

THE NECESSITY OF REGENERATION

INTRODUCTION

There are only two spiritual conditions of mankind and all men fall into one of those conditions. One is a state of spiritual death and the Bible teaches that all of us were born into this condition.

David said,

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Psalm 51:5

And again, in Isaiah 48:8 it says that man is a transgressor from the womb.

Yea, thou heardest not; thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb.

Isaiah 48:8

Now if we were sinners from our conception, it must mean that we are sinners by nature without respect to our personal sins. And that is exactly what the Bible teaches. It teaches that Adam sinned and God considered every human being in Adam. Adam was our representative and when he sinned we sinned. And when we were conceived we were sinners by imputation and by nature. And when we were born we proved it by our many sins.

And the Bible says,

The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.

Gen. 8:21

And I don't need to tell you that, do I? Though we have men and women from all stations in life in our congregation this morning, every one of you came into this world in the same condition – a condition that the Bible simply calls spiritual death.

Now, I said that there are only two spiritual conditions and all men fall into one or the other. The one condition is spiritual death and the other is spiritual life. And these two conditions are totally different in nature.

One is called death, the other is called life. One is characterized by sin and the other by righteousness. One is called darkness and the other light. And the final destination of one is eternal torment and the final destination of the other is eternal peace and joy.

But the question is, since we were all conceived in that state of spiritual death, and we are all sinners by nature, how do we get from spiritual death to spiritual life? How do we get out of that evil condition in which we stand under the condemnation of God, into that blessed state where there is no condemnation?

Another way to ask the question might be simply to ask the question, “What must I do to be saved?”

Now I want to assure you that there are many things that are required of a Christian. A Christian is commanded to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. A Christian is commanded to love God. A Christian is commanded to do good works. A Christian is commanded to put on patience and humility and all the Christian graces. There must be a thousand commands that are applicable to the Christian.

But none of those things are possible while you reside in the state of spiritual death. You see, that’s why it is called a state of death.

Example: In the physical realm, death means there is a body lying in a casket. And that body cannot think or feel or act because it is dead.

And spiritual death is like that. You can’t think or feel or act because you are dead spiritually.

In fact, every inclination of your being is against God when you are spiritually dead.

The Bible says,

The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the Law of God neither indeed can be.

Romans 8:7

Now this tells us that,

I. There are two problems which confront the man who is spiritually dead.

A. He is unwilling to come to God. He is at war with God. And he doesn’t want to come to God. He prefers the condition of spiritual death to spiritual life.

Listen to the Scriptures.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

John 3:19

So, in a man that is dead spiritually, that natural condition that we are all in at conception, there is a love for the darkness and an aversion to the light. And he is very much unwilling to come.

Note: The Arminian would like to suggest that some men, in their lost condition, want to come to God, but because they are not elect, they are prevented from coming. How foolish is that! John says, “Men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.”

As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Romans 3:10, 11

And so, the sinner in his natural condition, never wants to come to God. He is unwilling.

But, not only is the natural man unwilling to come,

B. He is unable to come to God.

They that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:8

Example: Now every New Year on January 1 people make big resolutions. Some people resolve to go on an exercise program. Some people resolve to stop smoking. Some people may resolve to stick to a budget. And they set a standard for themselves that seems attainable for the moment. But then, a few days later, they find that they have forsaken their own resolutions.

Now if people can't even measure up to their own ideals for more than a few days, then they certainly can't measure up to the holy requirements of God. The natural man must admit there is a force within him that drags him down and inclines him to evil.

And the Bible says, *They that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

And you say, Brother Ron, you're painting a picture that sounds hopeless. It sounds like we are born in a state of spiritual death and we have no willingness to get out and we have no ability to get out.

And that's the picture that I have tried to paint. And it is a very discouraging picture and a very unflattering picture of man, but a very accurate picture.

Now if you understand that hopeless predicament, you have come to understand a very basic and fundamental truth of the Bible. And that truth is, in your original condition which is called spiritual death, you don't **want** to do anything about it and you **can't** do anything about it.

Now this idea flies in the face of most human thinking. Most people think they can move from spiritual death to spiritual life by doing something.

1. Some think they can change their spiritual condition by joining a church.
2. Some think they can change their spiritual condition by doing good works.
3. Some think they can change their spiritual condition by reciting some prayer or reciting some words of a ritual.
4. Some think they can change their spiritual condition by denying themselves certain pleasures. Maybe they think fasting or being celibate will do it.

5. Some think they can jump from spiritual death to spiritual life by engaging in those very good acts of repentance and faith.

But the Scriptures say, *They that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

And Jesus said, *“No man can come to me except the Father draw him.”*
John 6:44

And so, the Scriptures assure us that there is nothing we can do to jump from that state of spiritual death to spiritual life.

Let me read you a story from Matthew 19:16-26

And behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

Look at verse 16. Isn't that exactly what men ask? What must I do?

And Jesus summed it up in verse 26. With men this is impossible!

Now think about what Jesus said there. “With men it is impossible.” That suggests that a man cannot do anything to save himself.

But you go from pulpit to pulpit in Memphis, Tennessee and you will hear that it is possible. “All you have to do is this and all you have to do is that.”

But Jesus said, “With men it is impossible.” And that suggests there is nothing a man can do.

But then, he says, “With God, all things are possible.” That suggests that God can save a man.

And this is exactly what is required to move a person from spiritual death to spiritual life – an act of God; and no mean act of God, but a miraculous act of creation.

And the theological word for that is regeneration. And regeneration is an exclusive work of God. It is not a cooperative work between God and man. It is what theologians call a monergistic work. God works alone in the act of regeneration and man is entirely passive.

According to Wikipedia, “Monergism describes the position in Christian theology of those who believe that God through the Holy Spirit works to effectually bring about the salvation of individuals through spiritual regeneration without cooperation from the individual. Monergism is often associated with Calvinism and its doctrine of irresistible grace.”

Synergism, on the other hand, is the belief that God and individuals cooperate for salvation.

And this is the essence of the doctrinal difference between the Calvinist and the Arminian. The Calvinist believes that regeneration is entirely a creative work of God that does not depend on any act of man. Regeneration does not depend on the faith of man. Regeneration does not depend on the repentance of man. Regeneration does not depend on man coming to Christ. Rather, the faith of man and the repentance of man and coming to Christ are wholly the fruits of regeneration.

The Arminian believes that the act of faith brings about regeneration. He believes that the act of the sinner coming to Christ prompts God into the act of regeneration. And there you have the difference. If you want to hear the Arminian point of view turn on your television sets to the biggest church in Memphis. And you will hear how it is ultimately up to the sinner. You will hear that God has made salvation possible, but it is the sinner who determines his own fate. You might hear something like this, “God votes for you, the Devil votes against you and you cast the deciding vote.”

But at Grace Baptist Church we believe that there is only one vote that has any significance whatsoever and that is the vote of the sovereign God. If he casts a vote for me by election, then neither the devil nor my own depravity can nullify the vote that was cast on my behalf in eternity past.

Once God said, “I hereby set my love upon such and such a sinner,” then the gates of hell shall not prevail against that sinner. And the fact that Satan hates the sinner will not prevent the sinner’s final salvation. And the fact that the sinner cannot come to God will not prevent God from drawing the sinner to himself. And though the sinner cannot please God, yet, God can make the sinner pleasing in his sight.

Now be sure, there are parts of the salvation process, after a man is regenerated, that do involve the will and the affections of man. Somewhere along the line, as a result of the regenerative work of God, man does choose to follow Jesus and man does love Jesus and man does repent and man does believe, but these good inclinations of men are not the efficient cause of regeneration. Rather, regeneration is the efficient cause of these good inclinations.

A man will be at war with God and will be a wretched and lost sinner to the end of his days, unless God does a regenerative work in his heart.

Listen to what God promised a lost and wretched Israel in the Old Testament.

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh.

Ezekiel 11:19

Notice how many times God says “I” in this verse.
Notice that this changing of the heart is a gift.

Example: There was a woman named Lydia in the city of Thyatira. And Paul came out to the river side where some women were gathered. And Paul spoke to these women. And in Acts 16:14 it says “the Lord opened her heart, so that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul.” And she was baptized.

Now when it says “God open her heart,” that is regeneration.

Example: Now when Jesus was on the earth, a man named Lazarus died. And the family called for Jesus because they knew that Jesus had performed great miracles. And when Jesus came into town he went to the place where the body of Lazarus lay. And Lazarus had been dead for several days and his body was beginning to stink. And Jesus shouted in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” And amazingly, Lazarus got up and hopped out of the grave still bound in grave clothes.

Now that is regeneration. Lazarus was alive and then he died and Jesus brought this dead man back to life. Now this illustration involves regeneration in the physical realm. But it illustrates how a man is brought to life spiritually.

You see, there was no life in Lazarus. And Jesus simply gave him life. And he moved Lazarus from the condition of being dead to the condition of being alive. He didn’t tell Lazarus he would raise him if he believed. Lazarus was dead. Lazarus couldn’t believe. Jesus simply made him alive. And then, he told Lazarus to come forth. And Lazarus came forth alive.

Now, when we are born into this world, we are born spiritually dead. And we have no desire to obey God and we have no ability to obey God. And we continue on in our sins day after day after day and there is no spiritual life in us.

And if we die in that condition, then the Bible says we shall be cast into the eternal lake of fire. And there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But by unmitigated and free grace, God regenerates his elect. He makes them alive. And they are moved from spiritual death to spiritual life, by his sovereign good pleasure and by his mighty power.

Now I would like you to see that,

II. Regeneration is by the efficient work of the Holy Spirit.

And let's look at John 3:1-12

Example: Nicodemus came to Jesus and asked Jesus what he must do to be saved. Jesus told him, "Ye must be born again." And the word can be translated, "Ye must be born from above." Not an earthly birth, Nicodemus, but a heavenly birth. And Jesus went on to explain that,

A. This heavenly birth is a birth of the Spirit. (v.6)

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

And look at verse 8 where it says,

Look at verse 8 which compares the working of the Spirit to the wind.

. . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Now this birth which is effected by the Holy Spirit is compared to the wind.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth:

John 3:8

Just as the wind blows wherever it wants,

B. The Holy Spirit blows wherever it wants.

This is the pure, unmitigated, undeniable, sovereignty of God. You see, salvation is not in the hands of men. The eternal destinies of men is not determined by the will of men. But it is determined by God. And in the case of regeneration, it is determined by the Holy Spirit, for it says,

The wind bloweth where it listeth.

And the simple analogy is that the Holy Spirit blows where He wants to blow and he makes alive those sinners whom he wants to make alive.

And does this not confirm what John already said in John 1:12, 13 where it says,

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, (there is regeneration) not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

You see, the wind bloweth where it listeth, and so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

And I would suggest to you that the Holy Spirit has determined to blow on those whom the Father has chosen, which, by the way, are the very ones whom the Son came to redeem. These same ones who the Father set his love upon and who the Son redeemed are the very ones whom the Holy Spirit regenerates. And this is because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in essence and there is unity of purpose among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And if the Father set his love upon some and elected them, then it was the pleasure of the Son to die for them to satisfy the just requirements of the law that were against them, and it was the joy of the Holy Spirit to make them alive.

Now we have seen that the Holy Spirit blows where it wants, but also notice that,

C. Regeneration is a direct creative act by the Holy Spirit upon the spirit of man.

That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

John 3:6

It appears that the regenerative act is an act by the Holy Spirit of God by which he brings to life the very spirit of man.

The majestic power of the regenerative act is very much like when God spoke and the world came into existence. The awesome power of that creative act is unimaginable.

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

And when the Holy Spirit says, "Let he that is dead in trespasses and sins live," it is a creative act of God wrought by his mighty power and by his mighty power exclusively. And therefore we say, "To God be the glory and to God alone be the glory."

Now I want you to see also that,

D. The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration seems to be performed in the unconsciousness of man.

And I think this is the idea when it says in John 3:8, *and thou hearest the sound thereof, but thou cans't not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth.*

You will surely see the effects of regeneration, those holy principles and holy dispensations that are wrought in the life of every man who is born again, and you may see those results simultaneously and immediately upon regeneration or you may see them by and by, but the work of regeneration itself is worked in the quiet recesses of the heart of man and that work is perhaps very unknown until those holy effects are manifested.

The work of the Holy Spirit is a mysterious work. It is a work performed in the spiritual realm.

If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things.

John 3:12

You see, regeneration is a heavenly thing as Jesus puts it. By that, he means a spiritual thing, not perceptible by the physical eye or ear or by the physical senses. And regeneration is not an ostentatious work, not a showy work, but a work upon the heart of man and upon the very spirit of man.

A SUMMARY OF THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

1. The necessity of regeneration arises principally from the natural condition of man. Is it necessary that God regenerate man? And the answer is a resounding, "Yes." It is necessary because man is dead. Man is not just sick, such that he might get better with treatment. Man is not merely polluted so that he might get better by daily washings and self-improvement programs. Man is not merely confused. Man is not merely a rebel for the moment. Man is not merely darkened intellectually such that he might get learning and be saved. But, man is dead. And this means that if man is to attain unto God, then God must make him alive.
2. The efficient cause of regeneration is the Holy Spirit of God and him alone.

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.

John 3:8

3. Regeneration is logically before faith, repentance and good works.

Now, the Arminian says that man believes then man is born again. But we say, man is born again, and then he believes. And there is a huge difference. One gives the credit for salvation to man's faith. The other gives the credit to God's sheer grace. One gives the credit to man's will. The other gives the credit to the will of God. One says, "Man is not totally dead, he can believe." The other says, "Man is dead, man cannot believe and God must make him alive."

Now if you remember nothing else about regeneration, remember that regeneration is in its essence taking something that is dead and giving it life.

Consider Ezekiel 37:1-14

A. v.1 God carried Ezekiel to the middle of a valley. And Ezekiel looked around and the valley was full of bones.

Now these weren't the bones of animals, but they were human bones. These were the bones of men that were slain. (see v.9) Apparently they were the bones of the armies of Israel who were slaughtered once upon a time in this valley. There were human skeletons.

B. v.2 And these bones were very dry. (v.2) These men were not recently killed, The flesh had disintegrated and there was nothing left but bones and the bones were dried out.

And this is a very good analogy to the hearts of men who are spiritually dead. There is no sign of spiritual life and in fact there are signs everywhere of utter decay and death.

C. v.3 And God asked Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?"

That is, can sinew and flesh and skin come back upon these dried up bones and can they live again?

D. v.3 And Ezekiel gave a very wise answer.

Now Ezekiel knew that this was impossible with men. But, knowing the power of God, Ezekiel said, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

E. v.4 And God said, "Ezekiel, prophesy unto these dead bones. And tell them to hear the Word of the Lord. And tell them that I will make them live again, that I will lay sinews upon them and will bring flesh upon them and cover them with skin and breathe life into them.

F. And Ezekiel prophesied to these dead bones and while Ezekiel was yet speaking, he heard a noise and a shaking. And the bones started assembling - hand bones and finger bones and arm bones and leg bones. And each bone fastened to the right joint. And when the bones were fastened together, the sinews and the flesh and the skin covered the bones. And yet, there was no life in them.

G. And God told Ezekiel to prophesy again and tell the wind to come and breathe life into these slain. And Ezekiel prophesied and the breath of life came into them and they stood up on their feet and they were an exceeding great army.

And this is what regeneration is. It is bringing life out of death. God doesn't merely bring health to the sick, but in regeneration, he brings life to the dead.

CONCLUSION

There are many millions of dead souls in this world. They died long ago when Adam sinned. And there is no life in them whatsoever. And the birds have eaten the flesh off their bones spiritually speaking. And their bones are rotting. And they seem to have no hope whatsoever.

Yet, there is one hope and one only - and that hope is that God would come to the valley of sin and death and that he would speak the creative word and miraculously make them alive. There is hope, yet not in man's ability to save himself, but hope in God's mercy and in his sheer grace and in his awesome power to bring the dead to life.

There is yet hope, because God has a people and he will not let their spiritual bones rot forever. Jesus redeemed these people by laying himself on the altar and spilling innocent blood. And the Holy Spirit will not let those for whom Christ died lay dead in their trespasses and sins. But he will speak the word and they will come to spiritual life. And they will then believe when they could not believe before and they will mourn over their sins when they reveled in them before. And they will repent of their sins when they would not repent before. And they will come to Jesus trusting and loving Him when they could not come before.

Such is the awesome power of the Holy Spirit in his wonderful creative work which we call regeneration.