

The New Birth – Part II - by John G. Reisinger *Sound of Grace – August 98*

In our last article (see *Sound of Grace*, Volume 5, Number 1) we showed four things: (1) The fact that all religions teach that man must be born again. (2) Both the nature of God and the nature of the sinner necessitate regeneration taking place before either God or the sinner can fellowship one with the other. (3) We then looked at the nature of regeneration and saw what it was and what it was not. (4) We closed by showing how regeneration takes place. We now conclude our study of regeneration.

I. Being born again is a creative act of the Holy Spirit.

We must keep emphasizing that being born again has nothing to do with heredity. It has nothing to do with our parents or church sacraments, and it surely has nothing to do with man's so-called free will. Free will is to spiritual life exactly what evolution is to physical life. It is a blatant denial of God's creative power. It amazes me that sincere Bible believers do not see this awful fact. It causes them to make really ridiculous statements. The following quotation from the Scofield Bible's footnote on John 3:3 is an illustration:

Regeneration: (1) The *necessity* of the new birth grows out of the incapacity of the natural man to "see" or "enter into" the kingdom of God. However gifted, moral, or refined, the natural man is absolutely blind to spiritual truth, and impotent to enter the kingdom; for he can neither obey, understand, nor please God (John iii.3, 5, 6; Psa. li.5; Jer. xvii.9; Mk. vi.21-23; 1Cor. ii.14; Rom. viii.7, 8; Eph. ii.3. See Mt. vi.33, *note*). (2) The new birth is not a reformation of the old nature (Rom. vi.5, *note*), but a **creative act of the holy Spirit** (John iii.5; i.12, 13; 2 Cor. v.17; Eph. ii.10; iv.24). (3) **The condition of the new birth is faith in Christ crucified** (John iii.14, 15; i.12, 13; Gal. iii.24). (4) Through the new birth the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature and of the life of Christ Himself (Gal. ii.20; Eph. ii.10; iv.24; Col. i.27; 1Pet. i.23-25; 2 Pet. i.4; 1John v.10-12).

How in the world can you say that a "**creative** act of the Holy Spirit" is "**conditioned**" in any sense whatsoever, and especially on something a poor sinner must do? That is like God saying, "I will create the world if you will agree to allow me to do so." Scofield totally confuses "being saved" with "being born again." See Volume 5, Issue 1 of *Sound of Grace* for a detailed study of the difference between these two.

II. The sinner is passive in regeneration.

In all the references to the new birth in the New Testament Scriptures, regardless of which word is used, the voice of the verb is always passive. No one ever "born himself," or "regenerated himself." The sinner is always passive and not active in regeneration. He does not "do" anything. Something is done "to" him but nothing is done "by" him. The sinner has no more to do with his second birth than he did with his first birth. You did not decide to "born yourself spiritually" any more you "decided" to be born physically.

Again we insist that we are not talking about "time sequence" but "cause/effect." The New Birth and repentance/faith are simultaneous; however, regeneration makes faith possible and not vice versa. Lydia's conversion is a classic example.

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 (Acts 16:14).

Everyone agrees that Lydia must hear, understand, and respond in personal faith to the gospel message of grace before she could be saved. The text clearly shows that all of these things happened. Lydia heard, understood, and responded—and that most willingly—to Paul's preaching. However, the question is this.

What was it that enabled Lydia to respond in faith. Did she with her own free will "open her own heart" and invite Christ to save her? That is not what the text says. The text says, "**The Lord** opened Lydia's heart [so] that she attended to the things which were spoken." Lydia's response was made possible by God regenerating (opening) her heart. The sinner's heart must indeed be opened but a spiritually dead sinner cannot open his own dead heart. He bolts it shut with ignorance and fear. Only God himself can open a dead sinner's heart and this he does for all of his elect. This is "being born again." This is being "made alive" or quickened (Eph. 2:1).

I am sure that some of my readers are saying, "You are preaching irresistible grace and I know the Bible clearly teaches that the sinner can resist the work of the Holy Spirit. What do you do with Acts 7:51, 52?"

Ye **stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears**, ye do **always** resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers (Acts 7:51, 52).

Pay particular attention to the words in bold type. There is no question that the text specifically declares that men can and do resist the Holy Spirit. In fact, the text says more than that, it uses the word *always*. I think every reader will agree that they have resisted the Holy Spirit in their past. Who among us did not laugh at the people who first witnessed to us the truth of the gospel? By nature, every sinner will not only resist the gospel, but he will *keep on resisting it*. The question is this: Why did every saved person decide to quit resisting and instead decide to repent and believe? Why is that word *always* not true of most of those who read this article? Again the text is clear. The people Peter was addressing were **stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears**, and do could nothing but resist. Every sinner will always resist as long as his heart and ears have not been circumcised. Regeneration is the Holy Spirit taking the resistance out of us and circumcising our heart and ears so that we want to believe. The verse does not refute irresistible grace but shows how essential irresistible grace is in true conversion.

One more thing is important in this text. The resistance spoken of in these verses concerns the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in the prophets. Sinners can and do resist all of men's preaching and exhortations. My son totally resisted all my entreaties with him for twenty two years. You may turn a deaf ear to the message when preached by men but when that message is applied to the conscience one on one by the Holy Spirit the resistance is removed. The internal work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is quite different then the outward work of human agency. The former cannot be rejected but the later can and is rejected by many.

The phrase *irresistible grace* turns some people off because they think of a steamroller rolling over a tube of toothpaste. That is not the irresistible grace of the Bible. We are not tubes of toothpaste. We are creatures with a mind, heart, and will. The same mind, heart, and will that fervently resists the gospel is made willing in regeneration to quit resisting and sincerely repent and believe. Let me illustrate biblical regeneration. Two mothers are having a cup of tea and the one mother's son comes down stairs neatly dressed, his hair neatly combed, and his shoes shined. As he goes out the door whistling his mother says, "That really bugs me." The other lady said, "What do you mean? I wish my son looked like that. He dresses like a slob." The mother replied, "Oh, that is not what I mean. What really bugs me is that a blond head and a pair of blue eyes did in ten minutes what I could not do in sixteen years."

That is the kind of irresistible work that we are talking about. That boy did not have to dress neatly if he did not want to. From his mother's remarks we gather that she had tried, without success, to get him to change his appearance. Then one day an irresistible attraction made him want to change and he did so immediately and most willingly. You did not have to receive Christ unless you really wanted to but when the Spirit of God showed you your heart and then revealed the beauty and glory of the Son of God you wanted to receive Him with all of your being. Irresistible grace is nothing less than God taking the resistance out of us and making us "willing in the day of his power" (Psalm 110:3).

Man indeed needs to hear the gospel preached but he also needs something more. He needs a new heart. The boy's mother gave him many correct and heartfelt instructions but nothing worked until an irresistible force came along.

III. The means God uses—His Word and Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we should have added the word *normal* to the above heading. The classic text to show what we mean in the above statement is I Thess. 1:4, 5.

Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

It is obvious that Paul had assurance that the people to whom he was writing were part of God's elect. How did Paul know this? It had nothing to do with their pedigree or baptismal certificates. It was because of the effect the Word of God had upon them. It is important to note that the gospel always comes in words. It does not come in dreams and visions nor in a baptistery or a communion cup. The gospel comes in *words*. It comes in propositional form. It comes as written facts of history. The gospel tells us, in concrete words, exactly what we must believe and do.

However, words by themselves are not enough—even *the words of God*. This is why Paul adds the word *also*. The gospel always comes in words but unless those words are attended with the power of the Holy Spirit they do not prevail in opening a sinner's heart. This is why we said the means that God [normally] uses are His Word and His Spirit.

Two things have to be said. (1) Many Scripture texts connect the Word of God with regeneration. However, (2) it would seem that regeneration may take place without the Word of God being applied to the mind and heart. Infant salvation would not be possible if the Word of God had to be the instrumental cause of regeneration. Having said both of these things, we can say that every instance where regeneration is specifically mentioned it is always in connection with the Holy Spirit using the Word of God. Note the following instances:

Ps 119:130 "The **entrance of thy words** giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." [This verse needs to be compared with 2 Cor. 4:4–6 "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."]

James 1:18 "Of his own will **begat he us with the word of truth**, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

1 Cor. 4:15 "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have **begotten you through the gospel**."

1 Pet. 1:23 "**Being born again**, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, **by the word of God**, which liveth and abideth for ever."

I repeat, these verses do not prove that the Word *must be* the instrumental cause of regeneration but they do show that it is the emphasis in all of the recorded instances of regeneration.

IV. The new birth is great mystery—so is physical birth.

John 3:8 and I Peter 1:23–2:1 demonstrate the mystery of our subject. John tells us that being born again is as mysterious and sovereign as the blowing of the wind. Peter tells that the union of a man and woman that produces a new life is also a mystery. We need to look closely at Peter's words:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. 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: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

Jesus told us that we must be born again and Peter here tells us how that takes place. Verse 23 compares our spiritual birth to our physical birth. We were begotten when a seed from our father was planted in the ovum of our mother. That seed had the power to literally beget life itself. That seed produced a new creation. That which was not, you, literally "became" in the womb of your mother. You were begotten and born of a seed but unfortunately that seed was a corruptible seed. All that seed could produce was a child that must die. No human seed has ever produced a child with everlasting life. When we were born of God we were begotten with the seed of God and that seed is incorruptible. It produces children that have everlasting life. That seed is nothing less than the Word of God. As that word is eternal so is everything that word begets.

Peter then compares our existence on this earth to that of a flower. All flesh is like the grass and the flower. You plant a seed, a few days later there is a stem and then a flower. Several more days and it dries up and blows away. Man is the same. Yesterday I was a little boy, today I am a grandfather, and tomorrow I will be gone and no one will know I was here. However, the seed of God produces plants of grace that are a sweet smelling savor to God for all eternity because they will wilt and die. When the Holy Spirit plants the seed of God in the ovum of a sinner's heart there is a new creation. We are literally "begotten of God" through His Word of truth and the power of the Holy Spirit.

VI. The Certain Evidences—John 3:8.

A. Even your dog will know something happened. I Thess.1:4-10.