

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 8 CHRIST AND NICODEMUS

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Transcript

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CHAPTER 8

CHRIST AND NICODEMUS

John 3:1-8

We begin with the usual Analysis of the passage that is to be before us:— 1. The Person of Nicodemus, verse 1. 2. The official Position of Nicodemus, verse 1. 3. The Timidity of Nicodemus, verse 2. 4. The Reasoning of Nicodemus, verse 2. 5. What did Nicodemus' ignorance demonstrate? verse 4. 6. The Stupidity of Nicodemus, verse 4. 7. The Instructing of Nicodemus, verses 5-8. "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him (John 3:1, 2). Nicodemus was a "ruler of the Jews," which means, most probably, that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. As such, he is to be viewed here as a representative character. He gives us another phase of the spiritual condition of Judaism. First, he came to Jesus "by night" (verse 2); second, he was altogether lacking in spiritual discernment (verses 4, 10); third, he was dead in trespasses and sin, and therefore, needing to be "born again" (verse 7). As such, he was a true representative of the Sanhedrin—Israel's highest ecclesiastical court. What a picture, then, does this give us again of Judaism! For the Sanhedrin it was nighttime, they were in the dark. And like Nicodemus, their representative, the Sanhedrin were devoid of all spiritual discernment, and had no understanding in the things of God. So, too, like Nicodemus, his fellow—members were destitute of spiritual apprehension. Again we say, What light does this cast upon Judaism at that time! So far, we have seen a blinded priesthood (John 1:21, 26); second, a joyless nation (John 2:3); third, a desecrated Temple (John 2:16); and now we have a spiritually dead Sanhedrim "The same came to Jesus by night." And why did Nicodemus come to the Lord Jesus by night? Was it because he was ashamed to be seen coming to Him? Did he approach Christ secretly, under cover of the darkness? This is the view generally held, and we believe it to be the correct one. Why else should we be told that he came "by night?" What seems to confirm the popular idea is that each time Nicodemus is referred to in the Gospel afterwards, it is repeated that he came to Jesus "by night." In John 7:50, 51 we read, "Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he

doeth?" And again in John 19:39 we are told, "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight." What is the more noticeable is that something courageous is recorded of Nicodemus: his boldness in reprimanding the Sanhedrin, and his intrepidity in accompanying Joseph of Arimathea at a time when all the apostles had fled. It seems as though the Holy Spirit had emphasized these bold acts of Nicodemus by reminding us that at first he acted timidly. One other thing which appears to confirm our conclusion is his use of the personal pronoun when Nicodemus first addressed the Savior: "Rabbi," he said, "we know that thou art a teacher come from God." Why speak in the plural number unless he hesitated to commit himself by expressing his own opinion? and so preferred to shelter behind the conclusion drawn by others, hence the "we." "The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). This was true, for the miracles of Christ differed radically from those performed by others before or since. But this very fact warns us that we need to examine carefully the credentials of other miracle-workers. Is the fact that a man works miracles a sure proof that he comes from God, and that God is with him? To some the question may appear well-nigh superfluous. There are many who would promptly answer in the affirmative. How could any man perform miracles "except God be with him?" It is because this superficial reasoning prevails so widely that we feel it incumbent upon us to dwell upon this point. And it is because there are men and women today that work miracles, who (we are fully persuaded) are not "sent of God," that a further word on the subject is much needed. In these times men and women can stand up and teach the most erroneous doctrines, and yet if they proffer as their credentials the power to perform miracles of healing, they are widely received and hailed as the servants of God. But it is generally overlooked that Satan has the power to work miracles, too, and frequently the great Deceiver of souls bestows this power on his emissaries in order to beguile the unstable and confirm them in error. Let us not forget that the magicians of Egypt were able, up to a certain point, to duplicate the miracles of Moses, and whence obtained they this power unless from that old Serpent, the Devil! Let us not forget the warning of the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 11:13, 14, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." And, finally, let us not forget it is recorded in Scripture that of the Antichrist it is written, "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). Yes, Satan is able to work miracles, and also to deliver this power to others. So, then, the mere fact that a certain teacher works miracles is no proof that he is "come from God." It is because we are in danger of being beguiled by these "deceitful workers" of Satan, who "transform themselves into the apostles of Christ," that we are exhorted to "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). And it should not be forgotten that the church at Ephesus was commended by Christ because they had heeded this exhortation, and in consequence had "tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Rev. 2:2). "But," it will be asked, "how are we to test those who come unto us in the name of Christ?" A most important and timely question. We answer, Not by the personal character of those who claim to come from God, for as 2 Corinthians 11:14, 15 tells us, "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness." And not by their power to work miracles. How then? Here is the Divinely inspired answer, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). They must be tested by the written Word of God. Does the professed servant of God teach that which is in accord with the Holy Scriptures? Does he furnish a "Thus saith the Lord" for every assertion he makes? If he does not, no matter how winsome may be his personality, nor how pleasing his ways, no matter how marvelous may

be the "results" he "gets," God's command is, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine (this teaching), receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed" (2 John 10). Let us emulate the Bereans, of whom it is recorded in Acts 17:11, "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." And how did the Lord receive Nicodemus? Notice, He did not refuse him an audience. It was night-time, and no doubt the Savior had put in a full day, yet He did not seek to be excused. Blessed be His name, there is no unacceptable time for a sinner to seek the Savior. Night-time it was, but Christ readily received Nicodemus. One of the things which impresses the writer as he reads the Gospels, is the blessed accessibility of the Lord Jesus. He did not surround Himself with a bodyguard of attendants, whose duty it was to insure his privacy and protect Him from those who could be a nuisance. No; He was easily reached, and blessedly approachable—quite unlike some "great" preachers we know of. And what was Christ's response to Nicodemus' address? This "ruler of the Jews" hailed Him as "a teacher come from God," and such is the only conception of the Christ of God. But it is not as a Teacher the sinner must first approach Christ. What the sinner needs is to be "born again," and in order to do this he must have a Savior. And it is of these very things our Lord speaks to Nicodemus—see verses 3 and 14. Of what value is teaching to one who is "dead in trespasses and sins," and who is even now, under the condemnation of a holy God! A saved person is a fit subject for teaching, but what the unsaved need is preaching, preaching which will expose their depravity, exhibit their deep need of a Savior, and then (and not till then) reveal the One who is mighty to save. Christ ignored Nicodemus' address, and with startling abruptness said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This brings us to the central truth of the passage before us—the teaching of our Lord upon the new birth. Here we find that He speaks of first, the supreme Importance of the new birth (verse 3); second, the Instrument of the new birth—"water" (verse 5); third, the Producer of the new birth—"the Spirit" (verse 5); fourth, the imperative Necessity of the new birth—a new nature, "spirit" (verse 6); sixth, the obvious Imperativeness of the new birth (verse 7); seventh, the Process of the new birth (verse 8). Let us consider each of these points separately. 1. The supreme Importance of the new birth. This is exhibited here in a number of ways. To begin with, it is profoundly significant that the new birth formed the first subject of the Savior's teaching in this Gospel. In the first two chapters we learn of a number of things He did, but here in John 3 is the first discourse of Christ recorded by this apostle. It is not how man should live that we are first instructed by Christ in this Gospel, but how men are made alive spiritually. A man cannot live before he is born; nor can a dead man regulate his life. No man can live Godwards until he has been born again. The importance of the new birth, then, is shown here, in that the Savior's instruction upon it is placed at the beginning of His teaching in this Gospel. Thus we are taught it is of basic, fundamental importance. In the second place, the importance of the new birth is declared by the solemn terms in which Christ spoke of it, and particularly in the manner in which He prefaced His teaching upon it. The Lord began by saying, "Verily, verily," which means "Of a truth, of a truth." This expression is employed by Christ only when He was about to mention something of a momentous nature. The double "verily" denoted that what He was about to say was of solemn and weighty significance. Let the reader learn to pay special attention to what follows these "Verily, verily's" of the Savior, found only in John. In the third place, Christ here plainly intimated the supreme importance of the new birth by affirming that "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (verse 3). If then the kingdom of God cannot be seen until a man is born again, the new birth is shown to be a matter of vital moment for every descendant of Adam. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). There is some doubt in our mind as to exactly what is referred to here by "the kingdom of God." In the first place, this expression occurs nowhere else in this Gospel but here in John 3:3, 5. In the second place, this fourth Gospel treats of spiritual things. For this reason we think "the kingdom of God" in this passage has a

moral force. It seems to us that Romans 14:17 helps us to understand the significance of the term we are here studying. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." In the third place, the kingdom of God could not be "seen" by Nicodemus except by the new birth. We take it, then, that the "kingdom of God" in John 3 refers to the things of God, spiritual things, which are discerned and enjoyed by the regenerate here upon earth (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:10, 14). The word for "see" in the Greek is "eidon," which means "to know or become acquainted with." The full force, then, of this first word of Christ to Nicodemus appears to be this: "Except a man be born again he cannot come to know the things of God." Such being the case, the new birth is seen to be a thing of profound importance. "Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:4). What a verification was this of what the Lord had just told Nicodemus. Here was proof positive that this ruler of the Jews was altogether lacking in spiritual discernment, and quite unable to know the things of God. The Savior had expressed Himself in simple terms, and yet this master of Israel altogether missed His meaning. How true it is that "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" (1 Cor. 2:14), and in order to have spiritual discernment a man must be born again. Till then he is blind, unable to see the things of God. 2. The Instrument of the new birth. "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (verse 5). Regeneration is a being born "of water." This expression has been the occasion of wide difference of opinion among theologians. Ritualists have seized upon it as affording proof of their doctrine of baptismal regeneration, but this only evidences the weakness of their case when they are obliged to appeal to such for a proof text. However, it may be just as well if we pause here and give the scriptural refutation of this widely held heresy. That baptism is in no wise essential to salvation, that it does not form one of the conditions which God requires the sinner to meet, is clear from many considerations. First, if baptism be necessary to salvation then no one was saved before the days of John the Baptist, for the Old Testament will be searched from beginning to end without finding a single mention of "baptism." God, who changes not, has had but one way of salvation since Adam and Eve became sinners in Eden, and if baptism is an indispensable prerequisite to the forgiveness of sins, then all who died from Abel to the time of Christ are eternally lost. But this is absurd. The Old Testament Scriptures plainly teach otherwise. In the second place, if baptism be necessary to salvation, then every professing believer who has died during this present dispensation is eternally lost, if he died without being baptized. And this would shut heaven's door upon the repentant thief, as well as all the Quakers and members of the Salvation Army, the vast majority of whom have never been baptized. But this is equally unthinkable. In the third place, if baptism be necessary to salvation, then we must utterly ignore every passage in God's Word which teaches that salvation is by grace and not of works, that it is a free gift and not bought by anything the sinner does. If baptism be essential to salvation, it is passing strange that Christ Himself never baptized any one (see John 4:2), for He came to "save his people from their sins." If baptism be essential to salvation, it is passing strange that the apostle Paul when asked point blank by the Philippian jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" answered by saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Finally, if baptism be essential to salvation, it is passing strange the apostle Paul should have written to the Corinthians, "I thank God I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius" (1 Cor. 1:14). If then the words of Christ "born of water" have no reference to the waters of baptism, what do they signify? Before replying directly to this question, we must observe how the word "water" is used in other passages in this Gospel. To the woman at the well Christ said, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Was this literal "water?" One has but to ask the question to answer it.

Clearly, "water" is here used emblematically. Again, in John 7:37, 38 we are told, "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Here, too, the word "water" is not to be understood literally, but emblematically. These passages in John's Gospel are sufficient to warrant us in giving the word "water" in John 3:5 a figurative meaning. If then the Lord Jesus used the word "water" emblematically in John 3:5, to what was He referring? We answer, The Word of God. This is ever the instrument used by God in regeneration. In every other passage where the instrument of the new birth is described, it is always the Word of God that is mentioned. In Psalm 119:50 we read, "For Thy word hath quickened me." Again, in 1 Corinthians 4:15 we find the apostle saying, "I have begotten you through the gospel." Again, we are told "Of his own will begat he us with (what?—baptism? no but with) the word of truth" (James 1:18). Peter declares, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23). The new birth, then, is by the Word of God, and one of the emblems of the Word is "water." God employs quite a number of emblems to describe the various characteristics and qualities of His Word. It is likened to a "lamp" (Psalm 119:105) because it illumines. It is likened unto a "hammer" (Jer. 23:29) because it breaks up the hard heart. It is likened unto "water" because it cleanses: see Psalm 119:9; John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26: "Born of water" means born of the cleansing and purifying Word of God. 3. The Producer of the new birth. "Born of water, and of the Spirit" (John 3:5). The Holy Spirit of God is the Begetter, the Word is the "seed" (1 John 3:9) He uses. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). And again, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). Nothing could be plainer. No sinner is quickened apart from the Word. The order which is followed by God in the new creation is the same He observed in the restoring of the old creation. A beautiful illustration of this is found in Genesis 1. The opening verse refers to the original creation of God. The second verse describes its subsequent condition, after it had been ruined. Between the first two verses of Genesis 1 some terrible calamity intervened—most probably the fall of Satan—and the fair handiwork of God was blasted. The Hebrew of Genesis 1:2 literally reads, "And the earth became a desolate waste." But six days before the creation of Adam, God began the work of restoration, and it is indeed striking to observe the order He followed. First, darkness abode upon "the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2); Second, "And the Spirit of God moved upon (Hebrew 'brooded over') the face of the waters"; Third, "And God said, Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3); Fourth, "And there was light." The order is exactly the same in the new creation. First, the unregenerate sinner is in darkness, the darkness of spiritual death. Second, the Holy Spirit moves upon, broods over, the conscience and heart of the one He is about to quicken. Third, the Word of God goes forth in power. Fourth, the result is "light"—the sinner is brought out of darkness into God's marvelous light. The Holy Spirit, then, is the One who produces the new birth. 4. The imperative Necessity of the new birth. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). By his first birth man enters this world a sinful creature, and because of this he is estranged from the thrice Holy One. Of the unregenerate it is said, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Unspeakably solemn is this. When Adam and Eve fell they were banished from the Paradise, and each of their children were born outside of Eden. That sin shuts man out from the holy presence of God, was impressively taught to Israel. When Jehovah came down on Sinai to give the Law unto Moses (the mediator), the people were fenced off at the base of the Mount, and were not suffered to pass on pain of death. When Jehovah took up His abode in the midst of the chosen people, He made His dwelling place inside the holy of holies, which was curtained off, and none was allowed to pass through the veil save the high priest, and he but once a year as he entered with the blood of atonement. Man then

is away from God. He is, in his natural condition, where the prodigal son was—in the far country, away from the father's house—and except he be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This is not an arbitrary decree, but the enunciation of an abiding principle. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. And this is the very nature of the case. An unregenerate man who has no relish at all for spiritual things, who is bored by the conversation of believers, who finds the Bible dull and dry, who is a stranger to the throne of grace, would be wretched in heaven. Such a man could not spend eternity in the presence of God. Suppose a fish were taken out of the water, and laid upon a salver of gold; suppose further that the sweetest of flowers surrounded it, and that the air was filled with their fragrance; suppose, too, that the strains of most melodious music fell upon its ears, would that fish be happy and contented? Of course not. And why not? Because it would be out of harmony with its environment; because it would be lacking in capacity to appreciate its surroundings. Thus would it be with an unregenerate soul in heaven. Once more. The new birth is an imperative necessity because the natural man is altogether devoid of spiritual life. It is not that he is ignorant and needs instruction: it is not that he is feeble and needs invigorating: it is not that he is sickly and needs doctoring. His case is far, far worse. He is dead in trespasses and sins. This is no poetical figure of speech; it is a solemn reality, little as it is perceived by the majority of people. The sinner is spiritually lifeless and needs quickening. He is a spiritual corpse, and needs bringing from death unto life. He is a member of the old creation, which is under the curse of God, and unless he is made a new creation in Christ, he will lie under that curse to all eternity. What the natural man needs above everything else is life, Divine life; and as birth is the gateway to life, he must be born again, and except he be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. This is final.

5. The Character of the new birth. But what is the new birth? Precisely what is it that differentiates a man who is dead in sins from one who has passed from death unto life? Upon this point there is much confusion and ignorance. Tell the average person that he must be born again and he thinks you mean that he must reform, mend his manner of life, turn over a new leaf. But reformation concerns only the outer life. And the trouble with man is within. Suppose the mainspring of my watch were broken, what good would it do if I put in a new crystal and polished the case until I could see my face in it? None at all, for the seat of the trouble is inside the watch. So it is with the sinner. Suppose that his deportment was irreproachable, that his moral character was stainless, that he had such control of his tongue that he never sinned with his lips, what would all this avail while he still had (as God says he has) a heart that is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked?" The new birth, then, is something more than reformation. Others suppose, and there are thousands who do so, that being born again means becoming religious. Tell the average church-goer that "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," and these solemn words afford him no qualms. He is quite at ease, for he fondly imagines that he has been born again. He will tell you that he has always been a Christian: that from early childhood he has believed in Christianity, has attended church regularly, nay, that he is a church-member, and contributes regularly toward the support of the Gospel. He is very religious. Periodically he has happy feelings; he says his prayers regularly, and on Sundays he reads his Bible. What more can be required of him! And thus many are lulled to sleep by Satan. If such an one should read these lines, let him pause and seriously weigh the fact that it was man eminently religious that the Savior was addressing when He declared, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Nicodemus was not only a religious man, he was a preacher, and yet it was to him Christ said, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." There are still others who believe that the new birth is a change of heart, and it is exceedingly difficult to convince them to the contrary. They have heard so many preachers, orthodox preachers, speak of a change of heart, that they have never thought of challenging the scripturalness of this expression, yet it is unscriptural. The Bible may be

searched from Genesis to Revelation, and nowhere does this expression "change of heart" occur upon its pages. The sad thing is that "change of heart" is not only unscriptural, but is it antiscritural, untrue, and therefore, utterly misleading. In the one who has been born again there is no change of heart though there is a change of life, both inward and outward. The one who is born again now loves the things he once hated, and he hates now the things he once loved; and, in consequence, his whole line of conduct is radically affected. But, nevertheless, it remains true that his old heart (which is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked") remains in him, unchanged, to the end. What, then, is the new birth? We answer, It is not the removal of anything from the sinner, nor the changing of anything within the sinner; instead, it is the communication of something to the sinner. The new birth is the impartation of the new nature. When I was born the first time I received from my parents their nature: so, when I was born again, I received from God His nature. The Spirit of God begets within us a spiritual nature: as we read in 2 Peter 1:4, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." It is a fundamental law which inheres in the very nature of things that like can only produce like. This unchanging principle is enunciated again and again in the first chapter of Genesis. There we read, "And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind" (John 1:12). And again, "And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind" (John 1:21). It is only the blindness and animus of infidelistic evolutionists who affirm that one order of creatures can beget another order radically different from themselves. No; that which is born of the vegetable is vegetable; that which is born of the animal is animal. And that which is born of sinful man is a sinful child. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. Hence, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." It cannot be anything else. Educate and cultivate it all you please, it remains flesh. Water cannot rise above its own level, neither can a bitter fountain send forth sweet waters. That which is born of flesh is flesh; it may be refined flesh, it may be beautiful flesh, it may be religious flesh. But it is still "flesh." On the other hand, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The child always partakes of the nature of his parents. That which is born of man is human; that which is born of God is Divine. That which is born of man is sinful, that which is born of God is spiritual. Here, then, is the character or nature of the new birth. It is not the reformation of the outward man, it is not the education of the natural man, it is not the purification of the old man, but it is the creation of a new man. It is a Divine begetting (James 1:18). It is a birth of the Spirit (John 3:6). It is a being made a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). It is becoming a partaker of the Divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). It is a being born into God's family. Every born again person has, therefore, two natures within him: one which is carnal, the other which is spiritual. These two natures are contrary the one to the other (Gal. 5:17), and in consequence, there is an unceasing warfare going on within the Christian. It is only the grace of God which can subdue the old nature; and it is only the Word of God which can feed the new nature. 6. The obvious Imperativeness of the new birth. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Without doubt, Nicodemus was startled. The emphatic statements of Christ staggered him. The vital importance and imperative necessity of the new birth were points which had never exercised his conscience or engaged his serious attention. He was amazed at the Savior's searching declarations. Yet he ought not to have been. Really, there was no cause for him to stand there in openmouthed wonderment. "Marvel not," said Christ. It was as though the Lord had said, "Nicodemus, what I have said to you should be obvious. If a man is a sinner, if because of sin he is blind to the things of God, if no amount of religious cultivation can change the essential nature of man, then it is patent that his deepest need is to be born again. Marvel not: it is a self-evident truth." That entrance into the kingdom of God is only made possible by the new birth, that is, by the reception of the Divine nature, follows a basic law that obtains in every other kingdom. The

realm of music is entered by birth. Suppose I have a daughter, and I am anxious she should become an accomplished musician. I place her under the tuition of the ablest instructor obtainable. She studies diligently the science of harmony, and she practices assiduously hours every day. In the end, will my desire be realized? Will she become an accomplished musician? That depends upon one thing—was she born with a musical nature? Musicians are born, not manufactured. Again; suppose I have a son whom I desire should be an artist. I place him under the instruction of an efficient teacher. He is given lessons in drawing; he studies the laws of color-blending; he is taken to the art galleries and observes the productions of the great masters. And what is the result? Does he blossom out into a talented artist? And again it depends solely on one thing—was he born with the nature and temperament of an artist? Artists are born, not manufactured. Let these examples suffice for illustrating this fundamental principle. A man must have a musical nature if he is to enter the kingdom of music. A man must have an artistic nature if he is really to enter the realm of art. A man must have a mathematical mind if he is to be a mathematician. There is nothing to "marvel" at in this: it is self-evident; it is axiomatic. So, in like manner, a man must have a spiritual nature before he can enter the spiritual world: a man must have God's own nature before he can enter God's kingdom. Therefore "Marvel not . . . ye must be born again." 7. The Process of the new birth. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). A comparison is here drawn between the wind and the Spirit. The comparison is a double one. First, both are sovereign in their activities; and second, both are mysterious in their operations. The comparison is pointed out in the word "so." The first point of analogy is found in the word "where it listeth" or "pleaseth"; the second is found in the words "canst not tell." "The wind bloweth where it pleaseth... so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The wind is irresponsible: that is to say, it is sovereign in its action. The wind is an element altogether beyond man's control. The wind neither consults man's pleasure, nor can it be regulated by his devices. So it is with the Spirit. The wind blows where it pleases, when it pleases, as it pleases. So it is with the Spirit. Again; the wind is irresistible. When the wind blows in the fulness of its power it sweeps everything before it. Those who have looked upon the effects of a tornado just after it has passed, know something of the mighty force of the wind. It is so with the Spirit. When He comes in the fulness of His power, He breaks down man's prejudices, subdues his rebellious will, overcomes all opposition. Again; the wind is irregular. Sometimes the wind moves so softly it scarcely rustles a leaf, at other times it blows so loudly that its roar can be heard miles away. So it is in the matter of the new birth. With some the Holy Spirit works so gently His work is imperceptible to onlookers; with others His action is so powerful, so radical, revolutionary, His operations are patent to many. Sometimes the wind is only local in its reach, at other times it is widespread in its scope. So it is with the Spirit. Today He acts on one or two souls, tomorrow, He may—as at Pentecost—"prick in the heart" a whole multitude. But whether He works on few or many He consults not man; He acts as He pleases. Again; the wind is invisible. It is one of the very few things in nature that is invisible. We can see the rain, the snow, the lightning's flash; but not so the wind. The analogy holds good with the Spirit. His Person is unseen. Again; the wind is inscrutable. There is something about the wind which defies all effort of human explanation. Its origin, its nature, its activities, are beyond man's ken. Man cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. It is so with the activities of the Holy Spirit. His operations are conducted secretly; His workings are profoundly mysterious. Again; the wind is indispensable. If a dead calm were to continue indefinitely all vegetation would die. How quickly we wilt when there is no wind at all. Even more so is it with the Spirit. Without Him there could be no spiritual life at all. Finally, the wind is invigorating. The life-giving properties of the wind are illustrated every time a physician orders his sick patient to retire to the mountains or to the seaside. It is so, again, with the Spirit. He is the One who strengthens with might in the inner man. He is the One who energizes, revives,

empowers. How marvelously full was the figure employed by Christ on this occasion. How much is suggested by this single word "wind." Let the above serve as an example of the great importance and value of prolonged meditation upon every word of Holy Writ. God has thrown an impenetrable veil over the beginnings and processes of life. That we live we know, but how we live we cannot tell. Life is evident to the consciousness and manifest to the senses, but it is profoundly mysterious in its operations. It is so with the new life born of the Spirit. To sum up the teaching of this verse: "The wind bloweth"—there is the fact. "And thou hearest the sound thereof"—there is evidence of the fact. "But knowest not whence"—there is the mystery behind the fact. The one born again knows that he has a new life, and enjoys the evidences of it, but how the Holy Spirit operates upon the soul, subdues the will, creates the new life within us, belongs to the deep things of God. Below will be found a number of questions bearing on the passage which is to be before us in the next chapter. In the meantime let each reader who desires to become a "workman that needeth not to be ashamed" diligently study the whole passage (John 3:9-21) for himself, paying particular attention to the points raised by our questions:—[1] 1. What does verse 9 go to prove? 2. What solemn warning does verse 10 point? 3. What is the force of the contrast between earthly things and heavenly things in verse 12? 4. How are we to understand verse 13 in view of Enoch's and Elijah's experiences? 5. What Divine attribute of Christ is affirmed in verse 13? 6. What is the connection between verse 14 and the context? 7. Why was a "serpent" selected by God to typify Christ on the Cross? verse 14. Study carefully the first nine verses of Numbers 21. ENDNOTES:

[1] (No doubt the reader will be glad to know that the Author has published a booklet containing the substance of the above entitled *The New Birth*, which the Lord has been pleased to own in blessing to many. Price 15 cents per copy. Order from the Bible Truth Depot, Swengel, Pa.—I. C. H.).

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