

The New Birth contrasted with The New Creation

Subjects which have been under consideration over a long period of time, acquire their own well-known terms. Often the mere discussion of a question conveys the idea that all is clear and plain to everyone, and further enquiry superfluous. Should the subject have been misunderstood, it is difficult to correct matters, for the familiar terms and their surroundings are not readily driven from the mind.

If the misunderstanding of the question arises from an erroneous background, then we have confusion, and correction becomes a real problem. Such a difficulty hangs around the new birth. For example, when fundamental evangelicals consider the new birth, any suggestion that calls for enquiry is deemed to be the mark of apostasy. Enquiry is furthermore hampered, because figures which ought to be distinguished may have some features of similarity, and so two subjects remain mixed, leaving us without clear knowledge of either.

NEW BIRTH NOT UNDERSTOOD BEFORE

Nicodemus is not the only teacher who is ignorant on this topic. Unfortunately, the ignorance of the present day arises from a different cause than did that of Nicodemus. Today great emphasis is placed on the necessity for regeneration, whereas Nicodemus did not understand it to be a requirement for entry into the kingdom of God at all. Nicodemus thought that physical relation with Israel was sufficient for the kingdom; he did not recognize the necessity for a spiritual renewal, and yet the Scriptures, of which he was a teacher, plainly stated such to be the case.

The present position is almost worse, for we do not realize that the teaching presented to Nicodemus and Israel is radically different and distinct from that given to the nations through the apostle Paul. We suppose the *new birth* to be the truth of the evangel of God, and so we continue to be modulated by this figure and lose the greatness of the revelation through Paul, which greatness is characterized by comparing it with the future *new creation*.

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS AND PAUL DISTINGUISHED

At the outset of our enquiry, let us then discriminate that which the Lord Jesus proclaimed to *Israel*: the *kingdom of God*. What He said of it, we must retain in the context in which He gave it. Paul preached to the *nations* the evangel of God's grace, gathering the saints who are the ecclesia (church) which is the body of Christ. All the Lord Jesus said, His words as well as His figures, accords with the object of His mission to Israel and finds its correspondences in the Hebrew prophecies, which relate to Israel's establishment as God's holy nation on earth. But what Paul says has a more extensive horizon and deals first with blessings among the celestials for the saints, yet also develops matters related to the universe outside the earth.

Israel's blessings, then, are *upon the earth*; they focus Messiah's glory on this terrestrial scene. The blessings of the ecclesia are *celestial* and focus Christ's greater glories, related to His allotment of the universe. Birth is the figure which conveys to us what makes Israel's sons fit for the earthly, millennial sphere. But creation is the figure necessary to indicate the new and radical features of the ways of God which are *not centred in Israel*.

With these distinctions made plain, we are ready to consider the difference between the figures and, at the same time, to develop their respective connections and the revelations which range along with them.

DETAILS OF THE NEW BIRTH

The new birth is crystallized in the familiar words: *you must be born anew* (John. 3:7). Our elaboration of it must be sought either in the words of the Lord Jesus, of those who heard Him, or in the Hebrew revelation. It was a matter which Nicodemus ought to have known and taught in Israel, for the prophets had much to say regarding it. Actually, *it is the new covenant stated in a few words*. What the new covenant brings to Israel is the measure of the significance of the new birth.

A detail of the words *you must be born anew* –which is usually ignored –is that the word *you* is plural;

this is not the only case where the plural pronoun is of importance in guiding understanding. The plural speaks of the nation of Israel and not of individuals. An example is seen in Matthew 5:14—You are the light of the world. So also the words of John 3:7 indicate that it is Israel's sons as a whole, as a nation, which must be born anew. *The prophet Isaiah speaks of a nation born at one time (Isa. 66:8).*

THE KINGDOM OF MESSIAH A RENASCENCE

The establishing of Israel in the kingdom of God was the basis of the Messiah's ministry to them. He refers to the time when He, the Son of Mankind, will sit on His glorious throne, as the *regeneration*, or more suitably as the *renascence* (Matt. 19:28). The import of such a feature indicates that birth illustrates matters regarding the kingdom on the earth, of which Israel is the chosen centre.

Entrance into the kingdom is by the new birth. This is the truth insisted upon to Nicodemus, one of Israel's teachers. It is the truth which applies to Israel only, within the scope of the promises confined to them alone. *It is not truth for the present administration.*

SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHING THE NEW BIRTH

The particular significance of the new birth is its intimation that physical relationship with Israel is insufficient: there must be spiritual regeneration, for the children of the flesh are not the children of God. Israel's sons require a new spirit; the stony heart must be taken away and replaced by a new one. So will Israel walk in Jehovah's statutes and keep His judgments. This earthly glory is pledged and promised to Israel, and they enter it by the new birth.

God's eonian covenant brings them all these blessings. It is the new covenant which God makes with His earthly people. The blood of Christ is its basis. This is the particular aspect of Christ's death as it refers to Israel's position, outlined in the prophets and the so-called gospels. We should not import into the teachings of the Lord, or of the Twelve, the significance which the apostle Paul reveals as attached to the *cross*. Such things are not in the evangel of the kingdom; *the new birth is not related to justification or conciliation*, which subjects are exclusive to the ministry of Paul to the nations.

BAPTISM AND THE NEW BIRTH.

Repentance and Baptisms are the leading features of the proclamation of John the Baptist, of the Lord Jesus and of the Twelve, and they are related to the new birth. In fact, the elements of the new birth are water and spirit, and these are the mediums of baptism. John announced that he baptized in water for repentance, but He Who is coming after him will baptize in holy spirit. Here we have the causes of the new birth; the water of baptism finds its counterpart in holy spirit which fits its subjects for entry into the kingdom.

THE FIGURE EXPLAINED

The new birth fits for a life on earth during the millennium. It rejuvenates the faculties during that time when Israel is established in the kingdom. It is a renewal in kind, enabling the flesh to walk in the statutes, ordinances and judgments of God. Thus it is a provisional matter in His ways and produces children of God whom He will edify and lead to the maturity of sons, in readiness for the new creation and God's ultimate uniting of the universe.

Humanity has much to learn and discover and Israel's regeneration is one of the factors which will contribute to the peoples of the earth coming to know and understand God.

THE IMPORT OF THE NEW CREATION

The new creation is quite a distinct matter from the regeneration. The latter proceeds by the avenue of youth, whereas creation produces the adult. It gives sons of God, sons of whom the norm is Christ. The significance of *creation* is that which is *new* and, from the context in which we find this figure used, viz. the ministry of the apostle Paul, we perceive that it fits for a different sphere from that of the new birth. It brings about the radical change necessary for earth-born humans who will have a celestial destiny, the subjects of which will require powers and capacities far superior to those possessed at present, and they will receive them because they are new creations in Christ.

NOT EXPLAINED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The new creation will eventually embrace heaven and earth. On rare occasions new heavens and a new earth were mentioned by Israel's prophets, but into any details they did not go. Even in Unveiling (Revelation) we have only the barest outline, though it is made plain that the present heavens and earth pass away. Peter also tells of this and shows such things to refer to the day of God, whereas Israel's blessings through the new birth are confined to the day of the Lord of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Unveiling.

AN INSTALMENT OF THE NEW CREATION

The present economy and the evangel related thereto, produce the ecclesia which is Christ's body. It is the first installment of the new humanity which comes by the new creation. This portion of the new humanity is now being created in righteousness and benignity of the truth. It requires that we put off the old humanity, for the truth of the evangel shows that the saint, who is a new creation in Christ, really no longer belongs to the race of which Adam is the head.

IN CHRIST

It will be perceived that the new creation is "in Christ." It is the present spiritual counterpart of the period which comes after the regeneration of Israel in the day of the Lord. By the blessing of being a new creation we skip the deviousness of the childhood of the new birth and receive the maturity of adulthood. These facts of the future new creation fit the figures of our faith as found in the Ephesian epistle, and do indeed confirm the necessity that we correctly partition the word of truth.

CONCILIATION AND THE NEW CREATION

Further examination of the subject of the new creation shows us that it is the accompaniment of the conciliation, just as the new birth was associated with repentance and baptism. And if we follow the conciliation closely, we shall learn much of the deep things of God. Israel's religious ascendancy passes with the coming of the day of God. And we understand that conciliation will then be possible on earth as it has been earlier in the heavens. It could not become a fact on earth whilst Israel intruded between God and the remainder of humanity, as in the day of the Lord. And there is a valid reason for this, for the greater and more radical truths around the death of Christ are not in point in the day of the Lord. At that time the blood of Christ dispenses its virtue in making possible the new covenant to Israel. This is the limit of blessings to the present earth. But the new creation is possible because, in the death of His Son, God achieved greater things than a covenant with His people Israel.

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

Justification is possible because of Christ's death, but justification, though a glorious and fundamental matter, and contributing to the new creation, is not exclusive, being quite a necessary matter in every connection. But the conciliation is especially for the new creation. To us in this economy it has precious blessings for our delectation, but these treasures are not for Israel, for that nation does not enter the blessings of the conciliation, resulting from the death of God's Son. Nor does it attain to the deeper meaning of the 'word of the cross'. That divides between the old creation and the new creation; also between the old and the new humanities.

The cross obliterates all the features of the old humanity. Through the cross the old humanity was crucified with Christ. The cross sets aside circumcision and removes the barrier with the uncircumcision. Sin's flesh and all its connections are gone, having been crucified at the cross. A new humanity which accords with God is thus a possibility, and it finds its basis, not in the death of Christ, nor in the blood of Christ, nor the death of God's Son, but in the word of the cross which applies the crucifixion to humanity. The old humanity and all its features are no more--they were crucified and rendered inert.

E. H. Clayton

©Grace and Truth" granted permission
to Martin Lee (GoodNewsGospel.info)
to copy and distribute this document.