



The New Birth
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THE PATHWAY TO GLORY

Prior to Pentecost, not even Jesus' disciples really understood the spiritual aspect of his teaching. Yet, since that day when God the Spirit arrived with mighty power upon Jerusalem, the youngest and least educated of Christ's true followers in each generation have grasped it because of the Holy Spirit's mysterious indwelling. He is the Spirit of truth. Surely, if one was needed, this is a proof of the reality behind the blessed experience of the "new birth".

Matthew 16:21-23; John 3:7; 14:5-9; 16:13; Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 3:16

Even the learned Nicodemus was startled into silliness at that famous meeting with Jesus "by night": "How can a man be born when he is old?" he said puzzled, "can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Really! Despite his educational and religious advantages—"a master of Israel" Jesus reminded him—Nicodemus was on that occasion incapable of comprehending what Jesus was talking about [although later he did], and we are not surprised. As the Lord stated on another occasion, "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word".

John 3:1-10; 8:43; 19:39

The few "hear" it today, but the majority do not, and it is this extraordinary paradox that causes so much irritation. The few and the majority are capable of holding conversations with each other on numerous topics, yet when entering the orbit of the "new birth" a thick curtain descends separating the two, for no aspect of truth is more detested by those devoid of the experience. They cannot tolerate the alarm it generates, particularly if they claim to be Christians, the possibility of having been overlooked. Not even an atheist likes to think he has been, by the God in whose existence he

does not believe! In any case, the very suggestion of a the "new birth" implies the insufficiency of the "old birth", and pride resents it.

John 10:3-5; 18:37

Were the subject not so serious, hell awaiting those devoid of the experience, there might be a humorous side to it. Roam the world for subjects to discuss and the room will buzz with excited chatter, but toss into the conversation even a veiled hint about having been "born again" and the hubbub will drain away into the "black hole" of embarrassed silence. Reasons will suddenly be discovered for a swift exit.

John 3:5

That being so, one hears some strange theories from the unregenerate on matters divine and eternal. It would be more sensible to invite a baby to author a work on the cosmos, than to expect a spiritual understanding of revealed truth from those who are incapable of "hearing" it; the "dead in sins". Opinions are openly expressed through the media and general mischief, from books and bar stools, pulpits, pundits and self-appointed armchair philosophers. The coldly philosophic and the outrageously blasphemous, the sentimentally silly and the downright daft: piffling trifles aired with such panache yet rooted in ignorance. G.K. Chesterton's wit is applicable [and fitting for a Roman Catholic one would have thought!]: "A man will believe anything, providing it is not found in the Bible!"

Ephesians 2:1

I. THE EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

David was able to write, "The Lord is *my* Shepherd", but only after his anointing by the Spirit of God. How wide is the chasm between those who



“hear”, and those who cannot! For example, a story is told about Benjamin Franklin of the American war of independence fame. He heard David Garrick, the 18th century’s greatest actor, reciting the 23rd Psalm; he had also heard George Whitefield, that century’s greatest preacher, reciting the same Psalm. Franklin was asked which of the two renderings he preferred, and his reply is interesting: “Garrick knew the Psalm, but Whitefield evidently knew the Shepherd”.

1 Samuel 16:13

Jesus was insistent about it: “THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE FLESH IS FLESH, AND THAT WHICH BORN OF THE SPIRIT IS SPIRIT. MARVEL NOT THAT I SAID UNTO THEE, YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN”. Humanity, of whatever nationality or creed, is either “in the flesh” or “in the Spirit”. There is no in-between, no alternative. Jesus did not suggest, or imply, that there is a loophole through which some might worm their way. In fact, he described a potential wriggler as “a thief and a robber”.

John 3:6,7; 10:1

Being “in the flesh”, and therefore without the experience of “new birth”, is the reason why the unregenerate are incapable of grasping spiritual truth, the door being barred against them. They have not been “given” it. It is God the Spirit alone who grants an understanding of “the mysteries”; who unfolds the “hidden wisdom”. Through the “new birth” blessing, the covenant people are “mystically” united to God the Son, and are therefore astonishingly in possession of “the mind of Christ”. Indwelt with his Spirit, this means they share his delights, and reflect his frowns: they “see” as he sees, albeit partially.

Matthew 13:11; John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:7,16; 13:12

II. THE EXPERIENCE RECEIVED

Instantaneous.

When their people are disturbed upon realising they have not experienced the “new birth”, apostate clergy quell alarm by suggesting the possibility of sinners “growing” into “new birth”. Although, they say, some claim to have had ‘a *dramatic* conversion” (a deliberate emphasis is invariably placed upon the supposed drama behind it), they assure these deceived souls loyalty to “the church” coupled to a life of good deeds is just as valid. They tell them, that although they cannot claim what “these evangelical people” do, not to worry, they are nevertheless gradually ascending towards acceptance in God’s sight; that they are on a “pilgrimage”! Such people tragically live within an aura of a “peace” that is false. From the devil’s darkness to God’s light: that is such a transformation it must of necessity be sudden, and cannot possibly be considered a journey to be undertaken.

Colossians 1:13; 1 Peter 2:9

That stated: to remember the actual moment when the experience took place is not always possible, nor is it important to do so. It did not need to have been an overtly dramatic experience either, but nevertheless, the fact of what has happened in the soul cannot be denied. Those

arriving from an untaught background will not be capable of explaining what has occurred, but they will certainly know “something different” has taken place within them. Equally, that it is not a passing phase but is to be a permanent fixture of their lives. In the language of John Wesley’s famous



encounter with God the Spirit, the heart will be “strangely warmed”, unrelated to anything superficial. “New birth” is a balanced experience related to the whole person; romantic idealism, psychology or sentiment will not have entered the equation.

1 Peter 1:18,19

Repentance.

How can one describe such a unique moment, when the soul is drawn into an intimate communion with Christ, and heaven’s gift of saving faith is received? The first impression undoubtedly is negative: one has a sudden dread of sin, and sinning. After all, even if the recipient of the gift is grossly ignorant about what has happened, the Holy Spirit instinctively unveils the realm of purity: “This then is the message which we have heard of him [Jesus] and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

1 John 1:5

What a contrast is that teaching to what is being heard today, where the only attribute of God mentioned is *love*, and thus the “Love is god” cult was born. In fact, although the divine attributes are of equal significance, the infant in the faith is *primarily* aware of God’s *holiness*. Sin, righteousness, and coming judgment: these awesome subjects, said Jesus, are the first the *Holy Spirit* brings to the soul when he arrives.

John 16:8

The message received by John and the other apostles was that known to the Israelites during the Old Testament dispensation. It was not the *love* of

God that first impressed itself upon them, although it was never far away, but his dread-full *holiness*. Repeatedly throughout their history this fact was impressed upon the Jews. For this reason, Moses—and later Joshua—was commanded to remove his sandals when confronted by the divine presence. It is a theme deeply embedded in the Torah, and especially in that section of it known as the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 3:15; 20:1-17; Leviticus 11:44,45; Joshua 5:15

When God appeared on Sinai to reveal his law accompanied by 10,000 angels, Moses quaked “exceedingly”. Likewise, to be “born again” and numbered among the “partakers of the divine nature”, is first of all to be confronted with the being of almighty God in the face of Jesus Christ. In other words, whereas at the “old birth” it is the mother who receives the pain, at the “new birth” the “baby” does! Nobody, but nobody, born of the Spirit can to a higher or lesser degree avoid the “pain” of being exposed in the light of God’s perfect purity. His righteous law, “holy, and just, and good”, has been introduced, genuine remorse and true repentance result.

Exodus 19:16; Deuteronomy 33:2; John 14:9; Romans 7:12; Hebrews 12:21; 2 Peter 1:4

Yet alarmingly, how many today claiming to be what they call “born again Christians” are evident strangers to this vital experience: in fact, are no different from the world? They are alive, but have never been “slain” by God’s searching law, and are therefore masquerading as Christ’s followers. Thanks to superficial evangelism during the past five decades, for whom the call for

repentance has been substituted by “deciding for Christ”, evangelical churches are very likely to be influenced from within by men and women in whom, despite the claims, there is no genuine work of grace. One



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shudders upon contemplating what future generations will suffer as a result.

Romans 7:9-11

The role models appear everywhere, whose life-styles and general demeanour expose them for what they are: Sabbath-breaking, fashion-conscious, trend-setting “stars” of stage, screen, sport, “gospel” scream, and shamefully, even the pulpit. These are the deeds of the modern Nicolaitans—“which I also hate”, condemns the ascended Lord—for whom Love is god, and whose spirituality rises no higher than their tongues. It is evident they know nothing of Calvary and its challenge, the thorny pathway and carrying the cross are not for them! Theirs is a feel-good-about-yourself philosophy, following a “Jesus” of their own making, who leads them where they wish to go, and smiles at whatever they “pray” to do. Jeremiah’s indictment of idolatry springs to mind.

Jeremiah 10:10; Luke 14:27; Revelation 2:6

Awe.

Having therefore genuinely been drawn into God’s realm of holiness and grace, and experienced the humbling that true repentance brings, the “new born” infant will be subdued in spirit. There will be no giggling “happy-clappy” moments in the church; in fact, such behaviour will be frowned upon. Instead, there will be a desire to sit quietly amid the brethren and sisters, in order to learn “steadfastly” about the precious truth from heaven that has been received. Righteous zeal for eternal matters will have entered where once sat ungodly sloth. There will also be an expression of astonishment at the paucity of one’s Bible knowledge, and wonderment at

how such treasures could have been ignored for so long. “Hidden wisdom” indeed, and kept hidden from them until now!

Acts 2:42

Like David of old—for the purposes of grace are ageless—upon meeting with revealed truth the “newly born” will “sit before the Lord” in awe—and marvel. Together they will stand in Eden with their first parents, and learn to trust their story, recognizing its vital importance to world history and revealed truth. Eve, tempted by the serpent, had dared to disobey the divine command to refrain eating from (“Oh, *not* an apple!”) “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. The covenant of works had been shattered, death of a physical and spiritual nature brought about. Fellowship between the Creator and his chief creation having been broken, they will watch Adam and Eve driven from the garden, scattered by the holy presence of the offended God, cherubim and a flaming sword guarding “the tree of life”.

Genesis 2:17; 3; 2 Samuel 7:16-18; Matthew 19:4; 1 Corinthians 15:22

Travelling through time, the spiritual beginners journey with Abram [Abraham] from Ur to Canaan, and with Moses and the Hebrews to Mount Nebo on the border of the Promised Land. They observe Joshua and the Hebrew nation enter the country promised to them, and the tribes claim their inheritance. They hear the prophets at a later date denounce the peoples’ sins, demanding repentance in return, and are amazed at the prophecies concerning the long-awaited Messiah. 332 of them in all! They are in awe at them in the garden of Eden, in the desert, at David’s court, and during the exile in a “strange land”—even from an enemy’s mouth.



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Genesis 3:15; 12:1-6; Numbers 24:15-17; Deuteronomy 18:15; 34:1-4; Joshua 3; 13-21; 2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 7:14; Ezekiel 18:30; 34:23

They will thrill also at the way the divine finger pointed towards the location where the Messiah would arise. Progressively, the mystery had been unveiled; firstly, in Abram (Abraham), to the barren country of Israel, and through his grandson Jacob to the territory of Judah in that land. Centuries later, spotlighted in that royal tribe was the little town of Bethlehem, where there stood a lodging house and alongside a stable, in which lay a squalid manger. The Messiah had arrived!

Genesis 12:1-3; 49:10; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:15,16

Wonder.

The freshly quickened will display the major sign of the indwelling Spirit, Christ's Word eagerly embraced: fascinated by his person, intrigued by his teaching, amazed by his Sacrifice, assured by his resurrection, uplifted by his ascension, and excited by his promised return in glory.

Matthew 7:28,29; 24:30; Luke 24:51-53; John 3:2; 7:46; Romans 4:25; Colossians 3:16

Numerous are the benefits of his grace, summed up in the apostle John's glorious assurances, "Herein is love", not that we loved God, but that he loved *us*, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins . . . We love him, because he *first* loved us". As a result, the quickened (and no one else) love God as his law demands of everyone, and as the prophets foretold they would, with "all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might", and "thy neighbour as thyself".

Deuteronomy 6:5; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Matthew 22:37; 1 John 4:10,19

It is not surprising therefore, that when the beauty of revealed truth is unfolded, and the fact of their part in it is made plain, deeply moved, spiritual infants (and their brethren and sisters) will in prayerful worship share David's astonishment: "Who am I, O lord God . . .?" Wonder follows "new birth" as assuredly as night follows day.

2 Samuel 7:18

Light, Life, Joy.

Even if at first they are at-a-loss to grasp the theological implications of what it means for the soul to be quickened by the Holy Spirit, one thing will be evident, a marked change will have taken place in their demeanour. No longer will Self demand attention, or pride loosen the tongue. Rather, a quiet unassuming peace and joy will have filled their lives.

John 14:27; 15:11; Romans 3:19

A genuine work of grace is devoid of mere sentimentality or superficial emotionalism, but nevertheless it has to be said, theirs will be a heart-warming glow not experienced before. Everything will appear new and fresh: the attitude towards God, his people and eternal matters in general, and because of that, the relationship to family, friends, neighbours and circumstances. The 'gems' of this new relationship with God will be observed (and closely!), in

the home and work place. Expressing "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance", for one freshly quickened, can anything ever again be a drudgery or a bore?



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Galatians 6:22,23; Colossians 3:17

Why, mysteriously, even creation itself will have assumed an even more wonderful appearance: “Heaven above is softer blue, earth around is sweeter green, something lives in every hue Christ-less eyes have never seen; birds with gladder songs o’erflow, flowers with deeper beauties shine, *since I know, as now I know, I am his and he is mine.*” Being aware of this, can the “newly-born” ever again be lonely, or feel isolated? As the risen Lord said, “I am with you ALWAYS, even unto the end of the world”. Little wonder, a spiritual infant was heard to ejaculate on more than one occasion, “I used to think I was living, but I was only existing, now though I’m LIVING!” Or, as Jesus put it: “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing, the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, *and they are LIFE*”.

Matthew 28:20; John 6:63

Yes, or no.

Nobody would blame one born blind for marvelling when sight is restored, or criticise the condemned prisoner for shouting for joy when released; likewise, for one “born again”. The transformation could not be starker: “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness”. Whoever, indeed, is “in Christ” is a “new creature, old things are passed away . . . *ALL THINGS are become NEW*”. What a breathtaking privilege!

Isaiah 61:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17

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