

The New Birth

by Alfred N. Gilbert

The new birth is a radical and vital change in man that inducts him into the kingdom of God, involving a change of relationship to Jesus Christ and the entire man, in all the departments of his being, being born again.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, John 3:3, Acts 2:38, James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 Peter 1:25

Topics: "New Birth", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

Alfred N. Gilbert preaches about the necessity of a radical and vital change in man, known as the 'new birth,' to be considered a true Christian. This change, symbolized as a 'new birth,' encompasses the entire nature of man - intellectual, emotional, volitional, and physical - and inducts one into the kingdom of God. The sermon delves into the specific aspects of man's nature that are transformed through this 'new birth,' highlighting the importance of belief, love, repentance, and obedience to Jesus Christ. The completion of this 'new birth' is signified by the act of baptism, representing the surrender of the physical nature to the commands of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."--John 3:3-5.

PRESUME there is no one of those here present to-day who does not believe in the sinfulness of man. We have too many evidences in the workings of our own hearts, in the developments of our own lives, in the fruits of our observation of those around us, in the universal necessity of means of enforcing the penalties of all systems of human law, to doubt for a moment that man is, by nature, sinful.

I assume, also, that there is no one of us, who believes in Christianity at all, who does not also believe in the necessity for some radical and vital change in man before he can be properly called a Christian. We realize that no man is a Christian by nature. We realize that his relationship to God, to Christ, to the Holy Spirit, must be [340] essentially changed before he can properly wear the honorable and sacred name "Christian." It will, I think, be also admitted that this change, whatever it may be, inducts into the kingdom of God; that, before it, man is outside of that kingdom; after it, inside the kingdom, so long as its effects shall continue. We shall agree that the man who has undergone the needed change is, by virtue thereof, a Christian, with all the rights, privileges and duties accruing to the rightful possessor of that name.

With these common premises before us, some questions will naturally arise, to the discussion of which I propose to address myself to-day, and to which I invite your thoughtful and prayerful attention with confidence, as every wise man and woman who accepts these premises must admit that no subject can be of more transcendent importance than this. I shall ask and try to answer:

First--What departments of man's nature does this change include and affect?

Second--By whom or what is it wrought?

Third--In what does it consist?

Fourth--How is it accomplished?

In the text which I have read to you, our Saviour speaks of this change under the vivid figure of a "new birth," and uses the most emphatic language with regard to it. He employs that peculiar form of speech with which He was wont to introduce solemn and profound truths, [341] "Verily, verily, I say unto you," than which nothing was better calculated to arrest and fix the attention of him to whom it was addressed, and then adds, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus had spoken with somewhat of a patronizing air to Jesus--"We know that thou art a teacher come from God"--but Jesus at once cut his pretension short with the assertion that until a man is born anew (or from above), he can not even see the kingdom of God--can not perceive the existence of such a kingdom, and therefore can know nothing about it. Jesus would accept no testimony of uninspired men. His testimony must come "from above," and therefore he who bore it must be informed and influenced "from above." Jesus would allow Nicodemus to occupy no other attitude to Himself but that of a humble learner from a superior. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus immediately vindicates Christ's estimate and declaration by asking, "How can a man be born when he is old?" evidently assuming that Christ referred to a second literal birth, and implying its impossibility. Whether this was sincere or ironical on his part, it equally involves his failure to catch the meaning of Jesus, and his ignorance of "the kingdom of God." We, of course, enlightened as we have been by the [342] communications of the New Testament, will fall into no such blunder, but realize that Jesus is using figurative language to express a vital, radical change of relationship. And surely no language could more vividly express such a change than this. A "new birth" exhausts the idea of complete new departure.

But, having heard the question of Nicodemus, Jesus continues and amplifies His thought, again using His solemn form of affirmation: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The thought is now complete. Until the new birth is begun, the kingdom of God can not even be seen (or known) as such. I add "or known" because the original of "see" here is a word which, in a large number of instances of its New Testament use, means "know," and carries with it not merely the idea of impact upon the visual organ, but of recognition as a consequence of that impact. It therefore comes to be very frequently used where there is no physical seeing, but only mental recognition.

"The kingdom of God," in this passage, is evidently the church of Christ on earth, as our Saviour, in the twelfth verse, speaks of the communications He had made to Nicodemus up to that point as "earthly things," or things transpiring upon the earth, in distinction from "heavenly things," or things transpiring in

heaven (the entrance upon eternal life), of which He subsequently speaks. [343]

Until the new birth has begun, then, I repeat, we can not know the kingdom of God as such, and until it is complete we can not enter into it; or, in other words, no man can be a member of the church of Christ until he has passed through the "new birth." Passing through this, entrance is at once secured into the "kingdom of grace," the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But, entrance of what into the kingdom of God? Christ says, "Except a man be born anew." (Note.--The original is tis, but is here used as expressing a human being, as in so many places in the New Testament.) But what is a man? Is it the mind, or the heart, or the body? Is it the intellectual, or emotional, or volitional, or physical? We say "the mind of a man." The phrase involves the idea that the mind is a part of the man, but it also involves the idea that it is only a part. We say "the heart of a man," as expressing his emotional nature. This also involves the idea that "the heart" is only a part of the man. So with the expressions, "the will of a man" and "the body of a man." All these, then, enter into the composition of the man--thought, feeling, will and action; the mental, emotional, volitional and physical. With either wanting, the object is no longer a man, whatever else it may be. When, therefore, Jesus says, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot know the kingdom of God," the fair (may I not say the necessary?) implication is that [344] the entire man participates in the new birth, and that it is not complete until the entire man has participated.

But when we go on to the completion of the Saviour's thought, this implied idea becomes explicit. "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Here are two elements contributing to the new birth, one of which is visible, the other invisible; one is material, the other immaterial. The material element can have no direct impact upon the immaterial object; the immaterial element can have no direct impact upon the material object. At once there is forced upon us the conclusion that the internal and invisible, and also the external and visible, departments of man's nature alike participate in the new birth. In further elucidation of the thought, Jesus calls the attention of Nicodemus to the fact that two departments of man's nature come into existence in natural birth. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," not "is fleshly," as so commonly interpreted; "and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," not "is spiritual." John never uses the word here translated "flesh" in a figurative sense, as expressing moral condition. He always uses it literally of the physical man, and it is an entirely arbitrary exegesis, born of the necessities of theological teaching, which interprets it in any other way here. [345]

Nicodemus, by his question, conveys the idea that new birth applies only to the physical. Jesus reminds him that there are two natures which come into being in natural birth "the spirit," or internal and invisible man, and "the flesh," or external and visible man. The mention of water, to one familiar with John's baptism, as Nicodemus doubtless was (and possibly with "proselyte baptism"), would at once suggest the Saviour's idea as far as the body is concerned. But the great difficulty of Nicodemus, as a Jewish rabbi, would be to grasp the idea of the new birth of the Spirit. At this point, therefore, Jesus amplifies: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

In view of the words employed, it is astonishing how this verse has been misapplied and misunderstood as conveying the idea of the mystery and incomprehensibility of the new birth. Jesus expressly teaches Nicodemus that there is nothing to wonder at ("marvel not"), but calls his attention to the fact that, the spirit of man being invisible, the new birth of the Spirit is invisible. The word translated "knowest," in the eighth verse, is a form of the same word translated "see" in the third verse, and all that is necessary is to insert

"see" to realize the meaning of Christ: [346] "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but seest not whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit;" that is, the birth of the Spirit is an invisible thing, as are both the Divine Spirit and the human. The thought of the verse is invisibility, not mystery.

The teaching of the Saviour, that the new birth concerns both the external and internal man, has its analogies in both natural birth and the final change or transfer into the heavenly state. We live successively in three kingdoms--nature, grace and glory--and we enter each of these by a birth. In natural birth by which we enter the kingdom of nature, the intellectual, emotional and physical departments of our nature all come into existence. Each is only germinal, and is to be developed into powers marvelously transcending what it possesses at the moment of birth, but the germ of all those powers is present in birth. The mighty intellect of a Newton, the emotional nature of a Paul, the physical powers of a Samson, once existed germinally in the infant of a day old.

In like manner, when we pass over into the heavenly state, the mind is to participate in a radical change. "Now I know in part; but then shall I know fully, even as also I was fully known." But the whole nature is to participate. "We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he [347] is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." He endeavors to approximate to the perfect purity that is finally to be his. But one of the most glorious and inspiring thoughts in connection with this final birth is that the external nature, the body, is to participate. It was the favorite theme of the great apostle to the Gentiles--the resurrection and glorification of the body; the thought that, not as disembodied, but as embodied, spirits, we are to bask in the smiles of God in His own glorious dwelling-place.

What, then, would seem more natural than that all the parts of our being should be consecrated which are thus to be glorified? If, in the birth into the kingdom of nature, the intellectual, emotional and physical all participate, and in the final birth into the kingdom of glory they also have a share, what could be more naturally expected than that all should participate in that "new birth" which lies between the two, and inducts into the kingdom of grace, which is the connecting vestibule between the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of glory? The teaching of the Saviour, then, that the new birth is not complete until the entire man has participated therein, is just what we would have expected from the other teaching of the New Testament, and forbids alike the neglect and undervaluing of baptism on the one hand, and the undue exaltation of it upon [348] the other. The mind, the heart, the body, must all have a part in the "new birth," and thus we reach the answer to our first question, "What departments of man's nature does this change include and affect?"

Pass we now to our second question, By whom or what is it wrought?

John, in the first chapter of his testimony, says: "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The author of the "new birth" is here definitely announced as being God, and to this purport are also the seven occurrences of the phrase "born of God" which are found in the letters of the same apostle. God, then, is the author of the "new birth," but so is He of all our blessings. "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." God, however, employs various agents in the provision of the many blessings which He gives us. The question, then, naturally arises, Who is God's agent in the accomplishment of the new birth? This question is sufficiently answered by the Saviour when He says: "So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

The words of the fifth verse also teach the same thought, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit," for it is as illogical to conceive of the Spirit as [349] an unconscious factor, as it would be to conceive of water as a conscious one. The agent of God in the accomplishment of the "new birth" is the Holy Spirit.

But we can conceive of the Holy Spirit as acting immediately, or through any one of various instrumentalities. The next question that arises, then, is, Does the Holy Spirit employ any instrumentality in the accomplishment of the "new birth," and, if so, what? Jas. 1:18 throws light upon this question: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." In this passage the instrumentality by which the "new birth" is wrought is undoubtedly declared to be the word of God. But Peter is equally explicit when he says: "Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth."

The "word of God," however, is a very comprehensive term, embracing the entire Bible, and, as the "new birth" is an exclusively New Testament revelation, and inquiry will naturally and legitimately arise whether there is not some more specific statement of the instrument of the "new birth," I would reply that such a statement does exist in the first chapter of Peter's first letter, in close connection with the last-quoted passage. After quoting, [350]

"All flesh is as grass,

And all the glory thereof as the flower of grass.

The grass withereth, and the flower falleth

But the word of the Lord abideth for ever,"

he then says, "And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

The circle of our inquiries is now greatly narrowed. We have ascertained that "the gospel" is the specific instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, who is God's agent in the accomplishment of the "new birth." The third verse of the first chapter of 1 Peter reciprocally illuminates and is illuminated by this thought: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." We have only to turn to 1 Corinthians 15 and read Paul's definition of the gospel, in which he holds before us the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ as its palpitating heart around which all else gathers, and we realize at once why Peter represents us as being begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the same chapter in which he represents us as being born again by the Word which is preached in the gospel.

Let us now recapitulate the Scriptural answer to our second leading question, By whom or what is the "new birth" wrought? The answer is, God is its author, the Holy Spirit is God's agent, and the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus [351] Christ is the specific instrumentality employed, as the word of God. That "gospel" or "good tidings" of salvation through Jesus Christ is the direct offspring of the Holy Spirit. In its completeness, none but the Holy Spirit could have authoritatively spoken or dictated it. He it is who has taken the words of human language and combined them in intelligible sentences which must ever remain instinct with His own life so long as they continue in the combination which announces His divine truths. These words are spirit and they are life. Until they are placed in different combinations and embody other propositions, the Spirit of God can never be taken out of them, and the man who sneeringly uses the phrase "bare word," of the gospel, is guilty of blasphemy.

Our third leading question is, In what does the new birth consist? It is evident that in natural birth, as we commonly use the word, nothing comes into existence. An hour before birth the child is possessed of every member and faculty that it possesses an hour after birth. Nothing comes into existence, but the relationship and surroundings of every member and every faculty are changed. Birth is simply the entrance upon a new state which is marked by new relationships, and which involves a new destiny. We have no right to push the Saviour's figure out of or beyond the legitimate application of the literal fact from which it is derived. When the Saviour, [352] therefore, speaks of a new birth, it implies a change of state or relationship on the part of all which participates in it. As this new birth inducts us into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the prominent thought of this change of relationship must be in regard to Him. The essential idea of the new birth, therefore, must be a change of relationship, of all that is born again, to Jesus Christ. But we have already seen that the entire man, in all the departments of his being, is born again, consequently in the new birth there must be a definite change of relationship to Jesus Christ, of every department of our nature. If there be a plan of salvation laid down, equivalent in its details to the new birth as a whole, it will inevitably include details expressive of this change of relationship for each and every department of our nature as human beings. With this key in our hand, it will be easy to unlock all the (so-called) mysteries of the new birth.

Man may be divided into the intellectual, the emotional, the volitional and the physical. If there is more than this, I have not been able to find it. The normal relationship of each of these to Jesus Christ, and the claim which He makes upon humanity, is our first inquiry. That claim is belief of His divinity, love for Himself, subordination to His will and obedience to His commands.

The normal relationship of the intellectual nature, the thinking principle, is unbelief. We do [353] not believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God. It may not be disbelief. It may consist simply with want of knowledge. There may not be conscious rejection, for there may be no knowledge of such statement. But, stated in its simplest form, we do not believe this great truth. The most radical, vital change of relationship to Jesus Christ, for the intellectual nature, of which we can conceive, is to implicit belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And in perfect accordance with this we find this laid down as one of the conditions of salvation through Christ, when it is developed didactically by the apostles.

The normal relationship to Christ of the emotional nature is indifference. It may develop, as in the case of Voltaire, into hatred, but this is exceptional. Indifference maybe predicated of all. Stated in simplest form, we have no love for Jesus Christ. The most radical, vital change of relationship to Jesus Christ, for the emotional nature, of which we can conceive, is to warm love for Him as the Saviour. In perfect accordance we find love to Jesus laid down as one of the essential constituents of Christian life, Paul saying: "If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema."

The normal relationship of the volitional nature or will to the will of Jesus Christ is insubordination. There is no purpose to obey His [354] commands. The purpose is to follow out our own desires. We care nothing for His will as revealed. We may happen to do some things that He has commanded. For instance, we may be upright in business dealings, we may be kind to the poor, we may abstain from immorality and obscenity, but it is not because we care for anything He has said, but from other motives. The most radical, vital change of relationship for the volitional nature of which we can conceive, is to the deliberate purpose to obey Jesus Christ, the acceptance of His will as ours. In perfect accordance with this we find repentance, which simply means such a change of purpose, laid down as one of the indispensable conditions of salvation.

The normal relationship of the physical nature to Jesus Christ is disobedience. It is not acting in accordance with the commands of Jesus. It is carrying out our independent personal will, or the will of some one whom we love or fear. Its motions have no reference to Jesus Christ or His commands. The most radical, vital change of relationship would be in the beginning of obedience to His commands, and the most striking exhibition of such obedience would be the performance of an act for which no known reason existed but the expressed will of Jesus Christ. If this act were of a character to symbolize the complete submission of the entire physical nature, it would possess a still greater fitness to express vital changes of relationship, [355] a symbolic pledge of the physical to the future service of Jesus Christ.

In perfect accordance with this we find a physical act commanded in the plan of salvation, and so clearly and constantly associated with the remaining constituents of that plan that none can neglect it without putting asunder what God hath joined together. We find that act to be one of such a character that we could have no moral motive to its performance aside from the expressed will of Jesus Christ. We find that in its form it is more perfectly symbolic of complete submission of the whole physical nature to Jesus Christ than any other act could be. There is in its performance a complete suspension of every voluntary physical function, and even of that which is partly voluntary, the function of respiration. Of course, I allude to the ordinance of baptism or immersion, the prerequisite and accompaniment of which is the physical act of confession of the claims of Jesus Christ, which lifts it from a mere physical dipping to a religious act of consecration of the physical.

In these successive acts of the intellectual, emotional, volitional and physical departments of our nature, a change of relationship of the entire man has taken place. There remains no other department to be considered, and, therefore, at this point the new birth must be complete. Short of this point, and with any of these elements wanting, [356] it can not be complete. Consequently, just here, by divine authority, is located that "calling upon the name of the Lord" which brings salvation, that Lord unto whom the new-born has covenanted himself, and who is therefore bound to hear and answer his prayer for pardon. At this point also is located the beginning of that indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is "earnest" of the future glory, and of such as have thus been baptized. Paul says: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ."

Our fourth question is, How is the new birth accomplished?

Having found that the Holy Spirit, through the gospel, does this work, and having found in what the work must consist, this question becomes an interesting and important one. We have already found that the first work to be done is to convince the mind of the truth of the claims of Jesus Christ, so that belief may be produced. An intelligent conviction of the mind on any point can be produced only by suitable and adequate testimony. If faith is to be an intelligent one, the Holy Spirit must furnish testimony, and the conditions of the problem do not demand that He shall furnish or do anything more. Paul declares that "belief cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." John says of his version of the gospel, "But these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God;" [357] and Jesus said: "If I go not away, the Comforter [Holy Spirit] will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you. And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged."

This prediction our Saviour made on the night of His betrayal. Its fulfillment began on the Pentecost day succeeding His resurrection. On that day the Holy Spirit convicted three thousand of the truth of the claims

of Jesus Christ, and of His consequent righteousness. We are expressly told how He did this. He spoke through the lips of Peter in intelligible sentences which announced that the death and burial of Jesus had been followed by His resurrection, ascension and glorification.

Thus God had vindicated Him and He was proved righteous. Being righteous, His declarations concerning Himself were true, and He had declared of Himself that He was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is the production of testimony to the truth of facts, which, if true, necessarily involve the reality of the great test truth of Christianity, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." No man can believe the facts without believing the truth that arises from them.

That testimony the Holy Spirit has furnished [358] through inspired men. They were the visible producers of the result, though he spoke through them, and it is for this reason Paul says of himself, to the Corinthians, "For though ye should have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I begot you through the gospel;" and again, to Philemon, "I beseech thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus." Paul thus transfers to himself, by a figure, the work which the Holy Spirit did through him by the "word of faith" which he preached.

This preaching of the apostles goes on, through the inspired record of the New Testament, as much now as in the first century. Whether read in the book or heard repeated from the lips of the preacher, the same process essentially takes place now as then. There is no intimation in God's word that there ever should be any change. And wherever this process takes place there the Holy Spirit is convicting the world, there the Holy Spirit is begetting men, there the Holy Spirit is present in the testimony He bears, and which only He can bear.

No intimation is given of any other influence upon the unbeliever to produce belief beyond the authoritative presentation of this testimony by the Holy Spirit. They who assert any additional, extraneous influence present a mere speculation of their own brains for which they can produce no authority from God's word. We need be at no pains to deny [359] it, and we certainly are under no obligation to accept it. It stands in the category of those "traditions" which the rabbis added to the law of Moses and the testimonies of the prophets.

In the absence of any declaration in regard to it in the New Testament, there is but one other testimony which would be worth anything, and that is the production of a single man or woman who, without having ever heard in any way any testimony of the apostles to the divinity of Jesus Christ, has, by independent action of the Holy Spirit, believed and confessed that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." No such instance has ever been produced, and in its absence it is an impertinent and gratuitous assumption and presumption which asserts on behalf of the Holy Spirit what He has never taught in regard to Himself.

He declares that the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," and He represents the belief of divine truths as being produced by the same method by which the belief of all other truths is produced; namely, the presentation of suitable and adequate testimony. It is thus, then, that He approaches our intellectual nature. He testifies to the facts of the gospel. The man who believes these to have occurred necessarily believes the truth inseparably united with them, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But we have already found that this constitutes the new birth as it pertains to the intellectual. [360]

It is necessary that the emotional shall have part therein. How, now, does the Holy Spirit reach the emotional, excite love for the Lord Jesus Christ? Through the gospel He presents to our hearts the most

lovable Being, by universal consent, upon whom the world has ever gazed, and further presents this Being as manifesting toward the human race the most unselfish and self-sacrificing love. In this combination the motive powers that can appeal to the human heart for the excitation of a pure love are exhausted. It is impossible to add anything even in imagination. When this is brought to bear upon the emotional nature of man, the testimony of the gospel being believed, the love of the heart to Jesus must inevitably be excited if that heart be at all reachable. We love Him because He first loved us. The test of the new birth of the emotional is that it loves Jesus, and the Holy Spirit accomplishes this by presenting in the gospel the love and loveliness of Jesus.

It is necessary that the volitional shall have part in the new birth. How does the Holy Spirit reach the volitional through the gospel? The point to be reached is that the man shall be willing to take Jesus as Lord. There is a distinction important to be preserved at this point. It is not sufficient that a person shall perform certain actions, go through certain physical experiences, but that he shall do whatever Jesus has required, [361] willingly. The action that results must result from his own deliberate purpose. If it is done unconsciously or under compulsion, it will have no value as far as the will is concerned. Consequently, it can be reached only by presenting truth to the mind and motive to the heart. Anything additional to this destroys the volition, and takes away the moral character of the resultant action. Whenever it can be shown that the Holy Spirit irresistibly, aside from the presentation of truth and motive, saves a man, that moment it will be shown that the freedom of the will is destroyed, and that the time spent in appeals to men to accept Christ is time wasted.

But this has never been shown, nor do I believe that it ever will be shown. The Holy Spirit appeals to the will by presenting Jesus Christ as having all authority in heaven and on earth, as demanding the submission of our hearts and lives, as offering eternal felicity in heaven to those who accept and obey Him, and threatening eternal punishment to these who reject Him, as deserving our implicit obedience by the price He has paid for our redemption, as requiring of us nothing but what is in itself good and holy and noble. It thus brings to bear a wonderful combination of motives to induce us to repent, which means to change our purpose, to submit our will to the will of Jesus so that we take Him as our rightful ruler, our Lord. This is the new birth of the volitional [362] nature as wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Word of truth.

When the man has reached this point the only question he has to ask will be: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? I believe in Thee, I love Thee, I am ready to obey and follow Thee. How shall I show my belief, my love, my repentance?" He does not ask in vain. His consecration is to be made complete by the consecration of the physical. The new birth so auspiciously begun is to be completed by the participation of the physical. To him, as to Saul of Tarsus, come the words of inspiration: "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name." The function of speech, which links itself with the intellectual, emotional, volitional and physical, which, indeed, may bring all together in its own exercise, is consecrated in the public confession of the Christhood and divinity of Jesus, and participates thus in the new birth.

All is now prepared for the carrying out of the great command which so enters into the apostolic commission to preach the gospel, that it can never be separated from it without such a wanton tearing to pieces of the Spirit's word as deprives it of its divine character and authority. Whatever it may be after this impious work of excision has been done, it is no longer the word of God as given to us by the Holy Spirit. That word is "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the [363] nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I

commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Such was Jesus' own commission. When Peter stood, upon the following Pentecost, to fulfill that commission, the Holy Spirit spoke through his lips to the assembled multitude. "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The baptism thus commanded was an act in water of such a character that the same Spirit could afterwards say of it, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead," and was, therefore, immersion.

Thus the Holy Spirit completes the new birth in commanding the administration of the ordinance of baptism, a great symbolic picture of the complete surrender of our physical nature to the commands of Jesus Christ, as we confidently expect that nature to be raised from death and glorified by Him in the final birth into the kingdom of glory.

We have thus followed in detail the various steps of the new birth. We have found it to be wrought, from beginning to end, by the Holy Spirit through the Word of truth; we have found [364] it to comprehend the entire nature of man, intellectual, emotional, volitional and physical; we have found it to consist, for the intellectual, in the transition from unbelief to belief; for the emotional, in the transition from indifference to love; for the volitional, in repentance, or the transition from unwillingness to willingness to obey Christ; for the physical, in confession and baptism, or the transition to overt obedience of the body to the commands of Jesus. Thus the whole nature is brought into a new relationship to Jesus Christ, and of such a one it may be predicted that, being "born of water and the Spirit," he has entered into "the kingdom of God." [366]

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