospel presentation is savvy enough to convert another soul. Rather, believers can take comfort in knowing that in so far as they faithfully impart Christ and Him crucified, the power of God in the gospel has gone forth and the Spirit of God will cause the growth according to His sovereign will.

5) The new birth must be proclaimed because of the large swatch of misinformed, professing Christians who think they are 'born again' because of something that they did in the past. Countless multitudes of churchgoers (and, perhaps, many who don't even go to church anymore!) believe *with all their heart* that because of a decision in the past they're saved. But the new birth affirms that salvation comes not to those who made a past decision for Jesus but for those to whom the Spirit has awakened to new life.

The PREACHING of the New Birth

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Preacher of God: *you must preach the glory of God in the saving of sinners!* It is paramount to preach this biblical gospel, namely, God gives spiritual life to spiritually dead souls. Regeneration is the life of God in the soul of a man. Pulpits must thunder out this glorious, God-honoring, Christ-magnifying, Spirit-energized message! It is truth! Men of God must preach the new birth.

1) The preacher's THEOLOGY. Preaching is biblical truth on fire. Heralding takes the word of God and elucidates the theology of God through a man empowered by the Spirit of God. Preaching is biblical theology thundering from the Word, in power, to the hearers. The minister's theology of the new birth is paramount. He must know that God saves and he must trust that God alone will grant the new birth through the preaching of the Word.

2) The preacher's CONFIDENCE. Preaching the new birth comforts the minister as he has unshakeable confidence in the power of God to grant life to the dead souls to whom he speaks. Those hardened sinners in the pew can come to life through the almighty, regenerative, irresistible power of the Spirit. Let the minister take comfort and have confidence in his heralding.

3) The preacher's EXPERIENCE. The pastor himself has been reborn and thus he preaches out of love for the hearers so that they may also experience the new birth by God's unstoppable power. He knows that the new birth is what truly changes a person. Morals, a new mindset, new habits, a mere decision, new resolutions cannot effect soul-change. Only the Spirit-endowed new birth can do this. Let the preacher, who himself is reborn, preach that this would happen to his hearers.

4) The preacher's URGENCY. Let every pastor remember the brevity of life. How urgent must every minister of the gospel be with the precious and eternal souls of men. Let him preach the word of God and the Christ of the Word so that souls will be won by the Spirit of God! Like Jesus, all heralds must announce the absolute, urgent necessity of being born again to see the kingdom of God!

5) The preacher's UNDERSTANDING. Many who hear the Word preached remain unconverted. The seed falls often on hard hearts and they remain obstinate. Let the minister understand that unless men are born again, they remain lost and headed for destruction. Understand this, and one will preach the gospel with fire, passion, zeal, and confidence.

6) The preacher's GOD-GLORIFYING PASSION. The goal of preaching is the glory of God. As the word goes forth, let God bring many into His kingdom to worship the Lamb who was slain for sinners. The minister's goal in preaching the new birth is for God to receive glory!

7) The preacher's JOY. Joy abounds in heaven over sinners who repent! Let every preacher of the gospel preach the new birth and anticipate this joy of the Spirit giving life to His own.

The CONFIDENCE in the New Birth

Geoffrey R. Kirkland

Christ Fellowship Bible Church

The believer receives nothing that can comfort the soul as much as the promise from God that He Himself grants life. It is *His* doing. It is His doing *alone*. And it is a work that God accomplishes by Himself, for Himself, and for the glory of His dear Son. God promises in Ezekiel 11:19 that God will take away the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh. When God says, "I will take away the heart of stone" [וְהִסְרֹתִי לֵב הָאֲבָן] it means that he removes and extracts the old heart that is cold, lifeless, and hostile to God and the things of righteousness. And then God says: "I will give them a heart of flesh" [וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם לֵב בָּשָׂר] which speaks to the sovereign life that He imparts to the sinner. The Christian, thus, must have absolute confidence that God always remains true to His Word. When a lost person hears the word of God and comes face to face with the gospel of salvation, the evangelist can speak with confidence and believe confidently in God that the gospel cannot return void. It is God who gives the new heart and the new Spirit (Ezek 36:26-27).

In speaking to people, Christians must have confidence that models that of Christ as He dialogued with Nicodemus. Nicodemus *must* [δέξει] be born again in order to see the kingdom of God (John 3:7). The Spirit blows where He wills and just as men cannot see the wind itself but yet all people can see the effects of the wind, so it is with the working of God's Spirit in the regeneration event that no one can see the invisible, supernatural miracle that God accomplishes in the soul of a sinner, yet the effects of this Spirit-given life are unmistakable in a newly-saved person's life. The Apostle Peter blessed God who Himself caused believers to be born again to a living hope. It is God who causes the new birth [ὁ ἀναγεννήσας] and when Christians understand this truth and it seizes their souls, they live with confidence, they speak with boldness, they evangelize with courage, and they trust in God's absolute sovereignty. A few points should be mentioned in the context of the new birth and its relation to one's confidence.

Regeneration instills confidence in **ONE'S OWN SALVATION**. Every Christian can bless God that regeneration does not stop at some point, but rather, God has caused us to be born again to a living hope ... to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable (1 Pet 1:3-4). Thus, regeneration lasts forever. Unspeakable confidence and unending comforts reside in this doctrine and console the believer's soul as he considers with confidence his eternal destiny.

Regeneration instills confidence in **PERSONAL EVANGELISM**. A child of God can plead with sinners to repent, trust in Christ and affirm to them that they need to be born again by God Himself. And every Christian can evangelize others with confidence and courage knowing that Christ is Lord and He saves His elect. This doctrine instills confidence in every Christian.

Regeneration instills confidence in **PUBLIC PROCLAMATION**. As the man heralds Christ's Word from the pulpit and presents the Word and the free offer of the gospel, he should rest confidently, preach confidently and plead confidently knowing that the Spirit saves.

Regeneration instills confidence in **THE TRIUNE GOD WHO CANNOT LIE**. Those whom the Father gave to the Son, the Spirit will save. So then, O Christian, be confident in Him.

The DOXOLOGY from the New Birth

Geoffrey R. Kirkland

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Everything that God does results in the glory of God. God works for His own glory. Everything is from God, through God, and for God. He is the end of all things. Perhaps the greatest act that brings glory to God is when a deadened sinner, hostile to God, a vile worm, a despicable rebel, an arrogant and self-worshipping and self-proclaiming person is radically regenerated by the supernatural Spirit so that divine life is given to a dead soul so that the stony, God-hating heart becomes a living, Christ-loving heart. And all this is done by God *for God*. Regeneration is doxological in every sense of the term! *What are the results of the new birth and how does this give glory to God?*

1) Regeneration **EXTOLS THE WORK OF GOD.** As has been mentioned and supported in nearly every essay in this series, regeneration comes from God and results from the sovereign, uninfluenced, miraculous power of God. Thus, it truly is, in the words of James, “by the exercise of His will *He brought us forth by the Word of Truth*” (James 1:18). It is *God* who Himself gives the new heart and the new Spirit (Ezek 36:26-27). It all is from God. Regeneration glorifies God because it comes from God and magnifies the only one worthy to receive praise — *God*.

2) Regeneration **DEMONSTRATES THE POWER OF GOD.** None can cooperate with God in the salvation event. None pick God and none would choose God. But that God takes rebels who live dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, and indulging the lusts of the flesh and the desires of the flesh and the mind, and are by nature children headed for wrath [τέκνα ὀργῆς] (Eph 2:1-3) and then He *made us alive together with Christ* [συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ] (Eph 2:5), demonstrates the unrivaled, sovereign, majestic, unstoppable power of the Almighty God!

3) Regeneration **PROVES ITSELF IN SANCTIFICATION.** Those whom God makes alive (Eph 2:5) are those who are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works* [ἔτι ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς] which God prepared beforehand so that believers would walk in them (Eph 2:10). Regeneration produces an obedient life where God’s people walk in His statutes and keep His ordinances and do them [לְמַעַן בְּחַקְתִּי יֵלְכוּ וְאֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי יִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשׂוּ אֹתָם] (Ezek 11:20). A converted soul will always manifest itself in a changed life. God’s life in the soul changes the course of one’s life — always, progressively, and inevitably. And this results in God’s glory!

4) Regeneration **ALLOWS THE BELIEVER TO PLEASE GOD.** The unsaved cannot please God (Rom 8:7). Yet believers strive to live pleasing to God in all things (2 Cor 5:9).

5) Regeneration **EXTOLS EACH MEMBER OF THE DIVINE GODHEAD.** The Father elects, the Son redeems, and the Spirit regenerates. God always works in perfect harmony with Himself and the saving of a soul magnifies the triune God for His power, glory, and grace!

6) Regeneration **LAUNCHES THANKSGIVING IN A BELIEVER THAT WILL CONTINUE THROUGHOUT ETERNITY IN HEAVEN.** Peter blessed God for the new birth (1 Pet 1:3). Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive glory forevermore (Rev 5:12).

