

The Christian.

"FAITH COMETH BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD."—Paul.

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REGENERATION.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.—John iii. 3:

With the words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemus ringing in our ears, the importance of this question does not admit of an argument. To enter or enjoy the kingdom of God is an impossibility unless we are born again. Right here I am asked a question, "What do you understand by the kingdom of God? Is it the same as the church or the kingdom of which he said he would give the keys to Peter, or is it the everlasting kingdom spoken of by Peter in his second letter, i. 11, or heaven itself?" That Jesus spoke these words in view of his public teaching that "the kingdom of God is at hand," can scarcely admit of a doubt. Jesus left the glories, the beauties and riches of heaven and came to this world of sin, sorrow, suffering and death, to save fallen man. In carrying out this purpose he established a kingdom in which they were saved. The prophets spoke of this kingdom hundreds of years before the Saviour came to earth as the Son of God, and pointed out the time when it should be set up. John the Baptist came at or near that time declaring the kingdom was at hand. The preaching of John, of Jesus, of "the twelve" and the "seventy" kept this matter before the people; and as the Jewish Rabbi approached the Lord, no doubt but that he desired information about that which was so much talked of. There is, then, no such thing as enjoying or entering into this kingdom without being born again—born of water and the Spirit. "Yes," says a man, "that is so, you cannot go into the kingdom on earth without being born again, but we may go to heaven all right." Perhaps you may, but how much hope does God hold out to you in the pattern shown to Moses in the Mount. There was the holy place and the holy of holies. What was the holy of holies the type of? You will find the answer of this question in Heb. ix. 24, and if the holy of holies represents heaven, certainly the holy place is a type of the church or kingdom on earth. And how did they get into the holy of holies while the tabernacle stood. Did you ever read of a door from the outside to enter the holy of holies? No, the only entrance was from the holy place. Then my dear friend, whatever you may think it is possible for God to do, and however He may save those who are not gospel subjects, such as infants and idiots, do not run the risk of getting in outside of the ordinary way. If you come into the kingdom here and abide there, you will at least be near the door of heaven. When we consider the importance of regeneration, we certainly must wish to know what it is and whether we have been born again. What

does God's word teach on this subject? James says, first chapter and 18th verse: "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth." In this passage, God, the fountain of life, He from whom all life proceeds, is set before us as begetting of His own will. Let us then keep this point before our minds. God begets us or we cannot be born again. There is another important point brought before us in this verse, viz.: "The seed is the word of truth." In 1 Peter i. 23, we read: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." Here we are told that the seed is incorruptible and liveth forever. That is the word of truth, or word of God. Though everything else shall fail, Peter assures us that the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which, by the Gospel, is preached unto you. The word of God, like all other seed, has life in it. It liveth and abideth forever. Paul says, 1 Cor. iv. 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." Here are persons begotten, and we find the seed the same, the word of God, which Peter said by the Gospel was preached. But Paul calls himself their father and says he begat them. In Paul then we must recognize God's agent in this work. What have we now of the new birth: "That God begets; that the word of God is the seed; the same word that is used when the gospel is preached; that God employs agents to accomplish this work." Why then is not everyone who has the Gospel preached to him begotten? We read in 1 John v. 1 (new version). "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." Now a great many persons have the gospel preached to them, but the word preached does not profit them, not being mixed with faith by them that hear it. There is the same impurity, the same love of sin after hearing as before. But when the seed, the Word of God, is brought to the understanding of a man by God's agent and the man believes the word he is begotten, there is *new life*, for believing God's word purifies the heart and that is the source of life, the fountain of life. Peter says in speaking of the Gentiles, Acts xv. 9, "God put no difference between them and us, purifying their hearts by faith." The heart, by its rebellion against God, is filled with all evil and iniquity so that we serve divers lusts and pleasures; filled with malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. The Gospel preached by the apostles, believed by a person, so changes his heart that he not only loves God but also all God's creatures. How beautifully this agrees with the commission of our dear Saviour. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved and he that believeth not shall be damned." Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "The Gospel is

the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." I think we can now understand this statement: "The Gospel is the power." We are saved by being born again and in that birth the Gospel is the seed and without the seed there cannot be a birth, the seed must be there. But it is only the power of God to save them that believe. "He that believeth not shall be damned." Is this regeneration? When the Gospel, as preached by the divinely commissioned apostles, is presented to a man, and it fills his mind with love to God and love to all around him, and this love is welling up in his heart longing for some way to show the life within, is the man regenerated, born again? I answer *No*, certainly not! What have we found thus far: (1) God begets us by the word of truth and this is the incorruptible seed, the word which by the Gospel is preached. (2) The people in Corinth were begotten by Paul through the Gospel. (3) The Gospel had to be believed and "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." This is as far as we have got and we do not see a birth, only a begetting. There is no expression of the life as yet, and Jesus said to Nicodemus when he was in doubt as to the possibility of a man being born when he was old, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." There is water in connection with the birth and we can no more be born again without the water than we, in our natural birth, could have been born without a mother. Men may try to get the water out of this passage as much as they please but "it is *thar yet*," as the old Kentuckian said of Acts ii. 38. It must be there; Jesus uses a figure, the figure of a birth, and whoever heard tell of a birth without a mother. We are begotten by the Spirit, for what God does is done by His Spirit. The Spirit gave the word, for Peter says, "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. The apostles who preached the Gospel were filled with the Spirit and they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. When this word given by the Spirit was preached to a man by an apostle speaking as the Spirit gave him utterance, and the man hearing believed what was preached, he was begotten by the Spirit, no more, no less. There is only one place in the present dispensation where water is used; that is in the ordinance of baptism given in the commission by Jesus. Has this ordinance anything to do with regeneration? It must have if there is any water in regeneration, and Jesus has as surely put the water there as the Spirit. Do you call that baptismal regeneration? Then I believe in it. But is it baptismal regeneration? Let us see. The Spirit of God in and through the Gospel comes into the heart of a man and works such a change there that the love of evil is gone as is also all that hatred, envy, strife,