

of Christ, in the ordinance specifically appointed for that purpose,—the ordinance of Christian baptism. He will certainly start no arguments at the baptismal pool. But this leads us to consideration of the birth which is involved in the process of regeneration.

#### 4. Spiritual Birth

We are now ready to consider the consummating phase of regeneration,—that act in which the one spiritually begotten enters upon a full and distinct personal existence as a new creature in Christ Jesus. In the sense that this "new man" is the product of the new increment of power—the Mind of Christ, the principle of spiritual life—breathed into the natural man in spiritual begetting, by which inbreathing he is raised up to the higher level of being, that of sainthood, he is essentially a Divine *creation*. 2 Cor. 5:17—"Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." Eph. 2:10—"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them." Eph. 4:20-24: "But ye did not so learn Christ; if so be that ye heard him, and were taught in him, even as truth is in Jesus: that ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been *created* in righteousness and holiness of truth." Col. 3:9, 10—"seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him."

This consummating phase of regeneration is designated by our Lord a *birth*. Now a birth is not the beginning of a new life; it is, rather, the entering of a life already begun upon a full and distinct personal existence as a new creature. Birth is transitional; by means of it the living creature previously begotten is delivered out of one state into another. This new birth, then, is the consummating phase of the bringing into existence of the new spiritual creature, and because it is the consummating phase of the process, it is frequently *per se* designated *regeneration*.

Now Jesus tells us expressly that this new birth is a birth "of water and the Spirit." We can readily see, moreover, why

it should be a birth of emergence (delivery) from some visible substance,—to give it the character of an external testimony to the unconverted, if for no other reason. We can readily see, too, why water should have been Divinely chosen as this substance, water being always a symbol of purification and an emblem of the Spirit's life-giving and purifying powers (cf. John 7:37-39). *Now where in the process of becoming a Christian does one come in contact with water and in such a way as to be delivered out of water? In the ordinance of Christian baptism of course.* This is in perfect harmony with the Great Commission, according to which our Lord instructed His disciples to baptize believers (those who had been made disciples) "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:18-20). When one is baptized, he is baptized out of a state of alienation from God into that state in which he yields to the *name (authority)* of the entire God-head. Cf. Col. 1:12, 13—"giving thanks unto the Father . . . who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love." It is a change of relationship that takes place in baptism: a formal transfer from the authority of the prince of this world, into that kingdom which is under the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, says Paul: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). *Baptism translates that one who has been spiritually begotten, into a full and distinct personal existence as a new creature in Jesus Christ and hence a member of the Body of Christ. That is its function; that is its place in the Gospel Plan of Salvation.* Now the Divine promise connected with baptism is remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Hence, the reception of the Spirit through faith into the honest and good heart, by this process of begetting and birth, resulting in the cutting off of the old body of sin, is known in Scripture as spiritual circumcision (Col. 2:10-15). Baptism is the transfer of the life already begotten into a new and independent existence as a child of God; *hence, without this birth of water spiritual abortion, so to speak, has been practised.*

Birth of water, moreover, is a delivery from water. In birth, the smaller is always born out of a greater; in baptism, therefore, the one born, having been concealed from mortal view in the water, then is brought forth from *out of* the water.

In this manner, the penitent believer dies with Christ, and is then raised up with Christ to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:1-4). Here the efficacy of the blood of Christ is applied to the human soul. That literal blood, which flowed when Christ died on the Cross, dried up and disappeared long ago. But the believing penitent can meet the efficacy of that blood by dying with Christ in the likeness of His death and being raised up with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. Rom. 6:5-7: "For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that hath died is justified from sin." Baptism is the ordinance Divinely appointed where-in God, through Christ, meets the penitent believer with the pardon of his sins, this pardon taking place, not in the obedient believer himself, but in the Mind of God. Or, putting it from another point of view, we meet the efficacy of the blood of Christ when we are introduced into the Covenant that has been sealed with that blood, and this induction into the New Covenant takes place in one's baptism *in to Christ*.

Note also the significant arrangement of this statement of Jesus: "born of water and the Spirit." In one sense a person is born of his father, that is, in the sense that his father is the author of his begetting and birth. But no one is born of his father until he is born of his mother. Hence, in every instance in Scripture in which the water and the Spirit, or the water and the Word, are joined together, the water stands first, just as in this statement of Jesus to Nicodemus. 1 Cor. 6:11—"ye were washed, ye were sanctified, ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." Eph. 5:25, 26—"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word." Tit. 3:5—"according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

Finally, as the consummating act of a process is often given the name of the whole process, so the new birth itself is often spoken of as regeneration, and baptism is Scripturally designated "the washing of regeneration" (Tit. 3:5). *Should someone object that this is figurative language, I reply: Very*

*well, then, if to be born of water does not mean to be born of water, then to be born of the Spirit does not mean to be born of the Spirit either. If Scripture does not mean what it says, then it means nothing at all.*

The fact remains that one is not regenerated short of his entrance upon an independent existence as a distinct child of God. Hypothetical cases are often presented, of course, especially by those persons who are addicted to quibbling, of individuals who may suddenly be brought to repentance by extraordinary circumstances, but who die before they have the opportunity of being baptized. It is asked: Will such persons be eternally lost? In reference to such supposititious cases, I should reply that God certainly does not require any man to do the impossible; hence it is inconceivable that He would condemn a man eternally, for failing to do the impossible. Human acts, moreover, are of two kinds, namely (1) *elicited* acts, or those completed within the will itself; and (2) *commanded* or *imperate* acts, those performed by mind or body at the command of the will. It follows, therefore, that when the intention to be baptized is fully completed within the will itself, this—the elicited act—in the absence of opportunity to perform the commanded or overt act, might possibly become an acceptable substitute for the latter in the view of God. However, such matters are the business of the great Judge, and I have never started trying to transact the Lord's business for Him. (Cf. John 14:6, Matt. 25:31-46, Acts 17:30, 31).

To sum up: this entire process of regeneration is ascribed in Scripture (1) to God, as the Author; (2) to the Spirit, as the Agent; (3) to the Word, as the means; (4) to the preacher, as the instrument; and (5) to the water, as the element. And the whole is said to be a birth of the Spirit, because the Spirit is the realizing Agent of the Godhead in effecting it.

Regeneration does not apply, of course, to the innocent and morally irresponsible, such as infants. Their salvation was purchased unconditionally by the Sin-Offering of Jesus upon the Cross (Rom. 5:19). Hence, Jesus Himself said, Matt. 19:14, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for to such *belongeth the kingdom of heaven.*" And He affirmed also, on another occasion, Matt. 18:3—"Except ye [grown-ups] turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." It is a known

fact that personality is pretty largely a construct of the environment. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to think that in all cases of these innocent ones who die in infancy, their spirits will go immediately into the Presence of God, where their personal potentialities will have the opportunity of development under the influences of that glorious celestial environment. The only salvation needed by the innocent will be salvation from the consequences of sin by the process of immortalization; this Salvation undoubtedly the Spirit will provide for them, as for all those who shall have come up to Heaven by the way of regeneration and sanctification.

I should like to point out, too, in this connection, that there are many things which are confused, in popular thinking, with the new birth, which are not in themselves the new birth at all. *Mere intellectual acceptance* of Christ, for instance, is not regeneration or new birth; as a matter of fact, it is not even faith, in the Scripture sense of that term. The Scriptures know of no faith that is less than a conviction which grips the soul, directs the will, and shapes the life; of no faith, that is, that does not manifest itself in works of faith, in obedience to the commands of Christ (cf. James 2:1-26). Jesus Himself said, "If a man love me, he will keep my word" (John 14:23). Again, John 15:14—"Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you." (Cf. also the closing words of His "Sermon on the Mount," Matt. 7:24-27.) Again, neither *repentance* alone nor *reformation of life* alone is the new birth. Nor is the *mere performance of religious duties* the new birth. If counting beads, bowing before images of the saints, sprinkling a little holy water now and then, or folding nicely manicured hands over fat stomachs and sleeping through the sermon—if such things as these go to make up religion, then the Lord knows that our century has plenty of religion. But not one of these practices, nor all of them together, constitutes new birth. Perfunctory, mechanical performance of religious rites is neither regeneration nor the product of regeneration. To be born again is to be a *new creature*: the old things are passed away; they have all become new. In the words of the Promise of the New Covenant: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33).