

THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE: REGENERATION



According to Thiessen (Thiessen, 1949), regeneration is the Biblical doctrine of the change that takes place in the believer at the time of the rebirth. The old person has made way for the new creature:

¹⁷Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. – **2 Corinthians 5:17**

DEFINITION

There are two ways to look at regeneration. From the **divine** point of view, regeneration is God effecting change in the heart of the believer. From the **human** point of view, it is called conversion. At its most basic level, regeneration is the communication of divine life to the soul of man and the provision of a new nature. This produces a new creation. The result is that there is a profound effect on the intellect, will, and emotions of the new man. These three are supported as follows:

INTELLECT

¹⁴But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he **know** them, because they are spiritually discerned. – **1 Corinthians 2:14**

The reference given here obviously refers to the state of man before his rebirth, showing that the natural man cannot know or understand the things of the Spirit of God using his intellect alone. This same understanding acts when the person is reborn, but now his intellect understands the Spirit of God.

WILL

¹³For it is God which worketh in you both to **will** and to do of his good pleasure. – **Philippians 2:13**

In this verse **will** is used as a verb, but it also implies the noun – **the will of man** to decide to do either good or evil.

EMOTIONS

⁸Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye **rejoice** with joy unspeakable and full of glory: ⁹Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. – **1 Peter 1:8-9**

The emotions rejoice in a way that cannot be humanly explained.

WHY IS REGENERATION NECESSARY?

Regeneration is critical, else man cannot be in the presence of God. Regeneration results in holiness, and holiness is a requirement for fellowship with God. Since we are sinners before the rebirth, as a result of this same rebirth, regeneration brings about a change in the mind. This change is an act of the Holy Spirit. He regenerates the heart so that there can be communion with God. The Word of God states in John Chapter Three that unless a man is born again (the rebirth), he cannot see the kingdom of God:

³Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. – **John 3:3**

Before the rebirth we are sinners, sons of disobedience, children of wrath, sons of this age, and children of the devil. While this may sound harsh, this is exactly what we were before we were regenerated by the Spirit of God.

THE METHOD

How does the regeneration take place? The agents that partake in the process of regeneration are the will of God; the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the Word of God; the ministers of the Word; and the Holy Spirit.

The will of God

John clearly states that we are born because it is God's will:

¹³Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. – **John 1:13**

Man is reborn not from the blood of man; neither because of a physical desire (flesh); nor of a decision man makes (man's will), but because of the will of God.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

Only by believing the truth of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (which God willed) can there be any chance of a rebirth:

¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: ¹⁵That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. – **John 3:14-16**

Jesus was lifted up on the cross (crucified); God gave the life of Jesus over to death (He died); and as a result of His resurrection (He lives again, forever), we can now have eternal life.

The Word of God

The true Word of God washes us clean. Although this may seem to suggest that baptism is a critical element, this would be an action of man rather than that the focus would be on the Word that breathes life into the dead spiritual nature:

²³Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, **by the word of God**, which liveth and abideth for ever. – **1 Peter 1:23**

As far as the baptism is concerned, Peter makes it clear that the baptism itself does not save us but being baptised is an act of obedience (good conscience):

²¹The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: ²²Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. – **1 Peter 3:21-22**

If Jesus felt the need to be baptised, so should we all.

The ministers of the Word

There is hardly an example of regeneration where persons other than the new believer were not involved. God uses people and they become His agents:

¹⁴How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and **how shall they hear without a preacher?** – **Romans 10:14**

In the times that we live, preachers are more important than ever. With the increased persecution of Christian believers and efforts made by the evil one to reduce exposure to the Word, it is vital that the Word of God be proclaimed using all possible media.

The Holy Spirit

The agent of the regeneration is the Holy Spirit who works in the life of the new believer:

⁵Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water **and of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. – **John 3:5**

Here we see the Trinity working in unison: God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, so that people may believe in Him, and the Holy Spirit directs the unsaved soul towards salvation.

THE RESULTS

What are the results of regeneration? There must be tangible or visible evidence that the person reborn, is in fact a new creature. Much of these results are outwardly visible in terms of the new believer's actions towards others, while some of the results will be inner changes.

The new person overcomes temptation

⁹Whosoever is born of God **doth not commit sin**; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. – **1 John 3:9**

This is something believers are confronted with every day, and something we should work on without ceasing. The tempter is not going to leave us alone and we have to resist the temptations that come our way. In addition, we need to be wise enough to see the temptation coming before it is upon us. If we stand on the Word of God and meditate on it, then we will go a long way towards overcoming temptation.

He demonstrates a changed attitude

1. The new believer shows love towards others who are in Christ:

¹Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth **him also that is begotten of him**. – **1 John 5:1**

2. He loves and feeds on the Word of God:

²As newborn babes, **desire the sincere milk of the word**, that ye may grow thereby: ³If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. – **1 Peter 2:2-3**

Soon, the new believer will not rely on the milk of the Word anymore, but grow spiritually and start eating meat:

²I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. – **1 Corinthians 3:2**

Paul here writes to the church in Corinth and tells them that he had to feed them the basics of the gospel (milk) because they were not yet spiritually mature enough to manage the more advanced concepts of the Word of God (meat). The verse above though, clearly indicates that there is a more advanced level of spiritual growth that we should aspire to.

3. He loves his enemies:

⁴⁴But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; – **Matthew 5:44**

He now sees the lost in a new way, people to be reached for the gospel in the same way he was:

¹⁴For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: ¹⁵And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. – **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

He is cared for

¹¹If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your **Father which is in heaven give good things** to them that ask him? – **Matthew 7:11**

He becomes an heir of the promises of God.

¹⁷And if children, then **heirs**; heirs of God, and **joint-heirs with Christ**; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. – **Romans 8:17**

This is a promise for the future and indeed every reason to strive to live a Spirit-filled life on Earth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Thiessen, H. C., 1949. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. 3rd Edition ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company.