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THE CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW BIRTH AS  
SEEN IN THE LIFE OF PETER

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INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

### A. The Problem Stated

At the center of the Christian faith lies the experience of rebirth, an experience which involves a radical change in the life of the individual. The purpose of this thesis is to discover the major characteristics of new birth and to examine these in the life of Simon Peter.

### B. The Problem Delimited

New birth is referred to throughout the Bible. The subject is not only vast in scope, but contains in its nature that which is a mystery to the mind of man. Thus the study of the phenomenon is necessarily limited. Certain major passages have been selected for study. From these conclusions will be drawn concerning any basic characteristics of new birth.

Only a fragmentary record of the life of Peter is found in the New Testament accounts. That record was made not for biographical purposes but in order to exemplify certain aspects of Christ's ministry or the founding of the early church. Therefore, an examination of Peter's life is limited by the nature and the amount of the material available. Because of this the conclusions drawn must be tentative, for there are many aspects of Peter's life which are unknown.

### C. The Problem Justified

The belief in the need of some great critical change in man lies at the heart of the Christian faith. Man, who is sinful and unholy, must be changed if he is to live in fellowship with God who is holy. Scripture and Christian experience testify that this is not only necessary but that it is possible through the experience of new birth. In this initial event the believer commences his life of fellowship with God and through his daily walk he finds growth and deeper fellowship. A study of new birth, then, is valuable because it deals with that which is the essence of the Christian experience.

Peter has been selected as the object of study because of the prominent position which he occupies in the New Testament accounts and because an examination of his life reveals the presence of a radical change. Although the findings may not be conclusive the study will give deeper insight into the experience of the Apostle, and through this into the experience of new birth.

### D. Method of Procedure

In considering the phenomenon of new birth the first step will be to determine the nature of the experience. This will be accomplished through an inductive study of certain key passages of the New Testament. The findings will be classified under the logical aspects of experience: the need for new birth, the means of new birth, the nature

of new birth, and the results of new birth.

After the characteristics of new birth have been established the experience will be studied in connection with the life of Peter. The second chapter concerns new birth as seen in the need and nature of Peter's change, while the third chapter examines new birth in the nature and results of Peter's change.

#### E. Sources

Since the following study is concerned primarily with an examination of certain passages of Scripture, the principal source of material will be the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament. Various commentaries, Biblical and Systematic theologies, and books concerning the nature of new birth and of the experiences of the disciples will also be consulted.

CHAPTER I

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW BIRTH



## CHAPTER I

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW BIRTH

#### A. Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to determine the essential characteristics of new birth. Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus found in John 3:1-21 forms the basic material for study. Concerning this passage G. Campbell Morgan writes: "This conversation with Nicodemus deals fully and finally with this whole subject."<sup>1</sup> He adds, however, that other passages of Scripture are valuable for an adequate comprehension of the discourse. Therefore, I John, I Peter 1:3-2:10, the remainder of the Gospel by John, and certain passages in the Epistles of Paul will also be consulted.

The chapter has been divided according to the four major aspects of new birth: its necessity, means, nature, and results. However, although each section will be examined separately and a logical analysis of the subject will be made, it should be emphasized that the subject itself is psychological. Its various aspects are not experienced in a rigid chronological order. Therefore, much of the material is indivisible and parts of the sections will inevitably overlap.

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<sup>1</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *The Spirit of God*, p. 215.

## B. The Necessity for New Birth

The necessity for new birth is found in the nature of God's moral law and in man's relation to that law. God's law requires that only those who are of a spiritual nature may have fellowship with Him in the Kingdom. Man's situation is that he is not of such a nature and he is unable to become of such a nature apart from new birth.

### 1. Man's Situation

Jesus' statement in John 3:3,5 establishing new birth as pre-requisite for seeing or entering the Kingdom of God makes two basic assumptions.<sup>1</sup> The first is that all men are outside of the Kingdom of God. That they are outside may be seen by an examination of the qualifications of the Kingdom and of the position of man. The Kingdom refers to the rule of God.<sup>2</sup> Its nature is such that those who abide in it are those who are subject to the will of God and obedient to His laws. On the other hand, Scripture abounds with references to the universality of man's disobedience to God's laws: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"; "None is righteous, no not one...All have turned aside..."; "If we say we have not sin we deceive ourselves."<sup>3</sup> Not only does man defy God's laws but this lawlessness involves obedience

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1. B.F. Westcott, The Holy Bible with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary, St. John's Gospel, p. 49. Gives the distinction between seeing and entering the Kingdom.
2. Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, p. 385; J. Excell, The Biblical Illustrator, Vol. I, p. 198; M. Dodds, The Gospel of St. John, p. 107.
3. Romans 3:23; 3:10; I John 1:8.

to the one who is God's adversary. Thus Paul exhorts the Gentiles to turn from the power of Satan to God.<sup>1</sup>

The second implication of Jesus' statement is that all men need to enter the Kingdom of God. His words are addressed to one whose position as a ruler of the Jews suggests membership and possible leadership in the Sanhedrin.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Nicodemus' sincerity in seeking truth is indicated in Jesus' response to him, especially as it is contrasted with His response to the multitude in John 2:24.<sup>3</sup> Morgan portrays Nicodemus thus:

"He was a sincere seeker after truth...He came to a Teacher from God, and therefore he came with an open mind willing to receive truth. He was perhaps the most perfect example of the highest possibilities of the old covenant, which had instructed men in the things of God..."<sup>4</sup>

It was to this man that Jesus said, "You must be born anew."<sup>5</sup> In spite of his sincerity, in spite of his position as a leader of a covenant people, Nicodemus, as all men, needed to enter the Kingdom. For the Kingdom offers to man that which he needs but cannot have apart from it. It offers mercy in the place of wrath, fellowship with God instead of enmity with God, life instead of death.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Acts 26:18.
2. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
3. A. Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. John* Cambridge, Westcott, *op. cit.*
4. Morgan, *ad loc.*, p. 214.
5. John 3:7.
6. I John 1:6; II Corinthians 6:14; I Peter 2:10; Romans 5:12-21; Romans 6:23.

## 2. The Need for Change in Man

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>1</sup> With these words Jesus separates life into two planes of existence, two spheres of experience: flesh and spirit.<sup>2</sup> Life is either governed by that which is earthly, physical, temporal, or by that which is heavenly, spiritual, eternal.<sup>3</sup> One born in the flesh is limited to fleshly experience. He can see and participate only in those things which belong to that sphere.<sup>4</sup> He is motivated by that which is of earth. In connection with this Paul writes: "For the ruler of earth blinds the minds of those who dwell in it so that they are unable to see that which is spiritual."<sup>5</sup>

Man is born in the flesh. But the sphere of God's Kingdom is spirit. To live in it, even to see it requires spiritual qualities. For God is Spirit and fellowship with God is only possible for those who are of a like nature with Him.<sup>6</sup> In order to enter the Kingdom, therefore, man must transfer from one plane of existence to the other.

This movement necessitates a transformation of character. For man's disposition must be governed by that which is of heaven instead of that which is of earth; his

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1. John 3:6.
2. Cf. Westcott, ad loc.
3. Cf. Morgan, ad loc.; Lange, ad loc.; Westcott, ad loc.
4. Dodds,
5. II Corinthians 4:4.
6. I John 4:7,8,16; I Peter 1:15; Exell, op. cit., p. 206.

action must be motivated by the Spirit instead of the flesh.<sup>1</sup> Austin Phelps speaks of this as "the most radical change to which human character is susceptible."<sup>2</sup> Scripture describes it as a new creation; as a move from death to life, from darkness to light; as a change in heart.<sup>3</sup> Jesus called it "new birth."

### C. The Means of New Birth

#### 1. Divine Action

The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel states that regeneration is an act of God.

"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."<sup>4</sup>

The image of birth itself suggests the One who is the Author of life. He who is the Creator of man must also re-create him.

This Divine action will be examined in the light of its motivation, and its instrumentation.

#### a. Divine Initiation

Under God's law man is responsible for a great and formative change in his character which he is morally unable to effect. In John 3:3,5, the word 'cannot' denotes moral

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1. Archibald Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 260.
2. Austin Phelps, *The New Birth*, p. 44.
3. II Corinthians 5:7; I John 3:14; I Peter 2:9; Acts 26:18.
4. John 1:12, 13.

inability.<sup>1</sup> Man's impotence, then, is located in his moral condition and not in a lack of physical power or faculties. That is, man is morally incapable of employing his physical energies to enter God's Kingdom. By locating man's weakness in the moral realm Jesus implies man's responsibility under God's law as well as his impotence and unrighteousness. For moral decision implies responsibility. Phelps has described it this way:

"This is the dependence of a perverse man, who of himself will not be other than a perverse man, upon the power that shall incline him to obedience. This, which in kind, and when applied to elemental changes in character, is of the most profound and terrific dependence under which moral being can exist, stands side by side with responsible being..."<sup>2</sup>

God's redemptive action, then, is undeserved by man. It is an act of grace in the sense of unmerited favor or mercy.<sup>3</sup>

God's action is also a work of grace in that it is an expression of His love. For every command to repent implies God's willingness to forgive; every exhortation to walk in newness of life presupposes God's offer of new life. And every act of forgiveness, every gift of life, is made possible by the supreme gift of God's Son. That this gift was an expression of love is shown in such passages as John 3:16; 17:23; I John 4:7-10. Jesus himself was motivated by redemptive love which found its highest expression at

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1. Plummer, loc. cit.
2. Phelps, op. cit., p. 187.
3. Cf. Ephesians 2:4-10.

Calvary.<sup>1</sup> The details of his life reveal this love also. For example, John 11:5,6 indicate that love motivated Jesus' action in regard to the raising of Lazarus.<sup>2</sup> Another example is found in John 13:1 ff.

Thus love and mercy are at once the motive and the means of man's redemption. They are the cause of God's action in behalf of man and their expression is the means of man's salvation. For it is through union with Christ that man is freed from the penalty of law and receives the gift of life eternal.<sup>3</sup>

#### b. Divine Instrument

The signs performed by Jesus in Jerusalem disclosed certain facts concerning His nature. On the basis of these facts Nicodemus came to Jesus, saying: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."<sup>4</sup>

The revelation of Divine Truth, then, brought Nicodemus to Jesus. Moreover, in seeking to redeem Nicodemus Jesus continued to teach facts concerning the nature and qualification of God's Kingdom. He did not use physical force, He presented facts. He did not teach false doctrines, He taught truth. He did not explain truths which man could

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1. Revelation 1:5; Romans 5:8.
2. The emphasis on belief in 1:5-44 reveals the redemptive purpose in this action. See for example vs. 15, 26, 27, 40, 42.
3. John 3:16; Romans 6.
4. John 3:2.

learn for himself, He revealed Divine Truth.<sup>1</sup> The revelation of Truth, then, is God's instrument in the regeneration of man.

That Divine Truth is powerful is seen first by its effectiveness in the lives of such people as Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, the disciples, the five thousand at Pentecost, and others. Secondly, its power is witnessed to throughout the Scriptures. Jesus said, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."<sup>2</sup> And the author of Hebrews wrote:

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."<sup>3</sup>

Truth operates through the natural laws of man's mind and not by any foreign or unnatural means.<sup>4</sup> Jesus appealed to Nicodemus' reason indicating that man is not compelled to respond to Truth. He tried to persuade Nicodemus on the basis of the natural appeal of Truth to man's intellect. Truth is not coercive in its effect. Its power lies in its attraction whereby it draws man to God.

However, although Truth has a natural power over man's mind it cannot, of itself, persuade the human soul to change from sin to holiness.<sup>5</sup> For no human response to the natural

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1. Phelps, op. cit., pp. 109-111.
2. John 6:35.
3. Hebrews 4:12, 13.
4. Phelps, op. cit., p.
5. Phelps, op. cit., p. 61.



attraction of Truth is sufficient to effect a change in heart. It is only as truth is energized by the Holy Spirit that new birth occurs.<sup>1</sup> Thus the power that regenerates is the power of God. How the Holy Spirit works can not be understood by man, but that He is active in new birth is attested to by Scripture and by the experience of man. Jesus referred to the work of the Spirit when he said:

"The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."<sup>2</sup>

This work of the Spirit is best understood in connection with its results and will be examined more fully in that section.

## 2. Human Responsibility

Gerhard Kittel writes: "...every act of God, creation as well as redemption, assumes both the possibility and the necessity of human activity."<sup>3</sup>

Scripture also shows that man's activity is necessary for new birth. For though man has failed to meet his original responsibility God has provided new conditions for man to fulfill in order to receive new life. For example, both Nicodemus and the crowd saw the signs which Jesus did in Jerusalem. Yet, on the basis of Jesus' knowledge of the nature of man, Nicodemus alone was given a deeper revelation of the person of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Similar illustrations

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1. Phelps, op. cit., p. 62.
2. John 3:8.
3. Gerhard Kittel, Bible Key Words, p. 56.
4. Westcott, ad loc.

of the effect of man's response in determining the outcome of Divine action may be seen by contrasting the Pharisees and the blind man in John, chapter nine; the crowd and Peter in John, chapter six; and Judas and the eleven disciples in John 13:1ff. The question here is: what must man do, in order to experience new birth and receive the gift of eternal life?

a. Repentance

Repentance, or the determination on the part of man to abandon sin and amend his life, is spoken of by Jesus in connection with birth by water. Birth by water refers to the baptism of John which, by his own definition, consisted in repentance and remission of sins.<sup>1</sup> Essentially it involves a decision or a change of mind. Thus repentance is more than conviction of sin. It is more than sorrow for sin. For the rich young man was 'exceeding sorrowful' but he did not follow Jesus. And Paul wrote:

"I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; ...For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death."<sup>2</sup>

Conviction and sorrow may turn man away from God so that with Adam he seeks to hide himself from God's presence, or with Judas he becomes desperate and chooses death rather than life. Conviction and sorrow must be accompanied by the will to turn from evil and return to God if it is to lead

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1. Cf. Spence, Plummer, Westcott, ad loc.
2. II Corinthians 7:9-11.

to repentance. Strong has expressed it thus:

"The idea of *Metanoia* is abandonment of sin rather than sorrow for sin, - an act of will rather than a state of sensibility. Repentance is participation in Christ's revulsion from sin and suffering on account of it. It is repentance from sin, not of sin, nor for sin."<sup>1</sup>

True repentance involves a new understanding such as Job had when he cried:

"I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear  
but now my eye sees thee;  
Therefore I despise myself,  
and repent in dust and ashes."<sup>2</sup>

The Prodigal Son expressed the same truth when he said: "How many of my Father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my Father..."<sup>3</sup> Thus, both the inward turning from sin and the seeking of pardon and cleansing are included in repentance. Through this act man is prepared to receive God's gift of pardon and cleansing and life.<sup>4</sup>

#### b. Faith

In repentance man rejects the ways of the past; in faith he turns to Christ as the new object of his love and trust. In repentance man is prepared to receive new life; by faith man appropriates God's gift of life. Faith, therefore, concerns the positive side of man's actions.

Just as conviction of sin does not necessarily lead

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1. Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 833.
2. Job 42:5, 6.
3. Luke 15:17, 18.
4. Lang, op. cit., p. 128; Westcott, op. cit., p. 49.

to repentance, so recognition of Divine Truth does not always lead to appropriation of that Truth. Faith has been described as "the creative human answer to the creative divine offer."<sup>1</sup> That is, faith goes beyond knowledge and emotion to volition, to action.

The initial act of coming to Christ in faith involves trust and self-surrender. The disciples were asked to leave their homes and business; the rich young man was asked to give up his wealth; the Pharisees were asked to relinquish their desires for worldly glory. D. Bonhoeffer writes:

"In the gospels the very first step a man must take is an act which radically affects his whole existence. The call to follow implies that there is only one way of believing on Jesus Christ, and that is by leaving all and going with the incarnate Son of God."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus compares such belief to drinking water, and to eating bread.<sup>3</sup> Both eating and drinking imply the presence of a need, the presence of an external object, confidence that the object will meet the need, and appropriation of the object if the need is to be satisfied. Just as man's physical appetite will not be satisfied until he actually eats the food, so man will remain in spiritual necessity until by faith he partakes of the One who is the source of life.

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1. Strong, op. cit., p. 841.

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, pp. 54, 57.

3. John 4:14; 6:51.

c. Willingness to Change

The action of man in repentance and faith is determined ultimately by man's willingness to change his present situation.

If man is to realize new birth he must redirect his affections toward that truth which is revealed to him. He must do this because his alternative is to place his affections on that which is in contradiction to the nature of Christ. For in the analysis of unbelief in John 3:19 the word for darkness is *οκóτος*, meaning absolute, complete darkness.<sup>1</sup> Those who refuse to believe choose to set their affections on those things which are in complete contradiction to the light. They choose to have no fellowship with light.

This choice is determinative in regeneration; for man has been created in such a way that the nature of his desire determines his capacity. Jesus said to the Pharisees:

"But I know that you have not the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me...How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God."<sup>2</sup>

And to the Jews he said:

"I say to you you seek me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life..."<sup>3</sup>

The principle in each of these statements is the same. The nature of man's desire determines that which he seeks, and

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1. Plummer, ad loc.
2. John 5:42,44.
3. John 6:26,27.

that which he seeks determines that which he receives.<sup>1</sup>  
 Man must seek that which is of God, must respond to God's  
 revelation, if he is to receive eternal life. Strong puts  
 it thus: "The taste for truth logically precedes perception  
 of the truth, and love for God logically precedes obedience  
 to God."<sup>2</sup>

But to respond to truth is to be willing to change,  
 to be willing to see self as it really is, to be willing  
 to give up that which is sinful. For there is no fellowship  
 between darkness and light. Thus those who refuse to come  
 to the light do so because they love their present situation,  
 and do not want it exposed or changed. Concerning John  
 3:19, 20 one writer has said:

"They shrank from the demands--from the repentance, the  
 transformation of habit and character, the utter moral  
 revolution that must be consequent upon the reception  
 of the light. Darkness was loved, hailed, accepted,  
 rested in."<sup>3</sup>

#### D. The Nature of New Birth

In one respect a discussion of the nature of new  
 birth embraces all aspects of the experience: the necessity,  
 the means, the results, and so on. However, there is a  
 more limited sense in which the nature of new birth may be  
 considered. This involves an examination of the phenomenon

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1. Spence, op. cit., p. 224.
2. Strong, op. cit., p. 825.
3. Spence, op. cit., p. 125.

itself as it occurs in the life of man. Such a study would answer the question: what is the essence of new birth as it is experienced by man? It is in this more restricted sense that the nature of new birth will be considered here.

### 1. A Change in Character

The change in man's soul effected in regeneration does not involve any change in the constitution of man. No new faculty is added, and no faculty already present is taken away. Man still thinks, feels, wills, as before.<sup>1</sup>

In new birth man's character is changed. The same faculties are exercised in a new way so that what was once hated is loved, what was once beyond discernment is seen, what was once rejected is accepted. Concerning the experience Phelps writes:

"The chief subjects of thought are changed--they are revolutionized. The prime objects of love and hatred are changed--they are transposed. The supreme inclination of the affections is changed--it is reversed. The character of the purposes is changed--it is transformed. In these aspects, indeed, old things are passed away, and all things are new."<sup>2</sup>

#### a. A Change in Man's Intellect

"Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup> Just as the flesh-conditioned life was able to discern that which was of the world, so the new life in the

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1. Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, p. 346; Phelps, op. cit., p. 30.
2. Phelps, op. cit., p.31.
3. John 3:3.

Spirit enables new spiritual discernment.<sup>1</sup> The contrast between the understanding of the unregenerate and the regenerate is illustrated in II Corinthians 4:3,4, and 6.

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God...For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Satan's dominion is darkness; the Kingdom of God is light. Therefore, when man moves from the sphere of flesh to that of the Spirit, from the rule of Satan to the rule of God, he moves from darkness to light. His darkened intellect receives new sight. Old things are seen in a new light, and new things are revealed.<sup>3</sup> Thus the old man was unable to discern the true nature of God, while the new man receives the "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God."<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the old man cannot see himself as he truly is, whereas the new man sees himself in the light of God's truth.<sup>5</sup> For it was when Isaiah saw the glory of God that he cried: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"<sup>6</sup>

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1. Morgan, op. cit., p. 217.
2. Morgan, op. cit., p. 221.
3. John 3:19-21.
4. II Corinthians 4:6.
5. John 3:19-21.
6. Isaiah 6:5.



b. A Change in Man's Emotions

The emphasis placed on the affection of man in the initial act of coming to Christ is echoed by John in connection with the nature of new birth. He writes:

"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death.  
...love is of God, and he who loves is born of God, and and knows God. He who does not love does not know God."<sup>1</sup>

The word for love here is ἀγαπῶμεν.<sup>2</sup> Such love is so different that its presence may be used as a proof of the experience of new birth. In his analysis Earnest De Witt Burton says:

"There are three elements which with more or less constancy and in varying degrees of emphasis enter into the thought expressed by the word: (a) to admire, 'to approve', 'to recognize the worth of', 'to take pleasure in', (b) 'to desire to possess' (c) 'to be well-disposed towards', 'to wish to benefit'."<sup>3</sup>

Agape, then, employs the intellect and will as well as the emotions.<sup>4</sup> For its foundation is the recognition of worth and its principal feature is the desire to serve or benefit.

The direction as well as the character of man's love is changed in new birth. First, man may, in some cases, continue to love the objects which he loved prior to regeneration. But he will do so for new reasons and to different

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1. I John 3:14; 4:8.
2. The Interlinear Trans. of the Greek New Testament, ad loc.
3. Ernest De Witt Burton, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, p. 519.
4. Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 4.

degrees. Secondly, in some cases the regenerate man will turn from former objects of love to new objects of love. Thirdly, he may hate that which he once loved, and love that which he once hated.<sup>1</sup> The life of Paul provides an excellent example of these changes in the direction of man's love. For Paul continued to love the Jewish people but for new reasons. He came to hate the pharisaic legalism which once he loved and to love Christ and His followers whom at one time he hated.<sup>2</sup> Thus, for Paul, the prime objects of love and hatred were changed--they were transposed.<sup>3</sup>

#### c. A Change in Man's Will

A change in man's love and understanding results in a change in man's will. For man's will is captive to his reason, feeling, and other faculties. His volition is determined by his own principles and feelings. So that, when those faculties change, man's volition will change. In fact, as is indicated in the preceding section, in its very nature the change in man's love involves a change in man's will.

In new birth man's mind is set on the Spirit thereby freeing the will from bondage to the flesh. His will is freed in order that he may of his own volition serve the

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1. William Anderson, Treatise on Regeneration, p. 35.
2. Acts 9:lff.
3. Ante, p. 15.

Spirit. Man thus chooses to become obedient to God, to become a slave of God. In this connection Paul writes:

"But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."<sup>1</sup>

This means that man's life is surrendered to the will of God. For as God's slave his actions must be determined by God's commands. And just as the newly grafted branch finds its source of life only as it abides in the vine, so man finds the source of his strength, his new spiritual life, only as he surrenders his will to God.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. A Continuous Process

New birth is a perpetual experience, a continuous process. One who is regenerate is continually experiencing regeneration. He is constantly receiving God's revelation of truth, constantly believing and constantly growing in understanding, love, and obedience to God. In fact, in the Gospel by John the term designating faith employs the present form without exception, thereby indicating continuation of action.<sup>3</sup> John 20:31 actually reads: "But these are written that you may keep on believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."<sup>4</sup>

Although the presence of faith on the part of the disciples is manifested at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, its development is traced through to the post resurrection scenes. For example, their belief is indicated at the marriage

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1. Romans 6:17, 18.
2. John 15.
3. Plummer, op. cit., p. 7.
4. John 20:31.

feast at Cana. Yet in John 11:14 Jesus says to the disciples, "Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe."<sup>1</sup> Apparently He anticipated a fuller and deeper belief on their part.

Similarly, the regenerate man needs continual cleansing in certain areas of life. Jesus refers to this necessity in John 13:10 when he says: "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over."<sup>2</sup>

Each of these factors points to the one main truth that the realization of new life depends upon a continuous and abiding relationship to the one who is the source of life. For new birth is a growing experience wherein the believer changes from 'one degree of glory to another,' becoming changed into the likeness of Christ.

#### E. Results

Man has become a new person," created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."<sup>3</sup> Paul speaks of him as God's temple in whom God's spirit dwells.<sup>4</sup> Phelps says:

"The thoughts of such a soul may be the radiation of the thoughts of God. Its emotions may be tremulous with the sensibility of God. Its purposes may be decrees of the will of God. Its entire character may be a similitude of the holiness of God."<sup>5</sup>

Note, however, that he uses the subjunctive indicating possibility as opposed to accomplished fact. And he adds: "This is Christian privilege. Realized in experience or

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1. John 11:14.
2. Westcott, ad loc.
3. Ephesians 4:24.
4. I Corinthians 3:16, 17.
5. Phelps, op. cit., p. 216.

not, the Christian prerogative towers to this height."<sup>1</sup>

Every child of God, then, has been created for a holy life, and he will manifest such a life as he continues to abide in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

In the book of Galatians Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. However, he employs the singular when referring to these elements of character, collectively presenting them as a unity.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the passage is paralleled in I Corinthians 13:4-8.<sup>4</sup> For every fruit of the Spirit is mentioned either directly or indirectly in connection with the many aspects of love.<sup>5</sup> Sangster, therefore, declares that love is "all the fruit in one," and that "having love, we have all the fruit of the Spirit. Without love, we are nothing."<sup>6</sup>

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1. Phelps, op. cit., p. 217.
2. Morgan, op. cit., p. 195. Morgan stresses the necessity for a continuous abiding with Christ in order to manifest a holy life. He refers to Handley Moule's statement the "the difference between a soul that is filled with the Spirit and one that is unfilled, is the difference between a well in which there is a spring of water choked, and a well from which the obstruction has been removed so that the water springs up and fills the well. In every child of God the Spirit is present, waiting to fill; and if He does not fill the whole life to its utmost bound with His own energy, light, and power, it is because there is something which prevents Him and which must be removed before He can do His blessed work."
3. Burton, op. cit., p. 313.
4. Burton, loc. cit., p. 314; W. Sangster, *The Pure in Heart*, p. 101.
5. For a more detailed analogy between the two passages see Sangster, op. cit., p. 101.
6. Sangster, loc. cit.

Love (agape), then, is the first fruit of the Spirit. It is the motivating power and the source from which all else flows.<sup>1</sup> Burton defines it as "that love of man for man which resting upon appreciation of value is chiefly characterized by desire to benefit."<sup>2</sup>

Such love finds expression in humble service. Thus Christ's commandment to "love one another even as I have loved you"<sup>3</sup> followed certain events in which his love had been supremely manifested in humble service. For He had taken the role of a servant in washing the disciples' feet. And He had offered the highest token of love and personal esteem to one whom He knew to be His betrayer.<sup>4</sup> John speaks of this love when he writes: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren...Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth."<sup>5</sup>

Concerning the other aspects of love, or the fruit of the Spirit which grow out of love, only brief mention will be made and the major characteristics noted.

#### 1. Joy

This does not designate a resigned or forced attitude but one of exuberance. It is grounded in a conscious relationship with God that is constant even in trial or pain.

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1. Sangster, op. cit. p. 101. Expositor's Greek Test., p. 188.
2. Burton, op. cit., p. 314.
3. John 15:12.
4. Edersheim, op. cit., pp. 498, 504-507.
5. I John 3:16,18.
6. Burton, op. cit., p. 314; Sangster, op. cit., p. 109.

## 2. Peace

Like joy, peace does not indicate passivity, withdrawal, or dependence upon circumstances. It rather suggests that tranquility of mind which is based on utter trust in God and is the natural outcome of a harmonious relation with God and man.<sup>1</sup>

## 3. Patience

Patience and longsuffering are used interchangeably in the Scriptures. Both endurance and courage are implied in patience.<sup>2</sup> The central meaning of the word is not to suffer pain but rather "the steadfastness of soul under provocation to change."<sup>3</sup>

## 4. Kindness

Sangster describes kindness as "love in its smaller manifestations."<sup>4</sup> The costly service rendered by the early saints towards one another is an example of the warm goodwill towards all men.

## 5. Goodness

The term here is general, implying that pureness and guilelessness which distinguish one who is abiding in Christ. Sangster calls it "that central flame of holiness - goodness

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1. Sangster, op. cit., pp. 116-120; Burton, op. cit., p. 314.
2. Sangster, op. cit., pp. 124-131.
3. Burton, op. cit., p. 315.
4. Sangster, op. cit., pp. 132-140.

in its very essence - which is in some ways, the distinctive hall-mark of the saint."<sup>1</sup>

#### 6. Faithfulness

Faith in the sense of belief is not implied here. The word refers to fidelity to Christ in times of trial, and fidelity in relation to fellow man.<sup>2</sup>

#### 7. Gentleness

The term is most closely related to humility both in association, in context, and in meaning. Burton feels it involves considerateness.<sup>3</sup>

#### 8. Self-Control

Self-control suggests the mastery of one's own desires and impulses; a condition in which the personality is controlled, disciplined, and obedient.

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1. Sangster, op. cit., pp. 140-146.
2. Burton, op. cit., p. 316; Sangster, op. cit., p. 147.
3. Sangster, op. cit., p. 158; Burton, op. cit., p. 317.
4. Burton, op. cit., p. 318.
5. Sangster, op. cit., p. 168.



## F. Summary

The preceding study was undertaken in order to determine the basic characteristics of new birth. These were studied according to the logical aspects of necessity, means, nature, and results. It was recognized, however, that new birth is realized as a united event and in actual experience can not be unskinned into logical categories.

First, the necessity for new birth was found in the fact that life is made up of two spheres of existence: flesh and spirit. Man is born in the former; the Kingdom of God is in the latter. A movement from one sphere to the other necessitates the transformation of character known as new birth.

Secondly, the accomplishment of this experience was seen to depend on both divine and human action. Divine action centers in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the expression of divine love and whose work enables divine mercy. The instrument of new birth is truth as it is energized by the Holy Spirit and supremely revealed in Christ who is the truth. Man's response affects the outcome of this divine action and is ultimately determined by a moral choice. The basic need is a willingness to change the status quo. Repentance and faith both depend on this initial condition.

Thirdly, the new birth was discovered to involve a change in character as opposed to a change in constitution. The change was analyzed according to the three elements of character: intellect, emotions, and will. Again it was

found that the nature of man's character is such that a change in one aspect causes a change in the other two.

Moreover, new birth was shown to be a continuous, dynamic experience based on a vital relationship to God. Thus the regenerate man continues to grow in his new life.

Finally, the results of new birth were examined in terms of Galatians 5:22,23 and I Corinthians 13:1-7. These passages revealed that the result of new birth is a holy life manifested in loving service. Such love contains joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

CHAPTER II

NEW BIRTH AS SEEN IN THE NECESSITY  
AND MEANS OF PETER'S CHANGE

## CHAPTER II

### NEW BIRTH AS SEEN IN THE NECESSITY AND MEANS OF PETER'S CHANGE

#### A. Introduction

In the preceding chapter the major characteristics of new birth were established. The purpose of the next two chapters is to examine these characteristics in the life of the Apostle Peter. The following study concerns the necessity and the means of new birth in Peter. The discussion has been divided according to the categories suggested in chapter one. However, it is emphasized again that the phenomenon is psychological so that a portion of the material will inevitably overlap. Two other factors are noted: 1. the record of Peter's life is fragmentary, emphasizing certain phases of new birth more than others, and 2. as an individual with individual needs and personality certain aspects of new birth are more pronounced in Peter's life. Because of these two factors, portions of new birth will be dealt with more fully than others in an examination of both the necessity and the means of Peter's change.

#### B. The Necessity for New Birth

The purpose of this section is to examine those incidents in the life of Peter that most clearly reveal his lack of spiritual motivation. Chapter one sets up the universal principle that those who are motivated by the flesh

are outside of the Kingdom and in need of new birth. Therefore, once Peter's spiritual limitations are realized it is unnecessary to re-establish his general need for new birth. The discussion is divided according to the three aspects of character: understanding, love or affection, and will.

#### 1. Understanding

One of the great misconceptions prevalent among the Hebrew people at the time of Christ was their Messianic expectation. Some looked for a king, others for a prophet, and still others for a prophet-king.<sup>1</sup> Yet the majority sought a temporal ruler who would deliver the nation from physical oppression and suffering.<sup>2</sup>

These concepts plus the traditional emphasis on the keeping of the law composed Peter's religious background. Coupled with his personal standards of conduct they formed a stumbling block to his understanding of the purpose, nature, and teachings of Jesus.

##### a. The Purpose of Jesus - Mark 1:35-39

Jesus' reply to Peter as well as the general setting of the occasion throw light on the meaning of Peter's statement. For Jesus gives a declaration of His purpose thereby indicating that Peter needed clarification on this subject. The implication is that Peter's remark implied a necessary

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1. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, p. 2040.
2. F.J. Foakes-Jackson, Peter, Prince of Apostles. See pp 49-52, and 53-56 for a more detailed analysis of Peter's religious background.

connection between the desire of the crowd and the ministry of Jesus. Such a concept might have been based on the work and consequent popularity of Jesus on the preceding evening. It suggests that Peter comprehended neither the scope nor the nature of Christ's work. His vision was of a popular Messiah and his expectation was that Jesus would remain and continue to minister to the eager crowds of Capernaum.<sup>1</sup>

b. The Nature of Jesus - Humility

(1) Peter's rebuke - Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-33

Jesus' initial statement concerning His death and suffering was met with violent protest on the part of Peter. A.B. Bruce suggests that Peter actually laid hold of Jesus by His hand or garment.<sup>2</sup> A strict translation would read: "And Peter took him (Jesus) to himself, and began to rebuke him." Certain factors in the account lend insight into the nature of Peter's lack of understanding.

First, Jesus specifically speaks of Peter as the mouthpiece of Satan thereby revealing that his thoughts and words were motivated by the ruler of this world.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, Jesus indicates the contrast between the mind of Peter and the mind of God saying: "For thy thoughts are not of the things of God, but the things of men."<sup>4</sup> The

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1. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p.26, suggests that the purpose of Jesus' early morning withdrawal was to avoid the crowds and seek guidance concerning the fulfillment of His mission in relation to His recent popularity. This would emphasize the contrast between the thoughts of Peter and Jesus.
2. Alexander Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, p. 178.
3. *Ibid.*, p.179.
4. *Interlinear Trans. of Gr. Test.*, ad loc.

contrast is further emphasized by the fact that Christ had spoken in "frank, unreserved, speech" so that Peter could not have mistaken the meaning of Christ's words.<sup>1</sup> Yet Peter's statement implies perfect assurance: "It will not, can not be."<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, Christ's charge to the disciples suggests that Peter was attempting to combine the interests of self-preservation with obedience to God's will. He was saying in effect, "Save your life at all hazards,"<sup>3</sup> and in so doing was qualifying obedience to God with his standards of self interest.

(2) The Transfiguration - Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36

The blindness of Peter's understanding on the previous occasion is stressed by the fact that even the severity of Jesus' rebuke did not alter his attitude toward the cross. Six to eight days later on the Mount of Transfiguration he needed admonishment from God to 'listen to' Jesus. That this exhortation referred specifically to Christ's teaching concerning the cross is suggested by two factors. First, Luke records that the conversation between Jesus and Moses and Elijah concerned "his departure, which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem."<sup>4</sup> And secondly, despite the chronological interval of six to eight days, the authors of the synoptic Gospels

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1. W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. I, p. 397.
2. Nicoll, ad loc.
3. Nicoll, ad loc., p. 226.
4. Luke 9:31.

place Christ's teaching concerning the cross and the event of the transfiguration in immediate sequence. The suggestion, then, is that the event was inseparable from the impending visit to Jerusalem and Christ's prediction of His death. In view of this, Peter's impulsive statement implies a renewed resistance to going to Jerusalem. The heavenly admonition paraphrased "Hear Him when He speaks to you of the cross"<sup>1</sup> was truly needed.

(3) The Foot-washing - John 13:1-20; Luke 22:24-27

These two passages provide a basis for understanding Peter's rejection of the humiliation of Christ.

First, the dispute recorded in Luke suggests that greatness and service were incongruous in the eyes of the disciples. Rather one's greatness was to be measured by one's privilege. In contrast, Jesus established devoted service as the expression and measure of true greatness.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, Peter's behavior in John 13 is caused by this worldly concept of greatness. In his initial statement the personal pronouns are brought together to emphasize the contrast in persons.<sup>3</sup> That is, it was the concept of the master serving the disciple that disturbed Peter. His second statement indicates that his belief was so strong that no future explanation could persuade him to change his mind.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Cf. Bruce, op. cit., p. 197.
2. Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VIII, ad loc.
3. Nicoll, op. cit.
4. Ibid.



The use of the emphatic pronoun in verse 7 indicates the change between the thoughts of Peter and the thoughts of Jesus. The difference is further stressed in Peter's second willful statement "You shall never wash my feet."<sup>1</sup> Jesus' response shows the worldly nature of Peter's thoughts and indicates that if he persisted in such thinking he would be separated from Christ. For in rejecting the humility of Christ Peter was rejecting that which was the very nature of Christ, that which made possible His incarnation and atonement.<sup>2</sup>

c. The Hebrew Law

Jesus' denunciation of the minute regulations and demoralizing zeal of the Pharisees for outward purity was not understood by Peter.<sup>3</sup> Surprise and possible reproach are suggested in Jesus' response to him, showing that the problem lay in his spiritual insight rather than in the difficulty of the teaching. On this basis A.B. Bruce says: "In such matters all depends on possessing the requisite spiritual sense."<sup>4</sup>

Later, in his vision on the rooftop, Peter rejected a heavenly offer of food because of the same ceremonial barriers concerning this law of uncleanness.<sup>5</sup> The reply of the heavenly

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1. Cf. Ibid.; Westcott, ad loc.
2. Bruce, op. cit., p. 346.
3. Cf. Matthew 15:10-20.
4. Nicoll, op. cit., p. 215.
5. F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of Acts, p. Connect this incident with Jesus' parable in Matt. 15:10ff.

voice employs the present imperative and might read, "What God has cleansed, you must not continue to treat as common."<sup>1</sup> Thus in spite of Jesus' teaching Peter was slow to understand and had continued to uphold the Jewish food laws.

## 2. Love or Affection

The twenty-first chapter of the Gospel by John provides a key to the behavior of Peter throughout the Gospel narratives. The three questions recall his three-fold denial and suggest a lack of love as their cause. Moreover, Jesus employed the word 'agapao' in the first two questions. Yet Peter used 'phileo' in each response. Apparently Peter was sure of his personal devotion but was still unable to claim the deeper, more spiritual love for Christ.<sup>2</sup> This need for a greater love is revealed throughout his life in his lack of humility and in his lack of moral strength.

### a. Lack of Humility<sup>3</sup>

#### (1) Forgiveness - Matthew 18:21-35

Peter's question on this occasion indicates a willingness to go beyond the Rabbinical measure of forgiveness which was three times.<sup>4</sup> Yet he limits forgiveness to the legal sphere and to outward actions. In contrast, the parable told by Jesus lifts forgiveness to the spiritual sphere. Men are

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1. F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ad loc. The present imperative implies that he is not to go on doing what he is already doing.
2. Westcott, ad loc.
3. Peter's behavior (John 13 and Matt. 16:21-28) also suggests this lack of humility. Ante, p. 2.
4. Nicolls, ad loc.

to forgive from the heart, and without limit. A.B. Bruce states that the parable represents the behavior of those who are "animated by the spirit of pride, and deliberately make self-advancement their chief end."<sup>1</sup> The incident, then, implies that the disciples tended to set their affections on selfish or material goals and points out their need for a deeper love for Christ and their fellow men.<sup>2</sup> In fact the parable is part of a series of lessons in which Jesus taught the need for humility.<sup>3</sup>

(2) Leaving Everything - Matthew 19:23-20:16;

Mark 10:23-31; Luke 18:24-30

In view of the recent incident with the rich young man, Peter's question and statement suggest self-complacency as well as an anticipation of material recompense. Thus Christ warns the disciples against sacrifice for the mere hope of reward.<sup>4</sup> The parable is a continuation of the same thought. It teaches that self-righteousness will so corrupt the quality of service that those who are first in the degree of sacrifice may become last in the eyes of God. Again, the suggestion is that the disciples, having left all, were tempted to become self-righteous in their attitude and to set their affections on material rewards.<sup>5</sup>

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1. A.B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 218.
2. Cf. Ibid.
3. For an interpretation of Matthew 18:1-14 see Ibid., pp. 199-216.
4. Swete, ad loc.
5. Nicoll, op. cit., p. 252.

b. Lack of Moral Strength

Peter's proneness to yield to the influence of his surroundings suggests lack of moral strength due to inadequate love.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) John 18:17-27; Matthew 26:69-75; Luke 14:66-72;  
Luke 22:54-62

Westcott states that Peter's denials simply reflect the 'temper' of his questioners. For the form of the questions suggests a negative answer.<sup>2</sup> One notes that Peter's trouble was not rooted in want of personal devotion to Christ. The fact that he dared to follow Jesus into the court proves his devotion. But he lacked that spiritual love, which is self-denying in its nature and single in its purpose.

- (2) Galatians 2:11-21

By eating with Cornelius and with the Gentiles at Antioch Peter had acknowledged the fact that the law of Moses was no longer binding upon Jews. His behavior in drawing back, then, was not caused by lack of understanding. In the original text, the verb 'drew back' employs the imperfect tense indicating a continuation of action or, in this case, gradual action. Thus Burton declares that Peter reversed his course of action gradually because of the presence of criticism.<sup>3</sup> He sought the approval of man, not God, and

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1. Cf. Swete, *op. cit.*, p. 226.
2. Cf. Westcott, *ad loc.*
3. Cf. Burton, *ad loc.*

therefore lacked the moral strength necessary to live according to his convictions.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Will

Chapter one disclosed that man's will is governed by his thoughts and desires.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, if Peter's intellect and affections were motivated by that which is of the world it is self evident that his will was controlled by the same. In fact, since the personality is in reality indivisible, each incident which reveals a flesh-dominated mind or heart reveals also a flesh-dominated will. However, Peter's lack of yieldedness to the will of God is seen most clearly in his persistent reliance upon his own understanding or judgements as opposed to obedience to the commands or desires of Christ.

In the first place, Peter's constant rejection of the cross as well as his resistance to Jesus' washing of his feet, are based on confidence in his own knowledge of right and wrong. In John 13:7 Jesus clearly indicates that he does not expect understanding on the part of his disciple at this time, but He does expect obedience. Yet Peter remains stubborn in his actions until he is sharply rebuked. Similarly in Matthew 16:22 Peter discloses his own lack of yieldedness by virtually counselling Jesus to seek self-preservation as opposed to God's will.<sup>3</sup>

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1. The direct opposition of the converted Pharisees is indicated in Acts 15:5.
2. Cf. Ante, p. 18.
3. Cf. Ante, p. 30.

Jesus' sharp rebuke silenced him for a time though he continued to reject Jesus' teaching concerning the cross. Thus, in the Garden of Gethsemane he attempted to prevent Jesus' arrest by drawing his sword and wounding the servant of the high priest.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, despite Jesus' teaching to the contrary, Peter persisted in his confidence in the strength of his own devotion to the Master. Jesus' question in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Could you not watch"? implies lack of strength of will.<sup>2</sup> He who boasted of readiness to die for his Master had not the will power to watch with Him for one hour. Marked contrast is noted between the earnestness with which Jesus yielded His will to the Father and the readiness with which Peter yielded to the temptation of sleep. Jesus won His victory and Peter lost his battle in Gethsemane because Jesus knew His own weakness and need while Peter refused to accept or see his need. It is not surprising that the disciple who failed in obedience in the Garden would prove unfaithful under the scrutiny of a maid. Moreover, one notes that Jesus specifically warns Peter of Satan's demand and of his fall that day, yet Peter not only followed Jesus to the court but entered in and mixed with the servants of the high priest. He almost seems to flaunt his willful self-confidence in the face of danger.

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1. Cf. John 18:10, 11.
2. Cf. Swete, ad loc.

## C. Means of New Birth

## 1. Divine Action

## a. Divine Initiation

The events of Peter's life testify to God's initiation of his regeneration. For Christ called Peter to his life of discipleship; Christ appointed Peter as one of the Apostles; Christ prayed for Peter's restoration; Christ sought Peter after his downfall; Christ charged Peter with pastoral duties; and Christ made possible the new operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples. Thus it was Christ who acted first. The disciples merely responded to Him.

That this action was motivated by love is revealed throughout the Gospels. It is manifested most in Christ's dealings with Peter during the last week of His ministry. Several factors are noted in this connection.

First, Christ's humility in washing the disciples' feet was an expression of love which the disciples could not fail to recognize. Their understanding of the depth of His love would increase as they saw it in the light of their disappointing behavior.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, Christ gives Peter two specific warnings concerning his lack of moral strength.<sup>2</sup> The first warns of Satan's demand for Peter. Success in the demand is indicated by the use of the aorist tense.<sup>3</sup> Plummer suggests the

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1. John specifically mentions this in his Gospel. John 13:3,38.
2. Cf. Luke 22:31-34.
3. Cf. Nicoll, p. 627.

paraphrase, "Satan obtained you by asking" or "Satan procured your being surrendered to him."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Jesus' second warning is a definite prediction and serves to make the nature of Peter's fall more explicit. "The cock will not crow this day until you three times deny that you know me."<sup>2</sup> The warnings, then, were statements of fact. Their purpose was not to condemn the disciple but to prepare him for the crisis ahead; to give the assurance of Christ's love and concern and the promise of final turning from error.<sup>3</sup> Thus A.B. Bruce says of Christ's first statement: "One can imagine though not easily describe, how this was said - with much affection and just enough of distress in the tone to make it solemn."<sup>4</sup> In his darkest moments Peter could recall this love and promise of restoration.

Thirdly, in spite of His knowledge of Peter's impending denial of Him, Christ prayed for and secured the restoration of Peter. His concern for the life of His disciple reveals again His selflessness and the greatness of His love.

Fourthly, Christ looked on Peter after the awful prediction had been fulfilled. Mrs. Browning suggests the implications of that look in her sonnet, 'The Meaning of the Look:'

I think that look of Christ might seem to say -  
 "Thou Peter! art thou then a common stone  
 Which I at last must break my heart upon,

. . . . .

1. Plummer, Luke, ad loc.
2. John 13:38.
3. Plummer, ad loc.
4. Nicolls, p. 627.



For all God's charge to his high angels may  
 Guard my foot better? Did I yesterday  
 Wash thy feet, my beloved, that they should run  
 Quick to deny me 'neath the morning sun?  
 And do thy kisses, like the rest betray?  
 The cock crows coldly. - Go, and manifest  
 A late contrition, but no bootless fear!  
 For when thy final need is dreariest,  
 Thou shalt not be denied, as I am here:  
 My voice to God and angels shall attest,  
 'Because I know this man, let him be clear.'<sup>1</sup>

Fifthly, Christ gave special attention to Peter in the days following the resurrection. The message of the Angel to the women at the tomb contained particular reference to Peter, assuring him again of Christ's concern for him.<sup>2</sup> He was given a private meeting with Christ possibly to assure him of his forgiveness and restore him as an apostle.<sup>3</sup> And he also received individual attention in the early morning meeting by the Lake of Galilee, again revealing Christ's concern for him. The special charge to Peter at this time, serves to emphasize the completeness of his restoration and the magnitude of Christ's confidence in him.

Concerning these events A.B. Bruce writes:

"Not by his (Peter's) piety or goodness of heart was the salutary result produced, but by God's Spirit and God's providence conspiring to that end. But for the cock-crowing, and the warning words it recalled to mind, and the glance of Jesus' eye, and the tender mercy of the Father in heaven, who can tell what sullen devilish humors might have taken possession of the guilty disciple's heart."<sup>4</sup>

In the light of Peter's deplorable failure, the depth and

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1. Robertson, op. cit.,
2. Swete, Cf. Mark, ad loc.
3. Cf. A.B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 518.
4. Ibid.

splendor of Christ's love are most clearly seen. Here indeed was love undeserved by the disciple; love that knew no limits but expressed itself in self-denying service; love that had as its basis the supreme value of an individual soul.

b. Divine Instrument

The work of Divine Truth in transforming the life of Peter is indicated by his own statements. He confesses:

"You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."<sup>1</sup>

Out of his own experiences he writes to the Christian exiles:

"You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God..."<sup>2</sup>

Through Christ's teachings and work, Truth had been revealed to Peter. For example he is brought to Jesus on the basis of Andrew's statement concerning the nature of Jesus. His call to discipleship is preceded by a revelation of his sinfulness and of the divine nature of Christ. Under this conviction he confesses his sin and addresses Christ as Lord. His great confession of Christ was a revelation from God and marks a turning point in his training as a disciple.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, his denial of Christ uncovered his true nature as well as the greatness of Christ's love. This revelation forms the basis of his new humility seen in his

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1. John 6:68-69.

2. I Peter 1:23.

3. Cf. Matthew 16:17, 21.

three-fold confession of love.<sup>1</sup>

The most striking example of the power of Truth in Peter's life is found in his experience at Pentecost. In order to understand the event more clearly several facts are noted.

First, Pentecost marks a turning point in the new life of Peter. Previously his self-confidence, willfulness, and impulsiveness are dominant features of his character. Afterwards his devotion, courage, and steadfastness are given prominence.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, this change can not be accounted for in terms of a new receiving of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> For the fact that Peter had experienced new birth prior to Pentecost testifies to the work of the Holy Spirit in his life.<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, this growth in character followed the completion of Christ's earthly ministry in which the final complete revelation of God was given. Charles Erdman explains Pentecost in the following terms:

"We are not to intimate for a moment any change in the being of God, nor in the office of his Spirit or **in the** sphere of operation; the change is in the significance of a phrase which has become possible and necessary because of the revelation of God in the Person and work of Christ."<sup>5</sup>

Thus the full revelation of Divine Truth enabled this fuller operation of the Spirit which so strongly affected the life

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1. Cf. Post, p. 47-49.
2. Cf. Post, pp. 63-69.
3. Cf. Post, pp. 62-63.
4. Cf. Post, p. 60-61.
5. Charles R. Erdman, The Spirit of Christ, p. 57, 58.

of Peter.

## 2. Human Responsibility

### a. Repentance

Two outstanding references to repentance on the part of Peter are found in the Gospel narratives. The first occurs at the time of his call to discipleship.<sup>1</sup> As indicated previously Peter's behavior on this occasion stemmed from a new realization of his own sin as it was seen in the light of the holiness of Christ. The intolerableness of the contrast between the two caused the plea "Depart from me."<sup>2</sup> Paraphrased that would read, "Go out of my vicinity," rather than "Leave my boat,"<sup>3</sup> for the emphasis is on the general contrast in persons rather than on the specific situation.

Peter's response to Christ's call indicates the reality of his repentance. For the call was to a new situation. The old life must be left behind. Business, family, wife, home, friends, must be left, not just for a short time, nor for a temporary pursuit, but for a permanent occupation.<sup>4</sup> D.

Bonhoeffer describes the situation thus:

"..the disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity, from a life which is observable and calculable into a life where everything is unobservable and fortuitous, out of the realm of finite, and into the realm of infinite possibilities."<sup>5</sup>

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1. Cf. Luke 5:1ff.
2. Luke 5:8.
3. Plummer, Luke, ad loc.
4. The use of the analytical tense indicates the permanence of the occupation.
5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 51.

In answer to Christ's call Peter left the old for a new life with Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The second marked occasion of repentance on the part of Peter occurs following his denial when he "went out and wept bitterly."<sup>2</sup> A.B. Bruce suggests that he went out not because of shame or fear but in order to weep; in order to "give free reign to his penitent feelings."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Greek term indicates weeping loudly as opposed to shedding tears.<sup>4</sup> It is significant that Mark, who probably drew from Peter's own account, adds that Peter wept after he "thought thereon."<sup>5</sup> His repentance, then, was not simply emotional sorrow. Nor was it the grief of total despair such as Judas experienced. It was the response of a broken and contrite heart. Just as material possessions were left behind in his initial answer to Jesus' call, so now the spiritual pride, self-confidence, boastfulness were left, never again to dominate his life so fully. In fact, by God's grace, Peter's moral weakness would be transformed and would become a stepping stone to a holy life.

#### b. Faith

In his first Epistle Peter writes:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!  
By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living

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1. Peter's own statement "Lo we have left everything," (Matt. 19:27) reveals the completeness with which he turned from the old to the new life.
2. Matthew 26:75; Luke 22:62. See also Mark 14:22.
3. Nicolls, op. cit., p. 322.
4. Cf. Ibid.
5. Interlinear Gr. Test., ad loc.; For variation in interpretation see Swete, Mark, ad loc.; Bruce, Expos. Gr. Test., ad loc.

hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."<sup>1</sup>

This was the faith of the mature Christian. Yet the rudiments of such faith are seen earlier in Peter's life. One might describe his actions as follows: by faith Peter left his home and business to follow a carpenter from Nazareth; by faith he confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God; by faith he chose to continue his discipleship when the religious leaders and the masses of people silently rejected or openly opposed his Master; by faith Peter obeyed Christ, waiting in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit despite the possibility of persecution; by faith he rejected his Hebrew tradition and preached the Gospel to the Gentiles; by faith Peter healed, preached, faced the Sanhedrin and was delivered from prison.

Thus, Peter did not simply turn from the past. He turned to Christ. When he left his nets he went with Christ. When he said: "We have believed and we know by experience that you are the Holy One of God,"<sup>2</sup> he had by faith, begun to appropriate these words of spirit and life. When in complete humility he faced his risen Lord, turning from the old self-life he reached out in faith to receive the resurrection life.

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1. I Peter 1:3-4.
2. John 6:69.

A concrete evidence of Peter's faith is found in his continual dependence upon God in prayer. One notes for example that in the ten days following the ascension Peter waits with the brethren in prayer.<sup>1</sup> During that time they seek God's guidance concerning the election of an Apostle.<sup>2</sup> Peter and John go up to the Temple at the time of prayer, suggesting that this was their usual custom.<sup>3</sup>

Following the trial before the religious leaders Peter and John return to the fellowship of the believers and prayer for new boldness in witnessing.<sup>4</sup>

Peter prayed before he raised Tabitha<sup>5</sup> and at the time of his vision he was praying on the rooftop.<sup>6</sup> These incidents emphasize again that it was by faith that Peter lived, worked, and appropriated to himself the power of the resurrection life.

#### c. Willingness to Change

Peter's willingness to change is most clearly revealed by the fact that he did change. However, several other points may be noted concerning this aspect of his response to Jesus.

First, Peter went to Jesus. This action was not simply a matter of course, for the Jews had been told who

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1. Cf. Acts 1:14.
2. Cf. Acts 1:23.
3. Cf. Acts 3:1.
4. Cf. Acts 4:23-31.
5. Cf. Acts 9:40.
6. Cf. Acts 10:9.

Jesus was yet they made no effort to seek Him.<sup>1</sup> But Peter, on the basis of Andrew's testimony, went to Jesus. And Jesus saw into the depths of his soul and found there a willingness to be moulded, to be changed from clay to rock. He did not speak of Peter's great virtues but of his latent capacities; not of his great strength but of his ability to be changed to a man of strength. Jesus saw in Peter a man willing and therefore able to be transformed into a new creation.

Secondly, Peter's sincerity in seeking truth is seen in the stubbornness with which he clings to Christ despite outward pressures. The sixth chapter of John presents a sharp contrast between the sincerity of Peter and the insincerity of the crowd. The Jews rejected Christ because they sought the material reward of bread. Peter remained with his Master because he sought Divine Truth.

Concerning this situation A.B. Bruce comments:

"The twelve as a body, were sincere and thoroughly in earnest in religion. Their supreme desire was to know the words of eternal life, and actually gain possession of that life. Their concern was not about the meat that perisheth, but about the higher heavenly food of the soul...  
A certain element of error might be mingled with truth in their conceptions of (Christ's) Mission, but the gross, carnal hopes of the multitude had no place in their breasts."<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, the same moral earnestness is seen in Peter's actions in the days following the resurrection. For in spite of the blackness of his sin Peter did not shrink from exposure

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1. Cf. John 1:19-34.
2. A.B. Bruce, op. cit., pp. 148-149.



to the light. He did not cling to darkness but sought the fellowship of the disciples. Thus he was with John when Mary brought the message concerning the empty tomb,<sup>1</sup> and he was fishing with six of the disciples when Jesus appeared by the shore of the lake.<sup>2</sup> No description is given of Peter's first meeting with Jesus but on that morning he 'sprang into the sea' in his eagerness to be with his Lord. It is significant on this occasion that Jesus addresses him as Simon, son of Jonas, thereby calling attention to his natural character as opposed to his character as an Apostle.<sup>3</sup> The phrase 'more than these' qualifies Jesus' first challenge of his love and recalls Peter's ardent boast of supreme devotion.<sup>4</sup> The three-fold repetition of the question brings to mind Peter's denial of Him. Furthermore, while Jesus' first two questions deal with Peter's love, His last question challenges Peter's devotion or natural affection for Him.<sup>5</sup> Under this probing of his Master, Peter did not shrink or try to hide his true nature. He did not boast of greater love than the other disciples nor did he claim the love which Jesus had challenged him to. Instead he stood before Jesus claiming only his

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1. Cf. John 2:2.
2. Cf. John 21:7.
3. Cf. Westcott, ad loc.
4. Cf. Matthew 26:33. Authorities disagree on the antecedent of 'these' however, Westcott feels that the word is not neuter and therefore it refers not to the fish or the boat but to the disciples. He is supported in this by Tholuck. See Westcott, op. cit., p. 302; Tholuck,
5. Jesus' first two questions employ 'agapao,' while the third uses 'phileo.' Westcott, ad loc.

personal devotion to Him and, in response to the challenge of even this, he appealed only to Jesus' own knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Westcott describes his action thus:

"The answer of St. Peter meets the points in the changed question. He leaves out the affirmation (yea, Lord) of his former reply and throws himself wholly on the Lord, upon His absolute knowledge, and upon His special knowledge."<sup>2</sup>

One senses an attitude of complete openness to the discerning eyes of Jesus. Peter did not fear the light because his heart was right and he was willing to be changed and moulded by his Master.

Finally, it should be noted that Peter's whole-hearted devotion to Jesus was at least partially responsible for many of his impetuous blunders. His abhorrence of Jesus' coming death, his indignation at the thought of his Master serving the disciples, his impulsive use of his sword in Gethsemane, his foolishness in disregarding Jesus' warning and in following Him to the home of the high priest, all reveal a devotion which, though often blind and self-willed, nevertheless indicates his sincerity and earnestness in following the One who is the truth.

#### D. Summary

This chapter examined the need and means of new birth in the life of the Apostle Peter. These were studied in terms of the categories suggested in chapter one.

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1. Cf. Westcott, op. cit., p. 303. "The knowledge to which he appeals is not only that of divine intuition, but of immediate observation."
2. Ibid.

It was discovered that Peter's character and actions were dominated by that which was of the flesh rather than by the spirit. His understanding was limited by his religious background and by the nature of his own desires. Therefore, he was unable to understand the universal and spiritual nature of the Kingdom or to realize that humility was not only the essence of Christ's holiness but that it was the true indication of greatness.

Similarly, Peter's love was seen to be controlled by his material standards and by self-interest. The consequence was lack of moral strength as well as lack of humility.

This influence of the flesh was seen also in Peter's will. His persistent over-confidence in his own strength and understanding caused him to defy Christ's will and disclosed his lack of yieldedness to God.

Peter needed new birth. And in His love, God reached out to make him a new creation. He did this through Christ who by patience and love called, trained, and secured the forgiveness of Peter, and who by revealing the truth drew Peter to God. But His work was effective only because Peter responded with a willingness to be fashioned anew by his Master. Such willingness was accompanied by a turning from the past in which Peter left home, family, and trade and, by faith, followed the Incarnate Son of God.

CHAPTER III

NEW BIRTH AS SEEN IN THE NATURE AND RESULTS  
OF PETER'S CHANGE

## CHAPTER III

### NEW BIRTH AS SEEN IN THE NATURE AND RESULTS OF PETER'S CHANGE

#### A. Introduction

In the preceding chapter the necessity and means of new birth were examined in the life of Peter. The following study concerns the nature and results of new birth in his life. The subject will be examined according to the categories established in chapter one allowing for minor changes due to the uniqueness of Peter's situation, the limitations of the New Testament record, and the individual nature of Peter's experience.

#### B. The Nature of New Birth

##### 1. A Change in Character

Even a hurried survey of the New Testament accounts reveals the humanity of Peter. The contrasts of his foolishness and his wisdom, his impetuosity and his sincerity, his courage and his timidity, has caused J.P. Love to write: "Warm hearted, impulsive, illogical, his life seems to be cast more in the terms of everyday than do the lives of the more meditative and the more understanding."<sup>1</sup> Peter is famous for his confession of Jesus as the Christ and for his denial of Jesus; for receiving the keys of the Kingdom and

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1. Julian Price Love, From Clay to Rock, p. 8.

for acting as a mouthpiece of Satan; for his cowardice before a maid and for boldness before the Sanhedrin. His life was a "mixture of good and evil, grace and nature"<sup>1</sup> disclosing the sheer humanity of the man and endearing him to the hearts of Christendom. Clearly new birth did not bring a physical or organic change in Peter. But though Peter still had the same mind, heart, and will, as before, these became motivated by the Spirit instead of the flesh so that his character was transformed.

a. New Understanding

(1) The Nature and Scope of the Kingdom

At the time of his vision on the rooftop Peter was staying in the home of a tanner.<sup>2</sup> That, in itself, was the beginning of a wider vision, for the Jew abhorred a tanner and forced him to conduct his business outside the city limits.<sup>3</sup> But the barriers which were destroyed in taking the Gospel to the Gentiles reveal the greatness of Peter's new understanding. Two quotations are given from Alfred Edersheim and F.F. Bruce in order to clarify Peter's actions.

"..the bitter hatred which the Jew bore to the Gentile can only be explained from the estimate entertained of his character. The most vile...crimes were imputed to them..., they should, so far as possible, be altogether avoided..., they and theirs were defiled..."<sup>4</sup>

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1. A.B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 15.
2. Cf. Acts. 10:5,6.
3. G. Campbell Morgan, The Acts of the Apostles, p. 262.
4. Edersheim, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

"..of all forms of intercourse with Gentiles, to accept their hospitality and sit at table with them was the most intolerable."<sup>1</sup>

To these people Peter came accepting their hospitality and saying: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."<sup>2</sup> He defended his position before the council at Jerusalem<sup>3</sup> and although he later refuses to eat with Gentile Christians Paul intimates that this was due to lack of moral strength and not to lack of understanding or conviction.<sup>4</sup> Peter, then, was the first to break the barrier between Gentile and Jew and to see the universality of the Gospel he preached.

## (2) Christ's Nature and Passion

An examination of Peter's attitude toward the suffering and death of Christ reveals a striking change in understanding. For that which was so vehemently opposed by Peter during the life of Jesus became the very center of the Gospel he preached. For example, his first message on the day of Pentecost centers in Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified and raised from the dead.<sup>5</sup> Similar observation is made of Peter's speech to the Sanhedrin.<sup>6</sup> In fact Peter continually

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1. F.F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of Acts, p. 223.
2. Acts 10:34-35.
3. Cf. Acts 15:7-11.
4. Cf. Galatians 2:12.
5. Cf. Acts 2:22-25, 36.
6. Cf. Acts 4:10.

refers to Christ as the 'servant' of God.<sup>1</sup> Several causes are suggested for this change in attitude.

First, Peter saw the necessity of Christ's humiliation for the atonement and for the new birth of man. He speaks of being "ransomed...with the precious blood of Jesus Christ from the dead..."<sup>2</sup> In fact, God's foreknowledge concerning the suffering and death of Christ are realized. The event itself is related to the Old Testament Scriptures and in particular to the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the suffering servant.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Christ's suffering and atonement are seen to be the basis of God's covenant with man and the source of life and hope.<sup>4</sup>

Second, Peter saw Christ's glory in His humiliation. He refers to Jesus as the holy servant, the glorified servant, the servant whom God raised and exalted.<sup>5</sup> Each reference to the crucifixion is followed by a statement concerning the resurrection and the glory of Christ.<sup>6</sup> To Peter, Christ's death was not simply a necessary evil. It revealed Christ's glory for He was the holy servant, the lamb 'without blemish or spot,' who being raised from the dead was exalted with the Father.<sup>7</sup> The disciple who at Caesarea Philippi showed

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1. Cf. Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30.
2. I Peter 1:18, 19, 3.
3. Cf. I Peter 2:22-25. See also I Peter 1:2, 20; Acts 2:23; 3:17.
4. Cf. I Peter 1:10, 20.
5. Cf. Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30.
6. See for example: Acts 2:23-24; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39-40.
7. Cf. I Peter 1:19.



so little understanding of the necessity for Jesus to suffer, became the first to preach the actual necessity of the suffering and death of His Lord. The one who felt it beneath Christ's dignity to serve a disciple, became the first to preach Jesus as the suffering servant of God,<sup>1</sup> and to see in that suffering all the glory of the risen and ascended Christ.

Oscar Cullman sums this up by saying:

"..he who tried to turn Jesus from the way of suffering, and denied him at the decisive moment of the Passion story, was the first one who, after Easter, grasped the necessity of this offence. He could not express this conviction better than by using the designation ebed Yahweh; this was the more true since he must have known how great an importance Jesus himself had attached to the idea connected with the phrase."<sup>2</sup>

Third, Peter saw in Christ's humility an example for all who would be His disciples. The Christians are counseled to be 'subject' to human institutions as servants of God; servants are to be 'submissive' to their masters; wives are told to be 'submissive' to their husbands.<sup>3</sup> And the reason given is the example of Christ who "also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."<sup>4</sup> In fact suffering and humility are seen in a completely new light. Peter speaks of rejoicing in suffering because suffering tests and purges one's faith; suffering unites the

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1. Cf. Oscar Cullman, Peter; Disciple-Apostle-Martyr, pp. 67-68.
2. Ibid., p. 68.
3. Cf. I Peter 2:13, 18; 3:1.
4. I Peter 2:21.

believer with Christ; and suffering is the prelude to glory.<sup>1</sup>  
 To be reproached for Christ's sake is to be blessed. Trials  
 are opportunities, humility is the foundation of glory.<sup>2</sup> In  
 all this Christ is the example who, though he committed no  
 sin, suffered for their sakes.<sup>3</sup> Peter's former concepts of  
 personal dignity and self-preservation have no place here.  
 Truly he has learned that self-denial, humility, suffering  
 make up the road to a holy and blessed life.

b. New Love

Love for Christ lay at the heart of Peter's new life,  
 not brotherly love or affection but that spiritual love  
 which controls one's mind, will, and heart, directing all  
 one's faculties towards Christ, who alone is worthy of such  
 commitment. This was the love that became the motive of  
 Peter's life making him constant in loyalty and service to  
 Christ.

Just as Peter's denials revealed his lack of love  
 so Peter's courage before the Sanhedrin reveals his new  
 love. Two trials of Peter are recorded in the book of Acts.  
 The first trial, found in Acts 4:1-22, followed Peter and  
 John's healing of the lame man and was caused by opposition  
 to their preaching concerning the resurrection.<sup>4</sup> The

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1. Cf. I Peter 4:12-14; 1:6.
2. Cf. I Peter 4:14; 1:7; 5:6.
3. Cf. I Peter 2:22-24.
4. Cf. Acts 4:2.

challenge put to them was, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"<sup>1</sup> Peter gives a direct answer. With deliberate carefulness he identifies the One in whose name he had healed. G. Campbell Morgan suggests that Peter did not intend that there should be any mistake. Therefore, he referred to his Lord not simply as Jesus, or Christ, or Jesus Christ, but as "Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified."<sup>2</sup> That was the name. The power was God who had raised Christ from the dead.

One notes in Peter's response his faithfulness in identifying himself with Christ, his courage in referring to the resurrection power which was the very cause of his predicament, and his boldness in specifically accusing his judges of the act of crucifying Christ. Moreover, he continued to witness to Christ as the stone which they as builders had rejected and as the One who is the only source of salvation for man. Upon receiving the charge to be silent Peter and John spoke of the necessity of doing right in the sight of God and of witnessing to the resurrection. The entire incident reveals a singleness of purpose and devotion that stands in sharp contrast to Peter's 'trial' before the servants of the high priest. Here he faced the high priest himself and unquenchingly and with all boldness professed his loyalty to Christ.

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1. Acts 4:6.
2. Acts 4:10.

The same singleness of purpose is revealed in the second trial when Peter and the apostles reply to a similar challenge, "We must obey God rather than men."<sup>1</sup> It is seen in his sharp rebuke of Ananias and Sapphira,<sup>2</sup> who were motivated by self instead of love.<sup>3</sup> It is seen in his faithful services. Note, for example, that multitudes came to him for healing, that he took time to heal a lame beggar, that he carried the Gospel to the Gentiles,<sup>4</sup> that he was willing to sacrifice his leadership of the church in Jerusalem to serve as a missionary to the Christian Jews.<sup>6</sup> Such was Peter's devotion. Because of it he endured trial, suffered imprisonment, and, according to tradition, died a martyr.<sup>7</sup>

c. New Surrender of Will

Peter's new surrender of his will to God is most clearly revealed in his new dependence upon God for guidance, and strength. In order to underline this change two contrasts have been set up.

The contrast between Peter's behavior in John 21:1-3

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1. Acts 5:29.
2. Cf. Acts 5:1-11.
3. Cf. Morgan, op. cit., p. 150.
4. Cf. Acts ch. 10.
5. Cf. Acts 5:14-15. His leadership is suggested by his prominence in Acts 1-12 and by Paul's reference to him in Galatians 1:18-19. See Cullman, op. cit., pp. 33-40; Foakes Jackson, Peter, Prince of Apostles, p. 96.
6. Cf. Galatians 2:8.
7. International Standard Bible Encyclopadeia, Vol. IV. p. 2349.

and in Acts 1:12-14 suggests a new dependence upon God; for on the former occasion the disciples were in home territory, had no particular pressures, and, under Peter's instigation, took a fishing trip; whereas on the latter occasion the disciples were in Jerusalem, in danger of persecution, and remain in prayer for ten days. A.B. Bruce has described the fishing expedition thus: "It was a return to dear old ways, amid familiar scenes which call up pleasing reminiscences of by-gone times. It was...a holiday for men fatigued by sorrow and surprise and watching."<sup>1</sup> He considers it to be a time of restlessness, of doubt. In the face of the future uncertainty Peter turned to the past wistfully dreaming of its easy pleasures.<sup>2</sup> In contrast the situation in Jerusalem was accompanied not only by uncertainty but by danger. The disciples waited solely on the hope of Christ's promise and that promise concerned a phase of experience hitherto unknown to them.<sup>3</sup> How much safer to have left the city. How much pleasanter to return to their own homes and old life. Yet Peter and the brethren continue in prayer, waiting for the fulfillment of Christ's promise and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

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1. A.B. Bruce, op. cit., p. 515.
2. Cf. Ibid., pp. 515-516.
3. Cf. Erdman, op. cit., pp. 57-58.
4. In this connection Peter's faithfulness in prayer is suggested in Acts 3:1 and 10:9. The former suggests that he observed the hour of prayer and the latter suggests that he sought guidance in prayer.

Peter's dependence is also seen in his new reliance upon God for moral strength. In the Gospel narratives Peter refused to accept his own weakness. Despite Christ's warnings he bragged of his love, refused to pray in Gethsemane, and willfully placed himself in a situation beyond his strength. Marked contrast is noted when, after healing a lame man and speaking with great boldness before the Sanhedrin, Peter sought the fellowship of believers, praying with them for strength from God.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Peter yielded his will to God entering into an abiding relationship in which God supplied the direction and strength of his life.

## 2. A Dynamic Experience

The commencement of Peter's experience of regeneration can not be established; however, the following factors are noted. First, Peter's call to discipleship involved the revelation and recognition of his own sin and the holiness of Christ. Second, it required repentance and a severe break with the past. Third, Peter's response constituted an act of personal faith in the man Jesus Christ. Such faith is explained by the fact that he had followed Jesus for some time prior to his call to discipleship.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it may be established that Peter experienced new birth at the time of his call if he had not done so

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1. Cf. Acts 3:1-4:31.
2. Cf. Swete, op. cit., p. 15.

before.<sup>1</sup> That this was the beginning of a dynamic experience is attested to by the fact that Peter's new life consisted in a process of growth, and was based on a vital relationship with God.

In this connection, the following facts are noted:

First, Peter grew in faith. He had faith when he walked to Jesus on the water but it was a faith that did not stand up when he faced the reality of his situation.<sup>2</sup> He had greater faith when he refused to follow the crowd and chose to remain with Jesus proclaiming him as the Holy One of God.<sup>3</sup> He showed still greater faith when he healed in Jesus' name and preached to the Sanhedrin.

Second, the contrast between growth in understanding and love are exemplified in the change in Peter's attitude towards the cross and the change in the depth of Peter's devotion to Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Third, in his epistle Peter speaks of growing up to salvation, being built into a spiritual house, and growing

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1. The following facts suggest that this was the commencement of Peter's new life: (a) Peter's almost superstitious fear of Christ suggests the newness of the revelation concerning Christ's nature and his own sin. (b) Christ's call was unique in respect to the rest of Peter's life. (c) No record is given of the particular relationship of the twelve to Christ prior to this time. (d) This did not constitute a call to apostleship since that occurred at a later date. (Mark 3-19).
2. Cf. Matthew 14:22-32.
3. Cf. John 6:68-69.
4. Cf. Ante, p. 53-58.

in grace and knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, Peter did not receive power, or become filled with the Spirit once and for all. He continually waited upon God in prayer, and was filled with the Spirit many times.<sup>2</sup>

Fifth, despite the radical change which occurred in his life Peter did not become perfect. He continued to make mistakes and therefore to need chastisement and forgiveness from God.<sup>3</sup>

Sixth, Jesus spent over two years training and teaching and preparing the Twelve to carry on His work.

### 3. A Unique Experience

An analysis of the experience of Peter is inadequate apart from a recognition of the uniqueness of the historical period in which he lived. The fact that Peter lived at the time of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ has significance in his new birth. For Scripture specifically stresses the necessary connection between the completion of the redemptive work of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.<sup>4</sup> Thus John writes: "For as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."<sup>5</sup> And Jesus comforted

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1. Cf. I Peter 2:2, 5; II Peter 3:18.
2. Cf. Acts 4:31.
3. Cf. Mark 8:31-33; John 13:8; Mark 14:37, 66-72; John 21:15-23; Galatians 2:11.
4. See also ante, pp. 42-43.
5. John 7:39.



the disciples saying: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, although Peter could have had a deeper experience than he actually did have prior to Pentecost,<sup>2</sup> he could not have experienced this full working of the Spirit in his life until that time. For the work of the Holy Spirit presupposes the revelation of truth and that revelation was only completed after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Therefore, Peter's experience was unique. Christians today may undergo a crucial period in which the Spirit begins a fuller operation in their lives. However, this new control by the Spirit is caused by a new surrender of their lives to Him, and need not await the completion of an historical event.<sup>3</sup>

### C. Results of New Birth

Peter's new love, as manifested in humble service, was mentioned briefly in connection with the nature of his change.<sup>4</sup> However, it is discussed here for the purpose of

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1. John 16:7. See also Galatians 3:13-14 and 4:6.
2. Note, for example, that Christ rebuked Peter for his lack of obedience (John 13:8) and for his refusal to accept the cross. (Matthew 16:23).
3. In fact Peter's response to Jesus in John 21 suggests a full surrender of his life at that time. Acts 1:12-26 seems to support this. If so, this would serve to emphasize the fact that his realization of the full working of the Spirit in his life was necessarily connected with Pentecost.
4. Ante, p. 58.

emphasis and elaboration. Special attention is given to his exhortations in I Peter 5:1-5 because they center in the need for loving service and reveal that attitude which the Apostle through years of service and experience had come to realize as the basis for Christian conduct.<sup>1</sup>

Peter addressed the elders as one who is a 'fellow elder' revealing his humility and the genuineness of his fellowship with these ministers and witnesses of the Gospel. His charge to them is based on Christ's charge to him and, in fact, employs the same words as Christ used when he said "Tend my sheep."<sup>2</sup> But he elaborates the charge stressing the need for willingness to serve, eagerness or desire in serving, and being an example to the flock when one serves. Thus Peter suggests that the elders (with whom he had identified himself) are called not to be served but to serve and their service must stem from an attitude of concern for the well being of the flock. He demonstrates this attitude by his own concern in writing to them<sup>3</sup> and by identifying himself with them.

Peter's charge to everyone is to 'clothe' themselves with humility towards one another. The verb derives from the noun signifying 'an outer garment' which was used by household servants and slaves.<sup>4</sup> Peter may have been recalling

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1. Cf. James Moffat, The General Epistles, p. 162.
2. John 21:16.
3. Cf. II Peter 3:1-2.
4. Cf. Nicoll, p. 215.

the example of the One who had so lovingly washed the disciples' feet. In any case, he is referring to serving in even the lowliest of duties. Thus Peter had come to realize the lesson which his Master had exemplified; namely, that loving service lies at the heart of the Christian life.

Peter's love for Christ and for his fellow man is seen in the fruit of the Spirit which grows out of it.

#### 1. Joy

Peter's joy is revealed in the underlying tone of his first epistle, in particular in 1:3-9. He writes to those who are experiencing suffering and trial as one who has experienced them himself. Yet his message is one of hope and joy in Jesus Christ in whom to believe is to "rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy."<sup>1</sup> Thus, Peter's joy is constant even in the midst of suffering, for, in fact, suffering perfects that faith which leads to joy.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2. Peace

Peace is defined in chapter one as "that tranquility of mind which is based on utter trust in God."<sup>3</sup> Such trust is revealed in II Peter 2:4-10; 3:9, 13. It is basic in his attitude towards suffering for he says:

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1. I Peter 1:8.
2. Cf. I Peter 1:6-9.
3. Ante, p. 23.

"..Let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful creator."<sup>1</sup>

"..the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement..."<sup>2</sup>

In fact confidence and trust in God who raised Christ from the dead underlies the message of both epistles.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Patience

Peter's patience or steadfastness is seen in his actions before the Sanhedrin when he showed no fear or doubt in his position despite their persecution and exhortations to be silent.<sup>4</sup> An overall picture of his life reveals this also. For the Book of Acts testifies to the hardships in his life at that time and his Epistles reveal his continued experience with suffering. Yet out of the experience of his years he writes:

"..do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."<sup>5</sup>

### 4. Kindness

It is difficult to distinguish this aspect of Peter's love from that of gentleness. According to the definitions

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1. I P eter 1:8.
2. II Peter 2:9.
3. Cf. Ante, p.
4. Cf. Acts 4:18.
5. II Peter 3:8-9.

given in chapter one Peter's kindness might be indicated in accepting the hospitality of Simon the tanner and in sharing that hospitality with the messengers from Cornelius. It is shown further by the fact that he remained with Cornelius for several days after he had preached the Gospel to him.<sup>1</sup> Another indication of kindness is found in Acts 3:17. Peter's message to the Jews had brought them face to face with the awful fact that they had crucified their long awaited Messiah. Yet he did not speak with bitterness or hatred but with concern for their salvation. Thus he adds: "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled."<sup>2</sup> The words soften the severity of his accusation and he follows them with an invitation to repent. "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that time of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you."<sup>3</sup>

#### 5. Goodness

The term as defined in chapter one is general and refers to that pureness of heart which distinguishes one who is a Christian.<sup>4</sup> It might be seen, then, in Peter's

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1. Cf. Acts 10.
2. Acts 3:17-18.
3. Acts 3:19-20.
4. Ante, p. 23.

willingness to serve all who came to him, in his refusal to allow Cornelius to bow to him, in his rebuke of Ananias and Sapphira, in his reproach of Simon the magician, and in every instance where his actions reveal the sincerity of his relationship to Christ.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6. Faithfulness

Peter's faithfulness is seen in the constancy of his witness to Christ despite outward circumstances. Thus he witnessed to a lame man and used the opportunity created by this occasion to preach to the Jews around the Temple. He did not simply defend himself before the Sanhedrin, he preached Christ. He not only rebuked Simon, he invited him to repent and accept Christ.<sup>2</sup> His faithfulness in strengthening the Christians in exile is indicated by his letters to them. Thus, Peter used every opportunity to witness to Christ and to encourage and strengthen his brethren.

#### 7. Gentleness

Considering Peter's background it is remarkable to find this characteristic realized in his nature. For Peter was a fisherman whose trade inevitably fostered the roughness of manner which he exhibited in the Gospel.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is with surprise that one notes his gentleness in exhorting and encouraging the Christians to higher standards of conduct

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1. Cf. Acts 9:38-39; 10:26; 5:3, 4, 9; 8:20-22.
2. Cf. Acts 3:11-26; 4:8-12; 8:22.
3. Cf. Matthew 16:22; John 18:10.

and to humble service to one another.<sup>1</sup> The exhortations are based in genuine love and concern for their well being.<sup>2</sup> They contain not rebuke but encouragement. And Peter addresses the believers as 'Beloved', Ἀγαπητοί, and on one occasion as fellow elders thereby identifying himself with them and establishing a closeness of spirit.<sup>3</sup>

#### 8. Self-Control

One of Peter's outstanding characteristics revealed in the Gospel narrative was his impulsiveness, his tendency to speak or act without forethought. Because of this he rebuked and contradicted Jesus both at Caesarea Philippi and at the Last Supper, spoke, not knowing what he said, and wounded the servant of the high priest.<sup>4</sup> However, one notes a new control in his actions throughout the Book of Acts. His speeches center around one thought and purpose and he is consistent in his actions such as healing, praying, and witnessing to Christ. The persecution and trials endured do not change the temper or attitude of his conduct. In fact, his gentleness, discussed in the preceding section, is an evidence of this new self-control.

#### D. Summary

The nature and results of Peter's new birth were

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1. This is particularly noticeable in his first epistle.
2. For example see II Peter 4:5-11.
3. Cf. I Peter 2:11; 4:12; 5:1.
4. Cf. Matthew 16:22; Mark 9:6; John 18:10.

studied in this chapter. As in the preceding chapter the study was conducted in terms of the categories suggested in chapter one.

Peter's new birth was seen to involve a dynamic change in character. He received new understanding both of the nature of the Gospel and of the nature of Christ. Thus, he became the first to preach Jesus as the 'suffering servant' and first to carry the Gospel to those outside of the Jewish faith.

New love for Christ was also seen in Peter's experience. It was evident in his courage in facing the Sanhedrin and in his devotion to his service. His dependence upon God for guidance and for strength at these times revealed the fuller surrender of his will.

The dynamic nature of Peter's experience was discovered in his growth in faith, understanding and love. Moreover, Peter himself spoke of growing up to salvation and he was seen to need continual forgiveness from God, continual filling of the Spirit, and a long period of training by Christ himself.

It was noted that because of the time in which he lived, Peter's experience was somewhat unique. For the fuller working of the Holy Spirit that began at Pentecost was inevitably connected with the completion of Christ's work. Therefore, unlike the experience of Christians today, Peter could not have realized the full working of



the Spirit in his life until that time. Notation was made however, that he could have had a deeper experience than he did have prior to Pentecost.

The results of new birth were seen in Peter's new realization of the need for loving and humble service as set forth in his first epistle. The other fruit of the Spirit were then traced in his life. Joy was revealed in the underlying tone of his first epistle; peace was basic in his attitude towards suffering; patience was disclosed in his actions before the Sanhedrin and in the message of his second epistle; kindness was found in his message to the Jews and in his response to Cornelius; goodness was seen in such incidents as his rebuke of Ananias and Sapphira; faithfulness was the cause of his constant witness to Christ; gentleness was revealed in his manner of exhorting the Christians to higher standards of conduct; and self-control was seen in both his gentleness and in the evenness of his temper despite outer circumstances.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

New Birth is the core of the Christian faith. It is the seed from which all else grows. The purpose of this thesis was to examine the nature of new birth as it is seen in the life of the Apostle Peter. In order to clarify the study the subject was broken down into its logical aspects. The psychological nature of the subject was recognized, however, and it was indicated that in experience new birth is realized as a single or united event.

The necessity for new birth was seen in man's need to enter the Kingdom and have fellowship with God. In order to accomplish this man must move from the sphere of the flesh to that of the spirit. His life must become motivated by that which is of God. Such a change requires a radical transformation of character which is possible only in new birth.

Peter's character was discovered to be dominated by the flesh. His understanding was limited by his religious background and by his own desires. His love was often controlled by worldly goals or self-interest. His will was not obedient to God. Peter, as all men, was in need of new birth.

The means of new birth was revealed to be two-fold: Divine and human. God's action is a result of His love and consists in drawing men to Him by means of Divine Truth.

Man's action is a response to God whereby he repents or turns from the past and receives new life through faith. The basic condition for such response lies in the moral sphere, that is in a willingness to change.

The transformation of Peter's life occurred because of the love and patience of Christ who called, taught, and obtained forgiveness for him. Peter's response was equally important. It was revealed in a willingness to be changed by Christ that was indicated in his obedience in leaving the past with all its ties and launching out in faith in a new life with Christ.

The nature of new birth was disclosed to be a dynamic change in character as opposed to a change in constitution. Man still thinks, feels, wills as before. But the subjects of thought, the character of love, and the motivation of the will are changed. For new birth brings spiritual discernment, spiritual God-given love, and spiritual motivation. Moreover, new birth was revealed to be a continuous process so that the regenerate man must constantly experience regeneration as by faith he continues to abide in Christ.

Peter's new birth was seen to involve a change in character. He received new understanding of Christ's nature and mission, his courage and whole-hearted service reveal new love, and his dependence upon God in prayer indicates a new surrender of his will. The dynamic nature of his

experience was discovered in his growth. Peter experienced new birth at the time of his call or possibly earlier, yet the record of his life reveals a continuous process of growth. He also needed a continuous forgiveness from God and filling with the Spirit. In fact his life was based on a vital relationship with Christ who was central in all his teaching.

Finally, the result of new birth was found in the fruit of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5:22-23, and I Corinthians 13:1-7. Love was seen to be the source from which all else grows. Such love contains joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Together, these manifest the holy life which is the result of new birth.

Peter's new birth is manifested in his new realization of the need for loving and humble service among all men. His life testifies to the sincerity of his conviction. The other fruit of the Spirit were traced in his life and discovered in varying degrees.

The thesis has therefore shown that new birth was real and vital in the life of Peter, transforming him from clay to rock, from one who was of the world to one who was fashioned after the likeness of God. The reality of his experience manifests the vital power of the Spirit of God abiding in those who belong to Him. The magnitude of his transformation provides encouragement for those who become

discouraged by their own weakness and inspires all to greater faith in the power of God to build them into a holy priesthood.

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