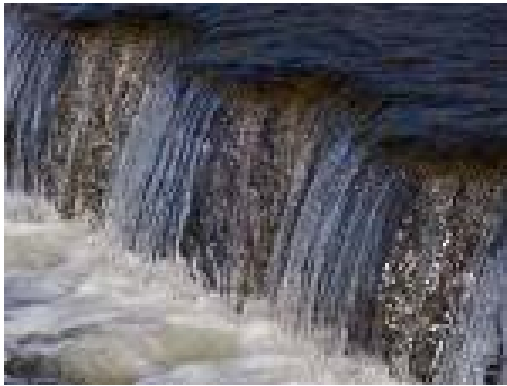


Regeneration

The act of regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit that is often misunderstood and many times suppressed in the modern church. Understanding the work of the Holy Spirit through regeneration is crucial for us to grasp the very beginning of God's work of salvation in our lives.

Regeneration in the Bible is called being "born again" or "born from above." Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth; no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3, NIV). Regeneration or being born again is not optional, it is essential for entering the kingdom of God or being saved.



The prophet Ezekiel, in the Old Testament, records the Lord's words: "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:25-27 NIV, emphasis added). This act of regeneration is

the receiving of a new heart, one that is free of impurities. It comes with a new spirit that is alive toward God. The new heart is also a suitable holy dwelling for the Holy Spirit who can now direct the believer along the path of righteousness. Perhaps this is where we get the saying, "Invite Jesus into our heart." Not just any old heart, but a heart that is born from above.

William Kirwin, who wrote and taught extensively on how to integrate theology and psychology, stated, "Regeneration is the actual change of heart brought about by the Holy Spirit" (p.193). Kirwin would have been clearer if he had said, "*exchange of heart.*" In the book of John, chapter 3, we see the encounter of Jesus with a man by the name of Nicodemus. The chapter tells us that Nicodemus approached Jesus at night (in secret) and that he had heard many wondrous things about Jesus. He obviously wanted to know how to enter into the kingdom of God. Jesus' answer shocked him when Jesus said, "You must be born again" (John 3:3, NIV). The declaration of Jesus was not an optional condition for entering the Kingdom of God—it was absolutely necessary. Kirwin concluded that "Nicodemus could no more be the cause of his new



birth than a nonexistent child can be the cause of his physical conception and birth” (p.193). Regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit—from beginning to end.



The new birth or regeneration of a person’s heart is something that is born or initiated from above—from God himself—out of God’s mercy. It involves the same power that God exercised when he raised Jesus from the grave. This power does not originate from the efforts of man. Titus 3:4-7 states, “When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (NIV, emphasis added). This regeneration is described as a washing of rebirth. It is a cleansing process that involves moving from the old life to a new life (being born again). The Holy Spirit as we saw earlier continues to renew the whole being from the vantage point of a new heart.

This rebirth is not just a cleaning up of the old life or the old heart; it is a removal of the old heart and the creation of a brand-new heart and life. The Apostle Paul stated, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV, emphasis added). It is a change that begins with a new heart, one that is alive to God.

The Bible states in John 16:18, “When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” Revelation, awareness, and conviction are the initial actions of the Holy Spirit toward moving a person toward regeneration. Kirwin contends, “In the act of regeneration the Holy Spirit makes us more self-aware. We become conscious of our sin, our lack of relationship with Christ, our need for righteousness in Christ, and the future judgment. We must become aware of these facts, so we can respond to Christ as Savior.... It is through regeneration that we become aware of our need for Christ and a need to respond to him” (Kirwin, p194).



Search me, O God” (Psalm 139:23). Regeneration is a beginning of a transformation that continues unto conversion (turning to Christ) and throughout our earthly life through continual spiritual growth (being made holy-sanctification), until the believer is face to face with the Lord (glorification). It is God who begins the work of salvation and continues it to its completion. “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10, NIV).

John MacArthur, internationally known pastor-teacher, argues that many miss the complete work of the Spirit because their hearts remain in rebellion or settle for a false salvation that does not require a change of heart. He states, “Far from encouraging Nicodemus, Jesus, who knew the unbelief and self-righteousness of Nicodemus’s heart, dealt with him as an unbeliever.... Nicodemus ... stands as an illustration of false faith—his mind accepted to some extent the truth of Christ, but his heart was unregenerate” (MacArthur, pp. 37-39). Nicodemus came looking for one more thing that could be done on the outside of his being by works, only to find that he needed a spiritual heart transplant that would require him to die and be born again.

For that which a man is incapable of doing, cleansing his own heart, God has done through creation of a new heart by the power, work, and grace of his son Jesus the Christ. Without which no one can be saved.

What’s Your Next Step?

You are loved!

Larry Roach



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