

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 28, Number 34

August 26, 2012



Born Again: How does it Occur?

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. (1 Peter 1:23–25, KJV 1900)

Peter's admonitions that lead up to these verses affirm a basic Bible truth. The new birth occurs first, followed by godly exhortations to faith and obedience. After the new birth, we purify our souls by obeying the truth, and we love the brethren with a pure heart fervently. We do these things after being born again, not in the process of becoming born again. (1 John 5:1; John 5:24)

However, in our study passage, Peter intends to inform us regarding the cause of our new birth. Jesus affirmed the truth of God's sovereign and immediate (No intermediate agency being employed in the process) work of the Holy Spirit by the analogy of the wind. (John 3:8)

...not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible....

The seed begins the process. Not only is the spiritual seed of which Peter writes not corrupt, but it also cannot be corrupted. It is impossible for anyone to corrupt this seed.

A significant discussion of this passage asks if the "...word of God..." here mentioned as the causing agent of the new birth is the gospel or Jesus, the living, eternal Word. (John 1:1) As frustrating and regrettable as the point is, the gospel message can be—and is—corrupted by sinful men. We have multiple examples of this sinful behavior in the New Testament. The corrupting process started while the apostles were yet alive. Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Galatians are two major examples of this sinful corruption of the gospel, as is the episode that we find in Acts 15. In fact, Paul addresses this precise failure.

For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. (2 Corinthians 2:17 KJVP)

Paul also writes of two specific men who taught that the resurrection had already occurred, even of their overthrowing the faith of some who heard them preach this insidious error.

But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the

truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. (2 Timothy 2:16-19 KJVP)

This point alone should settle the question. The gospel not only can be corrupted, but from the first generation of faithful believers, sinful men have followed their ego or other bad motives and in fact corrupted the message that they preached to hungry sheep as if it were the unadulterated truth of the gospel. It is for this Biblical reason that hungry sheep in our high-tech age should be incredibly caution regarding the sermons they download and hear from the internet. They may pride themselves into thinking that their minds cannot be corrupted, but Paul's example of the success of Hymenaeus and Philetus rejects their claim. My simple counsel to those who ask is this. Don't listen to a sermon by any man whom your pastor will not invite to preach in your church's pulpit. And observation over many years has proved again and again that the hungry sheep who fail to follow this practice often fall into grievous error, their faith being overthrown like the sheep who heard these two men in Paul's time.

The question of the identity of the word of God in our study passage should be fully settled by the points we've considered above. The "...word of God..." that causes the new birth is not corrupt, and it cannot be corrupted. The gospel can be, and sadly often is corrupted, so the causing agent for the new birth, directly or instrumentally, cannot be the gospel. It fails the descriptive test that Peter here teaches. However, Jesus, the living, eternal Word of God, was not corrupt during the Incarnation, and He could not be corrupted.

...which liveth and abideth for ever. While the message of the gospel is a "Lively" message, it is not alive. And although the truth that the gospel proclaims deals with God's eternal purpose and work, Scripture affirms that the actual gospel itself had a beginning with John's preaching in the wilderness.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1 KJVP)

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. A simple analysis of Peter's description of the causative word for the new birth should preclude our thinking that any mortal human, passionate preacher, loving parent, or anyone else can cause this work. The causative word is not corrupt, not corruptible, and it (He) lives and abides forever. Peter pauses in his discussion of the causing word to remind us that no human, mortal and ever-changing, can claim the properties necessary to cause or control such a powerful work.

*But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. Notice Peter's contrast of "...all flesh..." with the eternally abiding, causative word. In this verse, Peter further focuses on the true causing Word, Jesus, the eternal Word of God. "...which **by** the gospel is preached..." emphasizes the subject matter of the gospel, not the message itself. If Peter had intended to teach that the gospel is causative in the new birth, his words would more likely have been "...word of the gospel which is preached unto you." "...**by** the gospel..." takes us beyond the preacher and his message to the reality that the gospel preaches. Paul reminds a confused and carnal Corinthian Church.*

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2 KJVP)

Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, is the reality behind Paul's gospel. It should be the reality behind our preaching as well. And it is Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, who causes the new birth.

Perhaps some who object to this truth might observe that "word" is not capitalized, alleging that Scripture always capitalizes "Word" when it refers to Jesus. Why, oh why, do people think they can so carelessly generalize the teachings of Scripture? Consider just one of several passages that we could examine to refute this empty generalization.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 KJVP)

The translators didn't capitalize "word" in this passage. However, let's examine the verse and its context to see what we can learn of this particular "word" of God.

1. This word is "quick," alive. Peter described the word of God that causes the new birth

as being alive, so there is similarity in the "word" in the two verses.

2. Scripture may convict us and cause us to examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5), but Scripture itself does not so discern and divide.
3. Contextually—and grammatically—whatever or who ever this word may be, this same word is also described in the context as being 1) all-knowing and all-seeing, including the personal pronoun "his" in Hebrews 4:13, the very next verse.
4. The same word is referred to as our "great high priest" in Hebrews 4:14, just two verses later.

Hebrews 4:12 deals with Jesus, the living, eternal Word of God; not with Scripture or the preached word, but "word" is not capitalized in the verse. The alleged global rule fails. The decisive factor in identifying who or what the "Word" of God is in any context relies on the flow of contextual thought, not simply on whether the word is upper or lower case. Another example that explodes the capitalization idea appears in an examination of Joel 2:28, "And it shall come to pass afterward, *that* I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh...." Every publisher of a King James Bible that I've examined consistently uses the lower case "spirit" in this verse, not the upper case "Spirit." However, when Peter quoted this verse on the Day of Pentecost, King James Bible publishers are as consistent in using the upper case "Spirit," not the lower case "spirit."

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (Acts 2:16-17 KJVP)

Contextually, it is clear that Joel 2:28 refers to the Holy Spirit, regardless of the case of the first letter in the word, and Peter's words affirm the translators' belief in Acts 2:16-17.

In the process of living our lives with the noble desire to serve God on His terms, not negotiate our own terms of service to Him, we need to keep Peter's beautiful teaching firmly established in our minds. Do not fall into the distracting detour of thinking that you in some way, either directly, indirectly, or instrumentally were causatively involved in your—or anyone else's—new birth. God wholly brought it about all by Himself, and He did it on the basis of what Jesus, the living, eternal Word did for us. Our task as born again children of God is to obey the truth and thereby purify our souls, keep ourselves clean and ready for the Master's use. (2 Timothy 2:20-21) Maintain your conduct so that you will be an honorable vessel, "...fit for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor