

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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The Pastor's Letter (October 1972)

The Importance of Preaching the Doctrine of Regeneration



The importance of the preaching of the doctrine of regeneration in the mind of the great evangelist George Whitefield is most readily summed up in the famous answer which he gave when asked why he preached so much on the subject of men and women being “born again” by the Spirit of God. “Mr Whitefield,” the question ran, as it came from the lips of a woman who had been in his congregation many years, “Why do you preach so much on, ‘Ye **must** be born again?’” “Because, Madame” was his reply, “Ye **must** be born again!”

The necessity of the “re-birth”, or, of “regeneration”, is a subject that must form the very fibre of the gospel that the Church of Christ is to preach in every age in which she finds herself. But, even a casual examination of the bulk of preaching with the “evangelical” church today shows that this is far from the case. Although the words of the text are used – and have been used almost continuously throughout this present century – it is sadly apparent that the heart of the matter has been inadvertently lost, or, perhaps even deliberately set aside in order to produce a form of salvation that is more acceptable to the natural man and, therefore, able to give the appearance of the Holy Spirit’s operations among us when such operations are really not in existence.

When our Lord Jesus Christ used those famous words with that religious leader Nicodemus, He was pointing out to him what must happen within him – not something he must **cause** to happen. He was not speaking about Nicodemus “believing” on Him, but He was showing him the very source of that believing that would launch him into the course of eternal life as a follower of our Lord Jesus. The apostle John, earlier on in his gospel, sets forth the whole scheme of things in an unmistakable manner. “But as many as received him,” he says, “to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” This is another of the modern-day oft-quoted texts, but, unfortunately it is very often quoted out of context and so, becomes a pretext. While it is absolutely true that Christ gives the “right” to become “the sons of God” to all them that “receive” Him and “believe on his name,” it is also **far from the truth** to imagine that this

is something that they perform by themselves without the work of God's Holy Spirit first of all being accomplished in their hearts and minds. The next verse makes that crystal clear; "But to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;" and then, comes the explanation as to how and why they "received" and "believed": "Who were born," says John. (Every man, and woman, and young person, and child, who truly exercises faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for their soul's salvation, in fact, manifests life – spiritual life. But, there is no life – either physical, or spiritual – unless there is, first of all, a "birth." This is absolutely basic. And, says John, these people who received and believed did so, because they were "born.")

He tells us how they were born, they were "born of God." And in order for us to fully grasp the content of that magnificent statement, he also throws it into contrast with the methods by which they were **not** born. "Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, **but of God.**" They were "born of God." Not of "blood," he says. And this was the very thing that our Lord Himself was driving at with that man Nicodemus. No people boasted more in their "blood" than the children of Israel; "We be Abraham's seed," was their constant cry. But, salvation is not "of blood." And grace does't run in the blood. Believers' children don't inherit any of the parents' graces, but their natures – their old, fallen, corrupt, rebellious nature – so that they must be "born again" – "born of God."

Most "evangelicals" would heartily concur with that. But, what of the next negative means of salvation that John sets before us? "Who were born, not of blood, **nor of the will of the flesh ...**" You see, this doesn't mean salvation by **works** – the works of the flesh; that's not what it says; it says, "the **will** of the flesh." That is, anything that the will of man in his flesh can do apart from the operations of the Spirit of God upon him. If a person claims to have "believed" in order to be "born again," then, they have placed their life before their birth. Those who did believe, says John, were those who were "born of God." Not of themselves – not of some "act of free will," for the will belongs to the "flesh" of fallen man ("ye **will not** come unto me that ye might have life.") And knowing this to be the case, then, our Lord "regenerates" those wayward souls so that they can believe and receive Him unto "life" eternal. If a man persists in saying that he believed in order to be born again, and not that he was born again in order that he might believe, then he has exercised that belief in the flesh, and "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." The awful indictment that rests upon such theology is vividly

portrayed in that lamentation of our Lord's over the nation of Israel: "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know ..." What an indictment on the people of God today if they fail to know and acknowledge from whence they have their spiritual beings – Who was their Father, and by whom they are born in spiritual things. "Who were born, not of ... the will of the flesh ..."

"Nor of the will of man," is the third false source of spiritual life. Not by my own works and efforts; not by the works of any other mortal upon the face of this earth. Not the persuasion of the preacher, or the methods employed. Oh, these things can do a work! Is that not the tragedy of our day? There is such a thing as a psychological conversion; practically every politician and able salesman can accomplish such a "change" in a person's outlook, or, indeed, way of life. But this is not the work of regeneration. Oh, God uses men; of course, He does – "It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching ..." But, it is especially, "through the foolishness of **the thing preached ...**" That is, the gospel – the gospel of grace – the gospel which says to man, "Ye must be born again," – which lays him in the dust of earth just as surely as Adam lay there until God breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living soul. He didn't get up and walk about and then become a living soul. And says John, those who "received" Christ, and "believed on his name" did so, because they were "born of God." "Not of blood, nor, of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Modern-day evangelicalism has confused things that differ. There is a vast difference between "conversion" and "regeneration." In conversion we actually "see" the converted, as it were, showing forth the change in their life – turning from idols to serve the living and true God. But, this they do, because they have, first of all, been "born of God." Just as surely as the child who takes his first struggling kicks into this massive world has been "born" into the world. The child didn't become its own father! No more than any spiritual child of God has become his own father. The "conversion" – the "receiving," – the "believing," – these are the evidence of the life, but the **source** of the life is from "above", not "within." "Ye are born from above" – "Who were born ... of God."

Then, they take up their position as "The sons of God." Says John, "As many as receive him, to them gave he power (or right) to become the sons of God ..." They weren't the sons of God before; by nature we were all "the children of wrath, even as other," and we were "of our father the devil," says

our Lord. We were “born” of the devil, and the works of our father, as it says in another place, we willingly performed. But, when we “believed” on Christ we certainly were not doing “the works of our father” the devil; we were doing the “work of God.” For, says our Saviour, “This is the work of God that ye **believe** on Him whom He has sent. And those who believe on Christ are then doing the “work of God”, because they have been “born of God”, just as they did the ”work” of their father the devil, being born, by nature, of their father the devil.

When they do this work of God – when they “believe on him whom he has sent” – then they are “formally” and “legally” **adopted** into the family of God – they receive “the right to be called the sons of God.”

Again, we are not to confuse things that differ. Just as conversion and regeneration are two different things, so **adoption** and regeneration are two different things. In adoption God gives us the **standing** of the children of God; makes us joint-heirs with Christ, who is “the firstborn among many brethren.” But, in regeneration, God gives us the **nature** of the children of God. He can never, ever, have us in His family - joint-heirs with His only Begotten Who was “full of grace and truth” – as we stand in our old nature full of wrath and enmity against our God in heaven. So, - and, Oh, my friends this is the glory of the grace of our God in the gospel – He changes our nature! He “regenerates” us! He causes us to be “born again” of His Holy Spirit! He gives us “life” in place of our “death” – “you hath he quickened (made alive) who were dead in trespasses and sins.” And when He imparts this life, then we exercise that life by “receiving” His only begotten Son to our soul’s salvation. And then, we receive the “adoption papers”, as it were – signed, sealed, and delivered to us, so that none can take away this “right” to be a son of God. “But to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. **Who were born**, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but **of God.**”

“Mr Whitefield! Why do you preach so much on ‘Ye must be born again’?” “Because, madame, ‘Ye **must** be born again’.” Amen!

“The only gospel we can own,
Sets Jesus Christ upon His throne;
Proclaims salvation full and free,
Obtained on Calvary’s rugged tree.”



The Believer's Assurance – The Devil's Target

A well-grounded assurance is usually strongly assaulted by Satan on all sides. Satan is such a grand enemy to the joy and peace, to the salvation and consolation of the saints, that he cannot but make use of all his devices and stratagems to amaze and amuse, to disturb and disquiet the peace and rest of their souls. No sooner had Jesus Christ heard that lovely voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," but He was desperately assaulted by Satan in the wilderness. No sooner was Paul dropped out of heaven, after he had seen visions of glory that were unutterable, but he was immediately assaulted and buffeted by Satan.

Stand up, stand up, assured Christians, and tell me whether you have not found the blast of the terrible one to be as a storm against the wall. Since the Lord said unto you, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you," have you not found Satan to play the part both of the lion and the wolf, both of the serpent and the fox? And all to weaken your assurance, and to cause you to question the truth of your assurance, and to cast water upon your assurance, and to take off the freshness and sweetness, the beauty and glory, of your assurance; I know you have. His malice, envy, and enmity is such against God's glory and your comfort that he cannot but be very studious and industrious to make use of all traps, snares, methods, whereby he may shake the pillars of your faith, and weaken and overthrow your assurance. Pirates, you know, do most fiercely assault those ships and vessels that are most richly laden; so doth Satan assault those precious souls that have attained to the riches of full assurance.

Assurance makes a paradise in believers' souls, and this makes Satan to roar and rage. Assurance fits a man to do God the greatest service and Satan the greatest dis-service, and this makes him mad against the soul. And therefore never wonder at Satan's assaulting your assurance, but expect it and look for it.

The jailor is quiet when his prisoner is behind bolts, but if he be escaped then he pursues him with hue and cry. So long as the soul is behind bolts and in bondage under Satan, Satan is quiet and is not apt to molest and vex it; but when once a soul is made free, and assured of his freedom by Christ, then says Satan, as once Pharaoh did, "I will arise, I will pursue, I will overtake

...” Israel going into Egypt had no enemies, no opposition; but travelling to Canaan they were never free.

(Thomas Brooks 1654)



Gleanings In the Psalms

(Psalm 44)

In the first eight verses David remembers that the Land of Canaan was given to the children of Israel by God's mighty acts and re-joices in His Sovereignty.

Verse 1. “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.” They made their mouths, as it were **books**, wherein the mighty deeds of the Lord might be read to his praise, to the drawing of their children’s hearts unto Him.

John Mayer

Verse 3. (*A sermon on Free Grace Exalted*) **(1) In putting a negative upon human power:** - “They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them ...” **(2) In manifesting Divine energy:** - “But thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance ...” **(3) In its secret sources:** - “because thou hadst a favour unto them.”

A negative is put upon their weapons and themselves as if to show us how ready men are to ascribe success to second causes. The divine “hand” actively fought for them, the divine “arm” powerfully sustained them, and the divine “smile” inspired them with dauntless courage. Who could not win with such triple help, though earth, death, and hell should rise in war against him? What mattered the tallness of the sons of Anak, or the terror of their chariots of iron; they were as nothing when Jehovah arose for the avenging of Israel.

P. H. Spurgeon

Verse 3. “... because thou hadst a favour unto them.” Free grace was the fundamental cause of all their joy and success. God loved them because He loved them. He chose them out of His love, and then loved them for His choice.

John Trapp

Verse 4. “Thou art my king, O God; command deliverance for Jacob.” If there were no creature in the world to help, stillwithall, you would not be at a loss in your time of need. He that sits on the throne can do it alone. He can perform all that ever you need without any means or instruments. His bare word is sufficient all-sufficient. There needs no more power to deliver you – to deliver His people anywhere – than the **command** of Him that sits on the throne. He that is our King can command life into that which sees as far from living as a dry bone.

David Clarkson

Verse 6. “For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.” I will not trust in **my own** sword or bow, but in the Sword of the Divine Warrior, and in the Bow of the Divine Archer, whose arrows are sharp in the heart of His enemies, as David says in his next psalm.

Christopher Wordsworth

Verse 6. “For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.” This teaches us to relinquish all outward trusts. “My bow” may miss its aim, or may be broken, or may be snatched away. “My sword” may snap, or grow blunt, or slip from my hold. We may not trust in our abilities, or our experiences, or our shrewdness, or our wealth.

Hints to the Village Preacher

Verse 8. “In God we boast all the day long ...” Would to God the doctrine of election were considered more, and people were more studious of the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son. For my own part, I cannot see how true humbleness of mind can be attained without a knowledge of it; and though I will not say that every one who denies election is a bad man, yet I will say it is a very bad sign. Redemption is so ordered that no flesh should glory in the divine presence; and hence it is, that the pride of man opposes this doctrine (and refuses to **boast in God** all the day long), because according to this doctrine and no other, “He that glories must glory only in the Lord.” It is the doctrine of election that mostly presses me

to abound in good works. I am made willing to suffer all things for the elect's sake. This makes me preach with comfort, because I know salvation doth not depend on man's free will, but the Lord makes them willing in the day of His power, and can use even me to bring some of His elect home, when and where He pleases.

George Whitefield

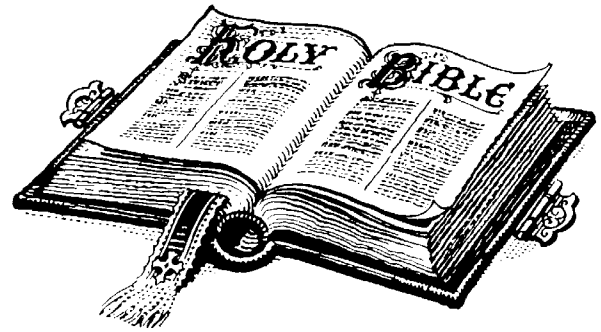
Verse 8. "In God we boast all the day long ..." Once we stand upon redemption's land of promise, see the King upon His throne, lay down the sword of Free Will and the bow of Human Ability at His feet, and acknowledge that if we have been brought into the Canaan of redemption at all, then it has been by Him, then we will "boast" in Him "all the day long."



The Debt We Owe

Eternity itself alone will reveal the debt that the Church of Christ owes to those individual men and women who, seeing the low condition that religion had sunk to in their day, resolved before the Lord to give their lives for the glory of the gospel. Not least among this band was the gentle, yet determined William Tyndale whose work of translating the Holy Scriptures into the language of the people of England caused the river of evangelical Christianity to burst its banks and overflow until, as it was later said, there was "a face of Godliness upon the whole nation." Tyndale's famous resolve was made in the home of one John Walsh of Little Sodbury Hall in the Cotswolds. Appalled at the abysmal ignorance of spiritual things, even among the religious leaders of his times, William Tyndale's voice one evening echoed through the rooms of the old Manor House: "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more scriptures than thou dost." This resolve came on the back of a conviction that had already begun to form in his heart and mind. "I have perceived by experience," he told a friend, "that it is impossible to establish common people in any truth unless the Scriptures be laid clearly before them in their mother tongue." So began the work that was finally to cost William Tyndale his devoted life.

These few words are not intended to give any kind of an outline of that life, but simply to draw our hearts out in appreciation to the God of our salvation who was pleased to raise up such a one in His good and appointed time to lay the foundations of an open Bible for our land today. Tyndale enjoyed the reception that many have experienced who sought only the good of the Lord's church and the prosperity of Zion, and he was hounded from pillar to post,



complete with manuscripts and a few printed pages of his New Testament in the English language. The bloodhounds of the Bishop of London were constantly on his trail, and though he had little care for his own safety he was more than anxious for the precious work that he had already carried out on the Word of God. "I perceived," he wrote again - and note how he was always "perceiving"; would to God we had spiritual perceivers in these days in which we live - "I perceived," he wrote, "that not only in 'My Lord of London's place, but in all England, there was no room for attempting a translation of the Scriptures." Accordingly, in the year 1524, Tyndale set sail for Europe complete with his two years of work and a hope of peace and safety to give England a true rendering of the Word of Life.

But the devil has two ploys with regards to the word of God; he will either corrupt it by sowing his imitation "tares" amongst it, or else, he will labour to "snatch it away," as our Lord told us in that other parable. Being very much the "angel of light" in our day, he is busy sowing the corrupt with the good seed, but in Tyndale's age, the devil was very much "the roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." Europe, therefore, proved to be only slightly better than England for Tyndale's work and again, we find him having to constantly fly from danger to preserve his labours. "When they shall persecute you in one city, flee ye into another," might well be the motto text of William Tyndale's work, but in spite of all the persecution that work did flourish and abound to God's praise and, whatever way we look at it today, we are eternal debtors to it.

The debt that we owe to Tyndale and his like is perhaps nowhere better set before us than in one of his very last letters which he wrote from his prison at Vilvorde, six miles north of the city of Brussels. Remember the stature of the man; remember his gentle and gentlemanly background; remember the

intellectual power and capabilities of the writer now imprisoned that we might have an open Bible in our day: “I beg your lordship,” he writes to one of his friends, “that if I am to remain here through the winter, you will request the commissary to have the kindness to send me, from the goods of mine which he has, a warmer cap; for I suffer greatly from cold in the head, and am affected by perpetual catarrh, which is much increased in this cell. A warmer coat also, for this which I have is very thin. A piece of cloth, too, to patch my leggings. My over coat is worn out; my shirts are also worn out ... and I ask to be allowed to have a lamp in the evenings; it is indeed wearisome sitting alone in the dark.” And then, there comes what must be one of the most self-less sentences recorded anywhere in the history of Christ’s church: “**But most of all,**” he writes, “I beg and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the commissary, that he will kindly permit me to have the Hebrew bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary, that I pass the time in that study.” A few patches for his trousers, if possible; a warmer coat and cap, if possible; “But most of all,” he says, the books, that he might continue his work and fulfil his resolve.

The debt we owe; the debt we owe.

Among other names, the Scriptures are referred to as:

The Word of God – the Mind of God – the Glory of God
The Gospel of God – the Councils of God, - the Charge of God
The Breath of God – the Mouth of God – the Oath of God
The Oracles of God – the Paths of God – the Wisdom of God

Why should we not then desire them? For, although they are also called a “**narrow** way,” nevertheless, they are “the **perfect** way”.

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE



I wonder if any of you have, over these past few weeks, noticed in the parks and woods, young birds being taught to fly by the mother birds? If you have noticed, I'm sure, like me, you have found it very interesting to watch. It reminded me of a story I read of a little robin red-breast.

This little robin was the only one left in the nest; the others had flown out into the great green world. Why this little robin red-breast stayed in the nest its mother didn't know. Perhaps it found the nest too comfortable, or maybe it enjoyed the food and water its mother brought it. Anyway, whatever the reason, it just stayed on in the nest and wouldn't budge. Then one day, two little boys walked past the tree where the nest was, and the little bird got such a fright that it spread its wings, and flew out into the open for the very first time, right over a large pond. But, the pond was wide and the robin's wings were small, and it fell right into the water. The poor little bird tried to swim, but its little wings got wetter and heavier. It looked around for help, and its mother called out to it. I suppose if we understood bird language, she might have been saying, "Swim on! Go on! Keep going!" and the little robin managed to struggle on, and, at last, reached the bank.

The bank was steep and the little bird was tired, but help was near at hand, because the two boys saw it all and ran over and lifted the little robin out of the water just as its tired head began to sink. They took it back to its nest and later on after a rest, it flew off, this time, right over the pond.

God, too, of course, saw all that happened to that little bird that day, for the Bible tells us that Jesus said that even when a bird falls to the ground God knows all about it. Our Lord also said, of course, to learn from that the great lesson that God also cares for us, for said our Lord to His disciples, "Ye are more precious than many sparrows." Such a lesson is meant to make us thankful, so let us learn to be thankful by seeking to do and say those things that will please our God who always sees us and hears us.

Love,
Mrs Seaton.