

Sermons  
New Testament  
John  
3:1-8

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Date written: June 19, 1947

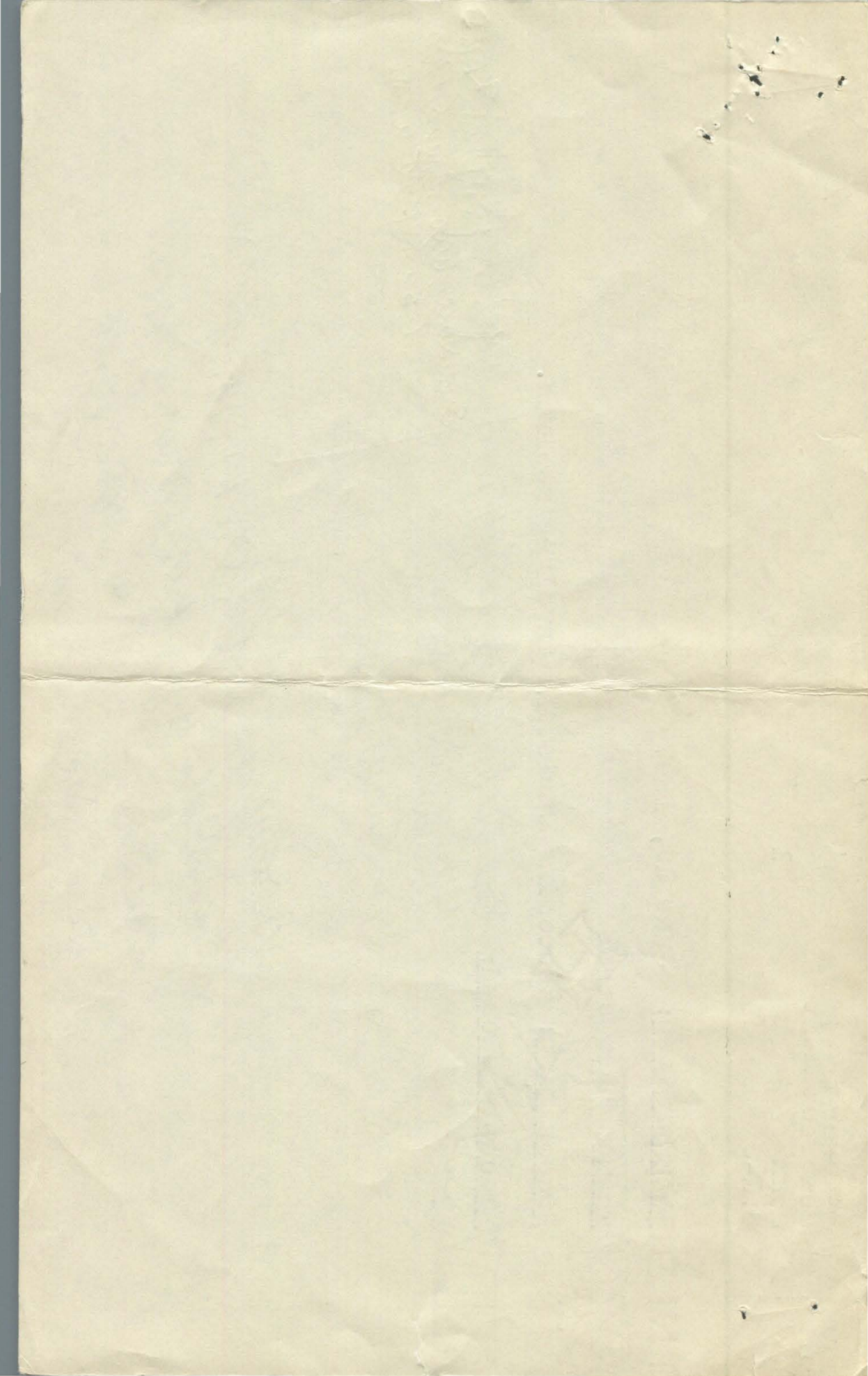
Theme: New birth

Proposition: Becoming Christian involves rebirth.

Places preached:

Epworth June 15, '47  
Talem " "  
Pawcatons " "  
P.O. " "  
Huntington, W.V., Dec 14, 1947  
Smithland, Wyo, P.M., Mar. 3, 1950  
Clauson, " , P.M., Mar. 5, '50  
Tennement, " , P.M., " "

Chapel of Ruckel 2750  
Shenandoah Ave. June 5, 1960  
9:30 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.



## John 3:1-8 (Revised Standard version)

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say ~~xxx~~ to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.'

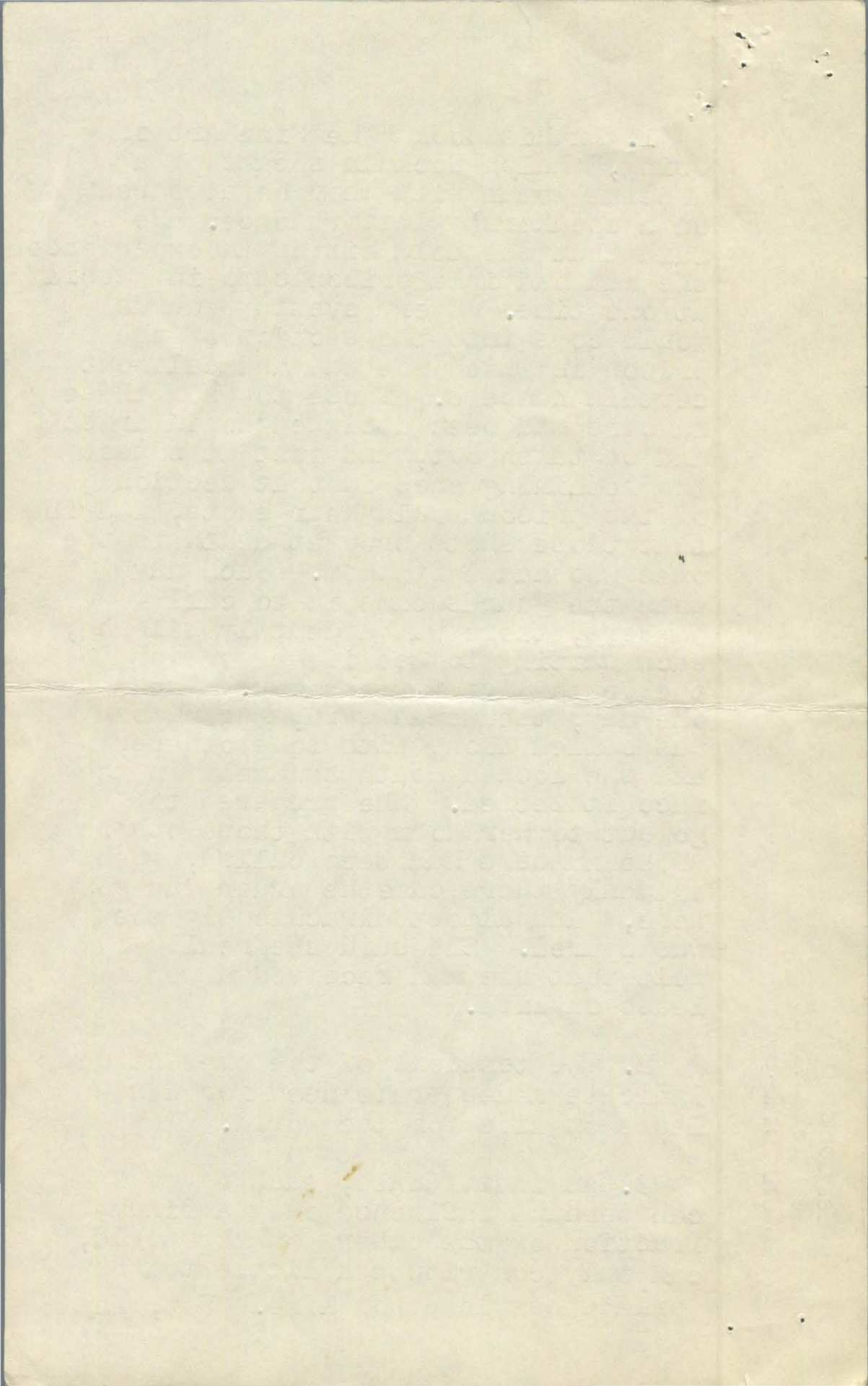
The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.



1. In his book "The Fine Art of Using," Ralph Sockman speaks of a Russian woman with whom he appeared on a speakers' platform once. He said that she told him of an experience she had had in a prison camp in Russia at one time. Every evening guards would come into the section of the prison in which she was and call out certain numbers. Those to whom these numbers had been assigned would arise and be taken out, and just at sunset the remaining ones in that section of the prison would hear shots, knowing that those shots brought death to the ones who had left them. Each day when the guards came in to call numbers, there was a deathly silence, each waiting to see if he were on the death list for the day. Then one day, the woman said, her number was called along with some others, and she looked death squarely in the face it seemed. She prepared to go out to her doom with those others whose numbers had been called, when suddenly there came the order "as you were," and almost miraculously she was spared. She said she really felt that she had received a new lease on life.

2. The tensions of the present day indicate a desperate need for a new lease on life for the world.

3. As individuals, each of us can perhaps influence only a minute fraction of the others in the world, can only contribute a little to the world's new lease on life. Yet, any



change in the pace toward moral and physical destruction of man's world must come through millions of individual contributions.

4. John Wesley saw the world of his day heading toward the moral dissolution which faces us today, though perhaps the threat of physical destruction was not so great as it is now. Wesley proved for his day that the best new lease on life available for a nation was through a spiritual new lease on life for individuals; that through such a new lease, which he called "new birth," individuals were able to make their contributions to improving world conditions.

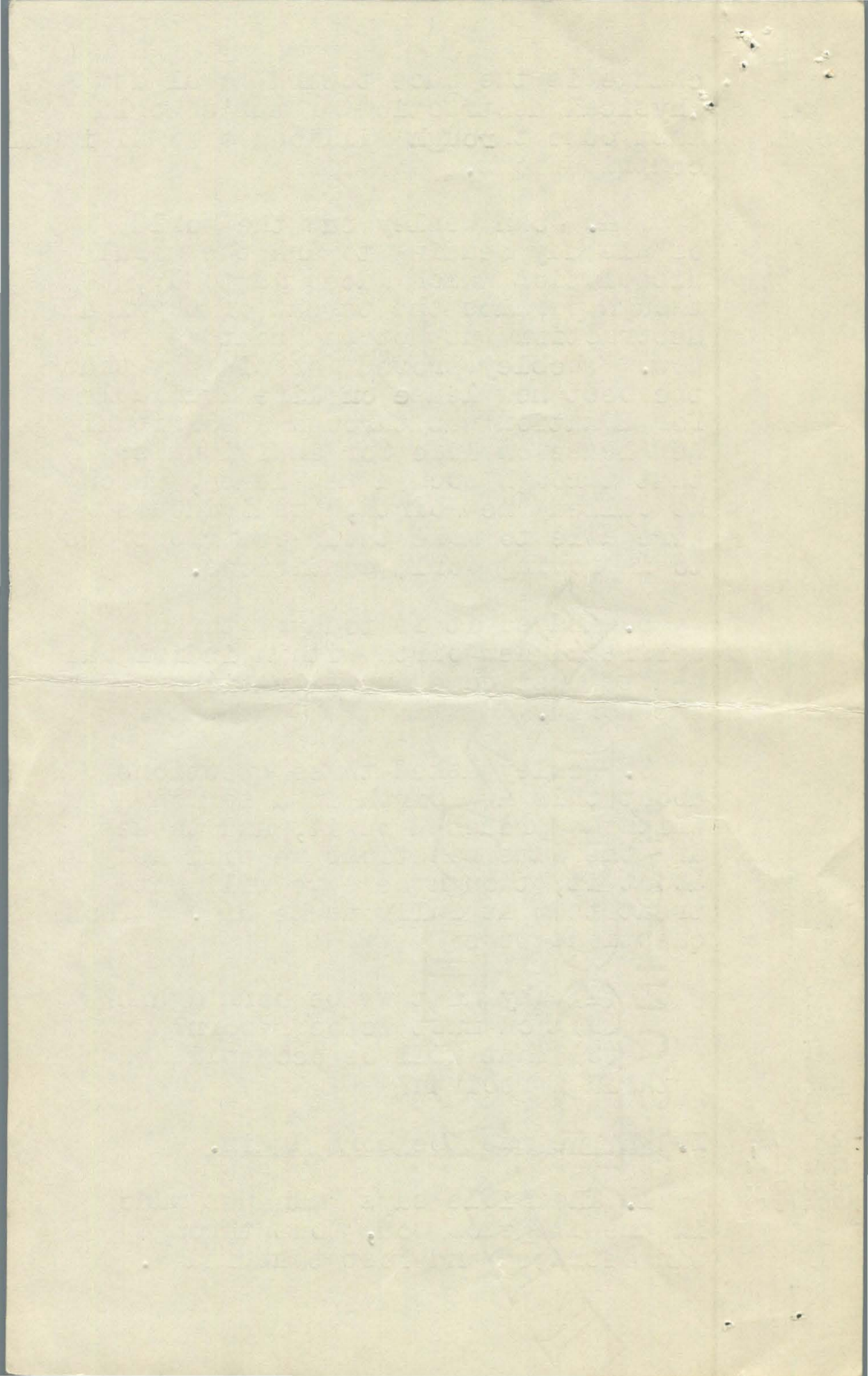
5. And so it is today: through spiritual new birth within individual hearts must come any salvation for the world.

6. Wesley asked three questions about this new birth in a sermon which he preached on it, and these are the same questions we will ask about it, though here we will not treat them as fully as he did. Those questions were:

- (1) Why must we be born again?
- (2) How must we be reborn?
- (3) What will be accomplished through rebirth?

I. Why we must be born again.

1. The Bible says "man was made in the image of God," but through sin betrayed and lost that image.





2. To be born again is to realize without question that one has been restored to a way of life which enables one to grow more like God, or to recover the image of God.

3. The story of the Prodigal Son might well be used to illustrate this principle of apostasy and restoration; of original Sonhood, Sin, and restoration.

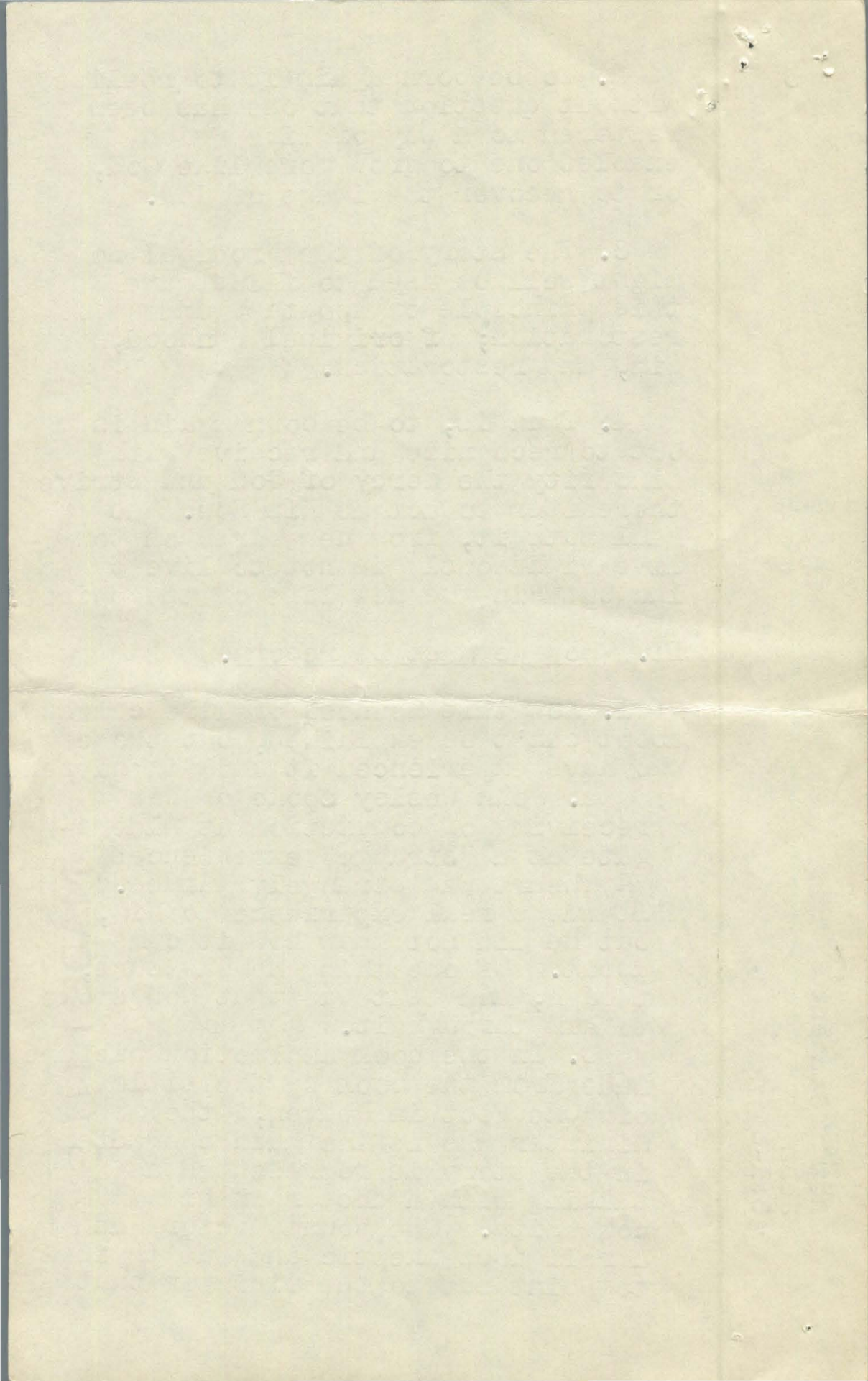
4. That is, to be born again is but to recognize and receive with sincerity the mercy of God and strive thereafter to act as His Son. As Paul puts it, from new birth on to live righteously is not to live by law but "in the new life of the Spirit!"

## II. How we must be reborn.

1. How this newness of life comes about can't be explained, but those who have experienced it know it happens

a. John Wesley spoke of his receiving of conviction at Aldersgate as a "strange" experience: "My heart was strangely warmed." It was a real experience to him, but he did not know how it came about. Of one thing he was sure, though, and that was that God spoke to him through it.

b. In the book and motion picture made from the book by the title of "One Foot in Heaven," the minister who is the main character in the story is represented as talking with a doctor in his community. The young doctor was a religious skeptic and was trying to point out to the minister that



religious experience wasn't real. To prove his point he asked the minister about his soul, thus: "You can't see it, can you?"

"No."

"You can't touch it, can you?"

"No."

"You can't smell it, can you?"

"No."

"You can't hear it, can you?"

"No."

"You can't taste it, can you?"

"No."

"Then your five senses are against you. There is no such thing. It's only in your imagination!"

The minister looked at the doctor a minute, then said: "Suppose you have a toothache. Can you touch the ache?"

"No."

"Can you see it?"

"No."

"Can you smell it?"

"No."

"Can you hear it?"

"No."

"Can you taste it?"

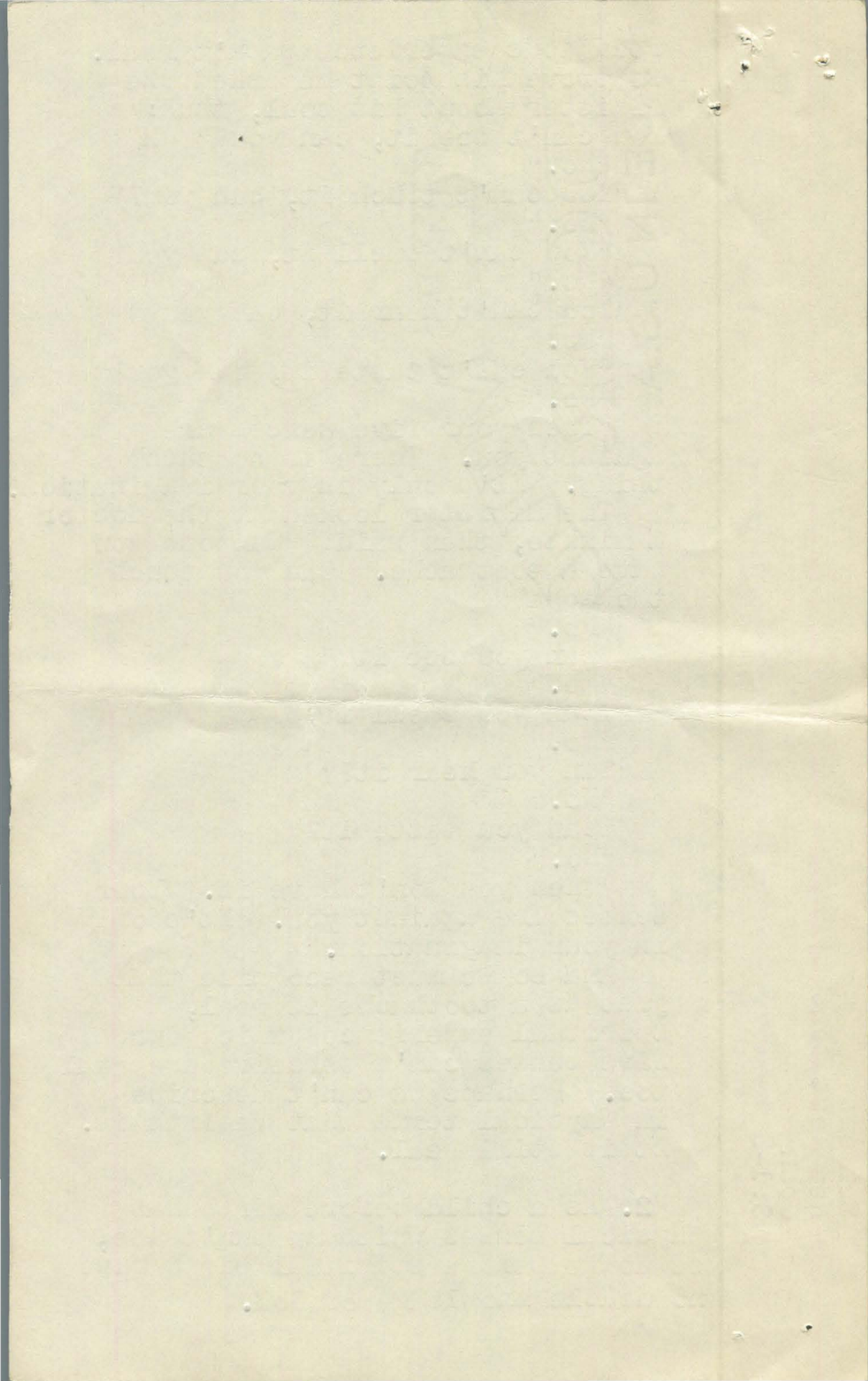
"No."

"Then you don't have it. Your senses are against you. It's only in your imagination."

And so we must recognize that just as a toothache is real, spiritual experiences which our five senses can't perceive are real too. Perhaps we can't describe in physical terms what rebirth is. It is still real.

2. As a child before birth has physical senses which he can't use, so do we before spiritual birth have no usable knowledge of God.

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3. As Jesus pointed out, the wind blows, but we can't see it nor can we tell when or exactly how it comes about. Even so is it with the new birth. We must seek, yet it is only in the power of God to give it.

4. Whether it comes quickly or gradually is a matter of interpretation. In our civilization, we consider a child as born only when physical birth actually takes place. In ancient Chinese civilization a child's ~~xxxxxxx~~ age was counted from the time of conception. So with spiritual birth: it may be counted the whole process by which God brings about new life, or it may be counted the moment of realization of that birth and new life.

III. What will be accomplished through rebirth?

1. Again, turning to John Wesley, we find that he gives three points by which to answer this question:

(1) Through it we can obtain holiness, which is the image of God stamped upon the heart together with a knowledge of the mind of Christ.

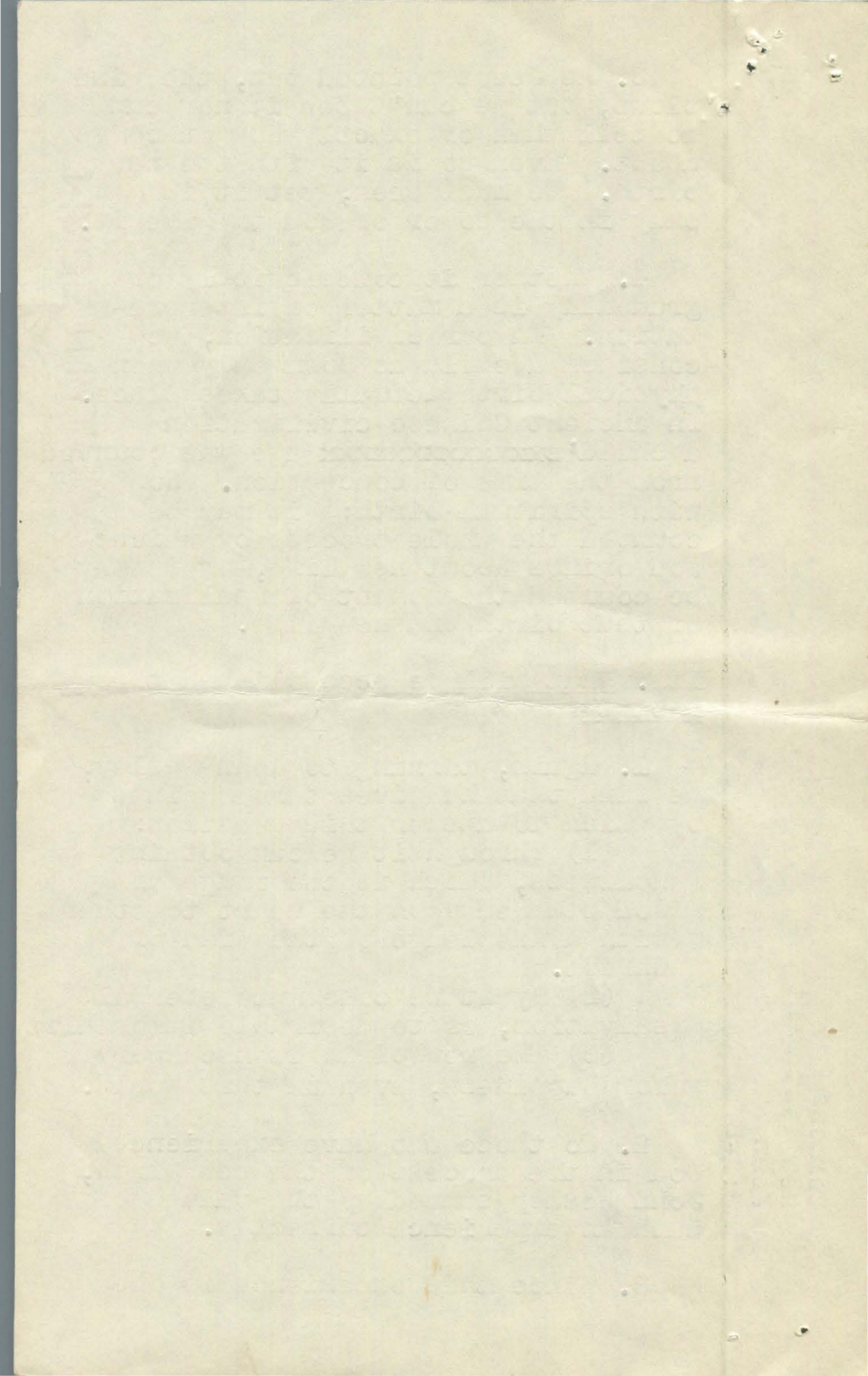
(2) By it we come unto eternal salvation, or to desirable immortality

(3) The new birth is necessary for happiness, even in this world.

2. To those who have experienced God in the process of the new birth, John Wesley summed up the values of such an experience correctly.

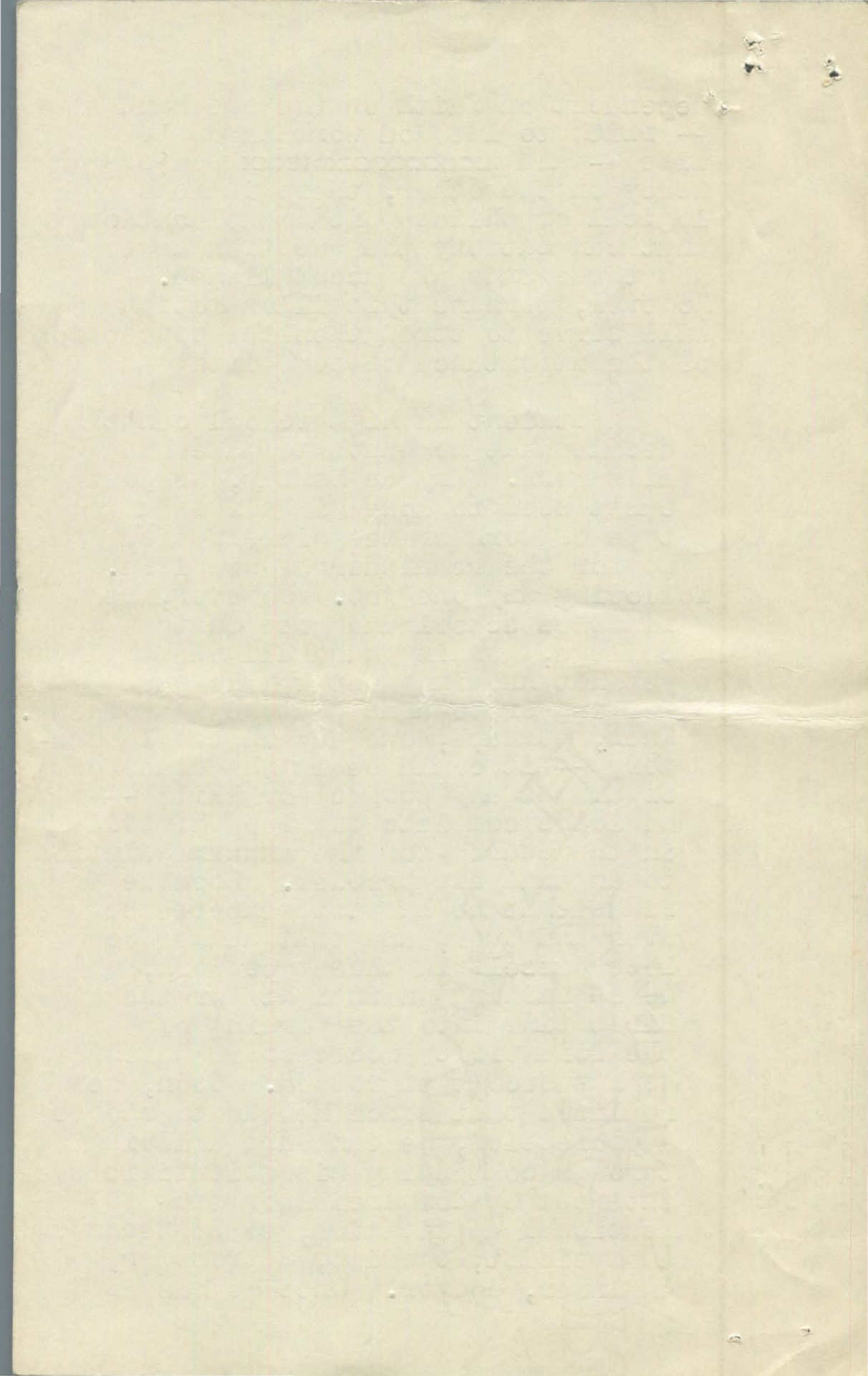
3. Since this experience is one

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dependent on faith on the one hand -- faith to let God work in one's life -- and ~~trust in God's~~ God's mercy on the other, there is no logical or philosophical explanation that can satisfy the question as to how these ends are accomplished. However, perhaps this illustration will serve to strengthen the conception of the importance of new birth:

A student in high school can't decide what he wants to make his life work. Try as he may, he just can't seem to lose himself in a type of work or see himself tied up for the remainder of his life, following any one job. However, he finished school and goes on to college, working hard all the while, yet not knowing just why he is working or towards what he is working. Then, perhaps, one day in the laboratory -- it could be in the classroom of almost any subject or skill -- he loses complete sight of himself in the search for the ~~answer~~ solution to an analysis problem. Soon he finds that he has this experience over and over, and that as he does lose himself in this type work, he is gaining an insight for the first time into the working of the scientific processes in which he has become engrossed. Soon, he realizes that since he has to choose a profession, he can earn a living through continuing his scientific interest by commercial or professional application, so he becomes a physicist, chemist, astronomer, engineer, doctor. Once he has





entered upon this profession, he finds himself becoming ever more interested in the problems it presents, and as he progresses in his chosen field, he becomes happier and happier. First, he gained a knowledge of a subject, then a continuous attachment to it, then happiness through it.

Though a poor parallel, this student's experience might be likened to new birth. When new birth is experienced, first comes a knowledge of God as presented by Jesus -- a personal knowledge -- which leaves little doubt as to right or wrong; then an assurance that life will continue forever as the son of such a God; and finally the realization that this new birth has given more happiness than any previous life experience.

Conclusion:

Becoming Christian involves  
-- necessitates - being born again.

