

## “Who concerning the truth have misaimed”—2 Tim. 2:18

### Misaiming concerning Paul’s Writing in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

**Misaiming:** “2 Cor 3:7-18 was neither composed by Paul nor inserted by him at its present location in 2 Corinthians...the passage is, in fact, a later, non-Pauline interpolation” (William O. Walker, Jr., “2 Corinthians 3:7-18 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation,” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters*, vol. 3, no. 2, Fall, 2013, p. 195).

**Truth:** Walker’s central argument concerning whether 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 was written by Paul is not persuasive and demonstrates an inadequate knowledge of Paul’s writings in the New Testament. The unique points made by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 match the contextual writings in other letters of his. Many of the references in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 are found throughout Paul’s writings and are not unique to this section. For example, Paul speaks of transformation being the result of beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord (v. 18), a concept that mirrors Romans 12:2, where Paul speaks of not being fashioned according to this age but being transformed by the renewing of the mind. This concept of being transformed is unique to Paul and his writings. Further, the concept of “beholding” or seeing God in His glory is not unique to this section of 2 Corinthians. In fact, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of being “face to face” (13:12) with Him, as in Exodus 33:11, and in Hebrews Paul speaks of seeing Jesus (2:9). Moreover, in chapter 2 of 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of forgiving someone in the person (or face) of Christ (v. 10), and in chapter 4, of the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (v. 6).

Additionally, Paul’s use of the term *ministry* (3:7) is not unique to this section either. He utilizes it at the beginning of the chapter, metaphorically referring to his ministry as an inscribing of the “ink” of “the Spirit of the living God” (v. 3); in chapter 4 he speaks of having

a ministry that causes the ministers of the new covenant to not lose heart (v. 1); in chapter 5 he speaks of a ministry of reconciliation (v. 18), which also matches what he wrote in Romans 5.

An outstanding feature of 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, one that matches Paul’s other writings, is his definitive identification of “the Lord” with “the Spirit” when he states, “The Lord is the Spirit” (v. 17) and, following this, when he uses the compound title *the Lord Spirit* (v. 18), which clearly points out that “the Lord”

(v. 17), who is Christ (v. 14), is “the Spirit.” This corresponds to Paul’s often overlooked but extraordinary expression in 1 Corinthians 15:45b that “the last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving Spirit.” Paul also equates the Lord with the Spirit in other passages, such as Romans 8:9-11, which refers to the Spirit of God, the

Spirit of Christ, and Christ dwelling in us at the same time, thus indicating Their essential oneness, and Philippians 1:19, where Paul refers to the Spirit as “the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

By comparing Paul’s use of apparently unique terms in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 with his other writings, it becomes evident that the writing in these verses consistently matches his writings elsewhere, which supports the sole logical conclusion that this section was, in fact, written by Paul. This attempt to argue that Paul was not the author of these verses casts a shadow of doubt over the truth referred to in the passage, namely that the Lord is coinherently one with the Spirit and that the Spirit is the realization of Christ in the believers’ experience of transformation through their direct, face-to-face contact with the Lord Spirit by beholding and reflecting His glory.

### Misaiming concerning the Intrinsic Essence of the Church

**Misaiming:** “With a new understanding and passion for what together we could become, [we] went from being

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monoethnic to becoming a healthy multiethnic church...

Seeing the diversity of our pastoral leadership team, our personal relationships and interaction, as well as our mutual respect for each other clearly communicated, as it does to this day, that we are a church for *all* people” (Mark DeYmaz, “From Monolithic to Multiethnic—How Understanding the Mystery of the Gospel Transformed a Church,” *Outreach*, Nov.-Dec. 2020, pp. 116-117).

**Truth:** In this article the author details his commendable journey in trying to apprehend the mystery of the gospel as defined in Ephesians 3:6, coming to the conclusion that the mission of the church is to proclaim and demonstrate the love of God beyond the lines of race and class so that diverse others in the community will be drawn to Jesus by our love for them and for one another. While the church is rightly composed of believers from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds—“out of every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9)—the recognition and celebration of these distinctions directly contradict the true nature of the church, which is Christ alone. In the church as the one new man, there is no distinctions and no cultural hold-overs, whether in pastoral leadership or in church gatherings. While it is noteworthy that the author tells of how the leaders in his group care for their congregation regardless of their race, which is unusual in this day and age, the progress of a group of Christians actually leads to the elimination of all racial and cultural distinctions among them.

In Ephesians 2:15 Paul writes concerning how the Lord on the cross was “abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, so making peace.” The Jews and the Gentiles were at enmity with each other and among themselves, but on the cross Christ created a new corporate entity called the new man, in which all races, cultural distinctions, ordinances, and ways of living that divide humanity were terminated and abolished. Therefore, a continuance of the diversity that Christ terminated on the cross in order to produce the one Body of Christ should not be lauded as a commendable goal.

In Colossians 3:9-11 Paul encourages the believers in the church in Colossae to “put off the old man” and their old manner of life and to “put on the new man... where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.” In other words, the church should not seek, through outward recognition and practices, to be a multiethnic expression as an end unto itself. A scriptural expression of the church can come

only out of an experiential realization that Christ has abolished all the racial and cultural differences of our “old” fallen man and has imparted Himself into us as our person. Through experiencing Him as the One who is “all and in all,” the church is brought into the oneness and living of the one new man, in which all cultural and racial distinctions are not only not celebrated but eliminated so that only Christ is exhibited and expressed. Such a living of the one new man, as a living expression of Christ alone, is the ultimate goal of God’s salvation and the highest manifestation and realization of the church.

### Misaiming concerning the New Birth in John 3 Being a Metaphor

**Misaiming:** “We should not only value what metaphors in Scripture mean but also see these particular metaphors themselves as a gift from God to convey something valuable about who he is and what he is doing. In the case of ‘born again,’ the conception of spiritual life in Christ as a form of birth leads us to think about how birth itself is like our own spiritual journey” (Beth Stovell, “We Need to Take Jesus’ Metaphor of Being Born Again More Seriously,” *Christianity Today*, Nov. 2017, p. 56).

**Truth:** Stovell’s scholarship focuses on the value of metaphor. The body of her work demonstrates that metaphors are essential conveyers of truth in the Scriptures and that it matters how we study them. Relevant to this article is *In Making Sense of Motherhood: Biblical and Theological Perspectives* (Wipf and Stock, 2016). There and in this article Stovell explores the metaphors of motherhood in the Scriptures, suggesting that our views of motherhood impact our views of being “born again.” Indeed, the Bible is filled with metaphors and imagery that help the believers to grasp many mysterious and intangible realities spoken by the Lord Jesus and the apostles. But concerning John 3, Stovell misaims when using metaphorical analysis to inform Christian understanding of the new birth. By relegating the matter of being born again to the status of being merely a metaphor, Stovell undermines a crucial truth in God’s plan of salvation, namely the reality of the impartation of the divine life of the Triune God through faith in Christ, which results in a new spiritual birth by the Spirit in the regenerated human spirit: “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (v. 6). Without this truth, the reality of being sons of God also becomes a metaphor. While Stovell is well-intentioned in her effort to move beyond viewing the matter of being born again as being just a call to come to Jesus, her conclusions fall short of the revelation that the new birth is, in reality, a new birth of the divine life in redeemed and regenerated humanity. By superimposing a metaphorical lens over the new birth, she diverts her readers from seeing and entering

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into the kingdom of God (vv. 3, 5). Moreover, she veils them from seeing, thus depriving them of the central vision of the experience of regeneration in the economy of God—that of the divine Spirit entering the human spirit to regenerate and enliven a sinner with the eternal life of God (vv. 15-16).

It is not correct to teach that the new birth is a metaphor, for the new birth is a fact, a reality (vv. 6-7). Rather, it is physical childbirth that should be considered as a “metaphor”—an illustration, or picture—of the reality of being born anew. To be born anew is to be regenerated with the divine life, a life that is different from the human life received through natural birth: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (v. 6). The first birth is of the flesh, generating flesh. John then goes on to state explicitly that the new birth is made active by the Spirit, the divine Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God with God’s life, the uncreated eternal life. Thus, a sinner experiences regeneration by receiving the divine, eternal life (in addition to the human, natural life) as a new source and new element of his or her new person.

The problem with assigning the new birth to the status of a mere metaphor or figure of speech is that it opens the door to personal interpretation. Anyone can ascribe any meaning to it, resulting in a variety of differing and often unscriptural points of view. These perspectives may significantly hinder the development of the new birth in a believer. We must seek to unlock the divine definitions in the Word of God by praying for a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we can discern the spiritual fact that can lead us as believers into one of the greatest realities in the universe—the reality of being regenerated by the eternal life of God.

Like John, Peter does not describe regeneration as being only like physical childbirth; rather, he calls attention to and exalts the Father, declaring, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3). Peter concludes, “Having been regenerated not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through the living and abiding word of God” (v. 23). A seed is a container of life. The word of God as the incorruptible seed contains life. Through this word we are regenerated. It is God’s living and abiding word of life that conveys God’s life into our spirit for our regeneration.

Finally, John, in his first letter, talks of being begotten, or born of, God and then refers to the seed not as a metaphor but as a term for a living, reproducing thing that safeguards the believer from living habitually in sin: “Everyone who has been begotten of God does not practice sin, because His seed abides in him” (3:9). When we were born of God, we received His life. This life, as a divine seed, abides in every regenerated believer. To assert that the description of the new birth in the Bible is only a metaphor is to not cut straight the word of the truth (2 Tim. 2:15). It does not affirm the reality of an actual divine birth. We are born of incorruptible seed. We have been born of the Spirit with the divine life of God, and now, in reality, we have a divine provision to grow, mature, and advance in the Christian life.

### Misaiming concerning the Church as Family Being a Metaphor

**Misaiming:** “When family is used as a generative metaphor for church, it can transform not only our preconceptions and expectations of church, but also our preconceptions and expectations of family. A non-nuclear, welcoming, diverse family can make the difference to all sorts of vulnerable people and model to an increasingly divided and isolated world a glimpse of the coming kingdom of God” (Krish Kandiah, “Church as Family,” *Christianity Today*, Jan.-Feb. 2019, p. 70).

**Truth:** Kandiah’s article misaims by stating that the church as family is a metaphor, a mere figure of speech used as an illustration. In the New Testament the church is not explicitly called a family but a household: “So then you are...members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19). God’s household is God’s family. When we were born of God, we became children of God (John 1:12-13). We are His children, and God is our Father in reality, not merely metaphorically. As His children, we are genuinely members of His household. The significance of the church being called the household of God is that it signals our having received the life and nature of our Father. As those who have been born of God with His eternal, divine life, we hold the honor and joy of belonging to God’s family for eternity. A household implies having familial relationships; that is, we believers are many brothers in the realm of the eternal life (Rom. 8:29)—not only do we relate to each other by having a common part in the human race, but, more significantly, we partake of the divine nature through God’s plan of redemption and the Spirit’s regeneration (2 Pet. 1:4).

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The church is the house of God; however, we should not understand the meaning of *house* completely according to metaphorical analysis or take it for granted, giving it a mere cursory glance. *House* can refer to both a dwelling place and a family. The family is a house, and the dwelling place is also a house. In the Greek language these are the same word with the same meaning. The house of God is the dwelling place of God, and His family consists of the members of His household. The church is not only the house of God but also the household of God. The church is this group of family members as a household. As such a family, in this divine household, we become God's dwelling place, and through our communion with our Father, we enjoy holy, sanctified relationships with the other members of our household, resulting in our being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit and, as living stones, being built up as a spiritual house (Eph. 2:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:5). In the physical realm, a family and a house are separate

things, but in the divine, spiritual realm, God's family is at the same time His dwelling place. In the divine family, which is also God's dwelling place, God with man is domiciled.

Parallel to the phrase *the household of God* in Ephesians 2:19 is the phrase *the household of the faith* in Galatians 6:10, which means the family of the faith. *The household of the faith* refers to all those who are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (3:26). All the believers in Christ together constitute this universal household, the great family of God. Actual membership in this family, not metaphorical membership, is through faith in Christ, not through any other agency, path, or course of action. God's fathering of us through regeneration (1 Pet. 1:3, 23) fulfills His purpose to complete the sonship of God, bringing us into His household, His family.

by the Editors

### Born Anew with the Divine Life

According to the Bible, to be regenerated is to be born of the Spirit (John 3:3-6). Before regeneration our spirit was dead. "And you, though dead in your offenses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). But at the time we believed, God's Spirit came into us and mingled with our spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:16). Thus, our spirit obtained God's life and was made alive. Whereas our parents gave us our natural birth, God's Spirit has given us our spiritual birth.

Regeneration also means to be born again or born anew. Originally we were born of our parents, but now we are born once more, this time of God. The Bible calls this experience being born again. When we were born of our parents, we obtained human life. When we were born of God, we obtained God's divine life.

We need to be regenerated because of two conditions. From the negative side, we need to be regenerated because our life has been corrupted and has become evil, and cannot be improved from evil to good. "The heart is deceitful above all things / And it is incurable; / Who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). "Can the Cushite change his skin, / Or the leopard his spots? / Then you also may be able to do good, / Who are accustomed to do evil" (13:23). "For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells" (Rom. 7:18).

From the positive side, however, we need to be regenerated because we do not have the life of God. Of all God's creation, man has the highest development of life. No plant or animal has a higher life than man. Yet man, the highest created life, needs to receive another life for his completion. He needs the uncreated, eternal life of God. When Adam was created, he obtained only created life; he did not at that time obtain God's uncreated life. Likewise, when we were born of our parents, we obtained only the natural, created human life. That birth gave us an entrance into the human kingdom. But for us to enter the kingdom of God, we must have another birth from another source. We must be born of God. By our first birth we were born into the kingdom of darkness, but by our second birth we are transferred into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13).

God's purpose is that we may obtain His own uncreated life and be transformed by this life into His image to be like Him. Even if our human life had not been corrupted by the fall of man in Genesis 3, we would still need to be regenerated. In Genesis 1 and 2, Adam was without sin, yet he was void of God's life. Thus, God placed him before the tree of life that he might receive the life of God and be regenerated. God's purpose in creating man is not merely to obtain a sinless man, but even more to have a God-man, one who has God's own life and nature.

From *What is Regeneration?* by Witness Lee, pp. 4-8