

Introduction

It is possible to have a conversion experience without being born again. Conversion happens in the human soul and is a purely human capability. According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit regenerates the human spirit in the new birth.

Let us begin by examining the Biblical and psychological approaches in defining human personality.

Harry Stack Sullivan, in his *Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, defines personality as the "relatively enduring pattern of recurrent interpersonal situations which characterized a human life" (Drakeford 1967, 45). This view states that one's personality is a product of the way he has related to others over a long period of time.

Freud postulated three aspects of the psyche: the

1. Conscious.
2. Preconscious.
3. Unconscious.

The *conscious* is that part of the mind containing information of which we are immediately aware. The *preconscious* is that part of the mind from which we can recall stored information at will. The *unconscious* is that vast storehouse of the mind from which one cannot recall information at will, but which has a profound influence over one's personality (Hall 1954, 54-57). These are not actual parts of the brain, but rather psychological constructs to help explain functions of the

psychē

(soul). Some see the unconscious corresponding to the human spirit. However, the writer sees the human spirit (

pneuma

) as the essential person, that exists on a deeper level and separate from the soul (*psuchē*

The New Birth Versus Conversion

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Sunday, 22 July 2018 21:35

). The spirit contains the

heart

(

kardia

)

.

(

Kardia

is never used as the physical blood pump in the New Testament). The heart contains the will

(the

ego

or decision-making self). The soul includes the

intellect

and the

emotions

.

The three levels of consciousness can be compared to an iceberg. The relatively small part of the ice above the water corresponds to the conscious. The preconscious corresponds to about the same size immediately submerged in the water. The unconscious corresponds to the largest part of the mind. The term *subconscious* is a less-precise term that includes both the preconscious and the unconscious.

As one leaves science and goes to the scriptures, he leaves *relative knowledge* and goes to *absolute or revealed knowledge*

Steps Leading to the New Birth

The Holy Spirit convicts the sinner of his sin and of his need to have the imputed righteousness of Christ:

And when He comes, He will convict {and} convince the world {and} bring demonstration to it about sin and about righteousness (uprightness of heart and right standing with God) and about judgment: About sin, because they do not believe in Me [trust in, rely on, and adhere to Me]; About righteousness (uprightness of heart and right standing with God), because I go to My

The New Birth Versus Conversion

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Sunday, 22 July 2018 21:35

Father, and you will see Me no longer;
John 16:8-10, AMP

When the sinner accepts Christ as his Savior, the Father imputes Christ's righteousness to the sinner and declares the sinner to be right with himself—this is called *justification*. Then the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner's

spirit

(

pneuma

), which is the new birth. He imparts Christ's nature into the believer's spirit.

Paul describes man as being spirit, soul and body:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit [*pneuma*

)], soul [

psuchē

] and body [

soma

] be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:23, NIV

Notice that Paul uses three different words that are translated "spirit," "soul" and "body."

Many reverse Paul's order to body, soul and spirit, due to having absorbed the world's values uncritically. We tend to be body and soul conscious. Many people are *body* and *soul* controlled rather than

spirit

controlled.

Paul further speaks of his body as "my body," as though it were a personal possession and not his essential person: "No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27, NIV).

The New Birth Versus Conversion

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Sunday, 22 July 2018 21:35

Again, Paul says that he "...would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8, NIV).

Kenneth Hagin continues,

Then in 1 Cor. 14:14 we read, "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth...." The Amplified Translation reads, "My spirit by the Holy Spirit within me prays...." In verse eighteen Paul said, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all." Paul used the terms "my spirit" and "I" interchangeably (Hagin 1975, 8).

Taking Paul's teaching and the general teaching of the New Testament, one can arrive at this definition of man: Man is "a spirit being who possesses a soul and lives in a body" (Hagin 1975, 7). With this understanding of man, we can examine the new birth in the light of man's responsibility and God's responsibility.

Man's Part: Trust Christ

But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Romans 10:8-10, NIV

The believer is not just a "forgiven sinner." God gave him the righteousness of Christ (legally) and he has been given a new nature (actually). Jesus described this inward change to Nicodemus:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come

The New Birth Versus Conversion

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Sunday, 22 July 2018 21:35

from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

John 3:1-8, NIV

Jesus answered him, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, that unless a person is born again (anew, from above), he cannot ever see (know, be acquainted with, and experience) the kingdom of God.

John 3:3, AMP

The word "again" means "*from above*." *One is born from above, since the Holy Spirit does the work. One is born again, since this is the second birth that the believer experiences. "Again" is the adverb *anōthen*, which is "from [the adverb] *anō*; from above; by analogy from the first; by implication anew: - from above, again, from the beginning (very first), the top" (Strong 1890, S.v., "anōthen").*

Jesus, in his conversation with Nicodemus, implied that we have a responsibility in the new birth. It is obvious that we cannot give spiritual birth to ourselves, but we do have a vital part. Jesus tells what our part is later in the same chapter:

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of man must be lifted up, that

The New Birth Versus Conversion

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Sunday, 22 July 2018 21:35

everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

John 3:14-18, NIV

Our part: We must (1) believe in Christ; (2) confess him as Lord and Savior and (3) repent.

Other New Testament writers teach about the new birth. Here are some quotations from Paul and Peter:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. . . .

Titus 3:5, NIV

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

1 Peter 1:23, NIV

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10, NIV

Therefore, it stands to reason that man cannot transform himself—our part is simply to trust Christ, that is, to exercise faith in Christ and repent.

The New Birth Versus Conversion

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Sunday, 22 July 2018 21:35

Not only must we trust Christ initially, but we must continue to trust Christ.

God's Part: Inner Transformation

Pneuma can be translated "spirit, wind or breath." The context determines how scholars translate it. Also, if *pneuma* is not preceded by *hagios* (Greek, "Holy") or some other qualifying word or phrase, the context will determine whether the Holy Spirit is meant, or another spirit is meant (such as human spirit). In John 3:6, Jesus reveals that the *Holy Spirit*

transforms one's

human spirit b

y the new birth. Other New Testament writers support this position.

The Holy Spirit continues to abide in the believer and maintain his new Christlike nature:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.... Ephesians 1:13, NIV

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:16, NIV

The Holy Spirit has the hard, complicated part in the New Birth—we have the easy, simple part!

What implication does the new birth have as far as self-esteem? There is a popular saying that communicates it well: "God don't make no junk!" The work of God in the human heart is a good work because the Holy Spirit changes one's essential being in the new birth. That new nature is Christlike. The indwelling Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts:

The New Birth Versus Conversion

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr - Last Updated Sunday, 22 July 2018 21:35

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love (agapē) has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Romans 5:5, NIV

Therefore, God's love is implanted in our hearts and we are able to love both our friends and enemies with this wonderful gift of God's love. We will be motivated to win the lost and disciple them.

We partake of the holy and love nature of God. Knowing this, we will begin to talk and to act like a child of God and self-esteem will rise accordingly!

Assignment: Confess aloud to yourself and friends, "I am a new creation in Christ Jesus!" ☺

"Step 14: The New Birth," is taken from my book, *How to Raise Your Self-Esteem: Using Proven Biblical Principles*.

Copyright © 1981 Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Published with Permission from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth TX

Copyright © (Popular version) John E. Russell 1993, 2018. All rights reserved.