



“Born Again”

An In-depth Examination of this Much-discussed and Controversial Subject in the Light of the Scriptures.

MANY PEOPLE in Western countries have been asked at some time or other, "Have you been born again?" Many will reply affirmatively, saying, for example, "I'm a born-again Christian" or "Christ entered my life and I was born again." These and similar expressions are used today like a password into some circles of Christian fellowship, especially those of Fundamentalists and other Evangelicals.

Recently much publicity has been focused on this subject, especially by U.S. Presidents claiming to be "born-again" Christians. *Newsweek* magazine has carried a feature article on "Born Again." Charles Colson (who before becoming a Christian was deeply involved in the Watergate scandal) has published a book entitled *Born Again*, which has been circulated widely and has had a film made, based on it. Billy Graham also published a book entitled *How to Be Born Again*. According to a Gallup poll, over 30 percent of the people in the U.S. believe that they are "born again."

But what is meant by this expression? Does it, in the words of Nicodemus (John 3: 4), mean that one will "enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Obviously not!

VARIOUS PERTINENT TESTIMONIES

Some of the explanations given by various individuals on being "born again" are as follows:

Charles Colson describes his experience of being "born again" in these words: "Something began to flow into me—a kind of energy ... then came the strange sensation that water was not only running down my cheeks, but surging through my whole body as well, cleansing and cooling as it went. ... I repeated [to Christ] over and over the words 'take me.'"

U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield states: "I can't say that I was ever saved through a mystical experience. It was an ongoing transformation. ... When I was teaching political science at college, I found out that the campus leaders of Sigma Chi fraternity were praying for me. ... That so impressed me that I went home to my bachelor apartment and told myself that I would have to make a choice. I began to pray and read an hour every night—the Bible and books like those by C.S. Lewis. It was a gradual displacement of ego, a moving away from the desire to serve just myself. I am still moving. I don't want to use Christ as an excuse in seeking political support."

In contrast with this, many Fundamentalists assert that the "born-again" experience is very marked, pinning it down to a specific day and event. They say that we know our physical birthday accurately and that anyone who has been "born again" will know his spiritual birthday at least as definitely.

Ruth Carter Stapleton, President Carter's sister, and an active religious worker and "faith healer," says that people misunderstand what is meant by the expression "born again." In her

words, "It just means that you have become aware of the third dimension, the spiritual. We know of the mind and the body—the spiritual is the third dimension. Born again means to be aware of that part of us that is eternal."

President Carter says that he was baptized and joined the Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia at the age of 11, but that in 1966, at the age of 40, he was "born again," accepting Jesus Christ in a way he never had before.

Thus it is evident that there is no unanimity among "born-again" believers in defining what is meant by being "born again." However, most people regard it as a great change or a very different inclination and feeling toward God and Christ than what they previously had.

The most common Fundamentalist definition of being born again is turning from one's sins to Christ and receiving Him as one's own personal Savior.

One Fundamentalist defines it this way: "A man hears the Word of God, believes it in his heart, and receives Christ as His Savior. Thus he is born again." Another explains, "Thus it [being born again] is that when the Word (Rom. 10: 17) reaches the heart, the Holy Spirit ... breaks open that seed and gives the life and the faith. It immediately comes out and testifies, 'I believe,' 'I am saved.' ... It is that simple. The easiest thing that a man ever did was to accept Christ. No works, no price, simply God's free gift."

GENNAO CORRECTLY DEFINED

A general misunderstanding on this subject has resulted from the translators' inconsistent rendering of the Greek word *gennao*. In the KJV Bible it is sometimes translated *to beget* and sometimes *to bear*. *Gennao* and its derivatives have three correct meanings: (1) *to beget* (used of the *male* only), (2) *to bring to birth* (used of both *male* and *female*) and (3) *to bear* (used of the *female* only). It should be translated by one or another of these English words, according to the sense of the passage in which it occurs.

To clearly understand the *birth* of the Spirit and the true Spirit-born condition, we must understand what is meant by the *begettal* of the Spirit; for as in human generation, so in grace, a birth must be preceded by a begettal and a period of gestation. And this is the way the Bible presents the matter of the generating of the Gospel-Age Church, the spiritual elect.

SEVEN STAGES IN THE CHURCH'S GENERATION

The Scriptures show that there would be seven stages in generating each one of the spiritual elect, corresponding to the *begetting*, *quicken*ing, *growth*, *strengthening*, *balancing*, *perfecting* and *birth* of a human being:

(1) The *begettal* would occur through God's depositing His Word as the germinating spiritual seed into the mind and heart of each of them (John 1: 13; 1 Cor. 4: 15; Philemon 10; Jas. 1: 18; 1 Pet. 1: 3, 23; 1 John 5: 1, 2), thereby making them embryo "new creatures" (2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 6: 15; Eph. 2: 10; 4: 24; Col. 3: 10).

(2) Later, each one would receive the *quicken*ing as an embryo "new creature" (John 6: 63; Eph. 2: 1, 5; Col. 2: 13).

(3) Each one would *grow* in grace, knowledge and service in the embryo condition (Eph. 4: 15; 1 Pet. 2: 2; 2 Pet. 3: 18).

(4) Each one would receive a *strengthening* in every good word and work (Eph. 3: 16; 6: 10-17; Col. 1: 11; 2 Tim. 2: 1; 1 Pet. 5: 10).

(5) Each one would develop more and more as an embryo by *balancing* the various parts of a Christlike character with one another (1 Thes. 3: 12, 13; 2 Thes. 2: 17; 3: 3; Jas. 5: 8; 1 Pet. 5: 10; 2 Pet. 1: 12).

(6) Each one would complete the full development by gradually being *perfected* in character, thus being completely conformed to Christ's likeness (Luke 6: 40; Rom. 8: 29; Eph. 4: 12; Heb. 13: 20, 21; 1 Pet. 5: 10).

(7) The previous six processes would make each one as an embryo ready for the *birth* of the Spirit, which is experienced by participating in the resurrection, in which each one receives the spirit nature. Christ's Body members receive immortality, the Divine nature (John 3: 8; 1 Cor. 15: 50-54; Col. 1: 18; 2 Pet. 1: 4; Rev. 1: 5).

So we see that the Bible clearly distinguishes and separates between the *begett*al of the Spirit and the *birth* of the Spirit. The Spirit-*begotten* condition is in the earthly lifetime of God's spiritual elect, while their Spirit-*born* condition is only in *the resurrection!*

The expression "born again" occurs only three times in the KJV Bible: John 3: 3, 7; 1 Pet. 1: 23. It occurs also in other translations.

1 PET. 1: 3, 23 EXAMINED

We will first treat of 1 Pet. 1: 23. A comparison of it with v. 3 demonstrates clearly that in v. 23, where the word *gennao* is translated "*born*," it really should be rendered "*begotten*."

In 1 Pet. 1: 3 we read, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath *begotten* us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Here the phrase "*begotten* us again" is the translation of the Greek words *hemas* (us) and *anagennao* (*ana* as a prefix gives emphasis, intensity, to its conjoined word and also suggests repetition, therefore it is properly translated "begotten us *again*"; *gennao* has the meanings indicated above).

That "*begotten*" is the correct translation of *gennao* in both 1 Pet. 1: 3 and 23 is evident from the following considerations:

(1) The spiritual elect (v. 2) are there referred to as still in *hope* ("begotten ... *unto* a lively *hope*"; v. 3) that is, awaiting the fruition, the culmination of their hope. What hope? The hope of everlasting, incorruptible life in heaven as spirit beings (v. 4), the hope, the expectation, of being in the resurrection like and with the glorified Jesus—in the Divine nature (2 Pet. 1: 4; 1 Cor. 15: 49; 1 John 3: 2). They are mentioned as having the "earnest," or guarantee, of their inheritance (Eph. 1: 13, 14) *but not yet their actual inheritance* (1 Pet. 1: 4)—else why would they still hope for it (Rom. 8: 24, 25)?

(2) The resurrection hope of the spiritual elect, to which they are *begotten*, is mentioned as being founded on Jesus' resurrection (v. 3; 1 Cor. 15: 12-20). His resurrection was His Spirit-birth, as Col. 1: 18 and Rev. 1: 5, properly translated, show. Both references, being to the same event, should convey the same meaning. But as in the case of *gennao*, so with the Greek word *protokos*—the KJV translators and others have darkened the subject through inconsistent rendering. Manifestly *protokos* should have been translated "firstborn" in Rev. 1: 5 instead of "first *begotten*," just as it is rendered "firstborn" in Col. 1: 18. The ASV, NASB, RSV, Rotherham, Young, Williams, the Diaglott, *etc.*, all properly render it "firstborn" in both verses.

Because Jesus' resurrection was His Spirit-birth, His being "born from the dead," into His resurrection inheritance, the faithful spiritual elect, the Church, were assured by the Apostle Peter in vs. 3, 4 that their Spirit-begetting would culminate also in their Spirit-birth, in their being "born from the dead" (Col. 1: 18; John 14: 19; 2 Tim. 2: 11, 12), into their resurrection inheritance; that is, just as God gave *Jesus* a Spirit-birth (resurrection) so He would give *the Church* a Spirit-birth (resurrection)—the fruition of their Spirit-begetting and Spirit-gestation (1 Pet. 1: 21). Therefore they with our Lord are called "firstfruits" (1 Cor. 15: 20, 23; Jas. 1: 18; Rev. 14: 4).

(3) The spiritual elect are mentioned as still *on trial*, to demonstrate by God's assisting grace their fitness or unfitness of being brought to birth on the plane of the Divine nature (1 Pet. 1: 7, 13). So they had not yet been brought to *birth*.

(4) In 1 Pet. 1: 21-23 the Apostle gives instruction and exhortation similar to that which he gave to the spiritual elect in vs. 2-4. He reminds them (v. 21) of their resurrection hope, based on the resurrection of Christ, their Head (compare v. 3). Observing that they had already been washed and made clean, holy, through faith in the precious blood of Christ (v. 22; compare vs. 16, 18, 19) and had been obedient to the Truth, including the development of genuine love for the brethren, he encouraged them to continue to love one another fervently. This love for the brethren was the indication that they had passed from "death unto life" (1 John 3: 14), and was eminently proper and becoming to those who had a holy, spiritual relationship one with another.

The Apostle's reference here to the "seed" (Greek, *spora*, the vitalizing generative life-germ; v. 23) obviously is to *begetting*, and *not to birth* (see ASV, Young, Rotherham, Moulton, Diaglott). The word "incorruptible" in v. 23 links this verse with v. 4, where the Apostle refers to the "incorruptible" inheritance (the Greek word for "incorruptible" is the same in both instances). For the "inheritance incorruptible," the "born from the dead" condition, attained by the Spirit-birth, in the resurrection, would be the natural sequence to the quickening, development, growth,

etc., of the deposited "incorruptible seed," just as the birth of a human is the natural sequence to the quickening, development, growth, *etc.*, of the deposited human sperm, or seed. This same sequence is brought out forcefully by our Lord in John 3: 1-13, as we will see later. Note 1 Cor. 15: 50-54; the "change" refers to the Spirit-birth, the door into the Spirit-born condition.

The foregoing remarks on 1 Pet. 1: 3, 23 demonstrate clearly that the expression "*born again*" in v. 23 should be translated "*begotten again*."

JESUS' AND NICODEMUS' CONVERSATION

In addition to the translation "born again" in 1 Pet. 1: 23 being incorrect and misleading, the same is true in the other two uses of the expression "born again"—in John 3: 3, 7. In both cases *gennaō* should be translated "*begotten*" instead of "*born*," as an examination of John 3: 1-13 will show; and the Greek word *anothen*, translated "again," would better in both cases be rendered "from above" (see margin, Rotherham, Young, Berkeley, Williams, Beck, Diaglott). Accordingly, in both cases the rendering should be "*begotten from above*" and not "born again."

The conversation of Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3: 1-13 is the outstanding Scripture passage on (1) *Spirit-begettal* and the *Spirit-begotten* condition and (2) *Spirit-birth and the resultant Spirit-born condition*. We must carefully notice which of these two conditions is referred to or the conversation will not make good sense to us. It is evidently only partially recorded, the main points being mentioned, from which we may gather the drift of it all. We suggest the following as an explanatory paraphrase. Note carefully how Jesus clearly distinguishes between the "*begotten from above*" (translated "born again") condition and the "*born of the Spirit*" condition, the resurrected, "born from the dead" state.

Nicodemus: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God." Yet some of your statements seem very inconsistent to me, and I come to ask an explanation. For instance, you and your disciples go about proclaiming "The kingdom of heaven is at hand"; but you have no army, wealth or influence, and to all appearances this claim is untrue, and in this you seem to be deceiving the people. The Pharisees generally regard you as an impostor, but I am sure there must be some truth in your teachings, "for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." The object of my visit is to inquire of what kind, when and from where is this Kingdom you proclaim? and when and how is it to be established?

Jesus: Your request to have a full understanding concerning the Kingdom of heaven cannot now be answered to your satisfaction; not that I do not know about it fully, but that in your present condition you could not understand or appreciate it, even if I would fully explain. "Except a man be *begotten from above*, he cannot see [Greek, *eidon, know, or be acquainted with*] the kingdom of God."

Even my disciples have as yet very indistinct ideas of the character of the Kingdom they proclaim. I cannot tell them, for the same reason that I cannot tell you; and they could not understand, for the same reason. But, Nicodemus, one peculiarity of God's dealings is that He

requires obedience to the light already possessed before more light is given; and in the selection of those who shall be accounted worthy to share the Kingdom, a manifestation of faith is required. They must be such as are willing to follow God's leading, step by step, often seeing only the one advance step clearly. They must walk by faith and not by sight.

Nicodemus: But I do not understand you. What do you mean? "How can a man be begotten when he is old? Can he enter [which is always by *begettal*] a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (This response by Nicodemus shows that he understood Jesus in v. 3 to refer to being "*begotten* from above.") Or do you mean that the repentance preached by John the Immerser and signified by baptism in water, is somehow a symbolic *birth*? I notice that your disciples preach and baptize similarly. Is this the new birth necessary to those who would see or enter your Kingdom?

Jesus: Our nation is a consecrated nation, a covenant people. They were all baptized into Moses in the sea and in the cloud when they left Egypt. God accepted them in Moses, the Mediator of their Law Covenant, at Sinai; but they have forgotten their covenant—some are living as publicans and as sinners, and many others are self-righteous hypocrites. Therefore the preaching of John and my disciples is *repentance*—a return to God and to a recognition of the covenant made; and the baptism of John signifies this repentance and reformation of heart and life, and *not the new birth*. But unless you have more than this, you will never see the Kingdom.

Except in addition to the reformation symbolized by John's baptism you receive a begetting by the Word of God and birth of the Spirit ("be born of water and of the Spirit"), you cannot understand or enter into my spiritual Kingdom. Repentance will bring you back to a typically justified condition; in that condition you will be able readily to recognize me as Messiah, the antitype of Moses; and by consecrating you will be *begotten* of the Father to a new life and the Divine nature, which, if it develop, become quickened and make proper growth, will insure your being *born* a spirit being, in the First Resurrection; and as such you will not only see but also enter and share my Kingdom.

The change to be wrought by this birth of the Spirit is truly great, Nicodemus; for that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (see also 1 Cor. 15: 48). Wonder not, then, at my first statement, that you must be *begotten* from above before you can understand, know and appreciate the things of which you inquire. "Marvel not that I said [in v. 3] unto thee, Ye must be begotten from above." The difference between your present condition, born of the flesh, and the condition of those born of the Spirit, who shall enter into or constitute the Kingdom I am preaching, is very great.

THE WIND AS AN ILLUSTRATION

Let me give you an illustration by which you will gain some idea of the beings who, when born of the Spirit, will constitute this Kingdom: "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.*" As the wind blows here and there, you cannot see it, though it exerts an influence on you and all about you. You know not whence it comes nor where it goes. This is as

good an illustration as I can give you of those born of the Spirit, in the resurrection, those who "enter into" or constitute the Kingdom which I am now preaching. They will all be as invisible as the wind, and humans, who are not born of the Spirit, will neither know from where they come nor where they go.

Nicodemus: How can this be?—invisible beings!

Jesus: "Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?"—that spirit beings can be present, yet invisible? Have you, who attempt to teach others, never read about Elisha and his servant, or about Balaam's ass and the many other instances in the Scriptures which illustrate this principle, that spirit beings can be present among men, yet invisible? Furthermore, you are of the Pharisees, who professedly believe in angels as spirit beings. But this illustrates what I told you at first: Except a man be begotten from above, he cannot see (know, become acquainted with, or understand as reasonable) the Kingdom of God and the various things connected with it.

If you would enter into and become a joint-heir with me of that Kingdom which I am announcing, you must follow the light, step by step. As you do so, more light will come, and this as rapidly as you will be prepared for it. I have been preaching these things now due which you can understand, and I have been performing miracles, and you acknowledge me to be a teacher come from God, but you have not acted out your faith and openly become my disciple, my follower.

You must not expect to see more, until you live up to all you do see; then God will give you more light and evidence for the next step. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that *we do know*, and testify that we have seen, and ye [Pharisees] receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" It would be useless for me to attempt to tell you of heavenly things, for you would not be convinced, and my preaching would seem the more foolish to you.

If what I have taught, which has been of an earthly character and illustrated by earthly things, which you can and do understand, has not brought conviction enough to your mind to lead you openly to become my disciple, my follower, it would be even less convincing to you if I were to tell you of heavenly things, of which you know nothing; for no man has ever ascended into heaven, hence none could corroborate my testimony. I, who descended from heaven, am the only one on earth who understands heavenly things. "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man [the words '*which is in heaven*' are not found in the most ancient and reliable manuscripts]." A knowledge of the heavenly things can be received only after the begetting of the Spirit, and the heavenly things themselves only when born of the Spirit, in the resurrection.

"SO IS EVERY ONE ... BORN OF THE SPIRIT"

Thus the Scriptures make a sharp distinction between the terms "begotten from above" (translated "born again" in the KJV) and "born of the Spirit," though the two expressions are related. Also, Jesus' illustration in John 3: 8 makes it very clear that the born-of-the-Spirit

condition is *in the resurrection*, and *not in the earthly lifetime* of God's spiritual elect. We read, "The wind bloweth where it listeth [*will*, ASV], 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*." Those who are *born* (in contradistinction to being *begotten*) of the Spirit are here likened to the wind. The wind is (1) *powerful* and (2) *invisible*. So are those who are born of the Spirit, as well as those who were created as spirit beings—the angels. They can be present but invisible, unless miraculously revealed (2 Kings 6: 17). They have awesome strength and powers of locomotion.

Note that Jesus was not here comparing *inability to comprehend* the new birth with *inability to understand* the movements of the wind. Those miss the point entirely who claim that the wind refers to the Christian's "new mind," which can freely without hindrance go back and forth as it searches out deep, hard-to-understand spiritual things that are incomprehensible ("invisible") to the natural man (1 Cor. 2: 9-16). And obviously no one can reasonably claim that physically he or she is able to move freely and invisibly *as the wind* while in a human body!

Other Scriptures in which *gennao* is mistranslated "born," out of harmony with the Bible context, are John 1: 13; 1 John 2: 29; 3: 9; 4: 7; 5: 1, 4, 18. In addition to the reasons already presented, since God (masculine) through His Word is the active agent in all these cases, the translation obviously should be "begotten" instead of "born."

The obscurity surrounding the two Greek words—*gennao* and *prototokos*—will disappear if we remember that the new creature was *begun* by the *begettal* of the Spirit, which occurred at the time God accepted the individual believers consecration, or dedication, as one of the spiritual elect, and finds its completion in the resurrection, which is the Spirit-*birth* (2 Cor. 5: 17; 1 Cor. 15: 20, 23, 42-54; Rev. 20: 4-6).

To confuse these two ideas is akin to confusing the begettal and birth in the natural sphere, which in the case of humans occur 9 months apart. As we have seen, the Scriptures liken the beginning and development of the new creature to the beginning and development of the human embryo. In both the natural and spiritual spheres there is first a begettal, followed in due time by a birth, unless there be a miscarriage.

TEXTS ALLEGEDLY PROVING THAT SOME ARE "BORN AGAIN" IN THIS LIFE EXAMINED

If it is incorrect from the Bible standpoint to speak of oneself as being "*born again*" in this life, how are we to understand Scriptures which refer to Christians in this life as "children," "babes," "sons," *etc.*, such as Rom. 8: 14-17; Heb. 5: 13; 1 Pet. 2: 2; 1 John 3: 1, 2?

While the spiritual elect are in this life *actually* Spirit-begotten, embryo new creatures, nevertheless they are *reckoned* by God (Rom. 4:17) as being *born* new creatures. Therefore in these Scriptures they are called "children," "sons," *etc.*, in this life.

A comparison of two literal passages will show this: "Now are we [reckonedly] the sons of God" (1 John 3: 2). "We ourselves groan within ourselves, *waiting for* [hoping for actual] *sonship*

[see Rotherham, Berkeley, Weymouth and the Diaglott], to wit, the redemption [deliverance in the resurrection] of our body [the Church, the Body of Christ—Eph. 1: 22, 23]. *For we are saved by hope* [anticipatorily, therefore *reckonedly*]: but hope that is seen [*experienced, realized*—Luke 2: 26; Psa. 90: 15; Heb. 11: 5] is not hope: for what a man seeth [*experiences*], why doth he yet hope for?" (Rom. 8: 23-25; see also 6: 10, 11; Eph. 1: 13, 14).

The harmony between 1 John 3: 2 and Rom. 8: 23-25 can be found only in the understanding given in the bracketed comments. 1 John 3: 2 must refer to God's dealings with the saints *as if* they were already sons though not *actually* such, because Rom. 8: 23 clearly shows the Church waiting to receive their actual full sonship in the resurrection. Notice that in 1 Pet. 2: 2 the word *as* is used, showing the *similarity*, but not the *actuality*.

Bible types also show the two standpoints: The *begotten* condition is represented by Isaac's condition in Sarah's womb, and his *birth* represents the First Resurrection—full sonship (Rom. 9: 9; Heb. 11: 11). The *reckoned* condition as sons of God is represented by Isaac after his birth, *e.g.*, in his circumcision, weaning, persecution by Hagar and Ishmael, offering up by Abraham, *etc.* (Gal. 4: 28-31; Heb. 11: 17-19).

WHAT SPIRIT-BEGETTAL MEANS

That the Gospel-Age new creatures have been begotten of God through the Word of Truth means that they received the first impulse in the Divine life from God through His Word. After having truly accepted Jesus as their personal Savior and having thereby been in God's sight justified freely—not by works, but by faith in the Ransom-sacrifice of Jesus Christ—they heard the call, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy [ransomed and justified through faith in Christ—and therefore], acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12: 1); and when, in obedience to that call, they in gratitude and love fully consecrated their justified humanity to God, living sacrifices, side by side with that of Jesus, their consecration was accepted by God for the heavenly calling; and *in that very act the new, spiritual life was begun*, that is, they were *begotten* of the Spirit.

Such found themselves at once thinking and acting as prompted by the new mind, even to the crucifixion of the human desires. From consecration on, these were reckoned as new creatures. This act, correctly called the *Spirit-begettal*, is often mistakenly referred to by the term "born again," because of the KJV and other mistranslations. As noted at the beginning of this treatise, many Fundamentalists and others even use the term "born again" to refer only to the initial step of justification—the step of recognizing Jesus as their personal Savior, with consequent endeavor to practice righteousness—which, according to the Scriptures, must during the Gospel-Age call precede full consecration and *Spirit-begettal*. The Bible shows that consecration is a clearer, more intelligent and advanced decision of a believer (Rom. 5: 2; 12: 1) than is usually entered into by those claiming to be "born again."

To the *embryo* new creatures old things—selfish and worldly desires, hopes, plans, *etc.*—have passed away, and all things have become new (2 Cor. 5: 17). The embryo new creatures continued to grow and develop, as the old human nature, with its desires, hopes, plans, *etc.*, was crucified.

These two processes progressed simultaneously, from the time of consecration and Spirit-begetting, and end with the death of the human and the subsequent birth of the Spirit in the resurrection.

As the Spirit of God through His Word continued to reveal more and more of His plans, He thus quickened the saints' mortal bodies (Rom. 8: 11), enabling these to render Him good service.

SPIRIT-BIRTH IS IN THE RESURRECTION

The birth of the new creature and the true Spirit-born condition is in the resurrection (Col. 1: 18) *and not before*. The resurrection of Christ's Body members is designated the First Resurrection because it is the chief or choice resurrection (Rev. 20: 4-6). It should be remembered that one does not become an *actual* spirit being, is not "born of the Spirit," until the resurrection, though from the time the spirit of sonship is received God deals with the saints as *embryo* sons (Rom. 8: 23-25; 6: 10, 11; Eph. 1: 13, 14). When one becomes a spirit being actually, that is, when *born* of the Spirit, he no longer is a *fleshly* being; for "that which is born of the Spirit *is spirit*."

The *birth* to the spirit nature in the resurrection *must* be preceded by the *begetting* of the Spirit after consecration, just as surely as the *birth* of the flesh is preceded by *begetting* of the flesh. All that are born of the flesh in the likeness of the first Adam, the earthly, were begotten of the flesh; and some during the Gospel Age have been begotten *from above*, by the Spirit of God through the Word of Truth, to later be born of the Spirit into the heavenly likeness, in the resurrection: "As we have borne the image of the earthly, *we* [the Gospel-Age Church] shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15: 49)—unless there be a falling away (Heb. 6: 6). For an examination of the Scriptures in relation to the "Eternal Security" teaching, "Once in Grace, Always in Grace," see BS 440—a copy free on request.

A TRANSFORMATION

Though the acceptance of the heavenly call and one's consecration in obedience to it be decided at one particular moment, the bringing of every thought into harmony with the mind of God is a gradual work (2 Cor. 10: 5); it is a gradual bending heavenward of that which naturally bends earthward. The Apostle terms this process a transforming work, saying, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed [more and more, to the heavenly nature] by *the renewing of your mind*, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12: 2).

Note that the Apostle's words are not addressed to the unbelieving world, but to those whom he recognizes as brethren, as shown by the preceding verse—"I beseech you therefore, *brethren* ... that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God."

It is commonly believed that when a man is converted, or turned from sin to righteousness, and from unbelief and opposition to God to reliance upon Him, that is the transforming which Paul meant. Truly that is a great change—a transformation, but not *the* transformation to which Paul here refers. Had not such a transformation of *character* from sin to righteousness already taken place in those whom he addressed, he could not have termed them *brethren*—brethren,

too, who had something "holy and acceptable unto God" to offer in sacrifice; for only those who are justified by faith in Christ and His Ransom-sacrifice are reckoned by God as holy and acceptable. Transformation of *nature* has resulted, then, to those only who, during the Gospel Age, have presented and laid down their justified humanity a living sacrifice, as Jesus presented His perfect humanity a sacrifice, laying down His right and claim to future *human* existence, as well as ignoring present human gratification, privileges, rights, *etc.*

The first thing sacrificed is the human will; and thereafter such may not be guided either by their own will or by anyone else's will, but only by the Divine will. The Divine will becomes their will, and they reckon the human will as not theirs, but as the will of another, to be disregarded. They then begin to think, to reason and to judge from the Divine standpoint: God's plan becomes their plan, and God's ways become their ways (Isa. 55: 8, 9). None can fully comprehend this transformation who have not in true faith presented themselves as sacrifices, and in consequence come to experience it.

Previously a believer might enjoy anything that was not actually sinful; for the world and all its good things were made for man's enjoyment, the only difficulty being to subdue the sinful propensities. But the consecrated, the transformed, in addition to the effort to subdue sin, are to sacrifice earthly good things and desires, whenever their use conflicts with doing God's will, and devote *all* their energies to the service of God. And those faithful in service and sacrifice will indeed realize daily that this present world is not their resting place, that here they have no continuing city. But their hearts and hopes will be turned to the rest that remains for the people of God (Heb. 4: 9). And that blessed hope in turn will quicken and inspire them to continued sacrifice.

Thus through Spirit-begetting the mind is renewed, or transformed, and the desires, hopes and aims begin to rise toward the spiritual, unseen things promised, while the human hopes, aims, ambitions, *etc.*, die. Those thus transformed, or in process of change, are embryo new creatures, begotten of God. Mark well the difference between these new creatures and those believers, "brethren," who are only justified, who still have the earthly mind, and, aside from sinful desires, whose hopes, aims and ambitions are such as will be fully gratified in the promised restitution of all things (Acts 3: 19-21).

But the consecrated spiritual elect ones are not of this world, even as Christ was not of this world, and their hopes center in the things unseen, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. The prospect of earthly glory, so enchanting to the natural man, no longer is a satisfying portion to those begotten of the heavenly hope, who see the glories of the heavenly promises and who appreciate the part assigned to them in the Divine plan. This new, Spirit-begotten mind is the earnest of their inheritance of the new nature—mind and body.

CHANGED FROM HUMAN TO SPIRIT BODIES

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus is now the express image of His Father's person (Heb. 1: 3), and promised that His Body members would "be *like* him" and "see him as he *is* [in His glorious spirit body; not as He *was*, when in the flesh—2 Cor. 5: 16; Heb. 5: 7; 1 Pet. 3: 18]" (1 John 3: 2;

Rom. 8: 17; Col. 3: 4). "There is a natural [human] body, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15: 44). We could not imagine either our Divine Father or our Lord Jesus as merely great minds without bodies. Theirs are glorious spirit bodies (John 5: 37), though invisible to men's physical eyes (John 1: 18; 6: 46; 1 Tim. 1: 17; 6: 16). While the transforming of the *mind* from human to spiritual is a gradual work, the change from a human to a spirit *body* is not gradual, but instantaneous (1 Cor. 15: 51, 52).

God created man in an earthly mental and moral image of Himself. The human is a likeness of the spiritual (Gen. 5: 1). For instance, God has a will, so have angels and men; God has reason and memory, so have angels and men. The character of the mental operations of each is the same. Given the same data for reasoning and under similar conditions, these different natures within their own spheres are able to arrive at the same conclusions.

Though the mental faculties of the Divine, the angelic and the human natures are similar, yet we know that the spirit natures have powers beyond and above the human—powers which result, we think, not from different faculties, but from the wider range of the same faculties and the different circumstances under which they operate. Perfect human nature is a perfect earthly image of the spirit nature, having the same faculties, but confined to the earthly sphere, and with the ability and disposition to discern only so much beyond it as God sees fit to reveal for man's benefit and happiness.

The Divine is the highest order of the spirit nature; and how immeasurable is the distance between God and His creatures! We are able to catch only glimpses of the glory of the Divine wisdom, power and goodness as in panoramic view He causes some of His mighty works to pass before us. But we may measure and comprehend the glory of perfect humanity.

With these thoughts clearly in mind we can appreciate how the change from the human nature to the spirit nature is effected, namely, by carrying the same mental powers over to a higher nature and higher conditions. When clothed with heavenly bodies, the Gospel-Age Church receives the heavenly powers which belong to those glorious bodies, and thus shall have the range of thought and scope of power which belong to them. "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." Indeed this is as clear a picture of the spirit beings' capabilities and power as the human mind is able to imagine (Rom. 11: 33).

We have examined in considerable detail this subject of "born again," to emphasize the real meaning behind the expression and to draw a definite, broad and clear distinction between (1) Spirit-*begettal* and the Spirit-*begotten* condition, which is the condition of God's spiritual elect in their earthly lifetime, and (2) Spirit-*birth* and the Spirit-*born* condition, which is their condition in their resurrection inheritance. *The two are not the same.* This understanding will prove to be a valuable key in comprehending many other truths of God's Word and in enabling the Truth-seeker to "rightly divide"—to make proper distinctions, not only between Truth and error, but between the scope, operations and time application of Scriptures in relation to one another (2 Tim. 2: 15). Only by so doing will the Bible really become to its earnest student a living,

harmonious, unified whole. We thank God for the Truth given in His Word despite incorrect translations.

We realize that Christian brethren who have studied this treatise carefully and in a proper spirit of meekness may be somewhat disappointed to realize that their blessed Christian experiences in this life have not included the new birth. We sympathize with such in Christian love and encourage them not to feel deprived, but to rejoice in the wonderful enlightenment, heart-warming and energizing of the holy Spirit which is provided for all of Jesus' footstep followers today. Let us all pray for more of it (Luke 11: 11-13), seek to be filled more and more with it (Eph. 5: 18) and let it have free course in our hearts and lives (Gal. 5: 22, 23), that thus we may be fitted more and more for God's Kingdom and our resurrection inheritance (2 Pet. 1: 5-12). (A free copy of this issue will gladly be sent to anyone on request; also, for any who desire it, we have a free issue on "tongues-speaking.")

*Born of the Spirit? oh no, not yet,
Begettal comes first, in God's routine;
In the resurrection the Spirit-born
Can come and go as the wind, unseen.*

*Christ tasted death, the wages of sin,
And thus provided a ransom for all,
Both for the Church and for all mankind,
To give them salvation from the fall.*

*Those who are His as Abraham's seed,
Will bless all the families of the earth;
The Second Adam and Second Eve
Will give to mankind a second birth.*

*The wicked will be forever destroyed,
With all sin, error, envy and strife;
The new earth will sing Jehovah's praise,
The righteous will be given eternal life.*