

REGENERATION

INTRODUCTION

- Definition: Regeneration is the impartation of eternal life, through the empowering of the indwelling of the Spirit of God.
- It is the act of God by which He imparts new spiritual life to those previously dead
- Regeneration by the Holy Spirit is the spiritual counterpart of human reproduction in the physical realm - Human generation produces human life; spiritual regeneration produces spiritual life.
- Regeneration is the natural consequence of God's effectual call
- Grudem: "Effective calling is thus God the Father *speaking powerful to us*, and regeneration is God the Father and God the Holy Spirit *working powerfully in us*, to make us alive" (pg. 700)

TERMINOLOGY OF REGENERATION

- Various terms are used in Scripture to express this truth:
 1. *paliggenesia* = regeneration, renewal, the production of a new life by God

Titus 3:5 ~ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,
 2. *anagennao* = to be born again, spiritual rebirth

1 Peter 1:3 ~ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:23 ~ for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.
 3. *apokueo* = brought forth, to give birth to

James 1:18 ~ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.
 4. *gennao* = to beget, to bring forth

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

John 3:7 ~ Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'
- Other terminology expressing regeneration:
 1. Alive/made alive

Romans 6:13 ~ present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead

Ephesians 2:5 ~ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

2. New man/new creation

Ephesians 2:10 ~ we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus

Ephesians 2:15 ~ the new man created in righteousness and holiness of the truth

2 Corinthians 5:17 ~ if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation

Colossians 3:10 ~ the new man who is being renewed to a true knowledge

THE NEED FOR REGENERATION

Ephesians 2:1-3 ~ you were dead in trespasses and sins

Ephesians 4:18 ~ darkened in their understanding excluded from the life of God.

Colossians 2:13 ~ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

John 8:42-44 ~ you are of your father the Devil

- Before coming to Christ, we were dead...there was no spiritual life, no heart for the Lord
- Before we can respond in faith and repentance, God has to awaken us spiritually since that which is dead cannot respond to God
- No one has the power to raise himself from spiritual death...No sinner can make themselves alive
- So God has to cause us to be born again to be saved...divine assistance is necessary to respond to the call of God
- This was Jesus' point in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3

John 3:3, 7-8 ~ Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."... "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

- Lazarus is a wonderful illustration of what happens in regeneration: Lazarus could not help Jesus raise him from the dead

But the most important thing to note about the account of the raising of Lazarus, is that Lazarus was dead! He was not merely sick, or a tad under the weather, nor was he doing anything to co-operate with the grace of God, when Jesus called him forth from the grave. In fact, his only contribution to his salvation was the fact that he was dead! Lazarus was not inside the tomb taking the bandages off, unwrapping himself, so that Jesus would do his part if Lazarus did his! Our Lord did not go to the tomb and leave a medicine outside that would help Lazarus to raise himself, if only he Lazarus would reach out and take the medicine. Jesus did not stand outside and "woo" Lazarus to come forth! Lazarus could do nothing to raise himself, apart from the sovereign voice of God calling him forth from the tomb and giving life to him in the process. And this exactly what the Scripture says of us, we are dead in sins and transgressions, and just like Lazarus, we too must be called to life by God through the word of Jesus or else we remain dead in our sins. And this is the meaning of grace alone God calling us to life when we are reeking in death, and calling us not because of anything he sees in us.

Kim Riddleberger, "Grace Alone: An Evangelical Problem?,"

<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/soluschristus.html>

THE WORK OF THE TRINITY IN REGENERATION

God the Father is the Author of Regeneration

- Regeneration is totally a work of God

Ezekiel 36:26-27 ~ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

John 1:13 ~ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Ephesians 2:5 ~ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

Colossians 2:13 ~ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

1 Peter 1:3 ~ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

- It was when we were dead that God interfered and made us alive...such a work can only be done by the One who is Himself alive (Romans 4:17 ~ who gives life to the dead)

God the Son is the Mediator of Regeneration

2 Corinthians 5:17 ~ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Ephesians 2:10 ~ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

1 John 5:11, 20 ~ And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son...And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

1 Peter 1:3 ~ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

God the Holy Spirit is the Agent of Regeneration

Ezekiel 36:26-27 ~ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

John 3:5-8 ~ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into 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 be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

- Jesus' phrase "born of water and the Spirit" looks harks back to Ezekiel 36:25-27, where God is pictured as symbolically cleansing persons from sin's pollution (by water) and bestowing a "new heart" by putting his Spirit within them

Titus 3:5 ~ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit

THE NATURE OF REGENERATION

The Word of God is the Instrument of Regeneration

- As the gospel comes to us, God speaks through it to summon us to himself (effective calling) and to give us new spiritual life (regeneration) so that we are enabled to respond in faith
- God uses His Word, applied by the Holy Spirit, to make His elect alive

Romans 10:17 ~ So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

1 Peter 1:23 ~ for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

James 1:18 ~ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

- A few examples of the role of the Word of God in the act of regeneration:

Acts 10:44 ~ the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word

Acts 16:14 ~ and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 ~ It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Thus regeneration and the effectual calling consist in large measure of the Holy Spirit's work of illumination, thereby enabling the recipient to understand the true meaning of the gospel
- The Spirit grants insight where once it was lacking
- This act of regeneration is further described in 2 Corinthians 4

2 Corinthians 4:6 ~ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

- As the outward call of God to faith in Christ is communicated through the reading, preaching, and explaining of the contents of the Bible, the Holy Spirit enlightens and renews the heart of elect sinners so that they understand the gospel and embrace it as truth from God, and God in Christ becomes to them an object of desire and affection
- The Spirit illuminates and animates the Word of God. As we listen to the Scripture, we come to the conviction that we hear the very Word of God itself.
- God does not save us "automatically" without our mind, emotions, and will being affected by the Gospel truth
- An unbeliever cannot thwart God's effectual call in their hearts, but this does not mean that people come into the kingdom "kicking and screaming" against their will...rather, their choice is genuine, but it is generated, carried along, and brought to fruition by the Spirit

Regeneration is an Act in which Man is Entirely Passive

- Regeneration is a sovereign divine act...It does not entail our "cooperation."
- Man contributes nothing to his "new birth" since he is spiritually dead
- Because of our love for sin and inability to save ourselves, God must act independently of the human will
- Regeneration is monergistic (i.e. it only involves 1 person), not synergistic (i.e. involving 2 or more people)

- We play no active role at all...it is totally a work of God...We are totally passive

John 3:3, 5, 7 ~ Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one **is born** again he cannot see the kingdom of God”...Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one **is born** of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”...Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must **be born** again.’

- In all three occurrences, “born” is in the passive tense
- It is not “unless one makes himself born again” (active voice)...It is passive
- It is something that takes place to a person, not something they do to themselves
- That’s why Jesus uses the analogy of birth here...A baby does not decide to get born
- It is an action in which they had no input – it is impossible for a baby to do anything to be born...No baby ever thinks: I think I would like to become a person, be alive...so I will cause myself into existence...I will cause myself to be born...Infants do not induce, or cooperate in their own birth
- Christ chose this analogy for a very important reason: No spiritually dead person can prompt the quickening action of the HS within them...No unbeliever can effect their own new birth...No unbeliever can move from unbeliever to believer of their own volition
- It must be an act that is done by God Himself

John 1:13 ~ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

- John’s point here is that the only way to gain spiritual rebirth is if God does the work
- People must be born from above to be saved...God must replace the heart of stone with a heart of flesh in order for a person to be born again...It is all a work of God
- And John uses 3 negative expressions to communicate this
 - “not of blood” - Refers to physical descent, heritage, ancestry
 - “nor of the will of the flesh” - Refers to sexual impulses, the sex drive, the desire to fulfill fleshly passions
 - “nor of the will of man” - Refers to the procreative urge to have children
- John’s point: In no sense whatsoever do believers derive their birth or standing from physical or biological causes...It’s from God alone
- No amount of human effort can produce spiritual birth...All human initiative is ruled out

We are helpless to cooperate in our regeneration as we are to co-operate in the work of Calvary.

Iain Murray

No more soul-destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that sinners can regenerate themselves, and repent and believe just when they please...As it is a truth both of Scripture and of experience that the unrenewed man can do nothing of himself to secure his salvation, it is essential that he should be brought to practical conviction of that truth. When thus convinced, and not before, he seeks help from the only source whence it can be obtained. –

Charles Hodge

Ephesians 2:5 ~ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

Colossians 2:13 ~ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

Here Paul locates the time when regeneration occurs. It takes place when we were dead. With one thunderbolt of apostolic revelation all attempts to give the initiative in regeneration to man are smashed. Again, dead men do not cooperate with grace. Unless regeneration takes place first, there is no possibility of faith

R.C. Sproul

Regeneration is an Instantaneous Act

- It happens only once...At one moment we are spiritually dead...at the next moment we are spiritually alive

Ephesians 2:5 ~ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

- We may not always know when this instantaneous change occurs, but it occurs in an instant

Regeneration Must Come Before Saving Faith

- It is the new birth that enables us to respond in faith

Practically regeneration may be seen as the time when the Spirit of God, upon an unsaved person, removes the heart of stone he had been born with and replaces it with a heart of flesh in order that he may respond positively to the Gospel which he could not understand before. So we see that according to Jesus Christ, regeneration precedes faith.

Matthew McMahon, *The Reformed Apprentice*, 204.

Faith is the evidence of new birth, not the cause of it

John Piper

- Regeneration is something that is misunderstood by many Christians
- Most Christians think that they believed, they had faith, they repented and that is what caused them to be born again (i.e. that being born again comes **after** they express faith)
- They think that faith is the key that unlocks new birth
- It is true, a person must respond in faith and repentance to be saved
- However, Scripture indicates that a man must first be born again before he can perceive spiritual things and then be saved

John 3:5 ~ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one **is born** of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"

- A person enters the kingdom of God when they become a Christian at conversion. But Jesus says that we have to be born of the Spirit before we can do that

John 6:44, 65 ~ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

Acts 16:14 ~ A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

Ephesians 2:5 ~ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

Colossians 2:13 ~ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

- A believer's ability to respond to the Gospel only comes when God gives new life within
- Thus, faith is the evidence of being made alive, not the cause of it
- Regeneration is a transition from spiritual death to spiritual life, and conscious, intentional, active faith in Christ is its immediate fruit, not its immediate cause.
- A clarification...when we say that it comes "before" saving faith, it is important to remember that they usually come so close together that it will ordinarily seem to us that they are happening at the same time
- As God addresses the effective call of the gospel to us, he regenerates us as we respond in faith and repentance to this call
- So from our perspective it is hard to tell any difference in time, especially because regeneration is a spiritual work that we cannot perceive with our eyes or even understand with our minds

THE EVIDENCE OF REGENERATION

1 John 2:29 ~ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

1 John 3:9 ~ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

1 John 4:7 ~ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

1 John 5:1 ~ Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

1 John 5:4 ~ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

1 John 5:18 ~ We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

- "We should realize that John emphasizes these as necessary results in the lives of those who are born again. If there is genuine regeneration in a person's life, he or she will believe that Jesus is the Christ, and will refrain from a life pattern of continual sin, and will love his brother, and will overcome the temptations of the world, and will be kept safe from ultimate harm by the evil one. These passages show that it is impossible for a person to be regenerated and not become truly converted" (Grudem, 705)
- What if a person does not possess these qualities?
- What if a person says he is a Christian but does not demonstrate these marks of regeneration?