

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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John 3:8

--By Terry Carter

The above passage is often misunderstood and misapplied. At first glance, it can be difficult to understand.

I've read the thoughts of quite a few people on this verse, but I've never read a better explanation than the one by B.W. Johnson in his *People's New Testament*. It is as follows:

'Most commentators have held that this means: "As the wind moves mysteriously, so does the Spirit, and it breathes upon whom it will, effecting the inward change called the birth of the Spirit arbitrarily." This view I believe [is] due to a wrong translation, sanctioned, not by Greek, but by current theology. Let it be noted that:

(1) Exactly the same Greek term [pneuma] is rendered "wind" and "Spirit" in this verse. It is a violation of all law that the same word should experience so radical a change of meaning in the same sentence.

(2) That the word (pneuma) is not translated "wind" elsewhere, although it occurs scores of times in the New Testament but is always rendered "Spirit."

(3) Another word in the Greek, "anemos", is usually used to represent "wind."

(4) The erroneous idea creates a confusion of figures. It makes Christ to say: "The wind bloweth where it

listeth; so is (not the Spirit, but) every one born of the Spirit."

It affirms of him who is born just what is affirmed of the wind, a thing the Savior never did.

These facts are sufficient to show that the rendering "wind" is wrong. All we have to do is translate *pneuma* here, as is done in the latter part of the verse and elsewhere in the New Testament.

The verse then reads: "The Spirit (pneuma) breathes where it pleases and thou hearest the voice thereof, but canst not tell whence it comes nor whither it goes. So (by hearing its voice) is every one born of the Spirit" (pneuma).

The meaning is: The Spirit breathes where it wills, and you recognize its manifestation by its voice; by the words spoken by men of God as the Holy Spirit gives them utterance.

You cannot tell whence the Spirit comes to whither it goes, but you can hear its voice when it does come. So, by hearing the voice of the Spirit, is everyone born of the Spirit.

He who receives by faith the communications of the Spirit is born of the Spirit. The birth of the Spirit is not the same thing as the gift of the Spirit. To those who are born of the Spirit is given. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Ga 4:6).

Hence, in harmony with the above view, Peter says, "Being born again,

not by corruptible seed, but incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" [1 Pe 1:23]."

To this I will simply add that some translations do translate "pneuma" as "Spirit" in the first part of this verse.

The Modern King James Version and Young's Literal Translation are among them. Some others have a footnote saying that the word can also be translated "Spirit".

Too often, "new" translations merely follow the precedent set by previous translations. This is especially true if it falls in line with the theological bias of the translator(s).

Jesus has already stressed the importance of the water and the Spirit in being born again. In this verse He is telling us how the Spirit brings about our new birth.

We hear His voice through the Word of God and by this means we can be born again.