

SOTERIOLOGY: The Glorious Doctrine of God's Great Salvation

Lesson 5: Regeneration

I. What do we mean by "Regeneration"?

Regeneration is the spiritual change wrought in people's hearts by an act of God in which their inherently sinful nature is changed and by which they are enabled to respond to God in faith.

Regeneration is MONERGISTIC: that is, entirely the work of God the Holy Spirit. It raises the elect among the spiritually dead to new life in Christ (Eph 2:1-10). Regeneration is a transition from spiritual death to spiritual life ... conscious intentional, active faith in Christ is its immediate FRUIT, not its immediate CAUSE.¹

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." John 3:3

New Hampshire Confession, Article 7, Of Grace in Regeneration:

We believe that, in order to be saved, sinners must be regenerated, or born again; that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is effected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel; and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life.

This new birth is SUPERNATURAL:

¹² *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)*

The new birth is inseparable from the EFFECTIVE CALL of God. (Remember: The Word is heard in the GOSPEL – or *external* – call but is made effective in the heart by the *internal* call of God.)

²⁴ *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)*

The Apostle Paul, while never using the phrase "born again", compares regeneration to circumcision of the heart:

²⁸ *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. (Rom 2:28-29)*

Remember that this was the warning that God gave to rebellious Israel:

¹⁶ *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. (Deut 10:16)*

But this internal work was beyond their ability. No one has the ability to change their own heart. Thankfully, God is gracious and does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In mercy, he tells Israel that he will circumcise their hearts so that they would "love him with all their heart and all their soul". (Deut 30:6)

I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek 36:26-27)

¹ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs*

II. The Necessity of Regeneration

We are/were DEAD in our trespasses.

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... (Eph 2:1)

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved ... (Eph 2:4-5)

What is the remedy?

63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. (John 6:63)

So, it is not the HUMAN WILL, nor even the communication of TRUTH that brings about regeneration. It is the HOLY SPIRIT. (John 1:12-13, Acts 16:14, Rom 9:16, Phil 2:13)

We are/were SLAVES to sin.

17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:17-18)

We have/had no inherent GOODNESS in us.

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. (Rom 7:18)

Without regeneration, we are ...

... unresponsive to God and INCAPABLE of saving response to the Gospel. (Eph 2:1-2)

... sinners by NATURE who DO evil because we ARE evil. (Eph 2:3)

... lovers of 'DARKNESS', not truth and light. (John 3:19-20)

... hardened in heart as 'STONE'. (Ezek 36:26, Eph 4:18)

... unable to PLEASE God. (Rom 8:7-8)

... unable to ACCEPT the Gospel. (Eph 4:18, 1 Cor 2:14)

... unable to COME TO CHRIST. (John 6:44; 65, 1 Cor 12:3)

III. Jesus, Nicodemus, and Regeneration

3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² 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."

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴ 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?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ 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 3:1-8)

Nicodemus' condition:

Nicodemus' truncated view of Jesus:

Jesus' sine qua non: "... unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus' response:

What was Jesus talking about ... "water and Spirit"?

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek 36:25-27)

1) You can't enter God's Kingdom with this REBIRTH.

And this is something that is physically impossible to achieve. It is a gift of the SPIRIT.

2) The gift of the SPIRIT isn't based on anything we do.

Our obedience is a RESULT, not a cause.

3) The Spirit is FREE in His regenerating work.

We can't predict or know who will be born again.

4) Those who are 'born again' show the EVIDENCE of it.

Akin to the effects of the WIND, we can see the effects of the Spirit (*Ruach*)

John speaks of being 'born again' in the opening of his gospel:

¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

So what is the relationship of *believing* and *being born again*?

John also addresses this in his first letter:

"... you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him." (1 John 2:29b)

"has been born" = PERFECT tense

"practices righteousness" = PRESENT tense

The point?

Being born again PRECEDES doing what is right. First, one is born of God. Second, that person practices righteousness.

⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9)

Again, notice the tenses ...

One is born again FIRST, then lives a new life.

The same principle applies to loving one another:

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

Do you see the pattern?

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. (1 John 5:1)

IV. The Conclusion?

Our belief in Jesus Christ (resulting in conversion, justification, et al) is the CONSEQUENCE of being “born of God”, not the CAUSE.

In short, regeneration causally PRECEDES faith.

J.I. Packer: *Regeneration is the spiritual change wrought in the heart of man by the Holy Spirit in which his/her inherently sinful nature is changed so that he/she can respond to God in faith, and live in accordance with His will (Matt. 19:28; John 3:3,5,7; Titus 3:5). It extends to the whole nature of man, altering his governing disposition, illuminating his mind, freeing his will, and renewing his nature.*

So, we see from Scripture that regeneration comes before we can respond to the gospel with saving faith.

Michael Horton writes, *“Regeneration is the Spirit’s sovereign work of raising those who are spiritually dead to life in Christ through the announcement of the gospel.”*

Regeneration is an instantaneous event in which the Holy Spirit works in us and enables us to have faith and to follow Christ.

It is then followed by conversion and justification.

Next week: Conversion