

## Regeneration

- The problem
  - There remains a critical problem in all humanity apart from salvation:
    - We are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-3)
    - We are alienated from God and hostile in mind (Col 1:21)
    - We are unrighteous and not seeking God (Rom 3:10-11)
    - We are unable and unwilling to please God (Rom 8:7-8)
  - So then, how can a person who is dead in trespasses and sins, whose mind is hostile against God, who is unrighteous and does not seek God, and who cannot please God, savingly answer the call of salvation?
  - God's sovereign work of regeneration solves the issue.
- Definition
  - "Regeneration is the sovereign act of God, by the Holy Spirit and through the preached gospel, whereby he instantaneously imparts spiritual life to a sinner bringing him out of spiritual death and into spiritual life."<sup>1</sup>
  - Regeneration is the work of God's Holy Spirit, through the knowledge of the gospel, in which He changes the spiritual condition of a person, bringing him from death to life. Regeneration is the beginning of all true change in the believer, from the heart. It results in a life of ongoing change (sanctification) and ends in the complete transformation of the believer into the image of Christ (glorification). Another term for regeneration is "born again." This is the moment the believer receives the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:5; Titus 3:5; John 3:5).

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 585.

- Biblical teaching
  - John 3:1-8 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; <sup>2</sup> this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> “Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> “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.”
  - 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.
  - Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)
  - Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit
- Described
  - Regeneration is the work of God’s Holy Spirit in which He changes the spiritual condition of a person, bringing him from death to life.
  - John Murray: “God effects a change which is radical and all-pervasive, a change which cannot be explained in terms of any combination, permutation, or accumulation of human resources, a change which is nothing less than a new creation by him who calls the things that be not as though they were, who spake and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast.”
  - Another term for regeneration is being born again. This is the moment the believer receives the Holy Spirit. Eph. 2:5; Titus 3:5; John 3:5.

- Regeneration occurs at the same time as the effectual call, but it is different. Effectual call describes the act of God's sovereign grace where he draws us to himself for salvation. Regeneration describes the act of God's grace, immediately consequent of effectual call, where the soul is made alive for the first time.
- "Regeneration...is a stupendous change because it is God's recreative act...The regenerate person cannot live in sin and be unconverted. And neither can he live any longer in neutral abstraction. He is instantly a member of the kingdom of God, and his action and behavior must be consonant with that new citizenship."<sup>2</sup>
- Regeneration is the beginning of all true heart change, and change of nature. It results in a life of ongoing transformation (sanctification) and ends in the complete transformation of the believer into the image of Christ (glorification).
- "While the believer's sanctification is linked organically with his new birth – in a sense, regeneration is sanctification begun, and sanctification is regeneration continued – nevertheless, this intimate relationship must not lead to a conflation of the two."<sup>3</sup>
- Far too often, the conception entertained of conversion is so superficial that it completely fails to take account of the momentous change of which conversion is the fruit. (109)
- The Trinity and Inseparable Operations
  - God the Father chooses who will be saved prior to creation (Eph 1:3-5)
  - God the Son atones for those whom the Father chose (John 6:37, 39; Eph 1:7)
  - God the Holy Spirit then regenerates all whom the Father chose and the Son atoned for (Eph 1:13-14)

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<sup>2</sup> Murray, pp. 109, 110.

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 585.

- The three Persons of the Triune God are one. Therefore, they operate inseparably in salvation (i.e., the doctrine of inseparable operations).
- Therefore, the Holy Spirit will certainly, without fail, regenerate every single soul whom the Father elected in eternity past. Not one will be lost (John 6:37, 39).
- Who will be regenerated/born again?
  - All whom the Father has chosen and given Christ (John 6:37, 39; Eph 1:4-5)
  - All who believe in saving faith upon Jesus Christ (John 6:37b, 40)
  - Those who believe are also those whom the Father has chosen and given Christ
- Timing
  - The timing of regeneration differs from the timing of election (before creation) and propitiation and the atonement (when Christ died on the cross).
  - The Holy Spirit's regeneration occurs simultaneous with God's effectual call (John 6:44); the moment which he decrees in history. Only he knows when he will call the elect sinner to salvation.
  - It is the moment that the previously unsaved sinner is effectually called to salvation.
  - Therefore, we cannot plan our own regeneration. We cannot cause our regeneration. It is solely the work of God's sovereign grace.
- Blessing
  - Without God's sovereign grace in regeneration, we would remain dead in our sins, hostile in mind towards God, and naturally unwilling and unable to please God.
  - By God's sovereign grace in his effectual call, he ensures that we are savingly brought to him. This he does by his grace and power, not ours.

All whom are called will respond by putting faith in Christ.

- Recommended resource:
  - *The Cross and Salvation*, Bruce Demarest, Chapter 7, (Crossway, 1997).
  - *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Biblical Truth*, eds. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, pp. 576-589, (Crossway, 2017).