

# REGENERATION

## I. THE CALL FOR IT: WHY IS REGENERATION DEMANDED BY GOD IN ORDER TO BE SAVED? YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN (John 3:3-7).

### A. The In-Born Pollution And Depravity Of Sin Demands It. No One Can See Or Enter The Kingdom Of God (3:3, 6).

#### 1. Man's disposition of nature is polluted with sin and makes him unfit for Heaven.

NOTE: Not only does man need the penalty of sin pardoned, he needs sins pollution cleansed. He not only needs guilt removed, he needs his heart renewed. Man doesn't just need objective atonement, but a subjective renewal. The issue is more than evil deeds. The heart itself is an offense to God (Ephesians 2:3).

#### 2. Man's deeds, as an expression of his evil heart, are unacceptable to God.

a. The example of Nicodemus proves that externals such as; heredity, law keeping, religious privilege and duty are rejected by Christ.

b. The emphasis of Jesus was on the internal heart (Matthew 5:20).

Man's righteousness must exceed the external law keeping of the Pharisees. The spirit of the law must be kept as well, and this is impossible without a new heart. "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good" (Matthew 12:33).

**B. The Inability Of Man To Change Himself Demands It. That Which Is Born Of The Flesh Is Flesh (v. 6a).**

- 1. A fundamental spiritual change acceptable to God is impossible.**

Man can modify, restrain, redirect or conceal his sin, but he can't change the basic disposition of his soul. The basic appetites, lusts and desires remain. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

- 2. The fallen nature bound in sin prohibits self-change.**

NOTE: Man is both spiritually dead and spiritually blind. Light that shines upon a blind eye does not give it sight. A dead body can't reanimate itself. The exercise of an outside power is required.

**C. The Intervention Of God's Almighty Creative Power Is Demanded. That Which Is Born Of The Spirit Is Spirit (v. 6b).**

- 1. A subjective internal change of the heart by God's Almighty Power is required.**

There is a demand for an external agent outside of man. More than an enlightenment of the mind is needed because man's heart guides his head. He will only perceive something as acceptable and appealing if it is desirable to him, therefore his heart must be changed first.

- 2. A saving change (regeneration) upon the heart enables the sinner to let go of his rebellion and receive Christ.**

## **II. THE CHARACTER OF REGENERATION: WHAT DOES GOD DO IN REGENERATION?**

Regeneration is a work of God that effects the entire human nature. This can be seen in three broad aspects.

### **A. It Is the Release Of God's Almighty Creative Power Directly On The Sinner.**

Regeneration is an immediate divine work upon man's nature. In an ultimate sense it is apart from man's participation. God is active, and man is the passive recipient (It is monergistic).

#### **1. It is asserted to be a Divine Work.**

- a. We are His workmanship and creation (Ephesians 2:4-5, 10; 4:24; Colossians 3:10).

Creation is not a realtering of what already exists. Creation is a bringing into existence that which had no prior being or existence. The new birth is a creation. It is a bringing into existence properties in man that were not there before. Paul refers to regeneration as a creative act of God 6 times (Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:10, 4:24; Colossians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; James 1:18). This shows the importance of seeing it as entirely God's own work.

- b. It is apart from human participation (John 1:12-13).
- c. It is distinguished from the Word of God which is the instrument of regeneration (1 Corinthians 2:4-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6; 1 Peter 1:23).

Regeneration is the result of the exercise of God's Almighty Power. It is not something we must or can do. It is something God does. He makes us alive (Ephesians 2:1, 5). Therefore, it is not an equivalent to believing. God is the active agent in regeneration and man is the passive recipient.

*The power of God most gloriously appears in man's being actually saved and redeemed in this way. In his being brought out of a state of sin and misery, into a conformity to God; and at last to the full and perfect enjoyment of God. This is a more glorious demonstration of divine power, than creating things out of nothing, upon two accounts...one is, the effect is greater and more excellent. To produce the new creature is a more glorious effect, than to merely produce a creature— making a holy creature, a creature in the spiritual image of God, in the image of divine excellencies, and a partaker of the divine nature is a greater effect than merely to give being. And, therefore, as the effect is greater, it is a more glorious manifestation of power. And then, the production of this last effect, is a more glorious manifestation of power, than the work of creation; because though in creation, the terms are very distant—as nothing is very remote from being—yet there is no opposition. Nothing makes no opposition to the creating power of God. — But in redemption, the divine power meets with and overcomes great opposition. There is great opposition in a state of sin to a state of grace. Men's lusts and corruptions are exceedingly opposite to grace and holiness; and greatly resist the production of the effect. But this opposition is completely overcome in actual redemption. Besides, there is great opposition from Satan. The power of God is very glorious in this work, because it therein conquers the strongest and most powerful enemies. Power never appears more illustrious than in conquering. Jesus Christ, in this work, conquers and triumphs over thousands of devils, strong and mighty spirits, uniting all their strength against Him.*

Jonathan Edwards, *Vol. II*, p. 144

## **2. It is asserted to be a sovereign act.**

- a. It is His merciful intervention in a life (2 Corinthians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 1:3).
- b. It is the result of the exercise of His will (John 1:13; James 1:18).

*'What!' says one, 'do you mean to say that God absolutely interposes in the salvation of every man to make him regenerate?' I do indeed; in the salvation of every person there is an actual putting forth of divine power, whereby the dead sinner is quickened, the unwilling sinner is made willing, the desperately hard sinner has his conscience made tender; and he who rejected God and despised Christ, is brought to cast himself down at the feet of Jesus ... If you like it not, quarrel with my Master, not with me; I do but simply declare his own revelation, that there must be in your heart something more than you can ever work there. There must be a divine operation, call it a miraculous operation if you please; it is in some sense so. There must be a divine interposition, a divine working, a divine influence, or else do what you may, without that you perish, and are undone— For except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. The change is radical; it gives us new natures, makes us love what we hated and hate what we loved; sets us in a new road; makes our habits different, our thoughts different, makes us different in private, and different in public. So that being in Christ it is fulfilled,—'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.'*

Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol III, p. 188

**3. It is affirmed that it is an almighty creative act by the different effects the Word has on people.**

Regeneration, as a sovereign direct release of God's creative power, alone explains the different effects that accompany preaching at the same time to different men. And it alone explains the differing effects to the same people at different times.

**B. It Is The Reanimating Of A Nature Dead In Sin By The Impartation Of Life.**

There are a number of references that indicate that regeneration is the imparting of life in man's once spiritually dead nature.

1. **It is a birth (John 3:3; James 1:18).**
2. **It is a making alive (Ephesians 2:5; 1 John 3:14).**
3. **It is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15).**

**C. It Is A Reconstructing Of The Fallen Human Nature With A Holy Disposition.**

Regeneration is fundamentally the imparting of life; but it is more than this. It is the reworking of the human nature.

*I cannot think of a better definition than this: regeneration is an act of God by which a principle of new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. That is regeneration. It means that God by His mighty action puts a new disposition into my soul.*

Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Ephesians Vol.II*, p. 79

*It is not an excitation or awakening of some gracious principle which lay hid before in nature under the oppression of ill habits, as corn lay hid under the chaff but was corn still; not a beating up something that lay skulking in nature, not an awakening as of a man from sleep; but a resurrection as of a man from death; a new creation, as of a man from nothing. It is not a stirring up old principles and a new kindling of them ... A revolution, a reconstruction takes place at the centre of man's moral and spiritual being; sin and pollution are dethroned in the citadel of man's being, and righteousness takes its place. 'Regeneration', says Charnock again, 'is a mighty and powerful change wrought in the soul by the efficacious working of the Holy Spirit, wherein a vital principle, a new habit, the law of God, and a divine nature, are put into and framed in the heart, enabling it to act holily and pleasingly to God, and to grow up therein to eternal glory ... There is a change, a creation, that which was not is brought into a state of being.*

John Murray, *Collected Writings*, p. 171

- 1. It is a cleansing of inward pollution (John 3:3-5; 1 Peter 1:22-23; 1 Corinthians 6:11).**

NOTE: The understanding of "water" in John 3:5 is best understood in the light of the Old Testament (Ezekiel 36:25-27) and the significance of this to Nicodemus. Nicodemus a self-righteous man was ignorant first of the Old Testament truth of God's promise to cleanse the human heart. Secondly he was ignorant of his personal need for it.

- 2. It is a removal of the stony heart for a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19, 36:25-27).**
- 3. It is a recreating of the image of God in righteousness and holiness in the nature (Ephesians 4:24; 1 John 2:29, 3:7).**
- 4. It is a renewal of the inner man (Titus 3:5).**

NOTE: Two things need to be clarified.

#### **The defective old nature/new nature view.**

A word must be said about the view that in salvation a believer receives a new nature alongside the old nature. This is usually taught together with the idea that the old nature remains unchanged in this life. There are a number of things wrong with this teaching.

- a. There is no new fundamental direction and change toward God and righteousness (which consists, essentially, in an adoration and delight in Christ and His glory) since the old and new natures are supposedly equal in power.
- b. It is impossible to expect and pray for true transformation. Since the old can't be cleansed and the new has no need of it. What is cleansed and transformed? A third nature?

**The remaining presence of sin is a broken inferior power.**

The believer's nature is changed pervasively, but not perfectly. It is dominantly righteous, but not absolutely (1 John 2:29, 3:9; Romans 6:18-22, 7:23). Sin remains in the believer's nature as a continual unceasing force. It is not simply a residue of his physical or bodily appetites. Remaining sin has lusts and desires so it is part of his immaterial man (Galatians 5:16). It is like a diseased tree which is still basically green and fruitful. It is like a deposed monarch that continues to harass the new government by continual guerrilla warfare.

**III. THE CAUSES OF REGENERATION: WHAT DOES GOD USE TO BRING ABOUT REGENERATION?**

**A. Ultimately God Is The Agent (Ephesians 2:5; 1 Peter 1:3).**

**B. Intermediately The Word Is The Instrument.**

**1. We are brought forth by the Word (James 1:18).**

**2. Faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17).**

**3. We are born by the imperishable Word (1 Peter 1:22-23).**

**IV. THE COURSE OF REGENERATION: WHEN DOES REGENERATION OCCUR IN RELATION TO FAITH?**

**A. The Dominion Of Sin Requires That Regeneration Logically Precedes Faith.**

- 1. Enlightenment is impossible without a change of nature (Ephesians 4:18).**
- 2. Enmity to God makes faith in Christ impossible (Romans 8:7-8; Hebrews 11:6).**

**B. The Definitive Teaching Of The New Testament Is That Regeneration Precedes Faith.**

- 1. Entering heaven, which is by faith, requires the new birth (John 3:3-5).**
- 2. Receiving Christ by faith is the result of the new birth (John 1:12-13).**
- 3. Belief in Christ is the consequence of the new birth (1 John 5:1).**
- 4. Regeneration is the reason for the faith that saved us (Titus 3:5-7).**

NOTE: The issue of the order of regeneration and faith is no small matter, as it is sometimes claimed. The matter centers around the extent of depravity and the nature of our dependence on the Spirit. Is the central factor of man's depravity his understanding? Does his mind only need to be illuminated, or does it go deeper? Is his depravity a basic disposition of heart that will never allow the truth about Christ to be welcomed and received? If man's fundamental, central depravity is the underlying disposition, then he will never be enlightened unless his heart is changed (Acts 16:14). This means he must be regenerated in his heart for his mind to be enlightened.

*Hence it follows, first, that faith does not proceed from ourselves, but is the fruit of spiritual regeneration; for the Evangelist affirms that no man can believe, unless he is begotten of God; and therefore faith is a heavenly gift. It follows, secondly, that faith is not bare or cold*

*knowledge, since no man can believe who has not been renewed by the Spirit of God. It may be thought that the Evangelist reverses the natural order by making regeneration to precede faith, whereas, on the contrary, it is an effect of faith, and therefore ought to be placed later...and yet faith itself is the work of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in none but the children of God ... so then, in various respects, faith is a part of our regeneration ... and thus faith flows from regeneration as from its source; but since it is by the same faith that we receive Christ, who sanctifies us by His Spirit, on that account it is said to be the beginning of our adoption.*

Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, pp. 44-45

## **V. THE CONSEQUENCES OF REGENERATION.**

### **A. The Inevitability Of A New Conduct.**

- 1. Righteousness (1 John 2:29).**
- 2. Love (1 John 3:14, 4:8).**
- 3. No longer sinning (1 John 3:9-10).**

### **B. An Illuminated Mind That Sees The Beauty And Glory Of Christ.**

- 1. A nature is given which now sees glory and beauty where it saw none before (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).**
- 2. A nature is given that delights in and relishes (or tastes) the moral excellencies of God's nature and works (1 Peter 2:1-3, 9).**