
RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

The Biblical Doctrine of Renewal

by

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The word '*renewal*' is one of many which have been 'hijacked' from their Biblical or lexical context and then spuriously reapplied to a tendentious or sectarian cause. However, far from being confined to referring to a weird display of extraordinary phenomena or sporadic outbursts of revivalism or a religious movement in history, the Biblical doctrine of renewal embraces **the whole creation**.

In this study, we seek to overthrow the revisionism which has beset this doctrine for the last few decades, while setting out the true extent and magnificence of this unique work of Holy Spirit in salvation, which is both individual and cosmic, particular and universal in its outworkings.

"He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations"

(Rev.22:1-2)

INTRODUCTION

A great many descriptive words such as 'charismatic', 'catholic', 'ecumenism' — even the word 'Christian' itself — have been hijacked into service for a tendentious or sectarian cause in the Christian scene. Why has this come about? Primarily because we tend to behold our concerns from a very limited and egocentric perspective, instead of developing a 'holistic' outlook based on a Biblical worldview. The same fate has befallen the word 'renewal', which has either been restricted to the work of the Holy Spirit in personal sanctification, or the sensational growth of the Charismatic-Pentecostal Movement. But when we come to examine the Bible objectively we find that the term *renewal* cannot be limited to either of these two things. As we shall see, it has a truly cosmic character and throws a great deal of light on the nature of the universe, past, present and future.

The Greek word which can be translated as 'renewal' is *anakainosis*, from the verb *anakainoo*, to renew. It occurs only twice in the New Testament, although the verb form also occurs in 2 Cor.4:16 and Col.3:10. On each occasion, it is referring to the total transformation of mind and heart which God effects in

the person who repents and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. First, it is used in Romans 12:2, "*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing** of your mind*"; and again in Titus 3:5, "*[God] saved us, through the washing of regeneration and **renewing** of the Holy Spirit*".

Many commentators believe that there are two entirely separate elements in this last phrase: first, *the washing of regeneration*, second the *renewing of the Holy Spirit*. This is presumably why the King James Version translators felt moved to insert a comma between the two phrases which is not in the original. But as both the regeneration and renewal of the Christian are the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn.3:3-8), we can see no reason why this phrase should not be taken in one, so that "*the washing of regeneration and renewal*" are the twin-elements of the purifying work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the primary thrust of this study is that *all* the work of the Holy Spirit can be embraced by the term 'renewal', so that even regeneration itself is a part of the renewing process.

Let us now focus on some of the important aspects of this Holy Spirit inspired renewal in both its *objective* and *subjective, immediate* and *ongoing* senses.

I. RENEWAL BEGINS WITH A NEW BIRTH

In Tit.3:5, we see that part of the washing which the Holy Spirit is said to do involves 'regeneration', which is a translation of the Greek *palingenesia*, from *palin*, 'again', and *genesis*, 'birth' — born again. This agrees with Jn.3:6, where we see the redeemed described as

those who are *“born [again] of the Spirit”*. This spiritual rebirth is the believer’s first experience of renewal and it renders him a new creation (2 Cor.5:17). In a profound metaphor which enables us to understand more deeply what is involved in this new birth, the Apostle Paul says: *“For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness who has shone in our hearts to give light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor.4:6). This is a reference to the original creation of the universe in the Book of Genesis, where we read that God began His creative work by saying, *“Let there be light”* (Gen.1:3). And in the verse immediately before those in which this creative activity begins, we read: *“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”* (Gen. 1:2). What we learn from this is that just as the Holy Spirit was the operative energy in the original creation of the material universe, so He is also the dynamic force in the re-creation of those who are saved. Both the generation of the universe and the making of the Christian involve a creation out of nothing, light shining out of darkness.

But that is not all. Although the Holy Spirit is clearly the dynamic force behind creation, the Scripture also speaks of the cosmos as having been created *through Jesus Christ*: *“The mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things **through Jesus Christ**”* (Eph.3:9; Heb.1:2; Col.1:16). And when Christ speaks to us as the Wisdom of God in the Book of Proverbs about His work with the Father in the original creation, He discloses, *“Then I was beside Him, **as a master craftsman**; and I was daily His delight”* (Prov.8:30). A further shaft of light is thrown on this process when Paul says, *“Yet for us there is only one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live”* (1 Cor.8:6). *“Through whom are all things, and **through whom we live**”*. In other words, not only is it through Jesus Christ — the Eternal Word — that the Universe is *created*, but it is also through Him that His people are *re-created*.

Do you see the marvellous correspondence here between the processes of creation and redemption? We have the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters, as God creates the Cosmos **through** His Word, Jesus Christ: *“Let there be light!”* The Trinity **working as one in the act of creation**. And **all three Persons** can be seen with great clarity in the classic text on renewal:

“When the kindness and the love of **God our Saviour** appeared... He saved us through... the rebirthing and renewing of the

Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through **Jesus Christ** our Saviour” (Tit.3:5-6).

Such Trinitarian involvement is similarly revealed in that saying of the Lord Jesus: *“The Holy Spirit will take of what is mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that [the Holy Spirit] will take of Mine and declare it to you”* (Jn.16:14-15). What does this mean? It means that Christ’s work through His life and death provides the basic *materials* of salvation, while the Spirit’s work *applies* that provision to the souls of men and women, and thereby renders it *effective* in their experience. The Holy Spirit takes of what is Christ’s and declares it to us. The Holy Spirit ‘rebirths’ and ‘renews’ us. Therefore, the apostle can say: *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Cor.5:17). So the first work of salvation involves a person being made into a new creation by the dynamic rebirthing of the Holy Spirit, applying the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, although this renewal of man by the Holy Spirit begins with a new birth — a new creation — this is only phase one of a lifelong process.

II. THE NEW BIRTH IS ONLY THE FIRST PHASE IN THE RENEWAL OF THE CHRISTIAN

Although the Biblical Doctrine of Renewal embraces regeneration, it does not *only* embrace regeneration. For there are two aspects to the process of Christian renewal which comes from the Holy Spirit. First, there is regeneration itself, the new birth. This is instantaneous. This is **the first phase of renewal**. But that is by no means the end of the story. There is a **second phase in the renewal of the Christian** which is not instantaneous but which goes on throughout his or her remaining life of service on earth. This second phase is progressive in its outworking. In between our regeneration and our finally coming into glory, there is a whole span of activity which is also a vital part of the renewing redemptive work of the Holy Spirit. We must begin to see salvation — having once been initiated — as a continuing *process* which embraces an evolving relationship between the Lord and His people in space and time, rather than *solely* as centering in a one-off cosmic event on the Cross at Calvary.

It is often said — when comparing the difference between the Roman Catholic and Protestant approaches to salvation — that the Romanist says *“Do!”* (a reference to their understanding of salvation

through works), while the Protestant says “*Done!*” (a reference to the fact that our salvation has its roots in the finished work of Christ). Now, which one is right? You may say that the Bible witnesses to the fact that the latter is right and the former is wrong. But we believe that they are both mistaken, although in different ways. To illustrate the way to salvation as “*Do!*” is patently wrong, as the Scriptures clearly show (Eph.2:8). But to sum up salvation *simply* as “*Done!*” is incomplete. The Biblical approach to the process of salvation can be summed up in the words, “*Done, therefore you now go and do*”. It is no coincidence that the proof text for justification by faith alone (Eph.2:8-9) actually goes on immediately to say, “*For we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (Eph.2:10). Done, therefore do! That is the necessary effect of renewal. We are not just robots who have only been predestined to be regenerated — period. We have also been predestined to be holy (Eph.1:4). As J.C. Ryle succinctly put it: “*We are not justified by our works; but the justified person works!*”

The Partnership of Pardon and Renewal

An over-emphasis on the “*Done!*” aspect of salvation will lead to a disjunction or even a dichotomy between justification (pardon) and sanctification (renewal). This can be one of the most potent and subtle harbingers of Antinomianism, and it makes a mockery of the purposes behind salvation. **For, without an ongoing, lifelong process of renewal, subsequent to the new birth, that new birth would be nothing more than an abortion!** Progressive sanctification is a natural outworking of our salvation process. This is why Paul says: “*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil.2:13-14). Salvation is a process that certainly **begins** in eternity (Eph.1:3-6), and will certainly **end** in eternity (John 6:37-40). But in between there lies a whole span of activity from the new birth until bodily death.

The objective fact of regeneration is only the first phase in the renewal of the Lord’s people. There is a need for the subjective, renewing aspects of salvation to be stressed in balance of this. As Benjamin Warfield puts it in his excellent essay on renewal:

“The strong emphasis laid by the Reformers upon the objective side of salvation [pardon from guilt, A.M.], in the enthusiasm of their rediscovery of the fundamental doctrine of justification, left its subjective side [progressive renewal, A.M.]...in danger of falling temporarily somewhat out of sight. And from the comparative infrequency with which it was insisted on, occasion — if not given — was at least taken to represent that it was neglected, if not denied”. [1]

There is a great danger that we can elevate the forensic, legal, aspect of salvation (redemption, pardon, forgiveness, etc.) at the expense of the ontological, **renewing** process which grows out of it. It is not enough merely to preach *about* the fruits of the spirit. They should be visibly ripening in our lives. In fact, the purpose of our regeneration is clearly stated in Scripture. It is that we may become more loving, more joyful, more peaceful, more long-suffering of others, kinder, showing greater goodness and faithfulness, more gentle and self-controlled (Gal.5:22-23; cf. Eph.2:8-10; 1:4; Tit.2:13-14; Matt.5:16; 2 Tim.3:17; Jn.13:34-35). After all, “*love is the fulfillment of the law*” (Rom.13:10b). [2]

Just as we have the *golden chain of redemption* in Rom.8:30, ‘Predestination, Effectual Calling, Justification and Glorification’, so we also have the *golden chain of renewal* in Titus 2:14, ‘Redemption, Purification, Good Works’. The objective aspects of salvation go hand-in-glove with the subjective. Pardon and renewal — justification and sanctification — are the Siamese twins of salvation (cf. Eph.5:25-27).

To illustrate this, consider the fact that the Fall of Man was not merely an *objective* incurring of guilt and divine condemnation, a purely forensic matter. There was also a *subjective* descent into sin and an actual corruption of the heart. Real people were really affected by it in the outworking of their lives. Because of this, although an objective atonement is indeed needed to take away the guilt and divine condemnation of man, there must also be a subjective cleansing of the heart from its sin, which is both immediate and ongoing — objective and experiential. As Edmund P. Clowney puts it in his excellent work, ‘Preaching and Biblical Theology’: “*Whenever we are confronted with the*

¹ B.B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies* (P. & R., 1968), p.373.

² This does NOT mean that the Christian will be a pushover or a doormat. Neither does it mean that the believer will not powerfully stand up for what is true when confronted with falsehood. Nor does it mean that the believer will fail to make judgements and even judge others who are guilty of destroying the faith or bringing it into disrepute. Being peaceful, joyful or gentle in Christian terms does not mean that the believer will never be in conflict. Renewal does not castrate apologetics; and apologetics will always bring the Christian into conflict.

saving work of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are faced with ethical demands". To put it another way: **Ethics is gratitude**. How are those ethical demands fulfilled by us? Through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Phil.2:13-14). If we think that the work of the Spirit in the application of salvation to sinners consists solely in what is known as "*effectual calling*" or the Spirit-induced regeneration of men and women, then we are very blinkered in our spiritual perception. For the Holy Spirit continues His work of salvation throughout our entire lives. The "*going and doing*" which grows out of the "*already done*" takes place under the auspices of the Holy Spirit. That is what the doctrine of the 'Perseverance of the Saints' is all about (Phil.1:6). In other words, the new birth is only the first phase in the renewal of the Lord's people.[3]

To use a metaphor:- When God created the heavens and the earth, although His actual work of creation (*ex nihilo*) ceased after six days, that was by no means the *finale*, but merely the beginning. The universe must go through a vast process which will one day issue in the complete renewal of all things; and it is the Spirit of the Lord who lies behind this process of creating and upholding, sustaining and renewing. So it is also with the work which God does in the hearts of His children. His Spirit creates the "New Man": regeneration. But that is just the beginning of a long road. We know what lies at the end of it; but in between there is much work to be done — which leads into our final section.

III. THE RENEWAL OF THE CHRISTIAN IS ONLY THE FIRST PHASE IN THE CREATION OF A NEW UNIVERSE

There is yet another mighty fact in relation to the Biblical Doctrine of Renewal; and it takes us from the confines of the personal into the realm of the eternal. For, although we may be renewed according to the inner man — a new creation — we still inhabit a body and live in a universe which lie under the curses that God pronounced in the wake of the Fall (Gen.3:15-19). This can lead to an almost unbearable tension in the life of the Christian, as he strives to come to terms with being a new creation in the midst of a fallen world. This is the main reason why the believer must walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor.5:7). However, the Lord has been most gracious: In order that we may have an absolute assurance of our future inheritance in

eternal life, we receive the indwelling Holy Spirit as a deposit or guarantee of that fullness to come:

"Now He who has prepared for us this very thing [eternal life] is God, who **has also given us the Spirit as a downpayment**" (2 Cor.5:5; cf. Eph.1:11-13; 2 Cor.1:21-22).

So another vital component in the renewing work of the Holy Spirit is to give the Lord's people a pre-heavenly deposit — a foretaste of the glory which is yet to come. But do you want to know the mystery of all this? The work that the Holy Spirit does in sustaining and upholding the new creation that the Lord has done for us and in us, must be seen in a vastly wider context than mere human regeneration. For, although we are indeed a new creation, we are but the *avant garde*, the forerunners. While we are presently living in a universe which is still groaning under the curse of the Fall — we have been made a new creation *in advance*, as it were. For the work of the Holy Spirit in Salvation is not merely confined to the redemption of human beings. The whole universe is also in the process of being saved — again by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom.8:18-23). The establishment of the kingdom of God in this present age is but a prelude to the fullness of the kingdom in the age to come.

This is the Dawning of the Age of the Spirit

We see the firstfruits of this now. The Spirit was poured out on the Church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). It is through the power of the Spirit that we preach the Gospel (1 Pet. 1:12). It is by the irresistible grace of the Holy Spirit that people are saved (Jn.1:12-13; 3:5-8). As a prelude to the glorious salvation of the universe into the fullness of its perfection, all those who are saved will be resurrected in the last day by the power of the same Holy Spirit. "*He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who dwells in you*" (Rom.8:11).

It is in this context that the Holy Spirit is a downpayment. For through His work we enjoy a taste of heaven to come. As it has been well said: "*The Church is the suburbs of heaven*" (William Perkins). The kingdom has come in grace but not yet in glory. This is the dawning of the Age of the Spirit — not the Age of Aquarius, as the famous song goes! We are the firstfruits in the Spirit of the glorious Age to come. That is why James could say, "*Of His own will He brought us*

³ We should always remember that the work of the Spirit is *monergistic* in terms of regeneration, in that He works **without** human cooperation. That aspect of renewal belongs to God alone. However, when it comes to the ongoing work of renewal in progressive sanctification, the work is *synergistic*, in that He now works **with** human cooperation. That is the beauty of progressive sanctification. The *paraklete* — the Comforter, the Helper — gets alongside us as well as within us, coaxing and leading us along the pathway of life in the wilderness of this world.

forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (Jas. 1:18). Moreover, the Lord Jesus also spoke of this fullness of cosmic renewal when He said: "*Assuredly I say to you, that in the **regeneration**, when the Son of Man sits on His throne of glory, you who have followed Me will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*" (Matt. 19:28). The Greek word here translated as 'regeneration', *palingenesia*, is exactly the same word which is used in Tit.3:5, "*the washing of **regeneration and renewal***". This is the only other place in which it occurs in the New Testament. In the one text it refers to the renewal of all things, in the other it refers to the renewal of believers who are the firstfruits of that broader cosmic renewal. This is what Peter refers to as "*the restoration of all things*" (Acts 3:21), and was long anticipated in the Old Testament as well as in the New (e.g., Isa.51:16; 65:17; 66:22).

The entire cosmos is being saved and renewed through the power of the Holy Spirit. It never was God's intention that things should stop at the original creation, which was not the pinnacle of the highest perfection (otherwise a Fall would have been impossible). This new creation of all things is what God has been working towards from the outset. And we see that the "*rivers of living water*" which symbolize the personal renewal of the Lord's people (Jn.7:38) are reiterated in the closing pages of Scripture in the context of the renewal of the whole creation (Rev.21:1-7). Here it is clearly displayed that **the fountain of the same water of the life which is given to all believers is the beginning of the new creation which issues in the new heavens and the new earth** (cf. Isa.12:3; 44:3). This is the real context in which we must come to see the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of human beings.

EPILOGUE

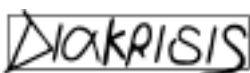
What, then, can we learn from a study of the Biblical Doctrine of Renewal? First, it tells us that salvation is truly of the Lord. If He was the one who built the original creation, He is also the one to effect the re-creation. What Man and Satan have together torn down, the Lord of Hosts can and will renew. Second, it tells us

that we should not be too egocentric and self-centred about the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. In the same way that we can become too "cosmic" in our outlook, leading to a detachment and coldness in our theology — or even to a form of mysticism — so we can also be too selfish and navel-searching in our understanding of salvation. An important balance is always needed here.

We are but the firstfruits of a complete renewal process which will affect the entire cosmos. Is it really any wonder that angels should "*desire to look into these things*" (1 Pet.1:12)? And if the angels have such a desire, surely we also should desire to search the Scriptures that we may begin to have a glimpse of what it is that God —through His Spirit — has prepared, and is preparing, for us and for the universe in which we live. Perhaps now we can understand the words of the Lord Jesus shortly before His crucifixion:

"Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **ALL** [Greek *pantas*, all things] to Myself (John 12:31-32).

The insertion by translators of the word "*men*" after "*all*" in some versions actually limits the full extent of the renewal by holding to a merely human-centered salvation. Moreover, every single human being will **not** be saved, as the Bible plainly shows (Mt.7:21-23; 2 Thess.2:12). It is **all things** that are being restored: the renewal of the entire creation — of which human beings are just the first part. At the end of the age, there will be a transformation of every constituent of this universe into a totally new universe, in which no place will be found for the Devil, his fallen angels, and the people who have helped them unrepentingly. Just as Job could only begin to comprehend the mystery of affliction in the context of the cosmic work of God (Job 40-42), so we can only begin to grasp the mystery of salvation against the same backcloth (Eph.3:8-11). This is the true context of 'renewal'. **Redemption accomplished and applied in its full cosmic perspective.** If all this could be grasped for just a moment, there would be silence on the earth for half an hour.



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