

Salvation—Sanctification (8th)

(Today we will continue studying the *experimental* aspect of sanctification in the life of the believer as he lives here on earth. We will continue looking at the new birth in this lesson.)

Today we are continuing our study of *experimental* sanctification. In previous podcasts we examined sanctification by God the Father and by the Lord Jesus Christ. Those topics were classified as *eternal* and *judicial* sanctification. In our first podcast concerning *experimental* sanctification we showed that the Scriptures clearly teach that a child of God overcomes the world because of the faith given to him in regeneration. See I John 5:4-5. It is obvious that one must be born again by God in order to live a holy or separated life in this world because man comes into this world a sinner and classified as a child of wrath by nature. This is clearly stated in Ephesians 2:1-3: “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” Though this passage is referring to the state of the children of grace prior to regeneration, it unmistakably affirms our condition was no different than that of unregenerated people. This state of being dead in sin originated in the fall. Romans 5:12 says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Notice that it says that “all *have sinned*.” (Emphasis mine.—JKB) Adam was the representative of the whole human race and, therefore, when he sinned he plunged the whole human race into sin. I Corinthians 15:22 equally affirms that “in Adam all die.” Also, since Adam and Eve were sinners, they could only produce sinners. Even Job verified this: “Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? not one,” Job 14:4. David also testified to this truth in his penitential psalm: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me,” Psalm 51:5. Yes, man in his natural state does not receive the things of God as testified in I Corinthians 2:14: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” Even Jesus taught us that apart from the Holy Spirit man is not only unwilling to obey the Lord, but he also is unable to follow Him. Speaking to the Jews who did not believe in Him, Jesus said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men,” John 5:39-40. And again He said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day,” John 6:44. Therefore, sinful man apart from the new birth not only will not go to Christ, he cannot go to Him. With this truth before us, how is it that man can obey the injunction to be holy or sanctified? See Leviticus 20:7; I Peter 1:15-16. The answer is, “Ye must be born again,” John 3:7.

The idea of the new birth is given to us in the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus as found in the third chapter of the Gospel of John. Christ introduced the subject by telling Nicodemus “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The Greek word for “again” is ἀνωθεν (*ánōthen*) and the basic meaning is *from above, from a higher place*. Thayer, in his Greek lexicon, further stated, “Often (also in Grk. writ.) used of things which come *from heaven*, or from God as dwelling in heaven: John 3:31; 19:11; James 1:17; 3:15, 17.” It is also translated as *top* when referring to the veil in the temple being “rent in twain from the top to the bottom” at the crucifixion of Christ (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38), and the garment of Christ being “woven from the top throughout,” John 19:23. And while it is also translated as *first* (Luke 1:3), *beginning* (Acts 26:5), and one other place as *again* (Galatians 4:9), it seems better to understand the new birth as being born above by God the Holy

Spirit. It seems obvious that the Holy Spirit is the immediate Agent in the new birth from the context of the passage as well as the concluding statement: “so is every one that is born of the Spirit,” John 3:8.

I will not expound on the phrase “Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit,” at this time to show why I believe that the water is not referring to baptism and that it is merely using metaphoric language denoting the same thing. Just as water is used to denote the Holy Spirit in other places (cf. John 7:37-39), the same analogy is in John 3:5. In other words, we might say, “Except a man be born of water even the Spirit.” Obviously, much discussion could be presented in showing the various ideas and opinions of this phrase, but I believe it would be counter-productive to the overall subject at hand to interject such a study at this time and maintain the obvious truth that a person must be born again or regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and that it is at this point in the life of an individual when *experimental* sanctification begins.

John, by the inspiration of God, previously wrote that prior to belief a person was “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,” John 1:13. In other words, the new birth is not based on natural relationship or because anyone desires it; that is, it is not because a person desires it for himself or because a person wants it for another individual. The determining factor as to who is born again or born from above is God. Furthermore, note that the new birth is not at faith (belief) nor after (or because of) one believes. Faith or belief is exercised *after* a person is regenerated. Since faith is “the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8) and “all *men* have not faith” (II Thessalonians 3:2), it is evident that “Salvation *is* of the LORD,” Jonah 2:9. But I digress. The point is sanctification begins in the life of an individual immediately at regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

It is important that we understand what is meant by the new birth because the general consensus regarding the word birth is that it is a process like that of a child being born from the womb of the mother. In some instances the Greek word for “bear” (γεννάω [gennáō, *ghen-nah'-o*]) is used to denote the birth of a child, but in John chapter three it is used with the idea of a child being conceived or brought to life. In Matthew 1:16, the word is used both ways in the same verse: “And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” In this verse γεννάω is translated “begat” and “born.” In the first instance it carries the idea of conception whereas in the second place it depicts the concept of giving birth. Interestingly, in Matthew 1:20, γεννάω is translated “conceived.” Just as there is a point in which a child does not exist and then at conception there is life or a human being in its earliest stage of life. Remember that David declared that he was a sinner at conception, cf. Psalms 51:5. Yes, life begins at conception. Likewise, spiritual life begins at the point in time when the Holy Spirit changes a person from being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) to “alive unto God,” Romans 6:11.

I will interject at this point that the word “begat” in James 1:18 is a different word. It is ἀποκυέω (apokueō, *ap-ok-oo-eh'o*) and carries the idea of a woman giving birth. While the new birth as mention in John 1:13 and 3:3-8 is the idea of giving life in the womb, James 1:18 is concept of bringing the life forth from the womb. The first is immediately (instantaneously); the second is a process. The first is regeneration; the second is conversion. Both are acts of sanctification, but the first is performed directly by God while the second is generally by the instruments of various means of God. (The Lord willing we will discuss this further in detail in future podcasts.) Since the general idea in Christianity is that the new birth is produced by various means used by man, we desire to enlarge on the subject to demonstrate that regeneration or the birth from above is performed alone by the Holy Spirit.

We saw from John 1:13 and 3:3-8 that this birth is by God the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we find that prior to regeneration that man is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), does not receive “the things of the Spirit of God” (I Corinthians 2:14), “enmity against God,” and “cannot please God,” Romans 8:7-8. In other words, there is nothing that man can do (for himself or for another) to cause him to be born from above. It is done immediately by the Holy Spirit of God. It is evident that a person that is dead to spiritual things cannot hear and understand the gospel, exercise a faith that he does not have, or “please God” under any condition. Even his prayer and sacrifice to God is a disgrace and an abomination

to Him, Proverbs 15:8; 21:27; 28:9. Yes, at one moment such a person is dead in sin and the next moment he is alive unto God. Again we distinguish between regeneration and conversion. Regeneration is when a person is made alive unto God; conversion is a process whereby changes are being performed in the life of an individual similar to the germination of a seed or the growth of a child after birth. Regeneration is performed solely by the Holy Spirit; conversion is by various means working effectually in the life of a child of grace by the Holy Spirit. While it may be that with some instances the work of regeneration and the initial stages of conversion may happen simultaneously as with the apostle Paul, it may be that the new birth takes place at one moment in time and conversion will begin at a later date. However, since the new birth is the inward work of the Holy Spirit, it is likely that we are unable to identify the exact moment it takes place. Take the example of Paul. Can we really identify the moment of his regeneration? Was it when the light from heaven shined about him, or when he fell to the earth? Was it when he heard the voice speaking to him the first time or the second or third time? In other words, can we really recognize when Paul was regenerated? We can say that it took place on the road to Damascus (though some people argue that it was at some time prior to this) but beyond this we must remain silent. We know that at one instant Paul was “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) and the next moment he was delivered “from the power of darkness, and hath translated ... into the kingdom” of the dear Son of God, Colossians 1:13.

Nevertheless, our time is up for today. Farewell.