

*“The LORD make his face shine upon thee” (Numbers 6:25) as you seek and search for God as for hidden treasure (Proverbs 2:3-5; Matthew 13:44); and just think, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation” (Hebrews 2:3).*

*“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”*

Proverbs 14:12

The

## Heavenly Birth

and its

## Earthly Counterfeits

*“The Heavenly Birth and its Earthly Counterfeits”*

[edited]

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**It is every individual's responsibility to study the Bible and pray for the Holy Spirit's illumination of what he reads:**

• “[The Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” (Acts 17:11) God invites us personally: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 1:18).

- ⇒ Pray that God would convict you of your sins and your unrighteousness and of the judgment to come (John 16:8); and that you are lost and will perish.
- ⇒ Seek the Lord. (Matthew 6:33)
- ⇒ Pray for the “*fear of the Lord*”, as it “*is the beginning of knowledge*”. (Prov 1:7)
- ⇒ Pray to have your eyes and ears opened to God's Truth. (Mark 8:18)
- ⇒ Pray that God would open the eyes of your understanding. (Luke 24:45)
- ⇒ Pray that you would see yourself as God sees you (dead in sin). (Ephesians 2:1)
- ⇒ Pray that God would make you hate sin and love holiness.
- ⇒ Pray to have a hunger and thirst for righteousness. (Matthew 5:6)
- ⇒ Pray for a “*broken heart*” and a “*contrite spirit*” (Psalm 34:18; 51:17)
- ⇒ Repent. Make a 180°. Turn from known sin in your life.
- ⇒ Pray with an obedient heart; pray for a willingness to obey.
- ⇒ Start obeying whatever the Lord shows you.
- ⇒ Pray for the gift of faith. (Ephesians 2:8)
- ⇒ Pray that God would make you a “*new creature*” (2 Cor 5:17)
- ⇒ Pray for the miracle of being “*begotten of God*” (“born again”) (1 John 5:18)
- ⇒ Read God's Word (the Bible) and ask the Lord to illuminate It for you and teach you in your heart.
- ⇒ And if you don't feel like it, set your will and seek the Lord anyway and pray that you would want to seek God and that the Lord would find you and that you would find the Lord Jesus Christ.

\* all Scripture quotations from the KJV

...1. “*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;*” (Eph. 2:1). Until God by His Spirit quickens the soul into spiritual life, there must be a determined rejection of Christ. However a man may receive Him into his judgment, the inward bias of his heart and the secret speech of his soul is, “*Not this man, but Barabbas*” (John 18:40.) If, then, there be any who do believe in Him, receive Him, love Him, and have a blessed union with Him, it all springs from the quickening Spirit of God, working with power in their souls.

Now this quickening work of God the Spirit upon the heart is manifested by certain fruits and evidences, which ever flow out of His blessed operations. For instance, wherever the quickening power of God's Spirit has passed upon a man's conscience, he is brought to see and feel himself to be a sinner. This inward sight of self cuts him off sooner or later from all legal hopes, all Pharisaic righteousness, all false refuges, and all vain evidences, with which he may seek to prop up his soul. In many cases the work may begin in a way scarcely perceptible, and in other instances may go on very gradually, for we cannot lay down any precise standard. But I am sure of this, that the Lord will 'bring down the hearts' of all His people 'with labor;' [Psalm 107:12] will convince them all of their lost state before Him, and cast them as ruined wretches into the dust of death-without hope, strength, wisdom, help, or righteousness, except that which is given to them, as a free gift, by sovereign grace.

And when the soul is brought down by the hand of God upon it to know the exceedingly heavy burden of sin, the wretchedness of the malady with which we are infected, the holiness and justice of God who cannot

clear the guilty; and feels itself not only implicated in Adam's transgression, but also condemned by actual commission of sin, it then begins to find its need of such a Savior as God has revealed in the Scriptures. And this work of grace in the conscience, pulling down all a man's false refuges, stripping him of every lying hope, and thrusting him down into self-abasement and self-abhorrence, is absolutely necessary to a true reception of Christ. **Whatever a man may have learned in his head, or however far he may be informed in his judgment, he never will receive Christ spiritually into his heart and affections, until he has been broken down by the hand of God in his soul to be a ruined wretch.**

2. We cannot indeed tell how long a man may be in coming [to this point]; some may be weeks, others may be months, and some may be years; but when he is effectually brought here, the Lord is pleased, for the most part, to open up to his astonished view, and to bring into his soul some saving knowledge of the Lord of life and glory. And this He does in various ways, for we cannot 'limit the Holy One of Israel;' (Ps. 78:41) sometimes by a secret light cast into the mind; sometimes by the application of a passage of Scripture with power; sometimes alone in the secret chamber; sometimes under the preached Word. In various ways, as God is pleased Himself to choose, He casts into the mind a light, and He brings into the heart a power, whereby the glorious Person of Christ, His atoning blood, dying love, finished work, and justifying righteousness, are looked upon by spiritual eyes, touched by spiritual hands, and received into a spiritual and believing heart.

sician could give; and your soul for a time feels satisfied with a sense and testimony of the Lord's goodness...



ence spring from a real work of God upon their souls, or whether they are mere counterfeits and imitations of a work of grace...

...He that has a conscience tender in God's fear knows what a dreadful thing it is to be a hypocrite before God, to have 'a lie in his right hand,' [Isaiah 44:20] and be deluded by the prince of darkness; and therefore, until God Himself assures him with His own blessed lips, speaks with power to his conscience, and establishes him in a blessed assurance of his interest in Christ by "shedding abroad His love in his heart," he must be exercised and tried in his mind, he must have these various tossings to and fro, for this simple reason-- because he cannot rest satisfied except in the personal manifestations of the mercy of God.

But what do you under such circumstances? Do you fly to man? No; for you are taught to see that "*miserable comforters are ye all*" (Job 16:2). Do you fly back to past experiences? As you endeavor to pursue them, they more and more recede from your view. Do you endeavor to gather up your former comforts? They slip out of your fingers, and you have no solid grasp of them. Do you go to ministers, that they may speak a flattering word? If they do speak to you words of encouragement, you cannot receive it. And thus, driven out of all creature hopes, your whole refuge and sole resource is the Lord Himself. To Him you go with a contrite heart, with a troubled mind, with an exercised soul; at His feet you bend with holy reverence, and cast yourself as a poor guilty wretch at His footstool. And when, in sweet and blessed answer to the cry of your soul, He drops in a word to raise up your drooping spirit, then you receive that which no human hand could minister; you have a balm which no human phy-

3. But wherever faith is given to the soul thus "*to receive*" Christ, there will be mingled with this faith, and blessedly accompanying it, love to the Lord of life and glory; and sometimes we may know the existence of faith when we cannot see it, by discerning the secret workings and actings of love towards that Savior, in whom God has enabled us to believe.

There will be from time to time, in living souls, a flowing forth of affection towards Jesus. From time to time He gives the soul a glimpse of His Person--He shows Himself, as the Scripture speaks, "*through the lattice*" (Song 2:9), passing, perhaps, hastily by, but giving such a transient glimpse of the beauty of His Person, the excellency of His finished work, dying love, and atoning blood as ravishes the heart, and secretly draws forth the affections of the soul, so that there is a following hard after Him, and a going out of the desires of the soul towards Him.

Thus, sometimes as we lie upon our bed, as we are engaged in our business, as we are occupied in our several pursuits of life; or at other times under the Word, or reading the Scriptures, the Lord is pleased secretly to work in the heart, and there is a melting down at the feet of Jesus, or a secret, soft, gentle going forth of love and affection towards Him, whereby the soul prefers Him before thousands of gold and silver, and desires nothing so much as the inward manifestations of His love, grace, and blood.

And thus a living soul "*receives*" Christ; not merely as driven by necessity, but also as drawn by affection. He does not receive Christ merely as a way of escape from "*the wrath to come*," merely as something to save a soul from where "*their worm dieth not*,

*and the fire is not quenched."* but mingled with necessity, sweetly and powerfully combined with it, and intimately and intricately working with it, there is the flowing forth of genuine affection and sincere love, that goes out to Him as the only object really worthy of our heart's affection, our spirit's worship, and our soul's desire. And we cannot say that less than this comes up to the meaning of the Scripture expression--'to receive Christ.' If we cannot, then, trace out in our hearts more or less of this work, which I have attempted feebly to describe, we cannot yet be said spiritually to have "received Christ."

**This is a very different thing from receiving Him into our judgment, or into our understanding in a doctrinal manner. To receive Him in the depths of a broken heart, as the only Savior for our guilty soul, as our only hope for eternity, as the only Lord of our heart's worship, and the only object of our pure affection; so that in secret, when no eye sees but the eye of God, and only the ear of Jehovah hears the pantings of our pleading heart, there is the breathing out of the spirit after the enjoyment of His love, grace, and blood—to know and feel this stamps a man to have "received" Christ into his heart by faith.**

4. But in the words of the text we read of a peculiar privilege, a sacred blessing, which is connected with and attached to the receiving of Christ. And perhaps you have been struck sometimes with the words-- "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*" [John 1:12] Did the word 'become' never strike you as a unique word? Does it not hint at a fur-

about the birth after "*the will of man.*" And what is the end of it all? It leaves the soul under "*the wrath to come.*" There is in all this religion no deliverance from the law, no pardon of sin, no separation from the world, no salvation from death and hell. These various births, be they 'of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man,' leave a man just where they found him-- dead in sin, destitute of the fear of God, and utterly ignorant of that divine teaching, which alone can save his soul from eternal wrath.

**But those who were so highly privileged and so spiritually blessed as to 'receive Christ,' and by receiving Christ to "*become the sons of God,*" were partakers of another birth than these false ones, and had received another teaching, another gospel, and another Jesus. And these, and these only, were "*born of God.*" The Lord Himself had quickened their souls, and brought them out of nature's darkness into His own marvelous light; the Lord Himself, by His secret work upon their consciences, had cast them down and lifted them up, had brought them to the birth and had also brought them forth; and thus they were "*born of God,*" and had received the kingdom of God with power into their hearts, so as to become "*new creatures,*" and to 'pass from death unto life.' [John 5:24]...**

Now I believe that for the most part, those who have nothing else but a birth 'of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man,' have no doubts nor fears, no strong exercises nor sharp trials as to their eternal state before God--while, on the other hand, those whom the Lord is teaching by the blessed Spirit, are often tried and exercised in their minds whether the feelings which they from time to time inwardly experi-

'shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit,' [Romans 5:5] in those that are 'born after the will of the flesh.' No abasing views of self, no tender feelings of reverence towards God, no filial fear of His great name, no melting of heart, no softening of spirit, no deadness to the world, no sweet communion with the Lord of life and glory, ever dwelt in their breasts. The flesh, with all its workings, and all its subtle deceit and hypocrisy, never sank so low as self-abhorrence and godly sorrow, and never mounted so high as into communion with the Three-One God. The depth of the one is too deep, and the height of the other too high for any but those who are "*born of God*."

c) We read, however, in the text, of another birth still, which is, "*of the will of man*." Man then it appears has a will to become religious; and as the birth according to "*the will of the flesh*" pointed out a religion taken up by ourselves, so the birth after "*the will of man*" shadows forth a religion put upon us by others. And to what does the great mass of the religion of the present day amount? If we gauge it by the scriptural standard, if we look at it with a spiritual eye, if we examine it in its beatings Godward, what must we say of the vast bulk of religion current in this professing day? Must we not say that it is according to "*the will of man*?"

Eloquent exhortations to "*flee from the wrath to come*," thundering denunciations of God's vengeance against the world, working upon the natural feelings, wooing men into a profession of religion, drawing into churches boys and girls just out of the Sunday school, and persuading all from infancy to grey-hairs to become religious--this is the way in which is brought

ther step? Does it not clearly imply that to "*receive Christ*," and to 'become a son of God' are two distinct things, and that one comes before the other?"

It is so. For it is only to those who "*receive Christ*," that the "*power*" (or "the privilege," as we read in the margin), is given, "*to become sons of God*."

**What then is it to 'become a son of God?'** For it is evidently not the same thing as 'receiving Christ,' but a step that follows on after receiving Christ; a privilege given to and reserved for those who do spiritually 'receive Him.' **To 'become a son of God' is to become so experimentally; to receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby the soul cries. "*Abba, Father*;" [Romans 8:15] to have that "*perfect love [which] casteth out fear: because fear hath torment*." [1John 4:18] and not merely to receive Christ as our hope of salvation from eternal perdition, but to be enabled by the witness and work of the Spirit in the soul to enjoy that relationship.**

**John 1:12-13 "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*."**

5. But in speaking of these "*sons of God*," the apostle describes them negatively as well as positively; he tells us what they are not, and he tells us what they are. And it is by contrasting what they are not with what they are, that we may arrive at some spiritual knowledge of their real character and position.

a) Those then that have 'received Christ,' and by receiving Christ have "*become the sons of God*" manifestly, are said 'not to have been born of **blood**.' The Jews, we know, laid great stress upon their lineal descent from Abraham. "We be Abraham's seed," they said to the Lord on one occasion, "*and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?*" "Art thou greater" asked they, "*than our father Abraham*" (John 8:33, 53). Their lineal descent from Abraham was the ground of their hope; and they believed that, being his children, they were interested in all the promises which were made to him. They saw no distinction between the children of Abraham literally and the children of Abraham spiritually; and those promises which were made to the spiritual seed of Abraham, as "*the father of all them that believe*" (Rom. 4:11), they appropriated to themselves as his lineal and literal descendants. Now the apostle in the text demolishes that false idea, cuts from under their feet the ground on which their vain hopes rested, and declares that those who are so highly favored as to "*become the sons of God*" had something more than being 'born of blood.'

If you look at the word "*born*," it implies some change. Birth is a transition from a state of almost non-existence into existence--a coming from darkness to light. When the apostle then says of them, that they were "*born, not of blood*," he implies that a change of some kind might take place, analogous to the natural birth, and yet not be such a change as makes a man become a child of God. Is there not such a false birth frequently now? Are there not what are called 'pious children of pious parents?' And could you trace their religion to the very source and run it up to its first origin, you would find that it had no better beginning than pa-

rental piety; that the religious father taught religion to his child, and by dint of admonition and instruction made him just as religious as himself. So that a change may have taken place; seriousness may have taken the place of trifling, religious books may have been taken up instead of novels, and hymns be sung instead of songs; but after all, the change is a mere birth "*of blood*." There has been no spiritual change, no almighty work of the Holy Spirit in the soul; but the religion has been handed down from parent to child, and stands upon no better footing than a mother's instruction or a father's tuition. Those who were "*born of God*" had something better than this to stand upon.

b) But the apostle, in tracing out the character of those who were "*the sons of God*," brings forward another imitation of a spiritual birth; he says they were not born "*of the will of the flesh*." Has "*the flesh*," then, a will to be religious? Aye, surely; we have a religious "*old man*," as well as an irreligious "*old man*." Nature is not confined to one garb; she wears many masks, and can put on various appearances. Thus there is a will in man--at least in many men--to be religious, and, if possible, save themselves. But those who were "*born of God*," and had 'power given to them to become the sons of God,' had experienced a deeper, higher, because a spiritual and supernatural work upon their consciences, than any such birth "after the will of the flesh."

The flesh, however high it may rise, can never rise above itself. It begins in hypocrisy, it goes on in hypocrisy, and it never can end but in hypocrisy. Whatever various shapes it puts on--a fleshly religion never can rise above itself. There is no brokenness of heart, no contrition of spirit, no godly sorrow, no genuine humility, no living faith, no spiritual hope, no heavenly love,