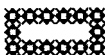


# New Birth

AND

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BY  
J. BOYD.

THE CENTRAL BIBLE TRUTH DEPOT  
12, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.

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Price Twopence

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1913.

## NEW BIRTH AND ETERNAL LIFE.

FEW subjects have been the occasion of more controversy than that of new birth and eternal life, and yet I venture to think that if we closely adhere to the holy Scriptures, we will find very little room for diversity of opinion; that is, supposing we have no desire to be wise above that which is written. There is nothing more foolish and contemptible in Divine things than the dogmatisms of the human mind, for the things that are revealed are matters of *faith*, not of *opinion*, and they lie outside the circle in which the mind of man revolves, and in which it exercises its powers. Regarding spiritual subjects no one can know the truth if there is no revelation; if there is, one has only to bow to what is revealed. Creeds invented by the wisest natural minds are, in the light of God's revelation, seen to be miserable ignorance, contradictory and unreasonable. It may seem strange that it should be so, for they are generally invented by men of intellect and learning; but so it is, and the very fact that there is so much disagreement reveals the discontent with that which is written lurking in the human

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mind. Our wisdom is to keep close to the written Word, hold dearer than life all we find therein, and refuse to theorize upon spiritual things which are unrevealed, and of which we know nothing.

Pride of heart would have us pose as those who know everything; and regarding spiritual things very few teachers are willing to admit that they have yet something to learn. And yet, as to things earthly or heavenly, human or Divine, we know nothing perfectly. Perfection has not yet come to pass for us. At present "we see through a glass darkly," not yet "face to face" (1 Cor. xiii.). In the pursuit of knowledge there is a point where the gloom becomes altogether impenetrable, and where a voice may be heard, saying, "Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther;" and there the quest has to be abandoned. Let us be grateful for the revelation given to us from Himself, in which He so clearly brings before our minds and hearts all He would have us know concerning Himself and His dealings with Adam's fallen race; and let us take it just as He has given it to us, neither adding to it nor diminishing from it.

That as soon as man fell God began to work in grace becomes evident in His clothing Adam and his wife with coats of skins, and by His giving witness to His acceptance of Abel; and that souls were born again from the outset cannot be

questioned, if we are to believe Scripture. We read in 1 John ii. 29 that "Everyone that doeth righteousness is born of Him"; and for an example of this the Spirit of God goes back to Abel, who was hated by his brother because his works were righteous. Of course, while the probation of man was in progress, we could not have the necessity of new birth stated in plain terms, for the statement of such a truth as that would have brought the probation of man to a close; for how could the trial of the flesh be continued after such a clear pronouncement of its good-for-nothingness, and of its utter rejection? But though we do not get the statement made in plain terms we do get it in dark sentences, yet sufficiently clear to be apprehended by one who in exercise of soul studied the Word to get the mind of God. Our Lord seems to infer that Nicodemus should not have been ignorant of this truth, when He asks him, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" (John iii. 10). He might have learned it from Ezekiel xxxvi. 25, 26. For a soul to be in blessing with God this was, is now, and ever shall be, necessary, as long as the world lasts, for there is no good in the flesh; and "that which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John iii. 6), and unalterable in its badness (Rom. viii. 7). Therefore the Lord says to Nicodemus, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

## ANEW.

Not "from *above*," as some have supposed, but "*anew*"; that is to say, "*from the very start*" nothing of the old entering into the new seed of God; an entirely new beginning in the soul of man, and on the line of *spirit*, as the old was on the line of *flesh*. It may be replied to this that it is "*from above*," inasmuch as it is the word of God which comes from above. But not so, for it need only be a word which speaks of the grace of God to men in connection with "*earthly things*," not necessarily that which would turn men's thoughts to heaven. Had Nicodemus understood the word translated "*again*" to have in this case the sense of "*from above*," he never would have asked the question he does, for had the second birth been possible on the lines indicated by his question, that would not have been from above. That the word here translated "*again*" is some times rightly translated "*from above*" is perfectly true. It is so in verse 31 of the same chapter, "He that cometh from above." But "*again*," "*anew*," or "*from the outset*," is clearly the meaning here.

## THE WORD.

As to the means used to bring about this wonderful work we are left in no doubt. James tells us: "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth" (i. 18); and Peter tells us it is

by "The word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter i. 23). In this latter case the reference is to Isaiah xl., where the forerunner of the Messiah is told to cry: "All flesh is grass, and all the godliness thereof is as the flower of the field." The Jew was grass, the Gentile was grass—all *flesh* was grass; and "the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." Nothing on earth abides but the word of God: it is living and abiding; and this, Peter says, is "the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." And of this living and abiding word we are born again. I am aware it is not quite the same word in Peter, which is translated "born again," as in John, but it is the same thing which is referred to. How establishing and comforting to know that we are the children of that which is living, incorruptible, and abiding!

The word by which one is born again need not be any unfolding of the great thoughts of God. Indeed I may say it cannot be this, for such thoughts can only be received by one who is already born again, and who has also received the Spirit. But it must be something that will bring God before the soul, for it is the word of God, and that in grace, and we are told it is by the *Gospel* the word is brought to us. Not necessarily a full Gospel such as the death of

Christ for our offences, and His resurrection for our justification. Still it must be of the nature of Gospel, a ray of the light of the knowledge of God, a word of grace, but not even of necessity the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins.

That it must be grace one can affirm without the slightest hesitation, because Scripture says it is by the Gospel ; and that it need not be anything in advance of that which was addressed to men in the days of Abel is evident from the fact that he was born of God. Abel was born again but could not know anything of a dead and risen Saviour ; the disciples also were born again while they went out and in with the Lord upon earth, but that He was to die for their sins and rise again never entered into their understanding, though He had told them of this again and again. The truth is, new birth really prepares a soul for the reception of Christ as the sent One of the Father.

This is evident from the first chapter of John's Gospel. There we get His advent into the world, and the consequences. The *darkness* apprehended not the light ; the *world* knew not its Maker ; the *Jews* received not their Messiah ; everything was manifested by the power of that Light. Nothing could remain in obscurity. Man was seen to be unable to profit by the presence of the Son of God in the world. But there was a race brought to light which had been in the world



since the days of Abel, but which until that moment had been in obscurity. *These were born of God.* And as others were exposed by their *rejection* of Christ, so were these manifested by their *reception* of Him ; and “ as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name : which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

This is just as true to-day as it was then. None but those born of God receive Christ. The Lord says : “ No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him ” (John vi. 44). I do not doubt this drawing is effected by the incorruptible seed being implanted in the soul. “ They shall be all taught of God,” He says, and “ Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto Me.” There is clearly a secret work of God wrought in the soul of man, which leads him to faith in Christ ; that is, when he hears of Christ in the Gospel of the grace of God. Hence faith in Christ personally and in His work is the outcome of new birth.

#### FAITH.

The next question arising is the connection of this work with faith. That it is the sovereign operation of God the very term seems to imply, for what hand could one have in one's own birth ?

Therefore we never find it pressed upon man as a *responsibility*, though he is informed of its *necessity* for him. Some have spoken of it as though man was capable of bringing it to pass in himself, others as a work of God of such a nature that even faith in the word by which it is produced is neither present nor required. Both are clearly wrong. It is a necessity, for without it he cannot see the kingdom of God, but to bring to pass one's own birth is in the nature of things impossible; and as I have already said, it is not presented to men as a responsibility. And as to the question of faith, one Scripture text puts the subject beyond controversy, and that text is, "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. iv. 2). Nothing lasting and profitable is produced in the soul of the hearer where the word preached is not believed. The word by which new birth is produced is a word that is received by faith, not a word that is rejected by unbelief.

Unbelief was the occasion of the fall of man at the beginning. The word of God was the ruling principle in the soul of Adam, until the suggestions of the enemy gained the ascendancy and brought him into transgression. This must be reversed in the souls of all recovered for God. Therefore man must be recovered on the principle of faith. The word of God must once again be

enthroned in the heart. He must "set to his seal that God is true" (John iii. 33). "Faith cometh by report, and report by the word of God" (Rom. x. 17).

In new birth the word of God gets for the first time this place. It is supreme in the heart that receives it. It sends down its roots there and springs up, and a new spirit-nature is produced: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The word which works such wonders in the soul of man is mixed with faith. Therefore James says: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear" (James i. 18, 19). Why swift to *hear*? Because of what *hearing* has produced. We have heard the word of truth. Where has it come from? It is the word of God; He is its source. New thoughts, new ideas, new aspirations, have been by it awakened in the soul, which nothing can satisfy but God Himself. And this is the beginning of a new spiritual existence, which shall only be perfected by a spiritual body.

#### SEEING THE KINGDOM.

Now apart from this operation of God His kingdom cannot be seen: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Evidently then a sight of the kingdom is not that which produces new birth. The kingdom of God (which was the power of God in activity for the

emancipation of the creature from the thralldom of the devil, in order that he might find his happiness in the service of God) was, when Jesus spoke these words, in their midst in manifestation, but apprehended by no one but those born of God. Others saw nothing but a man exercising supernatural powers, the source of which they did not understand, and the character of which they did not consider. Therefore Jesus would not commit Himself to such, for in them there was no foundation upon which anything of God could be built. Dazzled by the works of Jesus though they were, and convinced that a supernatural power was making itself manifest before their eyes, they were yet unable to see in these works the sign of the grace and mercy of a Saviour God acting for their deliverance from the thralldom of sin and Satan. To see this new birth was needful.

#### ENTERING INTO THE KINGDOM.

But our blessed Lord not only speaks of *seeing* the kingdom, but of *entering into* it. For this water and the Spirit are the means used. I am persuaded this carries one into Christianity. To enter into the kingdom is to enter into the practice of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. xiv. 17). Now in order to produce righteousness one must be indwelt by the Spirit (Rom. viii. 4, 10). Therefore, it seems to me that

while fitness for seeing the kingdom may be produced by the simplest element of truth, a full Gospel is necessary for entering into it. It is not for no purpose the Divine Teacher passes from *seeing* to speak of *entering into* the kingdom.

Water speaks of the cleansing properties of the word. It is not only that the word is the seed of God in the heart, taking root there, and producing a new nature, but when the Spirit of God speaks of it here under the figure of water, the reference is to its cleansing power. It is so in Eph. v. 26, John xiii., and other places. It is a word that brings in death upon the flesh, our whole sinful condition, as of fallen Adam; separates between what is of God, and what is of mere nature, so that by the power of the Spirit we are able to distinguish between that which is born of the flesh and that which is born of the Spirit, and connect ourselves in our thoughts with the latter. To this the Spirit unites His power, so that we enter into a sphere of righteousness, peace, and joy: which things subsist in His might. Therefore I think there is a way of looking at new birth in its inception as well as in its completion.

This way of presenting the blessings of the Gospel that are ours through grace is not peculiar to new birth. Salvation is ours when we believe in the Lord Jesus, yet Peter speaks of feeding on the word that by it we might grow up to

salvation (1 Peter ii. 2 N.T.). The Thessalonians were to put on as a helmet the hope of salvation (1 Thess. v. 8). And the Romans are told that their salvation was nearer than when they believed (Rom. xiii. 11). Eternal life is with John a present blessing, but with Paul it is a hope (John v. 24; Titus i. 2). Therefore we need not be surprised to find new birth set forth in its incipiency, or in its more complete sense.

In 1 Peter i. 22, 23, we get John iii. 3, 5, only in the inverse order. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit," is equivalent to "born of water and of the Spirit." The water separates between the new and the old, judges that which is of the flesh, and the Spirit builds up that which is of Himself in the true knowledge of God, and this results in love to the brethren. But in verse 23, Peter goes to the very beginning of this work of grace, and says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God." The water cleanses and the Spirit gives the consciousness of the love of God, and the soul is enabled to take its place in the family of God.

#### THE DIVINE NATURE.

Now as to the Divine nature: we get the term in 2 Peter i. 4. The apostle speaks of believers as having been called by glory and virtue, the

power of these two principles having been set before us in the life of our Lord, "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." As with Him, so with His followers, the glory is the object before the soul, virtue the inherent quality that considers no position of the opposing force too strong to be rushed, no battlement too lofty to be scaled, and no suffering too terrible to be endured, in order to reach the goal.

In connection with the goal and the pathway, exceeding great and precious promises are given to us, that by these we might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Now everything partakes of the nature of that of which it is born, and therefore we are accustomed to speak of those born again as partaking of the divine nature, and I do not question the rightness of thus speaking. But in this case it is those who have already been born again who are said to become partakers of the divine nature by those promises, and this is the only place where we have the expression. In John iii. the Lord tells Nicodemus that that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, but that this new spirit nature is divine I do not think will be questioned by any one taught of God. Still I think it must be admitted

that 2 Peter i. 4 goes beyond mere new birth. Certainly the Spirit of God puts the former considerably in advance of the latter in the epistles of Peter. I do not doubt that the divine nature, as it is spoken of here, refers not only to the initial work in the soul but to the qualities which are produced by embracing those exceeding great and precious promises, and which adorn the lives of the children of God, and bring them into manifestation in this world, as pointed out by John in his first epistle. It takes in, not only the principle of the new being, but also the divine characteristics which enable them to shine as luminaries in the midst of the surrounding darkness of this world.

I might ask, Is the soul described in the latter part of Romans vii. in possession of the divine nature? That he is so as to "the *law of his mind*," I do not doubt; but that he is so *characterized*, no one who knows God would dare to affirm. That he is under the action of the "*water*," and that the Spirit from without is giving power to the word within, I am thoroughly convinced, but that he can be said to be "born of water and of the Spirit," or that he is indwelt by the Spirit, or has grasped the exceeding great and precious promises," I could not at the present moment accept. He has not yet found *entrance into* the kingdom of God, though he may



see it, for he has not yet come to the practice of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

But some one will tell me that a man is either born or unborn. That is so as to *nature*, but who says it is so as to *grace*? Might I ask why the Lord, after telling Nicodemus he must be born again, refers in the second place to born of water and the Spirit? It will most likely be replied, that in the second instance it is the means used in the work that is referred to. Yes, but why does He change from *seeing* to *entering into*? And why water and Spirit in John iii., and the Word in 1 Peter? The natural figure may help us to the understanding of the spiritual, but we must be careful to give all the Scriptures which speak of the thing their rightful place in our thoughts; and if we do this I think we shall not be found contending that the natural must be a perfect setting forth of the spiritual, and that the latter must in every detail answer to the former. I have no doubt the rigid adherence to the natural figure has blinded many to the right understanding of the spiritual reality. It is this carnal way of looking at things that has caused some to contend that the wilful son (Luke xv.) is a backslider, and the elder son a well-behaved believer. Scripture, they say, speaks of both as *sons*. And for the same reason, ignorantly of course, contend that *quickenings* precedes new birth.

We cannot learn spiritual things except from the Scriptures in which they are set forth. The figure or parable used in speaking of them will help us greatly to understand them, but in no instance are these things a perfect setting forth of that which the Holy Spirit of God desires us to learn. It is plain enough from the Word that :

First: To *see* the kingdom of God one must be born again (John iii. 3).

Second: We are born again by the living word of God (1 Pet. i. 23 ; James i. 18).

Third: The word comes to us by the Gospel (1 Pet. i. 25).

Fourth: There must be faith in that word (Heb. iv. 2 ; Luke viii. 12).

Fifth: None but those born again receive Christ (John i. 11-13).

Sixth: To enter the kingdom one must be born of water and the Spirit (John iii. 5).

Seventh: By means of exceeding great and precious promises those born again are made partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. i. 4).

One word more regarding fitness for the kingdom of God. There is a side of the kingdom for the inheritance of which something more than new birth is necessary. This is the heavenly side. In this flesh and blood can have no part (1 Cor. xv. 50). For this we must have our bodies changed from natural to spiritual. This change

shall be effected at the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Phil. iii. 20, 21).

#### LIFE.

As to the connection of life with new birth, the fact that we are born of the *living* word of God settles the question. Therefore we have no need to argue the matter from the natural standpoint, or to ask the foolish question if those born again are still-born: questions which expose those who ask them to the suspicion of being better acquainted with the natural than they are with what God says about the spiritual. The resort to such carnal weapons in defence of the truth reveals a very low spiritual condition, and utter ignorance of the nature of the adversary, who holds in contempt every weapon but the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

But when one has said all this, it is not all that can be said on the subject of this paper, for it is not all that Scripture says. I have sought to make clear from the Word that, from the beginning, all that were in blessing with God were born of Him, and that by the LIVING word of God. But I have not said, for I do not see that Scripture says, that all born again had eternal life. I do not question that divine life for man is always *essentially* the same, but when I say this it must not be supposed that I admit it to be the same

in power, relationships, and enjoyments ; for this would be going beyond, and contrary to, the revelation with which God has so graciously been pleased to bless us. I do not read of eternal life for man in the Old Testament at all, except in the sense of promise ; and even then there is nothing to show that the expression refers to anything else than the prolongation of the natural life in this world. “ Life for evermore ” (Ps. cxxxiii. 3) is the blessing commanded from Zion, the hill of grace, upon which God establishes the throne of the Messiah, and refers to the immunity from death which shall be enjoyed by the righteous during the millennial age. Dan. xii. 2, I doubt not, refers to the same thing.

In the New Testament none of the writers of the epistles refer to it except Paul, John, and Jude. We have it in the three Synoptic Gospels connected with the world to come (Matt. xix. 29 ; Mark x. 30 ; Luke xviii. 30). In Paul’s epistles it is connected with the eternal state (Rom. ii. 7), a blessing unconnected with the course of time, promised before the world began (Titus i. 2), of which the believer is in hope. With John, as is well known, we have it in present possession. With Jude we look from an apostate profession for the mercy of God, with eternal life in view.

In the writings of John, to which our thoughts naturally turn in connection with the subject on

hand, it had no existence previous to the coming of Christ into the world. It is "that which was *from the beginning*," and that *beginning* is the "word of life" (1 John i.). "In Him was life," we read in the Gospel; and in the epistle, "The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." Up to the advent of the Son of God it was with the Father, and not until the incarnation was it in man; no, not even in His sheep, for as to them He says, "I am come that they might have life," and "I give unto them eternal life" (John x.). Life in the way in which it is presented in Christ no man ever had until He came to bestow it.

#### THIS LIFE ONLY IN THE SON.

I do not question, as I have already said, that divine life is always *essentially* the same, but with John its beginning in man was when the Son became incarnate. It never was here before. And when He was here no one had it but the one who believed in Him. Whatever may have been their previous state, no one possessed this life apart from coming to Him and believing in Him. Though there might be those born of God, and though there might be "children of God scattered abroad" (John xi. 52), yet must all find life only

in Him as come into the world, the sent One of the Father.

This life then in the writings of John must be considered in a way far in advance of the way in which it was possessed by saints in past dispensations. And such is really the case, for it has come to light in connection with a revelation of God, and a relationship for man that never was dreamed of by prophet, priest, or king, in any dispensation. In connection with eternal life we come to the revelation of the Father and the Son; and the Son speaking to the Father says: "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3).

"*The Almighty God*," the name by which God made Himself known to Abraham, did not carry with it the truth of eternal life; neither did "*Jehovah*," the name by which He entered into covenant relationship with Israel; but the name of *Father* does. The eternal life which was *with the Father*, has come to light in the person of *the Son* in incarnation. Nothing brought to light in connection with the name declared to Abraham or to Israel carries one outside the dealings of God with earth, and with the seed of man upon earth; but when you come to the consideration of the truth of eternal life you are carried outside the whole old earthly order, either in innocence or

in guilt, into eternity itself, where we see its promise in Christ Jesus before the world began (Titus i. 2). Hence, when this eternal life comes into the world in the Son, whatever God's dealings may have been with men in the past, whatever work of grace may have been wrought in the souls of men, whatever "generation of the righteous" may have been found under the sun, or whatever may have been the blessing of those who were born of God, this life is to be found only in Christ incarnate, and by faith in Him as the sent One of the Father. No one is contemplated as in possession of this life except those who have believed in Him, though they may be viewed as born of God.

#### ETERNAL LIFE A HEAVENLY THING.

In John iii. new birth is spoken of as a necessity for man if he was to see the kingdom, but this is one of the earthly things which were promised to Israel, and which Nicodemus should have understood ; but eternal life is one of the heavenly things which the Lord did not expect anyone to understand. He says : " If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things ? " And no one could set forth the truth regarding this life but Himself, for no one had gone up to heaven to get acquainted with what was suitable to that

place, and returned to tell men anything about it, except Himself, who even while upon earth could speak of Himself as "*in heaven.*" And of that of which He had certain knowledge, that which He had seen and heard, He testified, and no one received His testimony. The prophets could testify of new birth and of life for evermore, as the blessing of millennial saints, and men could receive their testimony ; but of eternal life, in the way in which it was now to be presented to men in the incarnate Son, no one could testify but Himself, and no one at all, unless taught by the Spirit, could receive the testimony.

The basis of this blessing was the cross, wherein the whole state of man in the flesh came under the righteous judgment of God, and where that state was judicially ended, and where also the love of God to men universally was declared : "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." On this foundation alone could the gift be given ; for if men were to be brought into new relationships with God, and if they were to have life in the Son of God, not only must their sins be put away, but all that they were as after the flesh must be brought to an end judicially. Therefore must the Son of Man be lifted up.

The last two verses of chap. iii. are, I have no



doubt, the words of the evangelist, and carry us to the present position of Christ, into whose hand everything is put. To this the blessed Lord refers in His prayer to the Father, as He was about to leave this world. He says : " As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him " (xvii. 2). Therefore we have in chap. iii. 35, 36 : " The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life : and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The power over all flesh, which has been given to Him of the Father, is at the present moment exercised in grace, and in giving eternal life to those given Him of the Father.

Therefore in chap. iv. we find Him outside the limits of the Jew, and telling a poor degraded Samaritan woman of the gift of God. She had been hitherto well enough acquainted with the *demand* of God, but of the *gift* of God she knew nothing. He says to 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." To think of any one, without some previous work in his soul, knowing the gift of God, and who it was who had come so low as to be dependent upon

a poor creature like herself for a draught of water from the well, is impossible. One who could thus come as a suppliant to Christ must surely first have "heard and learned of the Father." None but those born again could thus come to Him. No doubt the responsibility of all was to come, but He has to say of many, indeed of all not taught of the Father, "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (v. 40 ; vi. 44, 45). All this is only in perfect harmony with the statement made in chap. i. 12, 13, which tells us that none but those born of God received Christ.

But the Lord has something more to say to this woman about this living water. He says : "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." What was this water ? I have no doubt it refers to the Holy Spirit of God shedding the love of God, which came to light in the cross, abroad in the heart, and leading the soul to the knowledge of the Father, and to cry, Abba, Father, in His ear. This is the way in which it springs up into everlasting life ; for eternal life consists in the knowledge of the Father and Jesus Christ His sent One. This lifts one out of earth, its dispensations, hopes, and blessings, even out of the kingdom which is under the heavens, into a region which lies outside the whole material

creation, and into fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

In chap. v. it is the one who hears the word of Jesus, and believes on Him that sent Him, who has eternal life. The word that He spoke was the Father's word; therefore He says: "Heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me." His word, being the word of the Father, brought the Father before the soul, so that He in His grace and love became the object of faith. Such an one, He says, "Has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Who would say that all this was necessary to a soul being born again? or that new birth carried such blessings with it?

#### APPROPRIATION OF CHRIST'S DEATH.

In chap. vi. He is the bread of God, which came down from heaven. But this bread was His flesh, which He would give for the life of the world. In this chapter the possession of eternal life hangs on the appropriation of His death. It is the resurrection world that is in view here, and the purpose of the Father, giving the one who saw the Son in humiliation and believed on Him a place in it, and in the heavenly blessedness that belongs to that sphere, in which the Father and the Son reside. For that world, man had no life in himself. Had he been able to gain life

by the fulfilment of his obligations, this would not have fitted him for entrance into that world which lies in the purpose of the Father. Only in the Son, and by faith in Him, was such a life available for man. But though the life was there in His person, no one could avail himself of it apart from the death of Him in whom it was. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, if it is to bring forth fruit, so must the Son of man be lifted up, as we get in chap. iii. ; and by the believer His death must be appropriated as the way of deliverance from flesh, if he is to have eternal life at the present, and his portion with the Father and the Son in resurrection at the last day.

That He could, and did, accredit those who believed in Him at that moment with eternal life is clear from ver. 47, for the germ of life was in such, but it is equally clear that no one could have life according to the height in which it is set forth in the chapter until Christ had died and risen again, for the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood was, according to verses 53-56, indispensable to its possession, and there could be no appropriation of His death until it had actually taken place. To take this Scripture any other way would, it seems to me, make the discourse of the Lord confused and contradictory. Indeed, all the teaching concerning this subject, which we have in chaps. iv., v., and vi., looks

for its fulfilment to the Saviour's going back where He was before (ver. 62).

#### THE SHEEP.

In chap. x. He makes a distinction between the nation of Israel, which had the ostensible place of Jehovah's sheep, and those that were His true sheep through the grace of God. His sheep hear His voice, and they respond to His call, believing in Him as the good Shepherd. He had come to give them life, and that in abundance (ver. 10). He gives them eternal life. By the work of God in them they were able to distinguish the voice of the good Shepherd from that of all others. The rest of the nation were deceived by strangers, thieves, and robbers; but to these the sheep turned a deaf ear. Taught of God they waited for the voice of the good Shepherd, and when they heard it they knew it directly, and to these He gave eternal life. It does not appear that they had it previously, whatever work of God had been in their souls.

#### THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

In chap. xi. He is the resurrection and the life. The power of these two great principles lay in His own person. As to the time in which this power shall be put forth He gives no indication. Martha had said that her brother would rise again

in the resurrection at the last day. With her it was more the *time* than anything else that was before her. But the Lord says, as it were, I am that which you are looking for: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." When He comes to put forth that power this will be the effect of it, and had Martha known this she never would have looked beyond the presence of the Lord to any last day's intervention. This is only another instance of the way in which the fulness of a future day is spoken of as present, and can be spoken of in this way, because He in whose person all blessing lies was there present.

#### THE FATHER'S COMMANDMENT.

In chap. xii. the Father's commandment spoken by Jesus was life everlasting. This was rejected by the nation, and would rise against them in judgment at the last day. What would have been life to them, had they received it, would be found by them in the coming day to be a witness against them, and condemn them in the presence of the Judge. They, by their rejection of Christ, judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life, and now they must be left to the consequences of their sins, and the rejection of the Saviour.

## THE FATHER AND THE SENT ONE.

In chap. xvii. we learn from the Lord Himself what eternal life consists in. Jesus says : " This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." It has been said that the word here translated "*that*" might equally well be translated "*in order that*," and that the thought conveyed is that life eternal is given to us as a capacity for knowing God. I will leave the *Greek* to the learned, with this remark, that the people who talk most about the meaning of Greek words are often those who know least about the language. But just look at the passage thus translated in English : " This is life eternal, in order that they should know Thee the only true God." I must say I fail to get hold of any definite idea in such a sentence. But I will not pursue the subject. I will come to another. It is said that it is not the knowledge of the Father with which eternal life is here connected, but "*The only true God*." Who then is the Son addressing in this prayer ? It is the *Father*, from the beginning to the end. And He says, " This is life eternal, that they should know Thee." Know whom ? The Father, surely. But who is the Father ? " The only true God." It is a pity that one is compelled to waste time over such quibbling.

## FROM THE BEGINNING.

Now in the Gospel of John we have something that was *in* the beginning, and in the first epistle of John we have something that was *from* the beginning. But in the Gospel the beginning has reference to the first movement of God in creation, for farther back than that we cannot go in our creature thoughts; and there we are told that in the beginning the Word was, and that all things were made by Him. To tell us that in the beginning He *was* is only another way of telling us that He had no beginning Himself.

But in the epistle we have One that was *from* the beginning; but the beginning here is the beginning of that which is the subject of the epistle—*eternal life in its manifestation on earth*. In the Gospel we have that life in the Son, but in the epistle we have it in the believer: “Which thing,” he says, “is true in Him and in you” (chap. ii. 8); and the moral characteristics, which are developed in this scene of contrariety, are pointed out, so that we may be able to distinguish the children of God from all others.

The life, he says, was with *the Father*. It could not come to light until the Son was here, for He is it, and it was not until He came into the world that the Father was declared. But when He came the Father was brought to light, as was also eternal life: both in His person. The



beginning, then, in this epistle, is the beginning of the manifestation of this life upon earth. Therefore John speaks here of that which was FROM the beginning.

Now this life was manifested in this world, "and," John says, "we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us"; the object of this being, "That ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." That is, that we might partake of that life which was with the Father, and that we might be brought into those holy and blessed relationships which subsist in the Son gone back in manhood to the Father, and share in all those heavenly and sacred affections which subsist between the Father and the Son.

This fellowship is in the light. The one who is in the light has the life, the one who is in the darkness abides in death. The light is the knowledge of God revealed in the Son, and the darkness is that of nature in its sinful and God-hating condition. Then the one who hates his brother is a murderer; and we know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. On the other hand, the one who loves his brother has the consciousness that he has passed out of death into life.

## THE THREE WITNESSES.

In chap. v. we come to the "*three that bear witness.*" The blood and water bear witness to the efficacy of the death of Christ for expiation and moral purification, the Spirit to the truth that eternal life is nowhere to be found but in the Son of God risen and glorified. But all three together supporting the testimony of God, that He has given to us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son. Therefore "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." This life is considered according to the fulness in which it came to light in the Son. Nothing short of this is recognized as life at all.

## HAVING THE SON.

Now what does *having* the Son mean? Could we say that Abel had the Son? Could we say that any one of those born again in the past dispensations had the Son? I do not think we could. To *have* the Son, I have no doubt, is to have Him as the manifested Object of faith. We are told in this same epistle (ii. 23) that the one who denies the Son has not the Father, but that he who confesses the Son has the Father also. To have the Son then is to have the Father, which no saint in past times had, for the Father had not come to light; the revelation of the Father

waited upon the manifestation of the Son. Both were declared together, and both are known together; to have the One is to have the Other.

Having gone over those precious unfoldings of the truth of this wonderful blessing, how could a doubt remain in any honest mind that eternal life is viewed at a height above all that was ever previously said concerning it to any human being? And what condition must the soul be in who would, in spite of the whole New Testament teaching concerning it, strip it of the knowledge of the Father and of the Son, and rob it of all those holy relationships and affections that are so bound up with the knowledge of these Divine Persons? It is impossible to lift up saints of the past dispensations to the level of the revelation given to us through the advent of the Son, hence there is no way by which the enemy can rob us of our peculiar blessings than by reducing us to their level.

I do not for one moment think that men are always wilful in their attacks upon that which is true in Christ, for many are quite convinced that the things they contend for are the truths of the Gospel; but their limited knowledge of the mind of God, though they themselves may be compassionate, cannot excuse them from being placed among those who resist the truth. If the Son of God is the eternal life—and Scripture says

He is—then the one who has eternal life must have Him, must be in the same relationship to the Father as He is, must be in the enjoyment of that holy love of which He is the worthy Object, must have his portion and his place in such association with Him, that “*as He is so are we in this world*” must be true of him. And this is just what Scripture sets before our souls as the truth, for “Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” To say this was true of Abel, Abraham, or David, because these were all born again, is to declare one’s own ignorance of the whole truth of God; and to say it is not that which is inseparable from eternal life to-day, is to deny the plainest statements of Holy Scripture.

I admit—have admitted in this paper—that the life of all saints in all dispensations is essentially the same; but, as another has said, “Charcoal and diamond are the same chemically, but very different actually,” so is life in relationship with the Father and the Son very different indeed from life in relationship to the Almighty God of Abraham, or Jehovah of the Twelve Tribes. And if I admit that life in all saints is essentially the same, I admit it, not because Scripture says so in so many words, but because I see no other life for man than that which is in God (Eph. ii. 1–5), granted by the Father to the Son in humiliation, and now in Him risen and glorified.

Whatever else may be said about eternal life, it is plain enough from Scripture that it lies outside the earthly order, either of innocence or of guilt. It is connected with a system of relationships and affections with which the innocent creation was utterly unacquainted, and for entrance into which man, even in his unfallen condition, had neither title nor power. It is not mere immunity from death, which was what was held out to man on the principle of obedience, but in connection with this life an entirely new man is involved, not earthly but heavenly ; a new and perfect revelation of God in His nature, the revelation of the Father in the person of the Son and in the power of the Spirit ; and this life made available for man by the cross, which is viewed, not merely as the place where our *sins* have been dealt with, but where *the man who sinned* has been judicially ended ; a life also when perfected in the power and in the sphere of resurrection, and in the place into which the Son has entered in manhood. Let me bring before the reader a few simple statements regarding it :—

First : It was promised *before the world began* (Titus i. 2).

Second : It was *with the Father* (1 John i. 2).

Third : It was *manifested in the Son* (1 John i. 1-3).

Fourth : That the believer should have it *Christ must be lifted up* (John iii. 14, 15).

Fifth : To possess it *the believer must appropriate His death* (John vi. 53-56).

Sixth : *He that has the Son* has the life, and none other has it (1 John v. 12).

Seventh : It lies in the knowledge of the Father, and of Jesus Christ His sent One (John xvii. 3).

#### QUICKENING.

I cannot very well conclude this paper without saying a word about "*quickenings*." I do not know any place where this could be rightly said to be the same thing as eternal life. One thing is plain enough, and not to be lightly thrown aside, and that is, that the apostle of the Gentiles, though he speaks in several places of *quickenings*, and in two of these places referring to it as a *present* exercise of Divine power, always speaks of *eternal life* as *future*; and in his epistle to Titus, as we have seen, He is in *hope* of it. He is *already quickened*, but *in hope of eternal life*. And indeed in both Colossians and Ephesians we have "*quickened together with Christ*," which involves life in the power of the indwelling Spirit.

I have very little doubt that it is looking at life in a far too subjective character that is the cause of a great deal of the confusion that exists regarding it. In this purely subjective way,

without objects which produce, control, nourish, stimulate, and engross the affections and the mind, no *creature* has life at all. No one but God Himself can exist without an object. Life may be beyond the power of the creature to understand or define, but I am certain that every creature who lives according to God, lives *to* Him by some knowledge that he has of God, and in the knowledge of, and by means of, the relationships in which he has been placed; and were he deprived of the light which he has of the goodness of his Creator, and of his relationships to him, he would be, where all lost souls are, in moral death.

Therefore I do not doubt that it is a sense of goodness brought home to the soul by the word of God, that produces new birth, for life is in the word; but that is not the same thing as being brought into the light of the perfect revelation of the Father in the Person of the Son and in the power of the Spirit, and in this is found eternal life. But to accept the notion of purely subjective life, which has not objects by which it has been brought into being, and by which it exists, is to wander into error, and attribute to the *creature* that which is only true of the *Creator*.

May both reader and writer know better the blessedness of being able to say, "We know that

the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God, and eternal life."



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