

Big Words You Need to Know, Love, & Share

One of the most abused doctrines of our day is that of the new birth. The words “you must be born again” are presented as though the sinner can somehow birth themselves.

- Effectual calling and regeneration: As the gospel call comes to the sinner, it is a divine summons from God to draw the person to himself. When the call is made effectual by the work of the Spirit, it gives new life (regeneration) to the dead heart and enables him to respond in faith & repentance.
- Effectual call and regeneration presupposes *total depravity/inability* in the sinner being called (Eph. 2.1)
- *Effective calling is thus God the Father ‘speaking powerfully to us’, and regeneration is God the Father and God the Holy Spirit ‘working powerfully in us, to make us alive,* (Grudem, Systematic Theology, p700). Galatians 1:15-16a.

I. The Definition and Nature of Regeneration: Key Word - New Birth Jn 3:3-8

- Not merely reformation, moral change, turning over a new leaf, etc.
- *Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man...*(L. Berkhof, ST, p469)
- Regeneration is the theological term used to describe rebirth, new beginning; a radically renewed person.
- “regeneration” = found 2x: Mt 19:28; Titus 3:5

1. Matthew 19:28 "Truly, I say to you, in the new world... “new world” = *regeneration; new birth, renewal, recreation.* i.e. the renewal of the world to take place after its destruction by fire; new heaven and earth.

2. Titus 3:5 he saved us...by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, “regeneration” & “renewal” though different words are used to indicate a radical change. “washing” – is to remind of the purification of water; just as in John 3:5 a reference to the OT purification by water which symbolized purification; Ez 36:25

II. Descriptions of Regeneration

- In Titus 3:5 it denotes that change of heart; Ezekiel 36:26
- An inner disposition to the law of God Jeremiah 31:33
- A passing from death to life -1 John 3:14; John 5:24
- Becoming a new creature (creation) in Christ Jesus 2Co 5:17
- being born again John 3:5
- being “quicken” or “made alive” Eph 2:5
- a resurrection from the dead Eph 2:5,6

III. The Necessity of Regeneration John 3:3,7 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again¹ he cannot see the kingdom of God."... Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

➤ Four critical statements:

1. “truly, truly” = repetition of “amen” is an attention getter!

2. “unless” –anticipates something; something must happen before something else can happen.

Illus: “Let’s get something straight, unless your room is clean, you cannot eat supper”

3. “cannot” – Gr. *inability; no power; no ability; spiritual impotence*. Depravity is thorough.

- Man is dead in trespasses and sins Eph. 2:1,5
- Heart of stone - Ezekiel 36:26b
- Unable to please God Romans 8:7-8

➤ No power to: “see the kingdom of God” - “see” not the ordinary word for “see” that means “see w/the physical eyes” but to “perceive”, “understand”, “recognize”. *It is as if someone said to you, ‘O, I see what you are saying.* 1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural man does not accept [*receive or take hold of*]... and he is not able to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Illustration: Watching a movie in 3-d. You need special 3-d glasses in order to perceive the visual effects that are taking place.

➤ No power to: “enter the kingdom of God” - implies cannot be a participant or a partaker of the blessings which the kingdom offers.

4. v7 “must” = Gr. a word of necessity; Jesus said, “I must go to Jerusalem” referring to his mandated appointment with the cross. “must” – indicative rather than imperative – a statement of fact, not a command. Jesus is telling Nic. Something factual - he must (of necessity) have a spiritual light switch turned on before he can understand the things of God and it is something that must be done to him not by him. The necessity does not give the power; it is a new birth that comes from God.

➤ *Natural* ability vs. *moral* ability: we are free to choose, but we do not have the moral inclination toward God. We only choose what Adam’s fallen race desires; we choose what we desire. *The will is moved by the mind and affections; it cannot act in isolation,*” (Dr. Michael Horton, ST 567). 1 Cor 1:18

IV. The Divine and Sovereign Work in Regeneration John 3:8 The wind¹ 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."

1. Pelagian view: regeneration simply consists in moral reformation. Charles G. Finney, 19th C revivalist "Religion is the work of man."
2. Roman Catholic view: grace is a gift of God/the church also dispenses it; the added requirement is that we must "cooperate with it and assent to it" before it can take hold in our hearts. Man-works cooperating for a lifetime with grace.
3. Arminian view: regeneration is man co-operating with God; man’s will (choice) co-operates with the divine influences. Man reacts to the truth; God then responds in regeneration. Man can successfully resist the divine influences and remain unregenerate to his death.
4. Reformed or Augustinian view: regeneration is a sovereign work of God by means of the Holy Spirit; man is absolutely passive in this one sided divine act. 1 Pet 1:3; John 1:13; Rom 9:16.

No man has the power to raise himself from spiritual death. Divine assistance is necessary. John 3:3-8

- The term “again” can mean either “again” or “from above”. Nicodemus seems to be taking it to mean “again” by his response – v4

But Jesus’ answer also seems to point to a supernatural work of the Spirit which takes place “from above”. It is used in this way in v31³¹ **He who comes from above**. Jesus is talking about a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit on changing a person’s heart. *As he does with other terms, John may be choosing to extend double meaning to this one in John 3:3, 7, both ‘from above’ and ‘again’; he certainly does not mean less than the former,* (D. A. Carson, *ibid*, 188).

- “born” = passive: you were not active in your own natural birth; one cannot “birth” himself - *The new birth is a change wrought in us, not an act performed by us,* (*Decisional Regeneration*, James E. Adams, Chapel Library).
- v8 “born of the Spirit” = birth by means of the HS; dependence on the HS is critical in the new birth. We do not obtain by willing or deciding for Jesus – it is a divine sovereign work! Mysterious work - like the wind! *The wind is not at our beck and call; neither is the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.* (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, *Ibid*)
- Titus 3:5 **not by works of righteousness which we have done** anticipates the opposite i.e. a divine work of God. It begins with conviction, and then the heart is regenerated, and then comes repentance and faith.

Note that in John 6:66 the crowds turned back at that teaching; earlier he said, v44 ⁴⁴ **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him**. How does the Father draw? Through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is also a gift of the Father v65 ⁶⁵ **And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."**

- Ezekiel 36:25-27 demonstrates the initiative is from God not man; several times in reference to the change of heart the term “I will” is used

V. The Effects of Regeneration (expression, manifestation)

- The cause of all graces in the Christian’s life is found in the new birth. All exercise of saving grace is rooted in the new birth. The proper order must be that regeneration (the new birth) precedes repentance and faith. This is critical, since man is active in both faith & repentance. Apart from regeneration there would be no repentance or faith.
- With the heart changed, the will renewed, sinners most freely choose Jesus Christ, *“yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace,”* (*WC 10:1*)

We must never think that because the work of regeneration is a divine act, that we are forever passive in the activities of saving grace. As new members of the kingdom of God we live as a citizen according to the mandates of the kingdom. Jn 3:6 “born of the spirit is spirit” = indwelt & led by the spirit. The disposition of lawless, God hating sinners is changes to one of repentance, faith and willing obedience.

1. A new heart Ez. 36:25-26; Jn 3:5
2. A new creation 2 Cor 5:17
3. A new ability “see” & “enter” the kingdom of God Jn. 3:3,5

- Believe in Jesus Christ Jn. 1:12-13
- Believe Jesus is the Christ 1 Jn. 5:1
- Love the brethren 1 Jn. 4:7; 5:1
- Live a holy life 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9
- overcoming the world & the devil 1 John 5:18 (cf I Jn. 3:9)

VI. Application:

1. We must not preach to sinners as though they were sick, but dead. The Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy to a valley full of dry bones. I dare say that Ezekiel did so with the full knowledge that if something were to happen it would have to be the result of the Spirit's work. It certainly would not be because of anything Ezekiel did in his own power." Ezekiel 37:2-7

2. Rather than command sinners to be born again, we should press on them the absolute necessity while totally dependent on the Lord's mercies. Based on God's authority we may command them to repent from their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. We must always use the Word of God in our evangelism James 1:18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, 1 Peter 1:23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

4. We must guard the gospel doctrine of regeneration for the good of sinners and the church; the alternative is "cheap grace" and "easy believism" - we must not join ranks with the modern evangelicalism that minimizes the change of the new man. *Far too frequently the conception entertained of conversion is so superficial and beggarly that it completely fails to take account of the momentous change of which conversion is the fruit...Regeneration is at the basis of all change in heart and life. A cheap and tawdry evangelism has tended to rob the gospel which it proclaims of that invincible power which is the glory of the gospel of sovereign grace. May the church come to think and live again in terms of the gospel which is the 'power of God' unto salvation.* (John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p105).

J. H. Merle d'Aubigne (1794-1872) in his history of the reformation in England states that: *To believe in the power of man in the work of regeneration is the great heresy of Rome, and from that error has come the ruin of the Church. Conversion proceeds from the grace of God alone, and the system which ascribes it partly to man and partly to God is worse than Pelagianism.* (J. H. Merle d'Aubigne, *The Reformation in England* (London, 1962), Vol. 1, p. 98).

Charles Hodge: *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 a practical conviction of that truth. When thus convicted, and not before, he seeks help from the only source whence it can be obtained,* (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, 1970], Vol. 2, p. 277).

5. We must ask ourselves the question, "am I born again? John 3:18-21

Ronald Reagan was the Governor of California for two terms from 1967 ending 1971. He then became president of the United States for two terms – 1981-1989. Arnold Swartznegger became governor on 2003. Arnold Swartznegger can never become president of the United States. Why? He is not a natural born citizen of the U. S. He could change his name to Smith

and say “Now I am qualified.” He could say “I have lived in this country for XX years”. He could say, “I will learn to pronounce my words like an American Statesman” He must be born in America to preside as president in America. In the same way, unless you are genuinely born again, you cannot claim to be a natural born citizen of the kingdom of God.

6. A right understanding of the doctrine of regeneration ought to make us better worshippers - a deeper understanding of truths like this make us bow in humble adoration of our Lord and Savior.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found, Was blind, but now I see (John Newton).