

Doctrinal Study #3

Regeneration

John 3:1-18

Of the many experiences in a man's life to which he looks back with a great deal of fondness, certainly one of the most outstanding is the moment his firstborn child is put into his arms. He holds that tiny form and looks down into that little, red, wrinkled, squalling face and says, "This is mine." **What dreams, hopes, desires, and ambitions fill a father's heart in that minute.** Many times it has been a pastor's privilege to go into a hospital where a child has been born, and almost without exception, when the pastor has spoken with the mother and father, the father says, "Come on down the hall, I want to show you my baby," displaying that which is the father's joy. **One never gets over the miracle of a human birth.** We marvel at the miracle in the new life that has come into this world.

Heaven never ceases to wonder and to offer praise and thanksgiving to the God of creation, and the God of re-creation, for the miracle of the new birth. Our Lord spoke to Nicodemus and said, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). The Apostle, in Titus 3:5 said, "Not by works of righteousness which you have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit." That which was referred to as being "born again" in John 3 is referred to as "regeneration" in Titus 3:5. The same truth is presented to us in another words, as found in Ephesians 2:1, the Apostle says, "... you he has made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins." The words "made alive" or "quicken" are the same concept as in "born again" or "regeneration." **And frequently in the Word of God we have reference made to those who are the children of God.** In 1 John 3:1-2 John said, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons (or children) of God...Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be..." And when reference is made to those who have been born into God's family as the "children of God," Scripture is giving us the same basic concept as when our Lord said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again." In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read, "...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation..." So whether we speak of *born again*, or sons of God, or a *new creation*, or *quicken*, or *made alive*, these words all bring before us the thought of the miracle of the *new birth*. It is that miracle of the new birth we would have you consider as we consider the doctrinal word – *regeneration*.

The English word "regeneration" is a word of Latin origin, which means, "born again, born a second time, generated over again." And while we may be confused over the English word "regenerate" there can be little confusion over "born again" or "born a second time" or "the new birth." **One who is born into this world spiritually dead must be born a second time, of a new Father, into a**

new family, if he is to have eternal life and is to become the child of God. Human beings, other than Adam, came into this world only one way, by a process of birth. This is the result of conception where the parents gave to the child of the nature, the life, which they possessed. If we are to be born into God's family, it must be through a miracle of a new birth, of a new Father who can give a new nature to us, so that we may be called the sons, or the children of God. Now these are facts with which I trust you are very familiar, for there is no more important truth than that which Christ shared with Nicodemus, "You must be born again."

Look with me at several passages in the Word of God that will emphasize different facets of this truth, which reveal to us the complexity of this miracle. Human birth is a complex miracle, but the *new birth* is a far more complex miracle. That which we have come to take for granted manifests to us the exceeding greatness of the power and the wisdom of God. In John 1:12-13, we read, "...as many as received him (that is, Christ), to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe on his name; who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Notice the words "who were born...of God." In this phrase "born of God" the emphasis is placed on the Author of the new birth. God is the Author of the plan of salvation. The Apostle Paul, writing in 1 Corinthians, reminds us that Christ is the "wisdom" of God. Writing in Romans 3:26 Paul says that the salvation offered us in Jesus Christ is the manifestation of the wisdom of God, for God found a solution to the to the problem of how He could be just and at the same time justify the ungodly. The Author of our salvation is the all-wise God. Salvation is not an afterthought, as if after man sinned God found a way to patch up the hole in His plan for humanity. Rather, the Bible tells us in 1 Peter 1:19-20 that salvation was ordained in Christ before the ages were ever formed. Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 1 that before the foundation of the world that God ordained Christ to manifest His grace, His love, His mercy, His wisdom, His justice, His righteousness, and His holiness to us. In other words, salvation did not originate by *blood*; that is, it is not of human lineage. Salvation is not by the will of the flesh; that is, man would never have devised such an elaborate plan to accomplish his redemption. Nor is it by the will of the man; that is, man did not have the ability to save himself. Man, dead in trespasses and sins, had no will toward God, and no hunger or appetite for God. He was self-satisfied, and self-complacent in his spiritual death. Salvation's plan did not originate with men, even in the minds of the wisest of men, but salvation originated with God. The Apostle John has eliminated every human instrument and agent, every human craving and desire. He says that as the child was born into this world, not because of his own will, but because of the will of another, so we are born into the family of God, not by the exercise of our own will, or of our own desires, or of our own working, but we were born of God.

Reporting to us the message that was proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle records the fact that one of born of God. **With this we may rightly begin our consideration of the doctrine of regeneration. We are born of God.**

In the second place, as our Lord told Nicodemus in John 3:5-6, “Except a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” **Here a very well known truth concerning the new birth is presented. One must be born of the Spirit.** God the Father is the *Author*, but the Holy Spirit is the *active agent* in the miracle of regeneration.

Water, through the Scripture, is used as an emblem of cleansing: we are cleansed with the water of the Word. *Water* is also used in the Bible as an emblem of the *Word of God*: the Word of God convicts of uncleanness, and that conviction brings us to One who can grant us cleansing, and through Him we enter into the experience of the new birth. While the Spirit may use means, the Holy Spirit is the active agent who accomplishes the new birth. **As in human birth, there must be a human agent; so in the divine birth, there must be an agent, and the agent is the Holy Spirit of God.** Since the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, the one who is begotten of the Spirit is begotten, or is born, into the life of God and is filled with the nature of God. The agent, then, is not the flesh, for the Lord said in verse 6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh...” **Two human parents can beget only one in their own likeness.** They pass on, through this miracle of natural birth, the nature they received from their fathers, who in turn received it from their father, all the way back to Adam. **That which is born of the flesh is always flesh. On the other hand, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and our Lord emphasizes the truth that, if we are to become children of God, we must have a new Father who can give us a new nature so that we can be acceptable in that new family.** God is the Author; the Holy Spirit is the agent.

Now, that which the Holy Spirit births is not a body, but rather is life. When we were born into the world by a *natural birth*, our parents were responsible for the life that we possess and also the body in which that life resides. When the Holy Spirit births us into the family of God He does not give us a *new body*; that *new body* will come by *resurrection*. **But the Holy Spirit does give a new life, and the Spirit imparts the life of God as the life that is possessed by the child of God.** It is the Holy Spirit’s part, then, in this miracle of the new birth, to give life.

As we turn to 1 Peter 1:23, we find the means by which the Holy Spirit produces the miracle of the new birth. He says, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides

forever.” There Peter refers to the use made of the Word of God by the Spirit in the new birth. **We were born of God – God was the Author. We are born of the Spirit – the Spirit was the agent.** But here we are born again by the Word of God, and the Word is the means by which the Spirit of God accomplishes the miracle of the new birth. In order to understand the part that the Word of God has, we must realize that the Word of God is *living*, and *powerful*. The King James Version says this in verse 12, “...the word of God is quick, and powerful...” The word translated “quick” means “living.” **The Word of God is living because it came from a living God and it has the power to impart life to those who are regenerated as the Spirit uses it as the agent.** We are presenting to you “**living truth**” when we preach and teach the Word of God.

In addition to this fact, we must add Romans 10:17, where we are told that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” **A man cannot believe that of which he is ignorant.** He cannot accept that which he does not know. Before a man can exercise faith, he must have knowledge, and knowledge always precedes faith. **If there is no knowledge, then faith has no object.** The *Word of God* presents to us the *truth of God*. The Word of God gives us facts which faith can lay hold of. **It is our ministry to teach the Word of God so that you may have some facts upon which you may lay hold and which will be the basis of your salvation, the basis for your daily life in the Lord Jesus Christ, as a child of God.** Apart from knowledge, there can be no working faith.

Peter made it very clear the part the Word of God plays in our salvation. The Word of God shows us why we need to be born again: we are sinners; as sinners we are under wrath, judgment, and condemnation. The sentence of death has been passed upon us and all who are sinners will be removed from the presence of God forever. **They have no hope, no God, no Christ, no Savior, and no life.** The Word of God shows that the Son of God was the sinless One who took our sins upon Himself. The Word of God reveals that Jesus Christ has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, that upon Him was placed all of our *unrighteousness*, that His *righteousness* might be given to us. **The Word of God tell us that a man who does no more than believe that Jesus Christ is his personal Savior passes from death to life.** Those are all facts, which are presented to you for your belief, that you might accept those facts and reckon upon them. Now, if you are ignorant of the Word of God, you are ignorant of your need for salvation; and are also ignorant of God’s provision for salvation. Therefore, Peter says, the Word of God has a part in salvation, for the Word of God reveals the *fact*, the *need*, and the *solution* to the problem, as it is found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we turn to Galatians 3:26, we discover yet another fact. We are begotten by faith, “For you are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ...” We become a child of God by only one way – by a new birth. **And Paul point out, in verse 26, that that which accomplishes the new birth is faith in Jesus Christ.** Here we have the *instrument* by which the new birth is accomplished – faith in Jesus Christ. This is the same truth that we have been told in John 1:12, “But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” Twice he states the *instrument* by which we become the sons of God, “...as many as received him...them that believe on his name.” **This is the act of faith that simply stretches out the hand to receive that gift which God has to place in it.** *Belief, or receiving,* is the response to the facts of the gospel presented in the Word of God. Paul said he was “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it was the power of God unto salvation...” When the *power of God* is revealed in the *Word of God*, and the *facts* are *received* and *believed*, then the miracle of the *new birth* takes place.

In order that heaven might be populated with sons, God planned and provided for the miracle of the new birth. He sent the Spirit to accomplish the work. He gave His Son, that He might be the basis for salvation by shedding His blood. He gives us the Word so that we might know the Son, that we might come, through faith, to a new birth.

Our Lord said to Nicodemus, “You must be born again.” **There is no greater message that the world needs.** There is no solution but the solution, which the Lord gave to Nicodemus, “You must be born again.”