

THE CHURCH OF GOD



LESSON NO. 8

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CHURCH OF GOD

BIBLE

CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

LESSON NO. 8

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE “Born Again”

Most professing Christians sincerely believe they have been “born again,” but do not understand the REAL MEANING of the second birth. The TRUTH about being born again is startling—the most AWESOME revelation of your Bible!

NICODEMUS was a high-ranking Pharisee—one of the rulers of the Jews. He knew Jesus was a miracle-working prophet sent by God, and was deeply interested in His teachings.

But because Nicodemus did not want to be seen speaking with this man most of the other Pharisees called a “heretic” and a “deceiver of the people,” he came to Jesus secretly at night.

During that meeting, Jesus told Nicodemus a profound truth—something that completely mystified the man.

“YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN!”

“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” said Jesus (John 3:3).

Nicodemus, thinking of physical birth, was totally perplexed. He asked Jesus: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? (verse 4).

Jesus went on to show He was talking about a completely different *kind* of birth (verses 5-6). “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again,” He told the Pharisee (verse 7). But Nicodemus simply did not understand (verses 9-12). How like so many people today!

Most professing Christians think they were born when they “accepted Christ.” But what it really means to be “born again” they do not know.

The second birth described in the Bible is FAR MORE than most in traditional Christianity have assumed. When Jesus spoke of being “born again,” He did *not* mean what most people think He meant. It is vital that we understand.

TWO LITERAL BIRTHS

Nicodemus was familiar with the process of physical birth. Therefore he understood when Jesus told him, “That which is born of the flesh *is* flesh.”

But then Jesus explained that to enter the Kingdom of God we must be *born again*—not again of the *flesh*; not again entering the womb and being born again physically, as Nicodemus thought He meant. Jesus explained that we must also be born *of the Spirit*—born of God! God must be our Father this time! As we were born of the flesh through fleshly *human* parents, even so we must be born of the Spirit of our *spiritual* heavenly Father.

Jesus showed that there are *two different kinds* of birth—one physical, the other spiritual. When you were born of your parents you were composed of flesh. But “that which is born of the Spirit is SPIRIT” (John 3:6)—no longer composed of flesh, but of spirit!

There will be no blood in the body of one “born of the Spirit.” He will not have to breathe air to exist. He will literally be COMPOSED OF SPIRIT, declared Jesus.

That’s the plain teaching of your Bible! The second birth is *not* an emotional experience, but a *literal birth!*

To further clarify to Nicodemus the meaning of being born of the Spirit, Jesus continued to explain: “The wind bloweth where it listeth [where it wills], and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: *so is everyone that is born of the Spirit*” (verse 8).

Notice that carefully. When you are “born again”—born of the Spirit of God—you will be *invisible* to mortal eyes like the wind (unless you choose to manifest yourself as Jesus sometimes did after He was resurrected). The effects of the wind are easily discerned, but the wind itself cannot be seen.

Clearly, Jesus compared the spiritual birth to the physical birth—the physical being a *type* of the spiritual. Human parents pass on a *physical* nature to their children; when we are born of our heavenly Father, we will possess His *spiritual* nature in its fullness!

MAN THE “CLAY MODEL”

God formed the first man, Adam, not out of spirit, but “of the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7). God said to Adam: “DUST thou art” (Gen. 3:19), not immortal spirit—just plain earth! Man is *mortal*, physical, not yet immortal or spiritual.

What God created was a physical, fleshly man—a mortal flesh and blood human being. Adam was a perfect *physical* specimen. He was the perfect “clay model,” which God—the Master Potter—planned to mold and shape *spiritually* into a perfect spiritual Son of God!

Adam was a complete physical creation, but incomplete spiritually. He was created to need a SPIRITUAL birth! And so is everyone who has ever lived.

But how? When? Why? All of these tremendously important questions will be answered from the Bible with the guidance of this lesson.

So be sure to turn to and *read* the scriptures cited in answer to the questions asked in this lesson. (Also, it is highly recommended that you copy these verses in your notebook so you can easily refer to them after.) PROVE to yourself from the pages of your Bible exactly what Christ meant when He said we must be “born again.”

WHO AND WHAT IS “GOD”?

To fully understand what it really means to be born again, it is necessary to first understand who and what God is, and the very PURPOSE for our existence.

Turn to the very beginning of the Bible. The first words are: “In the beginning GOD created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The Hebrew word for “God”, here and throughout the account of creation, is *Elohim*. It is the plural form of the Hebrew *Eloah*, which in English means “Mighty One.” So *Elohim* means “Mighty Ones”—*more* than one divine Personage. (Notice the plural pronouns “us” and “our” in referring to “God” in Genesis 1:26).

Thus we see that *Elohim* is a plural noun. In other words, *Elohim* stands for a SINGLE CLASS composed of MORE than one individual such as the words church, family or kingdom. Just as there is the animal kingdom and the human family or kingdom, *Elohim*, as used in the account of creation, shows that there is also a GOD KINGDOM or FAMILY.

But who are the individuals presently composing the God Family? Let’s notice what the Bible reveals.

1. Who was with “God” when God created the universe? John 1:1. Was the “word” also God? Same verse. Was it the Word who actually created all things? Verses 2-3

COMMENT: The Greek word translated into English as "Word" in John 1:1 is *Logos*. It means "spokesman," or "one who speaks."

2. By whom was *all* the material universe created—including this earth and mankind? Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:16-17. Who, then is the "Word" of John 1:1? John 1:14; Eph. 3:9. And who is the other divine member of the God Family? I Cor. 8:6

COMMENT: John 1:1-3 and Genesis 1:1 are two accounts of the same event—the original creation of the universe. They both reveal that the two Supreme Beings of the God Family created all things. Together they planned the creation and the Word did the actual creating. Everything was created and made by the divine Being who later became the human Jesus Christ to die for the sins of mankind!

THE "LORD" OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Do you know which of the two members of the God Family dealt directly with man in Old Testament times? Was it God the Father? Could it possibly have been the Word, who became Jesus Christ? Very few have understood this important truth. But the Bible makes it plain.

1. Has any human being ever seen the Father? John 1:18.

2. But did people ever look upon the God of the Old Testament? Gen. 17:1; 18:1, 22; 32:30; Ex. 24:9-11; 33:18-23.

COMMENT: Notice in Exodus 33:18-23 that Moses had specifically requested to see the LORD in His "glory". But God prevented Moses from looking upon His glorified face lest he DIE from seeing His brilliance?

The verses cited in questions 1 and 2 clearly prove that the God of the Old Testament could not have been the "Father".

3. Who was called the "Rock" in Old Testament times? II Sam. 22:2-3. Did David call the LORD his "Rock" and his "God"? Ps. 18:2.

COMMENT: The *King James Version* of the Bible and several other translations use the word "LORD," usually in capital letters, to translate the Hebrew word *YHWH*. Most biblical scholars believe *YHWH* to be some form of the verb "to be" or "to exist," Hence *YHWH* signifies "the self-existent One," One who "lives"—from eternity and to eternity.

Revelation 1:8 clarifies the meaning of this name, speaking of Christ as "the beginning and the ending...which *is*, and which *was*, and which *is to come*." Consequently both Moffatt's "*the Eternal*" and Fenton's "*ever-Living*" are excellent translations of the Hebrew word *YHWH*.

In ancient Hebrew, the vowels were not written. They were supplied by the reader. Since the ancient Jews considered the name *YHWH* too holy to pronounce, instead of reading *YHWH* they substituted *Adonai* (meaning "Lord" or "Master") or occasionally *Elohim*.

When the Jewish textual scholars known as *Masoretes* added the vowels to the written Hebrew text about the seventh century A.D., they wrote the vowel points of *Adonai* or *Elohim* with each occurrence of *YHWH* to tell the oral reader to pronounce either *Adonai* or *Elohim*, whichever had been indicated. From the consonants *YHWH* and the vowels of *Adonai* came the hybrid form "Jehovah."

Thus the precise pronunciation of *YHWH* is unknown today. Obviously it is not necessary for us to know how to pronounce it, or God would have made certain that the correct pronunciation was preserved. It is clear that the meaning of the Almighty's name is infinitely more important than its mere sound in Hebrew.

4. According to I Corinthians 10:4, who was (and still *is*) the "Rock"?

COMMENT: Thus the Bible identifies the "Rock"—the LORD of the Old Testament—as *Christ!* How surprising to those who have assumed that the God of the Old Testament was the "Father"!

And so the "LORD" who spoke to and was seen of men was the One who later became Jesus Christ. For no *mortal man* has ever seen the Father (John 1:18).

5. Was the One who became Christ also the One who spoke the Ten Commandments? Ex. 20:1-2.

COMMENT: The Hebrew word for "LORD" in Exodus 20 is *YHWH*. So it was the *Logos*, the "Spokesman," who later became Christ, who actually spoke the Ten Commandments!

But why is this understanding important for us today?

Understanding the true identity of the God of the Old Testament is vital to becoming reborn with the spiritual nature of God. For the God of the Old Testament, commonly believed to have been harsh and stern, was really our SAVIOR—loving, kind, merciful *and* just (Ex. 34:5-7).

THE POWER OF GOD

Most of traditional Christianity today believes that God is a "trinity" composed of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Could this possibly be true? Let's learn what the Bible reveals about the Spirit of God.

1. Is God's Spirit the POWER by which He creates? Jer. 32:17; Gen. 1:1-3; Ps. 104:30.

COMMENT: It was by the Spirit of God that the Eternal (*YHWH*)—the *Logos* (Christ)—created the entire vast universe. Invisible spirit energy was literally transformed into the material creation (Heb. 11:3). And it was by the power of His Spirit that God renewed the surface of the earth (Ps. 104:30).

2. Exactly how did the Eternal God utilize His Spirit of power to bring His various creations into being? Ps. 148:1-5. Notice the word "commanded" in verse 5. Also read Psalm 33:8-9 and Genesis 1:2-3.

COMMENT: Christ—the *Logos*, or "Word" (John 1:1)—"spake, and it was done." He is the One who said, "Let there be light." The Word willed that spirit energy emanating from Himself be TRANSFORMED into physical energy and matter. That is how the creation of the universe was done.

3. Is God's Spirit omnipresent—does it fill the entire universe? Ps. 139:7-8; Jer. 23:24. Is it by His Spirit of power that God is also able to sustain and rule His vast creation? Heb. 1:2-3; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 66:7.

COMMENT: Like the atmosphere on earth, the power of God is everywhere. That is how the Word was able to do the work of the creation. God uses this power much as man uses electrical energy.

David's prayer in Psalm 139:7-8 shows that he knew God's Spirit or power was omnipresent. No matter where in the universe one might go, God's Spirit will still be there. That is how Jesus Christ is "upholding all things by the word of his POWER" (Heb. 1:3). By His authority as God, He keeps all things in the universe in their place. This work is done through the *power* of the God Family and with the express consent of the Father.

Though the Father is SUPREME in the God Family, as Christ Himself revealed (John 14:28), Jesus is the administrator of the Holy Spirit (John 15:26). He is therefore greater than that Spirit. These two scriptures alone nullify and make void the supposition that the Holy Spirit is a person of equal rank with the Father and Son. The Spirit is *not* a personality, but rather the very *power of God*—the power by which God does His will. IT IS NOT ANOTHER PERSON!

4. But what about I John 5:7-8, which many have supposed proves that God is composed of three divine Persons? How do these two verses read?

COMMENT: Verses 7 and 8 should actually read as follows: "For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

The words omitted in the above quote, but included in the *King James Version* of 1611, are left out of most all modern translations of the Bible—for a very good reason. The added words in the *Authorized or King James Version* are spurious—*fraudulent!* These words implying that there is a Trinity were added by editors to the Latin translation not earlier than the fourth century after Christ. They did not appear in the Latin Vulgate until later, nor do they appear in *any* of the older Greek manuscripts or in modern English translations.

The editors of both liberal and conservative Bible commentaries (ancient and modern) agree as to the fraudulent origin of the King James rendering of I John 5:7-8. Notice the following quotes from two modern commentaries.

Says the conservatively oriented *New Bible Commentary Revised*: "The words are clearly a gloss and are rightly excluded by RSV [the *Revised Standard Version*] even from its margin" (p. 1,269). Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, a standard liberal work, is even more incisive with its comments: "The famous interpolation after 'three witnesses' is not printed even in RSV, and rightly....No respectable Greek MS [manuscript] contains it. Appearing first in a late 4th century Latin text, it entered the Vulgate and finally the NT [New Testament] of Erasmus [and eventually the *King James Version*]" (p. 1,038).

5. Is the Holy Spirit referred to in the Bible as "it" and "he"? John 1:32; Rom. 8:16, 26; I Pet. 1:11; John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7-8, 13.

COMMENT: Normally, the Holy Spirit is referred to as "it" in the *King James Version*. In the 14th, 15th and 16th chapters of John, the Holy Spirit is *personified* as one who brings help. Therefore the English pronouns "he" and "him" are used in connection with the word "Comforter".

Grammatically, all pronouns in Greek *must agree* in gender with the nouns to which they refer. The Greek word *parakletos* ("comforter" in English) is masculine in gender; hence the translators' use of the personal pronoun "he" and "him" for the Greek masculine pronouns.

It should be noted, however, that in many languages the gender of a word has nothing to do with whether the thing designated is *really* male or female. For example, in Spanish the word table (*la mesa*) is feminine instead of neuter. Gender in language is nothing more than a grammatical tool.

In Greek as in English, the word "spirit" is neuter—*neither* masculine nor feminine in gender. *Pneuma* is the Greek word meaning "spirit." It is always grammatically neuter and properly represented by the English pronoun "it" as in John 1:32 and Romans 8:16.

The fact of the matter, which few realize, is that the Trinity doctrine implies that the Family of God is forever limited to three persons. It denies the very PURPOSE for which *Elohim* created mankind! You will grasp this astonishing truth more fully as you continue studying your Bible with this lesson.

THE NATURE OF GOD

What is the composition of God? John 4:24. But of What is man composed? I Cor. 15:47; Gen. 2:7.

COMMENT: One of the great *differences* between the God Family of Kingdom and the human kingdom is that God is composed of immortal spirit invisible to human eyes, while man is mortal flesh and blood—made from the dust of the earth and subject to death and decay.

2. Just before He was taken to be crucified, to what state did Christ ask His Father to restore Him? John 17:5. Was Christ again to share His Father's *glory* in the God Family? Same verse.

3. How do Christ's and the Father's powerful, *glorified* spirit bodies appear? Rev. 1:13-16. (The "Son of man" mentioned here is the glorified Christ.)

COMMENT: The power of the Father and Christ is *so great* that their spirit bodies shine as BRIGHT AS THE SUN IN FULL STRENGTH!

4. What is another great difference between God and man—what is God's characteristic attitude and general mental makeup? Ps. 99:9. Is there anyone as holy as God? I Sam. 2:2. Would you conclude that man, of himself, is "holy"? Rom. 3:10-18, 23; 8:7; Jer. 17:9.

COMMENT: The meaning of the word "holy" involves *pureness of heart* or freedom from sin. The two divine Beings presently composing the God Family possess a "holy" or *sinless* attitude and nature.

But what does all this have to do with *your* being "born again"?

EVERYTHING! When born again you will possess the *same* power, glory and holiness of God! But more about this later.

A "FATHER-SON" RELATIONSHIP

Have you ever wondered how the "Father-Son" relationship of the God Family developed? This

is vital to know in order to understand the purpose and plan of God, and what it really means to be born again.

1. What did Jesus say about Himself and His Father? John 10:30; 17:11. Yet who is *greater* in authority? John 14:28; I Cor. 11:3.

COMMENT: The Father and Son are one *in purpose* and *attitude*. But the Father is greater in authority. The Father has always been in supreme command in the Family or Kingdom of God—even *before* the Word became a human being.

2. Why did the Word (Christ) become a flesh-and-blood human being? Heb. 2:9, 14.

COMMENT: *All* mankind has sinned (Rom. 3:23). And “the wages of sin is [*eternal*] death” (Rom. 6:23). The Word became a mortal man so He could *die* to pay the penalty for the sins of ALL mankind. Christ was able to do this because His life was far more valuable than the lives of all human beings put together. He was not only the Creator of all mankind, He was GOD *made flesh!* (John 1:14).

3. But exactly how did the Word become composed of flesh and blood? Matt. 1:18-21. (“Ghost” in this passage, as elsewhere, is an unfortunate translation in the *King James Version*. It should rather be rendered “Spirit,” as it is in most other translations of the Bible.) What *title* did the other member of the God Kingdom acquire as a result of Jesus’ miraculous begetting? John 1:14.

COMMENT: Before Christ (the Word) was conceived in Mary, He was not the “*Son of God*”. He was one of the two members of the God Kingdom. He, like the One who became the Father, had existed eternally. But it is nowhere stated in the Bible that He was a SON of God prior to His conception in Mary. His *human* birth was His *first* birth. He gave up the glory He had shared with the other divine Being, who became His Father, in order to be born into the world as a human being, live a perfect life, and then give His life to pay the penalty of all the sins of mankind.

And so Jesus was begotten within His human mother Mary. But unlike all other human beings, He was *miraculously* begotten by the One who became the Father, through the agency and power of the *Spirit* of God (Matt. 1:20; John 1:14). (Here, by the way, is further proof the Spirit of God is not a person. Since Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit, if the Spirit were a person, then IT would be Christ’s Father!) By His miraculous begetting, Christ became the “son” of God, and the other person of the God Kingdom became His “Father”. And so began the “Father-Son” relationship, which is a FAMILY relationship!

Now let’s begin to understand exactly what all this has to do with our being “born again.”

MAN CREATED IN GOD’S IMAGE

Man is not just another “animal,” as evolutionists claim. God’s purpose for creating man surpasses anything ever imagined by the human mind. Let’s turn to the first chapter of Genesis and begin to understand the most astounding revelation of your Bible!

1. After what “kind” were the animals created? Gen. 1:20-25.

COMMENT: These verses plainly state that God created fish to reproduce after their own particular kind, birds after their particular kind, and cattle after the cattle kind. Each *kind* may have many varieties within it, but all creatures reproduce only after *their own “kind”*. That is why dogs reproduce dogs, monkeys reproduce monkeys, sheep reproduce sheep, etc.

2. But what about man? After whose “image” and “likeness” was man created? Verses 26-27.

COMMENT: In God’s pattern for physical life, like reproduces like. And just as each plant or animal reproduces after its own kind, so humans reproduce humans. But UNLIKE any of the animals, man was created in *GOD’S* likeness.

These scriptures refute the evolutionary theory that man is merely the “highest” of the animals, having evolved from lower mammals. They clearly state that God created man after *God’s own* image and likeness! God made man LIKE Himself—same form and shape.

3. Even though man is made in the likeness of God, are both composed of the same type of

"material"? John 4:24; Gen. 2:7.

COMMENT: There is a vast difference between spirit and dust. Although man was created in the very shape and likeness of God, he was not created out of spirit. He was made of the dust of the earth, subject to death and decay. But God's purpose is to eventually create him out of *eternal spirit!*

In I Corinthians 15:46-49 we read: "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and AFTERWARD that which is *spiritual*. The first man [Adam] is of the earth, earthy: the second man [Christ] is the Lord from heaven....And as *we* [speaking of true Christians] have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

Clearly, man is much more than any animal. Man has the *potential* to become divine spirit—just as GOD is spirit!

OUR AWESOME DESTINY!

Astonishing as it may sound, God is now in the process of creating His greatest creation of all—His supreme masterpiece!

Only a very few have really understood God's awesome purpose for human beings. The Bible reveals that *God is REPRODUCING HIMSELF through mankind!* Our destiny is to become the literal *children* of God—MEMBERS of His own divine *Family!*

Let's understand this amazing truth.

1. Is God forming and molding man as a potter works with clay? Isa. 64:8.

COMMENT: God's creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was complete only in the *physical* sense. They were created perfect physically—but *not* perfect SPIRITUALLY. They were created of the dust—not of divine SPIRIT. They were created corruptible and subject to death—not incorruptible and immortal.

But God did not intend that mankind should remain that way!

2. Did Job realize God was forming a *special creation* in his life? Job 14:14-15.

COMMENT: Notice especially the latter part of verse 15: "...*thou wilt have a desire to the WORK of thine hands.*" The "work" was *Job*. Job knew he was merely a piece of divine *workmanship* in the hands of the Master Potter.

3. Are true Christians being fashioned by God for a *specific purpose*? Isa. 43:7; Eph. 2:10.

COMMENT: "We" in the New Testament usually refers to true *Christians*, as Paul intended in Ephesians 2:10. We, then—if we are true Christians—are God's "workmanship." We are in the process of being "created"—Why?—"unto good works." God, with the Holy spirit He has put within us, is forming in us His perfect spiritual *character!* With our consent and cooperation, God is creating us in His own *character-image!* We are to become the supreme masterpiece of all His works of creation—individuals who will be capable of righteously exercising the awesome powers of God!

The material creation of man is only the *first* phase. Now the clay model has to be fashioned and molded, with our cooperation and the aid of God's Holy Spirit, into the finished *spiritual* masterpiece. An analogy of this process would be a caterpillar going through a metamorphosis into a beautiful butterfly. Mankind must undergo a spiritual "metamorphosis," or CHANGE—to become perfect SPIRITUAL MEMBERS in the divine *FAMILY OF GOD!*

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE "BORN AGAIN"

The Gospel Jesus brought to mankind is simply the "good news" of the *Kingdom of God*—and that Kingdom is DUAL. It is not only the ruling government Christ will establish over the nations of the earth when He returns, it is also the Family of God—the God Kingdom, composed of the spirit members of the God Family.

There are only two members in the God Family or Kingdom at the present time—God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. But God is going to *increase His Family!*

Incredible as it may sound, Jesus taught that humans can be "born" into the FAMILY, or

KINGDOM, of God!

1. Does God plainly show it is His purpose to increase His divine Family by bringing many Sons into it? II Cor. 6:18; Heb. 2:9-11; Rev. 21:7. Isn't Jesus Christ actually the "firstborn" of MANY sons of God? Rom. 8:29.

COMMENT: To be "conformed to the image" of Christ means to become LIKE Him—to be glorified as He is now glorified—to be a member of the divine FAMILY OF GOD even as Christ now is.

2. But what must happen to flesh-and-blood Christians *before* they can enter God's Family? I Cor. 15:49-52; John 3:3-8.

COMMENT: Jesus said we must be "born again"—*CHANGED INTO SPIRIT!* Yes, born *again*—this time born of the Spirit of God as divine Sons in the Family of God!

BEGOTTEN SONS NOW - NOT YET BORN AGAIN

1. If we are true Christians, are we already—in this life—the *children* of God? I John 3:1-2. Are we already inheritors of the Kingdom of God, or only *heirs* to it? Rom. 8:14-17.

COMMENT: Notice that although we are now the "sons" and "children of God," we are only heirs—ones who shall, in the future, inherit all that God has promised. Why? Because we are now only *begotten*. It is only when we are *born* of God that we become inheritors of God's Kingdom—divine members of the Family of God.

Before the second phase of man's creation—our *spiritual creation*—can begin, God the Father must *first* beget each of us by placing His Holy Spirit *within* our minds to join with the spirit in man. We are then *impregnated*, so to speak, by the "seed" or germ of *eternal* life. It is the *begetting* of the spiritual life of God within our minds. And much as a newly begotten physical embryo begins to grow in its mother's womb, we are to *grow* in SPIRITUAL CHARACTER after we are begotten by God's Spirit. This growth results from Bible study, prayer, and walking with God every day of our lives.

2. Now compare Galatians 3:26 and Ephesians 1:5 with Romans 8:14-17.

COMMENT: These verses in Galatians and Ephesians reveal the *same truth*—that Christians are already the children—the SONS—of God, destined to inherit eternal life.

Some versions of the Bible use the expression "adoption of sons" or "adoption of children" in Ephesians 1:5. Although linguistically possible, these do not give the real meaning. The original inspired Greek expression *huiothesia* means "sonship". When we receive the spirit of *sonship* as an impregnating "seed" (Pet. 1:23), that is not an "adoption". The Holy Spirit makes us the *literal begotten Sons of God*, for we are going to be like our heavenly Father when finally born into His family.

And so all Spirit-begotten Christians have become the (as yet UNborn) *children* of God the Father in the same sense that an *unborn* human fetus is the child of its human parents!

3. Do we actually receive of the divine nature of God when begotten by His Holy Spirit? II Pet. 1:3-4. What are some of the divine characteristics of "fruits" of God's nature that are made manifest in the lives of obedient Christians after they are begotten by God's Spirit? Gal. 5:22-23.

4. Is love ("charity") the greatest attribute of God's nature that is transmitted to us by His Holy Spirit? I John 4:16; Rom. 5:5; I Cor. 13:1-8, 13, especially verse 13. Is this the *same* love that enables us to "fulfill"—to OBEY—God's law? Rom. 13:10.

COMMENT: The Holy Spirit that a person may receive from God can be compared to the sperm of a human father. God's Spirit transmits His spiritual attributes to us, even as a sperm cell transmits a human father's physical attributes to his newly conceived offspring. The Holy Spirit—the germ or "seed" (I Pet. 1:23) by which we are spiritually begotten—imparts to us the very nature and life of God our heavenly Father.

If you are truly the kind of Christian described in the Bible, then you are now a spirit-begotten child of God. God the Father placed His Spirit within your mind, having joined it with the spirit in man. He thus begot you with the Holy Spirit just as the sperm from a human father impregnates the ovum of the mother. You were impregnated with the spiritual "seed" of eternal life so you could

begin the process of *spiritual growth*. But you are not yet born of God—not yet composed of spirit—not yet immortal. If you are not a Spirit-begotten Christian, then you have *not yet even begun this process!*

BORN AGAIN AT THE RESURRECTION

1. Can we, while still flesh and blood, inherit God's Kingdom? I Cor. 15:50. What must happen to us to be born as divine Sons in God's Family? Verses 51-53.

COMMENT: "That which is born of the Spirit IS spirit", said Jesus (John 3:6). But we have not yet been born of the Spirit. We are STILL FLESH AND BLOOD—capable of pain and bleeding when injured. But when *born* into the God Family, we will be free of human pain and suffering (Rev. 21:4). And with our new spirit bodies, we will be unfettered by the physical limitations of time and space. When Christ was resurrected—"born again"—He was able to pass through solid walls (John 20:19, 26). Obviously, any human beings who claim to already be born again are completely mistaken, for they are still flesh and blood.

Jesus said we must be "born of the Spirit"—we must become *composed of spirit*—to ever see or enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). And so the second birth is something yet to occur at the *resurrection to immortality!*

2. Until they are born again—changed into spirit beings—what are Christians exhorted to do in this mortal life? II Pet. 3:18; Eph. 4:15. How and by whom are they to be "fed" and nurtured so they may *grow* unto the stature of Christ? I Pet. 5:1-2; Eph. 4:11-13.

COMMENT: A father begets. He does not "bring forth", the *mother* does that, later. After the father's part, which *begins* the PROCESS, there is a period of time leading to birth. At the time of begetting, birth has not yet occurred. In the case of human beings, it normally follows about nine months later.

During the intervening time, just as the mother nourishes and protects the unborn son or daughter in her womb, so God's *Church* is commissioned to nourish and protect Spirit-begotten Christians in her spiritual "womb"—to "feed the flock." God's Spirit-begotten children must be nourished on the *spiritual food* supplied by God—the words of Scripture. They must live by every word of God in order to grow spiritually.

If by the return of Jesus Christ we have grown in spiritual character, we will then be *born of God*, being "*children of the resurrection*" (Luke 20:35-36), just as Christ became the "Son of God" at His resurrection (Rom. 1:4).

3. Speaking of the resurrection, when the second birth will occur, what did Paul say regarding the new body Christians will receive? I Cor. 15:42-44. Will they become as Jesus Christ is today? Phil. 3:20-21; I John 3:2; Matt. 17:1-2; Rev. 1:13-16; Matt. 13:43; Dan. 12:3.

COMMENT: Because God is spirit, when one is born of his heavenly Father, he will also BE SPIRIT he will be composed of the same substance of which God is composed. He will be given a spirit body like Christ's and will be GLORIFIED and given tremendous SPIRITUAL POWER. The power and glory Spirit-begotten Christians shall receive at the resurrection will be so great that it will make their faces *shine as the sun!* And all who are thus born of God will be able to see God because they will be *in* the Kingdom—the divine Family—of God!

THE GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "BEGOTTEN" AND "BORN"

Most professing Christians believe they were "born again" when they first "accepted Christ." Then by misapplying I John 3:9, "Whosoever is *born* doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and *he cannot sin*, because he is born of God," many conclude that they are no longer capable of sinning in this life.

The Bible shows that this conclusion is absolutely *false!*

1. Did the Apostle John say that Christians do sometimes commit sin? I John 1:8-10.

COMMENT: By using the *present tense* of the verbs in verse 8, John meant they sin *after*

becoming Christians. Notice also that he includes *himself* by saying "we".

2. Was the Apostle Paul beset with recurring sin long *after* he was baptized and received (was begotten by) the Holy Spirit? Rom. 7:14-25. Is there a just man on earth who does not at *some time* commit sin? Eccl. 7:20. So isn't it plain that Christians in this mortal flesh are *not now* perfect, and therefore NOT YET BORN OF GOD?

3. Now notice I John 5:18. Does this verse further prove that Christians are *not yet* born of God?

COMMENT: Once we are born of God at the resurrection, we will be able to live without ever sinning again because we will then possess the *fullness* of God's perfect character and divine nature (I John 3:9).

But as long as we are only "begotten" of God we must "Keep ourselves" from sinning—we must *resist* evil temptations. But we can still commit sin. *When caught off guard or in a moment of weakness, we can and do sometimes sin!*

Life to the begotten Christian is a battle against evil influences. Although a true Christian has received the *begettal* of God's *divine nature* (II Pet. 1:4), he still can and will occasionally manifest the traits of human nature, for the one wars against the other (Gal. 5:17). (The surprising origin of the evil characteristics of what is commonly called "human nature" will be covered in Lesson 9).

But what about the Old Testament men of God? Can we prove whether they were either begotten or born of God?

4. Did David have God's Holy Spirit? I Sam. 16:13; Ps. 51:10-11. What about all the "holy men of old," including Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? II Pet. 1:21; Rom. 8:14; Luke 13:28. Yet who was the FIRST to be born of God? Col. 1:18.

COMMENT: Since those Old Testament individuals had God's Holy Spirit, and yet Christ was the *first* to be BORN of God (by virtue of His resurrection), then it follows that those men of old were merely *begotten* of God—*not yet born* into His Family. They, as well as other Spirit-*begotten* children of God, will be BORN of God at the first resurrection!

THE GREEK WORD *GENNAO*

Much of the confusion about being "born again" has resulted from misinterpreting the original Greek of the New Testament. With one exception (Jas. 1:15-18), the Greek word used in reference to spiritual begettal or birth is *gennaio*. This word means both "to conceive" or "to beget," and "to bear" or "to be born"—all or any part of the process that produces a new human being.

Since both begettal and birth are included in the meaning of *gennaio*, we must let the Bible interpret itself in order to know which meaning is intended in a particular passage.

Here are several examples where the Greek word should rightly have been rendered "begotten," not "born," in the *Authorized or King James Version*: John 1:12-13; I John 2:29; 4:7; 5:1, 4. The King James is correct in using "begotten" in I Corinthians 4:15; Hebrews 1:5; I Peter 1:3 and I John 5:1, 18.

Now what about the scriptures that call Christ the "ONLY-begotten"? (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; I John 4:9). Do these, after all, disprove that true Christians are only *begotten* of God's Spirit, growing toward being *born of God at the resurrection*? Of course not!

The answer is that these verses are referring to Christ's *miraculous begettal* in His mother Mary's womb. Christ's physical begettal (*gennaio*) was unique. No other person in the history of mankind has been begotten by the Spirit of the heavenly Father in a human mother's womb! In this sense He is—and always shall be—"ONLY-begotten." But others have been "begotten again" (I Pet. 1:3) and will ultimately become—through the process of spiritual growth and birth—the *Spirit-born* Sons of God.

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN!

What God created at the time described in the first chapter of Genesis was a *physical* creation.

Man, made of the dust of the ground, was the MATERIAL being that God planned to mold, shape and form into a perfect SPIRITUAL creation. He pictures us as the clay, Himself as the Master Potter, forming us into the spiritual "image" of Himself.

Human reproduction is a type of the process by which God is reproducing Himself. Each human since Adam and Eve started from a tiny ovum, the size of a pinpoint, produced in the body of the mother. But the ovum is *incomplete* of itself. According to some authorities, its lifespan is only about 48 hours. Unless fertilized by the sperm cell from the human father within the limited time, it dies. A new human life can begin only when that sperm cell impregnates—enters—the ovum.

Spiritually speaking, each human mind is like an ovum. We were made to *need* the impregnating spiritual life of God's Spirit so we can be created in God's spiritual image and live forever!

The physical ovum, once it is fertilized, becomes a *begotten* human life called an embryo. A number of weeks following conception, the embryo develops into what is called a fetus. The mother's womb nourishes and protects it, carrying it in that part of her body where she may best protect it from harm until it has grown enough to be *born*.

Likewise, God's CHURCH protects and spiritually feeds Spirit-begotten Christians with the Word of God so they may *grow spiritually* (II Pet. 3:18) in the divine character of God. But here is one great difference in this analogy.

The human fetus does not attain physical and mental maturity before birth. However, the Spirit-begotten Christian must attain a measure of spiritual maturity *before* he or she is born of the Spirit at the resurrection. The newborn physical babe's main growth occurs after birth, but spiritual growth in Christians occurs *before* their spiritual birth (I Pet. 2:1-2).

When we are "born again"—born of God, changed into spirit beings at the resurrection—we will look essentially as we do now. But our resurrected bodies will be *different* bodies—composed of SPIRIT instead of flesh and blood (I Cor. 15:35-44). And our faces will shine with the brilliance of the sun in full strength, as does Christ's! (Rev. 1:16).

Now what, exactly, is the spiritual growth that is so necessary before being born again? It is spiritual CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT!

Such character is the ability, as a free moral agent, to *discern* right from wrong—the true values from the false—truth from error—and then to make the *right choice or decision*, even against self-desire, impulse or temptation; plus the *will* and self-discipline to *resist* the wrong and to DO the right, which is obedience to God's law of love. Such spiritual character development is possible only through our feeding on the Word of God in Bible study, through prayer, obedience to God, and wholehearted participation in the work of God's Church. (The subject of spiritual growth and character development will be covered in much greater detail in upcoming lessons.)

Then, when the glorified Christ returns to earth at His Second Coming, we will be resurrected or instantaneously changed into bodies that will be like His! (I John 3:1-2). At that instant, our physical bodies will be made like His glorified body. We will be BORN AGAIN, this time as SPIRIT MEMBERS OF GOD'S OWN FAMILY—as God's own glorious offspring with eternal life—as His immortal Sons to reign with Jesus Christ our elder Brother!

That, according to your Bible, is what it means to be "born again." May God help you to comprehend this glorious truth, and become one of His Spirit-*begotten* children, ultimately to be BORN into His Family!

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