

# BEING BORN AGAIN

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## **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh”**

Of course it is.

Even if the Lord Jesus had not said so (John 3:6), we should still have known. We say, ‘like father, like son’ to express the same idea. We are born in the same way as our parents were; we took our early food in the same way; we grew in the same way; we have the same kind of sicknesses. We have the same ambitions and hopes, the same joys and pains, the same temptations and sins. Sooner or later, we expect to die the same death. By and large, leaving out small differences of size, and weight, and feature, we look much the same as each other too. No one is likely, in the ordinary way, to confuse a man or woman with any other kind of animal.

And so, when the Lord Jesus says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” He means that human beings (“flesh”) are the same from generation to generation, and they can be nothing better, if nothing better happens to them. And it does not seem that He is very pleased with flesh, or with the children of flesh, for He says, “Ye must be born again!”

## **“That which is born of the spirit is spirit”**

Jesus said this, too, but it is not as obvious to us. No doubt, if we knew what “spirit” was, we should agree. But what is spirit? Perhaps we think we know, ahead, but it might be better if we agreed to wait and see. We shall learn more by letting the Scriptures tell us, than we shall if we start off with our own notions and cling to them at all costs.

Now there is a body of beings called spirits in the Bible. In the Psalms we read, “He maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire” (Psalm 104:4, Hebrews 1:7, 14). All that we read about the angels shows us that they are greater by far in power and might than men; and that they fear no death (Hebrews 1:9). Could it be that, the Lord was saying, “that which is born of angels is an angel?”

We know that it could not. There will come a time when all who survive will be like angels, “to die no more (Luke 20:35-36). These people are called the “sons of God, the children of the resurrection”: but they are not angels’ children, and angels are not their parents. For angels do not marry and therefore angels have no offspring. Men and women have children so that the race shall not be blotted out by death. Death makes sure that the world will not be utterly overwhelmed by unchecked birth. But the angels are immortal and cannot be thinned out by dying; and so they do not marry, nor multiply their numbers by bearing and begetting. It will be like that with ourselves,

at sometime in the future, if God is pleased with us. In those days there will be for all such people neither birth nor death, “They that are accounted worthy to obtain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they are like unto the angels, to die no more.”

We hope, then, that one day we shall have something in common with the angels, but this is not the way to be born again, since Spirit does not mean angels here. No doubt we should all see at once, if we read the third chapter of John, the kind of thing that it does mean. It has to do with the power of God, the mysterious movements of God — “where it listeth”- and. the will of God, To be born of the Spirit is to be born of God, And that, says the Lord, is the only way to enter into the Kingdom of God, Flesh and blood (which is the way we were born the first time) cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:20), And so in some way, and at some time, a change must be started and completed which converts that which is born of the flesh, into the fullness of that which is born of the Spirit. We must be born again. Without that there is no hope.

### **How can a man be born when he is old?**

This was a very reasonable question. At least, it looked like one on the surface. The idea of someone of adult years going again through the process of human birth is grotesque. But the intelligent man who asked the question ought to have known that it was grotesque. And he ought to have known that, even if it had been possible, it would have done no good. We need to be born again because alt was not well with the way we were born the first time; and merely repeating the process would make it no better. The new birth must be a different one. We must, as it were, have a different parent. We are being introduced to the things which are of God — the Spirit; and we are being taught how to get the better of the things which are of man - the flesh.

From the start, then, it will be clear that we are not talking about ordinary birth. But what we are talking about may be less clear. The Lord does give an answer, when He says, “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit” he cannot enter the Kingdom of God, but we have some way to go before we can see what that means. How water can help us to become new-born beings is not obvious at once, though it becomes so later.

But the plain fact is that we shall make no real progress in thinking about the meaning of being born of the Spirit, unless we look at an example. And there can be no. better example than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not really so much an example as the forerunner: one whose spiritual birth gives sense and meaning to all others’. Seen in one way, what Jesus was and did was all on its own: no one else has been, or is, what He was and is. No one else has done what He has done. But, seen in another way no one can do anything which has meaning before God, without taking part in what Jesus did; and no one can be anything before God without becoming part of what Jesus is, “There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be

saved” (Acts 4:12). No one is like Him. No one will be saved without becoming like Him. “We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2).

### **The Only Begotten Son**

To begin with, Jesus was certainly born of the flesh. We know the name of His mother, and she was just like our mothers: a little wiser, perhaps, and more humble before God, but an Israelitish maiden specially favoured, without (as far as we are told), being specially different: a good woman, as far as any of our race can be good, but like us all the same, and passing on our likeness to her Son, Jesus Christ was “made of a woman, made under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

Mary gave birth to her Son in humble surroundings (Matthew 2; Luke 2:16). He was circumcised on the eighth day like other Jewish men-children (Luke 2:21). He grew up in subjection to Joseph and His mother (2:51). He ate and drank as other men ate and drank (Matthew 11:10). He could grow tired as others grow tired (John 4:6). He could suffer thirst (John 19:28), and sorrow (11:35); and He could die. If His death was not like the deaths of most men – for few are crucified—at least others who have been crucified have died as surely as He died. He could be tempted, too; to feed Himself by stealing God’s powers for His private use; to test God’s powers to protect Him by throwing Himself from the temple; to take the world for Himself the quick and easy way, but the wrong way (Matthew 4:1-11). In these and all other ways He knew the same impulses as we know: but He was not quite like us. For we, when tempted, all too often give way and sin, Jesus never did. “He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). He was tempted in all points like as we are—yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

This is a big difference. We are every one of us sinners by our own act. By His own acts the Lord Jesus was not. How was this?

There is another side to His nature. In birth, form, growth, temptation, affliction and dying, He was like us. “The man, Christ Jesus,” Paul calls Him (1 Timothy 2:5). But this is by no means all. Jesus was born of the Spirit, too. We should say He was “begotten of the Spirit,” to show that this was the Father-act in His coming, but the Greeks would use the same word for both, so we shall make no distinction. No man was the father of Jesus Christ, and both Joseph and Mary were told this by the angel (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35). God Himself begot His only begotten Son when He sent His Holy Spirit upon Mary, and therefore also that holy thing which was born of her was called the Son of God.

Jesus was called the Son of God because He was the Son of God, as surely as we are the children of our fathers, and in the same order of things. The Most High became the Father of Jesus Christ when Jesus Christ was born of Mary. He sent forth His Son,

made of a woman, “Men beheld the glory of the only begotten of the Father, when God’s Word became flesh to produce this only begotten Son (John 1:14).

And so, when we look at the life of Jesus Christ, we find big differences from ourselves, as well as great likenesses. Those who knew Him best “beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Jesus always hoped that His disciples would recognise the family likeness when they looked on Him: “Have I been so long time with you, and yet thou hast not known Me? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9); His deep knowledge of the heart of man; His inspired words; His mighty miracles; His power and right, as it were, to visit the Father at home in His nights of prayer; His calm assumption that He is indeed Master and Lord so far as His disciples are concerned (John 13:13) - all these point to His inheritance from His Father.

His rising from the dead sealed all these claims. If he had not been the Son of God, then He would have been guilty of blasphemy in claiming so (Mark 14:61-64), and then He would certainly not have been raised after His crucifixion. But now His raising bears witness to His Sonship. Paul sums up both sides of His descent in the words:

“He was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, but declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of Holiness, by His resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:3-4).

What, now, about His sinlessness? It would be tempting to say that He was sinless because God was His Father, and God cannot sin. But this will not do, for a very good reason.

### **“He learned obedience by the things that He suffered”**

We are human beings, and we can be tempted. So, “in all points,” could Jesus Christ, who is a Man, born like ourselves. God is God, and cannot be tempted with evil (James 1:13), nor can He sin. Neither did Jesus Christ sin, who is the Son of God. How tempting it is to say, therefore, that the whole matter is solved: Jesus was tempted because He was like us: He could not sin because He was also like God.

But this cannot be right. For if He could not sin, He was not really tempted, and what the Bible says about His being like us in this matter is not true. It may have looked like temptation, but if it was impossible for Him to yield to it, then it was not real. Again, if He really was tempted just as we are, it must have been possible for Him to do the tempting things: and in that case He was not prevented from doing so by being the Son of God. Instead of finding an easy solution of the problem, we seem to have found an impossibility.

But let us think again about how children resemble their parents. We are like both our parents in some ways—the ones already mentioned, to do with birth, growth, sickness, temptation and death. But in others we are more like one parent than the other. “She has her mother’s eyes,” we say, or “He’s got his father’s hot temper.” And when all allowances are made for too much imagination, there is no doubt that such resemblances exist. But that does not mean that you can take any living being - the author for example - and divide him neatly into two piles, of which one is from his father and the other from his mother, until there is no real person left in his own right. For I know it is not true. My powers, and my weaknesses, come to, me through my parents. What I do with them is my responsibility. I do not have to be bad-tempered if one of my parents is: it is possible in measure to overcome that weakness. I am not sure to be sweet-natured if that is the nature of my other parent: it is all too easy to throw away one’s legacy and be, as it were, inexcusably bad. And if one of my parents is calm and the other hasty, it may well be that I have opposite tendencies in my nature which pull my motions both ways: but still it is my duty and my right to decide how I will go. I shall have my failures and my successes, and my parentage will help me, or hinder me, or both alternately: but it will be I who am answerable for what I both do and become.

Put this on the level of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and we can see how His temptations fit into the picture. On His mother’s side was temptability, the attraction of things earthly, a sensitiveness to the things of the flesh, be it food, admiration, vengeance or power. On His Father’s side was knowledge and appreciation of things divine: eternity, righteousness, humility before the authority of God. His human descent made sure that temptation would be real—though it was not absolutely inevitable that He should fall when it came. His divine paternity made sure that the right would be before His eyes when the wrong came to provoke Him—though it did not compel Him to take the right rather than the wrong. From His mother He inherited our common ability to sin; from His Father He had (as we have not) a full appreciation of the Tightness of righteousness, and so the possibility, each time temptation came, of rejecting it in favour of the way of God. But the way He inclined was for Him to decide. His battle was the keener because the issues on both sides were so terribly clear. If He should sin, it would be in yielding to specially potent temptations, worse than we have ever had because of the power He possessed to carry them out. If He should be altogether righteous, it would be because by the hard road He “learned obedience by the things that He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

### **The Battle of flesh against spirit.**

We can see how it works out in practice. Jesus comes to Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. All around are tax-gatherers, soldiers, harlots and Pharisees; and those who are willing confess their sins, and let John cover their bodies beneath the waters of Jordan. When Jesus arrives, John recognizes Him as One who has no sins to

confess. It would be better, he said, that Jesus should baptize him rather than he Jesus. These soldiers and sinners, they needed baptism, but not Jesus. Let Him not defile Himself by linking Himself with them. Which of us, in Jesus' place, would not have felt the force of this? Flesh taught Jesus to assert His dignity and keep Himself apart. But the Spirit's wish was different. He must identify Himself with sinners in their need and their humility. He must tread their way, as they in their turn must tread His. But it must have been a hard battle to make His flesh yield to the demands of Spirit and to say, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:16).

Perhaps the reality of the battle, and the hard-won victory, would hardly have been understood to the full had we not also had recorded the tones of satisfaction with which God, as the Spirit came upon Jesus in the shape of a dove, proclaimed His victory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" God was well pleased with what His Son had accomplished, when He might so readily have failed to accomplish it. This was a true victory, in fair fight against sin.

We could trace the same battle time and time again. Three conflicts took place during the Temptations in the Wilderness, when Spirit defeated flesh: Jesus preferring to live by God's word rather than by stolen meat; preferring to live in trust rather than throw Himself from the temple to put God to the test; preferring to live in pain, shame and rejection until the Cross and the grave, rather than take the Kingdoms of the world, before the due time. Just as John had played the part of tempter by Jordan, so did the disciples when they asked Jesus for leave to call down fire from heaven to destroy those who denied the Lord a bed (Luke 9:54); and again the love and compassion which the Spirit taught Him, must have had to do battle with the desire for revenge which enters so readily into the heart of man. But in all the conflicts of the Lord, never is the battle more clearly joined before our eyes than when the Lord debates the future with Himself, as the time of His death draws near (John 12:27-28):

- "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say?" He asks.
- "Father, save me from this hour!" is the answer of flesh.
- "But for this purpose came I unto this hour!" is the Spirit's rejoinder.
- "Father, glorify Thy name!" is the Lord's decision for God, and against the will of the flesh.

All His battles had been like that, but here we see one being fought out. Jesus was righteous, not because He had to be – far from it. He was righteous because in all His trials He set God always before His face, sought His will, and sought His strength to carry it out. The victory was brought to its culmination in the apparent defeat of the Cross, when there was taken down and buried a body in which the thought of doing wrong could from now on never be entertained.

## **Spirit triumphant**

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead had to follow. “It was not possible that He should be holden of death” (Acts 2:24). For the first time, it was safe to give immortality to someone. Jesus had devoted His life to serving His Father, and repulsing the impulses of flesh; when He died, the power of flesh to tempt Him again died with Him. When He rose from the dead, there lived for the first time one secure in the love of God, a Man without any of the weaknesses of man. His very flesh became what God had always wanted flesh to be, the firm and certain stronghold of the Spirit, for evermore. God’s honour had been His first thought, and it would now be His constant and effortless concern eternally.

God could therefore settle on Him all His own power, and lose nothing in doing it. If Jesus had all honour, it would all still belong to His Father; and so:

“God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and of things in the earth, and of things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that, Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-10).

But all this might seem cold comfort to us. In discussing “being born again,” much time has been spent in discussing Him who was born once, of flesh and the Spirit at the same time. Battle between the two was possible for Him, but not for us. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” and we are flesh both from our fathers and our mothers.

## **Who shall deliver me from this body of death?**

This was Paul’s cry of distress (Romans 7:24), when he realised the helplessness of flesh. All the impulses of his nature fought against the purity and righteousness of God, and it is the same with us. Even if we get so far as to recognise how good God is, and to want to be like Him, there is an unbridgeable gulf between flesh and – Spirit - or, at least, flesh cannot bridge it.

Yet the Lord Jesus is a bridge. That God is righteous is no help to us by itself. That only emphasizes the difference between Him and ourselves. But the Son of God, who is also Son of man, being righteous is a very different matter. If God brought into being One who in Himself could fight out the conflict between a good He knew (from His Father), and an evil He understood (from His mother), then He could become our bridge; and He, in the time to come, could properly become the ruler of God’s world, and make righteousness triumphant in Man.

And so Paul finishes his cry: “I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord.”



## **Of water and of the Spirit.**

What it amounts to is this: left in our native state, cannot fight successfully the battle for righteousness. In our flesh there is no good thing. If we can be opened up to the influences of God, can be brought to consent to do battle, with Him on the side of right, so that we do not fight alone against our flesh, then there may be victory, in the end, for righteousness. Jesus, born at once of flesh and Spirit, succeeded. What is His prescription for us?

“Ye must be born again,” He said. “Of water and Spirit,” He said it must be. And we can now see something of what He meant by Spirit. Something must become possible for us, which took place in Him. But why water? The Lord does not say, “That which is born of water is water,” though He does declare, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” What has water to do with this matter of rebirth?

Consider: when we were born the first time, we were not consulted. Others took the steps, and we were the result. But if we should be born again, we shall both need to know it, and need to consent. God will not force rebirth on anyone, though no one can be born again without Him. Each has his part to play: we are to trust and submit; God is to fulfil His promise to us when we do.

### **“Suffer it to be so now”**

The water is provided for our submission. Jesus Himself led the way at Jordan, when He said, “Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” Sinners must go that way with Him, as He went that way with them. And so He told His disciples to “go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:20). And so they went, and told the repentant hearers, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). And looking back on the process, Paul writes “According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5).

The water-act is Baptism. The New Testament offers baptism to repentant sinners. We can be baptized if we know our weakness, our sin and our mortality; if we confess them all before God; if we have seen the righteousness of God revealed in Jesus Christ, and consented that it is good; if we desire His help in working our lives out acceptably before Him. We can be baptized if we are willing to surrender our desires to God in the way in which the Lord Jesus did upon the Cross.

“As many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death.

Our old man hath been crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” (Romans 6:4, 6)

We are baptized if, upon such sincere confessions, we allow ourselves to be covered in water. This is a total act. We must be bodily immersed in water as though to bury ourselves in the grave of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:12). We must be washed all over in water as though in symbol to acknowledge our need of entire cleansing (Hebrews 10:22). Baptism should be carried out neither on those who do not know what is being done for very infancy, nor by means of a sprinkling of water which leaves on one side the covering of Jesus Christ in Jordan, and the lovely symbol of rising from the dead to a new life. In short, baptism is an act for grown persons who know their need; and baptism is immersion in water.

If anyone is disposed to complain at this, let him remember that the Lord Jesus did not complain “Suffer it to be so now,” He said, “for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” It was the Son of God who said this who are we to say less? And God was well pleased with Him the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and the voice was heard saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus had been born Son of God, of the Spirit of God, long before, but it is surely striking that the Spirit came to confirm God’s good pleasure in Him just as He became baptized.

There is no mistaking the importance which the baptism of believers has in the New Testament. Quite apart from the existence of the rite in the practice of John the Baptist, and the acceptance of it by Our Lord, it is made the mark of a submissive soul in the words: “The publicans and the harlots justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him” (Luke 7:29). It is not a good or a wise thing to “reject the counsel of God”: but at least this passage shows that the New Testament baptism is the kind one can reject. It is not imposed upon one in infancy: one takes it or rejects it when its meaning is understood. And then there follow the two recorded commandments of the risen Lord that His disciples should baptize their converts (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19), and in quick succession in the Acts of the Apostles the Pentecost baptisms (2:41); that of the Samaritans (8:9); of the Ethiopian proselyte (8:36); of Paul (9:18); of a friendly gentile (10:47), and of many others. It was taken for granted that Christians were baptized persons; “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

### **“Of His own will begat He us by the word of truth”**

But if we merely stressed our duty in the matter of baptism (real and imperative though that duty is), we should be in danger of neglecting God’s part in the matter. We are to be old enough to decide whether we will obey, but our obedience is not all. When the Lord impressed on Nicodemus that he must be born of water and the Spirit, He was asking for obedience, of course, but He was offering something, too, if

Nicodemus and the rest of us would take it. We have to consent to re-birth, but we cannot make it happen. God's part depends on our willingness, but we wait upon His grace.

Note the stress on God's part in these passages: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His own mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5); "of His own will begat He us by the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18); "being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23); "behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1)

The Word comes to us, of course, in the Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto Salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. No one is given any title to believe that God grants this rebirth upon other terms than those set out in the written Word of God. Yet in the receiving of the word is the promise of life: "the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). God does not merely send out a printed page and leave its workings alone. He sees to it that, in every receptive soul, it shall accomplish that thereunto He hath sent it, and shall not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:11)

From the beginning it is impossible to separate the Word from the Spirit: "The Spirit of God moved ... by the Word of God the heavens were of old;" "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee ... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"; and now, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit ... of His own will begat He us by the Word of truth."

### **"The promise is unto you and unto your children"**

This is what Peter said to the repentant Jews at Pentecost, when they asked: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter seems to leave no gaps in the application of the promise: both in time and space it stands for every one who receives the gospel: to you and to your children (as to time), to all that be afar off (as to place), and even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (for good measure). This message is as universal as that of John 3:5 and Titus 3:5.

But there are unhappily two serious misunderstandings of the promise, and to disabuse ourselves of false expectations, we must for a little while pause to deal with these. The first is that the "promise of the Spirit" means the power to work miracles in the name of Christ, of which the most popular in our day is "speaking with tongues"; and the second is that those who receive the promise of the Spirit are from that moment sure against sinning: that nothing can go wrong with them from then on.

It is true that some disciples (not all) did in the first century receive the power to work miracles through the Spirit (Galatians 3:5). These were given for a sign, to show that God truly was with His word (Mark 16:17,20), and they served an essential purpose in showing the truth of the faith when it first broached the world. But already in the apostles' days they were being misused by those who claimed them (1 Corinthians 14), and the way was being prepared for their passing (33:8-13). They carried with themselves no reform of the heart: they were external only, and to yearn for them for their own sake was carnal and unprofitable (Acts 8:18-24). Nothing could have been more beside the mark, when stricken men, guilty of the death of the Lord, came to the apostles beside themselves with guilt and helplessness and said, "Man and brethren, what shall we do?" than to say to them, "Be baptized, and as a prize you will be able to work great miracles!" What they needed—what we all need—was help to overcome their sin, and the offer of induction into the family of God so that His care might be upon them. And this is what they received: "As many as gladly received his word were baptized, and continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayer" (Acts 2:41).

This is what the Gentiles after them received too: "that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the gentiles, even the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14). A common access by one Spirit unto the Father was provided for all who were truly baptized into Christ (Ephesians 2:18). It was fellowship with God, and God's presence to help, that was offered to the desperate and the needy, not primarily, and in our days not at all, the opportunity of working external wonders. A sense of proportion, a knowledge of what we really need from God, will keep us from any desire for untimely sign-mongering here.

**"He that is born of God doth not commit sin".**

But while most of us do not hanker after miracle-working, we would like to feel security against sin. And there are those who claim a sort of instant salvation which rules out sin from the moment of conversion, and excludes the idea of falling away. Two passages in 1 John might be cited in support (1 John 3:9, 5:18), where it is said that those who are begotten of God do not, and cannot, sin. But John cannot mean that actual Christian men and women never sin. He tells those who claim that they do not that they are liars (1:8, 10), and he invites those who admit they do to confess and seek forgiveness (1:9). What he evidently means is this: those who sin after coming to the knowledge of the faith must not blame God for it, nor must they say that this is quite all right for sons of God to do. For God's part in their lives is altogether inconsistent with sinning, and if they sin this is harking back to the old man, to the Adam whom they profess to have done away with. It happens, of course, but it is something to confess and be ashamed of, and seek restitution for. It is natural, but for all that it is shameful, and it ought to be progressively overcome.

And as Paul puts it, who of all people ought to have been able to claim security from

sin if this was to be had, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection lest by any means, when I have preached unto others I myself should be a castaway” (1 Corinthians 9:27). As late as his imprisonment in Rome he confessed, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after ... I press on toward the mark for the prize” (Philippians 3:12).

The fact is that baptism is a beginning, not an end. Being born is not the same thing as growing up, and in the prolonged and sometimes painful process of growing up there can be both lapses (to be confessed and then shunned), and even permanent backsliding, a deliberate refusal of the Spirit once confessed, “counting the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and doing despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:29). There must in any case be the battle between flesh and Spirit for us, as there was the battle between the flesh and the Spirit for the Lord Jesus Christ, and not until that battle has been fought and ended is the end attained.

### **“The flesh lusteth against the Spirit”**

This is the present lot of the baptised disciple (Galatians 5:16), and each disciple must make up his mind as to how he will allow the battle to go. In his flesh lie all the deep-rooted rebellions of our Adamic nature. “The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these...” (Gal 5:19). In the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the written Word of God, lies instruction in that self-effacing service of Him and of our fellows which is the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). God, who sent His Son to teach the nature of the battle which has to be fought, and to give hope as to its outcome, stands by to render aid when it is asked for in faithful prayer, but the battle must be the disciple’s own. Paul is so far from taking the outcome for granted that, he gives us this advice: “Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh ... if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (5:16,25). But he starts with baptism and works onward. In baptism, “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (5:24). To undertake baptism acceptably, is to recognise that the proper place for the rebellious desires of the flesh is on the Cross; it is to think of ourselves as risen with Christ, seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1).

The development from then on is to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12). It is to pray, knowing that our prayers themselves can be transformed and heard (Romans 8:15,26), and that we can use the intimate family name of our Father as we draw near and say, “Abba, Father” (8:15; Mark 14:36).

It is to seek and obtain forgiveness for lapses, and strength against renewed temptation. It is to enjoy the companionship of Him who, in that He hath suffered being tempted is able also to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

### **“The children of the resurrection”**

The outcome is plainly promised. No son or daughter of God in Jesus Christ need fall short of it. All needed help is there for the asking, for them that love God, who are called according to His purpose. And the outcome of the victory is the same for them as it was for Jesus Christ Himself, in this as in all other matters our Forerunner.

To Him came the resurrection of the body. To His saints is offered resurrection too, and then, “He shall change our vile body, and fashion it anew like unto His own glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). He fulfilled His Sonship in His dying and rising; this is the pattern of our promised sonship, too, “for it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). The return of Jesus to the earth is the signal for this triumphant climax of the pilgrimage of the Sons of God. He is the first begotten from the dead, but to all His brethren He says,

“They that, shall attain unto that age, and the resurrection of the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:34).

And so, angels, who play no part in the birth of the Spirit for men, and are no more than ministering spirits, in the hand of God, during this pilgrimage, prove to be the pattern of life for those who are born again. Ultimately, those who are born of water and Spirit, and are true to their new birth, will join the ranks of those whose numbers are not thinned by death, and so who engage not in marriage nor in giving in marriage. Then is their sonship of God made perfect and permanent, with the only-begotten Son the Author, and now the Finisher, of their salvation.

*Alfred Norris*