

A SERMON ON THE NEW BIRTH

by Benoni Stinson

Stinson's sermon on the necessity of spiritual rebirth, presenting the biblical doctrine of regeneration as essential for entrance into the kingdom of God.

1 Chapters

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Beloved Brethren: -

Our text for this evening may be found in 1 John 3:2 and reads as follows: "Beloved now are we the sons of God; it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." The text asserts a know fact, a fact that may be easily known; it implies that they had not always been the sons of God, by saying now we are the sons &c. Our present object will be to show, first, that we are not, by nature, the children or sons of God, and to ascertain, if we can, by what process we become the sons of God, and by what evidence it may be known, &c. On yesterday we tried to investigate the great atonement wrought out by Christ on the cross; to night it will be our object, with a trembling heart, to find out, if we can, how a poor lost sinner may obtain a personal interest in the sin-atonement Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world; for Isaiah says, "A highway shall be there and a way," &c. Now this way, I understand, leads into the highway, so that from the habitation of every poor sinner there is a way that leads to God. First, then, we have before us the negative declaration that we are not the sons of God while we are in our sins. Of the truth of this declaration there seems to be but one opinion amongst all orthodox Christians. The Scriptures appear so plain in their teaching on this point, that it seems a waste of time and a needless tax on your patience to attempt to prove what has been ten thousand times proven, and is taught on almost every page in God's most Holy Word. Hence, Christ says to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again:" John 3:7; and Paul says, "They were children of wrath," &c. "Ye were sometimes darkness, ye were aliens from God." "The carnal mind is enmity with God, and the natural man discerns not the things of the spirit," &c., all of which teaches that man, while in his sins, is not a child of God, but still fighting against God and one the broad road that leads to destruction. But as I before said, there is no controversy amongst orthodox Christians on this point. But we will find a diversity of opinions on the proposition next under consideration, that is, by what process we become the children of God, &c. On this important point the Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, however much they may differ on other points, are very near alike on this; that is, to baptize or christen the child, to cleanse it from original sin, train it in the catechism until it is fourteen years of age, when they are confirmed, take the sacrament, and thus become the sons of God, leaving out the more weighty matters of repentance, faith, and the new birth. Such a glaring departure from the teaching of the Bible needs but to be stated to prove that it is not - cannot be - the passing from death unto life taught in the Bible. But our Calvinistic friends, both Baptist and Presbyterian, affirm that we, or a part of the human race, are children of God by virtue of God's decrees, and hence always were the children of God by virtue of the eternal covenant. Now this view not only supercedes the necessity of repentance, faith, and the new birth, but contradicts the apostle Paul when he says to this brethren. "Ye were children of wrath even as others." Or we must believe that we can be a child of God and a child of wrath, an heir of Heaven and an heir of damnation, at the same time; which, to my mind, is too absurd to claim respect, let alone belief; but to reconcile such contradictory terms is the task of those who profess to believe them. But there is another church

called, by some, Reformers, by others Christians, and still by others Campbellites; now whatever term I may use to designate them, it will be with the kindest of feelings for those brethren with whom we differ on the method or process by which we become the children of God. But we labor under some disadvantage in controversy with them, from the fact that they boast of having no articles of faith, while we have, and we hang them on the outside of the wall, so they read and set up their opposition against them with great ease to themselves, however unsatisfactory it may be to others, while we have to catch from their preachers what they believe, and this we find an arduous task. Suppose, for instance, I hear a Reformer preach here in Illinois, and, according to my understanding, he preaches false doctrine, and I go into Kentucky and in a sermon refer to it as Campbellite doctrine, and one of my hearers is a preacher of that order, and when the sermon is over he accuses me of misrepresentation. I tell him that Brother Smith, of Illinois, of the Christian Church and a leading minister amongst their people, taught the doctrine that I am opposing, "Oh," says Brother Jones, "that was Brother Smith's opinion, that is not our faith." I hear Brother Jones, and he, too, though not on the same subject, is wide off the mark, I being the judge. I go over to Indiana, there I oppose Brother Jones, but Brother Brown rises and positively tells me that neither Smith nor Jones are his exponents, "but the Bible, sir, the Bible in our confession of faith." I reply that we, too, have a claim on that book, that I was not aware that it belonged exclusively to their church. I also hear Brother Brown, and am yet ignorant of the faith of the so called Christian Church. But however much their preachers may differ on other points, they generally agree and teach that Baptism is absolutely necessary, in order to our becoming the sons of God. This, then, being one article of their faith, and one around which they rally with great zeal, it will be our object, in a brief way, to try and find out if this is God's method of salvation reveal in his Holy and ever blessed Word. Now it is an acknowledged fact that faith and repentance are indispensable to pardon; the only question about which we differ is, whether the believing penitent may hope for pardon before he is baptized; first, then, we will make a few remarks concerning faith. Now I understand faith and belief, scripturally, to mean the same thing, and shall so construe it, feeling sure that I am right. Now Paul says: Ephesians 4:5, "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism," &c.; now just as certain as there is but one Lord there is but one scriptural faith. But it is equally certain that there are different degrees of faith; hence the scriptures speak of little faith, great faith, strong faith, weak faith, &c. This is true, and Paul says, in Romans 5:1. "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God," &c. John the Baptist says, John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Paul said to the jailor, Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved;" and John says in 1 John 5:1, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God;" and again, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," Galatians 3:26. Now from the above quoted Scripture, and many more could be cited, it seems evident that there is a degree of faith directly connected with acceptance with God. We are all interested to know how strong our faith must be in order to secure this blessed boon. Now we do not stand here with scales to weigh, nor line to measure faith. But we do stand here with God's own words before us out of which we intend to teach and be taught. First, we would say that a mere belief in the Bible and story of the cross is not that faith or rather that strength of faith by which we are justified, but thanks be to God, it is enough to enable the sinner to start to God with. Every sinner in a gospel land is presumed to have faith enough to make this start; still a large majority of them remain in sin and rebellion against God, and without hope, without peace, and without God in this world. Stronger evidence could not be given that this amount of faith is not that faith by which we

are justified. Now the faith by which we are justified and through which we are saved, is distinguished from what I shall term the common faith, by being coupled with trust or confidence in the Lord Jesus as our only with trust or confidence in the Lord Jesus as our only hope. Hence we find where this saving faith is existing in the heart there is trust in Christ. But again we affirm that to believe with the whole heart, is the highest order of faith known in the Bible, for no man can do more than to believe with this whole heart. Now the fruits of this saving faith are joy, gladness, and peace with God, neither of which can exist in a soul under condemnation. Now, having laid down a system of what I understand to be gospel truth, let us see if we can find this strong faith, together with joy and gladness, existing prior to baptism; if so, then we claim to have clearly proven that the sinner may find pardon, peace, and joy before he is baptized. And now go with me to Gaza's Desert, and there listen to a conversation between Phillip and the Eunuch. Phillip is preaching to him Jesus, together with other great gospel truths; they come to a certain water; the Eunuch asks what hinders him from being baptized; Phillip says, "If thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest" Mark here, Phillip requires the highest order of faith, and the Eunuch answers in the affirmative. Now if this man believed with all his heart that Jesus was the Christ, John says he was born of God; and John the Baptist says he had everlasting life; and Paul says, he was justified and had peace with God; and this faith did not only exist prior to, but was absolutely require before baptism. So much for this case. Next we see this same Phillip at Samaria, preaching concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ; Acts 8:12, "Now when they believed," &c; here again we have the highest order of faith, and of course pardon before baptism. Next, we will notice the case of Cornelius, the gentile, and being the first Gentile that received the gospel, we regard it as an important case. Bear in mind our object is to find our whether Cornelius was a child of God, in a scriptural sense, before he was baptized. First, he was a praying man; secondly, benevolent; thirdly, his prayers were accepted; fourthly, God communicated with him by angels; and lastly, when Peter came with his brethren to satisfy them that all was right, the holy spirit was bestowed on them - this is on Cornelius and his company - that were assembled, and they spoke with tongues and magnified God. No can any sane man believe these men had not been pardoned - that they had not obtained remission of sin? Certainly not. But to proceed, Peter, seeing all this says, "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized.;" Acts 10:47. Now on what principle, I ask, did Peter urge their baptism; was it for the remission of sins? Certainly not, for this he knew they had received, but because they had received the Holy Spirit. Here then, is the first Gentiles baptized, not for the remission of sins, but because Peter had positive evidence that good old Brother Cornelius and his company were the children of God, by faith, and for that very reason they were baptized. Now if this proves anything, it proves that a man not only may, but absolutely ought to, obtain pardon and peace with God before he is baptized. And now, brethren, although we could produce many, very many, parallel cases, yet fearing that I may weary your patience, we must call your attention to other important points in this investigation. Now we claim to have demonstrated that faith and repentance are the only indispensable prerequisites to pardon. But our Campbellite brethren say that baptism is also a pre-requisite, and generally go to the 2d chapter of Acts to sustain their views on that subject, where Peter said to the penitent Jews, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Here, although faith is not expressed, it is evidently implied; "and with many other words did he testify and exhort," &c. Now I understand Peter meant to teach here precisely what he taught on the next day, when he said to the Jews,

“Repent and be converted that you sins may be blotted out,” &c. Peter in the text told the convicted Jews all that must be done in order to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, the last of which was to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith entitled them to remission of sin, and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ to the gift of the Holy Spirit, &c. That repentance and faith entitles the sinner to pardon will appear from Luke 24:47 : “That repentance and remission of sin should be preached in his name.” Also see Acts 17:30, add Acts 26:20, and Acts 5:30, add Acts 26:20, and Acts 5:31, and Acts 20:21 verse, all of which show that remission of sins was taught in direct connection with repentance and faith, and with this rule this chapter must be understood to harmonize. But again, we have evidence that Peter was so understood; the question was a general outburst of the multitude, charged with the blood of Christ. And to them, whose bosoms heaved under a weight of condemnation with the burthen of ten thousand crimes, Peter, after answering their question, continued to exhort and with many words to teach; after which they, that is that part of the multitude that gladly received his words, were baptized. Now I understand that these that gladly received his words to be that part of the multitude that claimed the promise, and their gladness or joy was evidence of peace with God and pardon of sin, for there is no joy in a penitent heart until the feels his load of guilt removed and at peace with God; such was their joy, such was their gladness before baptism. And we see that that chapter, rightly understood, instead of proving baptism necessary to pardon, proves precisely the reverse, and agrees with all the rest of Peter’s teaching, and all the rest of the Apostles. But again, we are told by some of our Reformers that Christ alludes to baptism in the 3d chapter of John, where he says to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again,” &c. Now if Christ did mean baptism, how very strange that Nicodemus could not understand him; doubtless he understood all about baptism, having, perhaps, see John baptize, and even if he was ignorant, how easy Christ could have set him right by saying, “Sir, I mean baptism.” But again, there is no mystery about baptism; every step connected with it can be easily comprehended. Still Christ uses a figure, fraught with unfathomed mystery, to illustrate this new birth. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, you hear the sound thereof but cannot tell from whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the spirit.” Now I ask in all honesty, what relation can this figure have to baptism? It has none, it can have none; but, brethren, there is some consolation, although we cannot comprehend whither the wind cometh or whither it goeth, we can feel when it blows upon us, any so is every one that is born, not of the water, no, but of the spirit. Although we cannot comprehend the operation of the spirit, we can know that we are operated upon. But again, says one, does not Peter say, “The like figure whereunto doth baptism save us.” Truly, and I am glad to name this, for Peter here declares baptism to be a figure or shadow; now all types and figures have their antitypes or substance, and if baptism is a figure it cannot be regeneration or the new birth, for they are substantial things. But, again, does not Paul say we are buried with Christ in baptism? Yes, Paul uses this language to the Romans and Colossians. This I agree alludes to baptism, but not for the remission of sins. Now a natural burial succeeds a natural death, and a natural death consists in a separation of soul and body. Now Paul says, “He that is dead has ceased to sin,” or in other words, to be dead to sin is for our sins to be separated from us, or pardoned; then the man being dead is a proper subject to be buried with Christ in baptism that he may walk in newness of life. Now to bury the man while his sins remain in him or on him, is to bury a sinner alive, and if he is buried alive he will be raised up a life sinner, without any change of heart. Having noticed the most important scriptures relied upon to prove the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins, and we hope explained them to the

satisfaction of our hearers, we no proceed to show some objections to that peculiar doctrine. And first, we object to it from the fact that it consigns to hell all unbaptized persons without regard to faith and piety. Secondly, we object to it from the fact that it is irreconcilable to the many scriptures used to describe the change of heart, such as the new birth, passing from death unto life, from darkness to light, begotten, quickened, regenerated, adopted, and many others that I might name, none of which are suitable figures if baptism is regeneration, &c. Thirdly, we object to it because it superseded the necessity of the agency of the Holy Spirit, and makes the whole scheme of our pardon, justification, and acceptance with God, a mere business affair, that may be arranged without divine help or independent of supernatural aid. Fourthly, it makes our salvation depend on three things: First, our own works; secondly, enough water; and thirdly, and administrator. The sinner may repent and believe with his whole heart, but in the absence of an administrator he must go away into everlasting punishment; in vain he pleads the blood of Christ! No baptism, no salvation; no administrator, no baptism. But by the help of the preacher and the candidate's consent, and a little exertion on his part, the whole matter can be arranged admirably! This puts me in min of the anecdote of the Irishman, who told the Church that between God and himself they had converted his soul. Now, if I understand the scriptures, and the plan of salvation rightly, man is not left to depend on human aid to save his soul; but, at home or abroad, on the land or on the sea, alone or in company, whenever or wherever he repents, believes and trusts alone in Jesus Christ for salvation, it is then and there he finds pardon and peace with God. And now, dear Brethren, in conclusion, we must notice that the fact of our being the sons of God may be known. Although all the process by which it is brought about may not be comprehended, we can tell where we started; we can describe the pains of conviction; we can tell of our prayers, groans, and tears; we can tell of the plans we laid for God to convert us by, and of our disappointments. I can tell of retiring to the lonesome grove and there lying on the ground groaning with unutterable agony! And now as I talk to you, that log cabin away in the mountains of Kentucky, the little prayer meeting held on the 9th of July 1820, the company there, the darkness of soul, all, all seem as the work of yesterday. But oh God! When I remember the last throes of my poor sin condemned soul in bitter anguish, when I gave up all self-dependence, I can remember the song that was being sung, the verse, yea the line, all, all are yet fresh in my memory, although thirty-eight years, with all their conflicting scenes have passed, much of which is by me forgotten, yet this, all this, is as fresh as yesterday. But here permit me to say that something took place, which, though remembered, cannot be described by me; the next thing I can say is, my soul was happy! What made it so I did not then know, but all was peace, all was joy. Jesus was precious! I thought I could tell it all to any or everybody, but though I have often tried to tell it, still there are things indescribable, and yet I know it is so. Now no two persons under the same circumstances ever feel precisely alike; so no two experiences may in all points agree; yet there are some great and important points where all meet, and all must have similar feelings in passing from death unto life. Now by what evidence may we know that we are the sons of God? First, John says, "By this we know we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren;" John 3:14; and upon this testimony no Christian can be deceived. Satan may counterfeit almost anything else, but to inspire our hearts with love to God and love to the brethren is contrary to his nature and cannot come from him. "The spirit of God beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God;" Romans 8:14. With such a witness who can doubt? Man's testimony may be wrong, either willful or by mistake, but the spirit of God is ever present, ever true, presenting to our spirits in unmistakable sweet and heavenly

emotions that we are the children of God. And the nearer we live to God the stronger the evidence will be, for the path of the just is as a shining light growing brighter unto the perfect day. Secondly it may be known from the fact that we are not what we once were, we don't feel as we once felt, we know we were once in the old broad road, and loved our sins. We now know that we are not in that road, and as there are but two ways, we must be in the King's highway. But you may ask, "are we not subject to doubts?" To this I answer, yes, but our doubts do not arise from any fear as to our having felt a change of heart; this we do positively know. But our doubts arise from the fear that the change we felt was not that change that amounts to regeneration or the new birth. But even then these doubts may be overcome by prayer and a holy life, until our acceptance with God will become a fixed fact, beyond doubt or controversy. May God help us so to live and so to die, "That not a cloud shall ever rise, To hide our Jesus from our eyes."

"What we shall be doth not appear," that is, after death. Thank God, John did not say it doth not appear where we shall be, for he knew we would be in heaven; but "what we shall be," &c. But one thing John knew, and that was that "We should be like Jesus, for we should see him as he is." What a delightful thought! To see him without a cloud, without a dimming veil; To see Jesus! What ineffable delight! One long look on him that died for me, that save me, that redeemed me, that fought my battles for me, that has been my unseen Savior, whispering words sweeter than the tongues of ten thousand angels! It will more than a thousand times pay for all the toil, pain, and suffering of this troublesome life. Yea, even if they were multiplied by the number of the sands of the sea. That one most glorious look on Jesus! Friends we have there, wives we have there, children we have there, but there's none there like Jesus! And now that the last battle is fought, the last enemy conquered, the grace, Oh the dark grave, will give up our bodies all incorruptible, undying, immortal! Now joins again the long absent soul, and before God, and surrounded by ten thousand angels, the countless throng of the redeemed with their harps of gold strung and tuned, marshaled before the great white throne, while all eyes are turned to the Lamb in the midst of the throne, with one long thrilling shout, methinks I hear on the highest sky, Oh Death, where is thy sting?

Oh Grace, where is thy victory?

Thanks be to God that giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN.

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