

Order of Salvation – All of Grace

The New Birth

Many changes have taken place since these words were spoken. Nations have come and gone. Great men have lived and died. But these words of Jesus stand unchanged and unaltered: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

What is the new birth? *It is the gracious and enlivening work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner, whereby He is made spiritually alive to God.*

Various pictures are given of regeneration in the Bible: *birth* (Jn. 1:12-13; 3:3,5; 1 Jn 2:29; Js 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3,23.), *creation* (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10), *resurrection* (Eph. 2:4-5; Rom. 6:13; 1 Jn. 3:14).

The need for the new birth

“No soul of man, woman, or child, will enter heaven without having been born again” (Ryle). Why is the new birth needed? Because man is *Godless* (Eph. 2:12), standing outside of the kingdom of heaven, separated from God (Is. 59:1). He is also *lifeless* (Eph. 2:1). He is also marked by *blindness* (Jn. 3:3, 10; Eph. 4:18). Moreover, he is in a condition of *sinfulness* and depravity (Jn. 3:6).

The character of the new birth

The new birth is not equivalent to saying: “I have been baptized;” or “I have made a decision,” or “I have made some changes.”

1. It is a heavenly work
2. It is the Spirit’s work
3. It is a purifying work
4. It is a sovereign work
5. It is a mysterious work
6. It is an enlivening work

The manner of the new birth

God regenerates by His word (Js. 1:18; 1 Pet. 2:23; 1 Cor. 4:15). “Truth is the seed of the new birth. God does not regenerate us by miracles or revelations, but by the word of truth” (Thomas Watson). How will they hear? Are they not spiritually dead? The divine call can pierce through all obstacles, including the state of deadness (Jn. 5:25; 11:43).

The Experience of the new birth

There is a great diversity of ways by which the Spirit “doth strike the first blow in producing this new birth” (Ryle). Some are awakened dramatically. Others are awakened by “little and trifling things.” Still others are born again not knowing when and how, but there has come a genuine change.

The Effects of the new birth

1. New sight
2. New life
3. New desires
4. New love

Lessons about the new birth

Christ has set forth a “must” that must happen before we die, if it is to be well with us. But it is not something that we can accomplish. That may seem discouraging. But it is meant to discourage sinners from trying to save themselves, and to turn them to God who is willing and able to save.

If the Lord has made you alive in Christ, overcome your hard heart, you should be amazed, and seek this blessing in prayer for others too.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why are people, like Nicodemus, so surprised by Christ’s emphasis on the need for the new birth?
2. What happens if we only emphasize the need to be born again, or only emphasize the call to believe?
3. W.G.T. Shedd wrote that “the Holy Spirit does not ordinarily regenerate a man until he is a convicted man.” What does he mean?