

# The New Birth and Eternal Life

John 3

Lecture 1 of 'The New Testament Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.'

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## **Preface to the First Edition.**

The volume which is now before the reader consists of a course of lectures delivered in London during a brief part of this summer, and, after an interval of other work, which delayed the needful revision, printed from the shorthand writer's report. Few, perhaps, will be more sensible of its defects than the author is. Nevertheless the need of souls is so urgent on the one hand, and the broad outline of the truth is so plain and momentous on the other, that he does not hesitate to commit the work to the mercy and the blessing of the Lord, who loves His own that are in the world, and loves them unto the end.

Guernsey,

*November, 1867.*

Lecture 1.

## **The New Birth and Eternal Life.**

### ***John 3: 5.***

The subject of which I propose to treat will demand, as the course of lectures may call for it, the development, according to God's word, of many operations of the Holy Ghost only experienced under Christianity, which were unknown in the times which preceded the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. But I rejoice to begin this night with that which spreads itself over the entire dealings of God in His mercy towards His saints at all times. That is, we enter on what is not special, save only as the knowledge of God Himself must distinguish souls in a lost world where grace chooses and saves-what is not special in the sense of being brought out and enjoyed, under peculiar circumstances and at a particular period, in the ways of God with man. On the contrary, what comes before us now is universal for God's children, was found in the earliest days since sin entered into the world, was never superseded, nor can be, till the last trace of sin is gone for ever. It is the one fundamental want for every soul of man who is brought out of the condition of fallen man-the common lot of man appointed, as we know, to die, and after that to judgment. God would make Himself known, would reveal Himself; it might be only partially, after sundry measures, and in many manners, as the apostle tells us in Hebrews 1; but, whatever the measure or the mode of His revelations, God has always wrought in sovereign mercy to souls, and He has given of His own nature to those who believe here below. This is what is meant by being born again. Nor was there ever a time when it was more necessary than now, not only to assert what is special, but to cleave to that which is universal in the sense just now explained. Let us maintain then that which never changes; while, at the same time, we leave ample space for whatever it may please God according to His own wisdom to bring in, amplifying, clearing, brightening,

deepening, and that in every possible form. There is progress, I need not say, in the way in which God does manifest Himself; at any rate, till Christ appeared, and His work was accomplished. Not that I speak of progress since, but that, in the unfolding of the word of God from the beginning, there is most manifestly an enlarging view given of the divine ways—given until God, and not merely His ways, were fully manifested.

Across the whole course of these varying dispensations, as I gladly allow, we have this great blessing enjoyed. And the reason is manifest: a God of goodness on the one hand, and lost man on the other. "My Father worketh hitherto," said the Son, also working in grace. Conscience may give its intimations of a God and His judgment; but the mind of man never can rise above the fact, or rather the inference, that there must be a God. God Himself is never thus known. Mind, as such, is incapable of finding out God; and, in point of fact, that which gave scope to the reason of man was his ruin. He reasons about God because he has *lost* God; and all that reasoning can discover in any of its processes is not what *is*, but simply, granting this and that, what *must be*. But a God that simply must be is awful to a conscience burdened with its guilt. The God that must be for him— that is, for a sinner—must be a judge; and if God be the judge of sin and of sinners, what must be the sinner's lot? If the righteous even with difficulty be saved, where shall the ungodly appear?

Now, in the face of all this, God has not merely given a revelation, made promises, given even still more distinct prophetic delineations of what He meant to do: this He has done from the very first; but there was always more than this. And it is of very great consequence to souls even now to recognise that it is not only a direction of the soul of the believer toward God by faith, but that there is, and has always been, far more. It is not too much to assume that those who listen to me here have no need to be told what that link really is. I do not refer now to the new fact that God has sent down the Holy Ghost; but I say, that while there was always faith, there was always more than faith. It is a very imperfect and even pernicious view, that souls simply look to God. However true this is, it is but a part of the truth. Besides the look of faith, besides the laying hold of the word of God by the operation of the Spirit in the soul, there is such a thing as spiritual life; and there always was such a thing; for it is the necessary condition of having to do with God. There always was, as there is, a positive new nature given to the believer; that is, it is not merely a question of faith, but of a new life. Faith, of course, is the only means whereby this new nature is imparted, as I shall hope to show; and faith is the true means for the soul to assure itself that it is thus born of God. There may be other evidences to other eyes and hearts; but faith is that which is intended of God to give its possessor the certainty that he is born of God.

Now this truth and indispensable necessity, although always made good in believers, it is evident before Christ was very feebly understood, and, in point of fact during Old Testament times, was rather implied than explicitly taught. It may be presented in figure, and there may be moral expressions; but nowhere is there a distinct statement of a new birth, save as a predicted privilege. The consequence was, when Nicodemus came to our Lord Jesus, arrested by that which he had seen, but, at the same time, with the sense of a deeper want in his soul, though totally ignorant of what he wanted, he was taken aback and confounded by our Lord's strong assertion to him, that except one were born again, he could not even see the kingdom of God. The Jews had quietly settled down in the conviction that the Messiah could and would do everything for them. Nor were they, in one sense, wrong. When He came, even the Samaritans were satisfied that Messiah would show or teach them all things; and the Jews knew that it was not a question merely of teaching, but that He would do all things; He would bring in everlasting righteousness, seal up the vision, anoint the most holy, deal with sin, iniquity, everything. They knew most imperfectly how it was to be done. Still there was a vague, general, yet, at the same time, sure conviction on the mind of every Jew, except, we may say, the infidel portion of them, that

the coming of the Messiah would be the turning-point of the world, and would be more especially the incoming of all promised and expected blessing for Israel. Hence it was most startling to hear so solemn an announcement from One now found present in their very midst, whom His forerunner, John the Baptist, declared to be the Messiah, from One who had manifested by miracles that He was really a teacher come from God at the very least. Yet this very One stopped Nicodemus at the threshold with the most cutting declaration of a necessity that he had never apprehended before, and this put in so broad a manner as to make it as absolute for a Jew as for a Gentile. "Except a man be," etc. No exceptions were entertained, no exemption was allowed, for the chosen family of Abraham. It was a divine requirement for those near, as well as the remote. "Except a man be born afresh, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The consequence is, that Nicodemus puts, as we know, a most unintelligent question to our Lord, how such a thing could be: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" But at least his question proves that "born from above" is not at all the true meaning of the verse. Had the Lord given Nicodemus to judge that this was the meaning, such a question could not have been proposed. No; He meant to be born afresh, born from the very outset, so to speak. It appears to be the strongest possible expression of this; at any rate, I do not know a stronger one in Scripture. This accordingly brings out from our Lord Jesus the statement on which I desire to enlarge a little to-night: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." He that sees the kingdom enters the kingdom; but there is no seeing nor entering, unless there be this new birth. What, then, is its source and character?

Our Lord here explains. He does it, as is habitually done in His discourses to the Jews in this Gospel, after a figurative sort. In the chapter before, when there was a question about the temple, He adopted that figure for His own body-Himself. In the chapter that follows He takes up another from the circumstance of the wants of the Samaritan woman; and a well of water becomes the image of that infinite blessing on which we shall hope to dwell a little by-and-by; and so I might go through the Gospel, and prove that this adoption of some well-known figure startles by the very fact that it is a figure, but by no means obscures; for this is never the object of figures in Scripture, or in any honest writing. The true object is rather to compress into one word the truth which might otherwise need to be expanded into many words; so that a word becomes what may be called an image-word of truth, and therefore bright with the light of God. And so, I doubt not, it is in this case. Now these images were used in the Old Testament prophets, and used too in connection with this very blessing. This was therefore what furnished occasion to the Lord, with a justice that appealed to Nicodemus' own conscience, to censure him who stood in the relation of teacher to Israel (for this is the meaning); not, I apprehend, in some special manner as *the* master, but the usual article of contrast with Israel as the scholar.

Our Lord, then, does tacitly refer to passages in the Old Testament which ought to have made His allusion and meaning intelligible to Nicodemus. Take Isaiah 44 for instance. Had not God there promised to pour water upon him that was thirsty? Had He not promised to pour His Spirit upon the seed of Jacob? Had He not still more plainly declared, in Ezekiel 36, that when He gathered Israel into the land, He would there take away their stony heart, and put into them a heart of flesh, sprinkle clean water upon them, and put His Spirit within them-the precise two elements of our Lord's statement? Thus in this place the Saviour does most clearly keep in view these Old Testament figures. Indeed, it was not some absolutely new privilege; it was, on the contrary, only the assertion, according to His own special dignity and glory, of a universal need in a manner suitable to Himself. That is, the Lord does give the whole scope of truth as to this found throughout the Scriptures, but then He brings it all to

a point, and clothes it with that force which was proper to the Son of God, if He took the place of a teacher upon the earth. How could He, if He taught, merely teach as another? "Never man spake like this man." Therefore, even while He is only taking up, so to speak, what was found before (at least in prophecy), and what ought thence to have been known from of old, nevertheless He gives it a characteristic depth in the form in which He presents it to Nicodemus. Hence it is no question of being sprinkled, or having a new heart given, or "a new spirit put within," but, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit"-an incomparably momentous, primary, and practical truth.

I deny not that there are other truths more apt to draw out the affections, and to fix them on the person of the Saviour, bringing the soul into full liberty, peace, joy, as well as power here below. Surely there are; but none has so much the character of a foundation, save only Christ and His work in which God Himself was glorified, and glorified too in such a sort, that He could thus righteously bless and give His own nature to a poor sinner. With His own divine perfectness the Lord here, in a single word, changes all, so to speak; for while the truth is adopted from others, nevertheless there is a new beauty, and there is such divine energy given to it, that we can well apprehend how glorious the person must be that utters the truth after such a sort. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit." It is in truth a new nature; it is that which has no foundation in man, no source save in God; it is God Himself who has His own kingdom; it is God Himself that is the centre of it, who fills it in the person of Christ His Son, and, therefore, who should give a new nature. For what nature could be suitably presented? It must be, and it is, the divine nature. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And thus, then, we come to the terms.

I have drawn attention to the force of being "born anew" found in the earlier statements. Next, the briefer expression in the third verse is expanded in the fifth. But now, if we look at the manner in which this birth is characterized, it is "of water." Water, in Scripture, is habitually employed as the figure of the word of God applied by the Spirit. It may be used also for the Spirit Himself in His own power; but still I need not point out the close connection there is between these two thoughts. However, here we have the Spirit distinguished from it, and this shows us at once the reason of the difference. The water is mentioned because God would draw attention to the character of what is applied, to what deals morally with the man. He might not at first be aware that what made him sensible of his uncleanness was the Spirit of God. There must always indeed be in the soul, whenever the Holy Ghost thus acts, a consciousness that there is a dealing of some sort. In a word there never is or can be unconsciousness where there is a real operation of God. But then a man might in nowise comprehend that it is the Spirit of God; but this he knows full well, that the word judges him-that it brings him in as guilty and altogether unfit for the presence of God. Thus, "wafer" is the expression of the word dealing morally with the soul, convicting the man of being unclean, and not merely, cleansing. It is a question at first of the impartation of a new nature that the man had not before. And as we have found the outward, so we have also the inner character of this divine action: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit."

It may be well, at this point, to refer to a few texts of Scripture which show that, in different ways, this is the unquestionable meaning of the passage. Take the apostle Paul, in the epistle to Titus, chapter 3, where he says that God saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. I purposely go no farther than this, because the next verse does convey a fuller character of blessing than what our Lord here expresses. So far there is a most evident link with our passage, even if the washing of regeneration be supposed to present another application of water, or another figure; still regeneration is in manifest harmony with the truth which our Lord had before Him, and was now pressing on Nicodemus. Again, when we turn to the epistle of James (James 1: 18), "Of his own will begat he us," we find a beginning of a life that was not possessed before. It was not merely that God

had so enlightened us; it was not merely that there were thoughts, views, truths, communicated to the mind, but there is a new kind of life or nature which the soul never had before. "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth." Not only have we the begetting on God's part, but also the word of truth, the instrumental means. It clearly connects itself with the "born of water" in our verse of John 3 Again we read in the first epistle general of Peter, (1 Peter 1: 22), "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit [born of water and of the Spirit] unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." The new birth is by God's word.

Texts need not be heaped up on a point which, it is to be presumed, will be familiar to most here, but I thought it well just to give enough to show how it runs through the inspired writers of God's latest and fullest revelation. I have therefore purposely chosen passages from different apostles. It is a common truth whether Gentiles or Jews be written to, and whether Paul, or Peter, or James be the writer. It is the same fundamental need of souls; but, in point of fact, it found its richest and fullest expression, its most definite and at the same time profoundest form, from the lips of our Lord Jesus. For such seems to me beyond doubt the divine communication in John 3: 3, 5.

Another truth of great importance is annexed to it. Not only is there a new nature; namely, as communicated by God's word through the operation of His Spirit, indispensable always, as we see, for man's entrance; but besides that, as the nature of man never can be etherealized, so to speak, never can be so improved or modified as to rise up into any acquaintance with the things of God, never can be changed into divine nature by any spiritual process whatsoever; so, on the other hand, the new nature does not deteriorate, can never be reduced into "the flesh," or the nature of man as he is. As our Lord says, on the one hand, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," so on the other, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." It partakes of the character of its source. Here we find that the great living agent, and not merely the instrument, is brought before us. This I conceive to be most important. Had there been the presentation of the water, or the word simply, it would have left the door open to the mind of man-which, after all, is really included in "the flesh"- and its pretensions would have led to a subtle kind of rationalism. But not so; "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The word of God unquestionably is what He uses; but still man is not born of the word in the strict sense; it is by it, but not of it alone; it is of the Spirit, if you look to the real active personal source.

"Marvel not," then, He says, "that I said unto you, Ye must be born again." Here He presses the truth home in the most distinct manner-not merely on man-as the want of all men who would enter God's kingdom, but now "Ye must be born again." This eminently leads Nicodemus to put his next question. "Jesus answered and said unto him," (in answer to "How can these things be?") "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness." Obviously this is a statement of the utmost value, as showing the place of our Lord Jesus in this chapter. He speaks as One who is familiar with God; not merely as One who acted from God, but who pronounced with His authority, speaking as One who is absolutely and perfectly at home with God. "We speak," says He, "that we do know;" and the word implies intimate knowledge-intrinsic personal knowledge; not that which was given, which a prophet might utter as presented to him, had he the means of revelation, but as One who knew God and His glory consciously. Such seems the reason why He says in this verse, "We speak that we do know." God alone, He who was God, could thus rightly speak, and none other. In the consciousness of this divine knowledge therefore Jesus speaks. At the same time also He gives His testimony as to what He had seen. It was not only One who came from God, and so went to God, but

also One who while He was God speaks of scenes of glory in which He had been. He was with God as well as was God; He had looked round upon that which was suitable, if I may so say, to the presence of God; He was thoroughly acquainted with it all, not only what suited God Himself, but also the sphere where God dwelt.

Accordingly, from this perfect knowledge of God and familiarity with heaven He makes the declaration: "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." For this very reason man had no relish for it-nay, not only man in general, but the Jews had not. Their place was the earth, and their constant idea, founded upon the testimony of God, as Jews, was God revealing Himself *here*; God blessing *here*; God putting down evil *here*; God delivering His people by judgments *here*. But now there was One in their midst who differed essentially from all that had ever been upon the earth, who was properly and exclusively the Son of God. But here, so to speak, He takes, if it be possible, a place closer than simply as One whom the Father owns upon earth, as beloved and a son to Him; because you can conceive such a thing possible without His being absolutely God in the fullest sense. But there is the union in Christ's person, not only of the relationship which He holds as the object of the Father's delight, but of the very nature of God Himself. Consequently there was not a thought in the Godhead apart from Him, if indeed rightly we can speak of thought as belonging to God; for, in point of fact, it is a wrong expression. God does not think-man does; but God knows. So Jesus, the Son of God, had this absolute knowledge entirely apart from revelation; He had this absolute knowledge of God, of that which was in keeping with God's presence, and nature, and kingdom; and accordingly here upon earth He also communicates this. What a place to be in! What communion to be brought into, beloved brethren, in the midst of this sea of sin and iniquity, in the midst of men rising up, proud in their own poor thoughts, and evermore proving that they are fallen and far from God-to have Him thus presented whom man would fain, and does, deny to be God!

While I am on this subject,-which is one of the deepest possible interest,-that it was only He who was man that could make known God to man, I am persuaded that it is not in the nature of the Godhead, so to speak, simply as such, to make itself known to man; and that the blessed scheme of God Himself, which was His way of saving us, is just as necessary in order that we should know Him, as it was for saving us. We are more apt to look at the incarnation of the Word, at the Lord Jesus Christ here below, as a means of our being, delivered, and at the fruit of His work in atonement: we are apt to think less of the infinite privilege of knowing God; but, after all, to know the only true God, and Him whom He has sent, is everlasting life. Now, for this very reason God is never called the Truth, nowhere in Scripture, nor anything like it or equivalent. It is a favourite expression of rationalism and infidelity, and for this reason, that man of himself sets up to know God, but never does know Him; and rationalism, by the very fact that it is the pretension of man to know God of and in himself, never can; for God is only known in Christ, and for this reason I do not know God, just because I am not God. Unless I be a partaker of the divine nature, I cannot know Him. That is the reason why I have been insisting upon this truth of the new birth. It is not faith merely, though of course there is faith, and faith is the only possible way of being brought into the possession of this nature. Again, it is not only the word, but by the Holy Ghost's application of the word, and bringing us in utterly lost as far as we are concerned. Hence also it is really the partaking of a new nature by virtue of which we know God. Now, I say, as long as it was simply God acting, or if it had been merely this, there never could have been such a participation of His nature; for a Being solely divine could not thus give of His own nature to man unless He had revealed Himself in man; and it was as looking forward to Christ, and always presenting Him as the object, that any soul ever did partake of the divine nature, -that any soul ever was born of God. I need not say that the Old Testament saints were thus born of God. Hence our Lord Jesus is not speaking prospectively, but, in point of fact, absolutely, as is His manner in John unless there be

exceptions expressly named; that is, He looks prospectively and retrospectively, looks right through the whole course of time into the kingdom of God. And this is the passport into it: a man must be born of God or, as it is explained here, born of water and of the Spirit.

Now the way in which this is done is by God's good pleasure, of His own sovereign love and wisdom, to bring Himself, so to speak, into the nature of man-to reveal Himself in man, as well as to man; that is, He Himself remains in another condition, and man is perfectly incapable of being brought into it unless in this blessed way; but now He revealing Himself in a man, I, a man, can know Him. By the working of the Holy Ghost, according to His own word, I can be brought into vital association with that blessed Man who is God. And thus it is that the profoundest truths of God, and those that might seem to have no immediate connection with that of which we have been speaking, are proved to be essential; as they are all riveted together in the faith of the children of God; and, while they are admiring the wonderful way in which God has been pleased to send His Son born of a woman- only thinking of it as a necessity for putting away sin- they may learn that it is as necessary for any real knowledge of God and communion with Him. I can know nothing, enjoy nothing of God, as I now know and enjoy Him under Christianity, unless He be pleased to reveal it through the man Christ Jesus. That is, according to the language of the day, so long as He is simply the absolute, I cannot. Will He deign to become relative to me? Will He come down into the condition in which I am? For this is the simple meaning of such out-of-the-way language.

This seems to be precisely the need our Lord here has in view. He asserts in the strongest way that which pertains to Him as God: "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." But then He had come down here to speak to man, and accordingly it became a question of witness. He bears testimony to the truth that it is the sole means by which man is brought into this blessedness which we now enjoy: man must be born of water, and of the Spirit. But what was the reception it met with from man? Man perceived his own things round about him, where he had been born and bred. He did not care for the things of God; nay, he was an enemy to God. Away from God, he disliked to hear of His things, and of the sphere in which they only should appear. Such was the tendency of man as he is by nature: "Ye receive not our witness." And it is remarkable that this is found immediately after what might appear to be a very easy reception in the chapter before ours, where, as we all know, they believed, seeing the signs He wrought; but there was no reception of His witness. There was an acceptance of the facts-that is, they acquiesced in what they could see, and what they could judge. And man always thinks the better of himself on account of this, because receiving simply on evidence puts man in the position of a judge: he conceives, he infers, he concludes, and is all the bigger a man because he does. It is something that falls in with the pride of man, who sets himself up in the judgment-seat, even where a miracle of God's power is in question; whereas here it is God's witness.

Who does not know every day this very thing? As long as souls are unexercised, they do not trouble themselves about that which they hear; when men are in earnest, they question, or at least sift and weigh. The twofold fact of either resisting obstinately, or of what you may call an *otiose* reception of a testimony, equally proves that there is no real work in the conscience. The reason of this is simple. If the thing sunk into the heart as that in which it was deeply concerned, there would be at once activity there. It might appear to be even too good; but, for all that, the heart would be deeply moved, and the very anxiety would lead a person to examine farther. At the same time there would be the desire that it should be true wherever God was welcome to the soul, and this is the form the gospel takes: when a person is utterly dead in trespasses and sins, the testimony of God produces no effect. It is as easy to slight it on the one hand, as to profess it on the other, The effect of indifference is, that you will find easy profession or open hostility to the truth. In short, men lapse into the form either of a mere

profession of faith on the one hand, or open infidelity on the other; they are just two forms at bottom of the same thing in the human mind, totally different in appearance, but in truth equally unbelief. Whereas, wherever a soul realizes the importance of it-and this must be so for the simple reason that to have what may be called this easy-going faith in the presence of what Jesus witnesses to us is utterly impossible-the truth, where it is believed in, must move the heart. It is impossible that if, justly condemned and feeling that hell must and ought to be my portion, I believe that God's grace in Christ has delivered me from it, so that I now look assuredly to go to heaven with Jesus; it is impossible for one who believes this to look coolly on it all. Therefore, when you find this kind of inert common-place traditional faith, receiving things with the utmost rapidity, and with no real action on the conscience and heart, it is quite evident that there is no vital work of God: it is a mere human conviction or feeling in the mind, and consequently good for nothing. Our Lord puts the case according to His own divine knowledge of testimony, and tells us of the resistance or indifference it encounters from man. But along with this He hints at higher things: "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?" This leads us to an important point that modifies what had been laid down. If any here should find it outside their ordinary thoughts, I trust they will weigh the words of our Lord; for it is His truth, not human speculation, that I would press.

Our Lord Jesus had spoken in the strongest way of the absolute necessity of the new birth for every or any man that enters the kingdom of God. This we must take both backwards and forwards throughout the whole course of the dealings of God. Now there is new language. From the moment that He presents Himself as bringing in this full divine testimony which man does not receive, He speaks of the blessing in a far richer and more precise style. All who are to be in the kingdom of God, whether in the earthly or in the heavenly things, whether below or above, when that kingdom is established and displayed in both its parts, all within it must be born again. But while a soul that receives the gospel now is born of God, it is very far short of expressing the full truth merely to speak of it as new birth. It is not so that Christ puts the matter in the very discourse in which He insists most on being born of the Spirit. "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not [for which it was an essential condition to be born of God], how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?" Connected with these last, He says, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." Thus He confirms what has been said before, that He is presenting Himself as most truly man, the rejected Christ, the Son of man, but as certainly God. Heaven was that to which He belonged, or rather it to Him. This was an entirely new realm, and the surroundings are as new. As born of a woman, born under law, even He was seen and known on earth, and in time, yet spite of all His grace, power, and glory, man would not have Him; but He who was now manifested in the flesh here below was really the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father, and claims even as the rejected One to be the Son of Man who is in heaven.

Observe the language carefully. It is not merely that He had been in heaven, for that is altogether short of the truth; He *is* there; it matters not when or where He is viewed-He is always the Son of man who is in heaven. His being the humbled man only gave occasion to a new glory for God and man, as it was the turning-point of a fresh and fuller knowledge of God by man. There was One who, Himself the Infinite, entered into what was limited, in order that they, men as they were, should enter into the knowledge of God, and see the Father in Him. They must be met by the word; they must hear One who is man, as He is God. It was grace, but it was truth; it was the only way in which the truth could be revealed. Before this there was only a partial manifestation; but the wonderful thing is that the full manifestation of the truth is found in man-One who is divine, but none the less man. Nothing therefore can be farther from the fact than the thought, that because Christ is come in the flesh, appearing in a limited sphere, the truth cannot be known In point of fact, till the Word was made flesh, the truth could

not be fully revealed. It is precisely in the combination of seemingly incompatible elements united in the person of Jesus that the truth appears. For the law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. He alone is the One who conciliates God with His righteousness saving in grace, who at the same time humbled Himself and glorified God to the uttermost. It is this blessed man who is the pattern of all lowliness, who, nevertheless, blots out all the glory of man in one word like this: "No man," He says, "hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven." Nor was it merely that He came down. Others might be caught up, as we know, by an act of power; but He could take it for His own proper portion, walking into it as simply as possible when the hour came. More than this, as we have seen, He is in heaven. It was not merely a question of going there, He was "the Son of man who is in heaven." This therefore attaches to Him as a divine person, and could be said of none else; and more than this, it attaches to this one divine person, and to none other. As a man, I cannot rise above the things of man: such are the limits of the human spirit; it cannot *per se* reach up to God, or the things of God, who alone can reveal Himself-alone does reveal Himself in the Word, the Son, and this only efficaciously by the Holy Spirit. This is the reason why the Spirit of God is said to be the truth, as well as Christ; the one as objectively viewed, the other as inward power.

The Lord Jesus, then, having brought in His own divine person after this manner, next discloses the need of a work to be done, in order to give God a righteous title to bestow the blessing of His own nature on sinful man. Accordingly this He does thus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but"- what? be born again? No-"have eternal life." Manifestly there is a difference, and of the most weighty and suggestive character. There is no need of strong language to set it forth; for indeed it cannot well be exaggerated. Again, I am not in the least denying, if one were born of God or afresh in the Old Testament times, that he has divine life, or that this life is eternal. Therefore you will understand that in no way is the fact questioned that all the saints, from beginning to end, have life everlasting. Still, we are bound to believe that the Lord is wise, and had an all-sufficient reason for introducing at this point so marked a difference. For now, for the first time, after having already asserted the universality of being born again, when He comes to express the application of this truth to the believer, founded on redemption, observe, founded on His own death as the Son of man lifted up on the cross, He will not describe it simply as a new birth, but gives it another style and quality in His expression of it. Of course, He, the Son, is the quickener of all saints, and therefore it is to me no question whether the Old Testament saints have not been quickened as really as ourselves: assuredly they must be and were. I hold, that there never was but one Saviour, and consequently that the new birth, which all need for God's kingdom, is ever the impartation, by the Spirit, of the life which is in the Son of God.

Nevertheless, I maintain with equal certainty, and on the positive authority of the word of my Saviour Himself, that He, when pleased to describe our place, refuses, if I may so say, to merge it merely in what belonged to all at all times. Thus, even to this universal and common truth, in its application to us since redemption, He gives an uncommon expression. How marvellously, then, the Spirit of God has shown, in this simple way, the honour that He puts on Christ and on redemption, when He brings near this glorious fact, this work worthy of God-the greatest, so to speak, in which God ever showed Himself forth, even in speaking of what is universal (in the sense of attaching to every child of His, in all ages and dispensations). Nevertheless, now the Saviour presents it in this new title and greatly enhanced quality. If we search into the Old Testament we may find eternal life spoken of, or what is tantamount to it; for we do not stand upon technicalities, but speak of things in a practical point of view-we speak of a reality which our Lord utters, and has kept in the inspired record as of the utmost importance for all of us to take heed to. I say, then, that the Lord does not vary phrases needlessly, but that if He gives another form, He means that we are to take notice of the difference.

Have we meekness of wisdom if we do not?

This appears to me the sum of what we read in the Old Testament. Eternal life is spoken of in Daniel 12, for instance, and "life for evermore" comes before us in the end of Psalm 133; but we may remark this in those two expressions of "life for evermore" and "eternal life" -they are bound up with the hope of Messiah's presence and reign, when He brings in the kingdom of God as a matter of visible display. But the wonderful truth that appears in John is, that the glory of the Son's person, being now manifested, brings us into the blessing entirely apart from all such future display. We wait for nothing else: the reason is, because we have Him. Consequently, although the kingdom may not yet be come in this sense, although there be not yet the establishment of public blessing, although in fact the Jews, instead of being blessed, are still subject to the curse under which they put themselves, "His blood be on us and on our children," and wrath come upon them to the uttermost (that is, the complete putting off of the promises, as far as they are concerned, for the time; and the postponement of the kingdom), in spite of all this, we are ushered even now into an unbounded scene of rich and divine blessing, and for this reason, because we have Christ, and have Him thus and now.

What makes the thing so touching, as well as instructive, lies in this, that we have now the comfort and joy of personal association with Himself. If only "born again," surely it is a great mercy; but it does not give anything of the sort. I find this indispensable qualification for God's kingdom from and through Christ doubtless; but it does not associate me in terms with Christ. Nobody could speak of Christ being born again: the man who did so would be a blasphemer, and must deny the person of Christ. Therefore, in speaking or hearing of "born again," if this was merely the expression, it rather keeps one from realizing identification with Christ; for it would remind us of the essential difference between what man acquires by grace and what was in Christ. But the moment He speaks of eternal life, I share in this at once. My portion in Him is eternal life; for He is that eternal life which was with the Father, so that instead of dissociation in the manner in which the Lord speaks of my participation in the new nature, this blessedness is now presented after a sort which is true of Christ Himself. Not merely is it a question of being brought into a common position, so to speak, of the body and the Head, which is not the point here (for there is always a deeper thing than this in John, who I believe in strictness does not treat of our corporate place): the point with him is community of life and nature, rather than the oneness of the body.

At any rate, such is exactly what we find here; that is, we now know that Christ speaks of His own manifestation here, His own bearing of divine testimony, and this not as a mere instrument according to God, but a personally divine testimony; for this is the scope of verse 11-"We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." Thus we see the fulness of the blessing made ours. He is not content with saying, Ye must be born again. This was always, and must be, true; but now, who can deny that, although it was the same blessing substantially, the character in which He clothes it and brings it to my soul carries its own witness of the truth, that I receive by grace what He has and is? He, the Son, is the eternal life, as well as true God. But what availed it, as far as we were concerned, that God was thus manifested in Him here below? He abode alone; and man, too, abiding outside Him, was dead as well as in impenetrable darkness. He, the Saviour, died and rose; and I receive Him, and know that "he that hath the Son hath life," and that this life is eternal life.

But if I merely look at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ as the necessary basis of divine righteousness, whilst it was also the fullest display of pity for me a guilty and needy sinner, this of itself would never settle my soul in perfect peace before God, still less would it give an adequate knowledge of Him. Therefore comes out another expression, repeating, it might seem, the same result, as in verses 13, 14, but really from a yet higher source; "for God," says the Son, "so loved the world,

that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." There had not been a word about God's "love" before, any more than about "the world," in this discourse; it was purely the intervention of the Son of man, and this, of course, in view of what was absolutely necessary. Just as a man *must* be born anew to enter the kingdom, so *He must* be lifted up on the cross, if there was to be an efficacious work in righteousness for the sinner. But now there is far more; for that never could satisfy God's love,-who is most defectively known if there be no more than a "must be." Not so. Let me see what He is; let me know what He feels; let me have the witness of His own grace in Christ. Is it a boon wrung out from God? Far be the thought! Does He, is He, not love? Let me listen more to that which Jesus tells us, who knew as none but He could know or tell. Yea He, the Son, knew Him perfectly, and would make Him known as He is and feels even about the world. And so, therefore, He adds, crowning this blessed revelation in Himself of God's grace and truth, shown in His work as in His very person too,-crowning it, I say, with a declaration truly divine: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

How blessed, my brethren, to have this eternal life; and to know that we have it; to have it, too, not merely as that which is to come to us as the hard-won spoil of redemption, but also as the free and full- and spontaneous fruit, so to speak, of His love, given us in Him who was Himself the most intimate object of the Father's love. Thus to those who deserve nothing less God would display what He is in the best gift even He could give; not merely because I could not be blessed otherwise, but because *He* would according to His own heart bless me to the full. He has given me that life, which is never said to be in any other, in His Son, which in Him I see to be absolutely perfect, which having in Him I am capable of fellowship here below with Himself.

Surely, however blessed it is to have our sin and misery met, it is incomparably more to have the positive side of the blessing, to have that in which He Himself can and did delight in Jesus as He beheld Him walk in all dependence and obedience, in light and love-the more wondrous because in man on earth. It is that life which reciprocates His mind and feelings, enters into all His joys, takes part in all the grief with which He looks upon rebellious man and a ruined world, and now, alas! we must add a guilty Christendom. "In Him was life." How blessed now for us to have in Him that very life already proved, spite of all and in the midst of all, to rise up to all that is in God; and yet exercised in every circumstance that can befall the heart of man! And this, brethren, is what, as possessed of eternal life in Christ, we are now partakers of in the grace of our God; for the life which we now live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God, founded on His redemption in love. It is, as a Christian, no longer the old I, but Christ that lives in me: such is its source and character. Christ, too, is the object; but along with the object there is life, and this life is in Himself, in the Son of God, even eternal life.

The Lord bless His own word, giving our souls to hold fast every truth that we have known, but to learn that God is still active in His love, and would impart greater freedom and fulness to us in realizing a growing sense of association with Christ. Assuredly this has been the secret; if indeed we have made already any real advance, it has always been in this direction. Such are our best blessings; such, I am persuaded, they will prove throughout all eternity. May we, meanwhile, be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, being rooted and grounded in love, that we may be able to comprehend the glory before us, and know His love that passeth knowledge, and so be filled with all the fulness of God.