

works of creation, preservation, inspiration, revelation, and demonstration. It is true likewise in the Divine works of regeneration, sanctification and immortalization.

## 2. The Holy Spirit in Conversion

Conversion is "turning again" through Christ to God, turning from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Matt. 13:15—"lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, *And should turn again*, And I should heal them." Acts 3:19—"Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out," etc. Acts 26:17, 18—"delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me." Conversion includes all changes—of thinking, attitude, desire, disposition, will and relationship—necessary to bring the once unregenerate person into covenant relationship with God through Christ. This process which, on the human side, is turning to God or *conversion*, on the Divine side is *regeneration*,—the begetting, by the Holy Spirit, of a new spiritual life in the human heart.

That the Holy Spirit operates in the conversion of sinners is not, as far as I know, a matter of dispute anywhere. As the Apostle Paul puts it: "Therefore I make known unto you, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). Certainly no man was ever influenced by the Spirit of God to imprecate Jesus, for it is made explicit in Scripture that the works of the Spirit are all designed to *glorify* Him. Jesus Himself said of the Spirit: "He shall glorify me" (John 16:14). Hence that any man should be moved by the Holy Spirit to anathematize Jesus, the Son of God, is unthinkable. On the other hand, it is equally true that no man ever confessed Jesus as Lord, or that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, without having been influenced to do so by the Holy Spirit. How, then, does the Spirit influence, induce, move men to believe in and to confess Christ, and to obey the commands of the Gospel?

The answer is self-evident, namely, that He does so through the instrumentality of the Word of God. In the first place, the Holy Spirit inspired and supervised the inditing of the Scriptures,—the sacred writings in which the testimony regarding Jesus is embodied in permanent form, and without which men generally would never have known that Jesus died for their sins, that He was buried and raised up again the third day, and crowned both Lord and Christ. These are the facts which make up the message of the Gospel, the Gospel which, according to the Will of the Head of the Church, was to be preached for a testimony unto all the nations (Matt. 24:14). Now, in the second place, it is a matter of both history and experience, that unless men come in contact with this testimony concerning Christ—the apostolic testimony—in some way, either by reading the New Testament Scriptures for themselves or by hearing these facts of the Gospel from the lips of others, they simply do not learn about Christ, and therefore, not knowing about Him and His redemptive work, naturally they neither confess nor obey. Where there is no testimony concerning Christ, there is no faith, no repentance, no obedience, no conversion, hence no operation of the Spirit. As Paul himself put it, too clearly for misunderstanding: "For, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? even as it is written. How beautiful are the feet of them than bring glad tidings of good things! But they did not all hearken to the glad tidings. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report. So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:13-17). As a matter of fact, the belief that leads to conversion to Christ never came to any man in any other way. The natural psychological process (as opposed to the mystical or Calvinistic) is clearly indicated in the well-known text from Isaiah: "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed" (Isa. 6:10; cf. Matt. 13:15, Acts 28:27). That process is, in its natural order, *hearing* (which has to come first), then *understanding*, then *believing*,

then *turning again*, and finally *healing*. The very initiation of this process depends, without exception, upon the presence of the Word—the testimony about Christ—either in written or in oral form; and where the Word is not present so that men may come in contact with it, there is no operation of the Spirit toward conversion. If the conversion of men depended on the Spirit's operating *directly* upon their minds and hearts, that is, independently of the Gospel message, then certainly the whole heathen world would have been converted and Christianized long ago; for our God, who is a good God, "would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). I think, therefore, that it can be taken for granted that *the Holy Spirit does not operate, in the conversion of sinners, independently of the Word*. I am convinced that the vast majority of Christian teachers, preachers and leaders would subscribe to this statement without question.

But—*does the Holy Spirit operate, in the conversion of sinners, by some mystical quickening or compulsion, in addition to the Word?* It has been taught quite generally in the past, in certain quarters of Christendom, that man is just as dead spiritually as Lazarus, for example, was physically; hence, just as a special exertion of Divine power by our Lord was necessary to quicken Lazarus and raise him from the dead, so a special operation of the Spirit is necessary in every case of conversion to quicken the heart that is dead in sin and make it receptive of, or indeed capable of being receptive of, the testimony of the Gospel. According to this view, such a special direct operation of the Spirit must take place in addition to, or accompanying, the preaching of the Word. But, again, does not plain common sense tell us that, if the conversion of sinners, depended upon the Spirit's direct operation upon their hearts with quickening and compulsive (or even attractive) power, even in addition to the testimony of the Word, such an operation would be an over-riding of human free will; hence, that God would be under the necessity, if He is a just God, of exerting such a force, by His Spirit, upon all who might hear the Word, or otherwise He would be a respecter of persons, which the Scriptures affirm repeatedly that He is not (cf. Acts 10:34, Deut. 10:17, 2 Chron. 19:7, Rom. 2:11, Eph. 6:9, Col. 3:25, 1 Pet. 1:17). If conversion depends ultimately upon the Spirit's exertion of Divine

power *directly* upon the hearts of men, either *independently of*, or *in addition to*, the testimony of the Word, then surely we are warranted in concluding either, on the one hand, that God is unjust and a respecter of persons, or, on the other, that He will save all men. If salvation depends, in the final analysis of the case, upon God, then certainly all men will be saved. But if salvation depends upon man's working with God, on God's terms and according to God's way of doing things, then a great multitude of men will never be saved, simply because they will *not* work with God according to God's way of doing things; they set up their own way of doing things instead. God would have all men to be saved and to come unto a knowledge of the truth. But the trouble lies with men: *they will not*. One is reminded of the words of Jesus, as He wept over the city of his love: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, *and ye would not!* Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23:37-38).

If I write a letter to a friend, must I also send him a telegram to enable him to read, or to induce him to accept and believe, the contents of my letter? Now the Spirit has given us all the testimony necessary to our conversion, in the message of the Gospel? Must He then also work upon our hearts directly, in some mystical and unexplainable manner, to induce us to accept that testimony? I think not. He has endowed us by creation with the necessary powers of intelligence, affection and will, for that very purpose. Hence, says Paul: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith to faith: as it is written, *But the righteous shall live by faith*" (Rom. 1:16-17). The Gospel is not just a power, nor *one of the powers*, it is *the* power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. It is the power of God unto salvation because the regenerating power of the Spirit—the life principle of the new spiritual life—is embodied in it and exerted through it. It is the means by which the Spirit leads men to belief, repentance and obedience. The Spirit operates, in the conversion of sinners, through the instrumentality of the Word of the Gospel either

printed or proclaimed. 1 Cor. 1:21-24: "For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe. Seeing that Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling block, and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, the power of God, and the wisdom of God." This does not exclude, of course the influence of by-products of the Word, such as the exercises of Christian worship, the hymns of the faith, gospel songs, Christian literature of various kinds, ministrations of mercy and charity, and especially the lives of the saints. The life of a true Christian is perhaps the most potent influence that the Spirit exerts upon the minds and hearts of those who come into contact with such a life. All true saints of God are indeed, as Paul says, living epistles of Christ "known and read of all men . . . written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh" (2 Cor. 3:2-3); and when they die, their works do indeed "follow with them," not only in the influences which they leave behind in the world, but even up to the very Throne of Grace itself as proofs that they are worthy of a glorious immortality. Rev. 14:13—"And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them."

*The Gospel is God's great amnesty proclamation to all people on the same specific terms.* The Gospel invitation is simple and clear: "He that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). The "elect" are the "whosoever will's," the "non-elect" the "whosoever wont's."

This message of the Gospel embraces *three facts to be believed*. These facts are "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-4). These facts support the fundamental truth of the Gospel—the truth to be confessed by men—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16, John 20:30-31, Rom. 10:9-10). This Gospel embraces *three commands*

to be obeyed. 1 Thess. 2:8—"rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus," etc. 1 Pet. 1:22—"seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth," etc. These commands are (1) *believe* on the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:31, Rom. 10:9-10); (2) *repent* (Luke 13:3, Acts 2:38, 17:30); *be baptized* (Acts 2:38, Matt. 28:18-20, Gal. 3:27). This message of the Gospel embraces also *three promises to be enjoyed*. 2 Pet. 1:14—"whereby he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises, that through these ye may become partakers of the divine nature," etc. These promises are: (1) *remission of sins* (Acts 2:38, 3:19, 14:43); (2) *the indwelling of the Spirit* (Acts 2:38); (3) *eternal life* (Rom. 5:21, 6:23; 1 John 5:11-12, etc.).

The Scriptures themselves bear out at every point the thesis presented here, that the Spirit operates upon the hearts of men to their instruction and guidance, and to their repentance and obedience, through the instrumentality of the Word as proclaimed by faithful men. This was true under the Old Covenant as well as under the New. For example, God is represented as saying in the early ages of the world, Gen. 6:3—"My Spirit shall not strive with man for ever." How did the Spirit strive with men in ancient times? Through the testimony of holy men of old, who "spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). He strove with the antediluvian world through Noah, "a preacher of righteousness" (1 Pet. 3:18-22, 2 Pet. 2:5). He strove with the Jewish nation first through Moses and the Prophets, then in later years through the Messiah and His Apostles. Isaiah pictures Jehovah as remembering "the days of old, Moses and his people," and saying, "Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit in the midst of them?" (Isa. 63:11). How did God put His Spirit in the midst of His people in days of old? He did so by putting His Spirit *upon* Moses, Joshua, the Judges and the earthly Kings, to qualify them for the leadership to which He commissioned them. But what was the result? "They [the people] rebelled, and grieved his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them" (Isa. 63:10). Then, in latter times, He put His Spirit in great measure upon the Prophets; but the

result was the same,—the people rejected their testimony too. As the Levites confessed, in their prayer on the occasion of the restoration of the Temple: "Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them" (that is, through Moses, Joshua and their successors), "and withheldest not the manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. . . . Yet many years didst thou bear with them, and testifiedst against them by the Spirit through thy prophets: *yet they would not give ear*; therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the peoples of the lands" (Neh. 9:20, 30). In like manner they rejected the testimony of the Prophets regarding "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them" (1 Pet. 1:10-12). And when the Messiah Himself appeared in the world, they rejected Him also; nor was their hate assuaged until they had seen Him die on the Cross. John 1:11—"He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not." John 5:40—"Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life." Then finally, as the crowning indignity, the nation as a whole rejected the Apostolic testimony—the inspired testimony of men who were themselves Jews—regarding the Christ, His death, burial and resurrection. Cf. Acts 13:45-47: "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul, and blasphemed. And Paul and Barnabas spake out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles, That thou shouldest be for salvation until the uttermost part of the earth" (cf. Isa. 49:6). As Stephen said to the infuriated Jewish mob which stoned him to death a few minutes later: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers; ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not" (Acts 7:51-53).

Thus it is evident from the Scriptures that the Spirit has striven with men from the dawn of history through the Word

of God as communicated to them through holy men, men of great faith. Hence, to resist the Word as proclaimed by inspired men is to resist the Spirit, and to resist the Spirit's operations through inspired men is to *grieve* the Spirit. But the Spirit of God will not keep on striving with men for ever. He quit striving with the Jewish people nineteen hundred years ago, and from that day to this they have been suffering the consequences of their own folly (Matt. 23:37-39, Luke 19:41-44). The time is coming, moreover, when He will quit striving with humanity *in toto*; when that Day dawns, every man will be judged according to his works (Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:12-13, 22:10-12).

The all-embracing mission of the Holy Spirit throughout the Gospel dispensation especially is to *glorify Christ* (John 16:14). This He does in two ways: (1) by *indwelling the Body of Christ*, and thus sanctifying the saints and preparing them for the enjoyment of their eternal inheritance, and (2) by *convicting the world* "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8. How does the Spirit convict the *world*—that is, unconverted men and women—of sin and of righteousness and of judgment? Through the Gospel of Christ of course—the Gospel of Sacrificial Love—by which men are moved to accept Christ as their Savior and to repent of their sins. 2 Cor. 7:10—"For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret; but the sorrow of the world, worketh death." Rom. 2:4—"Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" God's overwhelming Love for mankind is the very essence of the Glad Tidings: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). And the realization of this Infinite Sacrificial Love is borne into the hearts of men only through the message of the Gospel. In no other way do men learn that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). It is only through the realization of this Divine Love, moreover, as an *article of faith* in their hearts, that men can be moved to turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. It is through the Gospel of Christ that the Holy Spirit strives with men today, to lead them to repentance. It is through



the Gospel that the Spirit begets that faith in the human heart which bears the fruit of repentance and obedience. The faith that leads to conversion comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Hence it "was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Cf. the words of Paul, Acts 26:19, 20 — "Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; but declared both to them of Damascus first and to Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance."

The Holy Spirit operates in the conversion of sinners through the instrumentality of the Word. This truth is borne out by every case of conversion of which we have an account in the book of Acts; in every case, there was first the preaching and hearing of the Gospel message. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached that Jesus had lived, that He had died, and that He had been raised up and made both Lord and Christ. A great audience heard this sermon. We read that "*when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:36-37). This means that they were convicted of their sins, and especially of the sin of crucifying the Messiah: "him . . . by the hand of lawless men ye did crucify and slay" (v. 23). Had they been convicted by the Spirit? Of course. How? Through the Word as proclaimed by the Spirit through the Apostles. Again, in Acts 8:5, we read that Philip the evangelist "went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ." Then in v. 12, we read: "*But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*" In the same chapter, vv. 34-40, we are told that this same Philip, taking the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah as his text, preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch, as the two were riding in the latter's chariot along the road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza; and that, as a result of Philip's message, the eunuch believed and, on coming to a certain water, was baptized forthwith. In the ninth chapter of Acts, we have the account of the appearance of the glorified Lord to Saul the persecutor before the gates of Damascus, this appearance having been necessary, of course,

to qualify the latter for the Apostleship. It is significant, however, that Christ did not pardon his sins personally at this time; on the contrary, He said to him: "Rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee *what thou must do*" (v. 6). There was something, then, for Saul to do to receive remission of sins, and what that something was it was necessary for him to learn from the lips of a preacher: he must learn and obey the terms of pardon already prescribed by our Lord in His Last Will and Testament. Hence, the Lord sent one of His disciples at Damascus, a man by the name of Ananias, to seek the blinded persecutor and tell him what he must do. When Ananias came into Saul's presence, he found the latter no longer a persecutor but a believer, and a penitent believer as well—he had been praying in great contrition for three days; hence, as there was only one thing yet for Saul to do, according to the terms of the New Covenant, to become a Christian, that is precisely what Ananias told him to do. "Arise," he said to Saul, "and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name," that is, on the name of Christ (Acts 22:16). And straightway, we are told, the former persecutor received his sight, "and he arose and was baptized" (Acts 9:18). In the tenth chapter of Acts, we have the account of Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his household at Caesarea, as a result of which the hearers believed and were baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" (vv. 44-46). In the sixteenth chapter of Acts, we have the account of the conversion of Lydia and her attendants upon the river bank at Philippi, as a result of their hearing the Gospel message from Paul and his companions (vv. 11-15). And in the same chapter, we have the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household. We read that, following the stirring incidents at the midnight hour—the earthquake, the jarring open of the prison doors, and the gesture toward suicide on the part of the jailer—he, "trembling for fear, fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (vv. 23-31). Now this was an ignorant heathen man, a man who, in all likelihood, had never even heard of the living and true God, much less of Christ and His redemptive work. Hence, before he could believe, he had to *hear*, he had to have the testimony that is the prerequisite of faith that leads to conversion. Therefore, we read in the very next verse, v. 32, that

Paul and Silas "spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house." The usual results followed immediately: "And he [the jailer] took them [Paul and Silas] the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God" (vv. 33-34). And finally, in chapter 18, we read that as a result of Paul's preaching at Corinth, "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians *hearing*, believed, and were baptized" (v. 8). Thus it is too evident to leave room for any doubt that the Holy Spirit operated through the Word of the Gospel, in apostolic times, to effect the conversion of sinners to Christ.

Nor is there the slightest evidence in the New Testament that He operated directly upon the hearts of men, in some mystical manner, in addition to the preaching of the Gospel, to turn them to God. He did operate, of course, in two instances, to direct the evangelist to the person or persons to be converted, so that the latter might hear the Gospel which is God's power unto salvation. Thus He spoke to the evangelist Philip—evidently in audible tones—instructing him to preach to the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8:29—"And the Spirit said unto Philip, go near, and join thyself to this chariot." He also directed the Apostle Peter—again apparently in audible words—to accompany Cornelius' servants back to Caesarea, Acts 10:19, 20—"And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. But arise, and get thee down, and go with them, nothing doubting: for I have sent them." Cf. Peter's own account of the incident, Acts 11:11, 12—"And behold, forthwith three men stood before the house in which we were, having been sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, making no distinction" (*i.e.*, between Jew and Gentile). And the Spirit also impelled Paul and his companions by a straight course through Asia Minor to the seacoast town of Troas, where the Apostle received the call, in a night-vision, to cross the Aegæan and preach the Gospel in Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). All such special providential intervention, however, seems to have been directed exclusively toward the end of bringing the preacher and the unconverted person together, so that the latter might

hear the preaching of the Gospel. As Peter himself put it: "Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles *should hear the word of the gospel, and believe*" (Acts 15:7). But there is no evidence that the Spirit ever went to the sinner in New Testament times to work upon his heart directly, either independently of, or in addition to, the preaching of the Gospel. To be sure, there is one passage, in the account of the conversion of Lydia, which has often been interpreted as indicating a direct operation of the Spirit in addition to the preaching of the Word. The passage reads as follows, Acts 16:14—"And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us: *whose heart the Lord opened* to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul." This text has long been a subject of controversy, simply, to my way of thinking, because men have insisted on reading mystery into it. It may be taken for granted, of course, that the Lord has to open every sinner's heart before he will turn again to God. But does the Lord have to do this in some mysterious manner which no one can understand or explain? I see no reason for thinking so. The Gospel itself opens the heart whenever and wherever it falls—as the seed of the kingdom—upon the proper kind of soil, namely, an "honest and good heart" (Luke 8:11, 15), that is, a heart that is honestly seeking the truth, that hungers and thirsts after righteousness (Matt. 5:6). As a matter of fact, the seed of the kingdom could hardly be expected to fructify and produce a spiritual harvest in any other kind of soil. Moreover the reception of the Gospel into this kind of heart leads to further and greater, and continuously growing, attention to its content. To everyone that hears it, the Gospel is either a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death; every time he hears it, it either draws him a little closer to God or drives him a little farther away from Him. I see no justifiable reason, therefore, for assuming a direct, mystical operation of the Spirit in Lydia's case. No doubt the Lord opened her heart as He opened all imperfectly informed minds or hearts (Lydia is said to have "worshipped God," hence she must have been a Jewess or a proselyte), that is, by means of her growing comprehension of the content of the Gospel message as Paul unfolded that message to her mind. Certainly no one is justi-

fied in building a theory and practice of "miraculous conversion" upon a single phrase or text, when such a theory has no support elsewhere in Scripture. One may be sure that a Divine truth is corroborated by the Scriptures throughout. And the Scriptures uniformly support the conclusion that the Spirit operates through the Word, and neither independently of, nor in addition to, the Word, in the conversion of sinners.

The Spirit knows the deep thoughts of God and reveals them unto men? But—how? In *words*,—in words spoken or indited by inspired men (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9-13). Cf. Rev. 2:7—"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." We find this sentence repeated seven times in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation, once to each of the seven churches of Asia. How, then, did the Spirit speak to these churches? Through the words or "letters" indited by the author of the Apocalypse, of course. The Spirit speaks to men in all ages, not in mysterious feelings, but in intelligible words (1 Cor. 2:13, 1 Tim. 4:1, 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Acts 1:16, 8:29, 10:19-20, etc.). If He did not speak to men by the medium of words, His communications would be unintelligible. The Spirit has revealed the entire Plan of Redemption—the Eternal Purpose of God—through the Prophets and Apostles, who in turn have revealed it to men in the written Word (Eph. 3:1-7).

Finally, we should not commit the error of identifying *providential* or *accidental* circumstances in the lives of men, or in our own lives, with operations of the Spirit. The following treatment of this phase of the subject by T. W. Brents is so simple and clear that I feel it should be reproduced here: "The influence of *circumstances*, whether *accidental* or *providential*, are not the work of the Spirit in conversion. A merely accidental circumstance may take a man within range of the Spirit's teaching; *e.g.*, a young man goes to meeting to see a young lady—to see some friend—simply to be in company, or transact some business; the gospel is preached, he becomes interested, and is finally converted. The *accidental circumstance*, whatever it may have been, which induced him to go to preaching, was not the influence of the Spirit, for this began when he came in contact with the teaching of the Spirit, through the preaching and other services at the meeting. The Scriptures furnish numerous examples illustrative of this fact.

Lydia's occupation as a vendor of purple, took her from Thyatira to Philippi, where Paul preached the gospel to her, by which God opened her heart, enlightened her mind, and she was converted; but the influence of the Spirit upon her heart began not until Paul's preaching saluted her ears. Again: the Jailer's occupation, as keeper of the prison in the city of Philippi, caused him to hear the word of the Lord preached by Paul and Silas, by which he was converted, but he had not a spiritual idea until they spoke to him. Even after the miracles had ceased, he would have committed suicide, had they not prevented him. Had some one else been keeper of the prison, this one, and not he, might have been the beneficiary of the preaching. A *providential circumstance* may prepare a man to favorably receive the Spirit's teaching; e.g., the death of a friend or near relative, or physical suffering. When death fastens upon the vitals of a lovely child, brother, sister, or parent, with whom our affections are borne away to the realm of spirits; or when our physical powers are exhausted by the blinding influence of disease and trouble, then it is, that we realize the insufficiency of human aid, and the instability of all earthly things. Our dependence upon God is brought home to us, and thus the heart is prepared for a favorable consideration of spiritual instruction; but not a ray of spiritual light can be derive from such afflictions. We are simply prepared to consider what light we previously had, and to receive additional instruction if it is presented to us. We are not prepared to regard the mellowing influence of such afflictions as the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion; nor are they even within the lines of *special providences* for they are the common lot of all men—the result of *general providence* or *natural law*. Nor would we be understood to deny the doctrine of special providence. Nay, we not only admit, but believe it; but *it is for God's children, and not to convert sinners*. Paul says: 'We trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, but specially of those that believe,' 1 Tim. 4:10. God has a general providence of which all are the recipients, but he *specially* provides for them that put their trust in Him, according to His Word. Hence, we know that all things *work together for good to them that love God*, to them who are the called, according to his purpose,' Rom. 8:28. 'The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unti their prayers; but

the face of the Lord is against them that do evil,' 1 Pet. 3:12. . . . It is important to a proper understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in conversion, that we try to keep it disentangled from every thing foreign to it. If we can do this, and then quit hunting for difficulties and mysteries, we will not find many. The truths of God often sparkle as gems upon the surface of His Word, and are unobserved by those who are always digging tunnels, but never examining the virgin soil in its native simplicity."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Spiritual Begetting

The process which, on the human side, is turning to God or *conversion*, is, on the Divine side, *regeneration* or the begetting and bringing to birth, by the Holy Spirit, of a new spiritual life in the human heart.

Generation has to precede regeneration of course, in the Plan of God. 1 Cor. 15:45-49: "So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthly; the second man is of heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." In the very nature of things, one must belong to the Kingdom of Nature *before* one can belong to the Kingdom of Grace; and—I might add here—that one must belong to the Kingdom of Grace *before* one can belong to the Kingdom of Glory. Moreover, as man's place in the Kingdom of Nature is determined by his possession of that increment of power—the principle of natural personal life—which specifies him as man, which was breathed into him at Creation from the Being of God, that is, imparted to him by the Spirit (Gen. 2:7); so his place in the Kingdom of Grace is determined by his possession of the higher increment of power—the Mind of Christ, which is the principle of the new spiritual life—which is proper to the order of sainthood, and which likewise is breathed into him, superposed upon his natural faculties, so to speak, by the Holy Spirit. The King-

1. T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, 634-636.