

Digging Deep: Exploring the Joy of Systematic Theology
Class 26: The Doctrine of Salvation, part 5
Regeneration

"... this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."
John 17. 3

I. A Brief Recap



II. Defining "Regeneration"

Regeneration = the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit in granting spiritual life to each of God's elect by raising them from the dead so that they are able to repent of their sins, and believe on & trust in Christ alone for their salvation as new creation.

III. Understanding Regeneration

A. Regeneration is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*

John 3. 1-7

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

Titus 3. 4-6

B. Regeneration is the work of God alone.

*“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And **I will** vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. **I will** take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. **I will** sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols **I will** cleanse you. And **I will** give you a new heart, and a new spirit **I will** put within you. And **I will** remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will** put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

Ezekiel 36. 22-27

... to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1. 12-13

*Regeneration is birth; sanctification is growth. In **regeneration**, God implants desires that were not there before: desire for Himself, for holiness, and for the hallowing and glorifying of His name in this world; desire to pray, worship, love, serve, honor, and please Him; desire to show love and bring benefit to others. In **sanctification**, the Holy Spirit “works in you to will and to act” according to God’s purpose; what he does is prompt you to “work out your salvation” by fulfilling these new desires (Phil. 2. 12-13). Christians become increasingly Christ-like as the moral profile of Jesus is progressively formed in them (2 Cor. 3. 18; Gal. 5:22-25).*

Jl Packer, Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs

C. Regeneration comes before faith.

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

James 1.18

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ...

1 Peter 1.3

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God ...

1 John 5.1

... even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’

sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4. 3-6

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

Acts 16.14

IV. What Are the Implications of Regeneration?

1. Don't ever underestimate the power of the new birth to change anyone!

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am ...

I Corinthians 15. 8-10

2. Realize that regeneration gives to God's people ...

- a. A new sense of sight

The soul that sees, that gets spiritual sight, though it may have not discerned it in shadows before, now discerns in the truths of God a beauty and an excellence of which it had no conception until now.

Archibald Alexander, Thoughts on Religious Experience

Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy & gracious, & having a sense of the loveliness & beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former, that knows not how honey tastes; but a man can't have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind. So there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful & having a sense of his beauty. Such is the effect of the Spirit-wrought new birth.

Jonathan Edwards

- b. A new grasp of identity

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Philippians 3. 7-12

3. Rejoice! What has been started in you by God will be brought to completion for you by God!

I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1.6

... the implantation of spiritual life in a soul which is dead in sin, is an event the consequences of which will never end. When you plant an acorn, and it grows, you do not expect to see the maturity, much less the end of the majestic oak, which will expand its boughs and strike deeply into the earth its roots. The fierce blasts of centuries of winters may beat upon it and agitate it—but it resists them all. Yet finally this majestic oak, and all its towering branches, must fall. Trees die of old age, as well as men. But the plants of grace shall ever live. They shall flourish in everlasting verdure. They will bear transplanting to another climate—to another world. They shall bloom and bear fruit in the paradise of God. At such an hour one is born in Zion unto God. Few know it. Few care for the event, or consider it of much importance. But, reader, this feeble germ, this incipient bud, will go on to grow and flourish for infinitely more years than there are sands upon the seashore.

*To drop the figure—this renewed soul will be seen and known among the saints in heaven, and assisting in the never-ceasing songs of those who surround the throne of God and the Lamb, millions of ages hereafter. Pure and holy shall it be—“without spot or wrinkle or any such thing”. (Eph 5:27) Bright as an angel, and as free from moral taint—but still distinguished from those happy beings, to whom it is equal, by singing a song in which they can never join; in wearing robes made white in the blood of the Lamb; and claiming a nearer kindred to the Son of God than Gabriel himself. **Can that event be of small import, which lays a foundation for immortal bliss for eternal life?***

Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*