

The New Birth

By
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The word of God teaches, "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*" (John 3:3). I take it for granted that the Savior has fully conveyed the doctrine that everything, whether body, soul, spirit, feelings, affections, susceptibilities, appetites, hungering, thirsting, rejoicing, or mourning, pain or pleasure, that is "born of the flesh, ***is flesh***"! Hence the exhortations, "mortify the deeds of the body,"- "Crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts," "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection." "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). All the reproofs, admonitions and exhortations, with which the Gospel is so richly stored, and which are addressed to the churches, or to individual members of the body of Christ, are predicated upon the acknowledged fact that she and they are **yet** "*in the body*" – that she has not yet reached her "perfect state," where they would be inappropriate. Where "the Lord God and the Lamb are the light of the city." Where the "candle" [lamp] will not be necessary to her furtherance in the divine life.

The disciples are here composed of the "old man, which is corrupt with his deeds" (Ephesians 4:22), and the "new man, which is after God, created in righteousness and true holiness;" (Ephesians 4:24), between whom there exists direct antagonism of life, of natures, of instincts, of hopes, desires, appetites, enjoyments, pleasures and

pains, which are entirely **irreconcilable**. *"The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be; so then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."* *"To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace"* (Romans 8: 6-8).

Some contend that the corrupt feelings, affections and lusts are the old man! But the apostle seems not to have adopted this view, or why did he say the "old man is corrupt with his deeds"? Actions pertain to agents, hence he concludes the corrupt actions illustrate the corrupt nature of the agent from whom these actions proceed. I am unable to perceive what they gain by their assumption. Do they intend to assert that man is born all over again, and that all belonging to him has become spiritual by the new birth? That the "new man" is not only the subject of holy desires, spiritual enjoyments, and strictly of the Christian walk and conversation, and yet that the same man belongs to the same category with those for whom the law was made? "The law was not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murders of fathers and murders of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:10). Or do they mean to convey an idea that the disciples of Christ do no wrong? If the latter be their teaching, then Peter did no wrong when he "denied His Lord, and cursed, and swore he knew not the man." Is this what they design to teach? If it is, why, when His Savior looked upon him, did Peter go out and "weep bitterly."

Now, if all that a man was, and was possessed of, was born all over again, then indeed he could not sin. *"Whosoever is born of God doth **not** commit sin, because His seed remaineth in him; and **he***

cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). The unerring testimony does not contradict itself. There we learn also, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Let me ask, then, in all sincerity: Does the Word of the Lord anywhere say, "Except a man's soul (or any other part of the man) be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"? Why is the soul, in contradistinction to the other parts of the man (soul, body, mind and spirit), selected as that part which is said *by some* to be "born again"? Paul considered the soul as likely to contract "blame" as the body, or the spirit; hence he said, *"And I pray God that your whole soul, body and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (I Thess. 5:23). If the soul is born again, why pray that it be preserved blameless, when the apostle knew full well that it could not contract blame, if indeed it is born again? Allow me to enquire: Did not man sustain that name (Adam) before the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul? Did not the man exist, according to the divine testimony, antecedently to being born of the flesh? Now of what elements was man originally born? The answer is: "of the flesh." "Adam begat a son, in his own likeness, after his own image, and called his name Seth" (Genesis 5:3). Was there anything born of the flesh that had not a previous seminal existence in the flesh of Adam? If not, the figure is a perfect one. The elements of the sinner are found wholly in the flesh, as emanating from the "first man, who is of the earth earthy" (I Cor. 15:47). The elements of the saints are found wholly in their divine nature, imparted to them from the "last Adam," "the Lord from heaven," "born of God." The natural progenitor could impart to his offspring none other than the nature that he possessed. "As is the earth, such are they that are earthy." The Heavenly Progenitor could impart none other nature to His offspring than that which He possessed. "And as is the heavenly, such are they that are

heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:48). Paul said, "*as He is, even so are we in this world.*" He was here with two whole and distinct natures – the human and the divine. His children, "born of God," are possessed of two whole and distinct natures, neither nature contributing anything essentially to the existence of the other. A "part" of the divine nature did not compose "the man Christ Jesus," neither does a "part" of our human or fleshly nature compose any part of the divine nature, of which "we are made partakers." The paternity of each, the old and the new man, is as radically different as holiness and sin. The old man is "born of the flesh, and is flesh," the new man is "born of the Spirit, and is spirit." "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have," said Jesus. I have ever conceived that the "corn of wheat, which falls into the ground and dies;" contained within its germ everything, and nothing more, than that which will spring up and grow out of it. The idea that the "soul of the natural man," or any other part of him, is born of the Spirit, in the absence of proof from the Bible that that soul or part existed seminally in the Spirit, is a reversal of the doctrine taught in Genesis, that "every seed will produce his kind." We do not look for a crop of onions from the potatoes we plant. My flesh, simply considered, without an intelligent faculty, is as incapable of sinning as my horse's flesh. It is true my flesh has life, but so has my horse's flesh has life. It is the mind, or rational intelligence, which distinguishes beings capable of violating the Law from those incapable of contracting guilt from that source. "*Sin is the transgression of the Law.*" "*By the Law is the knowledge of sin.*" "*I had not known sin but by the Law; for I had not known lust except the Law had said, Thou shalt not covet*" (Romans 7:7).

The disciples of Christ are "not without law to God, but under law to Christ." Their comfort is, "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us*" (Galatians 3:13). Yet being under law to their King, what do we hear them exclaim? "*I find a law*

in my members, [are those members devoid of a rational intelligent faculty?] warring against the law of my mind, [what mind? Certainly not the carnal mind, but the "mind of Christ, which they have in the new man,] and bringing me into captivity to the Law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death" [Romans 7:24). If our carnal, or natural, mind is "born of God," worked over, or by any other process made to be "spiritual," how is it that "their mind and conscience is defiled"? If man be "born over again a second time," by which intelligence assumes altogether a spiritual type, and has cast off the natural, or flesh, whence the complaints of sinful, wicked, vile and presumptuous thoughts, of which Christians so universally complain?

The Bible nowhere teaches that the new birth **obliterates or changes** the product of the **natural birth** – that imparting spiritual life **destroys the animal life** the man previously had, or that the creating of holy desires, imparting appetite for the "bread of life," or a thirst for the "waters of salvation," **destroys sinful pleasures, proneness to sin, and a thirst for the natural elements which sustain our dying natures**, but everywhere teaches the "putting off the old man, which is corrupt according to its deceitful lusts," practically. "Let your conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ" – "putting away lying, let every man speak the truth with his neighbor." "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect will of God." "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, be careful to maintain good works; these things are good and profitable unto men." But the "new man" is said to be "**born not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible (seed), by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever**" (I Peter 1:23). Now, I ask, was anything born of that incorruptible seed which was not in the germ

thereof? Was the natural seed deposited in Christ? I think brethren will answer each of these questions in the negative. How then can they contend that some part of the old man is born of God? [for I have not yet met with one who contends that the entire Adamic man, was born over again!] The natural intelligence of man is not changed by the birth of the Spirit. He subsequently, as antecedently to the new birth experience, investigates natural subjects, arrives at natural conclusions from natural facts disclosed, partakes of natural food and drinks, partakes of the pleasures and pains attendant on our mortal state, and is subject to all the ills to which the flesh is heir.

We are told that the views we here propagate are too deep and mysterious to be published. I reply, Are they sustained by the record God has given? Is it more inconsistent with the Bible to contend that the "holy seed" had seminal existence in their spiritual Head "from everlasting, or ever the earth was," than that the "natural seed" existed seminally in their natural head (Adam) from his very creation? Is the one proposition more unreasonable or anti-Scriptural than the other? Shall we reject either because we cannot fully comprehend them? Let us remember, "*Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory*" (I Timothy 3:16); and "*canst thou by searching find out God?*" Can you find out the Almighty unto perfection? "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." Is not the implication irresistible, that if the world had known Him, it would have known His brethren? "We have known Jesus Christ after the flesh, but now henceforth know we Him no more." How was the Son of God manifested on earth? As we have just seen, "God was manifest in the flesh." How are His children manifest to each other in this world? "They are born of God." They "show the work of the Spirit, written in their hearts." They "deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously and godly

in this present world" (Titus 2:12). "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; He will show them His covenant" (Psalm 25:14).

I grant the subject is profoundly mysterious, how two whole and distinct natures dwell in those people that are "born of God." Yet it is not more mysterious than how two whole and distinct natures dwelt in their "Elder Brother." I rejoice to know that there is a great and infallible Expounder of the sacred testimony. *"But God has revealed them now to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."* *"He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you."*

Brother Beebe, I have read my Bible to little profit for the last fifty years, if in the divine economy our God has ordained that a **spiritual stock** shall grow out of a **natural seed** or root – that the product shall be essentially different from the seed which produces it, or that beings should spring from the germ of immortality, who had no seminal existence in that germ of immortality.

These views on this important and interesting subject are the result of much reflection and anxiety to have a solution of the mystery within me. After many long months, struggling and toiling to obtain a righteousness in which I could be accepted with God, and finding myself helpless, and almost hopeless of obtaining the Divine favor, realizing that "in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for the will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not," and fully assured that: "The Law's demand I can't fulfill, for I have nought to pay."

At a time, unexpected to me, I was led to a discovery of the Lord Jesus as the *"end of the Law for righteousness unto every one that*

believeth." For a short space I "rejoiced with joy unspeakable, and full of glory," and adopted the language,

**"All over glorious is my Lord,
Must be beloved and yet adored;
His worth, if all the nations knew,
Sure the whole earth would love Him too."**

My joy did not continue long, until I found the "Canaanite is still in the land" (Genesis 12:6) I soon found I still had a wicked heart and wandering mind, which led me to fear I was deceived. I found too, that vain, foolish and wicked thoughts were still bubbling up within me—was tempted to go to church and tell them they were deceived in me; that no Christian had so wicked and rebellious nature as mine. And to add to my distress, I occasionally heard from the pulpit that "the new birth changed the soul from the love of sin to the love of holiness." That sentiment seemed like a dagger to my heart. I felt, if that is true, I am not the subject of the Christian religion. But this was not all. I heard it proclaimed from the pulpit, "Regeneration, or the new birth, slays the enmity of the heart." I asked myself, Is the enmity of your heart slain? If so, whence the rebellion you feel at your domestic affliction? I was dumb, concluding the preachers were good men, speaking advisedly, and felt like resigning all hope.

My great distress, however, induced me to go to my Bible, and try to pray to God, that I might understand its teachings. After a severe conflict, which lasted some time I read, "*When I would do good, evil is present with me*" (Romans 7:21). Who is the speaker? The apostle Paul. Was Paul a Christian? "O, yes; but you should not take comfort from this. Paul was not so rebellious, so irreconcilable as you." I read on, when I came to this other expression of the same apostle: "*The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and*

these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). This is Paul's experience! He is right and the preachers wrong, responded my poor hitherto distressed heart. The more I searched the divine record, the stronger were my convictions that the preachers, who taught **the change** of heart theory, by the new or spiritual birth – that the enmity of the heart is slain by that gracious work, were in error. I knew if they were right I was wrong. Strong as was my confidence in their piety, and call to the work of the ministry, I was nevertheless fully convinced they were wrong in this matter. The Bible nowhere, as I read it, taught that the man - the soul, the heart, the mind, the affections, the instincts of the natural man - are changed; but rather, that "a new and right spirit;" an entirely new and higher order of life was given, the result of which was new views, new desires, new breathings, new appetites, new employments, new aspirations, of a spiritual, higher and holier character than those belonging to the natural old man. That his elder, or "old man," "shall serve the younger;" or "new man." Now are the saints desirous to "walk in the spirit," as a result of that holy implantation, to "keep under the body, and bring it into subjection," to "mortify the deeds of the body," to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts?" I said, forty years ago, in trying to preach, "The Lord does not make Christians as the hatter sometimes makes hats; namely, take an old hat, work it over, and put a little napping on it, and call it a "new hat." That is, God does not take an old sinner, and work him over, and put a little dressing on him, that he may be a "new man," or saint.

Brother Beebe, I have not in forty-eight years found any other view of exposition that will, in my judgment, meet my needs. If it be heresy, as charged by some, I pray God to deliver me from the heresy; but if Truth, God grant that we be enabled to proclaim it, though "our names may be cast out as evil."

I blame not any for differing with us on this subject, if they can enjoy more peace and happiness in contemplating a different theory. God forbid we should endeavor to disturb that peace, further than to proclaim, "The Lord saith," and be sure that we teach nothing as Truth which our God has not sanctioned in His divine word.

The conclusion is, then, that instead of any part of the Adamic man being "born of the Spirit," "a new man created in righteousness and true holiness," is developed. A spiritual man, "born of the Spirit," possessed of eternal life, with new or spiritual powers, perceptions and susceptibilities, who is expected to bring the old man into subjection, to control him, keep him under, and thus produce a change in practice, and thus, as a "branch in the true vine," to "bring forth fruit unto holiness." "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples." "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." "As the body without the spirit is dead, even so faith without works is dead also."

Letter to Elder Gilbert Beebe, April 20, **1868**.