

# **THE DIVINE IMPERATIVE: YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN**

**By Stanley C. Phillips**

Satan has more gimmicks to delude individuals into a false security of salvation than anyone can analyze in a brief article. Many are the man-made "plans of salvation" and throughout the world there are ten thousands of "Lo here, and lo there" quick and easy ways to enlist souls into organizations. But ah, how serious a matter that is so lightly taken by the multitudes! The eternal destiny of a soul is weighed against commercial "quick fixes" designed for modern-paced living!

These gimmicks range from the ancient sprinkling of infants before they are conscious of their soul's need, to deliberate tricks designed to lure children into religious societies' membership, membership in popular religious "in-groups", and promised camping trips for joiners. Once committed, the poor child is reared to believe his soul is safe from danger — not on the basis of anything Christ or the Holy Spirit have done —but solely upon his "Christian commitment (to which he may not have ever been committed in the first instance). Thus deluded, millions busy themselves in "helping the Lord" achieve what He has already accomplished by the sacrificial life and death He suffered in behalf of poor sensible sinners. Far too many expect to earn the blessings of the eternal God by performing acts which are totally unwarranted, or which were already effectually performed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such deluded souls have no experiential basis to suspect a difference exists between the mere nominal confession and the powerful circumcision

of the heart by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Having nothing by which to compare the "precious from the vile," nor anything to create and remove a sin-ridden conscience, they run after vain imaginations, follow charismatic speakers, and famous personalities, and esteemed religious organizations. Being dogmatic in their nominal "know-so salvation," (as they delight to call it) nothing in the Gospel exhortations and warnings spark any alarm to their benighted souls. Thus they pass through their "Christian experience" without an experience, unto everlasting damnation with ease and complacency.

Indeed, the ministers of Satan have built bulwarks against any effectual warnings by their twisted Arminian and Pelagian concepts. The great imperative "Ye must be born again" or "born from above" as an experiential work within the soul is glossed over as enamel on a rusty tin can. To be born again, they are led to believe it consist of one of several external acts, such as: "making a decision for Christ," "taking the sacraments," "joining the church," following three or four "simple acts of faith", "baptism", "walking down an aisle", doing "charity works," or "reforming society." All these are unwarranted external acts by which souls are deluded into a sense of security while they continue unchanged in an unregenerate state. Yet they truly believe they are thus "born again Christians." Nothing short of the power of God can pull that false foundation out from under them, and this power must be a sovereign unaided work of the Holy Spirit of God.

Still more sad is the fact that many called "Calvinists" make regeneration a magical incantation of pet Scriptures, as John 3:16, conjoined with Gospel preaching, or "Gospel regeneration". Thus they deny the very doctrine they espouse — effectual calling by the Spirit - or at least make it a cooperative effort between the preacher "with proper church authority" and the Holy Spirit. In so doing, they appear unaware that while preaching the sovereignty of God the Father and of the Son, they deny the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit and thus destroy (for themselves) the concept of the eternal Godhead. They feel for some reason that they must in some wise still give at least a little initiative to man — if only the preacher man — to effectuate

salvation. Many can preach great convincing sermons on the *total* depravity of man, and then inconsistently conclude that man is not quite so *totally* depraved but what he can at least spiritually hear the Gospel *before* the Spirit can, or will, regenerate. In so doing, they destroy the strongest basis for the alarming of sinners to their soul's eternal condition. To establish the doctrine of Total Depravity, they cite, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor. 2:14) And, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8:7, 8) Both texts indeed establish the point. But then by appealing to natural man and by advocating Gospel regeneration, they insist that the natural man *can receive* the Gospel spiritually; *can discern* spiritual things; and *can please* God in the flesh prior to being regenerated or given spiritual life.

The divine imperative "Ye must be born again" is set in opposition to the dreadful condition of natural man by the Saviour and the apostles. The Gospel of free grace will never reach a man that is not *totally lost*, and so long as he believes that he has some innate quality or ability, his lost estate is never fully realized. Jesus said he came "to seek and to save that which was lost." He did not come merely seeking — but to save the lost. He testified, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Thanks be unto God He is able, and for His elect, He always makes them see their total, absolute lost estate in spite of the false preachers and worldly religious organizers. The absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit to "quicken whom He will" is the most wholesome and God-honoring doctrine of this One of the eternal Godhead. He sovereignly quickens thousands, even in Mystery Babylon under its evil influence — not by using their perverted gospel — but in spite of it. Thus He calls them out. How can one explain an Arminian, or freewill deceiver, coming to the beauty of the excellency of free grace; proclaiming in the very midst of adversity the freeness of grace; and

converting some, or even whole congregations, to the truth except that the Holy Spirit did the work in spite of his former blindness? Prior to preaching the doctrines of Christ and receiving it in the love and power of it, such a person did not hear the Gospel first, yet came to believe and love it. How? By the same way Cornelius, Lydia, Paul, and every other child of grace — by Holy Spirit regeneration. For if it takes “hearing” the Gospel for the Holy Spirit to regenerate, then this person would have been doomed, for what the freewill religious world is preaching is anything else but the Gospel to poor sinners. As a free grace preacher once told me, “If it takes preaching the Gospel for one to be regenerated, then there will not be enough in heaven to form a choir!”

It is a matter of great hope to a poor and needy sinner searching vainly for a true Gospel church, to rest in this one fact: “The Spirit quickeneth whom He will.” He needs not be lost eternally because of the faithlessness of preachers, nor for an inability of the Holy Spirit to reach his case. He can rest assured that those for whom Christ died will be effectually called, regenerated, converted and justified. All hell, demons, and preachers notwithstanding, the foundation of God “standeth sure having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His.” The basic argument utilized by the first group of modern Baptists was that thousands and millions were dying and going to hell, for whom Christ died, because Baptists were too stingy to get sufficient money to the Baptist Board of Foreign and Domestic Missions; and this was the most God-dishonoring and damnable concept predestinarians among Baptists had every heard.

Every single soul created by God is duty-bound to honor and obey Him, ability or inability notwithstanding. It is imperative that every offspring of Adam’s race repent and believe whatever degree of revelation He is pleased to give them. Yet none will nor can truly repent without “godly sorrow which worketh repentance.” True repentance is produced within the quickened sinner by a sorrow which is OF GOD. None will or can believe, except God gives them faith, “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and THAT (faith)

not of yourselves, it is a GIFT OF GOD." Yet it is necessary for these two experimental graces, that one be first "born again." They are spiritual, and the "Natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them, for they are SPIRITUALLY discerned." That new birth is "from above" by the Spirit, and altogether of a different nature to any natural emotions of belief or grief occasioned by the flesh. "The letter killeth, but the Spirit maketh alive."

Throughout the history of Gospel churches, a pattern of God's work is clearly demonstrated. The Spirit, independent of the Gospel (whether in its presence or out of it), moves upon a community or upon individuals bringing sinners to a lost, hopeless, and helpless condition. They remain in that condition of misery, often seeking every conceivable means to deliver themselves, until they are made to acknowledge that God is just in their condemnation and ruin. They despair of all hope that they can possibly be saved, and yet they cannot turn back. They struggle as a child to be delivered in birth. And, bless His Holy Name, in His appointed time, He will send the Gospel in His own providential way to this lost and undone sinner. The "gospel" by definition is glad tidings. To such a one, enabled by a spiritual quickened life within, his poor heart will leap for joy, rejoicing in the hope of eternal salvation and will feel his sins pardoned and find rest for his soul. In this hour of his "first love" he will experimentally and powerfully know true godly sorrow, repentance, and faith in his dear Redeemer. He is in this deliverance converted by the Gospel.

Surely no one can read the historical documents of the churches, of Isaac Backus, or A.B. Semple, without being able to see clearly how God saved His people in regeneration by the Spirit and by Gospel conversion. Yea, surely, no one having been brought through "much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God would ever thereafter believe that any part of salvation was left up to the creature. These are they "which were born, not by blood, nor the will of flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." (Jn. 1:13)