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DOCTRINE OF THE NEW BIRTH

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”—Titus 3:5

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THE subject of the believer's salvation needs to be considered from two viewpoints—the divine and the human. God's work is to regenerate, to justify, to sanctify, and ultimately to glorify. Our responsibility is to repent, to believe, and to do good works.

Regeneration is solely the work of God and man has no part or lot in it. This from the very nature of the case. Regeneration is termed a *new birth*, or birth from above (Joh 3:3), and birth excludes altogether any effort or work on the part of the individual who is born. Personally, we have no more to do with our spiritual birth than we had with our physical. Again, regeneration is likened unto a *spiritual resurrection* (Eph 2:1; Joh 5:24). Clearly, resurrection is outside man's province. No corpse can quicken itself. No man and no number of men can reanimate a dead body. Only the living God can speak the word which will call forth a Lazarus from the tomb; and He alone can quicken into newness of life one who, spiritually, is dead in trespasses and sins. Once more, regeneration is denominated a *new creation* (2Co 5:17; Gal 6:15). Here again we enter God's domain. He alone can bring into being that which previously had no existence. We repeat, regeneration is solely the work of God, and man has no part or hand in it.

Because regeneration is the work of God it is a *miraculous* thing. The new birth is no mere outward reformation, no mere turning over a new leaf and endeavoring to live a better life. The new birth is very much more than going forward and taking the preacher's hand. The new birth is a supernatural operation of God upon man's spirit. It is a transcendent wonder. All God's works are wonderful. Physical birth is a marvel. The world in which we live is filled with things that amaze us. But from several standpoints the new birth is more remarkable still. It is a marvel of divine grace. It is a marvel of divine wisdom. It is a marvel of divine beauty. It will prove an eternal marvel, for it is a miracle performed upon and within ourselves, and of which we are personally cognizant. It is a miracle which is being repeated all around us every day.

Because regeneration is the work of God it is a *mysterious* thing. All God's works are shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Life, natural life, in its origin, its nature, its process, baffles the most careful investigator. Much more is this the case with spiritual life. The Existence and Being of God transcend the finite grasp. How then can we expect to be able to understand the process by which we become *His* children? Our Lord, Himself, declared that the new birth was a thing of mystery: "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*" (Joh 3:8). The wind is something about which the most learned scientists know next to nothing. Its nature, the laws which govern it, its causation, all lie beyond the purview of human inquiry. So it is with the new birth. It is profoundly mysterious.

Regeneration is an intensely *solemn* thing. The new birth is the dividing line between heaven and hell. In God's sight there are but two classes of people in this world—those who are dead in sins, and those who are walking in newness of life. In the physical realm there is no such thing as being *between* life and death. A man is either dead or alive. The vital spark may become very dim, but while it exists life is present. Let that spark go out altogether, and, though you may dress the body in beautiful clothes and deck it out with all imaginable finery, it is, nevertheless, nothing more than a corpse. So it is in the spiritual world. We are either sinners or saints; spiritually alive or spiritually dead; children of God or children of the Devil. In view of this solemn fact, how momentous is the question, *Have I been born again?* The answer to this question settles our eternal destiny. And in love we would say to all who never have been born again, that if you die in your present condition, the day is coming when you will wish that you had never been born at all. We shall consider:

1. The Nature of the New Birth

What is the new birth? What is the fundamental difference between one who is dead in trespasses and sins, and one who has been quickened together with Christ? Various are the answers returned to these questions; confusing and contradictory are the thoughts often entertained upon this subject. The effects of the new birth are frequently confounded with the new birth itself. Ignorance concerning *God's* answer to these questions has often caused regenerated persons to doubt whether or not they have actually passed from death unto life. In considering the nature or character of the new birth we shall deal first with the negative side.

A. The New Birth Is Not a Process of Reformation

Reformation is the work of man; regeneration is the work of God. Reformation is the attempt to eliminate evil from the old nature; regeneration is the impartation of a new nature. Reformation aims to earn salvation by our own efforts; regeneration is due to the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit. Reformation seeks to improve the old creation; regeneration is the bringing into existence of an entirely new creation. Reformation is external; regeneration is internal. Reformation is turning over a new leaf; regeneration is the beginning of a new life. Reformation is a tedious and protracted process; regeneration is instantaneous and complete. In short, reformation is human; regeneration is divine.

B. The New Birth Is Not the Purification of the Heart

Often have we heard preachers tell their congregation that regeneration is a “change of heart.” While their intention is good, their language is misleading. In this as in everything, we do well to “hold fast the *form* of sound words.” A “change of heart” is an expression nowhere to be found in the Holy Scriptures. It is true there are several passages which seem to convey this idea, but for lack of space we cannot discuss them now. Regeneration does not change the heart, though it results in a radical change of life.

In Jeremiah 17:9 we read, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” The word which is here rendered “desperately” is usually translated “incurably,” and ought to be so here. The heart is never changed for it is *incurably* wicked. John 3:6 sets forth the same truth: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” and it never becomes anything else. There is no process by which a horse can be developed from a tree. Neither does a son of Adam ever develop into a son of God. Regeneration is not a process of transformation. It is altogether a new creation. Even in a born-again person the old evil heart remains unchanged till the day of one’s death.

C. The New Birth Is Impartation of the Divine Nature

Regeneration is neither the changing of anything in man, nor the removal of anything from man; it is the implanting of an entirely new nature within man. Birth in the spiritual realm is precisely what it is in the physical—it is the gateway of life, the starting point of a new existence. Everything that is born partakes of the nature of its parents. That which is born of the vegetable is vegetable; that which is born of the animal is animal; that which is born of man is human; that which is born of God is divine. Like always begets like. This fundamental law is expressly stated and reiterated on the frontispiece of divine Revelation. In the first chapter of Genesis we read no less than nine times that each order of creation brought forth *after its own kind*. The herb of the field brought forth after its kind. The fowl of the air brought forth after its kind. The fish in the sea brought forth after its kind. Here is God’s refutation of the infidel theory of evolution. We repeat, like begets like. Those begotten of God are the children of God. When we are born again, born of God, we are made partakers of the divine nature just as really and actually as we were made partakers of the human nature at our first birth. Regeneration, then, is the reception of a new nature, a spiritual nature. Regeneration is the very life of God Himself, communicated to the human spirit. Regeneration gives us a place in the family of God by means of a spiritual birth.

We shall next consider:

2. The Need of the New Birth

The new birth is an absolute necessity. It is something for which there is no substitute whatsoever. None can enter the kingdom of God save those who have been born again. That the new birth is an imperative necessity is clear from the words of our Lord to Nicodemus—“Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again” (Joh 3:7). He did not say, “Ye may be born again,” or “Ye ought to be born again,” but “Ye *must* be born again.”

Nowhere else did Jesus Christ put a single statement so strongly or insist upon it with such emphatic repetition. Said He, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And again, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” And yet again, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (Joh 3:3, 5-7). On other occasions He threw wide open the door of mercy—“Come unto Me, *all* ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”—but here He deliberately bars the gate of heaven against all the unregenerate. Hence, His words to Nicodemus become the more solemn when we remember that they fell from the lips of One who never excluded a single soul from eternal blessedness unless truth compelled Him to do so. It is none other than the Son of God who says, “Ye must be born again.”

But why is the new birth an imperative necessity? Why is it that no unregenerated person can either see or enter the kingdom of God?

A. Man Is Spiritually Dead

The new birth is a necessity because by nature man is spiritually dead. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; *and so death passed upon all men*, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). In the day that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he died spiritually, and a person who is spiritually dead cannot beget a child who possesses spiritual life. By natural descent we enter this world “dead in trespasses and sins” and in consequence “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 2:1; 4:18). This is no figure of speech, but a solemn fact. Every child which is born into this world enters it entirely destitute of a single spark of spiritual life. Here, then, is the answer to the above questions—a dead person cannot see or enter any kingdom. Man is devoid of spiritual life, and if ever he is to enter the kingdom of God, which is the realm of spiritual life, he must be born into it.

B. The Spiritual Kingdom Requires a Spiritual Nature

The new birth is necessary because *the spiritual kingdom requires a spiritual nature*. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Heaven is the habitation of the thrice Holy God and only those who are holy can dwell in His presence for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). In order for a man to be happy he must be in harmony with his surroundings. If I were to take a number of live fish out of the water, place them on a silver salver, carry them into a garden full of fragrant flowers, and were to produce from a harp the sweetest strains of music, those fish would not be happy. Why? Because they are out of their natural element. They are not in harmony with their environment. So it would be if an unregenerate person were to enter heaven. He has no faculty for discerning spiritual things; he has no capacity to appreciate the divine glory; he has no power to worship in the beauty of holiness. An unregenerate person could no more enjoy heaven than could a deaf and dumb man an oratorio. To take such an one there, would be like leaving a blind man to walk through the halls of our art galleries.

The spiritual kingdom demands a spiritual nature. This follows a universal law. To appreciate or produce music, one must possess musical gifts. I take a young man and place him in the hands of an efficient music teacher. For several years he takes lessons from him. He diligently studies the theory of music and endeavors to master the laws of harmony. He practices regularly for several hours a day. In a few years’ time, will that boy be a musician? That depends altogether upon one thing—does he possess a musical nature? Musicians are born, not manufactured! It is the same in art. Artists are not the product of mechanical training, but the outcome of inherent genius. One cannot be an artist unless one possess the artistic talent. To be a real mathematician, one must have a mathematical turn of mind. To enter the realm of music, one must be musical. To enter the realm of art, one must have an artist’s soul. And to enter the kingdom of God, one must have a godly or spiritual nature, and the only way to acquire this is by being born again. Hence, “*Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again*” (Joh 3:7). It is self-evident. It is a logical as well as an imperative necessity. It is a requirement which follows a universal law. Take the purest woman to heaven who has never been regenerated, and she would be miserable. She cannot really enjoy a spiritual prayer meeting now, much less could she enjoy heaven. She prefers the social gathering, the dance, the picture show, and if she is deprived of them, she is discontented, and if she is compelled to spend an hour in the company of godly people, she is wretched.

C. Man Is Totally Depraved

The new birth is an imperative necessity, because man *is totally depraved*. Every member of Adam’s race is a fallen creature, and every part of our complex being has been corrupted by sin. Man’s heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, his mind is blinded and darkened, and his thoughts are only evil continually. His reasonings are unsound, his affections are prostituted, and his will is alienated from God. He is without righteousness, under the curse of the law, and in bondage to sin and Satan; truly his case is desperate and his condition deplorable. He cannot better himself, for there dwelleth no good thing in him. He cannot work out his salvation *for* he is “without strength.” He cannot live a better life, for he is dead in trespasses and sins. He needs, then, to be born of God. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but *a new creature*” (Gal 6:15).

Man is a fallen creature. It is not that a few leaves have faded, but that the entire tree has become rotten, root and branch. There is in every one that which is radically wrong. The word “radical,” comes from a Latin word which means “the root” so that when we say a man is *radically* wrong, we mean that there is in him, in the very root and fiber of his being, that which is intrinsically corrupt and incurably evil. Sins are merely the fruit; there must of necessity be a root from which springs the fruit. We sin because we are sinful by nature; we are sinful by nature because we are fallen creatures. It follows, then, as a natural consequence, that man needs the aid of a Higher Power to effect a radical change. There is only One who can effect the change. God created man, and God alone can re-create him. Hence the imperative demand, “Ye must be born again.”

D. Nothing Else Can Take the Place of the New Birth

The new birth is a necessity because *nothing else can take its place*. There is no substitute for it. *Education cannot take the place of the new birth*. Education is simply the training of the natural man. Education can cultivate, but it cannot create. This should be apparent from the analogy furnished by the physical realm. Capacities which are missing at birth cannot afterwards be supplied by the extra cultivation of others. The sense of touch may be trained to a high degree of proficiency, but it cannot give sight. Hearing may be developed to the utmost acuteness, but it will not give the sense of taste or smell. Neither is it possible to produce a spiritual nature by the cultivation of the flesh. Nature maybe educated to the highest standard attainable, but it cannot be developed into something of a totally different order. There is no process by which a man may be developed out of a horse; nor a beast out of a bird. So also between the natural and the spiritual a wide gulf is fixed. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” and it never becomes anything else. But, “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” A spiritual nature is the result of a spiritual birth, and not the outcome of cultivating the natural man.

Reformation cannot take the place of the new birth. Reformation has to do with a man's habits, and not the man himself. If the works of my watch are out of order, no altering of the hands or polishing of the case will make it keep correct time—the trouble is *inside*. So it is with the sinner. A man may be correct in his deportment, clean in his habits and punctilious in his dealings, and still be dead in trespasses and sins. To one of the Pharisees, our Lord said: "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness" (Luk 11:39). So it is with reformers. No amount of reformation can change the heart. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (Joh 6:63). I may gather some weeds out of a field and transplant them in my garden: I may fertilize and irrigate them, but no amount of attention will transform them into rose bushes. So a new environment will not change man's sinful nature. He needs to be born "of God."

Religion cannot take the place of the new birth. Spurgeon said: "It is difficult to say how far a man may go in religion and yet die in his sins." The Pharisees read the Scriptures, fasted oft, gave tithes, and made long prayers, and yet they rejected the counsel of God. It is possible to have one's name inscribed upon a church register, and yet not have it written in the Lamb's book of life. No performance of religious duties can take the place of the new birth. How many there are who rely upon the fact that they say their prayers, read their Bibles, attend church, and partake of the Lord's Supper, but who, nevertheless, are building upon the sand, rather than the Rock which is Christ!

The need of the new birth is universal. It was not to the woman taken in adultery, nor the thief on the cross, that our Lord said: "Ye must be born again," but to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a teacher in Israel, a man of unblemished character. Unless Nicodemus was "born again," he could not enter the kingdom of God. Neither can you! Mark well, then, the Lord's words: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again."

Sinner, in a little while at most you will be lying upon your deathbed (if deathbed you have). Then, it will matter nothing how large the fortune you have accumulated, how considerable the learning you may have acquired, nor how great the popularity or fame to which you may have attained; all that will matter then will be, Have you been "born again?"

Should any reader be exercised in soul, and led to inquire, "How can I be born again? How can I find Christ?" the best answer that we can give is contained in the words of the Lord Jesus when He said: "*Search the Scriptures...they are they which testify of Me*" (Joh 5:39).

3. The Author of the New Birth

The new birth is due to a sovereign act of God. We have no more to do with our second birth than we had with our first. It is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. This fact is clearly set forth in John 1:13: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Let us briefly examine this verse in detail.

A. The New Birth Is Not a Matter of Heredity

Salvation does not run in the blood. Natural descent cannot account for this supernatural phenomenon. There were those in our Lord's earthly ministry who boasted that they were the descendants of Abraham. But He said unto them: "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father." Many a good man has had a bad son, and many a bad father has had a good child. Isaac was the one of whom it was said: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," yet he begat Esau who was a profane person. Eli, the high priest, was a real man of God, yet his sons Hophni and Phinehas were slain by the Lord for their wickedness. David was a man after God's own heart, but his sons were idolaters. On the other hand, Jonathan was born of Saul who, subsequently, became possessed of an evil spirit; while Amnon, one of the worst of Israel's kings, begat the godly Josiah. Salvation, then, does not run in the veins.

B. The New Birth Is Not a Product of the Sinner's Will

Regeneration does not come by human resolution or effort: it is not the outcome of carnal volition or activity. Water never rises above its own level; so man's own will which is alienated from God, never moves toward God until the man has been renewed. "So then *it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy*" (Rom 9:16). "Ye have not the will to come to Me, that ye might have life" (Greek) said Christ (Joh 5:40). "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (Joh 6:44). The new birth, then, is not the outcome of the will of the flesh.

C. The New Birth Is Not the Fruit of a Preacher's Persuasive Powers

We would that some of our modern evangelists might realize this. It is to be feared that not a few of the so-called conversions in our day are but the product of a species of hypnotism. This attempt to force a decision by pressure and persuasion is expressly repudiated by the above Scripture. The new birth is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, *nor of the will of man.*" While it is the business of the preacher to beseech men to be reconciled to God, yet he cannot make the unwilling willing. The old saying is true: "Any man may lead a horse to the water, but no ten men can make him drink." To

change the sinner from unwilling to willing is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our work is to preach the Word and leave the results entirely to God, who alone “giveth the increase.”

*“We may listen to the preacher, God’s own truth be clearly shown;
But we need a greater teacher, From the everlasting throne.
Application is the work of God alone.”*

D. The New Birth Is of God

This is self-evident. If the new birth is the communication of the divine nature, then God Himself must be the Author of this work. God alone is the Author and giver of life, and He bestows His gifts as He pleases, and quickens dead souls according to His own sovereign pleasure. Accordingly it is written, “*Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth*” (Jam 1:18).

4. The Instrument of the New Birth

How is the new birth brought about? What are the means which God uses to accomplish it? What is the instrument which the Holy Spirit employs to effect regeneration? We shall again briefly consider the negative side before we turn to the positive answer.

A. The New Birth Is Not Effected by Any Religious Ordinance

There are not wanting those who seek to discriminate between works and the use of an ordinance. While repudiating the former as a cause of the new birth, they, nevertheless, attribute it to the waters of baptism. Appeal is sometimes made to John 3:5 in support of this theory—“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” It would be beside our present purpose to enter into a lengthy examination of this verse; instead, we shall content ourselves with one or two brief remarks thereon. We would affirm that, first “water” is used here figuratively. This must not be considered a begging of the question, for John elsewhere employs this word in a similar manner. “Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the *water* that I shall give him shall never thirst” (Joh 4:13, 14). And again, “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*” (Joh 7:37, 38). In neither of these passages can “water” be understood literally. Second, “water,” we believe, is used in John 3:5 as an emblem of the written Word. In substantiation of this, we would refer our readers to John 15:3, “Now ye are *clean through the Word* which I have spoken unto you.” Because the Word cleanses, water is a suitable emblem of it. Further, we read in Ephesians 5:25, 26: “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it *with the washing of water by the Word.*” Third, “water” in John 3:5 cannot signify baptism, for there are many baptized people in our churches who give no evidence of having been regenerated. Regeneration is an internal work, but how can an external ordinance accomplish such an end?

B. The New Birth Is Effected by the Word of God Applied by the Holy Spirit

“For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel” (1Co 4:15). The apostle went from place to place preaching the Gospel of God’s grace and as it found lodgment in hearts which had been prepared by the Holy Spirit brought them from death unto life. In Philippians 2:16, the Scriptures are termed “The Word of Life,” because they alone are capable of quickening those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Said our Lord Jesus Christ, “The words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life.” An illustration of this was furnished in the resurrection of Lazarus. As our Lord stood before the tomb, He cried, “Lazarus, come forth,” and His words were demonstrated to be spirit and life. Jesus Christ is still performing the same miracle in the spiritual realm: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead [in trespasses and sins] shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live” (Joh 5:25).

It is not by persuasive words of man’s wisdom, nor by touching anecdotes which appeal to the emotions, that dead souls are born again, but by the Word of the living God. “Of His own will begat He us, *with the Word of Truth*” (Jam 1:18). “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *by the Word of God*, which liveth and abideth forever” (1Pe 1:23). Oh, that more of our preachers would follow the example of Ezekiel, and say unto the dead bones all around them, “Hear the Word of the LORD” (Eze 37:4), then should we see the miracle of spiritual resurrection occurring more often than we now do. Believe and preach the Word of God, for by it, and it alone, are dead souls born again.

5. Evidences of the New Birth

What fruits shall we look for in those who have been regenerated? What are the marks of the new birth? How may I know that I have passed from death unto life? These are most important questions, and ought to engage the serious attention of all earnest inquirers after truth. What are the evidences of the new birth? We shall attempt to furnish a detailed answer.

A. Personal Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

“He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life” (Joh 3:36). “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but *has* [Greek] passed from death unto life” (Joh 5:24). “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ *has been* [Greek] born of God” (1Jo 5:1). In these passages, we learn that those who believe in the Lord Jesus are already in possession of eternal life, which is only another way of saying that they have previously been regenerated. Wherever there is a real reposing on Christ for salvation, there is clear evidence of the new birth. If you have abandoned all hope of being saved by your own works, if you have rejected the filthy rags of your own righteousness as the ground of acceptance with God; if you have come as a lost, helpless sinner to Christ and have cried unto Him for mercy and are depending on Him alone for salvation, it is proof that you have already been born again. Just as a baby instinctively clings to its mother, so the newborn babe of God clings, in its helplessness, to the Saviour.

B. Genuine Repentance for Sin

In theological works, repentance is usually treated before faith, for this is the Gospel order—repent and believe—“Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.” But for our present purpose, we reverse the order. There is a difference between repentance in a sinner and repentance in a Christian. In the unregenerate, repentance is the abhorrence of self, the realization of my ruined condition, the taking of the place of a *lost* sinner before God. But with the believer repentance is an hatred of sin and a grief of heart whenever he is overtaken by it. In the believer, “godly sorrow worketh repentance.” But “*godly* sorrow” implies that I have the divine nature within me, and this no sinner has. Repentance is more than sorrow for sin, it is a “godly sorrow.” Many a criminal lying in our penitentiaries has the former, but none save the children of God experience the latter. I repent not because I am fearful of or miserable in the punishment of my wrongdoing, but because I know that sin is hateful to God and grievous in His sight. Repentance is more than an act; it is an attitude. Repentance is taking sides with God and against sin. In a sentence then: God is Holy and hates sin and if I am His child, I have His holy nature within me, and consequently I shrink from sin and grieve over it when I am guilty of its commission.

C. Real Love for God

God is holy, and having His nature within us, we hate sin. But this is merely a negative thing. God is love, and having been begotten by Him, we love the One who is our Father. Here is the positive principle in regeneration. “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1Jo 4:16). It is the normal condition for children to love their parents, and we repeat, those who have been born again will love the One who has begotten them. But how may we know whether or not we love God? Surely, the question is unnecessary. We can not truly love anybody without our being conscious of the fact. If we love God, our affections have been drawn out toward Him.

His excellency has won our hearts. We can now say with the Psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Psa 73:25). Moreover, if we love God, our chief desire will be to please Him. Said our Lord, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.”

“Love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1Jo 4:7, 8) which is only another way of expressing the thought of the previous paragraph. Observe the order—love precedes the knowledge of God. In the human realm, we have to know a person before we love him, but God has to be loved before He is known. God is *known* by the heart and not by the head. “The fool hath said in his *heart* there is no God.” Have I then a real love for God? Do I see in Him every beauty that I should desire Him? Is my meditation of Him “sweet”? Is He the One before whom I bow in adoring worship? If so, this is an evidence that I have been born again.

D. Love for the Brethren

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God” (1Jo 4:7). God is love, and if I have His nature within me I shall love His children—love them all, irrespective of their social standing, their intellectual attainments, their denominational affiliation; love them whether they be black or white, rich or poor, cultured or illiterate. In the human realm, it is the normal condition for members of the same family to love each other. A tie of blood binds their hearts together. So it is in measure, and so it ought to be without limitation, in the family of God. His children, also, are united by blood tie—the

blood of Christ, in which all believers have a common interest. In the early days of the Christian era, it was a customary thing for the pagans to say of the saints: "See how they love one another!"

How is this love to be manifested? "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1Jo 3:17, 18). If I love my brethren in Christ, I must seek to defend their characters, promote their interests, minister to their need, and seek their well-being.

E. Life of Practical Righteousness

A tree is known by its fruits. Faith is evidenced by its works. A godly nature manifests itself in a godly life. "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him" (1Jo 2:29). One evidence that we have been born again is the performance of righteousness. The unregenerate are termed "children of disobedience." They have no respect for God's law, they refuse to submit themselves to His authority, they are more concerned about their own interests than they are with the glory of God. But those who have been begotten by the Spirit "yield their members as instruments of righteousness" and God's Word. They recognize that they are no more their own, but have been bought with a price. They have been "*created in Christ Jesus unto good works*" (Eph 2:10). Therefore they pray that the fruit of the Spirit may adorn their lives. Again, it is written, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1Jo 5:4). The believer's life is not regulated by the fashions, methods, maxims, and pursuits of the world, but by Christ who has left us an example that we should follow His steps.

F. Growth in Grace

Stagnation breeds disease and death. A limb that is never used becomes paralyzed. Life evidences itself by growth, hence we are exhorted, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (1Pe 2:2). As we feed upon the Bread of life, our spiritual nature is developed and the inward man is renewed day by day. As we live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord, we become strong in His strength and the power of His might. The life of the regenerate is a going on from strength to strength and from glory to glory. "The path of the just...shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Pro 4:18). Here, then, is our standard of measurement. Are we becoming more Christlike? Are we "growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord"? If so, it is an evidence that we are numbered among the children of God.

G. Steady Perseverance to the End

Here is a fundamental difference between professors and genuine believers. There is a class of people who "hear the Word, and anon with joy receive it; yet have they no root in themselves, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by they are offended," (Mat 13:20, 21). But these people have never been regenerated. The divine nature has never been imparted to them, consequently they have "no root" in them. They are like washed sows, which sooner or later, return to their wallowing in the mire. In contrast with them, God's children "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." They may fall, but they are not utterly cast down (Psa 37:24). They may, like Peter, backslide, but, like Peter, they shall go out and weep bitterly, and be restored. He that has been born again has been made a partaker of the divine nature (2Pe 1:4); and God is eternal, therefore shall they never perish. At the close of his earthly pilgrimage, every regenerated soul shall be able to say, in measure at least, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2Ti 4:6-8). ☞