

## Week 2 | Know Your Birthline

### Class Outline

- The Gospel: The Unique Evangel
- Our Spiritual Birthline and the Gospel
- Writing our Spiritual Birthline

### *The Gospel: The Unique Evangel*

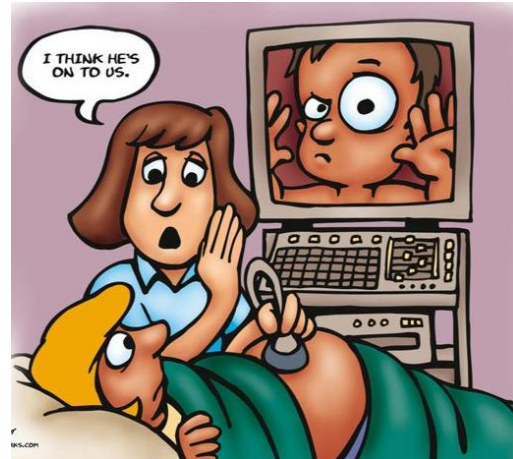
1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (ESV)*

“Ask any hundred self-professed evangelical Christians what the good news of Jesus is, and you’re likely to get about sixty different answers. Listen to evangelical preaching, read evangelical books, log on to evangelical websites, and you’ll find one description after another of the gospel, many of them mutually exclusive.”<sup>1</sup>

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47).<sup>2</sup>

**Q:** What gospel explanations have you heard that are not the gospel?



Ron Wheeler, *Cartoon Works* © 2021

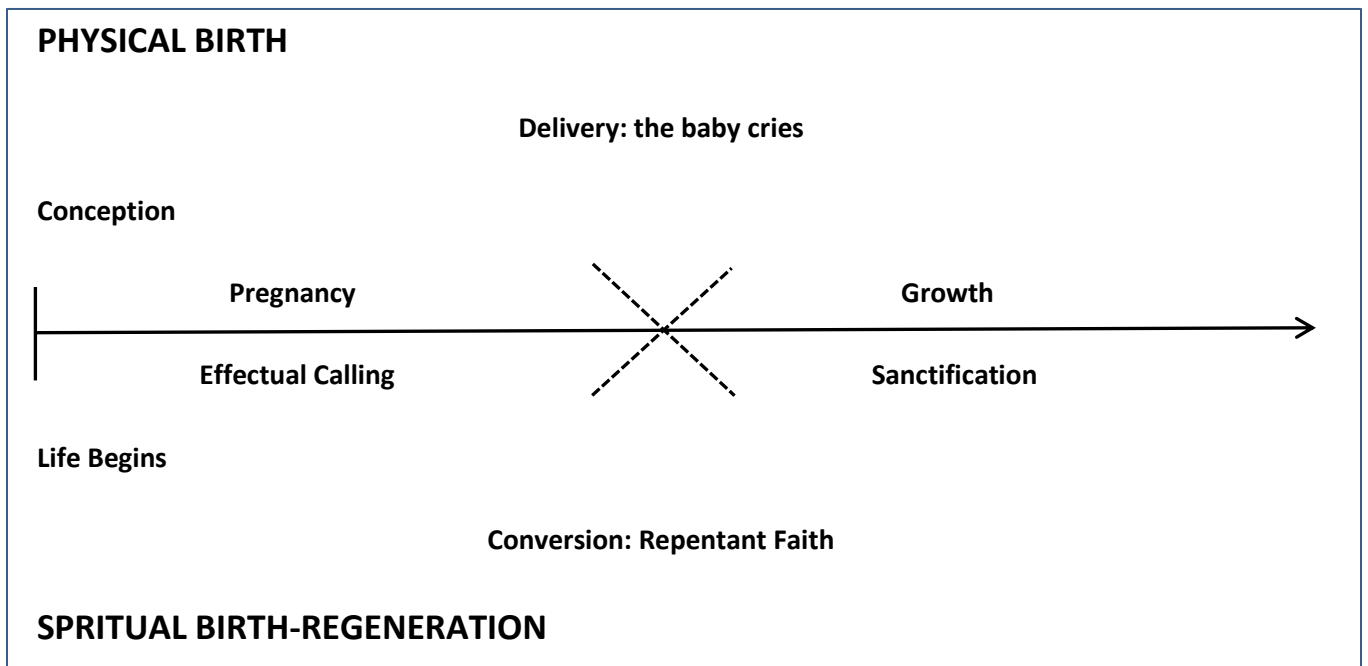
<sup>1</sup> Gilbert, Greg. *What is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 18.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Acts 26:22-23 [Acts 3:18, 21, 24, 17:2-3; 1 Pet 1:10-11]

**Our Spiritual Birthline and the Gospel**

“There is a common practical error in the minds of many Christians in regard to this matter. They seem to think that nothing has any relation to the conversion of the sinner, but that which immediately preceded this event; and the Christian is ready to say, I was awakened under such a sermon, and never had rest until I found it in Christ; making nothing of all previous instructions and impressions.”<sup>3</sup>

Consider the following diagram from Steve Smallman, former minister at McLean Presbyterian Church in Virginia:



Here is what Smallman writes:

The key is to remember that the time when we cry out, in prayer or confession (conversion), is a result of what God has been doing through the effectual call. People often think of their conversion as the beginning of their spiritual lives. But the birthline diagram is a reminder that new birth is really a process, with conversion as a response to the call of God.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Alexander, Archibald. *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1844, reprint 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Smallman, Steve. *The Walk* (Philipsburg: Crossway, 2009), 93 (diagram and quote).

*Jesus said to Nicodemus, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).*

The work of the Spirit inevitably compels us to the crisis moment of conversion (repentance faith). How can anyone except God understand God's working in the sinner's soul? This is the mysterious work of God in regeneration and when confession comes, John 3:16, then in many ways we begin to look back and see with different lenses God's purposes in our past lives as unbelievers.

*Archibald Alexander* said, "The implantation of spiritual life in a soul dead in sin is an event the consequences of which will never end. When you plant an acorn, and it grows, you do not expect to see maturity; much less the ends of the majestic oak, which will expand its boughs and strike deeply into the earth its roots."<sup>5</sup>

*Abraham Kuyper* wrote, "This divine act is wrought in a man at different ages; when no one can tell. We know from the instance of John the Baptist, that it can be wrought even in the mother's womb."<sup>6</sup>

As we turn the pages of Scripture we learn that Jesus and the Apostles understood this process. They attended to people in the midst of their current situations and needs while also demonstrating an awareness of the historical events that shaped the lives of these individuals publically or privately: Nicodemus, Samaritan woman at the well, the calling of the disciples, Dionysius the Areopagite, Cornelius the centurion, Lydia, Timothy, Titus. The list goes on. Jesus and the Apostles did this as they made the call to repentance and faith in the Christ. All of these people were planted with the seed of the gospel message, and mysteriously those seeds grew into oaks of righteousness (Isa 61:3).

**Q:** What implication does this have in our evangelistic and apologetic relationships?

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Kuyper, Abraham. *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941) 295.

### **Writing Our Spiritual Birthline**

As we consider our own spiritual birthlines we are not explaining simple facts about our past.

What we want to look for in our past are those lessons and signals that God impressed upon us in different ways. Instead of viewing all the events, influences, jobs, and people in our lives as scattered un-purposeful events, we ought to realize that *all of those events, influences, jobs, and people* are meaningful because God designed them to be. They are, in part, God-designed for our own salvation.

#### Example 1: Up to 20 Years

- Born Framingham, MA 1981
- Last of 6 children (2 half-siblings)
- Lived West Boylston, MA
- Next older brother died in fire in '83
- Baptist church plant, met in Elementary School
- Attended public school
- Went to college in Pennsylvania

#### Example 2: Up to 20 Years

My father's first wife, given over to alcohol, left him to raise their two kids on his own (2 and 3 yrs. of age). I saw the challenge between them and my parents as my two half-siblings wrestled with abandonment by their birth mother, accepting a mother-in-law, frustrated with our father's failures and weaknesses.

My mother was a '60s Flower child: a drug addict, Woodstock, suicide attempts, social protests. Spoke often of the futility of this lifestyle, warning me of the company I kept. She confessed faith watching Billy Graham in her living room.

My parents were invited to a bible study outside of Boston on the property of a farm. They were discipled with many other Christians. They married soon after meeting in '76 and moved to central Massachusetts. We grew up in West Boylston, MA and were members of an independent Baptist church while we attended public school. I learned firsthand what it meant to be an outsider as a Christian. Sometimes I was openly mocked for my faith. How I was taught and how students lived were often in conflict with what I read and was taught in the Scriptures. I also became like the company I kept in my later high school years. I stumbled into college yet God graciously and slowly exposed many of my rebellious, hypocritical dispositions.

In college, I met three Christians, Jonny N, Dae Y, and John B who all challenged some of my core assumptions about the Scriptures...

## **Write the Spiritual Story of your Life**

**Before Birth**

**Up to 5 Years**

**Up to 10 Years**

**Up to 20 Years**

**Up to 30 Years**

**Up to 40 Years**

**Up to 50 Years**

**Up to 60 Years**

**Up to 70+ Years**