

The Basis of All Things

By Gordon Gentry

Published by NTChurchSource.com

From the very beginning, God's purpose has been that all things be summed up in Christ. If we then, as believers, are going to begin where God begins, Christ must be our life. This statement seems elementary, but it is far from that, for we must know the reality of these words in our lives. Our experience must begin and continue with God as our life by the indwelling of the Spirit. We cannot begin where the religious world begins, or we will end up with a "cheap believism" which leaves us in the natural realm. We must therefore redefine our terms, so that we might move by faith.

We may use the term "new birth," but what does it mean? Man has often defined scriptural terms to suit his own experience and way of life, but only as God's Word is revealed to us by the Spirit can we know the true meaning of new birth. God's ways are made known to us by His Spirit, and we enter into what God has said by faith. We are not interested in what man says that God's Word says, but rather what the Lord truly does say. Christ is truth, and the Spirit will lead us in Him. Let us go on to allow the Spirit to give us God's meaning, so that we might know God in reality rather than only in our minds.

Beginning With God - New Birth

"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born anew. The wind bloweth where it will, and you heareth the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:6-8). Scripture tells us that to be born again is to be born of the Spirit. It is a new birth, an altogether new working. New birth is not repentance, nor is it belief in what Christ did for us at the cross. New birth is something that takes place by the Spirit, after one has repented and believed.

New birth is receiving a new life. John the Baptist knew what God was doing, when he said, *"I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire."*

The religious leaders of Jesus' time did not know what God was doing, and neither do the religious leaders of our time. This is apparent, with all the different religions we see around us in the world today. Paul gives us the reason in I Corinthians 2:11: *"Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God: that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God."* We do not know or understand the things of God by the natural mind or its reasoning. We can know the things of God only when we have received the Spirit. Jesus said, *"Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all truth."*

We cannot substitute anything for the indwelling of the Spirit and His revelation to our hearts. The Spirit's presence takes God's work out of the hands of man and keeps all of it in the Spirit and by the Spirit. When we look around us today, we see so-called Christians going in so many different directions. One reason for this is that they are not all hearing God; the Spirit is not indwelling and controlling their lives. Paul tells us in Romans 8:14, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God."* If we are being led by the Spirit we are being made one, and we have fellowship one with another. The Word of God is given for us to obey, and obedience will lead us into the *"fullness of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:13).

Christ must be Lord of our lives, and the only way He can be Lord is by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Repentance and faith allow one to be justified before God on the basis of what Christ did at the cross. All of this is only to prepare the believer to receive the life of God in the Spirit. We cannot have the life of God unless God comes to indwell each believer as the source of his or her life.

The difference between life and death is revealed in our fellowship. Far too many think that fellowship is simply agreeing in doctrine. The difference between trying to have fellowship in doctrine, and experiencing fellowship with one who has the life of God, is like the difference between death and life. We can never move in this life until we have received life from God and then gone on to know the Lord by experience through the working of the Spirit. If the Word never gets into our lives in expression, it remains in our heads and can never bring us into the relationship God has designed. We must be experiencing God by walking in the light; this is an active and continuing relationship in the life of God by the Spirit. One must press on past wrong teaching that blocks the mind, into truth which is in the working of the Spirit. Faith is the realm in which God is working. Faith brings all things back into focus, with all things beginning in God and being worked out by the Spirit. No one can ever tell God what He is going to do or how He should do it. We must recognize God for who He is, realize what He has done for mankind, and then go on to experience Him by faith. Faith always brings us into an experiencing of God and what He is doing, because faith begins in Christ and Christ is the finisher of our faith.

We must accept all that the Spirit brings, and not just what we want or what we have been taught by man. When the Spirit is in control, nothing is done in the natural realm. We cannot do what needs to be done in our lives or in the church, in our own strength. It can only be done by the Spirit and in union with the Spirit.

What is God's Purpose for Man?

God's plan from the beginning was that He would indwell man. The only limit that God put on the first Adam was Himself, but Adam chose to move apart from God and His limit into the bondage of sin, living unto self separately from God--which meant death. Sin brought death, but God in Christ Jesus brought us back to His purpose by setting man free from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. God's purpose can only be realized when we let God the Spirit come to indwell and control our individual lives and His church.

There is nothing natural about what God is doing in our lives and in His church. If we do not give God a place to work and a way by which we may know what He has promised, we can move only in a natural way, with natural results. It is the Spirit that is building us into a habitation for God. When we leave the Spirit and His manifestations out of our lives and the church, we leave God out and have no more than a religion, even though we may call ourselves Christians. The name "Christian" has become almost meaningless in our day, but it can still be a reality that is ours in and by the Spirit.

How Can One Be a Part of the Church?

The answer is very simple when we have ears to hear what God's Word tells us. *"For indeed we were all brought into one body by baptism, in the one Spirit, whether we are Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free men, and that one Holy Spirit was poured out for all of us to drink"* (1 Corinthians 12:13). We are put into the body of Christ by the baptism of the Spirit; then it is our responsibility to submit to the authority of the Head in the church. The indwelling of the Spirit is what makes us part of the one body and partakers of that one life. Having been made one, we now have the responsibility to submit to the authority of the Head and allow the Spirit to build us together.

Anything less than gathering together in the life of God and being directed by the Spirit comes short of the purpose of God. Without the Spirit we are as blind men, men probing around in the dark who cannot know the way, nor the truth. Man without the Spirit must settle for something less than life and a relationship with God. The sole ground of our gathering together is that we have the life of God, and the testimony is expressed in the locality where the believers live.

According to the Word of God, the Lord's only provision for spiritual government is in the local expression of His church. The reason for God's plan and the way it works is that Christ must remain in the place of authority at all times. It is Christ who is building His church. Any working, other than God's order, is only natural and can only produce man's results. We can never come to the glory that God has purposed for us if we forsake God's order and His working by the Spirit through the ministries that He has called and revealed as His plan. Paul tells us that Christ gave gifts, and those gifts were given for the purpose of bringing the body to a place of maturity and oneness. If we do not recognize God's grace coming to us through His gifts, there is no spiritual working taking place.

What is Man's Responsibility?

Man's responsibility is to obey God. So this is the real question: will we obey God? We cannot do what we want to do, and do God's will. We are brought to a place of obeying God rather than doing what we feel or think is right. When we are brought into the family of God through new birth and receive the life of God by the indwelling of the Spirit, we must then go on to know the leading of the Spirit and His control, in our lives and in the gathering of the body where we have fellowship. For the body of Christ to function, there must be that vital life connection between the Head and each member of the body. Each member must be spiritually alive and able to hear and see as the Spirit would speak and reveal Christ, causing the body to grow up unto Him in fullness, finding its completeness in God.

The walk of faith that we are called to demands that we have a relationship with God and be in fellowship with the other members of the body of Christ. This is not a natural working but a spiritual working. John tells us that if we walk in the light as He is in the light, then we have fellowship one with another. This is an active walk in the life of God which is dependent upon our relationship with God and whether we are living in union with Christ by the Spirit. Our walk in the Spirit is not separate from God, but continues because God indwells us by His Spirit. We can do nothing of ourselves. The Spirit must be working in us and we must be moving in union with Him with all the direction and light coming from the Spirit. We must accept all the Spirit brings, and not just what we want to hear or have been taught by men. When the Spirit is in control, nothing is in the natural realm. We cannot do what needs to be done in our lives or in the church in our own strength. It can only be done by the Spirit and in union with the Spirit.

What Does It Mean For the Spirit to Be in Control?

It means that He must control the movement and direction of our lives. Our lives are now no longer our own but Christ's. Why do we think that we can receive Christ for salvation and then go on to live our lives as we choose? Salvation without the Spirit controlling our lives is not God's salvation but only a "cheap believism" which leaves us in our sins and doing what we think is right in our own eyes. In Biblical terms this is death (James 1:15). It is a life separate from Christ. Anything separate from Christ is sin. Christ is life and He has become our limits-those limits being light and life, not the realm of good and evil:

The Spirit has come to indwell that we might become partakers of His divine nature, and then that we might be changed into His likeness in expression. *"Whereby He hath granted unto us His precious and exceeding great promises, that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust"* (2 Peter 1:4). These promises are the Savior, and the coming of the Spirit to indwell: *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"* (Isaiah 9:6). *"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions"* (Joel 2:28).

"I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire: whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing-floor, and He will gather His wheat into the garner, but the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11-12). *"And they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His"* (Romans 8:8-9).

God Has Made Full Provision

The Scriptures which we have read tell us about the promise of the Savior and the promise of the Spirit. The Lord is faithful to show us His plan if we have ears to hear. It has been God's purpose in His creation to indwell man. Now in Christ Jesus and what He has accomplished in redemption, we can know the indwelling of God the Spirit, that He might be our life, a life lived in perfect union with Him and not separate from Him. Jesus prayed in John 17:11-23, *"Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one...I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world...Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe in me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me...I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one: that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovest them, even as thou lovest me."* This prayer of God the Son has been fulfilled by the coming of the Spirit to indwell, and is being fulfilled in the outworking of our relationship in this union.

How is Our Oneness in Union With God to Be Expressed?

Our oneness in union with God must be expressed in the same way the union of the Son and the Father was expressed, for we are to give the same testimony of oneness. We can do nothing of ourselves, just as Jesus said He could do nothing of Himself. Our lives in the Spirit are now to be lived out to His glory. It is only the one who does the will of God that is going to be with Him for eternity. God does not have a salvation separate from His plan. His plan is that we might find our life in Him. He has made full provision, if we will only believe Him and avail ourselves by faith in His promises.

This is not something we do apart from Him, but in union with Him. Faith has these two elements: God speaking and man obeying. We cannot please God without faith because this is the union that God had in His heart from the beginning of creation. Faith brings a totally new and different expression into our lives, which expression is the character of Christ as we move in His life by faith.

God has done a perfect work, and His plan for man cannot fail. If we entertain any other idea in our minds it will only dim our vision and bring us into darkness. God has only one place for man to move, and that is in His will by faith. To be able to move in faith, we must see what God has done and that He cannot fail in the outworking of His purpose because of who He is--God.

The Spirit in Control

If we are going to please God and move on in His purpose, we will have to give the Holy Spirit His place in our lives, and He must be the only authority in every gathering of God's people. When it comes to what God is doing, there is really only one source of power, and that is the Spirit of God. It is by the Spirit that God is revealing Himself in us. There is no other way we can be brought to God's purpose except by the indwelling of the Spirit and moving in union with Him. We can do nothing separate from His inspiration and power indwelling us. This is why Paul could say in 1 Corinthians 1:30, *"But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."* Everything that we have in God has come about through the working of His Spirit. Nothing less than God's presence in us in His continued revelation (inspiration) and power can make each one of us a son of God.

We Can Do Nothing of Ourselves

It was God in His fullness who came to dwell in the lives of the believers on the day of Pentecost. Man may know what God wants to do, but it takes God indwelling to bring it into expression in the believer and in a many-membered body, the church. This working of God is not "once in a while," but a life of continuous abiding and union with His working within. Otherwise we are moving separate from His working. Saying we are Christians without living His life on a continuing basis is a contradiction of the gospel. The Spirit is our ability to live His life. The Spirit has not been given that we might live our lives for our desires and then once in a while do the will of God.

Some think that we may live a Spirit-led life on an occasional basis. Many want something that is not God's salvation. They want a salvation separate from Christ and the Spirit's indwelling and working. We must come back to the statement of Jesus, *"I can do nothing of myself."* This is now true of every Christian; he can do nothing of himself. It must be as the Spirit works within him that he can work. We can see how much of the labor of many people stems from self and not from the Spirit. In their thinking they can mix their lives, with the Spirit leading them sometimes and then doing what they call good works the rest of the time. This is no more than a religious form, denying the power of the Spirit. We are only deceiving ourselves if we are trying to live a double life--natural and spiritual.

To Live in the Flesh is Death

The "gospel" of our day has taught believers that God has given them salvation, separate from Christ, and that it is a gift they can never lose. This causes believers to believe in doctrine rather than knowing that their salvation is in a Person. There is no salvation outside of a relationship with God in Christ Jesus. He did not come to help us live a better life, but rather to give us a new life, and unless we have that new life we cannot even see the kingdom of God. 1 John 2:29 tells us, *"If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him."* We cannot do righteously unless we are moving in union with God. We are either in the Spirit or we are in the flesh. There is no in-between. Romans 8:8-9 is very plain when it says, *"And they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you..."* This means that if we continually live in His life, we continue to live out of our union with Him, the Spirit. *"So then brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh: for if you live after the flesh, ye must die, for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God."* If we are sons of God, it is because we have submitted to God's righteousness. We must realize that nothing good can come out of ourselves separate from Christ; yet some "Christians" find themselves trying to establish their own righteousness by the things they do or don't do.

Why do we think that we can start in the Spirit and finish in the flesh? Many in our time have gone the way the Galatians went, trying to do something for their salvation rather than allowing the works to proceed from their union with God by the Spirit. There is only one place to start from, and that is in relationship with God. This means life, new life, knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ, experiencing His power (ability), His wisdom, and His understanding in every step we take. It is not trying to copy the life of Jesus, but continually living in union with Him: Christ in you is the hope of glory.

Paul said it in this way, *"The life I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God."* Faith is the only working that makes Christ our righteousness, the only way we can talk and work in union with God. Faith is the realm in which God is working. Paul told the Galatians they had fallen from grace when they started trusting in something they had done separate from their union with the Spirit. The righteous shall live by faith. Paul also warned in Galatians 5:9, *"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."* There can be no mixture of flesh and Spirit. Galatians 5:4 says it plainly, *"Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law (your own works); ye are fallen from grace."*

This does not mean the Christian cannot sin or make a mistake; but rather that he will not continue to sin, living separately from God. Repentance is the answer to our mistakes (sin). Repentance must bring us back to a relationship with God, or it is not repentance. Without a relationship there is no salvation. Remember, salvation is not a free gift separate from Christ. We do not "lose our salvation automatically," but when we move separately from our relationship in Christ and find our life being lived unto self, there is no salvation. James tells us in 1:14-17, *"But each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin, and sin when it is full grown, bringeth forth death. Be not deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning."*

We Shall Reap What We Sow

Paul tells us that our lives will be revealing Christ if we belong to Him. *"And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof"* (Galatians 5:24). He then goes on to make it even plainer in 6:7-8, *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life."*

Our glorying should always be in what God has done. If there is going to be glorying, let it be in the cross of our Lord. The cross is what was provided to bring those who believe from the old creation into the new creation, from a place of complete rebellion to a place of faith, from a place of death to a place of life. Regeneration means the indwelling of the Spirit in the lives of those who believe. Justification is what God has done for us; regeneration is what God does in us. The cross shows each one of us what God thinks of the old creation and also reveals His love, in that we now may be partakers of His new creation.

This new creation is the answer to every question that may come into our minds, because the new creation is Christ. Not a historical Christ, but the living Christ who has come to indwell every believer by the Spirit-not automatically but by faith. We do not receive anything automatically from God; everything comes by faith, and faith always has Christ as its goal.

How can anyone live a Christian life without the indwelling of the Spirit? Any life lived in any way other than in and by the Spirit is only *self* bringing the works of its own hands and wanting acceptance from God. This is completely contrary to God's plan of salvation and what God has done by sending Christ to die for mankind on the Cross. Why does man want to make it so hard? Why does man want to come to God in his own way rather than God's way? These questions are answered by revealing sin in the heart of man. Sin has blinded man; he cannot know the ways of God. Only as man is willing to repent, to turn from the way he is going and turn to God, can he know the way of faith. It is the Spirit that has drawn each one who comes to repentance, but it is only faith that can bring each one to a place of knowing God by His indwelling.

Peter told the crowds on the day of Pentecost what they must do: *"Repent and be baptized, and you shall receive the Holy Spirit."* Baptism is a testimony that we believe what God has done at the cross, and that we accept God's judgment of the old and see that we have been brought into the new by His resurrection. Baptism identifies us with Christ, with who He is and what He has done for us. Then it is the Holy Spirit who comes and makes the life of God a reality within us. Why do we ever think doctrine and human knowledge can give us eternal life?

Evidences of New Birth

John is very positive about what will be the expression of those who are born of God, of those who are abiding in Christ: *"And hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments"* (1 John 2:3). *"He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked"* (2:6). *"If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that everyone also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him"* (2:29). *"Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither knoweth Him"* (3:6). *"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death"* (3:14).

"And He that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He in him, and hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us" (3:24). *"Hereby we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit"* (4:13). *"For whatsoever is begotten of God sinneth not, but*

he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not" (5:18). "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one" (5:19).

All of the above scriptures tell us how complete a work has been done by God, pertaining to sin and our relationship with Him. These scriptures will bring only condemnation unless we are abiding in Christ. God's Word cannot find fulfillment in us in any way other than union with God by the Spirit.

Faith finds its true meaning in union with Christ. If we have the life of God, we will not continue to sin or move outside of our union with God. We are not trying, but trusting. We are not doing "the best we can," for that misses the mark every time. The Christian is living the life of God, moving in union with the indwelling Spirit. This is our relationship with God. The one necessary ingredient is the life of God indwelling us by the Spirit. Faith moves into God and dwells there by faith.