

The Amazing Truth of Regeneration

Richard J. Hill

It is clear from the Bible that in order for man to spend eternity with God, a new birth is necessary. The need for this special birth was the very subject of a famous conversation between our Lord and a religious Jew named Nicodemus.

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ (Jn. 3:3)

Christ explained to Nicodemus that this new birth was not optional but critical. There is no way for man to experience the kingdom of God without it (Jn. 3:4-5). This spirit birth is designed by God to transform us from the realm of our physical flesh and blood life into the realm of the spiritual life of God (Jn. 3:6-18).

Two Greek words can teach us the amazing truth of regeneration. The first is the word *paliggenesia*.

“But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 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.” (Titus 3:4-5)

This word “regeneration” comes from a combination of the Greek words “*palin*,” which is translated “another,” and “*genesis*,” which means, “birth” or “life.” The single word could then be translated “another birth,” or “another life.”

You Were Dead (Ephesians 2:1-10)

According to the apostle Paul, the Ephesians were dead in trespasses and sins. Note the past tense “were.”

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.” (Eph. 2:1a)

Every member of the human family is born physically alive, but spiritually dead. This spiritual death results from an inescapable connection with our human forefather Adam. We do

not become a sinner with time and evil influence; we are born sinners. David said that his mother actually conceived him into sin.

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Psa. 51:5).

The Breath of Lives

“Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (lives). And he became a living being.” (Gen. 2:7)

When God created the first man, Adam, He breathed into him the breath of lives (Heb., *Nephesh chayim*). As a result, man became a living being. As strange as it may sound the Hebrew plural word *lives* is extremely important. It means that God breathed into man a dual spiritual capacity, a soul and a spirit. Man’s soul was created with a living spirit. This living spirit is that which connects us to our Creator.

Man was created different from the animals. No animal is said to have received *Nephesh chayim*. The animals receive life from God’s *Nephesh Chaya* (singular) (Gen. 1:24). Therefore, no animal has the capability for fellowship with God.

At the moment that God exhaled into man His breath, man inhaled and became a living being. The word “being” is the Hebrew word for “soul.” Adam’s soul awakened him to the consciousness of life; that is physical life. And because of the spiritual aspect of the soul he had a relationship with God. So, in his innocent state, Adam had consciousness of life and a relationship with God.

Adam’s Test

“The LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’” (Gen. 2:16-17)

God promised Adam that if he ate from the tree, he would die. Death in the Bible means separation. If Adam chose to disobey God, he would instantly be separated from God. He sinned and he did die! He did not immediately fall over physically dead but was suddenly separated from God. His soul remained consciously aware, but his spiritual connection to God, died. He no longer had a relationship with God. He was no longer connected to God in the way that he was before. This spiritual separation made the “new birth” necessary.

But God had already prepared a Lamb before the foundation of the world. This is a wonderful truth that emphasizes that God anticipated man’s fall. God already had His plan in mind. Adam’s sin did not shock God! God was going to use Adam and the fall to make known the riches of His glory upon His vessels of mercy (1 Pet. 1:20; Rom. 9:23).

When God created Adam, He placed into him the genetic building blocks necessary to produce every person who would ever live. The Bible teaches clearly that we all came from Adam and Eve. The moment Adam's human spirit died, the human spirit of every person who would ever live also died "in him."

This explains what the Bible means by "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). The death of Adam's human spirit was then physically passed down to every person who would ever live upon this earth.

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

If we come into this world through the usual method, we are all born into this world with a living consciousness but a dead soul.

Children of the Devil

We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. The nature to sin is born within us because of our spiritual separation from God. We come into this world with a bent to do those things that are in rebellion against God. This evil nature is under the power of Satan, the archenemy of God.

"In which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." (Eph. 2:2-3)

Read carefully the words of Jesus Christ as He confronted the evil that was coming from men's hearts in His day. These religious leaders knew the rumors that were flying about concerning the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. They made the accusation that they "knew" who their father was. They had one father. Notice how Christ responds.

"'You are doing the deeds of your father.' They said to Him, 'We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.'" (Jn. 8:41-44)

So man is born dead and is born a child of Satan.

But God

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:4-6)

Many times it is the small words in the Bible that carry the most spiritual weight. That is the case here. Paul, having stated our spiritual position of death in Adam, now gives us this tremendous contrast: “But God” (Eph. 2:2a).

God is the one who initiates salvation. It is God who gives His life, “the new birth,” to man. God is the one who gives grace. Understanding that we are born dead gives us the knowledge that we need God’s life. We do not need to be reformed because reformation cannot give us life. We do not need religion, because religion is man’s attempt to make us better. But better is not sufficient. We need life!

Mercy and Love

“But God being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgression.” (Eph. 2:4)

God’s mercy and love motivated Him to be gracious to us. This proves without any doubt that God’s life does not come to anyone on the basis of good works. Think of this! What good work of any kind can the dead perform? It should be obvious that the dead can do nothing at all for themselves. The dead are helpless and hopeless. The dead *are* dead!

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” (Rom. 5:5)

When we were dead in our sin, God reached down to us in mercy and love. . . to do what?

Made Us Alive With Christ

The second word that can teach us the truth of regeneration is σύνζωοποίησιν ; suzoôpoieo;

“Even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” (Eph. 2:5)

The word is a combination of the preposition σύν translated “together,” and ζωοποιεω which means “to give life.” The result is translated by the phrase “to give life together.”

Paul places this word beside Jesus Christ and the truth of regeneration comes into focus. God has made us alive together with Christ. “Together” indicates that our being connected with Christ is that which gives us life. God, who is rich in mercy and love, has made us alive together with Christ. Believers were formerly connected with Adam and his death but are now connected to Christ and His life.

At the moment that we trust in Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit places us into union with the body of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). And because we are placed into Him we receive His life, which is eternal life.

“And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” (1 Jn. 5:11)

Our spiritual connection to the one man, Adam, gave death, and our spiritual connection to the other man, Christ, gives life.

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” (1 Cor. 15:22)

God, because of our faith in Jesus Christ, instantly infuses His life into us. We are born into this world physically alive but with a dead human spirit. When we are born again by faith in Jesus Christ, our human spirits are “made alive.” No longer are we dead in trespasses and sins, but we are made alive in Jesus Christ.

A Change in Positions

Being alive in Christ and children of God replaces our “dead” status and the fact that we were children of Satan. Paul indicates this former state by his use of the terms “formerly walked” and “formerly lived” (Eph. 2:2-3).

At the moment of our faith in Christ, we are seated with Him in heavenly places.

“And raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:6)

It is from this amazing position in Christ that God will, in the ages to come, reveal to us more of the fabulous riches which are ours in Christ. God’s wonderful life in Christ comes to us as a gift of grace that is simply to be received.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9)

“For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.” (Rom. 5:15)

Though we were once dead in trespasses and sins, we now are to produce good works that are pleasing to God. These good works are the result of our being a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” (Eph 2:10)

Regeneration is all about receiving life. It is passing from death in Adam to life in Christ. To have Him by faith is to have His life. Not to have Him is to remain dead in trespasses and sins.

“He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” (1 Jn. 5:12)