

The Circuit Rider

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“Regeneration”

Jesus said, “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (Jh. 3:3,8).

The doctrine of REGENERATION is the same thing as what we commonly call THE NEW BIRTH (Titus 3:5). In the word, re-generation, we discover a description of a second birth denoting a new beginning of life. It is a spiritual quickening and imparting of divine life (Eph. 2:1). By nature, man is “dead” in sin and must be reborn in order to pass from spiritual “death unto life” (Jh. 5:24). For sinful man to experience salvation, he “must be born again”, or in other words, regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Those who are spiritually regenerated are “born” into the “household of faith” (Gal. 6:10) and will manifest a changed life and a new nature (Eph. 4:22-24). Within the ranks of the institutionalized church, there is some confusion as to what a Christian really is. A Christian is not merely one who has joined a local assembly or gives his money to charity. He’s not merely one who reforms his life by stopping bad things and starting good things. The only kind of true Christian is a “born again” Believer who has had a life changing, soul saving encounter with Jesus Christ by the power of God’s grace. Regeneration is a creative act on the part of God and not a reforming process on the part of man. Failure to be “born again” means to remain “lost” (II Cor. 4:3) in one’s sins, blind to the gospel, and outside the “kingdom of God”.

When Nicodemus heard Jesus speak of being “born again”, he too was somewhat confused about the new birth. By human standards, he was a good religious Jew, but he was “lost” (Matt. 18:11) in his sins. He needed something more than wealth, education, and religion to get him to heaven. Like Nicodemus, we’re all in the same sin boat together and “must be born again” if we want an eternal hope beyond the grave.

THE MEANING OF REGENERATION

Regeneration is the change brought about by the Holy Spirit by the use of divine truth in which the moral disposition of one's soul is renewed in the "image" (Rom. 8:29) of Christ. It is a transforming revolution that takes place within the heart of man. Nicodemus is a classic example of the "natural man" (I Cor. 2:14) who is unfit for the "kingdom of God". A supernatural new birth from "above" is necessary in order for a man to know God and enter into His "kingdom". The physical birth allows us to enter the sphere of men, but only the spiritual birth from "above" permits us to enter into the sphere of "fellowship" (I Jh. 1:3) with God. To be "born again" means that we become "partakers of the divine nature" (II Pet. 1:4). Receiving this "divine nature" doesn't mean that the "old" Adamic nature with which we were physically born is eradicated nor will it be until death. But, it does mean that we have a "new ... nature" that is subject to knowing and doing the will of God (Gal. 5:16-18).

Man could not and did not create himself and neither is he capable of re-creating himself (Jer. 18:3-4). Regeneration is necessary if man is to have fellowship with His Creator because his Maker is "holy" (I Pet. 1:15), but the creature is unholy. With the inherited nature of Adam, we are all "born" physically with vile and sinful tendencies. Therefore, the only way to receive a new divine nature that is directed to God is by means of a new spiritual birth.

THE MYSTERY OF REGENERATION

Regeneration is a spiritual mystery to man because it is a work of the Holy Spirit. He does the work of regeneration through the conviction of "sin" (Jh. 16:7-8) and gives "faith" (Rom. 10:17, Gal. 5:22) to believe. The Holy Spirit works quietly, silently, powerfully, and mysteriously behind the scenes of spiritual conversion to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the divine agent in the work of regeneration.

In speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus likened the work of the "Spirit" to the "wind". This Greek word for "wind" is pneumas and is the same identical word used in referring to the Holy "Spirit". No man has power over the "wind" nor can he control where it will blow. Likewise, the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration is above comprehension and is His sole prerogative. It's impossible to actually see the "wind"; all we can really see are the effects of it. The results of the new birth will be observable and unmistakable for all to see.

Regeneration is not a natural self-determined intellectual process, but a divine work of God's sovereign grace (Jh. 1:12-13). Because man is in "the flesh", he is at "enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7) and is incapable of pleasing God. No amount of human effort can ever appease God's requirements for righteousness. Only the imparting of spiritual life from the Holy Spirit can give one the capacity to know and love God.

THE MEANS OF REGENERATION

As the Holy Spirit does His work of regeneration, He uses certain influences to accomplish it. He uses the Word of God in the conviction of our sin and the revealing of truth (Jam. 1:18, I Pet. 1:22-25). The word, “water”, in our text is a reference to the Word of God and not to baptism (Eph. 5:26). God’s “word” is the cleansing tool used by the Holy Spirit to purge us from the filth of the world (Jh. 15:3). The figurative expression, “washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5) indicates the power of God’s “word” to cleanse us.

Not only does the Holy Spirit use the Word of God, but He also uses human instrumentality to proclaim it (Rom. 10:14-17). The preaching of the gospel has not been commissioned to angels, but to men (Acts 10:1-6). The Great Commission has been given to the church (Matt. 28:19-20) and believers are empowered to exercise their gifts for the good of both those inside and outside the church (Eph. 4:11-12).

Since the term, “born again”, signifies spiritual regeneration, it’s also inclusive of the concept of conversion. Regeneration and conversion are so closely connected that where one is, the other is also. Regeneration is the work of God, changing the heart of man by His sovereign will. Conversion is the work of God in turning man away from his sin to God and is the result of regeneration. Neither regeneration nor conversion actually originates with the “word of God” or the “preacher”. The Holy Spirit as effective tools through which He has chosen to accomplish His purpose uses both, the “word of God” and the “preacher” of the word. Not until the Holy Spirit overpowers man’s depraved will, man won’t “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6). God must supernaturally open our hearts to the gospel; just as He did that of Lydia’s (Acts 16:14). Unless God initiates our salvation and gives us the faith to believe, we can never become one of His “children” (Gal. 3:26). The truth of the matter is that regeneration must precede faith. When God regenerates a soul, He gives the sinner a repentant heart and faith to believe.

THE MANIFESTATION OF REGENERATION

Salvation is “free”, but that doesn’t mean that the “price” to obtain it was cheap. (Rom. 5:15-19). Jesus paid the “price” of man’s redemption by shedding His blood on the cross in order for us to be “bought” off Satan’s slave market of sin (I Cor. 6:19-20). When Jesus declared, “it is finished” (Jh. 19:30), He meant that God’s redemptive work of salvation was paid in full. God’s provision of salvation is a free “gift” (Rom. 6:23) to those whom God calls to receive it by “faith” (Rom. 4:16).

Regeneration is only possible through the “finished” work of Calvary’s “Lamb” (Jh. 1:29). Human “works” can never earn, achieve, nor merit eternal life (Eph. 2:8-10). Once we are “saved” (Rom. 10:9), then regeneration will manifest itself in “good works” (Jam. 2:17-18). Blood bought salvation frees us from the curse of the law and brings us under the liberty of grace (Rom. 8:1-6).

New life in Christ will evidence itself in the bearing of spiritual “fruit” (Gal. 5:22-25) and in faithfulness unto God. For a Christian, the things that he once loved, he will begin to hate, and the things that he once hated, he will begin to love. This is the result of being “born again” and becoming a “new creature ... in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17).

CLOSING

The regenerate man possesses the same absolute liberty, as did Adam before the fall and sinners after the fall. The difference between an unregenerate man and a regenerate man is one of ability, not liberty. Both are free to do good, but only one is able to do good. Man was created with a will to choose and when given a choice, he chose to do evil. After choosing to sin, man lost his ability of will to do anything good to accomplish his salvation (Gen. 6:5). Therefore, he is unable to convert himself and save himself from sin. But, when God converts a sinner, man is freed from his natural bondage under sin and by “grace”, enabled to trust Christ. Technically speaking, it is regeneration that breathes spiritual life into a dead soul and causes him to be “born again”. It is the exercise of faith and repentance in the heart of a sinner, both of which are accomplished by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Only God can make a new creature out of an old man. Practically speaking, we have no more to do with our second birth than we had to do with our first birth. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Agent in regeneration and for that reason, all glory and praise for our salvation belongs to God.

A MINISTRY UPDATE

We are glad to report that according to plan, our first series of messages in the Book of Esther has been completed and is now in the hands of our Webmaster. As soon as he is able, it should be downloaded on our Website very soon (hopefully, in another week or so). We are also adding another page to our Website and downloading all previous editions of “The Circuit Rider”.

Since our last quarterly publication of “The Circuit Rider”, we have been encouraged to hear from people as far away as India, Ethiopia, and Kenya. This is just a reminder of how far reaching is the world of the Internet. In the beginning of this ministry, we never thought of going on the world wide web, but Internet radio is the wave of the future. It remains our desire to broadcast over a local radio station by the end of this year, but by all means we plan, as God provides, to keep our Website up and running. The cost efficiency of the Internet is nothing compared to local airtime.

Once again, a heart-felt thanks to all that support this ministry with your prayers and finances. It is the Lord’s work and it will continue as long as He supplies the funds. If anyone would like a copy of the broadcast on the Book of Esther, we will be more than happy to supply it for the asking. It is available on either CD or cassette and consists of fifteen messages that are fourteen minutes each in length. If you can help with the cost of material and mailing it would be appreciated, but is not required. There is no charge for anything produced by this ministry. May the Lord give you a blessed 2008.

Because of His Sovereign Grace.....BWM