

MAN'S PROBLEM

Every human being is born spiritually dead. Although we may enter into this world animated with life, overflowing with energy, displaying mental alertness, a voracious appetite, and healthy vocal chords, yet spiritually we are dead. We are dead to God, incapable of knowing God, loving God, fearing God, pleasing God, or seeking God (Rom. 3:10-18; 8:8). We are separated from God by sin from our birth. We are conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5) and, from the moment we are born, we walk in sin:

The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies (Ps. 58:3).

Sin is rebellion against God and is defined by God's law (1 Jn. 3:4; Ex. 20:1-17; Matt. 22:37-40).

The Bible gives us many descriptions of spiritually dead people:

. . . who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:1-3).

. . . foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another (Titus 3:3).

(See also Rom. 1:18-32; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:17-19; Col. 3:5-9).

No amount of religious activity, moral improvement, good works, or philanthropy can change our condition. Man cannot make himself alive; indeed he cannot even see that he is dead, unless God sovereignly, graciously, and mightily gives him life.

GOD'S WORK OF REGENERATION

The word *regeneration* literally means *re-birth*. It is the work of God, whereby He makes the soul spiritually alive by the forgiveness of sins, through faith in Christ, resulting in eternal life.

The Biblical terminology regarding this supernatural work is copious and multifarious: *regeneration* – Titus 3:5; *born again* – 1 Pet. 1:3,23; Jn. 3:5,7; *born of God* – Jn. 1:13; *born of the Spirit* – Jn. 3:6,8; *renewal* – Titus 3:5; *quickened* – Eph. 2:5; *heart of flesh* – Ez. 11:19; *new heart* – Ez. 36:26; *circumcised heart* – Deut. 30:6.

This truth is implied in all the references in the NT regarding eternal life (e.g. Jn. 5:24; 11:25-26; 14:6). Since we are regenerated (made alive) by God, we have eternal life. It is also implied in all the references to believers as the sons or children of God (e.g. Rom. 8:14-16; 1 Jn. 3:1). Since we are regenerated (born of God), we are children of God. (See also Ps. 119:50,93; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:13; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18).

THE NATURE OF REGENERATION

(1) It Is the Work of God (not man)

*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: **Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God** (Jn. 1:12-13).*

*But **God**, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, **hath quickened us** together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) (Eph. 2:4-5).*

(2) It Is an Internal Work (not external)

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them (Ez. 36:26-27).

. . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer. 31:33).

THE NECESSITY OF REGENERATION

No one can be saved apart from regeneration (Jn. 3:3-5; Titus 3:5). All religion, all sacraments and ordinances, all fasting and praying, all suffering, all religious experience, all moral reform, all altruistic piety are worthless apart from regeneration.

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags . . . (Is. 64:6).

THE MEANS OF REGENERATION

How does God regenerate a soul? Let us briefly consider what the Scriptures teach.

(1) Through the forgiveness of our sins

We are dead in sins and trespasses. In order to make us alive, God forgives our sins. In order to forgive our sins, God provided a Substitute, His Son, who gave Himself on the cross to redeem us from our sins. Christ satisfied the Law and took the penalty for our sins upon Himself.

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross (Col. 2:13-14).

When we turn from our sin and call upon the Lord, trusting in the work of Christ upon the cross, we are forgiven. This is the means by which God regenerates us.

(2) By the Word of God

The written Word of God is the agency by which God makes known to us our sinful condition and the forgiveness that is available in Christ. We are regenerated through faith in Christ as revealed in the Word (Rom. 10:17; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:23).

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth . . . (James 1:18).

(3) By the Holy Spirit

The ultimate agent of the new birth is the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:8; Titus 3:5). The Spirit makes us alive by opening our eyes that we may understand and believe the testimony of Scripture to our sinful condition and God's love for us in Christ. He enables us to turn from our sin and cling to Christ. He writes the Law of God on our hearts so that we love God's truth.

THE FRUIT OF REGENERATION

How do we know that God has given us life? Just as physical life is always attested by observable evidence (animation, hunger, growth, fruit, etc.), so spiritual life always produces spiritual fruit, though in varying degrees. According to Scripture, the following is a partial list of evidences of the new birth:

- (1) **Faith in Christ** (Jn. 1:12-13; 1 Pet. 1:3)
- (2) **Love for God** (Rom. 5:5; 1 Jn. 4:19)
- (3) **Love for God's Word** (Ps. 119:97)
- (4) **Obedience to God's Word** (1 Jn. 2:3-4)
- (5) **Repentance from Sin** (Is. 55:7)
- (6) **Love for God's People** (Jn. 13:35)
- (7) **The Fruit of the Spirit** (Gal. 5:22-23)
- (8) **Endurance in the Faith** (Col. 1:23)

Are you born again? If not, or if you are uncertain, call upon the Lord today and ask Him to forgive your sins for Christ's sake and give you eternal life.

Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else (Is. 45:22).

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REGENERATION

By Dean Good

Early in the ministry of Jesus, a Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus came to him secretly, at night, seeking an interview. He is described as a 'ruler of the Jews' and 'the teacher of Israel.' He was highly respected, educated, and an expert in the Law of Moses. He would have been morally above reproach, holy in the eyes of men, fastidious regarding the keeping of the Law, a worshipper of the true God. He was apparently considered one of the greatest teachers of Biblical truth in the land of Israel. Yet the words spoken by Jesus to this man revealed that all of his religion was in vain. Jesus said:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . Ye must be born again (John 3:3,7).

Notice, Jesus did not give Nicodemus a command (*Be born again*). Neither did He give him an invitation (*Come and be born again*). Rather, Jesus declared that something must be done to him, if he would enter the kingdom of God! Salvation was not something he could *do*, or *attain*, or *accomplish*, or even *see* (understand) on his own. God must impart spiritual life to his soul. He must be spiritually born in a way that is analogous to physical birth. This doctrine of the new birth is central to all true religion. It is important to consider what the Bible teaches about it: What is it?; How is it accomplished?; What is the evidence that it has taken place?