

The Sovereignty of God In Salvation

Regeneration – What does the Bible say?

When we think about the biblical word “*regeneration*”, we must consider first its nature. Regeneration is a word derived from its root, “genesis” or “generate” meaning beginning or create. It is “re” or “again generation.” Plainly said by the apostle Paul.....

2 Corinthians 5:17 - 17 Therefore if any man is in Christ, **he is a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. NASB

When anyone is born again by the Holy Spirit, he/she becomes a “*new creation*” of God. They are **recreated by the supernatural creative power of God**. This is why Paul says in Galatians 6:15 that the true substance of saving faith is not a human work, but the work of the creative power of God.

Galatians 6:15 - 15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a **new creation**. NASB Salvation, then and therefore is **supernatural**. It is a work performed by God, transcending the earthly abilities of any man. So we see then that salvation is first the work of God, and it then results in many diverse blessings and benefits of which mankind is a partaker. Let us then consider the following definition of Regeneration.....

*“A sovereign act of God, performed by the Holy Spirit, in which the sinner is given the capacities needed to understand, believe, and enter the Kingdom of God by God given faith and granted eternal life. His/her mind and will are **divinely enabled** to comprehend sin and righteousness and judgment. His/her spirit is resurrected from its natural dead state, restoring communion with God who is Spirit. It is a fundamental change in the nature of mankind having the very nature and eternal life of God implanted into the human soul. At this time the Holy Spirit enters into the being of mankind performing this transformation eternally.”*

Let us consider the nature of regeneration from biblical texts. As we survey these Bible texts, consider how they are all pointing to the supernatural and Sovereign work of God in salvation.

Regeneration is the *act of God*, not of human doing –

1 Peter 1:3 - 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has **caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Peter 1:23 - 23 for you **have been born again** not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God. NASB

James 1:18 - 18 **In the exercise of His will He brought us forth** by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures. NASB

Ezekiel 11:19-21 - 19 "And **I shall give them one heart, and shall put a new spirit within them**. And **I shall take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh**, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances, and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

Regeneration changes the *mind and will*

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - 26 "Moreover, **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you**; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "And **I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes**, and **you will be careful to observe** My ordinances.

1 John 3:9 - 9 No **one who is born of God practices sin**, because His seed abides in him; and **he cannot sin, because he is born of God**. NASB

1 John 5:18-21 - 18 We know that **no one who is born of God sins**; but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him. 19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and **has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true**, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. NASB

1 John 5:4 - 4 For **whatever is born of God overcomes the world**; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. NASB

1 Corinthians 2:12-16 - 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but **the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God,** 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those **taught by the Spirit,** combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for **they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them,** because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? **But we have the mind of Christ.** NASB

Regeneration raises mankind's dead spirit to eternal life and implants God's nature into him/her

Colossians 2:13 - 13 And when **you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him,** having forgiven us all our transgressions, NASB

Ephesians 2:5-9 - 5 **even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),** 6 and **raised us up with Him,** and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; **and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;** 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast. NASB **Ephesians 4:24** - 24 and put on the new self, which **in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness** of the truth. NASB

John 5:24 - 24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life,** and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. NASB

John 6:39-40 - 39 "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me **I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.** 40 "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, **may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."** NASB

Regeneration then, is the very nature of salvation itself. It is the *saving act* of salvation, performed by God, whereby salvation is applied to the elect in time and space. It is the point in time when the called of God are supernaturally transformed by God. This is why the Bible says we were saved **"by the washing of regeneration."**

Titus 3:5 - 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the **washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,** NAS

Furthermore, this is the very reason why Jesus emphatically stressed, **"You must be born again"** to **"enter the Kingdom of God."** The **Bible plainly declares** that no can see or enter the Kingdom of God apart from the supernatural creative power of God in Regeneration.

John 3:3-7 - 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" 4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** 6

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, **'You must be born again.'**" NASB

A. Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." - Here we may see , God Himself, in the flesh, speaking to man about how to see His Kingdom. Here is where Christianity becomes very exclusive, **"unless"** Jesus declares. That is, in no other way but this way, can you **"see the Kingdom of God."** The word **"cannot"** speaks of man's inability, not His unwillingness. Mankind has an inability to see the Kingdom of God without the supernatural creative power of God in the new birth. People who are dead in trespasses and sins have no capacity of sight, hearing, or understanding of the Gospel. (1 Cor 2:10-14, 2 Cor 4:3-4, John 8:43, Matt 13:10-13, Romans 3:9-12, 18, 6:16, 7:14)

B. he cannot enter the Kingdom of God – The kingdom of God is here rightly understood as God's salvation wherein one enters into a justified state of being having one's sins forgiven and satisfied upon the merits of Christ alone. One **"cannot enter"** or possess this saving work of Christ apart from the divine grace of Regeneration.

C. You must be born again – Consider, God has come in the flesh and given us understanding. Here he says to us, "You must be born again if you want to see or enter the Kingdom of God." Here then the repetition by which the Savior speaks this very important word, **"you MUST"** says He, be **"born again."**

The analogy of birth and new life

Consider that Jesus uses the analogy of birth. A person no more had some choice in the matter of their natural birth as they do their spiritual birth. We did not choose to be physically alive, and we did not choose to be born, it is something that happened to us. This Sovereign work of God is performed by God before any person has capacities to even see, hear or understand the Gospel, being dead in sin. A person's ability to receive Christ as Savior and believe the Gospel are granted by the Sovereign choice and resurrecting ability of God.

John 1:12-13 - 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 **who were born** not of blood, **nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.** NASB

John 6:44 - 44 **"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him;** and I will raise him up on the last day. NASB

Romans 9:16 - 16 So then it **does not depend on the man who wills** or the man who runs, **but on God who has mercy.** NASB

Matthew 11:27 - 27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; **nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**

Lazarus had no capacities to raise himself from the dead, nor did he possess the ability to resist the powerful Word of God to be resurrected (John 11:43). This is clearly portrayed in the prophecy of Ezekiel where the nation of Israel will corporately be raised from their spiritual death and brought into the glorious Kingdom of God in the Day of their restoration.

Ezekiel 37:11-14 - 11 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. **We are completely cut off.**' 12 "Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' Behold, **I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people;** and I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13 "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. 14 **"And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life,** and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD.' NASB

Do babies resist being born? Do people being raised from the dead resist the free gift of life? Have they even the ability to do so? The answer is of course, no! People do not resist this regenerating work of God because it is this work whereby God overcomes the resistance of the fallen human nature by giving them the capacities to understand their dreadful state of death and their great need to be saved by God's power and free grace.

Acts 10:44-45 - 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, **the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.** 45 And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. NASB

Acts 13:48 - 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.** NASB

Regeneration is an invisible work of which we only see the results over time

When someone is born again, we are not always immediately aware of it because we only see what happens after someone gets saved. There is an obvious change that happens in the life as we see God's power changing us (sanctification). But we were not aware when the secret power of God actually resurrects someone from spiritual death and grants them new life.

John 3:8 - 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and **you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going;** so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." NASB

Wayne Grudem explains this very clearly in chapter 34 of his Systematic Theology....

"Exactly what happens in regeneration is mysterious to us. We know that somehow we who were spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1) have been made alive to God and in a very real sense we have been "born again" (John 3:3, 7; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). But we don't understand how this happens or what exactly God does to us to give us this new spiritual life....."

Because regeneration is a work of God within us in which he gives us new life it is right to conclude that it is an instantaneous event. It happens only once. At one moment we are spiritually dead, and then at the next moment we have new spiritual life from God. Nevertheless, we do not always know exactly when this instantaneous change

occurs. Especially for children growing up in a Christian home, or for people who attend an evangelical church or Bible study over a period of time and grow gradually in their understanding of the gospel, there may not be a dramatic crisis with a radical change of behavior from “hardened sinner” to “holy saint,” but there will be an instantaneous change nonetheless, when God through the Holy Spirit, in an unseen, invisible way, awakens spiritual life within. The change will become evident over time in patterns of behavior and desires that are pleasing to God.

In other cases (in fact, probably most cases when adults become Christians) regeneration takes place at a clearly recognizable time at which the person realizes that previously he or she was separated from God and spiritually dead, but immediately afterward there was clearly new spiritual life within. The results can usually be seen at once—a heartfelt trusting in Christ for salvation, an assurance of sins forgiven, a desire to read the Bible and pray (and a sense that these are meaningful spiritual activities), a delight in worship, a desire for Christian fellowship, a sincere desire to be obedient to God’s Word in Scripture, and a desire to tell others about Christ. People may say something like this: “I don’t know exactly what happened, but before that moment I did not trust in Christ for salvation. I was still wondering and questioning in my mind. But after that moment I realized that I did trust in Christ and he was my Savior. Something happened in my heart.” Yet even in these cases we are not quite sure exactly what has happened in our hearts. It is just as Jesus said with respect to the wind—we hear its sound and we see the result, but we cannot actually see the wind itself. So it is with the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.”

Regeneration precedes faith

Many times we fail to understand the Bible about this because of how the experience happened to us. Again Grudem explains...

“The idea that regeneration comes before saving faith is not always understood by evangelicals today. Sometimes people will even say something like, “If you believe in Christ as your Savior, then (after you believe) you will be born again.” But Scripture itself never says anything like that. This new birth is viewed by Scripture as something that God does within us in order to enable us to believe.

The reason that evangelicals often think that regeneration comes after saving faith is that they see the results (love for God and his Word, and turning from sin) after people come to faith, and they think that regeneration must therefore have come after saving faith. Yet here we must decide on the basis of what Scripture tells us, because regeneration itself is not something we see or know about directly:”

We heard the Gospel and then we believed, at least it seemed like that is what happened. But we were not aware that our belief was the granting of faith to us by God’s Sovereign choice and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth. But that is in fact what happened. We only learn of this great truth after we examine Holy Scripture and understand the process of salvation. Jesus made this very clear.....

John 6:63-65 - 63 **"It is the Spirit who gives life;** the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. 64 "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. 65 And He was saying, **"For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."** 66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. NASB

Here Jesus explains that the reason many people do not believe. This is why he says in verse 65 **“for this reason I have said to you”**, referring to verse 64 where he says **“some of you do not believe.”** The **Bible plainly declares** that the reason people do not believe is because saving faith has not been granted to them by God.

Matthew 13:11 - 11 And He answered and said to them, **"To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.** NASB

And to those who believe the **Bible plainly declares** it is because it has been granted to them by God.

Philippians 1:29 - 29 For **to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him,** but also to suffer for His sake, NASB

This is also clearly seen in the salvation of the Apostle Paul(Acts 9:18) or of Lydia in Acts chapter 16.

Acts 16:14 - 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; **and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.** NASB