

The Generation of Jesus Christ

G. W. North

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The text

This edition is based on the texts of Mr North's books which first appeared on the website of Lanark Christian Fellowship many years ago.

We have exercised as much care as possible in the conversion into this format, but if you are aware of any errors, could you please let us know.

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Genesis

The title of this book is part of the opening verse of the New Testament; Matthew says that the gospel that bears his name is 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ.' Perhaps he wrote more than he knew, though when he wrote he knew much of the wondrous Person concerning Whom the Holy Spirit urged and inspired him to write. But it is always thus when God moves a man to speak or write of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is always a vast amount more in it than just that which meets the ear or eye. Deep below deep lies under the surface of the mighty ocean, that at first strikes the eye with its greys or greens or blues of reflected light, or tosses its foamy whiteness on the head of some curling wave tumbling into a sandy cove — and so it is with the precious Book. More than at first meets the eye is hidden within the phrase, 'the generation of Jesus Christ'; and the purpose of this book is to attempt a fuller understanding of it as it is set there upon the threshold of the New Testament, which is the most precious and important document ever given to man.

The Bible in its entirety is the most wonderful book in the world. Its inexhaustible treasures constantly yield eternal riches of wisdom and knowledge that centuries of ceaseless investigation seem only to enhance and magnify. Every precious discovery is the earnest of a yet greater revelation, for its truth can never be fully mastered. Its realisation does but enslave the discoverer, alluring and leading him out unto the ultimate — God Himself — who is wanting to be known and understood of men. It is to this end that we take up these words of Matthew's; obviously the generation of Jesus Christ is a most vital, if not the most vital topic of all subjects a man could choose from the entire Bible for a theme of study. For full as the Bible is of facts and records not otherwise available to man, there are none within it so important as those given by God of Himself. These He has chosen to give us in simple terms readily understandable to any who even cursorily read the accounts, yet which yield fuller delights to those who would bring their whole being to that knowledge, unto which faith alone can attain.

It may at first sound unusual that the Bible should be called the Book of generations, but such it is. It is not only that, but it is truly that, and importantly that too, for in it we find the wholly accurate and solely inspired accounts of all generations, from the first to the last. The first of these is to be found in Genesis 1:2 to 2:4, and the last in Revelation chapters 21 and 22. These cover the whole work and range of creation, human existence and eternal life. This is altogether too vast a field for man to comprehend or presume to write about. Our theme is chosen from among them as being the most important of them all.

The accounts referred to above are of the generations of the heavens and the earth; the former being given in some detail and the latter but briefly mentioned as the writer sweeps on to reveal the greater truth of God's city, the glorious bride of Christ, as he sees her descending in splendour into the new creation of God. These things are recorded for us by God as facts that He wants us to know rather than scientific data He wishes us to analyse. Indeed we cannot adequately investigate either of these generations, for the first creation is even now but slowly, almost reluctantly, yielding up its secrets to those seeking to probe its hidden mysteries. Man's mind cannot of itself properly relate the scraps of knowledge it laboriously gathers from an inscrutable universe. The new creation, which as yet has its existence only in the mind and will of God, more slowly still yields up its secrets unto the humble heart that with prophetic insight sees into and by faith lives in a foretaste of the heavenly things it shall 'after receive for an inheritance.' The truth is that all such things are only of consequence and, therefore, have been made known unto us by the Lord, as they have relationship with, and bearing upon, the more important spiritual things revealed to us concerning man's origin and destiny; these themselves, illuminating as they are, are only significant as they in turn are related to the generation of Jesus Christ. All this knowledge is bound up with the manifestation and activities of God Himself on the earth at various and notable times in history, whereby throughout the centuries He appeared for and unto man on the earth, foreshadowing and leading up to the great miracle of the incarnation wherein He became Man amongst men in the generation of Jesus Christ.

These things being so, it is not surprising to find that His delight is with the sons of men rather than with the multiplicity of inanimate things He created. Therefore, scattered throughout the length of the Bible we find records of the generations and genealogies of men, commencing with Adam and concluding with Jesus Christ.

Following God's account of creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, and the story of the entry of sin into the world with its immediate consequences in chapters 3 and 4, we are told in chapter 5 verse 1 that this is the book of the births (Hebrew) of Adam. Thus beyond recording the facts He wishes us to know, the Holy Spirit aptly and succinctly names the Old Testament; it is the book of the generations (note plural) of Adam. Likewise, as our title reminds us, upon opening the New Testament our eyes fall upon the statement that this is the book of the generation (singular) of Jesus Christ. The importance of the difference between the plural and the singular as pointed out is of major proportions. Over and over again in the Bible this distinction, seemingly so small, is in fact the whole point which God wishes to make clear, as in Galatians 3:16, 1 John 1: 8, 9, 1 Timothy 2: 5, and 1 Corinthians 8 : 5, 6. We shall find in this instance no less than in those others, that the distinction between Adam's generations and Jesus' generation is, beyond the grammatical point, God's method of introducing us to one of the most amazing revelations in His book.

Further, in thus mounting the sentence 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ' at the head of the New Testament canon, the compilers unwittingly perhaps gave us an alternative name for the latter half of the Bible, for God's book is truly the Book of the generation. This seems to be the real reason why God writes books, for in heaven's library the most important book is called 'The Lamb's book of life.'

The main purpose of the two testaments that comprise the whole Bible is to set forth the differences between two men: Adam of the many generations and Jesus Christ of one generation. Jesus is both the last Adam and God's second man. Unlike Adam, Jesus never had a wife; Adam begot children, Jesus begot none. He was the first of a new family, each one to be directly begotten of His Father. The first Adam was created by God and by inspiration was made a living soul; the last Adam was begotten by God a quickening or life-giving Spirit. As by first birth all men are traceable back to that first creation / generation of Adam, even so men must be able to trace themselves back by second birth to the new generation of Jesus Christ.

In the first, or Old Testament, the account of the generations of the heavens and earth naturally precedes the records of the generations of Adam, but in the New Testament the order is reversed: the announcement of the new generation, the generation of Jesus Christ, precedes that of the new heaven (singular) and earth. The reversal of the order is logical and significant. The present heavens are quite adequate and perfectly suited to the race now inhabiting the earth. For such a people there need be no replacement. The new heaven and earth God has in mind are quite superfluous unless He has a people to dwell therein. If God is to populate a new earth it must be with a new people. But not as of old is He going to create a new man out of the new earth's dust; instead He begot a New Man on this earth, that beginning from Him He might bring forth a whole new race of men — for whom He has planned and promised and will provide the new universe. This new man, Jesus, was born onto this earth that through Him God might set forth:—

- [1] His intention for and example of the whole new race.
- [2] His method of generating every single member of it.
- [3] His means of accomplishing His ends.

The first is by the life of Jesus; the second by the birth of Jesus; the third by the death and resurrection of Jesus. These things we will examine more fully later, noticing only here that by the birth of His Son Jesus, God broke into the ever-increasing generations of Adam in a new and true Genesis. Adam's generations could not be allowed to continue for ever, for each is a propagation and expression and expansion of sin. Every one naturally born since Adam has been born of his nature and in his likeness, fallen and bound to sin. Adam's act of obedience to Eve in acquiescing to her disobedience to God predetermined it. Adam was not deceived as was Eve. He chose a woman instead of God and set a pattern of behaviour which many have since followed to their own destruction. Responsibility is laid at Adam's door because of this act. She was deceived; he was not. Had he remained faithful God could easily have given him another wife, but he preferred Eve to God, displaying his choice by obeying her word instead of God's. For this he forfeited his right to the headship of the chosen race, and God showed His eternal disapproval by refusing to be called the God of Adam. Though He was Adam's creator, He was not his God; as we are later told, 'his servants we are to whom we obey.' Becoming Satan's servant Adam was precluded from the privileges for which he was created, and thus God calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but never the God of Adam. So God's disapproval of Adam's act is signally written into the fabric of the whole book.

Following the creation of Adam and his subsequent fall, God suspended all such creative activity. He never created another man until He created man anew in Christ. Instead, He allowed Adam's sin to work itself out in the human race, which it commenced to do immediately and continues to do until this day, and shall till the end of the world. We recognise its immediate results in this tragic family. Of Adam's first two children his firstborn became a murderer in slaying his own brother Abel. In doing so Cain enacted in the flesh what had previously taken place in the spirit in Adam. Cain became the embodiment, the direct result of Adam's obedience and subservience to the devil. Adam, by Cain, is revealed to be a death-dealing spirit, even as Satan, by Adam, is revealed to be the spirit of death now working in all the children of disobedience, which we all are by nature as a result of the original disobedience of Adam. Seeing that the Lord Jesus is a quickening or life-giving Spirit, Adam's disobedience to God and its tragic results are shown to have brought about the absolute reversal of all God intended. Adam and Eve's preference for the word of Satan, as against the word of God, has set a predisposition to sin in the human race which has alienated us all from God. Because of this every person since born of woman is by spiritual heredity a child of the devil and not of God. The only exception to this is Jesus, the son of Mary, whom God fathered into the human race to break the deadly cycle set in motion by Adam. This miracle procured for man a way of escape and salvation from the inescapable end to which the genetic and hereditary laws that govern his life predestined him, which end is sin and death and hell. God accomplished this by the outstanding biological and spiritual miracle of all time — a virgin birth.

The birth of the Son

This unique birth of Jesus is such a wonderful and amazing miracle that the very Greek word used by God concerning it has equally amazingly been taken up and mounted at the head of all inspired writing: Genesis. This is the word translated 'generation' in Matthew 1: 1, and only once so in the whole of the New Testament writings. Being thus placed at the beginning of the entire Bible, it concentrates the reader's attention straightway upon the greatest miracle of the Godhead both in heaven and on earth: Birth. Birth is both in the Godhead in heaven and in manhood on earth. It is in the Divine nature and being, and because it is there it is also in the human nature and being. God ordained and reproduced a modification of it from Himself unto us.

The uniqueness of this new birth does not only lie in the fact that it was a virgin birth, remarkable as that surely is. Jesus was not the result of a freak birth. He was not spontaneously and inexplicably produced by some organic malfunction of a Jewish maid. Had it been so it would to that degree have been a virgin birth, being unique and new among women on earth. But it would not have been acceptable as such among the Persons of the Godhead. To be acceptable in heaven this birth must be a greater miracle than that, as the scripture shows. Perfectly satisfying to the paternal longings of God's heart, it must also be absolutely consistent with His holiness, as well as effectual in power. In terms of execution, New Birth on earth in flesh among men must be as flawless a reproduction of the eternal begetting in the Godhead in heaven as the frail human media could permit. Therefore its uniqueness must lie in its entire newness both with God and with man. So the Lord introduced the virgin birth, the new birth. This is that birth, unique in flesh and inaugural in the Spirit, by which God became incarnate.

God could not really make Himself known to men until Jesus was born. Until then He had been a hidden mystery. The incarnation enabled God to be manifest in the flesh so that He could reveal Himself to men personally. Even so it was not a complete unveiling and revelation of God; that is reserved for a future day spoken of in scripture. Whilst in the flesh Jesus was Emmanuel — God with them in person in a new way. Occasionally in the past He had come down onto the earth and walked and talked with men, and to some at certain times He had revealed Himself in very special ways, but to the vast majority He was there but unseen and unknown. Even when He had dwelt in the midst of the children of Israel in His tabernacle He was veiled and hidden; but when Jesus was born of the Father and Mary at Bethlehem, God was quite openly manifest in the flesh. He was still a mystery; it was all a mystery, but no longer a hidden mystery. And so through this amazing birth we are privileged to see a little into God, and this is the purpose of it. Birth was the great secret mystery of and in God that He never could reveal to men until Jesus came. Hinted at, foreshadowed, even prophesied in scripture, it was completely unexplainable in type or words; but when Jesus was born, the first and greatest step towards the clarification of the mystery of God to man was taken. It was the new birth on earth amongst men, and that birth is linked with His eternal birth amidst the three Persons of the Godhead. That is why the new birth is so vastly important.

The most vitally important thing a man must know about himself is that he needs to be born again. Someone must tell him that he needs to be regenerate, so Jesus Christ was born and, being born, He was able both to show it to men and to tell them all about it. No-one else had ever been able to do so, but Jesus came for that purpose. Not once did He ever say, 'You must have your sins forgiven' — others have said that and rightly so, but not He: He says, 'Ye must be born again — something so much, much more. So much more because the forgiveness of sins, tremendous and necessary though it is, is but a favour from God; whereas new birth, supreme favour as it is, is a fusion with God in the person and life of His Son. The former is grace, the fixed attitude of God toward man throughout this age; the latter is the exceeding riches of His grace, involving the eternal nature and being of God.

So to show the New Man to men, the eternal only begotten Son in the Godhead became, by a new birth, Mary's firstborn among men. Manifest in the flesh, He was both God's only begotten Son of a woman, and Mary's only begotten son from God. Though Mary brought forth other children after Jesus her firstborn, He only was begotten of God; Joseph was the father of her other children in the normal way. God never before or since has begotten a Son in the flesh. He has one Son, His unique and well-beloved Jesus.

Now miraculous birth was not an unknown thing among the children of Israel — they were quite familiar with it. In fact, the nation owed its existence to one such birth, and they were wont even in Jesus' day to trace their

ancestry back to Abraham by such means, for they were the descendants of Abraham through the miraculously born Isaac, and they love the thought of it. Unless there had been a miracle birth the nation could never have been and they knew it; but over and above that first miracle, the pages of their history in the Old Testament writings reveal this kind of thing happening again and again. Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, each had brought forth children by the grace of God alone, for as we read we discover that none of them could have borne children except by a miracle. In each case the miracle lay in that the barrenness of each of these women had been turned into fruitfulness. But not so with Mary, for she was a virgin, unmarried. Whereas throughout Israel's history it had been Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel, Elkanah and Hannah, it was not Joseph and Mary — neither was it God and Mary, but God by Mary. God made His Son of a woman; it was all God as we shall see. In His wisdom God has set these two kinds of miraculous birth side by side in the New Testament. In the first two chapters of Luke's gospel the accounts of the births of John Baptist and Jesus Christ are set side by side. Though written in the New, the birth of John Baptist belongs properly to the Old Testament and is the last great miracle birth of that order. As it had been with Abraham and Sarah, so it was also with Zacharias and Elisabeth — they were childless after years of marriage because of Elisabeth's barrenness. Thus by God's skill, in the simple reading of the scriptures we see the vast difference between the two Covenants, and what appears to be similarity is really complete dissimilarity.

The miracle of Jesus' birth does not lie in the fact that it took place, for God had eternally planned, and long prophesied, and solemnly promised that it should be. Both in the nature and order of the Godhead, and also in fulfilment of scripture, it must be God the Son who should be born on earth as the Son of God, and that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, and that the virgin's son should be called Emmanuel — 'God with us.' The real miracle, the great surprise, lay in how it took place; not so much His birth as His conception was the miracle; His actual birth was perfectly natural like anybody else's. It is perfectly in order to suppose that other babes have been born in stables or even worse places than He, but no other has ever been conceived directly and miraculously from God Himself, so that in spirit, soul and body He could say, 'God is My Father.' It was the conception that was the miracle; the birth was as perfectly normal as any other.

Marvellous as were the creation of Adam and the births of Isaac, Samuel, and John Baptist, Jesus' generation was far more marvellous, being entirely new. Uniquely incomparable. The greatest of all. Its greatness does not lie just in the miracle itself; greater than that is the sure sight it affords us into the being of God and the order of the glorious Godhead. Beside all this, as though the miracle is unending, Jesus' incarnation set the pattern for a whole generation. The entire family of God throughout the present age of grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ must be born in a similar way to Him. The means of His personal generation in and into man's physical human nature are exactly the same as those by which man must be generated into God's spiritual divine nature. As Adam's personal creation/generation began the human race, so Jesus' personal generation/creation began the divine race.

This is one of the reasons why the Lord Jesus Christ is called the last Adam, and not the last Isaac or the last Samuel, or the last any other particular person. None of these others had a personal generation from God. Adam in scripture is called the son of God; so is Jesus Christ, but not one other was personally so called. This is because Adam and Jesus are the heads of two different kinds and natures of men. In Adam all died; in Christ shall all be made alive.

Beloved, now can we all be called the sons of God, and for this same reason, for we also may experience a definite and personal generation from God. This is the only way it is possible to become a child of God. God must definitely and deliberately beget me or I am not His child. That He should do this is His dearest wish, for He is a Father and desires a great family all like His first and greatest Son Jesus, Who Himself being in the form of God was deliberately made in the likeness of man through Mary's womb by the Father, that by His birth God might perfectly and eternally reveal the only method of new birth for man. The Father wants many, many more sons like Jesus, as also does the Holy Ghost.

You see, God had never had a family. He created flaming spirits and called them seraphim and cherubim, and looked upon them as sons of God; and they were the nearest to Him of all His creatures, but not quite what He wanted. The deepest desires of His Father-heart were never truly fulfilled in them, for they could not quite fill the place of sons. So He created the universe, and taking a handful of dust one day He made of this earth a man to be

His son. He breathed His own breath into his nostrils and set him in Eden in paradise, and came down and walked and talked with him in the garden in the cool of the day as a Father with a son. How long that may have continued had not the sin of one of the Father's earlier 'Sons' been planted in Adam's heart, who can tell? But it was all ruined; God lost His son to Satan. So immediately the determination in His heart to have a true son finds expression on His lips as He says, 'The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head,' and His great Father-heart moved forward to the future.

Centuries later He called Abram with his wife Sarai and took them out from their own home into a new land. Changing their names, and making great promises to them, He miraculously gave them a son whom He might claim as His own. To this end He worked a miracle in Sarah's womb, and Isaac was eventually born. Therefore He took the child, and provided for him and wrought with him as though he was actually His own. Nevertheless, Isaac was not quite His own, not really; Isaac was really Abraham's son, not God's; God could only look upon him and treat him as a son by a sort of adoption, that was all.

From this seed adopted from Abraham God later, through Jacob, Isaac's son, made Himself a nation. He worked miracle upon miracle in order that this should be, and deliberately called Israel His son. It was very real and precious to Him, so much so that a prophet once cried out, 'Thou art our Father,' and He never denied it. But not a single one of them was born as Jesus was born, personally, of God's own seed; all were born of man. They had man to their father; indeed some of them once said, 'We have Abraham to our father.' They never had God to their father. The best they had ever known and the greatest that God had given them was adoption. The Father had adopted the entire nation. The scripture says so quite plainly, 'To them belongeth the adoption,' and because it does it will yet work its way out right to the end and we shall see it.

God in His Fatherly love sought most earnestly to treat the entire nation as His sons, seeking to draw from them the true filial love that should answer His own paternal love for them, but rarely did He achieve His desire. Here and there He found a man or a woman who loved Him as He sought, and when He did, it was wonderfully gratifying to Him.

One such was David, of whom He said, 'I have found David.' It was so precious to Him to find one after His own heart. He was like a father to him, and David became to God as a son. Indeed, at one point he said that the Lord had said unto him, 'Thou art My son, this day have I begotten thee.' He did not know then that he was crying out prophetically what God the Father was going to say to Jesus, the true Messiah, when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies. It was really spoken of Jesus, but David was granted such blessing as he was allowed from it. It was wonderful and precious to him, and so also was the promise God made him concerning Solomon, saying, 'I will be his father and he shall be My son.' But to God it was not, nor could be, all He was seeking. Not yet was the Father-heart being fulfilled. His Fatherly love and instincts were always acting, moving among men, instigating, adopting and adapting, but never finding fulfilment until, in the fullness of time, He could generate Jesus as His own dear Son into the world of men.

The life of the Son

It was a marvellous day when Jesus was born, for it was a new day. The Jewish day began with night; it started at sundown with darkness and moved from darkness to light, which fact in itself bears a great spiritual lesson. The shepherds keeping night-watch saw the glory of the Lord shining round about them, and in that glory a multitude of the first-created sons of God, all praising God, and an angel voice speaking to them of the Son of God that was born to them at Bethlehem. Angel-sons could come to the shepherds in the skies of glory, but Jesus the Son was born to them in a manger — what a world of difference lies here! Those angel eyes had never beheld such things, nor had their hearts known such inspiration for praise. They had been created by the very God now born man of Mary, a little lower than themselves, and they praised and praised at the wonder of the miracle, but the greater wonder they never knew. Only the Father and the Holy Ghost with the Son knew.

Scripture records that when the Son came into the world He said, 'A body hast thou prepared me lo, I come to do thy will, O God.' At that moment, He took away the first covenant in order to establish the second. This was the moment for which the Father was waiting. Jesus was God's Son in reality, just what the Father wanted. He was not born miraculously naturally, that is, in the natural order, but miraculously supernaturally, that is, in the completely divine order; God used Mary's womb to bring forth a human Son of the divine order and in the divine manner. He was not adopted by God after someone else had begotten Him by a miracle performed within his wife. He was actually begotten on earth of Him who is the Father in the triune Godhead in heaven, through the agency of the Holy Ghost. He was God's very own Son on earth.

Over and over again throughout the pages of scripture we come across momentary flashes of this great desire of God to have a Son through whom He could beget sons. Perhaps at no time in the history of Israel was this desire more manifest than when shining through the lives of their patriarchs, and in none of these was it more clearly shown than in the life of God's friend, Abraham. The particular incident commenced when, one night some two thousand years earlier than Jesus was born, God woke Abraham with the words, 'Take now thy son, thy only son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.' So many are the lessons we may learn from this statement and what resulted from it that perhaps a whole volume might be written about them. But one thing is outstandingly clear: at the last moment, when Abraham had come through this unparalleled test of faith without stumbling or faltering, or murmuring, and was found faultless before God and all principalities and powers, the Lord restrained him from his purpose. Among the many reasons foreshadowed by this act of restraint lies the fact that God did not want a son by such means. He did not want someone else's son given to Him, not even Abraham's — He wanted His own.

This all-consuming desire is later defined strongly on the negative side as adamant refusal to accept any human sacrifice at all. As a sacrifice for sin humans have no value at all, nor any power of atonement, and as an offering to God are totally unacceptable. God does not especially want sons by sacrifice, but by birth. That is why later the adopted nation of sons, being by birth children of Israel and not of God, could not offer themselves upon the altar. Instead they had to bring an animal which for the time being should represent Jesus the Son of God. So their whole sacrificial system, typical as it was, had to be enacted and adhered to with solemn meaning just as though it was themselves they were offering, but it was not really so. What was as it were mimed with Isaac was typified in the animal sacrifices of Israel. By this method of substitution God was telling them how very dear they were to Him. In type they were offering Jesus instead of themselves without spot to God, but unless they saw that thereby they were offering themselves to God, the whole point of the sacrifice was lost. In substituting them the Lord in type represented them. Jesus could be offered and accepted for them as them — He is God's very own Son.

This particular aspect of God's own heart's desire finds expression through the life of Isaac. At the end of this man's life the blind patriarch is found in scripture reaching out his hands to feel the son he could not see. He had the blessing to bestow and must be sure that it rested upon the head of his chosen. To him Jacob was not his very son. He was his son, but not his very son as was Esau; so Isaac asks him the vital question, 'Art thou my very son?' His heart groped with stronger power than his frail hands for the answer he wanted. Esau always did the things that pleased his father and for this reason he was to Isaac the 'very son'.

In the life of the Lord Jesus this is most powerfully brought out at His baptism in Jordan. Opening heaven to Him, the Father sent down the Holy Ghost to rest upon and abide with Him for ever in the sacred anointing of Messiahship, and at the same time cried out, 'Thou art My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' Thus was John Baptist assured and Jesus commissioned, for John now knew that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God, and Jesus the Son of God knew He was sealed for service. Under the power of this authorisation He stepped out into His life's work; the Son among a nation of adopted sons now far removed from the ideal in Father's heart.

During the course of His ministry the Lord lost no opportunity to show and teach His disciples the truth of sonship. Right at the beginning He went to the temple where the bodies of animals were offered to God, and called it His Father's house and purged it of the things they were practising therein. They were all so foreign to His Father's intentions and could not possibly portray what He meant. When they challenged His actions He said, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again.' He was really speaking of offering Himself wholly, bodily back to His Father; they thought He was speaking about the building, whilst His disciples thought of a text about the zeal of God's house eating someone up. None of them understood what had really been done and said. It was not until Jesus had died and risen again and ascended to heaven that they understood.

As He moved in and out in His ministry, disciples joined and followed Him by the score, multitudes of them; from them He chose twelve, naming them and calling them apostles. These left all and followed Him whithersoever He went, and He taught and trained them, some very intensively, for His service. But when the time came that He should offer Himself back to His Father on their behalf, they fled. What they could not do for themselves because they were only adopted Sons He was going to do for them, paying the price of their sin as He did so. But their relationship to Him was so insubstantial that they could not be true even within their privileged form of adoption / sonship; it was totally inadequate. Privileged they were beyond all who before them had been called sons. They were the adopted of the adopted, and in them was set forth in contrast to Him, the great gulf of difference there lies between adoption and sonship, for He was the Son of sons.

On one occasion when they had all been gathered together with Him, someone told Jesus that His mother and His brethren were standing outside wanting to speak to Him, and the answer He gave them made these men realise with joy how completely Jesus had adopted them. He as good as said, 'These disciples of mine are My mother and sister and brother.' When they heard Him say such things as, 'Except a man leave his father and mother and sister and brother and all he hath, he cannot be My disciple,' they knew they were His, for that is just what they had done. It seemed the adoption was complete.

On another occasion He taught them a prayer saying, 'Our Father which art in heaven,' and right from the beginning of their relationship He had occasionally referred to God as 'Your heavenly Father'. It was all so wonderful and they believed it, but, though He taught them thus, they could never bring themselves to use the familiar name so often upon His lips, and the Lord never tried to force them to use that sacred title — they just could not do it and that was that. He virtually told them once to ask their heavenly Father for the Holy Ghost, but they did not even do that; they were so dead to their real requirements, and underneath their apparent belief and activities lay a hard core of heedless, resistant unbelief. Jesus knew all about it and left it at that, for as yet He could not bring them into true sonship, though He had introduced the fact of it to them.

It was in the last week of His life that it all came to a head. Following the supper together in the upper room, when He had washed their feet and then sent Judas away on a mysterious mission, He talked to them about coming to the Father. 'I am the way,' He said, 'the truth and the life,' but they could not understand Him at all. So Philip said, 'Show us the Father and it sufficeth us.' 'Please Lord, show us this Father of yours that you so often talk about, for we don't know Him; He is so real to you, but so unreal to us; if you do so we will be satisfied; just to know Him will be quite sufficient for us.' Self-confessedly they did not know the Father, though they wanted to so very much; neither did they know the Son, though they had been with Him so long.

They did not belong to the same family after all; their parentage and therefore their nature was quite different. Leaving their own parents and families to follow Him did not automatically give them true new parents, His parents. Adopted they were, but not reborn. It needed more than He had yet said or done to them to make them sons of God. In their present state they were really just like orphans and He told them so. But He said He would

not leave them like that and it comforted them when He said He would come to them, although it mystified them more than ever that He said He would go away and then come to them. They just could not understand Him; it seemed to them that He was talking in riddles, and indeed it would have been utterly ridiculous had it not been Jesus Who had said it. But it was all so true. What was all mystery to them was so plain to Him. He knew before He came what He had to do when He did come into the world.

It was written of Him in the Psalms by David, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will O God.' It was His Father's will to beget sons, and He had come to make it possible for His Father to do so, but ever so many more preliminary works had to be done before He could get down to this major task for which He was born. All these were either plainly stated, hinted at, or materially typified in the Hebrew scriptures and practice, and all agreed in heaven before even they were written or ordained.

This was that great work which could only be accomplished as His life on the earth drew to its close. It was all very carefully planned and would happen exactly as it had been prearranged, so He gathered His chosen apostles unto Him and led them forth from that supper chamber that they might together take their last walk with Him. Gethsemane was a favourite garden where He had often walked with His disciples, but they knew something strange was to happen that night, for just before they had left upon this journey He had washed their feet. They did not know why or what it meant, they only knew it was because He loved them. But Jesus knew what it meant and why He had done it; that night they were to be privileged to walk with Jesus where none other had ever been allowed to walk, so their feet had to be clean.

When Moses and Joshua in their day had been privileged to meet their God they were bidden to remove their shoes from their feet that they might tread upon holy ground, but Jesus had actually washed these dear ones' feet. They were going to walk on holy ground, and gaze upon such holy scenes, and listen to such holy prayers and cries as had never before been granted to mortal man to see and hear. They were those blessed men who were going to walk in the counsel of the Godly (one), and stand in the way of the Righteous (one). They had sat in the seat of the adoring and worshipping ones and had delighted in the law of the Lord they loved; He was a wonderful man to them; all was holy ground, the holiest of all. They did not know what lay ahead of them. In fact, they were to discover that they knew nothing as they ought to know — even about Him. Jesus was always doing new things; somehow it seemed that newness originated with Him, and the discovery of His own self to their hearts that night was amazing beyond words.

As they walked with their Lord that night, somewhere between the Supper room and the garden He prayed the prayer of His life. It was indescribably lovely to them: without a pause in the way in order to adopt a different attitude, or strike a new pose, save that of an uplifted eye, He poured out His heart to His Father in a flood of soul-moving phrases that left them speechless at the realisation of His wondrous love for them. They did not understand one little bit of what it was all about, but they heard Him say, 'Father I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do and now come I to Thee. Holy Father keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me. Thine they were (Father) and Thou gavest them Me, now keep them whilst I go on unencumbered to do Thy will.' Thus He was left a free agent to decide whether or not He would fulfil His Father's wishes, and His feet never wavered from the path of His sheer determination to go right on to the end.

In the garden His Father gave Him a cup to drink, which caused Him great mental and spiritual anguish, but He drank it and it passed from Him. It was an ordeal terrible beyond description. It was His final agreement to be made sin. No-one and nothing had ever been able to make Him to sin, but God His Father made Him into sin. It was awful, but it was unavoidable. He had been born in order that He might be everything to us — everything, and that included sin. If He was going to be made sin for us, then He must be made sin to us, in order that He might be all in all to us. But even that was a preliminary. It was the greatest thing He ever did. He sacrificed Himself in order to do it, but He took sin away from before God. Jesus took away the thing that was preventing His Father from begetting sons. God could not have the family of sons He wanted until this was done, so the Son came and did it.

Sin was the reason why, before this, God had only been able to adopt and adapt other people's sons, and the reason also why Jesus' own disciples could only ever be orphans (comfortless) unless He went away and came to

them again anew. The seed of Satan is in the very human seed from which all men's lives develop, infecting and perverting and regularising the whole nature to sin so that no man, however devout or sincerely God-fearing, or genuinely religious, or most self-sacrificing, can possibly by these be, or because of these become, a son of God. Nothing that is of man, or has passed through the hands of man, can make a man a son of God. Religion, scriptures, education, civilisation, politics, art, science, philosophy, or any of these in combination are man's way of accomplishing his purposes. Whether it be church building, or erecting chambers of law or commerce, or college or charnel-houses, whether in order to achieve the highest and best or to sink to the lowest and worst, all are in vain to accomplish God's work. Conversions, indoctrinations, persuasions, proselytisings, coercions from one state of 'faith' or way of life to another, are of man. Regeneration is of God. He begets sons! Any conversion that is not unto total regeneration is not the genuine one God intends. It may have some points of value and benefit in it, but only as it is related unto new birth can it bring the eternal blessing it ought.

In order to accomplish this He had to go so far away, so very far away from them — farther than they knew. Even though what they thought He might mean made them very sad, He was going farther away than that, farther perhaps than He knew Himself, farther than any man had ever been, farther away than Adam was from God in the garden on the day that He had called out to him, 'Where art thou?' Jesus had known, of course, that Adam was only just hiding his body fearfully away behind a tree, but in spirit he was in sin, in death — everlastingly and irretrievably so, Satan hoped — and God was calling to him across the gulf. It was awful. He had only known then as from God's side how far Adam had gone away, but He also knew that on Adam's side it was farther than He had ever known or could know experimentally. That is why He had become a man.

He wanted to live where man lived, sit where man sat, walk where man walked, be cursed with the curse of men, hang where men hung, die where men die, and lie where men lie; and to know and do that was all new to Him. Head knowledge, even God's head-knowledge by foreknowledge, could not give Him that. Isaiah had prophesied it all earlier. 'By His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many,' God had said; and to gain such knowledge He who had never known sin had to leave the adopted sons and set forth on His last greatest work to make them true Sons as He was Himself. 'Who shall declare His generation?' asked the prophet. Isaiah did not know, neither did he know that centuries later men would write of it, but Jesus knew; and He knew also that He had come to bring others into it by His own generation. So committing the orphans to His Father's care and responsibility, He led them over the brook into Gethsemane.

In the garden Jesus again chose the three men who had accompanied Him previously on some specially selected occasions, and bidding the others wait, took Peter, James and John with Him a bit further on that they might watch with Him through the dreadful hour that lay ahead. Even though the others should fall asleep, these He hoped would stay awake with Him until the agony of God was past. But it all proved to be a vain hope; they failed Him; in the critical hour His three mighty men failed Him. He brought them forth from the others to a point of vantage and, leaving them there to watch while He went on alone a little further, He fell down on His face on the ground. Right in their full view He lay, just about a stone's throw away — not too far — so that they could see and hear Him — but not too clearly. Only dimly might they see and distantly hear His wrestlings and groanings as he accepted responsibility from His Father for the generation of the sons. It all took place in a garden, but it was no Eden for Him.

Perhaps He was as far away from the chosen three as was the first Adam from the Holy Three when he hid himself from Them — just a stone's throw away. The difference was that then the blessed Trinity had been wide awake, calling out, agonisingly concerned about Adam's fall, but now when the last Adam fell on His face, agonising openly before His chosen three, they went to sleep. His servant David's three mighty men never failed him, but His mightiest ones could not watch with Him one hour. Even Peter, who like the 'Tachmonite who sat in the seat' (2 Sam. 23 8) was the mightiest of them all, went to sleep. There was no-one to see Him, none heard, no-one cared. So much for the adoption. It just could not work; it was an utter failure.

It was an almost unbelievable repetition in reverse of all that took place in the beginning. The three elected ones were Adam's offspring and representatives lying there asleep on the ground. It was a deep, deep sleep, but God had not caused it to fall upon them, He could not take from them a bridal rib and from it form a bride. Oh, how He pitied them; their spirit was willing but the flesh — ah, that is it — the flesh was weak. That is why He had been

born. The law was weak through the flesh; the spirit was weak through the flesh; these men were dead to Him through the flesh; and so He had taken flesh and blood because they were partakers of flesh and blood. Out there alone it was as though He had gone back through millenniums of years. Quite deliberately the Lord Jesus was repeating and rearranging all that took place in the first garden, in order to reverse the original transaction whereby adoption had to take the place of true sonship.

The dissimilarity of the similarity between those two men and those two gardens, and the two great trials that took place in them, is well-nigh indescribable. The enormity of what took place is almost beyond comprehension. In Eden, Adam, God's first created son, was tempted by and succumbed to Satan: in Gethsemane, God's only begotten Son, the second man and last Adam, was asked by His Father to take and drink the cup and He agreed. It was as though the years had never been, that Father's heart had never been broken, and that it had never become necessary for Him to substitute adoption in the place of direct first birth from Himself, and that first birth had never become a sin-birth necessitating a second birth in order that thereby men might become true sons of God. It was as though the first man had been immediately followed by the second man, Who was to restore what the first had taken away. Adam stole and ate the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil under the direction of Satan, but the last Adam was offered a cup He would not take until it was given Him by God His Father. He shrank from it, wrestling and groaning in His agony until sweat rolled from Him like great drops of blood falling to the ground. It was the greatest battle He ever fought, and He won it!

No-one will ever fully understand the conflict that caused Him such great agony, for it lay in a realm that must for ever be a mystery to man — it was that realm into which Satan sought to enter so decisively in the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, and had he done so there could have been no salvation for man. It would have meant the defeat of God. But to defeat Satan then had cost Jesus no sweat, no agony, and indeed no noticeable conflict either. There had been no human audience to watch the spectacle as the prince of devils hurtled to defeat at the hands of the God-Man. Wretched devil; how little he knew Jesus of heaven and earth; how finite is fallen Lucifer's boasted wisdom and how ignorant he is of God. He tempted Jesus along the line of His deity, seeking to drive a wedge between His Godhead and His manhood, 'If thou art the Son of God

But Jesus ever refused the bait to pride and, as always, answered from the level of His manhood, 'Man shall not live

Satan then was defeated by Jesus without tears and sweat and blood, and wrestlings and anguish. The wilderness had held no terrors for Him; it was no Gethsemane, even though it was not an Eden.

There in Gethsemane it was in the same realm of the mystery of Himself, who and what He was, that the battle was fought. Not between Himself and His Father, nor yet between Himself and the devil, but within His own being. What was He to do? He could not wish to be sin! How could He desire to be the loathsome thing He hated and yet retain His own inward holiness? How could He entertain the thought of separation from His Father and still remain the faithful Son? He must desire this cup to pass from Him — and the sweat rolled off Him as within Himself He resolved the conflict of the ages. Out there where all men lay asleep in darkness and oblivion He settled it in one great oft-repeated heart-cry. He sacrificed Himself with strong crying and tears to His Father's will — and His Father sacrificed Him on Golgotha for the sin of the world.

Earlier, when He had gathered His disciples into an upper room and given them a cup to drink when He had supped it, He said, 'This cup is the New Testament in My blood, drink ye all of it.' They did not grasp what He meant, nor could He tell them the unspeakable blessings that were in it. All love, all righteousness, all peace and joy were in it; the whole of God's testament was therein, all of God's glory and virtue and grace, all life, and good, and heaven, and eternity, and God Himself was in it. Everything, absolutely and simply everything God is or was, or ever shall be. That was the cup Jesus said men could share with Him. But this was the cup that God had kept saved up for Him alone; they could not drink it nor even sip it. It was His alone to drink Gethsemane's cup. It was at once His highest joy and greatest sorrow, for all shame and lowest debasement were in it. It was paradoxical, inexplicable, impossible. In it was all hate, all sin, all warring and conflict and tragedy; the whole of the devil's testament was in it, all his pride and shame and renown; all death and evil and hell and everlasting torment, and the devil himself were in it. Everything, absolutely and simply everything; all the devil in man was, or had ever been beside. Oh, who can tell what was in it? What mixture of sin and death in the blood of man; what distillation from the matured hatred and rebellion and pride and original sin of Lucifer come to full fruition in human life and being! What grief and wrath of God because of and against it all! Who among us can tell? When the wrath of God

is poured out without mixture on the earth, who can measure or explain or abide it? But what worth the cup that beside this contained so much more? And who should or could drink it but Jesus?

Jesus went a lot further away than they knew whilst they slept that day, and when later they gathered ingloriously, some near, some farther from His cross, they watched until they could no longer see for the darkness, whilst He went further still. What He had accepted in the garden was all working out now. It was happening as He knew it would, and He wanted it to. It was a preliminary, the end of an age, and in enduring it He would be able to commence a new, new day of joy and glory for His Father; the age of adoption would be over and the generation of sons could begin.

It was far more than the dispensation of law that was ending that day. What an age God had waited between creating His first man and begetting His second. Even when He had done that at Bethlehem, He had to wait still further whilst Jesus proved Himself to be the Man from whom God could truly beget the race of men He wanted. And so there, so very far out where no-one else had ever been, Jesus hung in the dark until He had watched the long night through. It had seemed as though all eternity was in it, but it only lasted three hours. It was the blackest darkness the world had ever known, but it was all so perfectly right and in order, for it was from black primeval darkness lying upon the deep that He, with His Father and the Spirit, had started in the beginning of creation to generate the heaven and the earth. He had gone back beyond recorded time now; He had to; it was absolutely necessary; all must be finished. The effects and ravages of centuries of sin had to be blotted out, and they were; there He did it. All evil was dealt with, all time was redeemed, and in the Spirit all things were restored so that God could make a righteous new beginning. And as the last shades disappeared and the day returned to its strength, with all power and assurance Jesus greeted the dawn of the new era with a shout of joy and victory: 'Finished!' All the preliminaries were over; now the real reason for all else He had said, and borne, and done, was about to be fulfilled. He need suffer no longer nor lose one more moment of time, so with a quick word of dismissal He returned His Spirit to His Father and bowed His head and died.

It seemed to be all over to John who was watching Him. John had slept in the darkness of Gethsemane, but this time he had not slept. He had waited, straining through the dark hours, listening and looking toward the sacred spot where he had last seen his Lord. By his side was Mary, Jesus' mother, standing silently beside her newly adopted son. John held on to her for Jesus had ordained the adoption and she was precious for that reason. So together they watched with Him through His night of victory, though then, with unimaginable sorrow, they thought it to be His last tragic hour of defeat.

Seeing Him hanging dead upon a tree stabbed them to the heart, but still sadder things were yet to follow, for standing there in mute sorrow they were witnesses of saddest indignities heaped contemptuously upon His helpless body. A soldier, doing his duty no doubt, came and thrust a spear into His side just under His heart. To John's astonishment (he knew somehow it held tremendous meaning), 'Forthwith came there out blood and water.' He did not know its significance nor what was happening, nor that Jesus was still doing something even in death, but he knew something was happening. What it was John did not know, but Jesus did, and John had been posted and held there by God in order that the record of the truth might be given to us.

One of the most remarkable features of John's gospel is that he never recorded the facts of Jesus' birth. Jesus had given Mary to him and him to Mary, but with the unique opportunity thus afforded him to learn all the sacred details at first hand, John never wrote them in his account. Instead, he was stationed by God so near to the cross that he could record for all time this most important detail connected with New Birth — the blood and the water flowing from Jesus' side. This was the great new beginning. Jesus had done all else that this moment might arrive. He offered Himself without spot to God for this that God was now displaying before his eyes.

In the order and nature of Deity it had been impossible for God to give birth to human beings; create them, yes; adopt them, yes; but beget them, no. That which is flesh is flesh; that which is Spirit is Spirit. So first He created a man and from him made a woman, and then in the fullness of time selected a virgin that through her flesh He might beget a man — His Son. It was quite simple for God to do this, He only had to violate one principle of the biological law governing reproduction in order to beget a human Son. The birth was quite ordinary; only the method of conception was changed. But it was quite impossible for Him to beget children from human beings

already existing in sin, of the seed of the devil in the image of Satan. So God undertook in Jesus to make the impossible possible, thus fulfilling the word spoken at His conception, 'With God nothing is impossible.'

Beyond the great miracle then taking place, this word found its greater fulfilment in the miracle now taking place before John's very eyes. For what he witnessed there caused him later to exclaim, 'Jesus is the Son of God; this is He that came by water and blood — Jesus Christ.' What he saw happening to and through the Lord Jesus had at the time filled him with horror and awful wonder. It had appeared to be the last broken-hearted farewell of the dead Messiah, the shattering of all hopes, the final pathetic response of a gentle man to the savagery of hate-filled men wildly lusting for His last drop of blood. But not so, it was something far, far greater; Jesus had indeed said He would go away, but He had also said, 'I will come to you,' and thus He did. He was preordained to be the first that should rise from the dead, and thus became the first born from among them. By His own water and blood He eventually came forth as from the womb of God, a new-born man upon the earth, later to be received back up into heaven, the first of a long line of many sons — the new generation. Sons of God could not be born naturally to God, so a Saviour was born to man in order that man might be supernaturally born to God. He must be both their Father and 'Mother', and this the Son came to reveal.

Thinking back over the events of those last few days it all appears so plain in its wondrous simplicity. Yet it is positively marvellous how the Lord Jesus fills the picture and as it were fulfils the function of the 'Mother'. Right at the beginning of His ministry He had said to Mary, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' He cut Himself off from her then, and confirmed it later by saying, 'Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven the same is . . . My mother,' and finally concluded His natural association with her at the cross by bequeathing her to John, 'Mother, behold thy son.' She wanted still to look upon Him as her son and herself as His mother, but it could not be — dear Mary had to learn, even at the cost of the great sorrow of her crippled heart, that privilege must not lead to presumption. In the great plan of God and the nature of Deity, and in that which God was doing she could not — just could not be — it was impossible for her to be the 'Mother'. She could, and blessedly did bear Jesus, God's Son in the flesh in the likeness of man, but that was in order that He might be fashioned into the Servant that should do for God and man spiritually what she as the handmaid of the Lord had done physically. He must fulfil the role of 'Mother', and how gloriously, right to the last detail, the Lord Jesus did it.

Both male and female are of God. In God there is a relationship that could only be expressed humanly in and as the father-mother-child triumvirate, and this is quite plainly revealed in scripture. The self-revelation of the Trinity is generally accepted to be Father, Son and Holy Ghost in that order, but in the beginning of the Bible it is not so set forth. Genesis 1 :1-3 has it thus: (1) God, (2) the Spirit of God, (3) the Word of God. The order revealed here as God commences generation is undoubtedly Father, Holy Ghost and Son; and this is exactly what we discover in the generation of Jesus Christ. (1) God the Father speaking the seed-word, (2) the Holy Ghost coming on Mary for the mother function, and (3) the Son being born. Again we see this order (modified and adapted) in the actual creation of man. (1) God formed the male first and from him derived (2) the female, and then eventually (3) the sons. Thus it was that the great Male, Jesus, the new Adam, disconnects Himself from Mary and assumes and fulfils the female part, and then again finally emerges from the dead to be the son, to complete the family three. He is made all things to us. He fills all parts, fulfils all orders, functions perfectly in all roles. Gracing everything He does, beautifying and supplying the hidden meaning of every role He fills, outraging nothing, sanctifying everything: Perfect Jesus, how lovely Thou art!

So we trace His ways as the great female, 'Mother' aspect of God as derived from the Male. Having sought to instil the important fact of the Fatherhood of God into the minds of the disciples by showing and declaring Himself to be His Son, and also teaching them concerning their own relationship through Himself to the Father, Jesus begins to unfold the hidden truth of true Motherhood.

Gethsemane was the chosen spot to begin; there the great travailing pains first came upon Him. As the hour of God's great eternal delivery drew near He began to be amazed and very heavy; His soul became exceeding sorrowful even unto death as the agonies gripped Him. From the commencement of the unspeakable travail in Gethsemane there followed the recurring pains of His awful ordeal at the trial, speeding up now as the time drew nearer still, until the final end in the actual 'birth pangs' of death itself (Acts 2: 24, Greek). Then the spear-thrust of the 'Caesarean' operation for the opening of the 'womb', the breaking forth of the water and the blood, and then

the laying in the tomb. It was all done so thoroughly, so rightly, so conclusively. He had completely fulfilled His distinctive role as 'Mother'; and now He becomes the first born Son. Not Mary's this time, but exclusively God's.

On earth He had only been the adopted son of His earthly father; Joseph adopted Him; but being raised from the tomb by the glory of the Father, Jesus became God's first-born from among the dead and He knew He was to have many, many brethren of Whom He is the first-born. The Father begot Him as the first of a long line of sons whom He should afterwards bring to glory. So it was that Jesus was born of the Virgin — Himself being that Virgin. This is precisely the reason why Mary, the maid of Nazareth chosen to be His mother on earth, had to be virgin — because she was going to give birth to the eternally virgin Son. The great Virgin God came upon her and was found within her and was born of her, so she just had to be a virgin in order for that to be. And this great virgin God was born of her that He might both take and take away sin.

A virginal, sinless soul must be created within a spotlessly perfect body in order that God's eternal purposes with men might be achieved; and that soul must be poured out unto death and in His body He must bear our sins on the tree. During His life on earth sin was without Him and He kept it there, and the wrestling in the garden of Gethsemane was with the fact that although He had never known sin, He must be made sin for us. Yielding with agony to the inevitable, He gave up His body to bear that sin, resisting unto blood, striving lest in its nearer proximity as He made it His own He should sully the virginity of His being and thus destroy all hopes of new birth for man. And He succeeded. His resurrection proves it. Oh, Hallelujah!

So, in His hardly won yet eternally assured position as the first born from the dead, He is still the virgin Son. He was Virgin in eternity, Virgin in conception on earth, Virgin in His life, Virgin in His death, Virgin in His birth from the dead (resurrection) and Virgin for ever more. AMEN.

The birth of the Sons

In the eternal life and order of God the Lord Jesus became for us a man, that He might bring us by His own birth into the family of God. For by His grace we too may know a similar kind of birth, a new birth entirely. A birth from sin to sanctity, from self to God, from vileness to spotless virginity, for Jesus is plainly spoken of as the 'First-born among many brethren' who all must bear His image and grow up into the very same likeness. For God chose each one of them in Christ before the foundation of the world, and predestined them to this through Jesus Christ to Himself that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love. This they shall be if they will believe and entrust themselves to Him as He Himself also did to that blessed virgin of whom God took hold in the Beginning. We shall ever call her blessed who yielded herself to God beyond what she knew, who, when the realisation of what 'He that is mighty' had done dawned on her, said that we all who afterward understood would know how blessed she was. And how rightly she spoke, for we see most clearly that God wrought in her physical frame that which He would most dearly love to do within our own, though in a different way, should we let Him.

Mary is a type, a picture, a promise to us of the Lord's power and purposes in this age. As we so often see in scripture, the natural is an analogy of the spiritual, and fulfils the Bible dictum 'First that which is natural and then that which is spiritual.' Even so it must be, for these are eternal in God, for with Him both natural and spiritual are one. God is Spirit and naturally so (Galatians 4: 8). This is how and why the Holy Spirit could so tenderly inscribe within the scripture His sacred story of Jesus' conception and birth, wherein both the Spiritual and the natural by a supernatural act could and did become one in the Son. Because this is so, we will examine the account of the sacred story of Jesus' birth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, confessing that any such examination must be conducted in lowliest reverence and deepest humility, for its holiness is as the holiness of heaven, even the 'holiest of all', and its intimacy is unspeakable unto tears. It is a mountain that burns with fire, the womb of the morning whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, primeval, untouchable, believable only. Set forth in unguarded and unguardable light, in plainest language for all to approach unto, its solitary grandeur prohibits and precludes all but those who would die to live the holy life of God on the earth. It needs no flaming sword to keep the way; the angel came and went. God needs no protector, just a messenger, so that all who hear may believe and enter in. His Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Calvary need no more protection than His eternal throne.

So unbelievable was it that Joseph himself, who later learned of his fiancée's condition, just could not accept it to be true until reassured personally by God. He need not have worried about his espoused bride; she had not been unfaithful nor played the harlot, but had given herself wholly to God regardless of all that Joseph or any one else thought or said or did. It was just as though Mary had 'married' God; throwing away all her earthly prospects of marriage, her response to God's desires was complete. Borrowing the language of Hebrews 11 it could be written of her, 'By faith, Mary, when she was approached by the angel yielded to God, reckoning the reproach of Christ greater than all earthly pleasures that she might bring forth the Son of God, and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head.' So through Mary, the seed the devil had sired into the human race via Eve was counteracted, his headship superseded, and the way prepared for the Seed that God fathered into the race to overcome and destroy the devil.

Thus in our Head from heaven did the Godhead become man-head, even the Head of the Church which is His body, that whole company of Sons which is the generation of Jesus Christ. And so the saying of Jesus which He spake in the guest chamber prior to His crucifixion is explainable and its meaning understood: 'I am; the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.' He did not say, 'No man goeth to heaven when he dies except by what I accomplish at Calvary' — true as that is — but, 'No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.' 'I am the way, the truth and the life. I am a man; I was born; I came forth unto the Father through Mary from Bethlehem' (Micah 5 : 2). From days of eternity He had been going forth in His Father's name doing His Father's work, but never before had He been born as a man in order to do so.

And then His Father had chosen to beget Him as a man, first through Mary in the flesh that He might come forth unto the Father, and then through Himself in His own death by resurrection; so now must we also come forth from God unto God by a new birth. Jesus is the way, and the way He became the man Jesus is the only way for every one who would know Him as the Way. If this is not our own experience we can never be truth and life unto God

and man, but only read about it and talk and believe about it. We cannot, of course, be made The Way to any man; Jesus our Lord alone can and must be that to every single person seeking eternal life. But we can be an example of the Way before man, and thus fulfil the scripture which says, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me.' If it be true that Jesus' will and the Father's good pleasure is that we should be with Him where He is, it is equally true that we should be what and as He is also. Into this perfect relationship and blessed life Jesus was born and lived and died and rose again to bring us.

As in His life and works the Lord Jesus perfectly sets forth the pattern of life for us, so we find also that in His birth is set forth a similar kind of pattern. Jesus Christ is all. He is made everything to us. As His death must be mine because He has graciously made my death His, and His life must be mine as He powerfully makes my life His, so also is His birth mine as He tenderly makes my birth His. This is why He said to Nicodemus, 'Ye must be born again' (or anew, from above). It is absolutely unavoidable. Every man must, just simply must be born again. If he is at all going to become what God wants him to be — a son of God — there is no other way. It is quite impossible to enter into life except by birth, for this is that one and only strait gate. To enter into man's life Jesus had to be born of a woman, and to enter into God's life every man must be born of God. So when Jesus said, 'Ye must be born again,' He was not advancing some highly questionable idea; nor was He introducing a new set of terms for some long-established, well-known and perfectly understood dogmas; neither was He being merely authoritarian; He was simply telling the truth.

It was an amazingly new truth, but then Jesus was an amazingly new person. No-one like Him had ever been on the earth before; the method by which He came here was entirely new even for Him. When He was born, and before that, when He was being formed within Mary, He embarked upon an entirely new experience; He had never before been born. But of course, if God wanted a completely new type of man on the earth something like this had to be done; only He could create Him, no-one else could — so create Him He did. His plan had been long maturing, but bringing events and time to fulfilment, and finding the right person in Mary, God at last, as an age was ending, sent His angel Gabriel to visit the virgin of Nazareth with the good news. God was about to be born in order to create the new Man by developing, working out and maturing the Life of the Eternal Spirit in a human body as a perfect Soul.

God is an artist. His work is perfect. Imaginative conception, delicate perception, eternal perspective, historical harmony, emotional balance, superlative execution, everything is there in the wondrous virgin birth of Jesus Christ. We cannot compliment God but we can worship Him, inadequate as our praises are. The whole was carried out in a perfection of which we glimpse but little, yet it is sufficient to lift our marvelling minds to a new plane of love, seeking only to be led into all truth. A comparison at this point will serve to strengthen our wondering adoration.

There are many women named Mary in the scriptures, and for our purpose we shall select one from the Old Testament. At first glance it does not appear that she does bear the name, for Mary is the Greek form of the Hebrew Miriam. Miriam was the sister of Moses and Aaron, and the record of an incident of which she was the central figure shows to perfection the difference between the two Marys in the day of their visitation. They were both virgins in the sight of man, and Miriam in a much more exalted and privileged position among her people than Mary, but because of Miriam's dreadful presumption, God likened His conduct towards her to that of a father spitting in his daughter's face because he was ashamed of her. Because of this she became a leper and was shut out from the camp for seven days, white as snow with leprosy because of God's anger toward her. Virgin of body, she was ruined in soul through pride.

But the Father did not send the angel of His presence to spit in Mary's face; on the contrary, it was to plant the Seed of God in her womb. For this she was found willing to be mistaken for a spiritual leper; to use scriptural language that she never knew (all the faithful fulfil one spiritual truth), this woman was prepared to 'go forth unto Him without the camp bearing His reproach.' Thirty or more long years later, that which God did to her that day still lay upon her as a stigma which never died out of men's evil hearts; they never allowed her to forget what to their perverted minds was her great blasphemy. Derisively and reproachfully they said to Jesus, 'We be not born of fornication,' and thus openly accused her of sin whilst sneering at her son. Mary had conceived Him out of

wedlock, and it was her chiefest joy and greatest faith. They did not believe He was God's only begotten Son of woman — but He was.

Mary co-operated with God to allow Him to be the Father of her son. She sought nothing for herself, but just believingly yielded herself only to Him. She consented to allow the Holy Ghost to be the real Mother in her motherhood, even as God was the Father of her son. She let God, the blessed triune God, take her right over for His own use and purposes. It all happened so beautifully, just as Luke simply records it for us in his Gospel.

The story he relates in the first chapter is wondrous in its classic realism. No sentiment, and little of human emotion is revealed. Not a word of professional journalism is to be found, just the honest statements of the plain truth. Analysed, the account reveals these facts:

[1] vvs. 28 and 30 — She was 'highly favoured,' she had 'found favour with God.'

[2] vvs. 27 and 34 — She was virgin; she did not 'know' any man.

[3] vvs. 29 and 34 — She was troubled and fearful and completely baffled in mind as to how it could all be true and possible.

[4] vs. 31 — She sought no thrills or satisfaction for the flesh; the angel said she would conceive in her womb only.

[5] vs. 35 — The Holy Ghost came upon her and the power (Gk. *Dunamis*) of the Highest overshadowed her.

[6] vvs. 38 and 45 — She believed and conceived the word of God which was spoken directly to her.

In these six points we have set forth for us the perfect pattern of God's ways with men in new birth, for this was the new birth in very truth. No-one else had ever been conceived in this manner before. She had conceived God's Seed by faith; Elisabeth later told her so (Luke 1: 45).

At the same time as this was taking place Gabriel also broke the news to Mary that her cousin was now expecting her first child. Such exciting news sent Mary hastening off to share with Elisabeth in the mutual joy, but enquiry soon established the fact that although the dumb Zacharias and the abashed Elisabeth were indeed looking forward to the arrival of their firstborn, everything about its conception and expected birth was absolutely normal. Although it was a miracle and most exciting, it was not a new one. There was nothing unique about it, nothing that God had not done before. The history of Israel practically began with such wonderful happenings. God had done it with Abraham and Sarah, and Jacob and Rachel, and Samuel, the mighty prophet born and destined to restore Israel and anoint their first kings, was just such another child. Now it was Zacharias and Elisabeth who were enjoying a similar favour of God.

History was repeating itself and, of course, John would be a special child and a great man as were Isaac and the sons of Rachel, and Samuel. God had always done it like this. Through someone He would produce a son in a miraculous way, through whom He would change the established order of things and alter the whole course of history. The miracle every time was that ever they were born, because barrenness and/or age had rendered it quite impossible naturally. The miracle of Jesus' birth, however, was an entirely new one. This was not repetition, but reproduction. God was introducing Himself into human flesh. Made in the likeness of men, Jesus was the image of God — God's Son.

Zacharias and Elisabeth and John, their son, were a representative family. In them God finalised and headed up His 'birth' dealings under the Old Covenant, and showed them to be inferior and preparatory to the New. The great miracle man John ushered and heralded in the greater miracle man Jesus. For, taking hold of Mary, God bridged the gap between the Old and New Covenants, and in doing so typified in natural flesh the pattern of His birth dealings throughout the entire length of the new order.

What took place between Mary and God in order that Jesus could be formed in and born through her flesh must also take place in our spirits or we shall never know new birth. Apart from the fact that she had angelic ministry and we have human, there can be no difference in the pattern. Angels are only heavenly men, and though we hear the gospel from men who by their first birth are of the earth, earthy, they are nevertheless by their second birth completely heavenly. Such are sent from God to us to preach the gospel word that we might be born of God. God begot Jesus Christ by the Word. Mary conceived that in her womb and thereby Jesus was the Word made flesh. We too are born again of that same incorruptible seed, through the word, after we have 'conceived' it within us by

the same means as she. As soon as the angel procured her consent the transaction was completed. Her words, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word,' expressed her humble, grateful acquiescence to and willing co-operation with God, so he departed. He had spoken the word of faith to her and she received it, thus allowing the law of faith to operate in her.

It was done; she had conceived Jesus by faith alone on her part. The Holy Ghost had come upon her in Highest power to overshadow and enable her to do the will of God, and it is always like this throughout the length of the entire age. We cannot become the Sons of God by the will of man or the will of the flesh; man and flesh are right out of this. Mary in her ignorance thought that what God said was impossible of accomplishment because she did not 'know' any man. On the contrary, it was the only way it could possibly happen. Until men are prepared to become absolutely virgin to God, so that they look not to anything a man can do and least of all to their own fleshly manhood for help, they never can be born of God. Mary's 'How?' was answered by God's 'The Holy Ghost.' The Holy Ghost is God's 'How'. He always has been, still is, and ever shall be God's 'How'. He is how God does everything — God's means. In this connection the blessed Trinity may be respectfully related thus: the Father is the doer, the Holy Ghost is how He does it, and the Son is the thing done. It was thus in the beginning of creation: God the Father spoke the word, the Holy Ghost fluttering over the deep upon the face of the waters in the dark heard and received it, and light was. Jesus, the Lamb, is the Light.

Because this is the only order God knows and the law upon which He works, Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born of water and of the Spirit. Hearing this Nicodemus was completely baffled, and as Mary had earlier said to the angel so he also said to Jesus, 'How can this thing be?' Mary's difficulty was concerning (a) man — 'I know not a man'; Nicodemus' problem was bound up with (a) woman — 'Can a man enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?' But neither are needed for this great new birth. We have to be born from above to be born again of God, for this second birth is not of man and woman at all. If we wish our spirits to be born we must be born of the Holy Spirit, for that which is born of the flesh is only flesh. The spirit of man died to God in the 'faith' transaction between Satan and Adam via Eve in Eden. Since that occasion every individual person has become dead to God. And though in natural birth flesh is alive by reason of spirit indwelling it, that spirit is nevertheless dead to God. It neither knows Him, nor communes with Him, nor serves Him, nor loves Him, nor worships Him, nor acknowledges Him to be the Lord. It is not alive as Jesus was alive, but quite dead, and until it undergoes an experience from above whereby it is born it will remain dead; and this death is everlasting unless 'these things' take place within us.

This life which we receive at new birth is eternal, that is, it is exactly the same quality of life that is in Christ Jesus. He expressed it thus many times, 'I am the life'; 'I am come that ye might have life more abundantly'; 'Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood ye have no life in you'; 'I am the resurrection and the life'; 'Behold I am alive for ever more.' He has therefore made careful provision that we might have His life. Such provision is it, and so readily available to us all, that no man can live a life different in nature and quality and manifestation from His and yet claim to have eternal life, for it is His life in us. The only thing you can do with life is live it; what and how you live is your life. Christianity is not a religion, it is a life. Indeed, it is THE life — life itself; in this world men are either dead or alive according to whether or not they have received and live this life, and not according to whether or not they accept and believe certain beliefs or practise a certain religion. It is quite as possible to be dead holding all known Christian beliefs, as holding Buddhist or Brahmin or Islamic beliefs. To be sure, it is better to believe the Bible than the Koran, or any other so called sacred writings, but doing so does not bring life. 'Ye must be born again' — Jesus says so.

The life of the Sons

In this new birth many vital spiritual and psychological changes take place in a man. In fact, all the fundamental alterations required by God to make a man acceptable to Him as an eternal being are made at that time. Laws of spiritual being are changed. God puts His laws into our minds and writes them in our hearts so that we all (can) know Him and not our (old) selves, as the originators of humanistic philosophy vainly advise us. This inward change is an absolute necessity, for apart from this taking place it is quite impossible to be a new person. The only long term proof a man can have that he is born again is that he is becoming an entirely new person, and that the new personality being developed and revealed in him is none other than Jesus Christ's. There are, however, certain immediate and immediately recognisable features of new birth that every man must expect to find within himself when he is born again.

Speaking to His ancient people, Israel, through Ezekiel chapter 36: 26, 27, God sets forth some salient features of the new birth which some time in the future was to happen to them as a nation, when they were to be 'born in a day'. When that takes place these three things will happen within each individual. God will give to each one: (1) a new heart, (2) a new spirit, (3) His Spirit. They will happen spontaneously and synchronously so that they appear to be but one thing. Other things must happen prior to and as a consequence of these three major things, but these three must take place in every new birth at whatever time in history the miracle happens.

In these days of advanced medical knowledge ante-natal investigations of any natural birth always include, indeed major upon, the discovery of the heart beat. No heart beat — no life. Ante-natal life has begun when a heart starts to beat. So in new birth, God starts with the renewal of the heart. There can be no new life from an old heart. God says that it is impossible to get a clean thing out of an unclean thing, and it is equally impossible to get an unclean out of a clean. Born of unclean flesh it is not possible for any man to have a clean heart and live a pure life: born of the Holy Spirit it is impossible to have an unclean heart and life. In order to live a new clean life we must have a new clean heart and spirit. God says He gives new hearts for old, hearts of flesh for hearts of stone, as of course only He can and must, if He would have us for His children.

The Old Covenant was written upon stone. This in itself, as in everything God does, was of symbolic significance, for it typified exactly what was taking place; the hearts to which God was giving the law were as hard as stone, and the Covenant was a superimposition upon cold, resistant, unresponsive flint, a law enforcement to which the carnal mind must bow but which the heart could never receive. The New Covenant must be written within by the Spirit of God on the fleshy tables of the heart and put (given) into the mind, so that the law of being may supersede the law of doing. Thus the law of commandments becomes the law of life, not so much in the first instance by willing obedience, as by natural function which gives rise to the willing obedience. The law of God's being must become the law of my being — mind and heart law by which my life is governed naturally and develops normally into a life of simple obedience to God.

In this act of God I am reconstituted in the nature of God that I may grow as a person and develop a personality like Jesus in the image of God. I am reconstituted righteous, made the righteousness of God in new birth. Constitutional law is greater than institutional law. What God is constitutionally, that is, those qualities by which He is naturally God, so that because of them we recognise and acknowledge and confess Him to be God, He in measure adapted and projected from Himself as a law, instituting and commanding it under the hand of Moses as a code of life for His people. Even Moses himself saw and said that though this was so, God had not given the people a new heart. They had to keep the law for righteousness, but God had not reconstituted them so that they were functionally righteous within, and confession can not be made unto salvation until the heart has believed unto this righteousness. A man's heart has to be reconstituted righteous, made entirely new within, before he can live a new life, for the life must be basically righteous to be called life at all. The law of righteousness and life must take the place of the law of sin and death ere a man can live.

The heart is the most vital, basic and powerful piece of 'machinery' in the whole human being, and as it is in the natural so is it in the spiritual being. The reconstituted heart is the 'machinery' for living the new life, but even so, important as it is, it is not the whole new man, but only his heart. The new man himself is the new spirit God puts

within him. As in the first creation God made everything in perfect functional order before He created the man, so in the new spiritual order: the heart first, then the spirit (man) to use it. It was like this in the beginning. God formed man out of the dust of the ground in perfect working order and then breathed spirit into him so that man could be a living soul. Now God says, 'A new spirit will I give you,' and oh, how vital this is, for this is that inward man who is told, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,' and hearing it, with joy he now cries, 'Of course, I shall!' It is no longer conceived or imagined to be a commandment of authority to be understood despairingly as 'I must love God because He says so,' but an empowering from His will — 'I shall, of course I shall, because He has enabled me.' 'Thou shalt' is thus shown to be an utterance from supreme knowledge rather than from a superior power, though bearing that power in mind, and intending to act from it. Hence God is not so much commanding obedience as commanding life.

This inward man, being spirit, is either old or new according to whether it has been born from above, and being by first birth born dead, the inward man is not able to recognise himself or know his state, nor does he know how to act responsively and responsibly in this matter of new birth. That is why the gospel must be preached to us with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, for unless this is so there can be no all-powerful generation. Dead spirits remain unresponsive, totally unable to act, unconscious of need, and ignorant of how to enter into life. Aware of self and sin, unregenerate man is dead toward God. Loving sin, he engages in and practises it as in his natural element, so that he believes such a state to be his only possible way of life.

Yet it is to this part of man, the real I, that God appeals. His gospel is addressed to it and His new birth is for it. This is that part that has to be born again, the spirit; and it only can be born again when it rises up within and responds wholeheartedly to God's word. Just as a man has lusted after, gone after, engaged in and practised many abominable things within himself, though outwardly he has never done them, so, exactly so must he reach out and desire after Jesus as the word of God is spoken to him. He must not remain passively believing, but must actively receive. His whole self must be in it. He must engage in a personal transaction with Jesus Christ just as really as when, perhaps lying bodily passive in bed or sitting totally inactive in a chair, without moving a muscle outwardly, yet with unbridled passion, he inwardly engages with some other absent person or persons in some form of sin. Such sin does not require the bodily presence of another person; the imagination and desires and emotions of the man are quite sufficient to make others very, very real to him indeed. Such sins, though often never actually committed by the outward man are, nevertheless, the most real of things a person ever does.

Because this is so, God requires that in regeneration, the greatest thing that can happen to a man on this earth, that same part must act in the transaction of new birth. With affection, and emotion, and desire, and intellect, and imagination, and will, the whole inward man must believe and receive. Then he will become a new spirit-man. It cannot be too strongly urged upon a man that he must so believe God that he arises with all his manhood, and transacts with Jesus Christ earnestly and personally. Such an act no more requires the actual physical presence of Jesus Christ than do the sins spoken of above — it is the spirit that commits the sin or comes to Christ in either case.

The third thing specified in this one great birth is, 'I will put My Spirit within him.' A man must consciously receive the Holy Spirit when he believes, so that should an apostle of Jesus Christ ask him the vital question Paul asked of the Ephesians, he could answer unequivocally, 'Yes.' In our concern to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order that we shall be saved, we must not neglect to receive the Holy Spirit also. The Lord Jesus who said, 'Come unto Me I will give you rest,' also said, 'Come unto Me and drink this spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive.' Just because He said these two things upon two different occasions, He did not mean or say that He was speaking of two different 'comings' or experiences. It was clearly impossible for Him to say everything all at once or every time He opened His mouth, so it was as the occasion warranted, or the conditions afforded, or the needs demanded, or the media required that He spoke of different effects resulting from coming to Him. Each was related to the purpose in His mind when He spoke, therefore whilst what the Lord said was amply suited to each particular situation, it was nevertheless but partial in expression, and could not be otherwise. When this is clearly understood, many things mistakenly said to be different are at once seen to be distinctions only and not differences at all.

The gospel is now completely revealed as it never was whilst Jesus yet spake on the earth, for even He lived on the Old Testament side of Calvary and Pentecost. The New Covenant was then in His unshed blood; this had yet to be both shed and presented in heaven before the New Covenant could commence. But the redemptive offering being now complete and His precious blood presented in heaven, no heart need believe restrictively for partial things. Men today must believe on Jesus Christ unto the reception of the Holy Ghost. We must come to Jesus drinking and God will put His Spirit within us. The Holy Spirit must dwell forever within my spirit in my new heart. It will then keep new and I shall be the living soul God intends me to be — a thing entirely impossible apart from the miracle taking place as outlined above. This then is what basically takes place in every new birth, and in such a way that a man is unmistakably aware of the tremendous and eternal change that has taken place in him.

We have used the Old Covenant scriptures as a basis of analysis of the miracle of the New Birth which is, as yet, a future experience for the nation of Israel. Written prophetically, it could not then be testified to experimentally by any man. For a further fuller and additional exposition of the truth we will now examine the New Covenant scriptures, whose authors were all men who had been born again. These all could write from experience of that new birth which had taken place in them, as well as from the Holy Ghost. Inspiration flowing through experience speaks the most powerful word of all. Among these authors the apostle John was singled out to be the last contributor to the sacred canon and, as one who could look back over a long life filled with evidence of the things which he wrote, he was well qualified for the task. His first epistle is a blessed and vital statement of things he knew from God and from life. Spokesman for all the apostles as well as the whole unnamed company designated 'the sons of God', he sets forth for all time, for God and for us, the things commonly recognised as the marks of the new birth.

Examining his epistle we find the phrase he most often uses is the simple, positive affirmation 'We know'; this expression is doubled unto us in one place and with the triumph of complete assurance it becomes uttermost conviction, 'We do know that we know.' Such knowledge is rest, unassailable and profound; it is language such as the blessed Trinity themselves could be expected to use; it is life beyond doubt; as it is in God, so it is in us. Indeed, we find this very thing written into the letter, 'Which thing is true in Him and in us.' Into such a state of life the new birth is designed immediately to bring us, and it is testified to and declared so plainly that only sheerest unbelief could possibly deny it.

Taking the simple words 'born of God', or 'of God' as our ground of unerring truth, we will gather from this letter what God says are the unchanging marks or indications of whether or not a man is His child. There are seven proof signs:

- [1] ch. 2, vs. 29 — He practises righteousness.
- [2] ch. 3, vs. 9 — He does not commit sin.
- [3] ch. 4, vs. 2 — He confesses that Jesus Christ is (now) come in flesh.
- [4] ch. 4, vs. 4 — He overcomes them (that are in the world) because
greater is He that is in him than he that is in the world.
- [5] ch. 4, vs. 7 &
; ch. 5, vs. 1 — He loves, and thereby proves that he loves God.
- [6] ch. 5, vs. 4 — He overcomes the world and the victory is his faith.
- [7] ch. 5, vs. 18 — He keeps himself and the devil does not touch him.

In these seven things the Spirit through John speaks most plainly and powerfully to our hearts concerning His eternal life. Moreover, the letter is specifically written to the sons of God whom He classifies thus: dear (little) children (2 :12), fathers (2 :13), young men (2 :13), young (little) children (2: 13), brethren (2 : 7), beloved (4:1). The whole is written to them as God's sons, each one of them a dear child; some are young children, others are young men, while yet others are fathers — but all are brethren and His beloved. Whilst all need to know everything their Father has to say, some need particular instruction directed specially to their individual state so that each may know His will and yet all together love and live.

The whole reason for new birth is that by it we all may live the life of God. Therefore, as long as we live our lives on this earth, we must expect the proof signs as listed to appear clearly in all that we are and say and do. This is

why John, as He begins the letter, so emphatically draws our attention to the life: 'That which was from the beginning.' It is intriguingly startling how he couches his language so as to avoid a name — that is, Jesus — and to emphasise life, 'the life was manifested.' Of course it was Jesus the apostles saw and heard and looked upon and handled, but John says it was the 'Word of life', and it is the same in whomsoever it is found. That is the purpose for the writing of the book — the insistence is on the life of God manifest in the flesh; whether in the Son or in the Sons it is identical, recognisable, unmistakable, provable. This was the amazing thing to those men who followed Jesus — the state of being in which the Father and the Son eternally existed was manifested on the earth. God's life; eternal life; Life; just that, the Life. There is no other, nor can be. Other states of existence there are and shall be for ever, but these are not the Life. That Life was manifested on earth in order that we by a new miracle birth might have it; and when we have it, it is eternal; and having it we may with those for whom John writes, who first experienced it in succession to Jesus Christ, enter into the fellowship of the Father and the Son. It is utterly ludicrous to say we have eternal life if we do not live this life for it is the only one there is.

To John, God in trinity is a Fellowship, seeing, hearing and handling each other in perfect love, and this is Light. God is (the) Light, there is no darkness at all in Him. The motives of each member in the Fellowship are absolutely pure, therefore is God Holy. Each member of that Trinity is holy, and so all around Him is light. Because God is Light there is light, light to walk in and be — and we have to walk in this light exactly as He is. As He is Light so must we be; then shall we consciously be in the true eternal Fellowship, with the Father and with His Son. Only as this is so shall we be able to walk in the light and have fellowship one with another also.

Fellowship can only exist in the family of the Father, and it can exist in no other than these three basic things: (1) being, (2) relationship, (3) progression. It is only therein that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, continues its work of consistent cleansing which is one of the chief purposes for which it was shed. It was never conceived, nor intended, neither was it promised by God, that the blood of His Son should initially cleanse, and go on cleansing anybody who would not come to the Light, and in that light believe in the Light, and become a child of Light, and go on walking in the light; and neither does it, nor can it do, all-powerful though it is. Everyone who chooses to remain in the darkness of his own death-existence can never be forgiven or cleansed. But whosoever comes to Jesus, the Light, commences at that moment to move into the light and shall soon believe in and know the Light Himself whose grace forgives, and whose blood cleanses from all sin whatsoever.

Seeing then that it is into this Fellowship we are called as one family with the Father and the Son, it is most important that we be able openly to trace those seven signs of the eternal life of Jesus within us and about our lives and upon our works. We must be able fully and openly to confess Jesus Christ come in flesh. The perfect participle 'come' used here reveals a fullness of truth which often at first reading we easily miss, believing devoutly that it refers back to the incarnation only, whereas it means 'Jesus Christ having come and now coming in the flesh.' God is here telling our hearts that one of the major purposes of His Son's birth on earth whereby the Word was made flesh, was that He may also come into flesh today — our flesh. This is what we are told so clearly in the Hebrews' letter; the writer says that Jesus partook of flesh and blood precisely because the children (of God) are partakers of it — just for that reason. And if we are born of God the Spirit of God will make our spirit confess that Jesus Christ is come in(to) our flesh also. This being so, we see immediately why he that is born of God doth not commit sin. Why, with God's seed abiding in him so that Jesus Christ is come in(to) his flesh, he cannot do that!

Mary, during the incarnation, only had God's seed within her for a few months, but we receive it to abide within us for ever. God's purpose in taking flesh from (or through) Mary was in order that He might exist on the earth distinct and apart from her; but in regeneration Jesus takes our flesh as His own, to dwell in it on the earth and be identified with us in it. How then can we go on to sin? A man does not go on sinning when he is born of God, for sinning is the devil's life and work, not God's. Satan has sinned unbrokenly from the beginning, and being our spiritual father by our first or natural birth, he continues to do exactly the same in every one born of man.

But Jesus is not a sinner, nor can be; He has not sinned from all eternity and will not do so in any one who is born of God, for the purpose of the new birth is that the life and works of Jesus should be reproduced in us. God intends that, as a result of this birth, the sin and sinfulness of Satan's usurpation of God's headship of the human race should be eliminated, and that men should be restored to a sonship above that from which Adam fell. For his

sonship was in innocence, but ours is to be in righteousness and true holiness. Therefore in us the Lord Jesus will do righteousness, the absolute opposite from sin; and we know that it is he that doeth righteousness who is righteous, and he alone. A man cannot live and do sin and be righteous at the same time. Since sin is neither the nature nor the habit of the Seed within, it cannot characterise the life of the person in whom that Seed is now come. Not that by this a man is rendered incapable of sinning, for if a man loses power to sin he also loses power to do anything else, with the result that he would become an automaton and salvation would be a farce. On the contrary, it is that he now has power not to sin, or to sin not. Therefore, he does not go on sinning; he chooses not to, and being born of God he is no longer irresistibly forced to do so against his will. One of the most powerful elements of the new birth is its complete elimination of the compulsive power to sin from the heart of the 'born one'. The reconstituted heart has the law for/of righteousness written in it, and its genius and power lies in its irresistible drawings to holiness, so that a man may live free from sin whereas once he was its slave. This is because the change of paternity has robbed the devil of his power to dominate the will, and sin cannot therefore be the habit of the new nature — it can only occur as an accident', an irregularity in the life, and not recur inevitably according to law, as the norm of experience. The old law of sin and death has given way to the new law of righteousness and life, and so glorious is the enjoyment of the fellowship of God, and so great and many are the privileges of sonship, and so wondrous the holiness and purity of the new life, that to sin is unthinkable. When the temptation to do so comes, as it surely does — the suggestion made, the offer given, the allurements unavoidably there — and the pressure is on, a man says, 'I cannot sin because I am born of God; I cannot do it.' That is how deeply the blood is cleansing him. He knows he must not and he is not bound to, and does not want to, and feels he cannot sin and grieve his Father. As a man born of God stands firm on this ground, fully believing the plainly written truth, refusing to give in to the strong urge and great pressure of the temptation, he will not sin but taste the sweets of the victory which overcometh the world. Moreover, and greater still, he will soon joyfully discover that what appears still to be rising within him as latent sin is none other than a temptation skilfully disguised and subtly presented from without, and this is one of the most blessed moments of his life. Sin, we are told, is a deceitful thing, but even more deceitful is the deceiver, the devil, who tries by all means to deceive the son of God into believing the lie. To realise that one is able to detect the subtlety of the serpent in the temptation is one of the sweetest of realisations, as is to know that God does not expect His people to sin. But He is not unmindful that they may do so, and has graciously and logically made provision so that if they do there can be immediate forgiveness and cleansing and restoration to His life. But not the absence of sin — nothing so negative — but the presence and practice of righteousness is a more positive sign of new life from God, for this is the basic quality which marks it out as new and different.

The righteousness of God is that He acts consistently with His moral nature, and it can be no different with us. If a man acts out of character with his morality he is unmoral, unrighteous, not right but wrong. Because this is so in God it is an unbreakable law, a moral principle of first magnitude. So primal is it that John says, 'Little children, let no man deceive you, he that doeth righteousness is righteous even as He is righteous.' We know the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil not by whether or not a man believes in imputed or even imparted righteousness, but by whether or not a man practises, commits, does righteousness. If he does not, he is not of God, whatever his claims or beliefs may be.

Further, and because it is of great importance at this point, let us distinguish between good works and doing righteousness. There are so many works a man may do which are easily recognised as being good as opposed to evil, but it is utterly impossible to classify righteous works because they partake of moral and inward states, not seen by any eye but God's. Anyone may think he can see whether or not I love my brother by the works I do, but fail utterly in assessing the righteousness of those same acts simply because he cannot weigh my motives. In all his works a man must know his own heart before God.

The man that is born of God must be as God, and he will be so in all the normal everyday acts of his whole life, which will be consistent with the acts of God, that is, they will have the same moral quality and spiritual power about them. Of course, all the works that God does are infinitely and incomparably greater in power and scope and number than ours can ever be, even as He is incomparably greater than we are or ever shall be, but the righteousness is the same. Whether in the providential acts of every day to everyone without respect of persons, or in the special deeds of grace to the few — as He is, so are we in this world. If a man 'does sin,' that is, practises

it as the normal conduct of life, it is because he has a nature of, and disposition to, sin; similarly, if a man 'does righteousness,' that is, practises it as the normal conduct of life, it is because he has that nature and disposition. Apart from having this nature he cannot do it; he must act consistently with his nature or ultimately become a hypocrite.

Hypocrisy does not lie in trying to be what you are not, neither does it lie in an occasional failure to act according to what you are; it lies in deliberately deceiving people into believing you are what you are not. Unfortunately most of us at some time or another try to be what we are not. Not that by this we attempt to deceive people — though at times we may deceive ourselves in the process. It usually only occurs as we see a higher goal and seek to attain unto it. Alas in Christian circles this is the result of ignorance of God's ways and/or wrong teaching resulting from such ignorance. But such action only becomes hypocrisy when, being recognised as wrong, it is persisted in with a view to masking an underlying condition of unrighteousness.

Still further and because of the foregoing, he that is of God will both overcome the world and also all the other antichrist spirits that are in it. These spirits are not necessarily demons, but human. Careful reading will substantiate the fact that these verses are not there primarily to be used as 'demon detectors' but were written for a higher purpose. They may have another use but their true function is to inform us of the sure ways of the Spirit of God in establishing the bona fides of His own children. Every spirit of man that cannot confess Jesus Christ come in flesh is an antichrist spirit. It is against Him and not of Him; without exception every un-born-again spirit is an antichrist spirit; it is of the world and of him that is in the world, says John. Anyone purporting to be, or who is thought to be a prophet, and yet is not able to make the great confession that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is false. Here again let us pause to note the importance of this word confession. Actually it is a word rather more to do with morality than intellect, and must in this connection be consistent with the whole life. A man may talk about anything, but he can only confess what he knows. Knowledge in this sense largely comes to us from without by the means John mentions in the beginning of his letter, by seeing and hearing and handling. To this is added later another faculty, the unction or anointing by which we know all things, and John speaks so conclusively about this latter that we are bound to admit its infallibility. Given these abilities, correct conclusions leading to true confession can be made about all things. No-one and nothing is exempt.

As we have seen that every man not yet believing on Jesus Christ is an antichrist spirit, that is, he is against God's purpose(s) through Christ for him in this world, so must we also see that everyone who is born of God is a Christ-spirit. He is indwelt by Christ, and has already partially fulfilled God's ultimate purpose for him in this world, which is that he should grow and mature into the perfect image of Jesus Christ as time and opportunity allow.

Among those who are naturally children of Satan and not permanently indwelt by Jesus Christ, there are those who are specially indwelt for the devil by an evil spirit. Such are capable of substituting false claims for true confessions, but God is not deceived by them, and His children are not long in doubt either. Greater is He that is in us than he that is in them, and He has overcome them and laid the foundation for all to be overcomers who can make the great confession that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. He is the great and true Prophet and has overcome the false prophet, even Satan who deceived our first parents Adam and Eve in the garden, saying, 'Ye shall be as gods.' Now with full assurance we confess by the Spirit this true confession of the sons of God, and know that 'as He is so are we in this world'; we are not as gods, but as He. The true Prophet has overcome the false, the Seed in us has overcome the seed in them, 'We are of God little children.' Even the youngest babe of God has in him this victory that overcometh the world; this very thing is our faith that is born of God.

In almost heavenly conditions on earth in Eden long ago Satan, with prophetic power, lied a false confession into the heart and mind of mankind using God as his authority, 'God doth know . . . ye shall be as gods.' Now, in the near hell-like state of the world because of sin's maturing development on the earth under the curse of God, the true Prophet by His Spirit causes all God's sons to know and confess the only perfect God-like condition possible to man — 'As He is.' This is the only true faith that is born of God. It overcometh the present evil state of the world at this stage of its history, as well as all spirits in it; and it enables the true life to be lived and the true confession to be made, and wonderful and thrilling indeed it is.

In commencing His ministry to Israel of old, Jesus came from Jordan to them by water only. John Baptist was specially prepared and sent by God with his watery baptism to call all men to him, that he might present Jesus by that same watery baptism to the nation. Jesus Himself came up out of the water to see the heavens open to Him, and to feel the dove alight upon Him, and to hear the voice announcing Him. He had come to them by water as the people's Messiah. But at the conclusion of His life on the earth, whilst hanging on the cross in death and in response to the spear-thrust into His side, the water and the blood flowed out that by these He might come to us by the Spirit. Miracle of miracles, victory of victories — by and with this He comes to us that we all may be God's true sons.

Moreover, we know that he that is born of God keepeth himself and that wicked devil toucheth him not. The child of God, not now bound to commit sin nor even to fall into it, keepeth himself from it, and consequently the devil cannot touch him. Not that he would not like to; he would, but he cannot. Not that he does not attempt to; he does, but he cannot touch him. Not that he does not tempt him; he does but he cannot touch him. All the while a man keeps himself from sin the devil is powerless to touch him. The devil does not want us to believe that, but God does. Satan wants us to believe that he is almighty, but he is not — God is! It is important for us to know that Satan cannot have any more power over and in our lives than what we allow him by believing in him. Satan must not be believed in but believed about. That is, a man must believe about him but not believe in him — he must believe in Christ.

A man may always keep himself from the wicked one. Even at the worst times, when the greatest weights are upon him and he feels least like it, he can still preserve his total purity. The Lord Jesus is the prime example of this. Just before He left the guest chamber with His disciples for the garden of Gethsemane the Lord said, 'The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me.' He knew the devil was coming but He also knew he could not touch Him because He had no sin in Him. Not even when He bore our sins in His own body on the tree and was made sin for us, could the devil touch Him. It was God who made Him to be sin for us — to do so was beyond the devil's power. Even in His great extremity, resisting unto blood and striving against the sin He was bearing, He kept His spirit so pure that He could send it winging home to His Father as spotless, and clear, and perfect and free from sin as in the beginning, so that His Father may in turn give it to all the sons He should afterwards beget. The devil could not touch Him, He had kept Himself. The wicked one had attacked Him, hurt Him, tortured Him, crucified Him, but he had not touched Him. As with Him, so with us. Tempted, attacked, hurt, maligned, brutalised, anything, everything except sin, and the devil cannot touch us. Hallelujah! While we sin not but walk in the light in the Fellowship of the Three who are Light, with all those who are the children of light, we are untouchable. Nor shall we need the many panaceas or theories being proffered these days on every hand as 'guaranteed' ways to defeat the devil. The victory God gives us is the victory over the devil, and if we keep ourselves as God instructs and intends us to keep ourselves, we are safe.

A man is indeed happy if all these marks of the new life are in him, but he cannot afford to rest even in such a state, for beyond all this the best is yet to be made known to him. 'Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God.' Deliverance from sin and darkness and the world and the devil and all else of evil would be in vain if a man could not or did not love. God's purpose has achieved its ultimate in us when He has made us lovers as He is a Lover, for His love must be perfected in us. Because He loves us, God sees and hears and handles us into the place and condition where we can see and hear and handle Him in spirit. Indeed, this is the fellowship into which we are invited and exhorted by the apostle John and the Holy Ghost — the real and stated reason why the epistle was written. John, speaking for an unspecified group, states the means of the fellowship he and they enjoyed with that Life, and openly invites us into it that our joy may be full. And oh, how full it can be as we enter into and abide in this love, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, by this means of communion and communication.

To be in love is the greatest, simplest and most normal condition of life as it is in God; and the promise commanded into us to be the substance and law for life is, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all' — and this we do. But God wants us to understand that included in loving Him is the command to love one another also, and this is in order that we should by the latter prove the former. Nothing is genuine apart from this. It is quite impossible to love God unless we love one another also; likewise it is impossible to love God and no-one else. We must love Him exclusively as God and worship Him as no other, but doing that we must also love the brethren

inclusively — though as individuals — 'one another' is the command, not 'en masse'. In response to His first love He must have our first love, and the brethren must have our first quality love. To Him it is quality plus degree, to others it is the same quality but with less degree.

God says we are to dwell, live all the time, in love; that is, we are to be in love with one another all the time, and this is to be shown along unmistakable and well defined lines immediately recognised by all. Perhaps the greatest discovery a man ever makes is that God loves him individually, and then from that knowledge graduates to know that God is Love. The phrase 'God is love' occurs twice in this epistle. The first time it is a statement of fact — information given us by the Holy Ghost — albeit through a man who has lived to prove it. The second time it is the confession of one who as a result, and in the ways set forth in the intervening verses, has discovered it for himself and confesses that God is love. We are virtually told we cannot be God's children if we do not know this. We must see and testify and know and believe the love God has to us. It is a wonderful thing when 'God is love' is a testimony upon a man's lips, the confession of a discovery and not the repetition of an inspired quotation.

John was not just quoting it; he had never heard anyone say it. In the whole of the Hebrew scriptures with which he was familiar, it was never found upon anyone's lips. Even upon the memorable occasion in the guest chamber when he, together with the other apostles, had been Jesus' guest, it had come to him rather differently — 'I have loved you.' Their Lord and Master had invited them to this last supper, and it was a love feast if ever there was one, for Jesus' heart was brimming over with endless love to them — they could feel it, and John's heart just craved to become one with it. But there was no-one there equal to the love in Jesus' heart. He wanted to wash their feet in preparation for the meal and journey ahead, but there was no slave of God's love there with Him to do it so He got down and washed their feet Himself. They were absolutely bewildered; humbled and chastened. The unspeakable honour He did them utterly confused them, but it was by such things that John made both the greatest discovery and the great confession. It had always been like that since he had first seen, and then met and followed and heard this Man. John found God's love in a man. At the time he did not know He was the God-Man, but he knew this Man loved him, aye, and loved him in deed and in truth. Jesus never told him He loved him, yet John just knew He did, and he loved to think of himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved — not more than anyone else, only as much as everyone else of course — but he knew Jesus to be Love. Jesus loves in deed — not just one or two deeds, not an isolated act, or gesture, or occasional look, for that would not have been in truth; Jesus loved him in life, all of it.

The truth of a thing is the consistency of it; that alone gives substance to honesty and correctness, making them reality. This Man was the same all through, all the time — love in deed and in truth. It was the Light He was that first attracted John, but it was the Love he discovered Him to be that held him. Light drew him, love held him — held him so tightly and so closely that he lay on His breast feeling it was heaven, until one morning he received the Holy Ghost in the dawn of a new day, and the love of God was shed abroad in his own heart, and he became all one with that love and knew God within himself as all Love.

In the end a man must become love; in himself he must be love as God is Love. He cannot know God is Love until he himself is love; he can hear it, believe it, calculate it from scripture or because he has partaken of it in some providential or special manner, and all these are essential prerequisites unto the end in view, but he must be love as God is Love ere he can know God's state of love and confess it. This is but the beginning of a life which in development is love perfected in him, so that fellow men may know it by the power of apprehension placed within them for this very thing, viz., seeing, hearing, handling. It is of no use expecting a man to believe he is loved just because he is told so. God did not expect it. He did not merely announce His love from heaven. He did not invent and send a wireless or television set, or a printing press; He sent His Son to see and hear and handle people, and that man may see and hear and handle Him and know what eternal life really is. As it was with the Father, so it was among men — and this because He loved us so — and thus it must be with us also.

John says, 'We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.' Lovelessness is death, the state of complete inability; and the thing over which God grieves most is not a man's inability to walk or work or to do His will, but his utter inability to love. God lives the eternal life of love, and reading John's words it could almost be that we are overhearing the conversation of the blessed Father, Son and Holy Ghost in fellowship saying, 'Beloved, let us love one another for love is.' Perfect love uses words but needs none; its language is

attitudes, disposition, deeds, looks, deportment, patience, long-suffering, compassion, tenderness, and all the host of other indescribable and unnameable virtues, great and small, that support its claim or express its fullness. These each appear singly or in needful combination momentarily as an opportunity arises or a situation requires, and then disappear from recognition to lose themselves again in the whole virtuous nature of which they are but a part. Of itself each has no glory save as an expression of all, gathering up and focussing for a while the beauty of the whole, and then subsiding to blend into the composite glory that must shine out eternally as, and in, and through each with equal power as it is in turn revealed.

Seldom, if at all, do we hear of one of the precious Three directly telling the other He loved Him, or Them. Father and Son each wanted the other to know they were conscious of the other's love and that they loved each other, but they never descended to romantic or sentimental expressions; to them it was the deep, abiding, eternal security of Life. It is surely one of the most wonderful facts of scripture that it shows most clearly that only from human lips did Jesus seek to extract the confession of love: 'Lovest thou Me?'

As He is

These then are some of the basic proofs of a man's sonship with Jesus. They are not set forth as an end in view, or as a mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, but as simple 'first principles' of divine life to be found in any man who calls himself a son of God. If any man sins, or at any time acts unrighteously, or fails at some point to overcome the world, or finds himself not loving his brother as he should, or in some way or measure ceases to be light as and in the fellowship of Light, he does not automatically thereby lose his sonship. The true son, however, will speedily repent of and rectify the condition, and then restoration to all the former divine favours and fellowship will be surely granted by his Father. But let a man believe and abide and walk in the truth as here set, forth and he need never sin, nor fall short, nor stumble in the way. God has generated him with and into the generation of Jesus Christ, and it is not a generation in or unto sin but in and unto righteousness and love, so that we may say with confidence, 'As He is so are we in this world.'

The veriest babe in God's family must know this. He may not know the scriptural statements about it, having yet to learn them; but he must know it within himself, even though he cannot analyse it. That is why God has given to us of His own Spirit, because it is by the Spirit that we know. This knowledge is inward certainty of truth, not intellectual grasp of fact. All God's children have it without exception, for this constitutes part of the new spiritual life, of being as He is. God's children may never be nor can be who He is, but all must be as He is. Every human babe is as much a human being as the parents who begot the child. So we by divine promise and workmanship are made partakers of the divine nature. This was perfectly outworked in the birth of Jesus Christ — He was born of the divine promise. So are we — 'Repent and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost for the promise is unto you and as many as the Lord our God shall call.' So they on the day of Pentecost were, and so now may we be made partakers of the new divine nature.

Having thus been born of God, and finding this same nature within us, we now belong to the generation of Jesus Christ. Being now made sons by regeneration, we must in all things also be made like unto the Son. This must be our sole reason for living, for no lesser reason is acceptable to our Father. The Holy Ghost, Who has come forth from the Father through the Son, is under command to accomplish this very thing. His work is to glorify Jesus by reproducing His nature and personality in each of God's other sons. Jesus Christ is the Seed accepted for a generation, and each one of that generation is demonstrably of Him — clearly and firmly, marked out of God as belonging to the generation of Jesus Christ.