

FAITH AND NEW BIRTH.

IT has been taught that, except in one passage (1 John v. 1), the force of which is sought to be explained away, New Birth is not in Scripture linked with faith; or, as otherwise expressed, that New Birth is the sovereign operation of God apart from faith.

Negative statements of this kind are always dangerous, and the raising of subtle questions in what is plain for those who are simple can but unsettle souls. If it be asked, Do you really mean to separate faith from the divine operation in a soul called "New Birth?" no distinct answer is given, but a pre-emptious adherence to the words of Scripture is advocated, to cover the theological doctrine. It is an old device of the enemy who knows how to use the *letter* which kills in order to quench the power of the *spirit* which gives life. (2 Cor. iii. 6.)

New Birth has been taught to belong to "earthly things," in a way that implies it has little or nothing to say to "heavenly things." It is hard to believe that Christians should yield themselves to such reasoning. But as this "strange doctrine" is spreading, I have felt called upon to invite attention to the following passages of Scripture:—

John i. 12, 13: "But as many as received Him, to them gave

He power to become children 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.* The 13th verse describes as "born of God" those who have faith in Christ's name (ver. 12). Is this not linking New Birth with faith? The whole gospel is "written that we might *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we *might have life THROUGH HIS NAME.*" (John xx. 31.)

There was indeed a faith "in His name," which did not involve any change of heart in some of those who followed Jesus. It arose simply from human intelligence exercised correctly, though not spiritually, upon the evidence of the miracles which they saw. That was not saving faith. To such, Jesus had to say, as He did to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." That is to say, the faith must be of divine origin, not a mere conviction produced by man's wisdom or powers of reasoning. More than this, Jesus explains it in detail as the necessity of being "born of *water* and of the Spirit." The *water* purifies the heart, by the application of death morally to the natural man; the *Spirit* communicates a life which did not exist before; for in believing, we pass from

* A historical application of these verses to those into whose midst Jesus came, and with whom He identified Himself at His baptism, deeply interesting as it is, is not our present subject. The point of the passage is, that Jesus, being rejected as Messiah by "His own," that is, by the Jewish nation, introduces a new kind of relationship in connection with the revelation of the Father's name, as in Matt. xi. 25-30. Israel is set aside, and the new covenant blessings, which were to be brought in by the Messiah, are forfeited by that favoured people. But the Son reveals the Father, and introduces a new relationship with God, that of children, which depends not upon promises, however precious, but upon the revelation of the Father's name. (John xvii. 3, 6, 8, 11, 12, 26.)

death to life (John v. 24). Is not the water a well-known symbol of the *Word*? "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Read Isaiah lv. 1, 2, 3, 10, 11; Matthew xiii. 19-23.

Here again, then, faith is not only linked with New Birth, but the Lord insists upon divine intervention as being necessary in order to produce the only faith which is of avail, and then shows that the Son being the object of it—the Son of Man lifted up, and the Son of God,—he who believes *has* "Eternal Life." Blessed truth!

When God shall set up His *earthly* kingdom,* and the promised "times of refreshing," shall be established under the universal rule of David's Son—God's anointed King, He will not allow unregenerate man to turn it all to his own selfish profit, and corrupt it by his lusts; and with even more facility than he can in the present condition of things, for *then* the blessing will be widespread and guaranteed. The nation of that day will not be on their trial, resulting in their further debasing themselves, like Israel of old, by setting up the stumbling-blocks of their iniquity before their eyes. No, Satan will be bound, and the people will "enter into the Kingdom," with self-loathing, with renewed hearts, and obedient spirits. (Ezekiel xiv. 1-11; xxxvi. 16-36.) They will be born again, "born of water and of the Spirit." God's

* The "kingdom of God" is not limited to "earthly things." It is God's authority exercised according to His own nature and holiness, whether in heaven or on earth. The Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name: Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Elsewhere we read that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. xv. 50) Paul looked to be preserved unto the Lord's "heavenly kingdom." (2 Tim. iv. 18.)

word will be written, not on the tables of stone, but in their hearts ; and the veil that is now upon their heart, obscuring Christ, shall be taken away. If that be needful for enjoying the earthly blessings of the new covenant, how much more is it needed now that God introduces us into the "heavenly things" which Jesus brought with Him,—things He *knew* and had seen. Further, one may ask, Why is it only in John out of the four Gospels that we find the New Birth? Why does not Matthew speak of it, if it is to be limited to the earthly things of the new covenant?

In accordance with what is said elsewhere, "Ye are all SONS OF GOD, by *faith* IN CHRIST JESUS" (Gal. iii. 26), the Epistle of John shows that the New Birth, in its special present application, is connected with the revelation of the Father's name. The object of the Epistle of John is not to show how we get life, but what the life is that believers in the Son of God possess: consequently we might not expect to find much about *faith* here; but nevertheless we read, "Who-soever *believeth* that Jesus is the Christ is *born* OF GOD; and every-one that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him." (1 John v. 1.) Blessed, precious words! How simple! How intimately linked together are New Birth and faith in Jesus Christ. He is the object of faith, and marvellous indeed is the blessing involved, a now revealed relationship with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that He could say to His disciples, "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." (John xx. 17.) Hence, in the Epistle, we read: "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is *born* of Him. Behold, what manner of love the Father has

bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God! therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew Him not." (1 John ii. 29; iii. 1.) May God grant that the holy life of Jesus may be more completely reproduced in everyone of His own, in an unworldly, devoted walk in faith and love—that we may be found walking, indeed, "even as He walked." (1 John ii. 6.) "This is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment." (1 John iii. 23.)

1 Peter ii. 22, 23: "Seeing that ye have purified your souls in *obeying the truth* unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being *born again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by THE WORD OF GOD, which liveth and abideth for ever." With this we may compare Acts xv. 8, 9: "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bear them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, PURIFYING THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH." Is not "obedience" to the truth an expression of "*faith*," or, in other words, the reception of the word of God "in an honest and good heart?"

James i. 18-21: "Of His own will BEGAT He us with the WORD OF TRUTH, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures. . . . Receive with meekness the ENGRAFTED WORD, which is able to *save* your souls." This passage is of deep importance as bringing together the divine "will," the sovereign grace of "the Father of lights," and man's responsibility to be "swift to hear."

When the Lord is speaking of those who were "offended" at His doctrine, He says, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you,

they are Spirit, and they are life : but there are some of you that *believe* not." (John vi. 63, 64.) There can be no "quicken- ing" apart from faith wrought in the person quickened, who receives the word "sown in the heart." (Luke viii. 15.)

How all these passages—to say nothing of the uniform teaching of Scripture on this subject—associate in the closest way, faith with quickening, or the being born anew. We may add the remarkable one in Eph. ii. 8–10: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are His workmanship,* created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them."

If New Birth were apart from faith, what necessity would there be for a revelation of God to the soul? We should in that case have a soul made alive by divine operation, but in no relationship with God at all. New Birth is the ushering of a soul into life by divine power,—life which is not of the flesh

* In the song of Moses (Deut. xxxii. 18), the two thoughts of *begetting* and of *creating* are associated in the closest way, both referring to the outward position in which the nation of Israel was set, on the ground of redemption. The name of "father" is there used (ver. 6) as expressive of what God *does*, as Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Our present relationship with God as Christians depends upon the unfolding of what He *is*, as revealed by and in the Son (John i. 18). In the detail of the revelation, John gives the *begetting*, Paul the *creating*. John presents the Son as the *only begotten* of the Father, and speaks much of the communication to us of Eternal life, and of our being *born* or *begotten* of God. Paul sets forth Jesus as the First-begotten *from among the dead*, and speaks of the new *creation*, in connection with the putting forth of God's mighty *power* in raising up Christ and setting Him at His own right hand; his Gospel is the "*power* of God unto salvation to every one that *believeth*." God's righteousness is therein "revealed on the principle of faith." (Rom. i. 16, 17.) Compare 1 Thess. i. 6; ii. 13.

nor of this world, but divine in its origin, source and character, unending, and holy. But it is also a universal principle of Scripture, that "the just lives by *faith*." Now the life communicated at the present time is called "Eternal life," in the sense that Christ, as the Son of the Father, is the expression of it. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and JESUS CHRIST WHOM THOU HAST SENT." (John xvii. 3.) The Holy Spirit is the power of the life, not only as giving the sense of the relationship with God, but power for enjoyment and communion, for fruit-bearing and walk. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father." (Gal. iv. 6.) "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

Let us not forget that Jesus said, in speaking of one born of the Spirit, "*Thou canst not tell* whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." (John iii. 8.) This word of the blessed Lord's should surely restrain any reasoning of our minds as to what passes in a soul who hears the word.

The parable of the "sower" was the very first that Jesus spoke after His testimony to the people had been refused; for the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done repented not. The "wise and prudent," who had in their hands the "oracles of God" which testified of Jesus, had no heart to profit by what was written, and thus see in Jesus the perfect answer to all that had been fore-announced about Him. Thenceforward it was to be hidden from them. They honoured God with their lips, but their heart was far from Him (read Isa. xxviii. 9—13; xxix. 9—14; Matt. xi. 16—30; xv. 7—9.) The Lord no longer sought fruit on the "fig-tree"—the symbol of His chosen people of Israel—and very soon was it to be

dried up from the roots. (Matt. xxi. 19, 20; Luke xiii. 6—9.) The trial of man under responsibility was concluded by the rejection of the Messiah who brought with Him all the blessings of the New Covenant, promised and guaranteed, not on the ground of law-keeping, but of God's sovereign grace. No further probation remained. The time was come to unfold far higher purposes, depending not on law-keeping nor even on promise, but on what God was Himself, the Father who had sent His Son, and given all things into His hand. The Son stands forth as the Revealer of the Father, and finds His own delight in acquiescing in the Father's grace of revealing these things "to babes." Instead of seeking fruit from the responsible nation, He takes the character of a "sower" and brings in the divine seed, to sow it in human hearts, and looks for fruit *only* from the seed He brings in. Hence the importance of this parable. Any theory which supposes quickening apart from the word thus brought in by the SON OF MAN is therefore a denial of what He is in His own Person, Son of God and Son of Man, rejected of His people, but the Revealer of the Father. He alone can say, "We speak that we do know and testify that we have seen." This is Christianity.

"He that hath not the Son of God hath not life." "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." W. J. L.

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