
“Born Again”

The Doctrine of Regeneration

Various Passages

This lesson is the next in an ongoing series of doctrinal studies occurring between book series. Today’s lesson, on the Doctrine of Regeneration, continues a discussion of the subject of conversion. These studies have included the Doctrines of Salvation, Repentance and Faith. As with previous lessons this is intended as simply an overview of the subject.

If you need earlier doctrinal lessons, they are still available at www.cfdevotionals.org. Follow the Bible study link. As with the previous doctrinal studies, the material is drawn primarily from Through the Bible in One Year.¹

The term which is most frequently used or misused when talking about regeneration is “Born Again.” For a while this became a catch word to identify someone as a Christian. Certainly, it is a valid term. After all Jesus uses it in John 3

“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’” (John 3:1-7).

The problem is even the cults have begun using the term. The Mormons state they are born again. They do this to try to confuse issues and paint themselves as being part of Christendom. But the word, as they use it, doesn’t carry biblical content. When the Mormon speaks of salvation he means:

“Salvation is achieved only by those who do enough good deeds and obey all of God’s laws (i.e. works of righteousness).”²

But we know that salvation is by faith, not works. So what does it mean to be born again, regenerated? That is what we will consider this morning.

¹ Stringfellow, Alan B., ed., Through the Bible in One Year, Vol. 3, “Great Truths of the Bible,” Copyright © 1981 by Virgil W. Hensley, Inc., Publisher, Tulas, OK, p. 123-128.

² Abanes, Richard, On Nation Under Gods, Four Walls Eight Windows, NY, New York, 2002, p. 382.

I Introduction
II A Definition of Regeneration
III The Timing of Regeneration
IV The Necessity of Regeneration
V The Nature of Regeneration
VI The Gift of Regeneration
VII Conclusion

I Introduction: The study of salvation sometimes brings disagreement in how one reconciles the issues of free will and God's sovereignty. Clearly there are two aspects to our salvation, just as there are two aspects to Christ's nature, being both God and man. The Doctrine of Regeneration speaks to God's actions.

Stringfellow introduces his study this way:

*"To receive the "new birth," a person must be "converted." Must repent of sin and place faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Man must believe and receive Jesus by faith. "By grace are ye saved"; but how? "Through faith" (Ephesians 2:8)."*³

II A Definition of Regeneration: Let's start by looking at a summary of the concept of regeneration as found in the NIV Dictionary:

*"Regeneration is, therefore, an act of God through the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit operative in man (Col 2:13), originating in him a new dimension of moral life, a resurrection to new life in Christ. This new life is not merely a neutral state arising out of forgiveness of sin, but a positive implantation of Christ's righteousness in man, by which he is quickened (John 5:21), begotten (1 John 5:1), made a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), given a new life (Rom 6:4) and the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4)."*⁴

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ" (Colossians 2:13).

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it" (John 5:21).

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well" (1 John 5:1).

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4).

"Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:4).

³ Stringfellow, p. 123.

⁴ Douglas, J. D., and Merrill C. Tenney, editors, NIV Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1989 The Zondervan Corporation.

Regeneration is another statement of God's mercy. It was God's love and mercy that led to the Cross and therefore it is love and mercy that allows us to be born again.

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior ...” (Titus 3:4-6).

III The Timing of Regeneration: The work of regeneration is instantaneous with conversion. While it may be possible that conversion is a process that takes place over time, bringing one to accept Christ, regeneration is immediate.

“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:6).

Stringfellow explains the distinction between the conversion process and regeneration this way:

“The natural birth is a long process. The actual time of the natural birth is instantaneous. The baby is born, breathes its first breath, cries its first sound.”⁵

Well, almost instantaneously. Ask a new mother just how instantaneous delivery is. Anyway, back to Stringfellow.

“So, with the spiritual birth. When one goes through the pain of sin in this life—sees himself lost and without God—realizes the need to turn from sin, and turn to God through faith—then, he is “born again.”⁶

IV The Necessity of Regeneration: As we have already seen, Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again. (see John 3). But why must there be regeneration for the believer? This is needed because of the sinful nature of fallen man. We are sinners and totally depraved, that is, fallen in all aspects of our created being. Scripture states:

“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5).

“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3)

“... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

V The Nature of Regeneration: What occurs with regeneration? Certainly, contrary to what some believe, being regenerated doesn't mean we no longer sin. So, what does it mean? It means we are cleansed.

“Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5).

⁵ Stringfellow, p. 124.

⁶ Ibid.

Tenney explains the verse this way:

*“ Various interpretations have been suggested for the water. Does it refer to natural birth, which is accompanied by watery fluid? Or is it a symbol of the Spirit (John 7:37-39) so that “water” and “Spirit” are merely a hendiadys, two words referring to the same thing?”*⁷

“ On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

*“ Or is it a symbol of baptism? The best answer seems to be that if Jesus was attempting to clarify his teaching for Nicodemus, he would answer in familiar terms; and the author would want his readers to understand his phraseology. Since Jesus’ ministry came shortly after that of John the Baptist, Jesus may have been referring to John’s preaching, which dealt with the baptism of water, signifying repentance, and with the coming messenger of God who would endow men with the Holy Spirit (John 1:31-33).”*⁸

“ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’”

*“ The new birth is conditioned on the repentance and confession of the individual in response to the appeal of God and by the transformation of life by the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*⁹

Since baptism isn’t required to be saved but is the first work of obedience of the saved, then to believe this is speaking of the Holy Spirit is reasonable. It may also be speaking of the word. Consider the following.

“ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” ... “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” ... “... to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word” (1 Peter 1:23; John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26).

VI The Gift of Regeneration: We started by noting that regeneration is a supernatural work. It is a gift of God. None can do anything to regenerate themselves. This is often expressed by the statement that the new birth is not reformation—it is a new creation.

“ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” ... “... to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:10).

⁷ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, “The Gospel of John,” Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

And all persons of the Triunity are involved in this process, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Consider ... the **Father's** involvement:

“... children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.” ... “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” (John 1:13; 1 John 3:17).

... the **Son's** involvement:

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:14-17).

“Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die” (John 12:23-33).

The **Spirit's** involvement:

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you” (John 16:7-15).

“... he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

VII Conclusion: The greatest blessing God has given us is our salvation. But with this comes a host of blessings included within the work of regeneration and sanctification. Within regeneration we find the following qualities manifest in believers:

1. The believer abides in Christ. And, we have a new life in Him.

“Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us” (1 John 3:24).

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

2. The believer loves the brethren. We are given the opportunity to be part of a community of believers.

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death” (1 John 3:14).

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Ephesians 2:19).

3. The believer overcomes the world.

“... for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:4-5).

4. The believer is led by the Holy Spirit.

“... because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

And so the life of the of the unbeliever is radically changed when he or she is saved and regenerated. There is a turning from the old life and from a comfortable familiarity with sin, to a new direction, one that desires to please God.

“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:4).

And the most radical change that comes with regeneration is that we have passed from death to life and can look forward to an eternity with Christ.

“Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).

*Face to face with Christ, my Savior,
Face to face—what will it be
When with rapture I behold Him,
Jesus Christ who died for me?*

*Only faintly now I see Him,
With the darkling veil between;
But a blessed day is coming
When His glory shall be seen.*

*What rejoicing in His presence,
When are banished grief or pain;
When the crooked ways are straightened
And the dark things shall be plain.*

*Face to face—O blissful moment!
Face to face—to see and know;
Face to face with my Redeemer,
Jesus Christ who loves me so!*

*Face to face I shall behold Him,
Far beyond the starry sky;
Face to face in all His glory,
I shall see Him by and by!¹⁰*

¹⁰ Breck, Carrie E., The Celebration Hymnal, "Face to Face," Word/Integrity, Dallas, TX, 1997, #781.

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I Introduction

(John 3:1-7; Ephesians 2:8).

II A Definition of Regeneration:

(Colossians 2:13; John 5:21; 1 John 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:4; 2 Peter 1:4; Titus 3:4-6)

III The Timing of Regeneration:

(John 3:6)

IV The Necessity of Regeneration:

(Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3; Romans 3:23)

V The Nature of Regeneration:

(John 3:5; John 7:37-39, 1:31-33; 1 Peter 1:23; John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26)

VI The Gift of Regeneration:

(2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:10; John 1:13; 1 John 3:17; John 3:14-17, 12:23-33, 16:7-15; Titus 3:5)

VII Conclusion:

(2 Peter 1:4; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8)

1. The believer _____ in Christ. And, we have a new life in Him.
(1 John 3:24, 5:12)

2. The believer _____ the brethren.
(1 John 3:14; Ephesians 2:19)

3. The believer _____ the world.
(1 John 5:4-5)

4. The believer is _____ by the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 8:14)