

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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The New Birth – Indwelling of the Spirit

(Jerry Fite)

When religious people hear of the new birth and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, many think of God’s power coming miraculously on a person, and the Holy Spirit dwelling personally in the Christian. After all, being “*born again*” means literally being “*born from above*” (*John 3:3*). And the Spirit is not a force, but a divine person. It is the Spirit of God that must dwell in the person if one belongs to Christ (*Romans 8:9*).

What many fail to see is that God’s power works through the agency of God’s word, and He dwells in men through the same channel of God’s word. God does not work directly on the heart of man to save him, and give him new life. The Gospel is the power of God to save those who believe (*Romans 1:16*). And belief does not come miraculously upon people, for “*belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*” (*Romans 10:17*). The same process of faith is the channel by which Christ dwells and abides in the hearts of people (*Ephesians 3:17*).

God created man with a will to freely choose to submit to

God’s will or reject Him. God created the first man and woman with the ability to hear God’s command to not partake of a certain tree in the garden, and then freely choose to disobey His clear command when influenced by lies from the Devil (*Genesis 3:1-6*). “*Choose you this day whom ye will serve...*” was Joshua’s invitation to people centuries later who could independently choose between God and idols (*Joshua 24:15*).

God used the means to save and indwell men that is consistent with acknowledging man’s free will. The word of God can and is rejected by man. Jesus himself can be rejected by men who do not His sayings (*John 12:48*.) But God’s miraculous power upon man cannot be resisted. Even when Balaam wanted to curse Israel, the miraculous power of God’s Spirit upon Him would not allow Him to do so. Nor would the miraculous empowerment of the Spirit allow him to be quiet (*Numbers 23:12, 26; 2 Peter 2:15*).

The new birth occurs when man, from his own free will, submits to God’s word and is baptized in water for the remission of sins. The new birth does not work

independently from the Word revealed by the Spirit, but in conjunction with the inspired word. After Jesus said to Nicodemus ye must be born anew or from above, He said “*Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (*John 3:5*). Christ’s spiritual bride is “*cleansed*” by the “*washing of water with the word*” (*Ephesians 5:26*). The “*washing of regeneration*” is baptism in *Titus 3:5* (*cf. Acts 22:16*). We are “*begotten... through the gospel*” (*I Corinthians 4:15*). We are “*begotten again*” through the incorruptible seed of “*the gospel*” which abides “*forever*” (*I Peter 1:23-25*).

It is clear that God does not work directly from heaven on the heart of man to beget him. He works through the received word.

God’s Spirit does not directly dwell in the Christian, but does so as man’s free will submits to God’s direction revealed in His word. Being “*filled with God’s Spirit*” and under His influence occurs when we allow Christ’s “*word to abide in us richly*” (*Ephesians 5:18-19, Colossians 3:16*). The Gospel is the means for salvation and indwelling.