

THE REGENERATION PROMISED IN THE NEW COVENANT

INTRODUCTION

- The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit which results in a new heart was promised in the New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-34 ~ “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. 33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Ezekiel 36:24-28 ~ For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 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. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. 28 You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers (Abrahamic Covenant); so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

- Israel will experience this regeneration nationally one day when God applies the New Covenant promises to them, resulting in their repentance and their acceptance of their Messiah
- Gloriously, those who come to Christ in the church age also experience this regenerating work of the Spirit



- “It is obvious that regeneration and renewal are intimately inter-related. We might even view regeneration as the spiritual launching pad for a process of renewal into the image of Christ. Or, carrying on our relay-race illustration, once new life is divinely implanted, renewal in the biblical *ordo salutis* scheme of things, takes the baton of new life and runs the sanctification lap.”¹

¹ George Zemek, *A Biblical Theology of the Doctrine of Sovereign Grace*, 160-161.

DEFINITION OF REGENERATION

- Regeneration is the impartation of eternal life, through the empowering of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
- 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
- "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."²
- It "denotes a saving act of God, performed on man and in man, but not by man"³
- "Regeneration is the divine impartation of eternal spiritual life into the spiritually dead sinner."⁴

- "We have found that the application of redemption begins with an effectual call by which God the Father ushers men into the fellowship of his Son. An *effectual* call, however, must carry along with it the appropriate response on the part of the person called. It is God who calls but it is not God who answers the call; it is the person to whom the call is addressed. And this response must enlist the exercise of the heart and mind and will of the person concerned. It is at this point that we are compelled to ask the question: how can a person who is dead in trespasses and sins, whose mind is enmity against God, and who cannot do that which is well-pleasing to God answer a call to the fellowship of Christ? Fellowship is never one-sided; it is always mutual. Hence the fellowship of Christ must involve the embrace of Christ in faith and love. And how can a person whose heart is depraved and whose mind is enmity against God embrace him who is the supreme manifestation of the glory of God? The answer to this question is that the believing and loving response which the calling requires is a moral and spiritual impossibility on the part of one who is dead in trespasses and sins...The fact is that there is a complete incongruity between the glory and virtue to which sinners are called, on the one hand, and the moral and spiritual condition of the called, on the other. How is this incongruity to be resolved and the impossibility overcome?"⁵
- "It is the glory of the gospel of God's grace that it provides for this incongruity. God's call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel. God's grace reaches down to the lowest depths of our need and meets all the exigencies of the moral and spiritual impossibility which inheres in our depravity and inability. And that grace is the grace of regeneration. It is when we take into account God's recreative power and grace that the contradiction between the call of God and the sinful condition of the called is resolved...God effects a change which is radical and all-pervasive, a change which cannot be explained in terms of any combination, permutation, or accumulation of human resources, a change which is nothing less than a new creation by him who calls the things that be not as though they were, who spake and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast. This, in a word, is regeneration."⁶
- 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 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 700.

³ Guhrt, *NIDNTT* (1:185).

⁴ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 580.

⁵ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*

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, God must awaken us spiritually since what is dead cannot respond to God
- No one has the power to raise himself from spiritual death...No sinner can make themselves alive
- God must cause us to be born again...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: he could not help Jesus make him alive
- "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."⁷

THE WORK OF THE TRINITY IN REGENERATION

God the Father is the Author of Regeneration

- Regeneration is totally a work of God...we play no active role at all

Ezekiel 36:25-27 ~ Then **I will** sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; **I will** cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 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 ~ if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

⁷ Kim Riddlebarger, <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/soluschristus.html>

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. (see an illustration of this in Ezekiel 37:1-11)

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 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 us 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 we would be 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

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 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
- 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...not “unless one makes himself born again” (active)
- It is something that takes place in a person, not something they do to themselves
- That’s why Jesus uses the analogy of birth here...a baby does not decide birth itself...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 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 Holy Spirit 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
- “In the physical realm, a child makes absolutely no contribution to his conception or his birth. He is nonexistent and thus is entirely dependent on the will of his parents to be brought into being. In the same way, Jesus chooses this analogy to illustrate the reality that dead and depraved sinners cannot contribute to their rebirth unto spiritual life but are entirely dependent on the sovereign will of God for regeneration.”⁸

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
- John uses 3 negative expressions to communicate this

⁸ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 577–578.

- “not of blood” – refers to physical descent, heritage, ancestry
- “nor of the will of the flesh” – refers to the natural human desire for children
- “nor of the will of man” – refers to the decision of parents
- 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
- The birth of a child of God is not a natural birth...it is a supernatural work of God in regeneration
- “We are helpless to cooperate in our regeneration as we are to co-operate in the work of Calvary.”⁹
- “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.”¹⁰

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.”¹¹

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
- “Especially for children growing up in a Christian home, or for people who attend an evangelical church or Bible study over a period of time and grow gradually in their understanding of the gospel, there may not be a dramatic crisis with a radical change of behavior from ‘hardened sinner’ to ‘holy saint,’ but there will be an instantaneous change nonetheless, when God through the Holy Spirit, in an unseen, invisible way, awakens spiritual life within...In other cases (in fact, probably most cases when adults become Christians) regeneration takes place at a clearly recognizable time at which the person realizes that previously he or she was separated from God and spiritually dead, but immediately afterward there was clearly new spiritual life within. The results can usually be seen at once...”¹²

Regeneration Must Come Before Saving Faith

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

⁹ Iain Murray

¹⁰ Charles Hodge

¹¹ R.C. Sproul

¹² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 701.

- “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.”¹³
- “Faith is the evidence of new birth, not the cause of it.”¹⁴
- Regeneration is something that is misunderstood by many Christians...most 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 person must first be born again before he can perceive spiritual things

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
- “But how can regeneration (life) come before justification? some might ask. This is because causes and effects usually happen at the same time. God creates the world and it exists. It did not hesitate 5 seconds but sprung into existence the same moment he called it into existence. When a pool ball hits another, they touch at the same time, but only ONE is the cause of the other moving. Likewise, God breathes new life into us and we breathe. God opens our eyes and we see, He gives us a new heart and we believe. no time delay takes place. They occur simultaneously, but one actually CAUSES the other. Faith is the fruit of grace and as such we can only ascribe all glory to God.”¹⁵
- “When we talk about the order of these things, we are discussing not to much a temporal order as a logical one. What’s the difference? When we say that we are justified by faith, we mean that in the order of salvation, faith comes before justification. How long before? How long must we have saving faith before God justifies us? Five minutes? Five days? Five months? Five years? None of the above. The moment true faith exists in our souls, justification exists in them. But logically, faith comes before justification in the

¹³ Matthew McMahan, *The Reformed Apprentice*, 204.

¹⁴ John Piper

¹⁵ <https://www.monergism.com/ordo-salutis-order-salvation-0>

sense that justification depends on faith. Likewise, I do not think there is a temporal delay between regeneration and faith. But if we are discussing which depends on which, the vast majority of Christian people believe faith logically precedes regeneration...[but] rebirth is the work of God the Holy Spirit alone; it is not a joint venture between the believer and God. Regeneration is an immediately supernatural act by which God changes the disposition of the human heart and quickens that person to spiritual life. Spiritually dead people cannot even assist in this operation. It is something that God alone can do.”¹⁶

- 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.”¹⁷
- What if a person says they are a Christian but do not demonstrate these marks of regeneration?

¹⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Matthew*, 423-424.

¹⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 705.