

## E1. The Case for the New Birth

It is essential to lay the first foundation stone with precision and accuracy, without which error is distributed throughout the whole building. Regarding the salvation of mankind we cannot rely on the judgments and estimates of man, but must seek the undeniable and verifiable truth revealed in the Word of God—you must be born again.

Greetings, I am Dan DeVitis and I welcome you to this podcast. Today I would like to begin with the most essential, the most critical element relating to salvation. It is the most fundamental principle, without which, continued spiritual growth is impossible. What is this vital factor? It is the essential element of what is referred to in the Bible as the “new birth” or “regeneration.” One may ask, “Isn’t the principle of the new birth already quite known in the church? After all, even the most novice Bible student has learned of it in John 3, where Jesus talks of its necessity to Nicodemus; Jn. 3.3 – Jesus said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* However, having head knowledge of it is one thing, but pursuing its reality is yet another matter altogether.

### Question

Let’s begin by asking a few simple questions, “Does God have a purpose for His creation? Is there a Divine plan that guides all His intensions since the beginning of time? And if so, is there an end product for creation, a Divine destiny, achieving this eternal purpose?”

If it be true that God has such a purpose, should we not do all that we can to pursue an understanding of that purpose, and to seek to know how we fit into that Divine plan? This is not a question reserved for philosophers and

theologians alone, but one that should be pondered by every living soul. It is as the psalmist wrote,

*Ps. 8.3-4 – “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, **What is man that You are mindful of him?**”*

Wow, imagine that, God is mindful of man. We, as human beings, are continually brought into God’s remembrance. Why is this? The most important aspect of this query is that it shifts the focus from the first person perspective, from “what I want out of my life, my existence on this earth,” to the second person perspective, “what does God want of me, and what does He want for me.” It also turns our attention away from what are my hopes for this life and my expectations for eternity to the reality of what will God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally gain for themselves from His creation.

It seems the highest expectation for much of the Church world today is simply salvation for one’s self and for discipleship of believers. This is known as The Great Commission and is rightly considered to be the God-given purpose for the Church. After Jesus’ resurrection from the death, but before His ascension into heaven, He commanded His disciples,

*Mt. 28.18-20 — “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

The most troubling thing is that even though *salvation* and *discipleship* is the focus of today’s church, there is an overall elementary understanding of either. I fear that the Church has stopped short by maintaining only the most rudimentary knowledge of these words of our Lord, without pursuing their depth of understanding. In the natural world one is received as a member into

a secret organization by confessing its creed and undergoing an initiation ritual. It seems that in like manner anyone with a little knowledge can preach the Gospel and baptize people, thereby making them members of a church; but somehow this seems to fall short of the *salvation* and *discipleship* as intended by our Lord? The Church today must be more spiritual and not behave as a secular organization, and the highest for believers must be more than becoming a church member and receiving a free pass to heaven. There is a calling in Christ of something more, something deeper, and something more somber, more holy, even to the transforming of our very souls. The calling of the church is far more than becoming a religious organization with many members and its calling much higher, more spiritual, involving the Kingdom of God in the earth today. Indeed it is.

## Natural Vs Spiritual

The objective here is to pursue a deeper, or more complete and thorough, understanding of that great commission of salvation and discipleship. We cannot rely on our natural understanding and reasoning abilities; we must begin by prayerfully asking God to open our understanding of this great call of God upon our lives. A necessary beginning point is to acknowledge that there is a distinction between knowing in the natural and knowing in the spiritual. For now, let us assume that “natural” understanding comes from the intellect, our senses, and our emotions. For example, we may notice a dark cloud drifting our way, feel a cool breeze in advance of it, and hear distant thunder; we then determine the approach of a thunderstorm and make preparations for its arrival for fear of possible damage. Our intellect senses and emotions are all involved in our decision making.

However, “spiritual” understanding comes from a perceiving in the heart, by revelation and discernment—discernment being the ability to grasp and comprehend what is not obvious to the natural understanding. We may hear the message of Christ as perhaps having heard it several times before. But this time there is a strange and unfamiliar stirring in the heart and it is as if God Himself is speaking to us, and we respond not out of reasoning or logically analyzing the situation, but because we discern being apprehended

by something spiritual, intangible, but seemingly real. The intellect or emotions are not involved in the decision but can only be described as being gripped by the Spirit of God. We respond in humble submission.

For additional emphasis, I would like to mention two scriptures to enforce this distinction between the natural and spiritual. The first involved Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate; He said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” Jn. 18.36 So, with this comes the understanding that Christ’s kingdom is spiritual, not being of this natural world; it is invisible, intangible, and without time restrictions. It cannot be seen or understood by the intellect, our senses, or emotions.

The second scripture involved Jesus speaking to Nicodemus, Jn. 3.3,5 — He said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” and “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” These words of Jesus were decisive and with a tone of authority and certainty. “Most assuredly” He said, one cannot “see” or even “enter” the Kingdom of God by any natural means; being “born again” is the only initiation into the spiritual world of God.

So now, let’s proceed with this intent, to pursue an understanding of God’s purposes for man and explore the depths of understanding baptism and discipleship; we will do this by not relying on our own understanding, but by drawing closer to the thoughts and intent of God’s own heart. There is, however, the prerequisite mentioned earlier, the spiritual experiences of seeing and of entering the Kingdom of God; and we know now the absolute necessity and precondition to all of this is the new birth experience, the quintessential element of salvation.

## **The Case for the New Birth:**

In considering the case for the new birth, we must be most direct and assertive, for this alone is the stable rock upon which to build our lives. A foundation of any other sort, any confession of faith, of church membership, or participation in church rituals, or any other religious activities, will become as a foundation built upon sand, unstable and subject to failure. And, the most direct means is by opening up the clear and meaningful word of God, the holy scriptures, beginning with Acts 2.38,

*“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall **receive** the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”*

How often baptism is explained and performed as a ritual, but without its essential two-fold emphasis: believing and receiving. To be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ is one thing; to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit is yet another thing.

Things of the Kingdom of God are not automatic but must be accessed by faith. Baptism may be done as a meaningful “ritual” as is the practice of most churches. The second, however, cannot be practiced as a ritual but can only be spiritually experienced; baptism is physical and sensible, however receiving the Spirit of Christ is spiritual and it is by faith—remembering once more, faith is defined as, “... the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Heb. 11.1 In short, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ entering into one’s heart; it is bringing the believer’s spirit into oneness with Christ. This experience is 100% outside the realm of natural understanding and practices; it is an invisible and intangible impartation of the Holy Spirit as a most powerful influence into one’s life. It is as Jesus promised,

*Jn. 7.37-39 — “Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who **believes** in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would **receive**,”*

Take particular notice that both words, *believing* and *receiving*, are emphasized by Jesus: *believing* in Him and *receiving* the Holy Spirit. When the apostle Paul came upon some disciples at Ephesus he asked them, “*Did you **receive** the Holy Spirit when you **believed**?*” Acts 19.2. Here again Paul emphasized both *believing* and *receiving*. The disciples replied that they never even heard of the Holy Spirit, that they were only baptized in water into John the Baptist’s baptism. Paul then explained more fully,

*Acts 19.4-6 — “Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should **believe** on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’*

*When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the **Holy Spirit came upon them**, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”*

By *believing and receiving* one enters into the spiritual realm of the Kingdom of God; they are never the same again. There is no more reverting to the old life nor is there ever the satisfaction of settling for religious practices, for they now have tasted of **spiritual “life.”** This spiritual life is distinct from our natural soul life; for as our soul life gives us a knowledge and relationship to natural things in the world, this spiritual life opens our hearts and understanding to heavenly things. There begins an altogether new life in Christ, as it is most powerfully written,

*2 Cor. 5.17 — “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*

Let us pause for a moment before reflecting upon this awesomely weighty scripture, and together pray for the opening of our understanding, praying the prayer of Paul for the Church of Ephesus, as he prayed,

*Eph. 1.17-21 — “the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”*

This word in 2 Cor. 5.17 does not just imply there is a termination of an old life and the regeneration of a new lifestyle, it explicitly describes and dogmatically states it as an incontrovertible truth that an old life is terminated, and a new life has come. To accept and believe this is a matter of “faith;” to doubt or reject it is a matter of “unbelief;” and furthermore, to think that it just “implies” a change in behavior is only relegated it to the realm of “religion.” Once again, it all comes down to a matter of religion or of life.

The word “regeneration” (See Titus 3.5) is a word which literally means “new birth”—a meaning that is not to be taken lightly. Regeneration is properly applied to one who is “born again,” in the sense that a new life has entered into him, and that a further connection must be made between that life and the life he now lives is altogether new in origin. It is important now to realize the source of this new life; it is God, the only true source of all life. As it is written,

*Jn. 1.12-13 — “But as many as **received** Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who*

*believe in His name: who were **born**, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but **of God**.”*

*But as many as **received** is as we discussed previously, a step in faith beyond **believing** in Him. Receiving Christ is receiving His own spiritual seed of life into our hearts. The mention of that word “seed” brings up yet another important related spiritual concept. This is clearly expressed by Peter, “*having been **born again**, not of corruptible **seed** but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.*” 1 Pet. 1.23 One may be born of the natural seed of his parents and eventually die. But this speaks of being *born again of the incorruptible seed* of Christ. An incorruptible seed is an eternal seed leading to eternal life. This is, in all truth, the spiritual new birth.*

Having been born again, the believer now has a status above all creation, for the new life has not come from creation, as being *born of the will of the flesh* of his parents, but is *born of God*; believers are born into the family of God in its truest spiritual sense. We now have an altogether new relationship with God, we now belong to *the family of God*. (Eph. 2.19); and again, it is written, “you have received the Spirit of adoption (sonship) by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father;” (Rm. 8.15) its importance noted by using both the Greek and Hebrew words for “Father”.

This, and this alone, is the basis of our faith in Christ. One may say, “I have repented of my sins,” or “that I have been baptized in His name,” or that “I am now a Bible-reading God- fearing member of the Church;” but can you say “I have been born again of the seed of Christ” and that “God is now my Father.” The former consists of what you religiously “do” for your faith, the latter is what your “are” in your faith. This is God’s highest for man; there is nothing higher or greater. It is outside the bounds of all denominations, creeds, and rituals. It has been said, and I repeat it here, “Christianity is not a religion but a relationship with God in Jesus Christ;” it is about being born into the family of God, into a new life now and extending unto eternity. There arises within both a thirst and a hunger, not for “things” of the Kingdom of God, but for God Himself and the working out of His purposes in our lives and in the earth today. To know our Father and to know Christ in true *relationship* and



*fellowship*, of oneness in spirit, and of the hope of things to come, is God's ultimate purpose and calling for every believer.

## Recalling Jesus' Words to Nicodemus

We have been discussing what many perceive to be His purpose as described in Mt. 28.19-20, and that is to go forth, making *disciples* and *baptizing* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It has also been clearly mandated that there is a bridge to cross between *baptism* and *discipleship*, from which there is no return. And, unless that bridge is crossed there can be no making of true disciples with a proper understanding of the Kingdom of God. And what is this bridge? Once again, it is the *new birth*, a spiritual experience that spans the chasm between the natural and the spiritual, between the temporal and eternal, and between the worldly and the heavenly.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,*” and “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*” Jn. 3.3,5 Man, merely by his fallen human nature, is in darkness and is blind to the things of God; they are before him, but he cannot see them with his natural eyes nor understand with his intellect and reasoning ability. The *new birth* spans the gap between the realm of fallen man and the redeemed man, between darkness and light, between children of God by creation and the children of God by divine birth.

This message on the eternal purposes of God is intended to go beyond some intellectual pursuit of Godly principles or some theological understanding of the nature of God or some religious belief system. For all of that can be undertaken through education and training; the only ways known to natural man. However, when the apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Rome, he said in his letter, Rm. 1.11 — “*For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established.*” Do you see that to become *established* in the faith, in other words to grow up as a disciple of Christ, requires an *imparting* of something *spiritual*. The *new birth* opens one's

spiritual eyes to see and ears to hear to receive things of the Holy Spirit; so that he not only *enters into the Kingdom of God*, but continues to grow up spiritually *in* the Kingdom. There is a Divine purpose in the Gospel of Christ, a purpose for a salvation well beyond the natural understanding of man. It all begins with the baptism into Christ, a physical act of confession of belief and the spiritual impartation of the Spirit of Christ in the new birth. With this, the bridge has been crossed from the worldly natural into the heavenly spiritual; entrance into the Kingdom of God has been gained, and a walk has begun towards the upward call of God upon your life. It is an altogether new beginning, *old things have passed away, behold, all things have become brand new*.

## **S1.E1. The Case for the New Birth:**

### **Questions for discussion**

1. Distinguish between the natural and the spiritual. Give four examples of each. Is a cross icon spiritual? Explain.
2. Distinguish between the natural purpose for your life and your spiritual purpose. Do you think your purposes are in line with God's purposes for your life?
3. Why is the new birth necessary for salvation? Are there any other options? Explain as accurately as possible what is regeneration or the new birth. Cite some scriptures in your explanation.
4. Explain what "faith" is, and then how there must accompany our faith the acts of both believing and receiving.
5. What is the Kingdom of God, how and when is it entered, and what does this mean for your life in the present?