

BEGOTTEN AND BORN OF THE SPIRIT.

That beginning of spiritual existence, which dates from the moment persons believing in Christ as the ransom for their sin, make a full surrender or consecration of themselves to him; stands related to their final existence as actually spiritual beings (when they shall be "like Him" who is their Lord), as in the natural generation *begetting* stands related to *birth*. Really there are three steps of development, begetting, quickening, and birth; and so with those who become "new creatures in Christ" there are three steps which correspond in likeness; and to these corresponding names are attached in the Word of God. We are *begotten* through the truth – the Gospel (1 Cor. 4:15, and 1 John 5:18). In due time the *quickenings* into activity, zeal, and labor, will give evidence to others that we have been begotten of the truth to newness of life; the new hopes and aims, the spirit of Christ in us, will "*quicken* [or make active in God's service] our mortal bodies." – (Rom. 8:11.) And finally [unless we lose the new life, the spirit, and become "castaways"] we shall in the resurrection come forth, or be *born* into full spirit-power and being, and be "like him" who is the "express image of the Father's person."

It happens that the same Greek word, *gennao*, represents the same thought as our two words, beget and born, and in our common translation it is rendered beget, conceive, begotten, as well as born, delivered, bear.

For ordinary purposes it made little difference, as the connecting discourse would generally indicate whether conception or birth was meant. For instance, if the father were spoken of in connection with the word *gennao*, it would be translated *beget*, for it would [R837 : page 5] be manifestly improper to speak of a child as *born* of a person of masculine gender. Likewise, in using the word *gennao* when referring to a woman, *born* would be its understood significance, since it would be improper to speak of a female begetting children.

But human begetting and birth are used to illustrate or symbolize spiritual processes, and here it is more difficult to determine when *gennao* should be understood as referring to begetting, and when to birth. It is safe, however, to say that when God is associated with the matter he is always regarded as of the masculine gender; hence *gennao*, when used in connection with God, should be always rendered beget or begotten. The translators have so used the word in the following instances: –

"Thou art my Son; this day have I *begotten* thee." – Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5. "He that loveth him that *begat* loveth him also that is *begotten* of him." – 1 John 5:1. "He that is *begotten* of God keepeth himself." – 1 John 5:18.

On the contrary, in the following cases *gennao* is rendered *born* in the common version; whereas we believe, for the reason named above, God being associated with the action, it should be rendered begotten. These instances occur in John 1:13; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4 and 18.

In 1 Peter 1:3, *ana-gennao* is correctly rendered "begotten again," but in verse 23 the same word is rendered incorrectly "born again." Please note these illustrations carefully.

Our special attention is drawn to the use of the word born, in John 3:3-8. The word rendered born eight times in these six verses is the word *gennao*; and the question arises, does the word, as here used, signify born or begotten – which? Or should it be some places translated one way and some the other?

It is our opinion that the translation born is correct, except in the first and seventh instances (verses 3 and 7), where we think the significance is *begotten*. In verse 4 it certainly is correctly rendered *born*, as the association is feminine. And in verses 5,6, and 8, *born* is undoubtedly the correct translation, because water, flesh, and spirit, are treated as feminine, the literal rendering of the Greek being born *out of* water, flesh, and spirit.

Our opinion of the use of the word in verse 7, is that it is a reiteration of our Lord's first statement (v. 3), and verse 3, we think, should be rendered begotten, because to introduce the subject of the second birth (resurrection) so abruptly would be unreasonable, while to introduce the new begetting would be highly proper, as we trust may be seen from the following suppositionary statement of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, of which evidently but a meagre fragment is given by the apostle in the verses under consideration.

Supposed conversation: – Master, I have heard and seen much of you and your work of late. I am convinced that you are a teacher sent of God, for your miracles attest this; but some of your statements seem very inconsistent to me, and I have called to ask an explanation. For instance, you and your immediate disciples go about proclaiming, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," but you have neither an army, wealth, nor influence, and to all appearance your claim is a fraud, by which you are deceiving the more ignorant. My fellow-pharisees regard you as an imposter, but as I said before, I am sure there must be some truth in your teachings, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him. This, then, is my inquiry – the object of my visit – Of what sort, when and from whence is this kingdom you proclaim, and when and how is it to be established?

Jesus. – Your request to have a full understanding concerning the kingdom of heaven cannot be answered to your satisfaction; not that I do not know about it fully, but that in your present condition you could not understand or appreciate it if I would explain (John 3:3). "Except a man be *begotten* from above, he cannot see [Greek *eidon*,* to know or be acquainted with] the kingdom of God."

*The same Greek word is translated consider, Acts 15:6. The Apostles and elders came together for to *consider* [know or understand] of this matter. The same word is rendered *behold* in Rom. 11:22. "*Behold* [consider, understand] therefore the goodness and severity of God; also in 1 John 3:1, "*Behold* [consider, know, understand] what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." These illustrations substantiate our claim, that Jesus, speaking to Nicodemus, meant that

except a man be *begotten* of the spirit he cannot know, understand, or be acquainted with the doctrines and facts relative to the spiritual kingdom.

You rightly say that my most zealous followers have very indistinct ideas of the character, etc., of the kingdom they are proclaiming. I cannot tell them for the same reason that I cannot tell you. They could not understand [R837 : page 6] for the same reason. But, Nicodemus, this is one peculiarity of God's dealings in the present time. He requires obedience to what light is enjoyed before full light is given. In the selection of those who shall be accounted worthy to share the kingdom, a manifestation of faith is required – they must be such as are willing to follow God's leadings step by step, seeing only the next step clearly: they walk by faith and not by sight.

Nicodemus. – But I don't understand you. What do you mean? How can a man be born again after he is grown to maturity? You cannot mean that he must be born again from his mother?

Jesus. – No; let me illustrate what I mean by reminding you of "John the Immerser" and his work. His baptism represented in symbol a change of mind, a beginning of life anew, the sinner rising from the water symbolized a new person. This will at least give you a hint of what I mean by speaking of a new begetting and new birth. John's work was a preparatory one, to prepare men for the kingdom by teaching a change of heart and life as expressed in his baptism. Such a change of heart and life was necessary, but more is necessary; the still higher begetting and birth of which I am now telling you. And except a man have the reform of heart and life, the birth out of water, and be in addition born (out) of the spirit, he cannot *enter into* the kingdom of God.*

*The expression "*enter into*" here, has the sense of *share*, or partake of, as in other cases where the same Greek word is used. Thus we read, "If thou wouldst *enter into* (partake of, or share) life," and "Pray lest ye *enter into* (partake of or share in) temptation." So here the Lord spoke of those who would share in or be members of the kingdom or ruling power as royal officers, and not of those

millions who should be blessed by the kingdom, and be under it as *subjects* blessed and ruled by it.

The change to be wrought by this new birth is truly great, Nicodemus, for that which is born (out) of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born (out) of the spirit is spirit. Wonder not then at my first statement, that you must be begotten from above ere you can understand, know and appreciate the things of which you inquire. The difference between your present condition, born of the flesh, and the condition of those who shall enter into and constitute the kingdom I am preaching, is very great. Let me give you an illustration, by which you will gain a feeble idea of the beings who, born of the spirit, shall constitute this kingdom.

Thus is their condition illustrated: The wind blows here and there, you cannot see it though it exerts an influence all about you; you know not from whence it comes nor where it goes. This is as good an illustration as I can give you of those born of the spirit in the resurrection; those who shall constitute the kingdom which I am now preaching; they will all be as invisible as the wind, and men not thus born of the spirit, will neither know whence they come, nor when nor where they go. "So is each one born (out) of the spirit."

Nicodemus. – Your claims seem more unreasonable to me the more I hear of them. I cannot conceive it possible for beings to be present yet invisible, or to go and come unseen, as the wind. How could it possibly be so?

Jesus. – Can it be possible that you, a master in Israel, are ignorant of this simple fact, that spirit beings can be present yet invisible? Have you, who attempt to teach others, never read about Elisha and his servant, nor about Baalam's ass? Furthermore, you are a Pharisee, who professedly believe in angels as spirit beings. But this illustrates what I told you at first, Except a man be begotten from above he cannot see [know, become acquainted with, or understand as reasonable] the kingdom of God and the various things connected with it.

I repeat, that if you would be led of God into all truth, and find a position in the kingdom which I am announcing, you must follow the light, step by step. As you do so, more light will come; and this is as rapidly as you will be prepared for it. I have been preaching things now due which you can understand, and performing miracles, and you acknowledge me a teacher come from God, but you have not acted out your faith and become my disciple and follower publicly. You must not expect to see more, until you act up to all you do see; then God will give you more light and evidence for the next step. Hence it would be useless for me to attempt to tell you heavenly things, for you would be no more convinced thereby; nay, my preaching would seem the more foolish to you. If what I have taught, which has been of earthly sort, or illustrated by earthly things which you could and do understand, has not brought conviction enough to your mind to make you a public follower, it would be no more convincing to you if I were to tell you of heavenly things of which you know nothing, for "no man has ever ascended into heaven," hence none could corroborate such testimony. I, who descended from heaven, alone understand heavenly things.+

+The words "*which is in heaven*," ([ver. 13](#)) are not found in the most ancient and reliable MSS.

There is an object in my coming, and before you or others could be begotten of the spirit I must perform my mission. And as Moses in the wilderness, among the bitten Israelites, lifted up the brass serpent, a symbol of the punishment of their sin, even so must the Son of man be lifted up to the eyes of the world of dying sinners. Bitten by sin, and they must by faith recognize in him their sin-bearer, **[R838 : page 6]** the one upon whom their penalty was placed, and by whose sin-offering they were redeemed; that believing on him thus, they might have life, enduringly.

A clear apprehension, then, of this lesson to Nicodemus, shows (1), a begetting, and ultimately a birth of the spirit; and (2), that a natural man, not begotten, cannot know or be acquainted with [see] spiritual truths, even though the great Master himself were the instructor; (3),

that obedience to the natural things which they can see, is a prerequisite to advancement in knowledge; as during the entire Gospel Age it has been a pre-requisite to **begetting** to the new nature. (4). Incidentally the Lord here assures us that what the Scriptures uniformly show concerning angels and God, namely: that they, though present with mankind, would be invisible as the wind, though powerful, will be true also of all who during this Christian age become "new creatures," members of the kingdom. (5). This agrees also with Jesus' other statement to a number of the Pharisees, "The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show, neither shall ye say, lo, here! Or lo, there!" as you might do with a visible and earthly government, "for behold the kingdom of God [shall be*] in the midst of you [visibly present on every hand in power, to bless the obedient and to punish the unruly].

**Shall be* should be understood here to agree with the words *cometh* and *shall*, which precede them in the sentence.

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