## New Birth

According to Scripture, we receive regeneration in virtue of Christ’s resurrection from the dead: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3). Just as the Lord Jesus passed out of death to life, believers in Him pass out of the condition of spiritual death into a new condition – new life in Christ.

The new birth, or “regeneration,” is that experience by which a believer in Jesus Christ receives new life and a new nature. The Holy Spirit enters the heart of each believer to renew, teach, direct, strengthen, sanctify, and comfort. Horton correctly notes that regeneration, as well as justification, are “the effect of union with Christ.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Paul links the experience of the new birth with Christ’s resurrection as well. We read in Romans 6:4, “As Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” He repeats this thought in Ephesians 2:5-6: “Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ… and raised us up with Him.” Colossians 2:13 reads, “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is significant that when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He immediately charged them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22). This indicates that the experience of the new birth through the Spirit was connected with His physical resurrection and became available from that time.

Rightmire rightly emphasizes that the Christian calling is more than just imitating Christ’s example: “Christian experience is more than an imitation of the life and teaching of Jesus. It is the present experience of the risen Christ indwelling the believer’s heart by the Spirit.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

### А. Definitions and Terminology

The rebirth of a fallen, sinful human into a new creation in Christ is one of the most stunning aspects of our salvation, and one of the most magnificent operations of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life. The respected Evangelical theologian, Millard Erickson, gives a fine definition of the experience: “Regeneration… is God’s transformation of individual believers, his giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives when they accept Christ.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Packer concurs, “Regeneration, or new birth, is an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

In John chapter 3, Jesus calls this spiritual experience being “born from above,” or “born again.” Which of these expressions better translates the words of Christ? The first emphasizes the origin of the experience – it is from heaven, from God. The latter stresses the results of the experience – the start of a new life. Which did Jesus mean to communicate?

The proper translation depends on the meaning of the Greek phrase γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν (*gennethe anothen*), which is found only in John 3:3-7. The first term, γεννηθῇ (*gennethe*) is “to be born,” but the meaning of the second term, ἄνωθεν(*anothen*), is more elusive. It is found in other passages of Scripture with both meanings: “from above” (Matt 27:51), and “again” (Gal 4:9). Peter’s term ἀναγεννάω (*анагэннао*) in 1 Peter 1:3, 23, which translates “regenerate,” can have the same two connotations.

Paul’s reference to regeneration in Titus 3:5, though, may shed light on the question of translating John’s phrase γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν (*gennethe anothen*). Paul employs the term παλιγγενεσία (*paliggenesia*): “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration (παλιγγενεσία) and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” This term consists of two parts: παλιν (*palin*), i.е., “again,” and γένεσις (*genesis*), i.е., “birth.” This example inclines us to translate γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν (*gennethe anothen*) in John 3:3-7 as “born again.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

We can confirm this conclusion by examining Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John chapter 3. When Jesus stated, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” Nicodemus inquired, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?” Based on Nicodemus’ reaction to Jesus’ words, it is clear that Jesus meant “born again.” We also find confirmation in the oft-repeated New Testament concept of “new life” in Christ. This would imply that believers have experienced a new birth

Other designations express the idea of regeneration or new birth as well. The Bible speaks of the “new heart” (Ezek 11:19; 36:26; Jer 24:7), the “law written on the heart” (Jer 31:33), the “new creation,” (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10), the “new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), “receiving the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13; 6:19; Rom 8:9), and “becoming a child” (Lk 18:17; 1 Pet 2:2).[[7]](#footnote-7) The apostle John typically uses the expression “born of God” (Jn 1:13; 1 Jn 3:9; 4:7; 5:1-18).[[8]](#footnote-8) As we see from this list, the word “heart” is often associated with regeneration since it is the driving force for human life.[[9]](#footnote-9)

We must draw a distinction between “regeneration” and “adoption,” which Paul prefers. The idea of regeneration concerns life transformation by the Holy Spirit as He begins His work of sanctification. “Adoption,” however, concerns a person’s status before God in Christ and the benefits that result from that position. We have already discussed the theme of adoption in chapter 10.

According to Christ’s teaching, rebirth is necessary for salvation: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5).[[10]](#footnote-10) In is important to observe that Jesus did not speak of the necessity of rebirth to a so-called “sinner,” but to a religious leader – Nicodemus. Thus, as Nuelsen writes, “Even the most punctilious observers of the law are dead and therefore unable to meet the demands of God.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

The Bible teaches that people are sinful by nature. Without an experience of spiritual renewal, no one can submit to the Lord (Rom 8:7-8). Whitefield comments that in order to live in a heavenly dwelling, one must have a heavenly nature. He considers an unbeliever simply attempting to lead a moral lifestyle to be inadequate. Moral living must spring from “the principle of a new nature.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Even Paul could not please God in the “flesh”:

If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ (Phil 3:4-7).

Faust correctly states that although the actual objective experience of regeneration is the same for all, subjectively people’s perception of the experience may differ. Some receive it with great emotion, others less so. Yet, all true experiences of regeneration lead to a progressive transformation of the individual, that is, “sanctification.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Hoch rightly claims that, although regeneration initiates the process of sanctification, we must not conclude from this that regeneration itself is a process. Citing Jesus’ words “born again” (Jn 3:3-7), Hoch, together with Packer, notes that we encounter here the Greek verb tenses “aorist” and “perfect,” which refer to a momentary event.[[14]](#footnote-14) If we compare regeneration with natural birth, it become obvious that they both occur in a moment of time.[[15]](#footnote-15) Burkardt affirms that the new birth is an unrepeatable, historical beginning of a new life.[[16]](#footnote-16)

### B. Doctrine of Regeneration in Church History

The Early Church did not possess a clear doctrinal formulation for regeneration.[[17]](#footnote-17) From its earliest years, the post-apostolic Church identified water baptism as the beginning of the Christian life. During water baptism, the recipient supposedly experiences forgiveness of sins and receives grace to enable them to live the Christian life. The newly baptized receive a “new start” on life.

Augustine was the first to suggest that only by virtue of God’s grace could a sinner turn to the Lord. However, Augustine did not equate this grace for conversion with regeneration itself. Later, followers of Calvin made this association, also calling this conversion-effecting grace “God’s effectual calling.” They compared the new birth with seed sown in the person’s heart, from which repentance and faith spring forth. Exponents of Arminianism, on the contrary, hold that regeneration follows conversion. We will return to this discussion later.

Liberal theology created a different approach to the new birth altogether. In this school of thought, regeneration does not involve any supernatural impartation of grace. “Regeneration” is simply reforming one’s life by means of self-effort. Some theorize that every individual has a “divine spark” that he or she must develop.[[18]](#footnote-18) Liberals look not only for the reformation of individuals, but of all society. Karl Barth and Otto Weber view regeneration not as personal renewal but the restoration of all creation.[[19]](#footnote-19)

### C. Mechanism of Regeneration

What exactly occurs during the experience of spiritual rebirth? What changes occur in the born-again individual? Two main views are voiced. The first position posits that an actual change occurs in the makeup of human nature. Through regeneration, the people receive “divine life” in their spirits and in this way become “new creatures” is Christ (1 Cor 5:17) and partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). They are now “one spirit with the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17).

Adherents of the theosis teaching (see chapter 8) equate this “divine life” with God’s so-called “uncreated energies” that supposedly interpenetrate the believer’s soul and deify it. Yet, this renewal occurs only in human *nature*, not in the individual *personality*. This is because in His passion, Jesus took upon Himself “general human nature,” not each individual person. The renewal of the personality occurs by a different mechanism (see discussion in chapter 11).[[20]](#footnote-20)

This first view in general, proposes that this “divine life” permeates the spirit and becomes part of the individual’s essence. As a result, the person’s spirit becomes perfected. Some even embrace the more extreme position that this infusion of divine life causes the human spirit to become divine (or deified). Consequently, it is thought that the “fruit of the Spirit” that Paul speaks of in Galatians 5:22-23 are, in fact, fruit of the reborn human spirit.

Smedes also believes that we receive the “the divine-human life of Christ.” Yet, he qualifies that nothing is “added” to the human constitution, but rather we are dealing with “more like a power that pushes the soul upward on the ladder of being.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

A well-known supporter of this theory is Kenneth E. Hagin. He teaches that people are basically spirit beings that have a soul and live in a body. Before the rebirth, people have a satanic nature (Jn 8:44). After the rebirth, they possess God’s nature: “The nature of God is within our spirits.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Regeneration occurs exclusively in a person’s spirit: “In the New Birth, our spirits are recreated.”[[23]](#footnote-23) The result is union with God: “We are one with Christ. Our spirits are one with Him.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

Hagin continues, “The new birth is a real incarnation…. (We are) as much sons and daughters of God as Jesus.”[[25]](#footnote-25) He also writes,

*Jesus was first divine, and then He was human. So He was in the flesh a divine-human being. I was first human, and so were you, but I was born of God, and so I became a human-divine being! God is living in us!*[[26]](#footnote-26)

The rival understanding to the view described above claims that regeneration consists in receiving the person of the Holy Spirit and the effect His presence and activity has on the individual. The newly reborn person under the influence of the indwelling Spirit obtains new perspectives, new relationships, new ways of thinking, new direction in life, and new behavior patterns. In this view, the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 are not the fruit of the human spirit, but of the Holy Spirit through the believer.

Mueller supports this variant: “Conversion is not a *substantial change*, that is, not the creation of a new essence of the soul…, but the complete transformation of the soul, or the creation of new qualities in man.[[27]](#footnote-27) Similarly, Best affirms, “The new birth is not the removal of anything from the sinner, neither the changing of anything within the depraved person; it is the impartation of the principle of the spiritual life to the elect.”[[28]](#footnote-28) In the words of Faust, “The mind is to be illuminated, the eyes of the understanding opened, the heart renewed, the will conquered, and the man made willing.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Dickason adds his confirmation:

The new birth actually creates within the believer a renewal of the moral base of his whole person that allows him to exercise his reason, emotion, and will in harmony with God as he yields to the indwelling Holy Spirit, who created him new.[[30]](#footnote-30)

We may cite other respected authors in support. George Whitehead taught that through the new birth, we are “altered as to the qualities and tempers of our minds,” but the soul remains “the same as to essence.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Hoch writes that regeneration “renews the believer’s intellect, sensibility, and will to enable that person to enter the kingdom of God and to do good works.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

Pink also agrees that regeneration involves a change in the direction of a person’s life: “No new faculties are created, rather are his original faculties enriched, ennobled, and empowered.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Regeneration effects change not in one aspect of the human constitution alone (i.e., the spirit), but in the entire person. The reborn individual becomes a new creature not “in respect of his essence, but in his views, his desires, his aspirations, his habits.”[[34]](#footnote-34) This is called “new birth” because “it is the gateway into a new world, the beginning of an entirely new experience.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

Returning to the question of whether Galatians 5:22-23 and similar passages refer to the fruit of the human spirit or the Spirit of God, we must recognize that the Greek term πνεῦμα (*pneuma*), which can be translated “spirit” or “Spirit,” is always written in the New Testament without the capital letter. We determine the best translation based on contextual and theological considerations.

In the entire epistle to the Galatians, there is only passage where the word πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) clearly refers to the human spirit (Gal 6:18), and it is found there in Paul’s typical parting words. Many other passages in this epistle, though, clearly refer to the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:2-5; 3:14: 4:6). We see the same in Romans 8. Therefore, we are safe to assume that in Galatians chapter 5, Paul is continuing on the theme of the work of God’s Holy Spirit. The Spirit manifests His divine nature through us, producing the fruit of the Spirit. It is the fruit of His work, not ours.

Furthermore, the contrast between “flesh” and “spirit” in such contexts also supports the variant “Holy Spirit.” Our interpretation here runs contrary to the Greek view that connects “flesh” with “body” (see below). The contrast in Scripture is not between the human spirit and the human body, but between the sin principle in people and life in the Holy Spirit.

Other factors count against the “impartation of divine life” view of regeneration. If the reborn spirit is divine, then one may consider the born-again human a divine being, or a “god.” We soundly refute this idea in chapter 7 of this volume. Moreover, such a teaching leads to developing an attitude of independence from God. If the human spirit is able to produce fruit on its own, then why do we need a continual dependence on the Spirit?

Concerning the interpretation of John 3:3-6, it is misguided to teach that the phrase “that what is born of the Spirit is spirit” refers to the birth of the human spirit by the Holy Spirit. The word “spirit” here likely refers to the “spiritual perception” or “receptivity” of the born again individual that is obtained through the new birth.

Moreover, some proponents of the “divine life” theory propose that the spirit of an unbeliever is dead. It comes to life only at the time of regeneration. Yet, they are mistaken here. Both believers and unbelievers have an active spirit. The Old Testament testifies of the presence and activity of the human spirit in both believers and unbelievers.[[36]](#footnote-36)

When the New Testament speaks of unbelievers being “dead,” what is meant is not that they lack a viable spirit, but that they are dead (that is, unresponsive) to God. They have a spirit, but it is not open to God or directed to Him. In this regard, Pink rightly states that spiritual death means that a person lacks the ability to properly use his members in relation to God.[[37]](#footnote-37)

In refutation of this theory, we also call attention to its resonance with the Greek philosophical worldview, which likely serves as its source. The Greeks of antiquity divided the human constitution into two parts: soul and body. The first element contains a “divine spark.” In it dwells the “logos.” The soul is the “real person.” The body is a “prison” for the soul.[[38]](#footnote-38)

So then, this teaching advises deliverance from dependence on the body in order to attain to true spirituality and actualize the potential of the soul. Although exponents of this theory do not necessarily advocate abusing the body, enough common factors exist between these systems to recognize that one has borrowed from the other.

We also take into consideration that the Bible reveals the need for believers’ spirits to undergo sanctification. In 2 Corinthians 7:1, we read, “Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The spirit of a born again person is still anticipating perfection, along with the soul and body. Paul speaks of this again in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete…».

Defenders of the “divine life” theory also appeal to 2 Corinthians 5:17, considering that the human spirit alone experiences the “new creation.” Consequently, the spirit, as a “new creature in Christ,” is now perfect. However, this passage nowhere refers to the human spirit. It does not say, “the spirit of a believer is a new creature,” but rather, “If anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature.” Paul is referring to believers’ new status in Christ. “In Christ,” the believer is already perfected in spirit, soul, and body. This positional status is progressively actualized in the experience of believers through the process of sanctification.

Concerning the text in 1 Corinthians 6:17, the phrase “joins himself (to the Lord),” translates κολλωμένος (*kollomenos*) and refers in verse 16 to a man’s relationship with a harlot. When a man “joins himself" sexually to a harlot, then enter into an intimate relationship, so much so that they are regarded as “one flesh.” Yet, they remain separate individuals. There is no merging of their natures. In a similar fashion, when people “join themselves” to the Lord, they enter into close fellowship with Him in the Spirit to the degree that we may speak of them as “one spirit.” Yet again, there is no merging of natures. Humans remain humans, and God remains God. Finally, see chapter 7 on “Deification” of a discussion of the interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4, which claims that we are “partakers of the divine nature”.

### D. Results of Regeneration

As a result of the new birth, believers can expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and assistance from Him. Correspondingly, some commentators speak of “marks” of the genuine experience of regeneration. The apostle John’s teaching supports this idea when he details how truly born-again Christians conduct themselves in the word: in righteousness (1 Jn 2:29), in holiness (1 Jn 3:9), and in love (1 Jn 4:7).[[39]](#footnote-39) John Wesley identified the “marks” of the Spirit as faith, victory over sin, peace, as well as love.[[40]](#footnote-40) Let us investigate further what the Spirit does in our lives as Christians.

**1. Spiritual Fruit**

The Spirit’s most fundamental work is to bear spiritual fruit. Peter asserts that spiritual fruit comes as a result of the born again experience: “…fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again” (1 Pet 1:22-23). So then, those born of God bear the fruit of love. In his second epistle, Peter lists other fruit: “moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Pet 1:5-8).

The most well-known delineation of the fruit of the Spirit comes from Paul’s epistle to the Galatians: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). It is remarkable to compare the list in Galatians 5:22-23 with Jesus’ Great Commandment in Mark 12:30-31: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength…. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This commandment calls us to love God, others, and self. Correspondingly, we can divide the nine fruits of the Spirit into the same categories: spiritual fruit expressing love for God, spiritual fruit expressing love to others, and spiritual fruit expressing love to oneself.

The fruits pertaining to God are “goodness,” “faithfulness,” and “self-control.” “Goodness” translates the Greek term ἀγαθωσύνη (*agathosune*).[[41]](#footnote-41) Aside from Galatians 5:22-23, we encounter this word another three times. In Ephesians 5:8-9, it is associated with such ideas as “righteousness” and “truth.” The connotation, then, is proper behavior before the Lord. Its usage in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 implies the same. The reference in Romans 15:14 is less clear – whether ἀγαθωσύνη (*agathosune*) connotes good behavior or graciousness to others. All things considered, we assign to ἀγαθωσύνη (*agathosune*) in Galatians 5 the meaning “proper behavior before God.” This term expresses love to God through obedience to Him.

The next item in this list describing love for God is πίστις (*pistis*), which is typically translated “faith,” but can also mean “faithfulness.”[[42]](#footnote-42) The idea of “faith” as “trust” would be foreign to a list of Christian virtues. Therefore, we prefer the rendering “faithfulness.” Although faithfulness is a trait that can be expressed toward people as well, it finds its highest expression in relation to God. Faithfulness is when we continue to do what is right before Him.

The Greek term ἐγκράτεια (*эгкратейя*) is well translated “self-control” (see 2 Pet 1:6; 1 Cor 7:9; Tit 1:8).[[43]](#footnote-43) The sense of the word is that believers refrain from behavior that is not pleasing to the Lord. In summary, then, the spiritual fruits relating to God are goodness, faithfulness, and self-control, that is, proper behavior before the Lord, continuing to behave properly, and abstaining from wrong behavior.

The fruits that relate to other people in Galatians 5:22-23 are kindness, gentleness, and patience. The word translated “gentleness,” πραῦτης (*prautes*), means “the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one’s self-importance, *gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness.”*[[44]](#footnote-44) This reflects our primary attitude toward others – walking in humility and showing respect and consideration for others.

The word “kindness” translates the Greek χρηστότης (*chrestotes*). Sometimes χρηστότης(*chrestotes*) refers to proper behavior (1 Cor 15:33; Rom 3:12), but it more frequently indicates “kindness” or “generosity” (2 Cor 6:6; Col 3:12; Rom 2:4; 11:22; Tit 3:4). This virtue especially applies to those in need, to whom believers can show special attention.

The final term, “patience,” comes from the Greek μακροθυμία (*makrothumia*).[[45]](#footnote-45) This type of behavior is especially called upon when someone offends or irritates us. Considering the description of love that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, it is interesting to note that μακροθυμία (*makrothumia*) and χρηστότης (*chrestotes*), are listed here as well in Galatians 5:22-23.

In summary, the Holy Spirit produces in the Christian the virtues of πραῦτης (*prautes*), i.е., gentleness or respect, χρηστότης (*chrestotes*)*,* i.е., kindness, and μακροθυμία (*makrothumia*), i.е., patience. “Gentleness” or “respect” describes our basic approach and attitude of respect toward all people. “Kindness” applies especially to those in need. “Patience” is called upon when others fall short of our expectations. Love embraces all these qualities, seeking the welfare of others in every sense.

The final spiritual fruit to comment on relate to the Christian himself or herself, namely “joy” (χαρά *- chara*) and “peace” (εἰρήνη - *eirene*). Peace and joy, produced by the Holy Spirit, can be the believer’s constant possession independent of circumstances (Phil 4:4; Acts 13:52; Col 3:15) since the Spirit produces them in the heart (Rom 14:17). Correspondingly, the book of Acts relates, “The disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52), and Paul prays for the Thessalonians, “May the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance” (2 Thes 3:16).

We also recognize that one could expand this scheme to apply certain fruits to other categories as well. Self-control, for example, has application to self and others, and peace can apply to one’s relationship to God and others. The categories created above can be helpful, but are not meant to be limiting.

**2. Fellowship with God**

Likely, the most glorious aspect of the Spirit’s indwelling is that believers can enjoy continual contact and fellowship with God. Paul refers to this in 2 Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

The Greek term κοινωνία (*koinonia*), which is translated “fellowship,” has the following denotations:[[46]](#footnote-46)

1. association, fellowship, close relationship
2. generosity
3. sign of friendship
4. participation

The first meaning best corresponds to Paul’s use in 2 Corinthians 13:13. Believers may expect this type of relationship with the Holy Spirit. In connection with this, the teaching of the Orthodox monk Symeon the New Theologian is thought provoking. He feels that a genuine experience with the Spirit should be characterized by a strong inner awareness of His presence and action.[[47]](#footnote-47) The well-known, 18th-century English evangelist George Whitefield affirmed the same.[[48]](#footnote-48) Although the claim that the new-birth experience is “always” accompanied by such a strong awareness of God’s presence may be a bit exaggerated, nonetheless these testimonies motivate us to seek a closer walk with the Spirit and consciousness of His presence in us.

**3. Aid in Prayer**

The Bible testifies of the Spirit’s support in the believer’s prayer life. Thanks to the presence of God’s Spirit, believers can pray effectively. Ephesians 2:18 informs us that through the Spirit, we have access to the Father.

The Spirit aids in prayer not only when believers pray in their own language, but He also gives supernatural enablement to pray in unknown tongues. According to Scripture, those who speak in tongues speak to God (1 Cor 14:2), praise Him (1 Cor 14:16-17), and at the same time, edify themselves (1 Cor 14:4). When Jude speaks of “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20), it is hard to decipher his meaning. It could refer to prayer in known tongues, or possibly in unknown tongues.

We give special attention to Romans 8:26: “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for {us} with groanings too deep for words.” Key to interpreting this verse is the meaning of the final two terms, στεναγμός(*stenagmos*), i.e., “groanings,” and ἀλάητος (*alaetos*), i.e., “too deep for words.”

The word ἀλάητος (*alaetos*) consists of two parts: the verb λαλέω (*laleo*), “speak,” and the negative particle “a.” This indicates that what the Spirit expresses is non-verbal. The word στεναγμός (*stenagmos*) is well translated “groanings.”[[49]](#footnote-49) When believers pray, then, the Spirit may groan within them, expressing prayer on a very deep level. The verse does not specify whether the person in prayer participates in this type of intercession or not. Some feel that the verse implies that we do participate in some way.

**4. Leadership of the Holy Spirit**

Believers are led by the Holy Spirit. We can highlight two aspects of the Spirit’s leading. He directs in matters of Christian ministry (Acts 8:29; 10:19-20; 11:12; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6-7; 20:22-23) and in the ethical life of the Christian (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:16). In this section, we will focus attention on the first aspect. The ethical aspect was highlighted in the section on spiritual fruit.

The Spirit’s direction and guidance has a long history among God’s people, who sought His counsel in difficult times, such as: during war (1 Chr 14:10-14; Judg 20:18-28; 1 Kin 22:5-7; 2 Sam 5:19-23), famine (2 Sam 21:1), and persecution (2 Sam 2:1; Jer 42:2-3). Those who did not ask God’s counsel could encounter tragic results (Josh 9:14ff), along with those who did not take His advice (2 Chr 35:20-23).

After the exodus from Egypt, God directed Israel as a nation by means of a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night (Neh 9:12). He also gave direction to specific individuals as well. He often spoke to Israel’s prophets and leaders. He also gave guidance through angels and dreams. 1 Samuel 28:6 lists several methods God employed: dreams, prophets, and Urim.

The Old Testament records many instances where God gave guidance through Urim or casting lots. By casting lots, Joshua divided the land of Canaan (Josh 16, 18), the transgression of Achan was discovered (Josh 7:14-18), the priests received their assignments (1 Chr 25:8; 26:12-16), people were appointed to live in Jerusalem (Neh 11), etc. The book of Proverbs applauds this system: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh” (Prov 16:33; сf. 18:18).

Interestingly, the New Testament recounts only one instance of casting lots – in the selection of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot among the Twelve (Acts 1:24-26). After the Spirit descended on the disciples at the day of Pentecost, we do not witness another time when believers cast lots. We may safely assume that since the Spirit has come, this practice is no longer appropriate.

The Spirit’s leading in the book of Acts, in fact, in more internal. The indwelling Spirit directed people personally. For example, at the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council, the participants wrote, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials…”. Phillip was led by the Spirit in his meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-29). Paul was “bound by the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). The Spirit once forbade him to preach in Asia (Acts 16:6-7).

The Old Testament also testifies of this internal leading by God’s Spirit. God put it into Nehemiah’s heart to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls (Neh 2:12; 7:5), stirred Moses’ heart to visit the Israelites (Acts 7:23), and taught David in the night (Ps 16:7).

There are also New Testament examples of God leading by more demonstrative means, namely, through dreams (Acts 16:9), visions (Acts 9:10-12; 10:10-16), and angels (Acts 27:23-24). Also notable is that God prophetically confirmed Barnabas and Saul’s call to apostolic ministry (Acts 13:2).[[50]](#footnote-50) Later in his ministry, God warned Paul through other believers about the sufferings that awaited him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:4).

We also note in the Old Testament that God often confirmed His direction in supernatural ways. He did so for: Abraham’s servant (Gen 24:12-14), Joshua (Josh 2:23-24), Ahaz (Isa 7:11-13), Saul (1 Sam 10:2-7), Samuel (1 Sam 10:20-21), Jonathan (1 Sam 14:8-12), Josiah (2 Chr 34:20-25), and, of course, Gideon (Judg 6).

**5. Comfort in Suffering**

When Christians suffer, God the Holy Spirit provides supernatural comfort (2 Cor 1:3-4). It is supernatural in the sense that even if the circumstances do not change for the better, nonetheless the indwelling Spirit comforts and strengthens. A believer’s mood is not dependent on circumstances, but on the comforting presence of God’s Spirit.

The psalmist expresses this thought well: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar {and} foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. Selah. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High (Ps 46:1-4). The “river” likely symbolizes the activity of the Holy Spirit.

**6. Assurance of Salvation**

Those who have the Spirit have an internal assurance of their salvation. This work of assurance has two aspects. First, the Spirit’s production of fruit in Christians’ lives helps them see that they are truly the Lord’s people (Eph 1:13-14; 2 Cor 1:22; 1 Jn 4:13). Second, the Spirit gives an inner witness to believers, that is, a subjective confidence confirming their status as Christians (Rom 8:16).

**7. Insight into the Word**

The Holy Spirit is our teacher. The apostle John speaks of Him, “As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things…” (1 Jn 2:27). This fulfills Jesus’ promise that the Spirit “will teach you all things” (Jn 14:26) and “guide you into all the truth” (Jn 16:13).[[51]](#footnote-51)

Yahweh was the source of truth for His Old Testament people as well: “I am Yahweh your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go” (Isa 48:17). He makes known “the path of life” (Ps 16:11), “reveals the profound and hidden things” (Dan 2:22), and “teaches the humble His way” (Ps 25:9). He promises His people, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you” (Ps 32:8), and, “Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer 33:3).

Why do we need the Spirit’s help in understanding the Word? First, the Bible reveals that we are fallen people with distorted minds (see Eph 4:17-18; Rom 12:2). Although we are now in Christ, our minds are still undergoing the process of renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, the Scriptures testify that God’s Word is spiritual (1 Cor 2:12-13; Jn 6:63; Lk 24:45). This means that those who attempt to study the Word without the leading of the Spirit will never fully grasp its meaning and may well err in its interpretation. Yet, God promises that the Spirit will guide us into truth. The Spirit renews our minds to properly perceive God’s truth. One must have spiritual perceptivity to properly handle the Lord’s revelation. This is the significance of Jesus’ saying: “He who has ears, let him hear” (Matt 13:9; 11:15; Rev chps. 2, 3).

It is important to understand that the Holy Spirit does not reveal new truths to us that are not already in the Bible. Rather, He opens the eyes of our heart to understand what is written there. Erickson correctly states,

There is an understanding of the text that cannot be obtained simply through intellectual study, but which the Holy Spirit gives in illumination… The role of the Holy Spirit is not to convey new information that is not in the biblical text. Rather, the Spirit gives insight or understanding of the meaning that is in the biblical text, although it may not always be possible to unpack that meaning fully using exegetical methodology.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Fram adds, “Nor does the Spirit give us power to transcend reason altogether.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Goldingay concurs, “Interwoven with the active analytic work of my mind is a periodic receiving of a spark of insight on the actual subject matter of the text I am wrestling with.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

How can we engage with the Spirit in this endeavor? First, the Bible urges us to pray and request guidance (Ps 119:18; Eph 1:16-19; 1 Kin 3:9). Second, upon completion of our exegetical research, we must reflect or mediate on the Word, relying on the Spirit to give insight. Scripture speaks of the value of meditation on the Word:

- This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it (Josh 1:8).

- I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation (Ps 119:99).

- Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything (2 Tim 2:7).

When students of Scripture sincerely seek the Spirit’s help, He will guide them in their understanding. When the Spirit gives special insight, the interpreter may experience an inner confirmation that the Spirit is speaking. We observe an example of this in Luke 24:32: “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?” It is important to note, though, that such an inner conviction is not the best indicator of true spiritual illumination from the Spirit, but rather the correspondence of one’s interpretation with the total witness of Scripture on the topic. Henry rightly comments,

Yet unless priority is given to the objectively inspired content of Scripture, Spirit-illumination readily gives way to private fantasy and mysticism. The Spirit illumines persons by reiterating the truth of the scriptural revelation and bearing witness to Jesus Christ. Spirit-illumination centers in the interpretation of the literal grammatical sense of Spirit-breathed Scripture.[[55]](#footnote-55)

When an interpreter, who has truly heard from the Spirit, gives out his or her teaching, others in the Body of Christ should be able to recognize and confirm that truth as well. It is curious to note that, although the enemies of Jesus and the disciples opposed their teaching, they were not able to refute it, thereby indirectly confirming its validity (see Matt 22:46; Lk 2:46-47; 20:26, 39-40; 21:14-15; Acts 4:13; 6:8-10). Packer agrees that one can verify the insights given by the Spirit: “This Spirit-given understanding comes by a rational process that can be stated, analyzed, and tested at each point.”[[56]](#footnote-56)

**8. Power for Living**

Finally, we must not neglect to comment that the Holy Spirit provides power to live the Christian life. In a later chapter, we will look at the power of the Spirit for effective ministry. Yet, the Spirit is also active in the everyday life of believers, enabling them to do the will of the Lord.

In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul prays that the church would be “strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience” (Col 1:11). In one of his prison epistles, Paul expresses his confidence in the “provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” to aid him in getting through his trials for the Lord (Phil 1:19). Later, he boldly claims, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

### E. Receiving the New Birth

Two rival theories exist about how an individual receives the new birth. Calvinists teach that a person is reborn before their actual conversion and turns to Christ in the power of that new birth.[[57]](#footnote-57) They reason that conversion must be completely God’s work, since people cannot repent or believe, that is, fulfill the requirements for salvation, on their own. Several Scriptures speak of God’s initiative in salvation. Ephesians 2:8 states that faith is a gift of God (also see Phil 1:29; Heb 12:2; Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:9). Similarly, 2 Timothy 2:25, Acts 11:18, and Acts 5:31 reveal that God gives repentance.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Best offers the following evidence.[[59]](#footnote-59) He points to the fact that unbelievers cannot perceive or understand spiritual things: “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14). They are “foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor 1:18). The darkness does not “comprehend” the Light (Jn 1:5). God enables people to receive the Word by first giving them the new birth. He did this, for example, when He “opened (Lydia’s) heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14) and “shone in our hearts” so that we believed (2 Cor 4:6). He prepares the soil to receive the gospel (Matt 13:18-23). Just as in His work of creation, God takes the initiative to create new life in the hearts of the elect.

Moreover, God created us in Christ (Eph 2:10) and made us alive together with Him (Eph 2:5). He gives us understanding (1 Jn 5:20), just as He enlightened Peter (Matt 16:17). In His light (understood as regeneration), we see light (Ps 36:9). In addition, Best interprets the following words in a spiritual sense: “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, Yahweh has made both of them” (Prov 20:12). Finally, Best sees in John 3:8 a comparison of the activity of the Spirit with the action of the wind. The Spirit’s work is “secret, creative, and immediate,”[[60]](#footnote-60) that is, the recipient is not aware that it is taking place. Ezekiel similarly writes about the “breath from the four winds” (Ezek 37:9) that brings dead bones to life.

On the other hand, according to the Arminian understanding, people turn to Christ before regeneration, and the latter is the result of the former. So then, at the moment when an individual believes in Christ, the Holy Spirit enters the heart and seals it for salvation. In Paul’s words, “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). Notice here that hearing the Word and believing in Christ precede the reception of the Spirit.

Peter taught the same. On the Day of Pentecost, he established the order: “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).[[61]](#footnote-61) He repeated this theme in his first epistle, stating that we have “born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, {that is,} through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet 1:23). Here again, receiving the Word precedes regeneration. James confirms, “He brought us forth by the word of truth” (Jam 1:18).

How can we explain Ephesians 2:8, “saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God,” from the Arminian point of view? The Greek pronoun translated “that” is in the neuter gender. The term “faith,” however, stands in the feminine gender. Therefore, “that” does not refer to faith being the gift of God, but refers to the entire preceding sentence. “Salvation” is the gift of God that Paul is referring to.

According to 2 Timothy 2:25, God grants repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. Yet, we respond that the individual must still respond to God’s prompting to repent. In addition, the context speaks of other factors that condition someone’s repentance, such as how one behaves toward those in need of repentance. For this reason, Paul instructs his protégé: “…with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance.” It appears that conversion depends on human factors as well.[[62]](#footnote-62)

When Peter was giving account before the elders of the Jerusalem church about the happenings at Cornelius’ house, the latter exclaimed in response, “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance {that leads} to life” (Acts 11:18). The elders did not mean by this that God specifically chose certain Gentiles for salvation, but that now the gospel is available to all people, including Gentiles.

When considering the overall historical context of Acts 5:31, “a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel,” the meaning is clear. Peter is not talking about predestination to eternal life, but that God grants forgiveness through His Son rather than through the sacrificial system.

Paul wrote to the saints in Philippi: “For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29). This passage leaves the impression that God caused the Philippians to believe. Yet, Paul may have meant “the ability to believe.”[[63]](#footnote-63) In other words, God grants individuals the opportunity to believe, but they decide for themselves whether or not to do so. This interpretation finds support in that this verse also speaks about being granted the opportunity to share in Christ suffering. In this latter case, the sufferings are not forced on the Church, but God’s people voluntarily participate in them. Similarly, God does not coerce faith, but grants opportunity to voluntarily believe.

According to Romans 12:3, God gives to everyone the measure of faith. This context, however, is devoted to spiritual gifts. Thus, the faith mentioned here is not saving faith, but faith enabling one to operate in spiritual gifts. Also significant – the readers of this letter were already Christians, that is, they already possessed saving faith.

1 Corinthians 12:8-9 also claims that the Spirit gives faith. Yet again, Paul is teaching here about spiritual gifts. Faith in this context refers to a specific spiritual manifestation of power as the other items listed are as well, like prophecy, healings, etc. We also recall that the recipients of this instruction are already believers possessing saving faith.

Lutherans take the following view of regeneration and conversion. Mueller writes, “The right relation of faith to eternal election is this, that saving faith, wrought by the Holy Ghost, belongs into election as the *means* by which the object of election is accomplished.”[[64]](#footnote-64) In other words, faith precedes regeneration, yet it is conditioned by God’s election.

Although in the previous discussion, we defended the Arminian position that conversion precedes and is the condition for regeneration, we must nonetheless concur with Packer that the new birth, in a strict sense, is a work of “monergism.”[[65]](#footnote-65) This word means “one energy,” that is, although people must fulfill conditions to receive the new birth, God accomplishes the work of regeneration itself without human participation.

Another important facet of the question of receiving the new birth is the relation of regeneration to water baptism. Many of the Church Fathers and some present Christian denominations insist that people receive the new birth at the moment of baptism. Others, though, separate the two experiences. We discuss baptism in detail in chapter 22 of this volume.

The distinguished George Whitefield taught that people must put forward some effort to receive the new birth. He felt that those seeking this experience should “never cease watching, praying, and striving till he finds a real, inward, saving change wrought in his heart.”[[66]](#footnote-66) However, Whitefield’s description of the experience fails to correspond to the biblical witness. Paul, for example, taught that we receive the Holy Spirit by a single act of faith (Eph 1:13). Furthermore, he asked the Galatians, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” (Gal 3:2). Additionally, we see no example in Scripture where people sought the rebirth for an extended period of time. In the biblical narrative, people received the new birth at the moment that they believed in Christ.

Finally, all Christian confessions agree that at the time of regeneration, the Holy Spirit enters the hearts of new converts. Romans 8:9 confirms this: “You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” According to this text, those who lack the Spirit are not Christians. The converse is also true: all true Christians have the indwelling Spirit.

### F. Regeneration in the Old Testament

Many wonder whether the Old Testament saints were born again. What evidence exists to support that thesis? In Romans 9:4, Paul writes that the “adoption as sons” belonged to Israel. If Israel was adopted by God, it seems to follow that the Old Testament saints experienced the new birth. Moreover, God often spoke of Himself as the Father of Israel.[[67]](#footnote-67) Does this imply that regeneration was available in Old Testament times? Furthermore, although such references are rare, some texts do indicate that the Holy Spirit dwelt “within” individuals: in Joshua (Num 27:18), in the prophets (1 Pet 1:11), and in Daniel (Dan 4:6). However, the last example reflects the opinion of a Gentile king.

Adherents of this position also appeal to the good behavior of Old Testament saints. If they were not born again, then how did they live for Yahweh and serve Him so faithfully? In addition, in Saul’s case, after the Spirit descended on him, he was “changed into another man” (1 Sam 10:6).[[68]](#footnote-68) Additionally, in Psalm 51 David prays the Lord would create in him “a clean heart,” renew a “right spirit” within him, and not remove the Holy Spirit from him (Ps 51:10-11). Does this mean that David was reborn and had the Spirit dwelling in his heart? Jeremiah 24:7 creates the same impression, where Yahweh speaks to Jeremiah about the exiles returning from Babylon, “I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am Yahweh.”[[69]](#footnote-69)

Proponents of this view also note that in the Old Testament, Yahweh called His people to sincere repentance (Jer 4:1-4; Ezek 18:31; Ps 34:14).[[70]](#footnote-70) Could such a repentance not lead to a new-birth experience? In addition, we recall Jesus words that without the new birth, one cannot be saved (Jn 3:3-5). Would this mean that all the Old Testaments saints perished, not having the new birth? In addition, when Jesus was discussing the new birth with Nicodemus, he reproved him for not already knowing about it: “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?” (Jn 3:10). Jesus expected that Nicodemus already knew about regeneration from the Old Testament.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Robertson contributes the following arguments.[[72]](#footnote-72) In the Old Testament, Yahweh calls people to circumcise their hearts (Jer 4:4; Deut 10:16). The second verse is especially significant in that the circumcision of the heart would enable God’s Old Testament people to “fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 10:12). In addition, Robertson highlights passages in the Psalms where the Law is already in people’s hearts (Ps 37:31; 40:8). This corresponds to what Moses wrote, “The word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it” (Deut 30:14).

The contrary position on this question proposes that regeneration is available only under the New Covenant. When Paul speaks about the “adoption” of Israel in Romans 9:4, he is only pointing out the special, covenantal relationship that existed between Yahweh and His Old Testament people. Yet, they were not yet born again. The same explanation applies to God being the “Father” of Israel under the Old Covenant.

Moreover, in Romans 7 Paul contrasts life in the Spirit with life under the Law. Therefore, since Israel lived under the Law, they did not have the Spirit. They were still “slaves,” and not “sons” (Gal 4:1-7).[[73]](#footnote-73) Furthermore, Paul taught that we become new creatures “in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17). Old Testament believers did not enjoy that privileged position.[[74]](#footnote-74)

A strong argument for the lack of regeneration under the Old Covenant is the existence of multiple predictions about the *future* coming of the new birth and the Holy Spirit:

- For I will pour out water on the thirsty {land} and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants; and they will spring up among the grass like poplars by streams of water. This one will say, “I am Yahweh’s”; and that one will call on the name of Jacob; and another will write {on} his hand, “Belonging to Yahweh,” and will name Israel's name with honor (Isa 44:3-5).

- I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Jer 31:33).

- I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always…. I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me (Jer 32:39-40).

- I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God (Ezek 11:19-20).

- Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (Ezek 36:26-27).

- I will heal their apostasy (Hos 14:4).[[75]](#footnote-75)

It is unlikely that these prophecies were already fulfilled in the Old Testament period. The prophets spoke of this phenomenon as one that encompassed God’s people *in their entirety*. The New Testament experience of rebirth is for each individual personally.[[76]](#footnote-76) Nuelsen comments that the Old Testament promises of regeneration “refer to the nation of Israel as such and to individuals only so far as they partake of the nation’s blessings.”[[77]](#footnote-77)

Moreover, Moses speaks of a future time when “Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 30:6). This prediction was not fulfilled in the Old Testament. Through Jeremiah, God declared, “All the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart” (Jer 9:26).

We can conclude, then, that the prophetic promises of the new birth have two fulfillments. First, they refer to the regeneration of followers of Messiah in the New Testament Church. Second, they predict a still future, eschatological conversion of Israel.

The Psalms express this need for spiritual renewal in prayer:

- Revive us, and we will call upon Your name (Ps 80:18).

- Teach me Your way, O Yahweh; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name (Ps 86:11).

- Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it (Ps 119:35).

- Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground (Ps 143:10).

In the majority of Old Testament cases, the Spirit is not “in” individuals, but “on” them. The former designation refers to regeneration, while the latter indicates a more external empowerment by the Spirit of God.[[78]](#footnote-78) Even this empowering experience, though, was limited to only specially chosen individuals (see Num 11:29; Joel 2:28-29).

The words of Christ about the work of the Holy Spirit recorded in John are highly significant: “He abides with you and will be in you” (Jn 14:17). Here, we observe that the Spirit was not “in” the disciples. Jesus spoke of the Spirit’s indwelling as a future experience. Therefore, they were not born again. Jesus also stated, “I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Lk 7:28)[[79]](#footnote-79). Possibly, New Testament believers are greater than John the Baptist because they have something John never possessed – the born again experience.

Later in John’s Gospel, we learn that after His resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). Most likely, that was the moment of their spiritual regeneration. This agrees with 1 Peter 1:3 that the new birth is associated with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

All things considered, we are more persuaded by the view that the new birth was not yet available to God’s Old Covenant people. Possibly, we can explain the faithfulness of the Old Testament saints by some kind of empowering by the Spirit, or by virtue of their faith.[[80]](#footnote-80)

### G. Warnings

We will conclude our examination of the new birth with some warnings from Scripture about how Christians must relate to the indwelling Spirit. We must not grieve Him (Eph 4:30; Isa 63:10; Ps 105:33), tempt Him (Acts 5:9), quench Him (1 Thes 5:19), offend Him (Heb 10:29), or resist Him (Acts 7:51).[[81]](#footnote-81)

1. Horton M. S. Traditional Reformed View // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. Kindle Edition, 1102. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Packer J. I. Regeneration // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1000-1001. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rightmire R. D. Union with Christ // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 789. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 799. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Packer J. I. Regeneration // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1000. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In Greek literature, this term is used to describe the renewal of the earth. It also referred to faith in reincarnation. Josephus employed it in discussing Israel’s restoration after the Babylonian captivity. In the Gospels, it refers to the millennial reign of Mesiah (Nuelsen H. L. Regeneration // Bromiley G W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 4. – P. 67-68; Burkardt H. The Biblical Doctrine of Regeneration. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1978. – P. 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Thiessen H. C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 367; Nuelsen, v. 4, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Packer, Regeneration, p. 1000. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Faust S. D. Regeneration. – Dayton, OH: United Brethren Publishing House, 1902. – P. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hoch shares an interesting observation about Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. In John 3:7, we encounter second person pronouns of both singular and plural number: μὴ θαυμάσῃς ὅτι εἶπόν σοι· δεῖ ὑμᾶς γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν. In this way, we see that all people need the rebirth, not just Nicodemus (Hoch C. B. Jr. New Birth // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996. – P. 558). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Nuelsen, v. 4, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Whitefield G. The Nature and Necessity of our Regeneration or New Birth in Christ Jesus // Smith T. L. Wesley & Whitefield on the New Birth. – Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press; Zondervan, 1986. – P. 71-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Faust, p. 49-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hoch, p. 558; Packer, Regeneration, p. 1000. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Luther held a different view – the Christian life is a continuous new birth (Burkardt H. The Biblical Doctrine of Regeneration. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1978. – P. 11). Here, Luther is confusing regeneration and sanctification. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Burkardt, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Packer, Regeneration, p. 1001; Bromiley G. W. Regeneration // Bromiley G W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 4. – P. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Best W. E. Regeneration and Conversion. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975. – P. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Burkardt, p. 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Mantzaridis G. I. The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Smedes L. B. Union with Christ. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. – P. 116-119. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Hagin K. E. The New Birth. – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1975. – P. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Hagin K. Zoe: The God Kind of Life, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Mueller D. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 339. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Best, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Faust, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Dickason C. F. Demon Possession and the Christian. – Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987. – P. 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Whitefield, Nature and Necessity, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Hoch, p. 558. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Pink A. W. Regeneration or the New Birth. – Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications. – P. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Gen 41:8; Ex 35:21; Deut 2:30; Ps 145:4; Prov 15:4,13; 16:32; 18:14; Ecc 12:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
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61. Shedd responds to this argument by claiming that Peter’s words “as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Acts 2:39) indicate that repentance is possible only for those whom God regenerates at the moment that He calls them to salvation (Shedd, p. 772). Yet, Shedd’s response does not overthrow the plain testimony of the text that repentance precedes the gift of the Spirit. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
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67. See Deut 14:1; 32:6, 19; 1 Chr 29:10; Ps 82:6; 103:13; Isa 1:2; 30:1, 9; 43:6; 45:11; 63:8, 16; 64:8; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9; Hos 1:10; Mal 1:6; 2:10 (rus-baptist.narod.ru). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
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76. Packer, Regeneration, p. 1000. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Nuelsen, Regeneration, v. 4, p. 68. However, Neulsen also recognizes that the latter prophets, as a rule, gave greater attention to the individual’s personal relationship with the Lord. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. There are cases where we read that God put His Spirit “in Israel” (Isa 63:11; Hag 2:5), yet this means the Spirit’s presence among the people as a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. The King James Version of this verse reads, “Among those that are born of women there is not a greater *prophet* than John the Baptist,” but it is based on inferior manuscripts. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Кремняк. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Thiessen, p. 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)