

The New Birth

By

Herman A. Hoyt, Th.M., Th. D.,
Dean, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PROPOSITION OF THE NEW BIRTH

"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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God" (John 3:16-21).

The conversation between Nicodemus and CHRIST is now at an end. Some will immediately dispute this statement, insisting that the words of CHRIST ended with verse 13. Others will insist that CHRIST's words do not come to an end until the close of verse 21. For each one of these three positions there are plausible reasons to support them. But this is hardly the place to enter into prolonged argument to support any position. It is sufficient at this point for the writer to state that as far as he is able to see at this time, the words of CHRIST ended with verse 15.

If this be true, then the words from this point on constitute the commentary of the apostle John. This does not mean that these words are of any less value than the words of CHRIST. In either case, they are the words of GOD the Holy Spirit. In the one case they would be the words of CHRIST which the Holy Spirit caused John to remember and write down. In the other case they would be the words given by the Holy Spirit to John, which words he wrote down. In one sense, if they are the words of the apostle John, they acquire value because they are imparted and directed by the Spirit of GOD, and in this sense they mark an advance upon the message of CHRIST, unfolding in greater degree precisely what CHRIST meant.

These concluding remarks of the apostle John are invested with special value because they constitute the mature reflections of the Spirit-directed apostle through sixty years of Christian experience. New birth had never been experienced before the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. From that memorable day when the Spirit was poured out upon that little band of believers until about 90 A.D. when John wrote the Gospel, he had had opportunity over a span of almost sixty years under the guidance of the Spirit, to see this supernatural experience in

operation and to observe its effects. During those years he had gradually come to understand what JESUS meant in His conversation with Nicodemus.

Here, then, is the conclusion to the whole discussion on the subject of New Birth. It is presented in the nature of a proposition. A proposition consists of provisions, safeguards, and issues. And all of these appear in verses 16-21. The provisions of the proposition are set forth in verse 16. The protection for the proposition is outlined in verses 17 and 18. The principles involved in this proposition are presented in verses 19 through 21. In this order the threefold movement of thought will be examined.

I. THE PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN THE PROPOSITION OF NEW BIRTH

"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" (John 3:16).

Within verse 16 a general statement of the provisions is made, a specific emphasis is incorporated, and the intended result is stated.

1. The general statement of the various provisions in this proposition are simply stated.

There is nothing formal or documentary about them. It does not begin with the word "whereas," and then proceed with carefully chosen legal language. But this doesn't mean that the language is not accurate to the minutest detail. It only means that it is phrased in the language of the common people and is therefore accessible to all people regardless of rank, education, or station. In this simple language the various provisions are clearly presented.

A proposition incorporates three things within its provisions: the parties, their performance, and the purpose.

The parties include the party of the first part and the party of the second part. In this proposition, the party of the first part is GOD. The party of the second part is "**whosoever believeth.**"

The performance of the two parties is likewise simply stated. GOD loved the world. He loved this world because He saw value in it. Mankind had been created in His image. This image even after being marred by sin was capable of restoration by divine grace. If this image were lost, a man would lose something more valuable than the universe. For this cause, GOD therefore made provision to save human souls. GOD gave His only begotten Son upon the Cross of Calvary. In this action He paid the penalty for sin to the last farthing.

The performance of the "**whosoever**" is described as "**believeth in him.**" This consists of mental assent to what GOD has done, the appropriation of the benefits, and a personal committal into the hands of this crucified Saviour. This is not the performance of a great feat, but the persuasion of the human heart to rest everything with CHRIST. It opens wide the door of hope to every sinner.

The purpose within the provisions of this proposition is twofold.

- on the one hand it is in order that the believer might not perish.
- on the other hand it is in order that the believer might possess everlasting life.

2. The specific emphasis in this proposition is the provision of redemption from a supernatural source.

This is performed through the exercise of divine judgment. That is the meaning of the words with which this verse begins. **"For in this manner God loved the world."** The word "so" means thus, or in this manner, and it directs the attention of the reader back to verses 14-15. There a serpent was lifted up, and in the same manner the Son of man must be lifted up. For in this manner GOD loved the world. It is therefore evident that GOD's love and GOD's gift have direct reference to Calvary. It was there that the fullness of divine wrath was poured out upon sin. But the wrath was inflicted upon the spotless Son of GOD who was made sin for men. In this event, GOD not only fully satisfied His holy wrath upon sin, but He also expressed His infinite love toward sinners. In this brilliant manifestation of wrath and love redemption was provided for sinners in whom there was no hope of recovery.

3. The intended result of this performance was twofold.

The immediate result was to spare the believer infinite loss from perishing. Apart from the righteousness provided by CHRIST in His work on the Cross, the sinner must suffer eternal death. But faith in CHRIST cleared away the cloud of sin that separated him from GOD. This opened the way for the ultimate result. Now GOD is free to enter into immediate and vital relation with the sinner and impart to him His own eternal life. In fact GOD enters the believer in the person of the Holy Spirit. Now the believer has God-life, and this is eternal life. This event is the New Birth.

This makes it clear that salvation is ultimately the experience of the life of GOD through the avenue of New Birth. It is also clear that the method by which one enters this experience is the redemption of Calvary. Thus the benefits of Calvary can be realized only as one exercises the responsibility of faith.

II. THE PROTECTION INCORPORATED IN THE PROPOSITION OF NEW BIRTH

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:17-18).

While it is true that a proposition centers specifically in its provisions, it is always necessary to throw about those provisions protection to guarantee their fulfillment. The protections are therefore generally added to and included within the proposition. Responsibility for failure, it is declared, does not rest with GOD (17). Such responsibility must be laid at the door of men themselves (18).

1. A proposition centers in its provisions.

The provisions are usually simply and briefly stated. It is certainly true in this case. Surely no language could more simply and briefly state the provisions of the proposition than that of John 3:16. But minds vary and the medium of human speech can be misunderstood, so every effort is made to protect the proposition from false interpretation.

This is done so that in the end its purpose will be accomplished for the parties involved.

During sixty years following the nocturnal visit of Nicodemus to CHRIST, John has witnessed the strange and sundry interpretations that have been given to the simple message of the Gospel. They were unwarranted, but they were very real. In most cases they were the emanations of the carnal heart in an effort to escape human responsibility. For "**the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?**" (Jeremiah 17:9). The answer is - the Holy Spirit of GOD, "**for the Spirit searcheth all things**" (I Corinthians 2:10). It is therefore under the guidance of the Spirit of GOD that John writes into the text the message of verses 17 and 18. In these verses he places the responsibility for success or failure exactly where it belongs.

2. The responsibility for failure, it is definitely declared, does not rest with GOD.

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17).

It was necessary to state this because he had already affirmed that there was a manifestation of GOD's wrath in judgment at the Cross of Calvary.

Sin-benighted minds have always associated manifestations of GOD with judgment.

- Was this not true of Jacob the night of his dream (Genesis 28:13-17)?
- Was this not the response of Manoah when the Angel of the Lord came to him (Judges 13:22)?
- Was this not the experience of Job (Job 42:5-6),
- and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-5),
- and Daniel (Daniel 10:4-7),
- and Mary (Luke 1:29-30),
- and the shepherds (Luke 2:9-10),
- and Peter (Luke 5:8-9),
- and the eleven (Luke 24:36-37),
- and Paul (Acts 9:4-6),
- and John (Revelation 1:17)?

Since this was true for those who had some knowledge of the true GOD, it is reasonable to suppose it is more than true for that vast host of men and women who sit in pagan darkness. For them to whom this proposition will come, there must be a hedge thrown about this manifestation of GOD at the Cross. That event was not to condemn the world. It was for the purpose of saving the world through CHRIST. Fear and fright on the part of men from this provision in the Cross will only cause the work of GOD to fail. But the responsibility for failure will not rest with GOD. GOD's work in CHRIST at the Cross is finished. Any failure in the outworking of its purpose must be charged to men.

3. Therefore, just as definitely, the Word of GOD declares that responsibility for success or failure must be laid directly at the door of men themselves.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

There is judgment taking place, but it is not from GOD.

In the good providence of GOD, man is permitted to mount the throne of judgment, and sit in judgment upon himself. He sits in judgment upon himself and decides his own eternal destiny. By believing on Him, the crucified CHRIST, he is thus deciding that his sin was judged at Calvary in CHRIST. The continuous exercise of this faith in CHRIST guarantees that this man is ever being delivered from being regarded as a fit object of judgment by GOD.

Nor is there any middle ground. The failure to believe does not mean that he is taking a neutral position. His action is just as positive on the other side. The man who does not exercise continuous faith in CHRIST has been judged already. He has decided his case by not acting upon the proffered remission of penalty provided in CHRIST. His case is therefore settled, and he himself has settled it. He has every reason to expect that the sentence for sin will fall upon him in GOD's appointed time.

The criminal case of man is thus decided in the court room of his own heart. He is the criminal.

- as criminal he pleads guilty to sin.
- as jury he reaches the verdict of guilt.
- as judge he pronounces the sentence.
- by believing on CHRIST he elects to have the penalty borne by CHRIST regarded as his own.
- by refusing to believe in CHRIST he elects to bear his own punishment.
- by believing in CHRIST he places himself in the position of one to whom GOD can communicate Himself in New Birth.
- by refusing to believe in CHRIST he places himself in the position of one from whom GOD must ultimately separate Himself in divine wrath.

III. THE PRINCIPLES IN THE PROPOSITION OF NEW BIRTH

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:19-21).

Now that it has been established that responsibility for deciding the issues rests entirely with man, it is necessary to show the principles that are in operation. Unvarying laws of action are working themselves out in the decisions men make toward the provision for New Birth. Recognition of these laws of action may help men to diagnose their own case.

Disclosure of a principle operating in a man's life does not always come at the moment of decision. It may be hidden at the time and revealed much later. But it may be depended upon as the sure Word of GOD, that in every case it is the actions of men that finally reveal the reasons for their decisions. In other words, the actions of men ratify their decisions.

1. Ratification is the agreement of conduct with character.

The principle is stated in verse 19. "**And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**" This covers the whole of action, for the believer as well as for the unbeliever. For the unbeliever it is stated. For the believer it is implied.

The opening statement places the matter before the mind. "**And this is the condemnation**" (KJV). The revisers used the word judgment in the place of condemnation. The word means "*crisis*." (*krisis*) It means the process of judging. Then the process is analyzed. Light has come into the world, and to this light men respond in one of two ways. They either hate the light (20), or they come to the light (21). If they hate the light, it is because they love darkness. If they come to the light, it is because they do the truth.

The reason men love the darkness is because they find in the darkness that which they count of value. This value lies in the fact that it covers their deeds, and they do not desire to have their deeds examined and evaluated by the light. Their deeds are rotten at heart and the light would expose this condition. They prefer to believe that such revelation would be the establishing of a false standard of measure. On the other hand, the man who loves the light and comes to it recognizes that light bears on its very fact the stamp of divine reality, and he wants his deeds to be measured by the standards of truth.

2. There is ratification of this principle by the man who rejects the proposition in CHRIST for New Birth.

"**For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved**" (20). The unfolding of the meaning in this statement centers in three words.

First, there is the word "**doeth**." From the Greek word there has come into the English language the words, *practice*, *practical*, and *pragmatic*. This means that the motivating force in this man is that which works, accomplishes something, gets things done. Ethics is not the primary concern. Fulfillment is the principle emphasis. This is evident from the fact that he practices evil.

Second, there is the term "**evil**." This word describes the standard of morality by which this man measures accomplishment. This is one of many Greek words that are translated into English by the term "**evil**." The word first means that which is easy. Then it comes to mean that which is ordinary. And finally it designates that which is bad. The man thus described as doing evil is one who finds it personally easier to respond to the impulse of the sinful nature, to conform socially to the conduct of ordinary society, and thus to engage in that which is essentially bad, for it accomplishes something.

Finally, there is the word "**reproved**." This is a legal term denoting *conviction*. This does not refer to subjective conviction of conscience. This does refer to *objective conviction by the standard of truth*. Most criminals are not convicted in conscience though they stand convicted by the law. Upon the basis of conviction by truth, the guilty one is therefore obligated to suffer the punishment he deserves. The man who lives by the principle that the end justifies the means, and therefore pursues a course of the easy, ordinary, bad in order to achievement, this man will never submit his deeds to the measurement of light. He knows, though he will never admit it, that in the end he will stand convicted by the standard of truth and will be obligated to suffer punishment. This man will never come to CHRIST.

3. There is also the ratification of this principle by the man who receives the proposition in CHRIST for New Birth.

"But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in Christ" (21). There are three expressions in this verse, when explained, that help the reader to understand the principle of action.

First, there is the expression "**doeth truth**." This does not say, "**doeth righteousness**," as though this were to be set over against the expression "**doeth evil**" as an exact opposite. The man who comes to CHRIST is no different than the man who refuses to come to CHRIST in one respect. "**For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God**" (Romans 3:23). But the difference lies in the fact that the man who comes to CHRIST doeth truth. In this he recognizes the true standard of righteousness, and he admits that this standard has taken a true measure of his deeds. The verdict is that his deeds are sinful and he deserves to be punished. In this there is also the admission he must present himself for judgment. A man like this is open, frank, honest, and knows that coming to the light is a confession of sin and obligation to suffer just punishment.

Second, there is the expression "**made manifest**." This means to bring out into the open and make plain that which hitherto existed but was not known. When a man comes to the light, when a man confesses CHRIST as Saviour, he is admitting publicly that the light has exposed him; that the light has brought his deeds out into the open and made them plain. Especially has it been made plain to him that his deeds are evil. It was true before, but was hidden from him. But now that he knows, his coming to CHRIST makes this manifest to others, and in coming to CHRIST he "**doeth truth**," he is conforming his conduct to the facts of truth.

Third, there is the expression "**wrought in God**." What has been wrought in GOD? His deeds. What deeds? Doing truth. Frankly facing the standard of righteousness, he discovered that his deeds were sinful. He confessed this by coming to CHRIST as the only one who has the right to judge sinners. But in coming to CHRIST as judge, he found that sin had already been judged in Him at the Cross. As a result he found in CHRIST a Saviour.

The explanation for his coming to CHRIST is to be found in the fact that his deeds have been wrought in GOD. This is another way of explaining that this man has been born again. From above GOD has moved upon him. By His word he has been cleansed in that he accepted the removal of guilt in CHRIST. Simultaneously the Spirit of GOD has imparted to him new life. His actions reveal the new life that is moving within him. Doing truth by coming to the light in

the Saviour where his deeds are made manifest, this man displays the fact that GOD has moved upon him in sovereign grace.

In magnificent movement of thought, the Spirit of GOD has revealed through John the Apostle the principles which explain the response of men to GOD's provision in CHRIST for New Birth. Both believer and unbeliever are charged with personal responsibility to respond to the provisions in CHRIST. Rejection on the part of the unbeliever must be borne by himself. Reception on the part of the believer is traced ultimately to the movement of GOD in sovereign grace.

At last the Spirit of truth has brought the reader of this Gospel back to the place where CHRIST began with Nicodemus. Shattering every erroneous theory of men, CHRIST declared that a man must be born from above in order to experience the rule of GOD.

With the skill of the master teacher that He was, CHRIST demonstrated that this was impossible of accomplishment on the human level, but through His own heavenly performance at the Cross he is now able to share His own eternal life with men. In those who come to Him, already He has wrought in them His own divine presence through the experience of New Birth.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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