

THE POWER OF THE WORD

For a long time I was burdened to see something written on this subject, but could not find it. I have spoken on this subject in the past and tried to reveal some of the golden nuggets that God has blessed me to see. At times I have been misunderstood and have had labels put on me that were not true. Now I am writing on this subject so that we may “grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Not Gospel Regeneration

Several years ago, I stated to some friends, “I do not believe in gospel regeneration, but I cannot disprove it.” When I asked ministers for answers to some scriptures, I often got evasive answers. Therefore, I began to study the Word of God to find out if the Bible taught gospel regeneration or not. Now I can say, by the grace of God, “I do not believe in gospel regeneration and can prove to my satisfaction that the Bible does not teach such a doctrine.” I believe if you honestly study this pamphlet you will understand my position, too.

New Birth Is the Power of God

There are some verses of Scripture concerning the new birth on which all can agree. The first of these is John 3:3-8. Jesus stated that one “must be born again,” and He said that this birth is “of the Spirit.” Further, in John 5:25, Jesus compared the new birth to a resurrection were people must hear *His* voice. A beautiful picture of this example is seen by Jesus raising Lazarus from the grave.

Some may wonder how the new birth is ascribed equally to the Spirit and Jesus? In John 6:63, Jesus stated, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, They are *spirit*, and *they* are *life*.” By comparing John 3:3-8 and John 6:63, it is seen that the giving of life is by the Holy Spirit and by the voice of the Son of God. Therefore, when Jesus stated that when *He* speaks *His* word it is equal to the *Spirit*, we see how the new birth is performed mutually by the Spirit and Jesus. Other passages concerning the new birth state that the giving of life is by God, but they do not tell what means, if any, are used to accomplish it. The only other passage, aside from those given above, that gives credit to the Spirit being instrumental in the new birth is Galatians 4:29. All other passages state that it is God Who gives life, but they do not tell how He does it.

An Honest Look at Hard Scriptures

Some of the passages that previously troubled me are now some of the most comforting passages in God's Word. One of these is I Peter 1:22-25. Usually when one teaches on the new birth, he quotes only a portion of this passage—verse twenty-three. The person who believes in gospel regeneration interprets “the word of God” to mean the preached word—the word which a minister preaches. A person who does not believe in gospel regeneration usually interprets “the word of God” to be the same Word as in John 1:1, 14. He does this because the word for “word” in both places is “logos” in the Greek language. If I Peter 1:23 stood alone, either interpretation could be correct. However, a verse must not be interpreted out of its context.

Look at the passage again and notice verse twenty-two; these people had purified their souls in obeying the truth. The only way a person can obey something is to know about it. Therefore, to obey the truth, one must have it taught to him. Look at verse twenty-five. It states that the *word* is that which the gospel minister preaches. You may ask, “Is not Christ preached by the gospel?” The answer is yes, but we cannot pass this verse that easily. The word translated “word” in verse twenty-five is a different Greek word from the one in verse twenty-three. The word in verse twenty-five is “rhema,” but in verse twenty-

three it is “logos.” “Logos” may be translated to mean Christ as in John 1:1, 14, but “rhema” means the written or spoken word. It is never translated nor interpreted to mean Christ. Likewise, “logos” does not always stand for Christ. It can, and most of the time does, mean the written or spoken word. In Matthew 7:24, 26, 28; John 4:37, 39; and I Timothy 1:15, it is translated “saying.” In Matthew 12:36; 18:23; Romans 14:12; and Hebrews 13:17, “logos” is translated “account.” It is translated “saying” fifty times, “account” eight times, “speech” eight times, along with other synonymous terms. The word “logos” is used 330 times in the New Testament and 225 times it is translated “word” and only seven times out of the 225 times is “logos” translated “Word” to mean Christ without question.¹ Therefore, by studying the word “word” in its context in I Peter 1:23, the conclusion is that it means the written or spoken word.

You may be thinking that if gospel regeneration is not true then, “What does verse twenty-three mean?” I hope to answer this question later. First I will try to explain the following passages: James 1:18; Romans 1:16-17; 10:17; and I Corinthians 4:15.

Why Preach the Gospel?

To answer this question, I direct you to Romans 1:16-17. Paul stated that he was ready to preach the gospel of God to anyone. Paul further stated that he was a debtor to preach the gospel to all men and was not ashamed to do so because it was God's power unto salvation to the person who has faith.

I do not wish to divert to the subject of salvation, yet I remind you that “life” and “salvation” are two different subjects. Salvation is something that begins in the mind of God, is experienced in the believer's life, and is complete when in glory with God. Therefore, we are not studying salvation *per se*. We are studying life and the gospel and their relation to each other.

In Romans 1:17, Paul stated that the gospel reveals the righteousness of God “from faith to faith.” Paul did *not* say that preaching the gospel causes the righteousness of God, but that the gospel *reveals* God's righteousness. Paul maintained that God's righteousness is revealed to the person who has faith. Romans 10:6-9 further explains this.

In Romans chapter ten, the subject is still the righteousness of God. Paul states that Israel (Israel as a nation) is ignorant of this righteousness. He also tells what God's righteousness maintains or asserts. It does not ask for God's Anointed to come from heaven nor to rise from the dead. The righteousness of God says that the word is so near that it is in the mouth and heart. It further maintains that the word is the *same* “word of faith” as the gospel of God. Therefore, when the testimony of the gospel is already in an individual, he can confess with his mouth or believe in this heart. Thus, by looking at this passage with Romans 1:16-17, when a man of God preaches the gospel and someone believes, it is because God has *already* placed the “word of faith” *in* the individual. Since the word translated “word” here in Romans 10 is “rhema” and not “logos,” it cannot be interpreted to mean Christ. When Jesus stated in John 6:63 that the *word spoken by Him* was Spirit and life, the word He used was also “rhema.” By comparing I Peter 1:23-25 in its context, one sees that the word which “begets again” is “rhema,” the same “word” which is *already in* an individual when, or before, he believes the gospel.

How did this “rhema” get in the individual? It was when he heard the voice of the Son of God, *not* when he heard the voice of the preacher. When Paul heard the voice of the preacher, Stephen, it was only a “savour of death unto death,” but when he heard the voice of the Son of God on the road to Damascus, it brought him to the ground. Then the Lord sent Paul to the preacher for the righteousness of God to be revealed to him. Thus the Scriptures state that “life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel” (II Timothy 1:10). This is the same as *revealing, bringing to light, or receiving* the righteousness of God.

Considering this, how does Romans 10:17 fit into the picture? Romans 10:17 states that faith comes by hearing. However, it does not say that life nor the Spirit comes by hearing. Galatians 5:22 states

¹ J. B. Smith, *Greek-English Concordance to the New Testament* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1965).

that faith **IS** a fruit of the Spirit, and we discovered the words that Jesus speaks, or the voice of the Son of God, is Spirit and life. Life (the Spirit) is present *prior* to faith or belief. A man dead in sin cannot hear nor believe. Furthermore Romans 10:8-9 teaches that when a person hears the gospel and believes, it is because the word, “the word of faith” (rhema), is already in him. Therefore, Romans 10:17 is not teaching the new birth. Yet, it has *everything* to do with a person believing in Jesus Christ and God revealing His righteousness to him. This is the same as having life and immortality brought to light.

A Look at James 1:18

Often James 1:18 is set forth to show gospel regeneration. On the surface, this verse appears to teach gospel regeneration. A study in the Greek language will show otherwise. However, James 1:18 proposes no problem if it did teach that the spoken or written Word was used by God in the new birth. Why? Because in giving life, it is the Son of God that speaks the word. But in revealing the life, it is the preacher speaking the word. Nevertheless, this passage teaches how life is *revealed* or *brought to light*.

Let us study the word “begot,” in this verse. This word is “apokueo” in the Greek language, and it comes from the word “kuo” or “kueo” which means to be pregnant. Therefore, “apo-kueo” means “to bring forth as from the womb, or to give birth to.”² This word is used only twice in the Scriptures—here and in verse fifteen where it is translated “bringeth forth.” James is not speaking about the initial quickening or giving of life, but how the life is manifested or *brought to light*. Thus, the giving of life to a child of God in the Spiritual realm is like conception in the natural realm.

Some may argue that at conception there is not a person, but only a fertilized egg. However, according to Psalm 51:5, David declared that he was a sinner the moment he was conceived in his mother's womb. Some people deny this is talking about original sin, yet I do not stand alone in this thinking. Men such as David Dickson,³ C. H. Spurgeon,⁴ Matthew Henry,⁵ John Gill,⁶ and many other sound scholars maintain that this verse is teaching original sin. Spurgeon stated, “It is a wicked wresting of scripture to deny that original sin and natural depravity are here taught.”

This raises the following question, “Can someone who does not exist, nor ever will exist, be charged with something?” The answer according to logic, as well as the Scriptures, is an emphatic “NO!” Since David was a person at conception, we see that that is when his natural life began. Likewise, when God quickens a person, or gives him Spiritual life, he is alive like the babe in the womb of its mother. When someone preaches the Word of truth to that individual, it is parallel to the doctor bringing a child into the world. Therefore, from the time an individual is quickened or born from above, until the gospel is preached to him, he is existing by the umbilical cord of God's grace. It is possible for a person to be quickened for a time and not know anything about it, as a person is conceived and living for some time before he has a conscience awareness of his existence. Not everyone has a dramatic experience like Paul.

Our conclusion is that James was not speaking about giving spiritual life to anyone; he was speaking about life being brought to light as Paul said in Timothy (II Timothy 1:9-10). The context of the first chapter of James (as well as the entire book) bears out that he wrote to encourage professing believers to exhibit fruits of a child of God. James did not write to instruct how one becomes spiritually alive.

² Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967).

³ David Dickson, *A Commentary on the Psalms* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965).

⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1 (Byron Center, Michigan: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., 1970).

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 3 (Marshallton, Delaware: Sovereign Grace Publishers, n. d.).

⁶ John Gill, *An Exposition of The Old Testament*, vol. 3 (London: William Hill Collingridge, 1852-1854; repr., Atlanta, Georgia: Turner Lassetter, 1954).

A Look at I Corinthians 4:15

I Corinthians 4:15 is also used to teach gospel regeneration. We cannot study the word “begotten” in this verse and come to a definite meaning of the word. “Begotten” is used in a very broad sense throughout the Scriptures. Still, I believe that after studying the word, we will see how I Corinthians 4:15 harmonizes with what is written above.

The Greek word for begotten is “gennao” which is a form of “ginomai.” “Ginomai” carries the idea “to become.” It can mean something coming to pass or something coming into existence. The word “gennao” has the idea “to beget, to be born, or to arise.”⁷ I have tried to state the meaning of these words as briefly and simply as possible. For a fuller understanding of “gennao” and “ginomai,” I suggest that the reader study them in depth.

The word “*gennao*” is translated as nine different words, with the majority being “begat” and “be born.”⁸ When looking at Matthew 1:2-16, we find that it is used to indicate the giving of life. However, when looking at Matthew 2:1, 4; Luke 1:57; John 16:21, we find that the same word is used concerning a child being brought forth from the womb. Therefore, I have as much right to claim that Paul was speaking concerning bringing life forth as someone else does to say that Paul was inferring the idea of giving life. When interpreting this verse in light of the other passages on this subject, one discovers that Paul was saying the same thing as he wrote to Timothy concerning the gospel—that it was to “bring life and immortality to light.” In Acts 18:10, when Paul was in Corinth for the first time and was going to leave because of persecution, the Lord told him to stay because He had “much people in the city.” God had people in Corinth before Paul preached there, and God told him to stay and preach to them and bring forth life and immortality to light—that they might receive the righteousness of God. As with James, when we study the context of I Corinthians 4:15, we see that Paul is not speaking about how the people became living children of God. He was reminding them how they had Christ revealed to them, manifesting themselves as children of God. Since Paul was the first preacher in Corinth, he was instrumental in their conversion but not their regeneration. He was instrumental in their living like God's children, and they were to continue keeping the faith as he had.

I might add that this is exactly the same situation in Philemon 10. Paul, by the grace of God, brought to light the life that God placed in Onesimus so Onesimus would live like a child of God and not like the slaves of the world.

Summation

I have tried to show that when a person is quickened, the same Word of God (rhema) that is used in preaching is used in giving life. The difference is when this Word is used by the Son of God, it quickens or gives life to a dead sinner. However, when the same Word is used by *the preacher*, it brings life and immortality to light; or as Paul stated in Romans 1:16-17, the righteousness of God is “revealed from faith to faith.” This is because the Word of faith (rhema) is placed within the individual by the voice of the Son of God, and it is the “*same Word of faith*” that we preach. Therefore, the same testimony that is in the Scriptures (the word—rhema) is in the regenerated person. When the Word (rhema) is preached to that individual, the two testimonies bear witness to the same thing; that is, the righteousness of God is revealed to the individual, and the life and immortality in that person is manifested or brought to light.

This shows how a person might believe in gospel regeneration because the *same* Word of truth is used in both cases. The difference lies in the *person* using the Word. I admit that while a minister is preaching the Lord may quicken someone who is listening to the preacher; however, God is not using the

⁷ Thayer.

⁸ Smith.

preacher's words; it is the words of the voice of the Son of God that quickens. God is only limited to Himself. Just as Jesus told the disciples to loose Lazarus and let him go after He had given him life, likewise, when God quickens a person, we should to be present with the gospel to loose him and let him go. You may ask, "How do we know who God is going to quicken?" I answer, "We don't." This is why Jesus said to go into all the world and preach the gospel; that is why Paul gave his life to be first with the truth of God and not let someone beat him to people with a half-truth (II Timothy 2:10). If we, who know this truth, do not go and preach it with the zeal of our brother Paul, may God take it from us and give it to those who will. I sometimes wonder if God has judged us for not spreading the truth by allowing those who preach a half-truth, or even a partial truth, to go and preach to His sheep.

Conclusion

I have not exhausted the subject in this small pamphlet. I believe this is an honest approach to the subject using the main passages involved. There can and needs to be much more written upon this topic. I have given a brief introduction with some answers to these passages of Scripture. I pray that this will be of some benefit to you and that it will cause you to study the subject to *know* His word and to *preach it with great enthusiasm to his honor* and to the *manifesting* of the life of His Son, Christ Jesus, in our mortal flesh.

Jimmy Barber, 1970
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