

Regeneration

Title: The New Spiritual Work Of God

Text: John 3:3-8

Introduction: In the work of justification, where God declared us not only innocent, but He imputes the righteousness of Christ to us and our sin to Him. In our text today we see the work of regeneration, how God imparts new spiritual life to us. In the late 1970's the phrase "born again" became popular. John 1:12,13 is clear, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*" Clearly without any reservations, it is God who does the work of regenerating a lost soul. It's not that man isn't responsible either, it's that man cannot do anything to satisfy the justice of God. And only God can make dead bones live, and turn a stone cold heart into flesh. For context, we may put the works of God in this order, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Point 1 - The Work Of God

In 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." Before Christ we are lost sheep, dead to spiritual things, and have no hope. But now hope isn't just some vain hope, it's a living hope. We have made reference to this text in Ezekiel many times, and it's worthy to celebrate now, "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" (Ezekiel 36:26-27). The three times the word "I" is mentioned is God. I rejoice today that God has regenerated my dead spiritual life.

According to the Baptist Faith and Message on the subject of salvation, regeneration is defined as, "Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace."

Point 2 - The Work Of Regeneration Is A Mystery To Us

We know that we were dead and we're made alive. Ephesians 2:1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins", "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4-5). Exactly how this happens is a mystery, but we know that God does it. Remember in our text of John 3:8, "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."

The work of regeneration is an instantaneous act, not a progression like sanctification. 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." Remember the word behold means to "call attention to." This change will become evident over time in patterns of behavior and desires that are pleasing to God, not the world. Wayne Grudem says this about regeneration, "there will be a heartfelt trusting in Christ for salvation, assurance of sins forgiven, a desire to read the Bible and pray, a delight in worship, a desire for Christian fellowship, and a sincere desire to be obedient to God's word." **NOTE:** If what is old has been made new it will be evident in one's own life.

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Point 3 - Regeneration Is Not A Work Of Man

Man does not have the capability of doing good or seeking God, unless God draws Him. John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." 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." So if no one understands, no one seeks after God (Romans 3:11), then it is God, in His mercy that opens our eyes to see and our ears to hear. 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." Application: It is God who keeps as well. He keeps His regenerative work. The reason it's a work of God is because man couldn't keep himself.

Point 4 - Regeneration Will Bring Results In Life

If you were dead, then you're alive, won't there be evidence of this? Redeeming grace is more than just an outward expression. It is an inward, life giving change. 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." First, one who is redeemed won't stay in a perpetual state of sin. It does not mean he won't sin nor will he attain what some have called "sinless perfection" but he will not stay nor continue on the path as before. Why? Because he is alive and not dead. A new life will be evidenced in behavior and actions. But some may ask, "isn't that legalism"? And the answer is no, you aren't judging someone based upon your own standards, but the standards of God.

Second, a genuine Christlike love will be evident. 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." One cannot understand the depths of God's love unless he is born again. And because of this love, we love. You cannot love, you cannot be long-suffering, and you can't be merciful, if you don't know love, long-suffering and mercy.

Third, there is the aspect of overcoming the world. According to Romans 3 we aren't good, nor can we be good. Because of this we are bound to do wickedness. But the glory of regeneration is we are no longer slaves to the world and flesh, but to God. 1 John 5:5, "Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" The effect of regeneration gives you the ability to say no to temptation and sin, and to obey God's commands not the flesh's. 1 John 5:4, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world." Paul tells the Corinthians of this overcoming power in 1 Corinthians 10:12-13, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." The precursor to this text is not thinking too much of yourself. If you think you stand on your own will and power to say no to sin, you are a fool. But God is faithful through the regeneration process and by being obedient, which you can do now, will give you a way out.

Fourth, regeneration will keep us from the power of Satan. Note: this doesn't mean we won't be tempted or under pressure from wickedness, but it means God protects us from what Satan desire to do. 1 John 5:18, "but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him." Herein lies one of the most important truths about regeneration, 1 John 4:4, "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." There will be attacks from Satan. He will

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attempt to ruin your testimony of faith, he will attempt to drown you with oppression of evil. But the assurance we have is greater is God within us, than he who lies in this world. We have this hope because we have been made new. God keeps you safe from ultimate spiritual harm. God keeps you from eternal hell.

Wayne Grudem says in his book, “If there is genuine regeneration...he or she will refrain from a pattern of continual sin, and love his brother, and will overcome temptations of the world, and will be kept safe from ultimate harm by the evil one.”¹ Other results listed by being regenerated are in Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” By contrast of these traits, those who just “profess” Christ, or those who are genuine unbelievers, won’t possess these traits. I think this passage is never more clear than in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus describes the evidence by what fruits are being produced. Matthew 7:15-19, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.” There is nothing clearer. And this assessment isn’t being “judgmental” it’s identifying what is good and what is bad. You make these decisions everyday in your life. And we know, from Scripture, what is a good trait of regeneration and what is not.

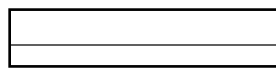
Point 5 - Regeneration Isn’t A Result Of Activity

There is no biblical evidence that points to “activity” in the church or miracles as evidence of regeneration. Rather the Scriptures point to character traits in life that present genuine regeneration. I think it’s worthy to look at the verses after the bad and good fruit text that Jesus points to judgement, Matthew 7:22-23, “Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” NOTE: Even the evil one can reproduce apparent miracles, see all the false prophets of our day that claim healing at so called healing events.

Application: A genuine love, obedience and Christlike walk are developed over time as you grow closer and more aware of who God is and who you are. You desire to reflect Him in everything you do, everything you see and how you conduct yourself. That simply cannot be produced for any length of time from someone who has not been truly regenerated.

Concluding Points

First and foremost, have you been “born again?” What goes hand in hand with regeneration is repentance. And repentance defined is, “Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.”² This question follows the first, is there evidence of the new birth in your life?



¹ Systematic Theology; Wayne Grudem; pp. 705

² The Baptist Faith and Message 2000; Salvation

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Regeneration is a total work of God. You can't earn nor can you please Him on your own. How does this fact remove any idea of a works based salvation? Do you have some area in your life that is lacking in obedience to God? Are you faithfully assembling together with the saints, to study, learn and grow in the word of God?