

Born Again (Part 1)

A Different Analogy

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to John 1:21-27, which breaks into a questioning session.

John 1:21-27 And they asked him [John the Baptist], "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD," as the prophet Isaiah said." Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."

John 3:10-12 Jesus answered and said to him [to Nicodemus], "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

Both John and Jesus said and did things that went against the grain of what was commonly believed and practiced even by the Jewish leaders. I am sure that in times past you have noted what Jesus said here. He appears at least to be mildly surprised that a man of Nicodemus' position and stature in the community did not grasp the intent of what Jesus was saying. We might have asked ourselves, "How could they possibly have known? Was not this 'born again' concept something entirely new when Jesus walked and preached?" The answer is no. It was not new. It had already been preached in the Old Testament, and the Jews had some knowledge of it.

Regarding John's baptism, according to the commentary, the Jews had a well-known theological practice that when a Gentile accepted Judaism as his religion, he needed to be baptized for the sake of spiritual purity, and their comment was that as though he was "born again."

Now except for a few sects like the Essenes, who almost made a fetish of baptism, a Jew being baptized was rare, if it was done at all, because he was *born* into the religion. But, as you can see, because the Essenes were doing it, there were some Jewish groups who were baptizing. It was not completely unknown to them, and neither, brethren, was the "born again" doctrine unknown to them. That is why the surprise by Jesus, and He says to Nicodemus, "You are such a man in the community, and you don't know this?" However, through their tradition they anticipated that "Elijah to come" would baptize, and they also interpreted Elisha's counsel to the Syrian, Naaman, to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River, as a form of baptism.

Notice in John 1:23 that John associates himself with "wilderness." He apparently used that ploy as a part of his appeal for people to be baptized by associating Israel's march between the waters of the Jordan River as being a type of baptism preceding a new life in the Promised Land. So being born

again, and being baptized, was not entirely new. It was not practiced, but that was not unusual, because a thousand years had passed between David and what we see going on here, and during that period of time very much had happened, and it was very possible for them to lose things.

Now like every other doctrine, the Bible is written in a way in which there is "a little bit here and a little bit there."

I want you to go back to the book of Psalms, to David's prayer of forgiveness in Psalm 51, and you will see that he makes a bit of a mention of it here. David asks of God:

Psalm 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

The concept of needing a clean heart was not unknown to David. He understood that the carnality of his heart had to be removed, and that it would take a miraculous act of creation on God's part to provide him with a clean one, and that is what he asked for.

But now we are going to go to a book that contains quite a number of mentions of this very subject. We are going to Ezekiel 11 and I want you to notice how much *Ezekiel* knew.

Ezekiel 11:19-20 Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

Is that not what happens to us? Here it is, way back in Ezekiel—six hundred years before Christ.

Ezekiel 11:21 But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 18:31-32 Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn [repent] and live!"

Let us go a little further to Ezekiel 36:24. Look how plain this is.

Ezekiel 36:24-27 For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

So here and there God speaks of a radical change of heart that should have given them the concept, but the problem was that they did not receive the teaching as part of their understanding, and therefore not as a part of their lives either.

We are going to go to the New Testament just to pick up a bit of encouragement in the book of Hebrews, in chapter 9. He is talking about the Tabernacle and the Old Covenant.

Hebrews 9:9 It [the Tabernacle and all of its furniture] was symbolic for the present time [that is, the time in which those people lived] in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience.

Hebrews 9:24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true [The old things were copies of the true.], but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

It is always my hope that you will not ignore the Old Testament, because it is literally loaded with foundational information. Much of it is figurative, but all of it is instructive. The Tabernacle, the Temple, and all of its furnishings and ceremonies are teaching instruments given for our understanding.

Let us go back to the book of John once again. We are going to go over a couple of verses Richard used in his sermon ["Spiritual Maturity"], but in a little bit different context. What I am going to use these verses for is only to remind you, from Jesus' own mouth, where He got the things that He said.

John 8:26-28 I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him." They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father. Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.

John 12:49 For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.

Brethren, virtually everything Jesus taught has its roots in the Old Testament—even the "born again" doctrine which is seen by many people as being new. No, it was not. The roots of it were there in the Old Testament, and so when Jesus spoke those words in what is now John the third chapter, He expected Nicodemus to be tuned in to that enough to know where He was coming from. It was not new.

Isaiah 42:21 He will exalt [magnify] the law and make it honorable.

Isaiah is speaking there of the Servant of God, who was Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who will magnify the law. He will make it bigger. He will make it easier to see. He will expand its application and its authority, and He will make it honorable. What Jesus did was expand upon the foundations given in the Old Testament and put them into a New Covenant context. The New Covenant context is somewhat different from the Old Covenant context, both in the much broader application of the law of God, and a much clearer and understandable application of the symbolism that is there as well.

Though the ceremonial aspects are indeed no longer required in terms of everyday use for the workers of God, they are most certainly *not* done away in terms of instruction so that we see ever more clearly the everyday application in terms of spiritual guidance under the New Covenant. All of those sacrifices have a spiritual application under the New Covenant. That is a vivid example right

out of the book of Leviticus. They teach us total dedication to God, dedication to the service of man, and being at peace with one another.

The New Testament adds that we are "living" sacrifices dedicated to fulfilling those responsibilities in our daily life. The days of sacrificing are not over, but the sacrificing is shifted from animals to you and me, and *we* become the sacrifice by giving up our *living* life rather than being burned on a fire.

Now back to John 3. I will tell you right at this point I am going to give you a different perspective on being "born again." It is different, but it is not new.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a doctrinal controversy erupted in the Worldwide Church of God over the "Born Again" doctrine. I think some of the papers sent to the membership made the issue more confusing than it needed to be. This was at least partly because the authors tended to concentrate their efforts on defining, and then attempting to illustrate the meaning of, the Greek word *gennao*. That is the word that underlies the English translation, and that translation in most Bibles is "born again" or "born anew." But the word is also capable of being translated into "begotten again," or as implied in the context, "born from above." I will tell you right now that "born from above" is my preference, because that is what the context implies. It implies born from above by means of what *God* does.

None of those usages is technically wrong. The term, as Jesus used it, simply indicates a significant spiritual change that takes place in the life of an already living person.

I want you to think for just a moment of the Israelites being freed from their Egyptian slavery. One day they were slaves. The very next day they were free men. That, brethren, is an example of a significant change. Life went on, but a significant question remained, and it was this: Would they complete their journey and remain free? Brethren, in that analogy there, they were still the same people, except that now they were no longer in a physical bondage.

Herbert Armstrong chose to interpret the Greek word *gennao* as "begotten again," because he wanted to impress upon people that just because one had repented of sin and accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, his responsibility to his Savior was not over. In other words, the journey, the pilgrimage, had just begun. We were out of Egypt, but were we going to make it all the way to the Kingdom of God? So he felt that interpretation of the word *gennao* best illustrated that the journey was just beginning.

Mr. Armstrong wanted to impress that the convert must grow and overcome, or God's purpose of creating one in the image of Jesus Christ would not be fulfilled. He must, we must, I must, *you* must, go on to sanctification, and that process is not complete until the resurrection occurs and one is actually glorified in the Kingdom of God. This kind of covers what Richard was talking about this morning about how we have to grow in maturity from a beginning to an end. It is a continuous process that is always moving in one way or another.

I heard Mr. Armstrong illustrate it this way: If you are a Christian, you are either going forward, or you are going backward. There is no standing still. If you stand still, you are going to get swept backward, and so it is our responsibility to take advantage of God's calling and granting us

repentance, and keep going forward even if it is just a plodding manner, one day at a time, one step at a time, but always moving forward. That is something really we should thank Mr. Armstrong for, that he made that process so plain and clear in our lives.

Herbert Armstrong's choice was to illustrate this process through "a baby being in a womb" analogy. That is a reasonably good analogy, but do not forget, it is only an analogy, and all analogies eventually break down, and by their own nature, analogies are imperfect illustrations. Unfortunately, this had a lot of imperfections in it, and it is why the doctrine caused so many problems for people, because if they were doing their own personal study, they began to see that this analogy does not fit here. It does not fit *here*, and so they tried to make changes, and it caused a great deal of trouble.

I think there is a better analogy, because it is biblically based, and Richard almost touched on it this morning. I am glad he saved this one for me. He just stopped at the right verse, but he mentioned it. But I am going to give you a different analogy, and it is biblically based. Please remember that it too is only an analogy, and analogies are not absolutes.

As we begin, a significant word is "regeneration." I want you to turn with me to Matthew 19.

Matthew 19:27-29 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

Just remember the context, that Jesus used the word "regeneration."

Now we are going to go to Titus 3:3-5. Notice the context in which the word "regeneration" appears here.

Titus 3:3-5 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Reflect on the way the context in which Jesus used the term "regeneration." The key there, He Himself said, is "When the Son of Man comes in His glory." That puts "regeneration" at the time of the resurrection and the return of Jesus Christ. Now if we just stop there, you would not be getting this sermon. But let us go on to what the apostle Paul said.

Paul's usage, just as positively, places "regeneration" at the *beginning* of the process when we were still in the world, sinning left and right. Then we got God's calling from Him, and God cleaned us up through the application of the stripes and blood of Jesus Christ, and we received His Holy Spirit.

Paul puts it at the *beginning* of the process. Jesus puts regeneration at the *end* of the process. You put the two of them together, and regeneration encompasses from the beginning to the end. The whole process is regeneration, and the reason it is, is that regeneration does not take place in a moment, in the twinkling of any eye. The whole process is a regeneration.

The term "regeneration" is #3824 in *Strong's*. It is *paliggenesia* (*pal-ghen-es-ee-ah*). Its literal meaning is "new birth." Can you begin to see what I am driving at? The new birth occurs right at the beginning. God would not put contradictory terms in His Word. "Born again" is correct. It agrees perfectly with "regeneration." "Born again" encompasses the whole period of time from God's calling all the way to the resurrection of the dead, but that moment Jesus is talking about [in John 3:3—born again] is when it begins. The literal meaning of *paliggenesia* is "new birth," but figuratively its use in the Bible indicates spiritual rebirth, spiritual regeneration, and Messianic restoration. That comes right out of *Strong's*.

Now I am going to quote to you from *Vine's*. He says a great deal more, and what he says is important to our understanding. Please pay close attention. "The new birth and regeneration do not represent successive stages in spiritual experience; they refer to the same event, but it is seen from different angles."

Vine's adds (if I can make it as plain as anything), "New birth and regeneration are the same thing." In other words, the term is broad enough to encompass the entire process. But there is more from *Vine's* to confirm this. "Regeneration's synonym is *anakainosis* (*an-ak-ah-ee-no-sis*)." It is #342 in *Strong's*. *Anakainosis* literally means "renewal."

What we see here in Titus 3:5 is a typical Hebraic way of emphasizing a point where two different words that mean essentially the same thing are used to strengthen a point. Two words, one meaning. The term *anakainosis* appears in Titus 3:5, and it is translated "renewing." That is literally what *anakainosis* means. It is a new beginning.

Anakainosis also appears in Romans 12:2, in Paul's statement "the renewing of your mind." Now is the renewing of one's mind a blink-of-the-eye event that takes place at one point in time? Even though *paliggenesia* literally means "new birth," *anakainosis* confirms it encompasses the entire process from beginning to end.

I am going to quote from *Vine's* again. "*Anakainosis* is the adjustment of the moral and spiritual vision and thinking to the mind of God which is designed to have a transforming affect upon the life, and stresses the willing response on the part of the believer."

Again, like Richard said this morning, the plant has to respond and do things on its own. The new birth gets us started; then the plant has to respond. That is *anakainosis*—the renewing of the person into something entirely different.

Let us add one more thing here: the English definition of the word "regenerate." You can look this up in your own dictionary, but I have the *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedia Dictionary*, which says: "To cause complete moral and spiritual reformation." How about that? That is not a religious book. It is a secular book. [Quoting again:] "To cause complete moral and spiritual reformation in [meaning in a person], to produce or form anew, recreate, reproduce." Regeneration is simply the noun form of the verb regenerate.

Now there was nothing wrong with Mr. Armstrong's choice of teaching this doctrine in the manner that he chose, and he did it in order to correct the false approach of this world's ministers who misrepresented the term to make salvation look as easy as falling off the proverbial log. These false ministers just wanted to motivate a large number of converts to make a decision for Christ by leaving out, in many cases, the entire sanctification process of growing, overcoming, and having God's laws written on one's heart and mind through life's experiences. In so doing, they completely blinded people to the necessary creative process in which God is engaged in our lives.

In John 5:17, Jesus said, "I work, and My Father works." They are constantly at it, and what they are doing is creating the image of Jesus Christ in one's character, and this takes time and experiences in a relationship with Him.

I am going to add more to this.

II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Indeed, brethren, we are a new creation. Every physical living thing that God has created almost screams understanding to us that all living things go through a process from a beginning, and as long as nothing stops the process, there is a period of growth toward maturity.

It is helpful to understand that Paul had a choice of two words, both which are translated "new" in the New Testament. The word Paul chose here is *kainos* (*kahee-nos*). Its number in *Strong's* is #2537. Zodhiates says this: "It is used metaphorically here, meaning renewed and changed from evil to good." We are a new creation that has been changed from evil to good. *Kainos* can also mean that we are the new creation—something current not known before, newly introduced.

The other word he might have used appears in the term "New Covenant." It is the word *neas* (*neh-os*) . It is *Strong's* #3501 and it means "in relation to time." It means "useful, young." The term suggests fresh, a renovation, a refreshing, a reproduction. We are not a refreshing. We are *new* . It is not what we are, just being dolled up or something. We are something *new* .

Paul is saying that upon our repentance and conversion, we are considered by God as a brand new person with a new heart, a new family, new values, and new possessions. Nowhere does the Bible compare us to an embryo, nor to a fetus. In the Bible, brethren, we are always dealt with as a whole person, and incidentally, one who is already born, as I shall continue to prove as we go along here. This is one reason why certain analogies and metaphors are used by Paul so frequently in his word.

I want you to go to Ephesians 4. Remember, we are a new creation. We are already born.

Ephesians 4:23-25 And be renewed [*anakainosis*] in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.

Let us go to one that is even clearer.

Colossians 3:9-10 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, [Put off what?] and have put on the new man [just like a piece of clothing] who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

Again, the analogy he is making here is in dressing. Does anyone dress a fetus? We are talking all through the Bible of a whole person, not somebody who is in the womb. This is a person who is walking around, functioning, working, sleeping, dressing, undressing. You will begin to see that Paul always addresses us as a whole human being, just like he was. Not only that, we dress spiritually in the same general manner as we dress with our clothing: one piece at a time, and that is the way we dress up our character as well.

There is a parallel to this spiritual birth, and it is given at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis 1 and 2 in the physical creation. I will not go back and read that. I will just tell you what it says there, and you know that what I am telling you is the truth.

God created the living animals. As an example we will compare ourselves to mammals—full-blown and prepared to forage and to reproduce and carry out whatever their function was in the creation. Boom! They did not exist. Boom! They did. And when He created them, they were ready to go and do the purpose for which He created them.

God created Adam a whole person, and when He breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, Adam instantly became alive and began to function. There is your perfect parallel of being born again. We repent, and as Paul says, we are good as dead, and so we get buried. When we come up out of that water, and God, as it were, breathed into us the breath of His life, which is *His* life—spiritual life—immediately, brethren, we are born and ready to function as a spiritually-minded human being.

The spiritual birth parallels the physical birth at the very beginning. Can you begin to understand why Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You don't get this? It is all through the Old Testament."

Romans 8:11-14 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Immediately upon receiving the Holy Spirit from God we are *already* sons of God, not fetuses in a womb.

I will add more. This begins to get overwhelming. We are not *becoming* sons of God, brethren, we *are* sons of God! We are not waiting for a birth. It has already occurred. Let me put it this way. We are a full-blown son of God, but like any child we need time to grow up and come to the maturity that He wants to see in us. It is just the same with you, brethren. You want your children to grow up and be mature. The parallels are perfect.

Let us go back to John 3. This is just a little aside. Bullinger has an interesting comment here on John 3:3-5.

John 3:3-5 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

This is something that would take somebody like Bullinger to see. But here is the comment in *The Companion Bible* that Bullinger makes. He says, "The question [Nicodemus's question] requires a negative answer. Nicodemus misunderstands, and he uses the verb *gennaō* of the mother. The Lord uses it of the father, as meaning begetting."

Now here is the important thing. Any time Jesus taught this, He never once used the female gender. He always used the male figure "Father" as being the only one who is involved in this being "born again," or "born from above." There is no mother, and no womb involved in Jesus' teaching of it. No mother and no womb. The Father is the Creator.

At this time you are probably thinking, "What about the church? Isn't she a female figure, and are we not in the womb of the church?" The answer to that, brethren, is no. We are not in the womb of the church. We *are* the church! Try to figure that out. How can we be the church and be in the womb of the church at the same time? You see, confusion begins to arise from this analogy, and this analogy was making people think, "How can this be? Can we be in ourselves?"

Let us go to Revelation 14:1 and 4.

Revelation 14:1 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.

Revelation 14:4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.

The church, brethren, is a virgin. The church is not giving birth to babies. You begin to see that analogy falling apart. It keeps falling apart more and more.

Revelation 19:7-9 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

I do not know why I put that in there, but I think what I was thinking about is that Jesus is marrying a virgin bride.

I have another question for you. Does it not say the church is our mother? No, it does not. Let us look at that a bit more closely. Let us go to Galatians 4. This is the only place where this appears.

Galatians 4:26 But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Do you see it? It does not say the church. It says "Jerusalem above." Our mother, brethren, is a city, if we want to use that accurately. It is Jerusalem above where our Father's throne is, and is that city which is going to come down on earth. This is not unique. There are other places where Israel is considered in the same way as being the mother of its children, of its citizens.

Are you with me so far? There is more to add here, but I will reiterate this a bit. Mr. Armstrong was correct in seeing a growth process is involved regarding our salvation. Our creation into the image of Jesus Christ is not instantaneous, but his choice of using an embryo-fetus-womb-birth analogy had quite a number of weaknesses within it.

Now what about being born into the Kingdom of God by means of a resurrection? Richard touched on this.

Colossians 1:9-13 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed [translated] us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Brethren, we are already *in* the Kingdom of God. We are not only His sons, we are already *in* the Kingdom of God. We do not need to be born into it, we are already there in the mind of God.

Let us add to this. We are already citizens of the Kingdom of God, and brethren, nobody issues citizenship to an unborn fetus. The Bible sees us always as fully functioning adults, and now we see that we are already in the Kingdom of God.

I Corinthians 15:41-44 There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

I Corinthians 15:50-52 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed [not born again, changed]—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Another transformation is coming. This transformation will be from physical to spiritual—from the glory of the physical to the glory of the spiritual. It is a transformation. It is a change. It is not a birth.

I Corinthians 15:53-54 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this

mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written:
"Death is swallowed up in victory."

Now let us go to Philippians 3. Remember I told you, and you have read it yourself, that we are already in the Kingdom of God. We have been transferred there by God Himself upon the receipt of God's Holy Spirit.

Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Brethren, in those two verses citizenship and transformation are both mentioned. Citizenship is not given fetuses in the womb. There is no need to mention birth, because we have already been born again, but glorification through transformation is still necessary.

God is wasting no time with us, because He has us involved in a positive project that prepares us for His Kingdom.

Let us go back to that time period where we began this sermon.

John 2:14-22 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

The most important information for our purposes here today is that Jesus, in verse 16, declared the Temple to be His Father's house. It was a house of worship. It was His *Father's* house.

The next important step Jesus made (again, for our purposes here) was then to transfer the spiritual imagery of the Temple to His body. Now He adds one more thing, and that is that He assigns this transfer as not occurring until after He is resurrected. In other words, it did not immediately apply, and that is why He said "after three days." He said that in verse 19, and then it is confirmed by the disciples in verse 22. So Christ metaphorically became the Temple of God after His resurrection.

God wastes nothing, and this thing He did here is very meaningful to you and to me.

Exodus and Leviticus in the Old Testament contain the foundation of the Tabernacle/Temple system under the Old Covenant. In John 2 God is laying the foundation for the New Covenant *spiritual* temple system, and it is focused on Christ Himself, not a building.

I want you to go to John 4:21. Jesus adds another little thing, we might say, but it is more meaningful now that we understand it more clearly.

John 4:21-24 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

He is there prophesying the end of the Old Testament's Temple/Tabernacle system. We found out from John 2 that it is going to focus on Christ Himself, no longer on a physical building. Even though there might be a building eventually there, it is still going to focus on Jesus Christ.

Now a couple of definitions here. There are two words in the New Testament that are both translated at times into the term "temple." The one we are mostly interested in is *naos*, #3485 in *Strong's*, and Zodhiates says it is best understood as the Temple building itself in distinction from the entire area, and sometimes means specifically the central sanctuary.

The second term is *hieron* (*hee-er-on*). It is #2411 in *Strong's*. Zodhiates says it indicates the entire precincts of the Temple, including any stables, courtyards, or any other out buildings.

When Jesus referred to Himself in John 2 as being the Temple following His resurrection, He used *naos*—the one that means the building itself, or the central sanctuary. He could have easily said, "I am going to be the central sanctuary." We might say "the Holy of Holies," but He takes the whole building, including what is inside of it.

From here we are going to go to Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:17-22 And He came and preached peace to you [Gentiles] who were afar off and to those who were near [meaning the Jews]. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God [We are already in the family of God. We are already in the Kingdom of God. We have yet to be glorified.], having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Let us stop for just a little bit here. After receiving the Holy Spirit, converts are placed within the resurrected spiritual body to become part of God's Temple—God's dwelling place. We are not in the womb of the church. We are part of the body of Christ, and Christ Himself said that He would become the Temple.

These two sections of verses here—Ephesians 2:17-22 and Ephesians 1:22-23—blend the church into the Temple figure. But we have to make a distinction here. In the Bible, which is our source of truth,

the church is not a building. Do you know what the word "church" means? It means "an assembly of people." **We people are the church.** It is not a building. We are in the assembly which God is putting into the building.

Verse 22, and especially verse 23 in Ephesians 1—tell us that we complement Him. Now think of Christ. We are being added to Him. We are that which completes Him, makes Him whole. Remember, He is the Head, and we are put into this, and we make Him whole. "We fill Him to the full," is literally what it can be translated as. So our addition to Him is completing the Temple building and its staff. We will see, as we go on, that we are both the building, and we are the building's staff.

When I said earlier that the Father has us in a positive project that is intended to prepare us for the Kingdom of God, are you beginning to see, brethren, we work in the Temple. We *are* the Temple as a part of Christ. We are an assembly of people that He has called out and made a part of the Temple.

The Temple was under the operation of the priests. Jesus Christ takes up the position that under the Old Covenant Aaron had as the High Priest. Aaron's sons were part of the Temple/Tabernacle staff. Aaron's sons were the only Israelites permitted to go into the Temple. The Levites were *not* permitted to go into the Temple.

Now brethren, we are *becoming* the Temple because we are part of Jesus Christ, and it is in becoming the Temple, and it is in doing the work of a priest that we are prepared for the Kingdom of God. Are you doing the work of a priest? That is what God expects of us. And what are we to do? I will show you, in a generality, as we go on here.

You may feel there is little difference between saying "church" or "Temple," but I encourage you to think again. First, it is because the word "church" in the Bible merely means an assembly of people. Christ Himself used the term "Temple," and I think He knows which one is best.

Let us go back to the book of Hebrews again. I just go through this to remind you of the functions that there are inside the Temple, and our responsibilities will fall somewhere broadly within these things.

Hebrews 9:1-7 Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance.

I want you to kind of hold that in mind as we go to our next set of scriptures.

I Corinthians 12:4-7 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it

is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

And then he goes on to name a number of those gifts.

I Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Are you beginning to see what God is doing here? He is instructing you and me, that when He gave His Spirit, He already had a function for you and me set apart, and He gave you gifts that are necessary for you to fulfill that function within the Temple. We cannot say that we do not have the help that we need. It is there. We do not want to be guilty of calling God a liar. He has equipped us to do the work He wants us to perform within this Temple occupation.

I Corinthians 12:18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

Paul then goes on and describes things a little bit more specifically.

So what all this is telling us is that the church—the assembly of people who make up the spiritual Temple—has a very specific function. Each person has a very specific function, and all of the people together have a very specific function. It serves as His spiritual sanctuary. Jesus Christ is the High Priest, and all of us operate as functionaries under Him.

Let us go to I Corinthians 3. I was holding my breath as Richard tramped all over here, but he missed it from what I have, but he mentioned it. We are going to pick it up in verse 9.

I Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

Here the metaphor changes to the Temple. Let us notice verse 10. Notice the building terminology.

I Corinthians 3:10-13 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation . . . each one's work will become clear [manifest]; for the Day will declare it. . . .

I Corinthians 3:14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

I Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

In this particular context we are all lumped together, and the whole church, as it were, is the Temple.

I Corinthians 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

This one is very interesting because it singles each person out as also being like Christ—a temple for God's Spirit. That is a pretty high privilege to be equated, in a sense, with Jesus Christ, that we become a temple too. That is why Paul says, "Don't you dare defile your body."

I Peter 2:1-5 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, [Notice the figure "newborn babes." Not a fetus, but a babe that is already born and functioning.], desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him [Notice how the metaphor changes.] as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men [We are back to the building.], but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

There is one of our major functions. We offer up spiritual sacrifices just like the priests did in the Temple and the Tabernacle. They offered up animals. We offer up spiritual sacrifices to God.

I Peter 2:6-8 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense."

Brethren, we are not a parallel to the Levites. We are a spiritual version of the sons of Aaron the priest. The Levites functioned *about* the Temple, but only the sons of Aaron functioned *within* the Temple, directly in the function of aiding people to worship God. So we have a job, and that is the function of what priests in the Temple of God do. My guess would be that there is a parallel here that we become a part of the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ, and He is the High Priest. In God's Kingdom we are going to be kings, which is a term for leaders and priests.

Let us carry this just a little bit further.

John 6:49-58 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread [meaning Himself] which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

Brethren, it is Christ whom we eat. He is feeding us. He is the One responsible to God for preparing us for the Kingdom of God. He is feeding us so that we can be prepared when our change comes, and continue what we have been trained for under Him when He returns to this earth, and so this is what lies before us.

We are going to go back to I Peter once again, to chapter 4, verse 17.

I Peter 4:17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God.

What is the house of God? It is what Jesus said. It is the resurrected Christ. We have been made a part of that house. Christ has already been judged. He has been found worthy. He is immortal. His life is unending. He has the glory that He had with the Father from the beginning, but we are that part of the house that is not yet glorified, and judgment has come upon the house of God—upon those who have been added to what is now Jesus Christ—the Temple.

I Peter 4:17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God, and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Let us go to Revelation 11:1, because this brings us right into our day and age.

Revelation 11:1-2 Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God [We are the temple in Christ.], the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

As disciples of Jesus Christ we are being schooled. That is what a disciple is. A disciple is a learner. We are learning under Jesus Christ. We are eating of Him. We are being tested. We are being measured as to whether we are using the gifts He has given for the benefit of the church and God's glorification by our conduct.

We have already been born again. The process began when we were called and repented, and upon faith in Christ we were given God's Spirit, and were immediately made sons of God, and as a new creation we became part of the body of Christ, which is now the New Covenant spiritual temple of God. We are already in the Kingdom of God. We have been made part of that spiritual temple that is Christ, as functionaries, eating of Christ, being schooled, tested, and judged so that we will be prepared for glorification and continued service at a much higher greater level when He returns.