

**190123-4 Doctrine Series, The New Birth an Immediate Act of God – Craig Thurman**

In Article #6, *The Election of Grace*, there are a number of teachings that could be considered. In it is a portion which tells of the new birth, as well as conversion. It reads:

... The Holy Spirit quickens the elect sinner, who is dead in trespasses and sins, giving him repentance and faith; the quickened sinner hears the gospel of Christ, repents of his sin and exercises faith in Christ as his savior, turns from his sin and follows Christ.

We believe that it is correct to say that the elect sinner is first quickened to life by the Holy Spirit, which will dispose him to repent of sins and believe in Jesus Christ when he hears of the gospel.

The time of the new birth is when the Spirit imparts to the sinner everlasting life. The life received is called a gift.

*Ro 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Joh 4:10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.*

The new birth is the time when sinners are *created in Christ Jesus*.

*Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

It is when the Lord, of His own grace, pours out upon the elect sinner the Spirit of life.

*Pv.1.23 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.*

It is when there is a change of the will (what we want to do) and the affections (what we love).

*He.8.10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people ...*

In the title of this lesson there is the term *immediate*, 'The New Birth [Is] by an immediate Act of God.' By *immediate* I mean that the new birth is the result of God's direct act to bring the sinner to life. God does not use any means to call sinners from the dead (it is an unmediated act); whether He calls sinners from their dead state in trespasses and sins, or from their dead state where their bodies lie corrupted in the graves He is the direct cause of life. The Bible does not teach that the new birth is conditioned on any other things but the power of God. It is not conditioned on Christian witness, reading the Bible, hearing the Bible read, being raised in a godly home, Christian schooling, preaching Christ, etc. As good as these things are they are not the cause of the new birth. These bring about conversion. (Next lesson)

Some believe that the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ brings about the simultaneous experience of the new birth and conversion. Though the new birth and conversion sometimes might appear to be simultaneously experienced, the word of God divides between these two events and their causes. They are divisible acts and might not always be viewed or experienced as happening at the same moment. That they are divisible acts, first look at Jo.5.24, 25.

Conversion by means of the word of God, the gospel:

*Joh 5:24 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 is passed from death unto life.*

This verse simply states a fact. Those which hear His word and believe on Christ have life. This is a statement which tells how conversion was wrought in the sinner. It tells how the sinner is turned by the word of God to believe in Christ. These, this verse says, *hath everlasting life*. Those that have life *hear* and *believe*. So we can say this too: those that have no life cannot hear the word of the gospel

or believe on the Son of God. Now, the next verse takes us to the moment when life is conceived in the sinner.

The new birth by direct means of God's calling the elect directly to life:  
*Joh 5:25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*

**First of all**, who are the dead in this verse that that *shall hear the voice of the Son of God* and live? It is those which are dead in trespasses and sins. It is not the dead in the graves. The things which our Lord Jesus says concerning those which are dead and in the graves are found in verses 28, 29.

*Jn.5.28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,  
29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*

There are those that are dead in trespasses and sins which shall hear *the voice* of the Son of God, and these shall live. John 5.24-29 divides between conversion, the new birth, and the resurrection.

**Second**, is there a difference between hearing the word of Christ and hearing His voice? Are these synonymous expressions? I believe that they differ. Whatever *heareth my word* means it differs from the words *his voice*. For example, does the gospel of John say that those which are dead in trespasses and sins shall live at the hearing of the word of Christ or at the hearing of His voice? Of course it says, *hearing his voice*. Let me ask another question. Does the gospel of John say that the dead that are in the graves should be raised at the hearing of the word of Christ, or at His voice? Again, the dead in the graves shall rise at the voice of the Son of God. So, this text marks for us a distinction between hearing the word of Christ and hearing His voice. And that marks the difference that there is between conversion and the new birth. *Hearing the word* of Christ is a mediate means for conversion. *Hearing the voice* of Christ is an immediate act which causes regeneration. It is a matter of fact that both the dead in sins and the dead in the graves receive life at the *voice* of the Son of God.

For example, in John chapter 11 Lazarus had been dead and in the tomb for four days by the time that Jesus had arrived. When Jesus brought forth Lazarus from the dead He did not preach the word to him. Rather He *cried out* with His voice and commanded him to *come forth*.

*Jn.11.43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.*

*44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.*

Jesus used no mediate means of the word of God to raise Lazarus from the dead. By Christ's immediate voice Lazarus received life and came from among the dead in the graves. There are two passages of Scripture, one in the O.T. and the other in the N.T., where those which *heard* the voice of the Lord were instantly changed from what they once were, without any other means than by the voice of the LORD.

**The Old Testament example of regeneration:**

*1Sa.3.1 ¶ And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*

Samuel had been dedicated by his mother, Hannah, to serve the Lord all the days of his life. (1Sa.1.11, 22, *and there abide [before the LORD] forever, 27, as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD.*) But though Samuel was dedicated to the LORD by his mother, he didn't yet know the LORD.

*2 And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;*

*3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was,*

A very careless act of negligence on the part of Eli.

*and Samuel was laid down to sleep;*

*4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I.*

5 *And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down.*

6 *And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.*

7 *Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.*

Of the things that we have said already concerning the differences between hearing His voice and hearing His word, Samuel didn't know the LORD, therefore he couldn't understand His word.

8 *And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.*

This young man was effectually called of the LORD.

*Joh 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:*

*28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (also, cf. Jn.10.3)*

Samuel heard the voice of the LORD but didn't know what to do. (regeneration) At this, like the gospel does, Eli gave Samuel the necessary commandment to know what to do next. (conversion)

9 *Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.*

10 *And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.*

A beautiful picture which speaks of regeneration and conversion. Not simultaneous, but close.

**The New Testament example of regeneration:**

*Acts 9.1 ¶ And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,*

*2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

*3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:*

Now, we know that this wasn't just *any light*: it was *The Light!* It was a discriminating light. Not every man there comprehended this light (cf. Jn.1.5); only Paul.

*Ac 26:13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.*

*4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

In that moment this voice called out no other name but Saul's. It was an unmediated voice spoken direct to Saul. Distinguishing grace.

Chasing a rabbit: Was every one of these men headed down to Damascus to do evil to Christians that had fled there because of persecution? Yes. Weren't they all equally dead in trespasses and sins? Yes, they were. Did every man have a need to hear this voice? Yes they did. Could God have called every name had He chosen to do so? Yes, He could have. Is God obligated to call every man without exception? No, otherwise this call wouldn't be of His *grace*. We really need to give these things serious thought.

*5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

Ananias said to Saul, when he came to him a little later that the Lord Jesus had appeared to him in the way. (v.17)

*6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

*7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*

Meaning that they could not comprehend the sound of that which they heard to be a voice.

*Ac 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light (and comprehended it not, Jn.1.5), and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.*

*Ac 26:14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

The Lord, by His voice, gave to Paul an hearing ear.

*Re 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*  
(Christ expressed this to each of the seven churches. Not all that have ears can hear.)

How did Lydia hear the preaching of Christ by Paul?

*Ac 16:14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*

*attended, προσέχειν, pres. infin. of προσέχω, to hold.*

What about the Parable of the Sower? What made the soil different from the others? Who would deny that this was a *choice* soil, a soil having received special attention so that the seed sown could/would produce fruit for the owner.

*Mt.13.23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

The hearing ear, whether it is natural or spiritual, is the work of the sovereign God.

*Pr 20:12 The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them.*

Brethren, before there is faith, there is the word of the gospel. Before there is the word of the gospel there must be the hearing ear. Before there is the hearing ear there must be the voice of the Son of God commanding them to 'Open!'

Now, there are many places where the phrase *the word of God* refers to either the direct spoken utterance of God or to a mediated means, whether it is a written or proclaimed record. In the O.T. it most often refers to the unmediated voice of God: God spoke directly to His servant and prophets. In the N.T. the word of God most often to the mediated word of God: that is, to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**In the O.T.:**

Most often *the word of God* refers to a direct utterance of the LORD:

Ge.3.15.1, 4; Ex.9.20, 21; Nu.22.18, 20, 35, 38; 1Sa.15.10, 11; 2Sa.7.4, 5; 24.11, 12; 1Ki.6.4; 13.1, 9, 17, 20, 21; 16.1; 17.5; Ps. 33.6; and all of the prophets, et al; And,

In some few places *the word of God* refers to the Scriptures:

Deu.4.21; 1Sa.3.1, 7, 21; 1Chr.15.15; 16.15; Ps.33.4; Is.2.3; 5.24; Dan.9.2; 10.22.

**In the N.T.:**

In some few places *the word of God* refers to a direct utterance of the Lord:

Lk.3.2(?); Mt.8.8; 26.75; He.1.3; 11.3; 2Pe.3.5; And,

Most often *the word of God* refers to the Scriptures:

Mt.13.19-22; Mk.2.2; 4.17; 7.13; 16.20; Lk.1.2; 5.1; 8.21; 11.28; Acts 4.4, 31; 6.2; 8.4; 15.7; 2Co.2.17; et al.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Romans Paul cites that though Christ is preached many do not hear.

*Ro 10: 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?*

It is incontestable that the preached gospel is an instrumental means used to save sinners. Christ must be preached so that some might hear, believe and called upon Him as Savior.

*Ro 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*

*15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

Though that is done many have not responded in obedience to it.

*Ro 10:16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?*

Why? The answer comes in the next verse.

*17 So then faith [cometh] by (ἐκ) hearing, and hearing by (διὰ) the word of God.*

**First, faith cometh by hearing ...**

By the things that we have said already I'd assert here that what is meant is, *faith* comes from *hearing* the declaration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Only by hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ is faith produced in us. *Faith ... understands. Heb 11:3 Through faith we understand ...*

The gospel declared to the newborn soul will produce faith. The gospel informs the living so that they *know* they have life.

*Jn.17.1 ¶ These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:*

*2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*

*3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

*1Jo 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*

As a matter of fact the gospel is so vitally connected with faith that it is called *the word ῥῆμα of faith, which we preach.* (v.8; cf. 1Pe.1.25 below, *the word of the Lord ... the word which by the gospel we preach, ῥῆμα, is the communication.*)

### **Second, and hearing by the word of God ...**

And this is that hearing which results from the commandment of the Lord for the ears to be opened. This tells us why so many that come under the sound of the gospel do not obey that gospel to believe in Christ when it is preached. We know this much, that whatever faith came by [from] (*faith cometh by hearing*), it is distinct from that which hearing came by [through] (*and hearing by the word of God*). It is not only that the gospel is preached, but that it is preached to those whose ears have been opened by an immediate act of God.

The voice of Christ quickens sinners. All other effects are excluded. Sinners can no more bring themselves to life than a dead body that is in the grave can raise itself up. Dare we say that the power to quicken sinners to life is in the hands of men, dependent on men, no matter how good or evil they are?

*‘How can we that are dead in trespasses and sins, renew ourselves, more than a dead man can raise himself out of the grave? Who but the sanctifying Spirit of Christ can form Christ in a soul, changing it into the same image?’ Thomas Boston (1676-1732)*

A point concerning the new birth is worth noting at this place: the Bible instructs no one *how* to be born again. It only states the necessity. Jesus, in the famous

chapter of the new birth, informed Nicodemus of the necessity of the new birth, but never intimated that it was by anything that he could do. Rather, Jesus told Nicodemus that the new birth was *from* the Spirit of God. Jesus didn't tell Nicodemus to believe. The truth is He didn't tell Nicodemus to do anything. He only made statements of facts through the entire discourse; read through the entire chapter, verses 1-36. There was no offer, no invitation, no wooing, no begging, no pleading; no, nothing but statements of facts.

*Jn.3.3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

*4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

*5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water (a natural birth) and of the Spirit (a spiritual birth), he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

*6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

*7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

*8 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 (ἐκ, from) the Spirit.*

As no man has anything to do with his natural birth so no man has anything to do with a spiritual birth. Two chapters earlier in John's gospel it is reported that the new birth is not *of blood*, of the *will of the flesh*, nor of the *will of man*, but of *God*.

*Jn.1.11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

*12 But as many as received him,*

Remember what the Bible says about receiving ...*Jn.3.27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.*

*to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*

*13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Verses 12 and 13, that those that received (a.i.a.) Him believe (pres. ind.) on His name. And these which believe (pres.i.a.) were born (a.i.pass.) of God. Or, if I could cut it down to the simplest statement: those that received him were born of God.

To arrange this verse another way, it could read:

*But (though He was rejected by His own) He gave to them, as many as received Him, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, power (right) to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on His name.*

Peter interestingly enough attributes the new birth never to the preaching of the gospel. First he attributes it to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (cf. 1Pe.1.3)

*1Pe 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ...*

In other words because our Lord Jesus raised from the dead we have received the same life He has, so that we might live like Him as He walked among us during His earthly ministry.

Then he adds that it is by the reception of the incorruptible seed. This is not a reference to the gospel message; but rather to that germ of life which raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. He says,

*1Pe 1:22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:*

*23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word (λογος) of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

The new birth is the result of an implanted living and faithful seed.

*being born again*, ἀναγεγεννημένοι, nom. pl. masc. part. perf. pass. of ἀναγεννάω, ἀνά above, re-, again + γεννάω, to generate, be born, beget; **v.3**; this is synonymous to Jn.3.3, 7, ἄνωθεν γεννάω.

*seed*, σπορᾶς, gen. sing. of σπορά; this is the germ of life in Mk. 4.26, 27; Lk.8.5, 11; 2Co.9.10; especially in the Parable of the Sower the *seed* only produces fruit in the *good soil*, a soil that had prepared aforetime.

*word*, λογοῦ, gen. sing. of λόγος, *word*, the word.

*liveth*, ζῶντος, gen. sing. masc. of ζάω, to live.

*abideth*, μένοντος, gen. sing. masc. of μένω, to abide, continue, dwell, endure, stand, tarry.

24 ¶ For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

25 But the word ῥῆμα of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word ῥῆμα which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Here the *word*, ῥῆμα, of the Lord is the abiding communication of the Lord. I think that Peter is asserting the everlasting life is via the promise of God. Though we die, we shall all be made alive.

*word*, ῥῆμα, twice in this verse (25), meaning the *sayings*, the communication & so the communication of the Lord.

*endureth*, μένει, 3ps. pres. ind. of μένω, to abide, continue, dwell, endure, stand, tarry.

As with every doctrine, there are always going to be questions. Some questions we cannot answer.

'It is a known rule, that a truth well established and confirmed is not to be questioned, much less relinquished on every entangling \*sophism, though it should appear insoluble.'

*John Owen*

\*sophism: an argument that has the appearance of truth, but is used to deceive

I believe that there is more than enough proof in Scripture to state the new birth is a an immediate act of God. Next time, if the Lord will, we will consider what the Bible teaches as the means of conversion.