

The necessity of regeneration and faith to salvation is absolute, the necessity of baptism, or anything else, is merely relative (Mark 16: 16. (Schaff))

B. Is flesh—Human nature as at present constituted. The context shews whether the idea of sin is to be emphasized or not. By itself, the name at least implies sinful humanity, for there is no other kind by nature. Membership in the kingdom of God must rest upon a spiritual birth, for it is impossible for fallen humanity to step out of the fatal circle of recurring generations springing from a corrupted ancestry. To enter into a spiritual kingdom it is necessary to be born into it by regenerating spiritual influence. "There is a natural birth and there is a spiritual birth. The spiritual can never rise out of natural, as no stream can rise higher than its source." (Reith).

Is spirit—is kindred in character, in essential being, with the Spirit of God. Rom. 7: 6; 8: 2—10; 2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 6: 15; Eph. 4: 23; 1 Pet. 1: 23. This is Christ's answer to Nicodemus' incredulous question. "How can a man &c.?" He is born by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Evidently increased astonishment was depicted on his listener's face. Noticing his thoughts, our Saviour seeks to assist his comprehension by a familiar illustration.

7. Marvel not—For you see as wonderful things every day, changes which you cannot explain. **Ye**—He does not say "we." He was not "born of the flesh." In him from the first the Father was well pleased.

8. The wind—In Greek the same word stands for "wind" and "spirit". The R. V. marg. reads. "The Spirit breatheth," but the sense is not so good. **Where it listeth**—"list" and "lust" are from the same Saxon root. This illustrates the unrestrained action of the Spirit. You cannot bid the wind blow, or dictate its direction. We know the Spirit's work by its fruits (Gal. 5: 22), but his modes of action are diverse and the laws of his working unrevealed. **So is every one**—The points of resemblance summed up in "so" are (1) unrestrained freedom of action, (2) visible effects produced, and (3) ignorance of its origin and end is no reason for doubting the reality of the agent.

III. THE UPLIFTED SAVIOUR. **10. Art thou a teacher of Israel** (R. V.)—i. e. the wellknown, illustrious teacher. **Knowest not**—He ought to have known all these things from Jer. 31: 33; Ezk. 36: 26-28; Ps. 143: 10, 11 and such passages.

11. We speak—Some of his disciples may have been present. **Ye receive not our testimony**—Ye Jews, people and rulers.

12. Earthly things—"Things which take place on the earth." The new birth as manifested amongst men. "Facts which pertain to the domain of human consciousness and which man can verify by observation of himself." (Godet). **Heavenly things**—"The

heavenly side of the new birth and the salvation of man, in the eternal counsels of God regarding his only begotten Son." (Alford) These things have to be received by faith resting on the word of the Revealer. Christ proceeds to unfold these "heavenly things" and, in the next verse, asserts his competency to do it. "And no other than I can reveal to you heavenly things for I alone have come from heaven." (Meyer)

13. No man hath ascended—i. e. and returned to tell us any of the affairs of that world. **But he that came down**—at the incarnation (ch. 6: 33; 16: 28.) He speaks "in the prophetic language of accomplished redemption. He regards throughout the passage, the great facts of redemption as accomplished, and makes announcements which could not be literally acted upon till they had been so accomplished." (Alford.) He describes himself as the one who was to ascend back to the place whence he descended. **Son of man**—A title by which the Messiah was known. Dan. 7: 13. **Which is in heaven**—The meaning is similar to that of "which is in the bosom of the Father" (1: 18), indicating the kind of existence which Christ as the divine Son has ever had and continues to have." (Reith.) There is a profound mystery in the words. They clearly assert that He who spoke to Nicodemus was at the same time locally in heaven, in two places at one time. Compare John 8: 58. It is the mystery of the incarnation.

14. Having stated his right to speak of "heavenly things," Christ proceeds to declare God's method of salvation through his crucified Son. The reference is to Num. 21: 8ff. There are two points of comparison (1) being lifted up, and (2) giving life by simple faith. Fancy may find other resemblances between the brazen serpent and Christ, but the words do not suggest them. **Must**—Luke 24: 26. In pursuance of the unchangeable plan of God. In no other way can sinners be saved. Matt. 16: 21.

15. That whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life (R. V.)—Resting on him and his atoning death. "Faith in Christ is looking to him as given by God for our salvation from sin; it is the look expressive of helplessness, of need, of desire, of acceptance, of personal appropriation. A look brought sin into the world, a look takes it away." (Reith.) **Eternal life**—ch. 17: 3. "Life in the true sense is fellowship with God through faith in Jesus Christ and this, the possession of which is a matter of certainty now to the believer, lasts for ever." (Reith.)

16. For—the reason of the "must be lifted up." **So loved**—the measure of divine compassion is the sacrifice made to save men. Rom. 5: 8; 1 John 2: 2; 4: 8. **The world**—1 John 4: 9. The case of Abraham offering up Isaac is suggested. Heb. 11: 17; Rom. 8: 32.