

PLAIN TRUTH®

Volume 89, Number 2

inside

What's in an Anniversary? 2

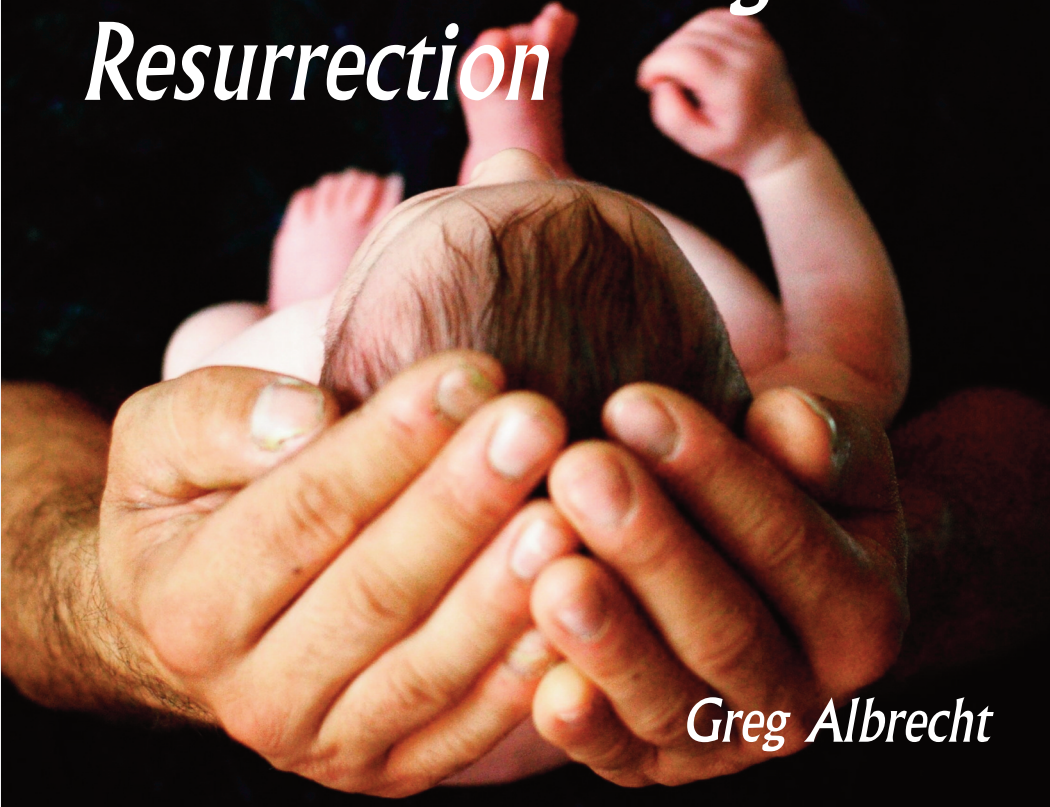
Prophecy Pays: The Gospel
Frees 5

Inside and Out 6

Sidewalk Wrinkles 7

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

New Birth Through the Resurrection



Greg Albrecht

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.—1 Peter 1:3-4

What a fascinating passage! Four points to notice: 1) God is to be praised, for 2) in his great mercy, 3) he has given us new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and 4) he has given us an eternal inheritance of life, for it will never perish, spoil or fade.

We learn more about the depth

of meaning inherent within our new birth and our eternal inheritance from conversations Jesus had with Martha and with Nicodemus. Just before he resurrected Lazarus, Jesus explained the spiritual life that he gives to all who receive him.

Jesus said this to Martha, who was grieving the death of her brother Lazarus:

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they died, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die... (John 11:25-26).

Earlier, Jesus told Nicodemus that he would never literally see, grasp or experience the "inheritance" about which Peter speaks (1 Peter 1:4) unless he was first born again.

More literally, "born again" is better understood as "born from above," as opposed to an earthly birth.

Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again (John 3:3).

New Spiritual Beginning

The Greek word Jesus used for "born" is *genno* or *genmao*—a word that is related to the word for the first book of the Bible—Genesis. Genesis means "beginning" or "bring into being." Many words in English begin with the letters "gen" and have to do with origins, creation, sexual relations, reproduction and heredity.

We think of *generation*, *gender*, *gene*, *genitals*, *genetics* and *genealogy* and of course the biblical book of *Genesis*.

Jesus was speaking of a birth from above (not of or from this earth)—a new beginning—a *re-generation*.

We see that concept in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, which is the New Testament counterpoint to the first chapter of Genesis, in that it also discusses the beginnings of all things—the origin of the universe and life within it.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning (John 1:1-2).

In these two verses, the word "beginning" is mentioned twice, within the context of the Word, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead who came, in the flesh, to reveal the Father and the fullness of God.

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 1

And while all the intervening verses in this mind-staggering, divinely beautiful first chapter of the Gospel of John are powerful and profound and so worth pondering at great length, given our topic of new birth, regeneration and new life, we skip down to:

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God... (John 1:12-13).

All who “receive” the Word of God, Jesus, God in the flesh—all who believe him, he GIVES the right to become children of God.

How does one become a child of God? 1) By receiving, trusting and believing in him. 2) NOT by human efforts—NOT by searching for God and then, once we find him, pleasing and appeasing him by our dogged determination and by qualifying for spiritual rebirth!

As children of God we are not born by *natural descent*—our spiritual regeneration is NOT by human biological means, logic, intuition, passion or effort. It is a birth from above, not from this earth.

Our spiritual rebirth is NOT BY OUR WILL NOR is it BY OUR DECISION, in terms of initiating activity that produces a birth.

And further ...*he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...* (1 Peter 1:3).

We are born anew by the power and the dynamic and the eternal reality of our risen Lord, who re-births us by living his risen life within us—it is his life that gives us eternal life, both initially when we begin our spiritual life and at all subsequent times, as he eternally breathes the breath of life into us.

The Breath of Life

Back to Genesis, *the beginning*—the book of bringing into being. In

Genesis 2:7 we read that God formed a man from the dust of the ground and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life—and thus man became a living being. ***The physical breath of life.***

One of the major lessons of our physical life and our spiritual life is that all life we have, all life we experience and all life we enjoy, is a gift. We have *derived life*—our physical life and our spiritual life is acquired, not earned—obtained as a gift, not produced by our effort—divinely originated, not humanly conferred.

That said, ***one of the great contrasts with human birth and spiritual re-birth*** is that our spiritual birth is not of any natural means or descent or decision—as human beings do when they biologically become parents—at least one of them must be sexually active even if the other does not wish to have a child or even, in the case of rape, if the other party does not consent.

So human life does involve human action—but it is not the action of the one who is born. We often speak popularly of this dynamic by saying that we do not choose our parents—we do not choose *when* we come into the world or *where*.

We often speak of the “accident of birth” when we find ourselves in favorable or unfavorable human conditions and surroundings. Parents can only be parents because they themselves were given human life—and ultimately their physical life derives to and from God.

All life—physical and spiritual, is a gift of God. Just as we obviously cannot boast of who our parents were, or the exact place and time of our arrival on planet earth, so we cannot boast of any presumed part we play in our spiritual rebirth.

But God does not force us to be spiritually reborn—and this is yet another contrast with the two lives—the two births—the physical and



He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... (1 Peter 1:3).

the spiritual. John 1:12 says that children of God become children when they RECEIVE Jesus and BELIEVE on and in his name.

We have a part in this spiritual rebirth. It is derived entirely from God—we become his children by his power and his grace and his love—but he does not force us to become his children. Our part in our spiritual rebirth is accepting God's love. We must *embrace his grace*, we must *consent to his love* and receive him—receiving him, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Back to the physical creation of humanity—in Genesis 2:7, God breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of man. Jesus spoke of the spiritual breath of life when he told his disciples of the coming of God the Holy Spirit (on the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2). After his resurrection Jesus, as one translation has it, “expelled a deep breath” saying to his disciples, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22)—the spiritual breath of life.

Spiritual New Birth Received, Embraced... Not Forced

Jesus breathed on them and invited them to “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Accept it, receive it—it is not forced! Jesus was breathing spiritual life on and into them just as God had breathed the breath of physical life into the first human.

We are, if we receive God the Holy Spirit, if we believe in God the Son, spiritually reborn children

of God. Our spiritual rebirth is from a divine source, from heaven, from above... not produced by human decision or sexual intercourse.

The New Testament uses many terms and definitions to speak of us as God's own precious children. Matthew, Mark and Luke speak of us as *the light of the world and the salt of the earth*.

These three Gospels records Jesus' invitation to us to *pick up our individual cross* and follow him. The Gospel of John explains we are *the children of God* and that we are *the fruit of the vine*, who is Jesus.

The book of Acts says we are *the people of the Way*. Romans says we are *joint heirs with Christ*, and in Corinthians we are *the temple of God—the dwelling place of God*. In Galatians we are *one in Christ, sons and daughters of God*.

In Ephesians and Philippians we are *citizens of heaven*. In 1 Peter 1:3-4 we are given *new spiritual birth and an eternal inheritance*.

Paul speaks of *the old man* who was the person before spiritual rebirth, and *the new man*, who is spiritually regenerated by the risen Lord. In Galatians 2:20, Paul tells us about his spiritual identity, and our own, the spiritual identity of all who follow Jesus, who receive him, who believe in and on him.

“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Thanks be to God—praise be to God! He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, into an eternal inheritance! □

Based on a true story, *Under Authority* is Kate Elliot's unusual account of what took place at Cross Independent Baptist Church in New England during her childhood and teen years. The pastor, Rhuttland Abbott—or the Reverend as people referred to him—believed he had been placed behind the pulpit directly by God.

To question him was to question God, resulting in swift church discipline. Those unwilling to comply with his self-imposed rules and regulations would face severe, cruel, and unreasonable penalties. Kate finally escapes this vindictive environment and builds a new life in a new city.

But after twenty years of running, she finds herself back in her hometown facing the ghosts of her past and the ongoing pain from harsh sermons, shocking incidents, and the fate of those who did not obey the Reverend—including several deaths.

Will Kate continue to run or will she find a way to overcome her fear and the far-reaching influence of the Reverend's authority?

Available on Amazon

