

THE NEW BIRTH

By Elder H. M. Curry

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When Jesus said, "*Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,*" He gave a name to a hitherto nameless fact. The doctrine of the new birth, as announced by Christ and developed in the New Testament Scriptures, was a novel doctrine at that age of the world, and remains a novelty yet. The fact of the new birth, as exemplified in the experience of God's people, is as old and as universal as man himself; but the doctrine had never been named before. The new birth is not stated in the Old Testament, although the effects of it are clearly manifest in the experience of patriarchs, prophets, priests and kings, and many in the humbler walks of life, among both Jews and Gentiles. It is not mentioned in any known religious writings, either Jewish or Pagan, before the New Testament. The ancient epics of India, the ethical codes of China, the complicated systems of Egypt, the fanciful philosophy and poetry of Greece, the gorgeous ceremonials and mystic rituals of ancient Mexico and Peru, are all silent upon this doctrine. It came from the lips of Jesus, a novelty, an original doctrine, a new name for a hitherto nameless Truth, a golden key to unlock the rich mines of Christian experience so long closed by human ignorance, so completely covered by ceremonials, and so deeply buried in tradition, a lamp by which the wonderful works of God in the elect children of men was to be more clearly understood, the exceeding greatness of His power to usward more fully known, and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints more fully beheld.

The novelty of the doctrine is one of the clearest proofs of the divinity of the great Teacher who was the first to announce it. The most gifted prophet, the most highly favored priest, the great law-giver, Moses, nor even the favorite Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, had never

been blessed to discover this Truth or honored with the commission to announce it to men. Thus the novelty of the doctrine gives weight and prominence to its import.

"Ye must be born again," but no instructions as to how was given; it was the initial statement of the doctrine of Christ, and constituted the fundamental difference between Christianity and all religions and theories of men. Take away the necessity of the new birth and Christianity will take its place on the common plane of all other religions, and will be robbed of that which alone entitles it to the distinction of divinity, and will be degraded to a mere system of ethics, a naked code of morals, or to empty, meaningless and vain ceremonials. [Here Elder Curry appears rather prophetic- this is exactly what has now taken place in the absence of understanding of this doctrine and the scarcity of this experience in this twenty-first century. SCP] The fundamental idea in all other religions is man's supposed ability to reform himself by a simple decision into newness of life, based upon the alike false idea of the universal love and Fatherhood of God. The last of these, the universal Fatherhood of God, gave birth to the World's Congress (Parliament) of Religion in Chicago, in 1893; and the first, man's supposed ability to save himself by a simply act of faith, formed the basis of every system presented, whether by Buddhist, or Brahmin, Moslem, or Mormon, Catholic or Protestant. Hence all of them are loud in their cry for reformation, and winning the world for Christ. The only difference to be found among them is the name and manner in which the end is to be reached.

The superficial notion of religion is deeply fastened upon all men; but it seems that modern Protestantism has a double portion of it. The Jews, in the time of Christ, were extremely zealous for vain traditions, empty formality and hypocritical appearance. They thought that making wine and eating with unwashed hands polluted and defiled a man. But the Savior condemned their foolish tradition by the simple axiom, *"It is not that which goeth into a man that defileth him, but that which cometh out."*- Matthew 15:11. It is from the heart that evil thoughts, thefts, murders, and all other

wickedness, proceed. Evil thoughts are not in the wine a man drinks. Bad conduct does not come from the food taken with unwashed hands. A man steals because he is a thief; a man kills because he is a murderer, or lies because he is a liar. The theft is in the heart before the hand is put forth to steal; the murder is in the heart before the hand is stained with blood; the lie is in the heart before it rises to the tongue or is coined by the lips. The tree bears fruit *after its kind*. Cultivating the tree can never change the kind of fruit; the only effect of cultivation are seen in the quality and quantity of the fruit. Can a thorn tree ever be made to produce grapes, or a thistle to bring forth figs? All things are bound by their natural life within their seed and produce after their own kind.

More to the point. Men are carried away with the notion that through religious instruction, training and favorable opportunities, children or men are made Christians; that men enter the kingdom of God through teaching and moral suasion. Agrippa had this idea when he said to Paul, "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,*" and Nicodemus betrayed the same weakness when he said to Christ, "*We know that Thou art a man sent from God.*" But the answer of Jesus covered the whole ground when He said, "*Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" This is as much as to say, "Why, Nicodemus, this is not a mere matter of teaching; there is something vastly deeper; a man must be born again." A man does not have to be born again in order to be religious; he may be infatuated with religion, and be a zealous devotee to creed and ritual; he may be taught to observe most rigidly forms and ceremonies, and to subject himself to the strictest discipline; to mutilate his body [as Moslems for penance] and deprive himself of all earthly comforts; to yield perpetual obedience to priest craft, to pray three times a day and give tithes of all he possess; take up the sword in defense of his religion, or lay down his life in testimony of his zeal; but except he be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. A man must be born again in order to receive Christ, or embrace His doctrine in Truth and reality. The import of the doctrine leads us to consider its necessity.

"*Ye must be born again*" is not a mere dogma of theology, but a necessity, arising from deep fundamental, basic *principles of biology*; hence we shall first consider the biological necessity. All life of all created living things is found with the seed of each kind, and each seed carries within itself the germ of life for all seeds to be produced by it. "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh.*"- John 3:6. The term *flesh* here is generic, and is used in the Scriptures to designate man as a whole, and comprehends him with all his natural attributes, all his powers, parts and capacities, including body, natural soul and natural spirit in their mysterious combination in constituting human personality. It is equivalent to saying, "That which is born of man is man." Men by nature are dead in trespasses and sin - Ephesians 2:1. This death is not merely a moral or ethical condition, but a condition extending far beyond the moral or ethical sphere. It is a biological condition. Take this illustration: Science divides this world into two great kingdoms, the organic and inorganic, or in equivalent terms, the dead and the living. The stone belongs to the inorganic or dead kingdom, the plant to the organic or living kingdom. The difference between the stone and the plant is a biological difference. Again, the organic kingdom manifests different orders of life; as animal or vegetable life. In this kingdom, both have seeds which produce only after like kind.

The difference between the animal and the tree is a biological difference. [Today, it may be said to be a botanical difference- SCP]. They belong to different orders of life. Now, just as the animal life is of a higher order than vegetable life, so Christ's life is of a higher order than Adamic life or natural life. And just as the tree, although alive in its own order, is dead to the presence and voice of the birds that sing among its branches, so is man, although alive to all within his environment, dead to the things of the Spirit of God. This Truth, although most persistently disputed, most vehemently opposed and wickedly ridiculed by professors of Christianity, is legibly and indelibly written in the stones and in the trees, in the earth and in the sky, and in the experience of millions of human hearts. Man, then, is cut off from

the kingdom of God by the deep mysterious, impassible gulf that separates the nonliving from the living, the organic from the inorganic; the natural from the spiritual. The inorganic can never be transformed into the organic; neither can the natural be born of the Spirit, for the lower life form is incompatible with the higher. **As man enters this world by a birth, just so he must enter the spiritual kingdom by a birth; and as his birth into the world was contingent upon things entirely outside of himself, so his birth into the kingdom of God is contingent upon things entirely outside of himself.**

This second, and spiritual birth is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God."- John 1:13. Except a man be born he cannot see the world, is a fact which none can or will deny, and which none would ever think of denying. But how few of all who have read it acquiesce so readily in the conclusive Truth of its analogous expression, "*Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*"

We turn now from the biological to the experimental necessity of this birth. Children may be most carefully trained from their youth in the name of Christ and in the precepts of the Scripture and religious observances, but except they be born again that have no more knowledge of Christ than if they had never heard His name.

This birth is the beginning of the Christian experience, and all that is ever seen, felt, heard, and known of grace in this world, or glory in the world to come, is but the development of the life imparted in this conception and birth by the Spirit. All knowledge of Christ is *vital or experimental* knowledge; this includes all knowledge of the need of Christ. I once thought that the time when a child of grace received his hope and experienced deliverance was when he was "born again;" but I have come to a different conclusion. Who can remember when he was born naturally? Let the mind run back to childhood, to our earliest recollections, even to the very borders of infancy; but our birth was prior to that. All things fade from memory, and

still the time of our passing through a long stage of which we know nothing at all. Think back over your experience; you came to many *Ebenezers*, to many milestones and memorable places; you approach the time when hope came to you, a helpless sinner; but the birth was before this. Life is antecedent to feelings and activities. You pass on to the time when you first realized that you were a sinner indeed; but the birth was before this, and this was only the *result* of it. How long before you felt the first movements of soul, I cannot tell, **but life was before this feeling of sinfulness.** Those who place their second birth upon conditions to be complied with by those receiving it, have never seen the necessity of it. If a man can repent of his sins and believe in Jesus *before he is born again*, then the Scriptures are not true. This notion of religion puts the cart before the horse, puts the fruit before the tree, the effect before the cause. Without this second, spiritual, birth sin would never be hated and holiness would never be loved, poverty of spirit would never be felt, and the riches of Christ would never be prized; none would ever hunger and thirst after righteousness, and the bread which came down from heaven would never be desired; the fountain of living waters would never be sought, there would be none to love the Truth, and faith would not be found on the earth; the wilderness would never blossom as the rose, and the parched ground would never become a pool; the name of God would be but an empty sound, and His existence a mere matter of speculation and all worship would be but dry formality and empty mockery.

The person affected by the new birth is the Adamic sinner, in the sense that his circumstances have been greatly changed by it. That which is now in him is greater than he that is in the world. This needs no argument, for there is no other personality on earth, and personalities in heaven do not need it. The immediate effects makes up what is called "*Christian experience*," and belong to time; the ultimate effect is to awake in the likeness of Christ, and is realized in the resurrection.

The effects are evidences to us that we have been born again. Let us now examine ourselves, and prove ourselves, and see whether we are

indeed what we profess to be, or only graceless hypocrites, carnal professors, who have never known the love of Christ or the power of His resurrection. The most momentous question ever propounded to an exercised heart is: Have I been born again? Have I been born of the Spirit? And when we begin to examine ourselves, the evidence that the carnal mind seeks is not found within us; but we are full of things that our traditional notions of religion record against us. The carnal mind is not eligible to sit as judge or to testify as witness in the trial of a Christian, because it is enmity against God, and cannot be subject to His law.

One of the best evidences that anyone has ever had that he is born again is that he is personally concerned about his own case. The man who thinks that salvation is by doing or believing something is never concerned about the new birth; but the heart upon which the import and necessity of being born of God have been impressed is bound to be very personally concerned in the matter; but the import and necessity of the birth are only communicated through the birth itself. Let us begin the examination with a question. Do you know that you are a child of God? Every exercised heart answers at once, "I do not know that I am born of God." Do you know that you are a sinner? "O yes, I know that I am a sinner!" Do you know that you are saved? "O no, I do not know that I am saved." Do you know how a sinner was saved? "O yes, a sinner is saved by grace alone, rest assured that you are saved and called, for that knowledge comes only by experience. None of the princes of this world know that. Human wisdom has never made that discovery. Those who have this knowledge are in possession of that *"hidden wisdom which God before the world ordained to our glory."* The above test, when applied to a nominal, or dead, Christian will extract the very opposite responses than that of one who is born of God.

The knowledge of sin is one of the brightest evidences that you will ever have that you have *"passed from death unto life."* Permanent, incorrigible, inherent sinfulness has always been acknowledged by holy men. David said, *"I am a worm, and no man."*- Psalm 22:6. Isaiah confessed that

he was a man of unclean lips, and Paul exclaimed, "*O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of this death?*"- Romans 7:24.

There was a time in the experience of many of us, perhaps, when we thought that we would never know sin or sorrow again, but that we would live in the comfortable peace of that sweet deliverance all the rest of our days. But when we began to feel again the power of sin in our members, we sank into a sea of doubts and fears, and disappointments bordering on despair. We thought that one who is born of the Spirit is free from the motions of sin; but when we found that sin still remained in us, we concluded that we were still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. We learned by experience the old man of the flesh was not the object of that gracious birth. We have learned many lessons since that time, and are still learning. We have learned that in the flesh we are ignorant, sinful creatures, no better now than at the first dawn of our hope.

Men in nature have strenuously assailed the doctrine of total, innate, inherent depravity, and have long devised and proclaimed their lying, deceptive and seductive argument against it; but God will make His own people know the truthfulness of it by a daily experience of their own sinfulness. A vital knowledge of sin puts to flight every traditional theory of human ability or Adamic purity, and fastens upon the conscience a pungent conviction that man is a sinner from the cradle to the grave, with no part or capacity reserved. The Adamic flesh is not changed in this work. It is not the Christian's burden that he only sins by word and deed, but his very thoughts are unclean, and above all he discovers lurking like a serpent in the deep recesses of his heart the love of sinful things. This almost drives him to despair, and makes him hate his own life, and trust nothing but the blood and righteousness of the adorable Redeemer.

How prone we are to take comfort in the thoughts of our own hearts, or the state of our own feelings, and to look within ourselves for something good to build our hope upon. How often do we say, "O, if I could only see myself as I desire to see myself, I would have some hope that I am a

Christian!" If you could always see yourself just as you would like to be, would you ever deny yourself? And if you should never deny yourself could you ever be the disciple of Jesus? Did He not say, "*If any man will be My disciple let him deny himself?*" When Jesus said, "*Let him deny himself,*" denial of self must follow. God said, "*Let there be light,*" and light was. He also said, "*Let the earth bring forth,*" and it was so. Have you not been able to translate those feelings of unworthiness that fill your soul, and stand like an impassable wall, an immovable mountain, between you and your ideal Christian character that your own imagination conjures up and places before you? They are translated into this sentence, "*Let him deny himself.*" This is the first qualification to follow Christ.

The tempter comes with another plea that we are not the children of God. This plea is our weakness. How often do we consider this suggestion of the tempter and put it on file as evidence against ourselves? Christ put the tempter to flight by quoting what is written; so all me to bring the same weapon to our defense: it is written, "*Except ye be converted and become as a little child ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.*"- Mark 18:3. What did the Savior mean by this expression? I have heard preachers say, in my early exercise of mind, that little children are innocent, pure and sinless, and that we must get like them or we can never be saved. I thought this was true, and set about most diligently to attain unto this child-like purity of character, but failed – utterly failed – failed as completely as Hermes in his search for the philosopher's stone, or Ponce de Leon for the fountain of youth. The more I tried it, the more helpless it seemed to grow, and yet I thought it must be so. O! What absurd things will men not undertake in the name of religion! If all the absurdities that have been taught and practiced in the name of religion could be collected and placed before men's eyes, the exhibit would shock the world, and would doubtless surpass in quantity and quality all other follies, caprices and wickedness that the world has ever known! Suppose for one moment that little children do receive the kingdom of heaven upon the grounds of their purity of character,

and who have grown out of infantile purity? How can a man ever be a child again? We might repeat the question of Nicodemus, "*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?*" Suppose a man could be born when he is old, would he not come forth again in the likeness of his parents?

A man might be made a child again ten thousand times, if such a thing were possible, and still he would never be raised above the nature and likeness of his parents. A corruptible seed can never bring forth an incorruptible object. So if a man should be born again of the same father and mother, would he not come forth the same natural man, and grow up the same blind, alienated, wicked sinner? **It is not only necessary to have another birth, but a birth proceeding from an entirely different source, a birth from above, from an incorruptible seed,** a birth of water and the Spirit, of that water which is above the firmament. The Savior did not mean that the little child is sinless, and we must become such. Sinless persons would have no need of Christ, and He has no blood for them. What is the characteristic of the little child that forms the basis of the Savior's teachings here? It is the helplessness, the weakness of the child, its inability to provide for itself. The child is not only unable to provide for itself, but unable to minister to itself what others may provide for it. Food and drink and raiment might be abundantly provided and placed in the closest proximity to the child, and if left to itself, it would be none the better off. It would perish as certainly and as speedily as it would if nothing had been provided. The man or woman who has experienced this helplessness in a *spiritual sense* has become as a little child, or, in other words, has been born again from above; and the very weakness which he so much deplures and from which he would daily fly, is the sure and abiding evidence that God is His Father and Author of eternal life.

Our blindness is often urged as an evidence against us, but God says He will "*Bring the blind by a way they knew not, I will lead them in paths that they have not known.*"- Isaiah 42: 16. God leads His people as those

who are blind and cannot find their own way. If your travels have been in entirely different ways from what you yourself marked out, if you experience daily the opposite of your own planning, if you are led as one blind in unknown ways, then you are led of the Lord; and "*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*"- Romans 8:14.

Belief in Jesus is an *effect* of the new birth, and consequently an evidence of it. "*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.*"- I John 5:1. What a comprehensive, decisive and conclusive statement! This birth raises men to a knowledge of Christ, and imparts to them the evidence that He is the Christ. The doctrine that men have the capacity to believe in Him as a *condition of salvation* is as fabulous, as illusive and as foreign to the Gospel of the grace of God as the grotesque mythologies of the ancient North-men, the fanciful poetry of the ancient Greeks, or the nonsensical nursery rhymes of Mother Goose. *Belief* is **not** a volition of the human will. We do not have to revert to dusty libraries of philosophy to prove this statement, but to our own minds. Each man knows more about himself than the wisest philosopher knows about him. Belief is a condition of mind produced by evidence; it is an *effect, and evidence is the cause*. Every day we hear reports that we do not want to believe, and seek in every direction a refuge from the conviction of the truth of the report. Every power of the mind is aroused against it, but facts come, evidence conquers, and we reluctantly, unwillingly sink into a belief on the very thing we tried so hard not to believe. Upon the other hand, how often have we exerted every power of will to believe a certain thing to be true; but notwithstanding our ardent desire and willing efforts we at last had to yield to lack of evidence or to contrary evidence, and believe against our will to the contrary. Believing in Jesus is brought about by the new birth. It is only by the Holy Ghost that any man can knowingly say that Jesus is the Christ; and the man who believes in the only begotten Son may rest assured that he is born of God. "*He that hath the Son hath life.*" It is he that hath the Son that believes on Him.

Faith, which is the substance of the Christian's hope, is the evidence upon which we believe; and this faith is born of God, is the fruit of the Spirit, and is found alone in the man who has been born again. Believing in Jesus, repentance and faith are new covenant blessings themselves, instead of being *conditions* of blessings, and are the fruit of the new birth instead of conditions upon which it is brought about.

The ultimate effect of the new birth is to awake in the likeness of Christ. This birth added to a man constitutes the man who receives it as a son of God, and consequently an heir of God, and guarantees to him a resurrection in the likeness of Christ, and consequently an eternal and enduring satisfaction. The development of Christ's character is a process begun, carried on and consummated by the inherent, sovereign, unfailing working of Christ-life in the soul. Originating in Christ, the Seed, its development is an evolution, but a grander evolution than ever Darwin dreamed of; not the process that transforms a monkey into a man, a man into a spirit, as advocated, but an evolution that conforms a wretched, wicked, hopeless, helpless sinner into the image of Jesus the immaculate Son of God. This process is first the blade, then the stalk, and after that the full corn in the ear. The blade and the stalk may appear here, but the full corn in the ear must appear hereafter. Inasmuch as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

This birth originated from above, and is directed alone by sovereign, unconditional election and predestination. It comes by virtue of life given us in Christ before the foundation of the world; according as the saints were chosen in Him in the ages eternal and their seed were in Him. We could never be born from above without a life above. This heavenly eternal, incorruptible Christ-life is implanted in the subjects of God's electing grace by the sovereign, irresistible, unconditional working of the Holy Spirit. It is implanted in God's own time, whether it be in the babe upon its mother's breast, as was the case of David (Psalm 22:9) or from its very birth, as with John the Baptist, (Luke 1:44) or in the declining days of old age and

decrepitude, as may be the case with many; but whether in the babe upon its mother's breast, or in the man in the prime of life, or in old age upon the verge of the grave, the issues are all the same, and alike certain in results. All who receive it shall awake in the likeness of Christ.

--H. M. Curry.

[Stan's note (Stanley C. Phillips): In this period of time, the Old School and Particular Baptists identified with the SIGNS of the Times were unified in a common sentiment relative to Regeneration and the New Birth. They made it rather plain that they did not believe the fleshly, natural or Adamic man was the object of the spiritual birth, and went to great pains to point to the Christian's warfare between flesh and spirit as proof that the "Old Man" was never born of the Spirit; but that the spiritual seed that was preserved IN Christ begat the "New Man, or New Creature" within the *"vessel of mercy afore prepared unto glory;"* that the natural body the "earthen vessel" contained the "treasure" of the spiritually begotten man. As Samuel Trott so ably presented it: The spiritual birth begotten by the incorruptible seed, was **added onto the child of God**. This work of grace did not change or modify the natural man physically, but changed his circumstances and brought him into servitude to God. Elder Curry follows the true Old School Particular Baptist in this view, but with his unique writing style. This doctrinally unity was first broken in 1852 by Elder John Clark of the Kettocton Association of Va., who denied almost every Christian doctrine, and picked up a following that continued to increase until his views were adopted by the Primitive Baptists following the 1900 Fulton Convention in Kentucky.]