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## The Necessity For New Birth

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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Reading: 1 Cor. 15:45,47; 2 Cor. 5:17; John 3:3,5-7.

I want to bring a word very simply to you, a word which many may think to be quite elementary, but it will be intentionally so. Perhaps there is no fragment of Scripture which at the same time is more elementary and yet more comprehensive and profound than this, "You must be born anew." I want to place the emphasis where I believe the Lord Jesus placed it in that statement. It is on the word "must", you *must*. "You must be born anew."

You will have noticed that the statement was in answer to an unasked question. As far as you can see as you read, there was no enquiry made, nothing asked of the Lord Jesus. All that Nicodemus said was: "We know that you are a teacher come from God." He made a remark about Him, and about His teaching and about His work, and it is almost as though the Lord Jesus was abrupt, as though He held up His hand, and said, "That is all right, Nicodemus, but it will not get us very far!" It is as though in effect He said, "Nicodemus, I know that you are interested in these things, you are interested in religious matters, you are interested in teaching and good works. But, Nicodemus, that will get you nowhere, and if you have come to Me in order that I might say something to you by way of enlightenment or help, if you have come in a spirit of enquiry to know things from Me, Nicodemus, we shall get nowhere until we are on common ground. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. Nicodemus, I am from heaven. You belong to the first category, and therefore we are in two different realms altogether, but there is no bridge across the

gap. It is no use our trying to talk across that great gulf between these two worlds, the old creation and the new, the earthly and the heavenly. We shall never get anywhere. If we are going to get anywhere at all, you will have to come to the place where I am and become another kind of man; you will have to be born from above!"

You know, that is a very real thing that is very often overlooked. We can never get anywhere with the Lord Jesus, with the things of God, we can never have any kind of understanding, appreciation or enjoyment of the things of the Lord until something has taken place in us. We can never get anywhere until that something has happened, and that something is what the Lord Jesus called being "born from above". Now, let us get down to this with our several passages of God's Word.

In the first passage, we have been presented with two men. They go under the name of Adam; respectively, the "first man Adam", and the other, not the second, but the "last Adam". It is very important not to make that mistake. If there were a second, there might be a third, and a fourth, but with the Lord Jesus the thing is brought to an end, there is not another. Everything is finished in Him, God has no third, fourth or fifth Adam. He has a first and a last Adam, only two races.

This Scripture makes it perfectly clear that all who are born into this world are by nature in the first Adam. That first birth is from the first Adam, and we belong to his race. We are born of him. Well, Adam the first was made by God, as we know, and when he came from the hand of God he was very good, God was very well satisfied, there was nothing wrong with him. But then he was marred, he was spoilt, he was ruined by sin, and then he was rejected by God, as no longer pleasing to God or satisfying Him. He was set aside; sinful in nature, judged as sinful in nature, and now dead to God. As the apostle puts it, dead in trespasses and in sin.

Now, we must recognize this, that in Adam everyone shares Adam's sin, and Adam's judgment, and Adam's rejection. This is where a great many people have made lots of mistakes, very vital mistakes. They have misunderstood God altogether as to this rejected Adam. This Adam, this first Adam and his race in which all of us are by nature, is not pitied by God. He does not look upon us in our sin and sinfulness and rejection, and so pity us that He will come to have compassion upon us and lift us up and improve us, so that we are restored to His favour. No, with all that the Word of God seems to say in that direction, it does not mean that. Yes, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." You say, surely that contradicts what you have just said? No, it does not. Yes, God loves, but He does not love that old creation, God does not love that old Adam race. It is something which He does not pity, and yet — and yet — He looks upon us with love that desires to get us right out of it, that desires to get us to leave it behind; not to be improved in it, not to be mended, but to be made a new creation in Christ Jesus. There never does come a moment in our history, however long we may be the Lord's children, when He loves our old creation, when He has pity upon it and when He sets Himself to do something to repair it. Never! It always remains that right to the end, always rejected by God. Well, that is where we are in Adam, and we are all there, as we have said, by nature.

Well, what does God do? God brings in a new Adam, a new man, and that is His Son, but He does not bring Him in in the same way. He comes in from heaven; He is not of the earth, earthy; He is from heaven. He is not made in time; He is timeless, eternal. He is, therefore, not subject to death. He is deathless, and although He may enter into death, as He did, He will conquer death because it was not possible that He should be hold of death. He is deathless. This is the new Adam, the Lord Jesus. It is very important to get this first point, where this new Adam comes from.

In John 1:51, we have these words. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, you shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." The heaven open; the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Well, that clearly implies two things. That the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus, belongs to heaven. Heaven is His place. He comes from heaven, He goes to heaven. Heaven is His home. The last Adam is from heaven. The other thing that it indicates is that the heaven is opened, and you notice it says, in the Authorized Version, "Hereafter (or afterwards) you shall see heaven open." The Lord Jesus was just pointing on a little way to a time not far ahead of when He said those words. When He said those words, this was not true. The heavens were not opened, they were closed. When the first Adam sinned, the heavens were closed, and from that time onwards for all his race the heavens were closed. Just as surely as Paradise was closed to Adam, and the cherubim with the flaming sword were set to guard the way that he should not return, just so was Paradise removed from the earth and became part of heaven and remained closed to Adam's race right up to the time that the Lord Jesus came, and no one of Adam's race can get into heaven.

That is what the Lord was saying to Nicodemus. You are interested in heavenly things, Nicodemus, but interest in heavenly things will not get you anywhere. The thing is to get to heaven, the thing is that heaven should be your home, that you should belong to heaven, that you should have the right to heaven, and all that heaven is and has should be yours because you were born there, your name is enrolled there as a citizen, it is in the Lamb's book of life. That is the thing that matters, Nicodemus, not interest in heavenly things so that you talk about them, discuss them, sing about them, have a lot of information. No, but that you belong there. Now, Nicodemus, I was born there, I belong there, and no one of Adam's race can ever come there. You will have to be born from above.

The Lord Jesus in the words in John 1:51 to which we have already referred, was just pointing on to that day not far ahead when He would deal with all Adam's sin and take all Adam's state in His own body on the tree and bear it away in judgment, and then, rising from the dead, become the first man of this new race, this last Adam. And what happened to Him? Well, after His resurrection, as they were gathered round one day, they suddenly saw Him go up and the way it is described is, He "was received up into heaven". You notice, if you look at it, it is put like that frequently. It does not say He went up into heaven, He "was received up into heaven". Yes, you see now He has a right of way, everything is open to Him, He is received. He has gone back to His own place. He is the last Adam and the first man of a new race, and "You shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man", that is, there will be a way for you. There will be communication, the heaven will be open. Yes, in the Lord Jesus, that heaven which was closed to all Adam's race and is closed to everyone of us as members of Adam's race, that heaven is open now. In Christ, a new creation, all from above. "You must be born from above", which means that we, like the Lord Jesus, become possessed of a heavenly nature.

Everything depends then upon our being in Christ. I do want to press this home to you very simply and very earnestly. I expect everyone of us is interested in heavenly things. You would sing hymns about heaven, about going to heaven, about desiring to go to heaven, about the time when you will be in heaven. "I love to hear the story"; you know the sort of thing: "unseen things above". We are all interested, we all hear about these things, we all read about these things. They are brought near to us continually. Yes, but Nicodemus lived in all that world. You see, his very life, his business, was to do with things about God. It was his whole life. He was a grown man, and probably from his infancy he had been interested in a very real way in things about God; that was his world. And yet the Lord Jesus had to say to Nicodemus: Nicodemus, this is no good. You may spend your whole life in touch

with these things, and yet never get into the Kingdom of God! You see, it is not good enough for us to know about heaven, about the Lord Jesus, about the things of God. It is not good enough. It would be a terrible thing, and it will be terrible for a great many, to have heard about it, known all about it, to have been in touch with it every day in some way or other, and then, when it comes to the end, to be outside. Terrible, and yet it is going to be true of many, and that is why the emphasis is upon that word "must", "You *must* be born again." There is no other way. "You *must* be born again." So it is a question as to whether we are in Christ.

We know we are in Adam. If you have any doubt about that, well, you will not have to go very long before you can prove it. I think most of us have proved it very well indeed that we are in Adam. We talk about our old Adam, our old man, that nature which is ours, that sinful nature. It is there all the time. We know that we are in Adam because of the effect of Adam's sin in us. All the hatred, the unlove, the disagreeableness, the irritability, the bad temper, all the selfishness, all the unkindness; all that, and so much more mountains of it — well, that is Adam, it is the fruit of Adam's sin in us. We know we were in Adam.

How can we know that we are in Christ? Well, just in exactly the same way. Being in Christ means that, just as we share the life of Adam by nature, the sinful life that Adam has passed on to us, so we come to share the life of the Lord Jesus, to have His life really in us, and we have it by being born anew. To be in Christ then is to share His life. He has given us one very beautiful and very simple illustration of what sharing His life means. "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5). The phrase "in Christ" or "in Me" in its various forms occurs more often in that fifteenth chapter of John than in any other chapter in the Bible. "Abide in Me." "If you abide in Me...". The branches must abide in the Vine. We must abide in Him. Now, what is the link, what is it that makes the branches abide in the Vine and what is the result of their abiding in the Vine? What is it that makes the Vine and the branches one? It is the one life which runs through all, just one life in all. If that life were cut off from any branch, that branch would soon fall off and cease to be in the Vine, a part of the Vine; something dead, and we should not call it part of the Vine at all. It is the life shared by every part which is the basis of the oneness and of the abiding in the Vine, so far as the branches are concerned. Life, His life, the life in the Lord Jesus, which He had and has from heaven, that is the basis of being in Him.

Now, what is the effect of that life? Well, there are several things, and I will select one or two. "If we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). And Paul says concerning that likeness of His resurrection, being planted with Him, that "we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). This is newness of life in Christ, and if you want to know whether you are in Christ, here is something by which to test it. Do you know what that newness of life is? Now, newness of life is a very wonderful thing. I think that the thing about it which is its particular feature and characteristic is its newness, is its wonder, is the wonderfulness of it.

Have you ever watched lambs at play? There they are, skipping, playing all sorts of imaginary games, jumping over imaginary fences! There are the old mothers getting on with the grazing, just going on quite quietly and steadily, and here are these little lambs springing and jumping, almost turning somersaults! It is newness of life. Now, that life was derived from that old mother, but you do not see it in the old mother. You would think it very wonderful if you saw an old mother sheep doing what the little lambs do! There is life there, the same life which has been imparted to the little one, and it is simply marvellous what that newness of life does. Has no parent ever tried to imitate their

little one for half an hour when they are in a lively mood? You are exhausted in three or four minutes, you cannot keep it up. Newness of life! It is a wonderful thing. It is freshness, it is energy, it is activity, it is joyous irresponsibility, just newness of life. Is that not true to the experience of everyone born from above? Did you not feel like that when you were born from above? Is that not exactly how you have felt at every fresh crisis of the spiritual life when something more of the Lord has become real to you? I remember quite well when the real transaction took place between myself and the Lord. I remember the newness of life. It was not put on. The "hallelujahs" that came from my lips were not artificial. The number of open-air meetings at which I spoke was not some hard task that I undertook. No, there was newness of life and I had to talk about it, I had to let it out somehow or other. If I did not, I felt I should have exploded! It was just newness of life. Now, this is very simple, but it is very real, and I mention it to test the situation. "You must be born from above." Do you know anything about that real newness of life? That is what it means to be in Christ to start with.

But it does not of course mean that it just remains at the start. As we go on with Him, with every fresh movement in fellowship with Him, there can be and there is a fresh experience of this newness of life. Some fresh act of obedience, some fresh step in compliance with His will, some new development in our knowledge of Him, a new life — it is just wonderful. It is discovering what we have in Christ. I think that we must realize that this life, while its outward manifestation may not always be the same on to the end, this life has got to be a reality to us right on to the end — this different life, this newness of life.

Now, I have heard quite a lot of people asking the Lord that they might have back their early experiences. They seem to think that, because it is not like it was at the beginning — the skipping lamb kind of experience — they have lost something, and so they sing, "Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?" Not necessarily have we lost anything. You look at the old mother sheep, and, while it is not skipping and dancing and turning over itself, it has got life. It has got just as much life as that lamb. I venture to say it has got more life. Put them both out alone in a storm, and see which will weather the storm longest. The lamb will not last as long as the old mother. The life has gone deeper, the life has become stronger and more mature. It is still the same life; the life there is going to prove itself in other ways. We all like a little lamb, I think we would like the energy of a little lamb. We all like the beautiful trees in spring when the blossom is on them. We all like the bubbling brook on the mountain side, or running in the valley, shimmering and making such a noise. When the blossom has blown away, perhaps we think that the life has gone. Do we? But presently, if we wait a little while, we shall see some fruit in the place where the blossom was. It is the same life, not making quite so much show, but being a little more valuable, more useful. If we follow the brook far enough, we shall find it widening into a stream and deepening into a river, and presently in the midst of the great city, we shall see laden ships borne by it. It is the same brook, but it has become mature. It has the same life, but it is a good deal more useful now. That is not to say anything disparaging about young Christians, but you see my point. This life is a very real thing, and although at the beginning it has these marks of freshness and newness, all the way through it has got to abide as that thing which has come out from God and bears its testimony in different forms. From the early days of bright, sunny, cheerful, happiness of new birth, we go on into storms and tempests, now proving that life by endurance, by suffering, and by fruitfulness and usefulness to others. It is the one life, it is a new life, an altogether new life.

Now, have you had the first stage of that? If not, oh! then, this word is a very important word. Heaven is closed to you, however much you may think about heaven, and long for heaven, and sing

about heaven. "You must be born from above." If you are, your experience will be in common with all those who have been born from above. You will know that newness of life which simply bubbles up in joy, in wonderful joy, and manifests itself. It is only a half dead lamb that does not show that activity and energy, and does not skip.

Be very patient with this simple word, but let it come home to your hearts and test your own position. Do you know the newness of life?

Then you know how often in the Word this life is called eternal life. "*My sheep hear My voice*", said the Lord Jesus. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish" (John 10:27,28). This life is eternity of life. You see, it has no beginning, it is not something of time — that is the first Adam. The last Adam — out from eternity, passing through time on into eternity, timeless life; that is the life which the Lord gives us so that we are no longer children of time; though we may pass through this life and although this body that we use here for the time being may be laid aside in the grave, we receive another body which is deathless, governed by eternal life, we are alive for ever. "You must be born again", anew, from above, to have that life.

Then one other thing about this life, a thing that ought to be of great help to us as we remember it, although we know it perhaps so well — the wonderful sustaining power of the life of the Lord Jesus. A great deal is said about this in John 6. "You seek Me... because you did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life" (vv. 26-27). If you look on in that chapter, you will see that, not very far on, the question arose about the Israelites in the wilderness. The men here asked the Lord Jesus what sign He would give, and they referred Him to the sign of the manna in the wilderness. That to them was a sign, it was a miracle. What kind of miracle do you show as a sign that you come from God? The Lord Jesus refers back to the bread of life. He says that He is the bread of life. The point is this. There are tens of thousands of people in a wilderness for forty years. You know quite well that you cannot grow anything much in a wilderness, and you know quite well that it would be an impossible thing to have stores for tens of thousands of people for forty years, and as a matter of fact, we know that these people did not bring out into the wilderness food to last them more than perhaps for a day or so. They had no bread with them for all that time. The fact is that they did not starve, they did not become weak and emaciated for want of food, but they were kept strong, well, sustained, supported, able to keep going for all those years, because God sent them food from heaven.

Now, the Lord Jesus says about the life that He gives in Himself, the life which He is, that it is like that. You may be in what is like a wilderness. There is no spiritual food, nothing to keep your new life going, nothing to keep you going as a Christian here — everything is against you; it is like a wilderness. You will not find anything in this world to help your spiritual life. There will be nothing here to help you to go on as a Christian. It is starvation in this world for Christians. There is nothing that they can feed upon or live upon. The wonder is that, here in a world where there is nothing to make us strong, to make us grow, to enable us to go on as the Lord's children, we do go on in the midst of all the difficulty and adversities. This is the miracle of His life in us, its sustaining power to keep us going. Oh, it is a great thing to remember in days like these. We know that in some parts of the world the Lord's children are being scattered everywhere — in China, for instance — their meetings broken up. No more meetings, no more Christian fellowship. None of these things to help, but everything to hinder and make difficulty. How are we going to have any hope that they will survive at all? It is here. It does not depend at all upon conditions outside, it is the life that is in them, the life of the Lord Jesus. That is the basis, and to be in Christ just means that, it means to know His

power within keeping us when there is nothing outside to help. That is being in Christ. That is very simple. The link is life, the life which keeps us going when there is nothing else to help us, but everything against us.

Then, if I were adding one more thing, I should remind you again of John 15 — the fruitfulness of that life. "He that abides in Me, and I in Him, the same brings forth much fruit" (John 15:5). The life of the Lord Jesus in us is a fruitful life. "By their fruits you shall know them." What are the fruits? Well, the Apostle puts it this way. "The fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22). Then he breaks that up, explains what he means by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. The fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of His life — love. That means everything. Yes, joy and peace. Have we got His love? Is His love manifested? Is His joy manifested? Is His peace manifested? Are these fruits growing in us, being shown in us? That is what it means to be in Christ.

All that is very simple, but I have mentioned it because I feel it ought to just test us right the way through. Newness of life, the sustaining power of His life in adversity, the fruitfulness of His life in love and all that it means. "You must be born again." May the Lord make us very sure about this matter.