

Several months ago I put myself on a list to get regular updates from Barna—thus every week or so I'm sent another email with the results of a survey concerning the evangelical church in the west—typical to these surveys are the beliefs of supposedly born again Christians in this country—according to Mr. Barna nearly half of all born-again teenagers no longer believe that the Scriptures are infallible, Christ was God, and there exists a literal and eternal hell—well let me make something very clear at the outset—the reason why half of all born-again teenagers reject these things is because they are not truly born again...

In fact it's my contention that many professedly born again people give no clear evidence of being born again—in fact most of them couldn't even explain what the word regeneration means—as a result, it's my opinion that churchgoers have become one of the largest mission fields within this county—the only difference between them and their pagan peers is that they attend church...

Now as I see it there are three root problems as it relates to regeneration—[1] it's often neglected—by this I mean that some people see such things as outdated or no longer relevant—we live in a time of practical religion—10 steps to a better marriage, 7 ways to be a better you—who has time or concern about old theological concepts such as the doctrine of regeneration—but let me suggest to you that much of the practical problems within the church is due to a lack of regeneration—thus I don't believe the answer is more seminars on husbandry or parental duties, but what we need is more teaching on the necessity and results of regeneration...

Notice [2] it's at times denied—here I refer to those who either theologically or practically deny that their children are in need of regeneration—in fact in some places parents would be outright offended at suggesting that their children need to be born again just as much as the children of their pagan neighbors—for example, one man wrote, in a spirit of disgust—“Every Baptist holds that the children of believers are lost heathens outside the church, no different from the children of unbelievers...”—how do I, as a professed Baptist, respond to such a statement—[a] it's in one sense not true—we do believe that our children are privileged above the children of heathen, for example what was said of the Jews can be said of them, Rom.3:1—“what advantage then has the Jew...much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God...”—but [b] this statement is in another sense very true, because we do believe that our children have as much need to be converted and are in this sense no different from the children of unbelievers...

Notice [3] it's often misunderstood—here I refer to perhaps the most common problem—a total confusion concerning what regeneration is and is not—many people simply equate it with walking an isle or repeating a prayer, or else others equate it with “asking Jesus into your heart...”—within such places the new birth isn't neglected or denied its grossly misunderstood, and so such ignorance is perpetuated from generation to generation...

Now before I move on to our text, let me address these three problems with a single response—if regeneration is no longer relevant, necessary, or crucial to understand, then why does John use the phrase “born of God” seven times within these five chapters does he again and again speak about the necessity and results of the new birth—let me suggest to you that one obvious reason behind this repetition is because a proper knowledge and application of regeneration is necessary if any man would ever enter heaven...

- I. The Reality of Regeneration
- II. The Results of Regeneration
- III. Three Summary Lessons

I. The Reality of Regeneration

Here I refer to the phrase—“born of God...”—the word rendered “born” literally means—“to beget or to bring forth...”—throughout the NT it's used of both natural and spiritual birth—the prepositional phrase “of God”

refers to the source and nature of their birth—thus I want to here suggest a few things concerning [1] the source and then [2] the nature of regeneration...

A. Its source

1. Let me suggest three things with reference to the source of regeneration, notice [1] God's will—by this I mean that people are born because God has willed to give them a new birth...
2. This of course is true with reference to physical birth—no child willed or chose to be born—but were conceived and born by actions totally foreign to themselves...
3. So too—no sinner ever made a decision to be born again—but was born by the sovereign and purposed actions of God Himself...
4. Jn. 1:12-13—“but as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, 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...”
5. Notice [a] the cause—this is first stated negatively, v13—“who were born, not of blood [physical decent, that is regeneration doesn't run in blood lines], nor of the will of the flesh [human decision], nor of the will of man [external compulsion]...”
6. He then states it positively—“but of God...”—that is, they were born of the will of God, or because God willed it, Jas. 1:18—“of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth...”
7. Notice [b] the result, v12—“as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...who were born...of God...”
8. You see—birth precedes belief—we believe because we were regenerated—yes—we believed—we received Christ—but this is the direct result of life...
9. Notice [2] God's Spirit—while in one sense the triune God is the source of regeneration, the Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is the direct author...
10. John Owen—“The Holy Ghost is the immediate author and cause of the work of regeneration...” Jn.3:5 —“I say unto you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven...”
11. By “water and the Spirit” is meant the powerful working of the Spirit in and with the word, which serves as a cleaning agent upon the soul...
12. Tit.3:5—“according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...”
13. Notice [3] God's word—while the Spirit is the direct author of our regeneration He doesn't act nakedly in accomplishing this work...
14. 1Peter 1:23—“having been born again...through [or by] the word of God, which lives and abides forever...”
15. Here I must make a fine and yet necessary distinction between the actual giving of life and the exercising of that life...
16. In theological terms we draw a distinction between regeneration and conversion—in regeneration life is giving and in conversion life is exercised...
17. But at times the Scriptures use the concept of regeneration in a more general way so as to include both the giving of spiritual life and the exercising of it in repentance and faith...
18. And this is what Peter is doing when he says—“having been born again...through or by the word of God...”
19. When the Spirit is about His work of regeneration, the first thing He does is to give spiritual life to the dead soul...
20. Jn.6:63—“it is the Spirit who gives life...” Eph.2:1—“and you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...”
21. This in the strict sense is regeneration or the begetting of life in the soul—but this is always accompanied with the gifts of repentance and faith—which of necessity entail the word...
22. For nobody every repented without knowing something about their sins and no one ever believed without knowing the gospel...
23. Thus I could say that when the Spirit comes into a heart to give it life He comes with the sword of His word in His hand, Eph.6:17—“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...”

24. Or we could change the imagery and say, that when the Spirit enters the soul for the purpose to regenerate it, He does so riding upon the chariot of the gospel...
25. He awakens the soul, giving it repentance and faith all of which is spoken of by Peter as—“having been born again...through or by the word of God...”

B. Its nature

1. Here I come again to the phrase—“born of God...”—for as I mentioned earlier it refers both to the source and nature of regeneration...
2. For example, we read in 1Jn.3:10—“in this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest...”
3. This is to say—both the children of God and the devil bear their father’s image—by nature we are children of the devil and by grace children of God...
4. Thus to be born of God, refers not only to the source of our birth but to it’s nature—to be born of God is to bear the moral image of God...
5. But to be specific—[1] it’s spiritual, Jn.3:6—“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit...”
6. The first phrase—“that which is born of the flesh is flesh...”—refers to our first birth wherein we received a fallen and corrupt nature...
7. But in contrast to this our Savior says—“that which is born of the Spirit is spirit...”—that is, those who are born of God are given spiritual life—they are awakened to spiritual truths and realities...
8. Thus by “spiritual” I mean—the new birth results in a new nature—a new heart—a heart that now loves what God loves and hates what God hates...
9. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—“Now we have to be very careful with this doctrine; we must not think of it in any material sense. It does not mean that I receive some kind of essence or something tangible and material. But it does mean that I receive the spiritual nature and the spiritual outlook and disposition of God Himself. To be born again means to receive this new disposition; that is what is meant by a new nature. So it is something that is done to us by God that makes us like God...”
10. Notice [2] it’s mysterious, Jn.3:8—“the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit...”
11. While the Scriptures teach us various truths concerning the new birth, it also reminds us of its mysterious nature...
12. As the winds blows in various ways, so the workings of the Holy Spirit in regenerating a soul may vary from case to case...
13. This is to say, that while every Christian has necessarily been born of God, by the Spirit, through the word—the precise way in which this was realized may vary...
14. For some the work is realized more abruptly, for others it may be more subtle—for some it may be prefaced by great anguish for others very little...
15. For example—the birthing process for some ladies is preceded by great pains, while others give birth with lesser or little pain...
16. So too—some may be birthed anew with great preparatory anguish, while others, amidst relatively little such anguish...
17. Furthermore, while regeneration is an act, for some it may be realized in a more gradual way, yet for others, it may be sensed in a more abrupt way...
18. Thus it’s impossible to be overly dogmatic in establishing an exact pattern of regeneration, any more than it’s possible to establish some concrete pattern for the wind...
19. Canons of Dort—“The manner of this operation cannot be fully comprehended by believers in this life. Nevertheless, they are satisfied to know and experience that by this grace of God they are enabled to believe with the heart and to love their Savior...”

II. The Results of Regeneration

We find within this verse two inevitable results of the new birth—[1] faith, and [2] love—these will to varying degrees be present in every regenerate heart...

A. Faith

1. As we come first to consider faith, let me suggest several things—[1] faith follows birth—“whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...”
2. Notice John does not say, Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ will be born again...—that is, believing is not the cause but result of regeneration...
3. We saw the same truth back in Jn.3:3—“unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...”—here our Savior is referring to the eyes of the soul...
4. Thus to look to Christ is elsewhere used as an imagery of faith, Isa.45:22—“Look to me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth...”
5. And so our Savior tells Nicodemus that unless you are first born again—“you cannot see the kingdom of God...”
6. That is—you cannot see the glory of the kingdom nor the way of entering it—you cannot see the glory of its King unless you are first born again...
7. Notice [2] faith focuses on Christ—“whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ...”—that is, believes that Jesus is the God-Man Savior of the world...
8. As soon as faith is placed within the heart of a regenerated soul, it’s first and initial act is to look to Christ as its only hope...
9. I am at times worried, when I hear a Christian person speak of God in general, but very little of Christ in particular...
10. We some times joke that the first thing a newly hatched chick sees it follows as it’s mother, but this is precisely what happens in regeneration...
11. For no sooner does the dead soul receive life, does it run unto Christ as it’s Savior—finding it’s all-n-all in Him...
12. Calvin put it like this—“Christ alone is set forth as the object of faith, as in him it finds righteousness, life, and every blessing that can be desired, and God in all that He is...”
13. But I would have you notice that faith takes the whole Christ as it’s initial and primary object—“whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ...”
14. Lenski—“To believe that the man Jesus is ‘the Christ’...means to believe the deity of Jesus, the expiation of his blood, the remission and the cleansing which this blood effects, in fact, the whole love of God that is expressed in the whole Saviorhood of Jesus, the whole gospel...”
15. John Cotton—“To believe that Jesus is Christ is to be persuaded that God has anointed him to be king, priest, and prophet of his church; as a priest to sacrifice himself for us, as a prophet to direct us and reveal his will to us, and as a king to govern and to rule us...”
16. Notice [3] faith entails trust—this is found in the word “believe”—“whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ...”
17. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is more than mere believing that facts but it entails an entrustment in the Christ of the facts...
18. This is put very simply in our Children’s Catechism—*Q.* What is it to believe or have faith in Christ? *A.* to trust in Christ alone for salvation...”

B. Love

1. V1—“whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him...”
2. Here John assumes that the person who has been born of God, who now believes on Christ, will also love—love is an inevitable result of the spiritual birth...
3. Let me illustrate—we can liken faith to a pregnant grace that no sooner is placed within the heart gives birth to a daughter named love...
4. Eph.1:15—“therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints...” Col.1:4—“since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints...”

5. Accordingly, we saw back in 1Jn.3:23—“and this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment...”
6. Thus wherever mother faith is her daughter love will ever be present—and wherever love is absent so is faith...
7. Notice this love is twofold—[1] love for the begetter—“everyone who loves Him who begot...”—that is God as He is the begetter of His people...
8. Notice [2] love for the begotten—“everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him...”
9. Some have attempted to apply this phrase to Christ as the eternally begotten Son of God, but it seems better to apply it to Christians in general...
10. Calvin—“Augustine and some others of the ancients have applied this to Christ, but not correctly. For though the Apostle uses the singular number, yet he includes all the faithful; and the context plainly shows that his purpose was no other than to trace up brotherly love to faith as its fountain...”
11. Notice v2—“by this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments...”
12. Thus what John here refers to is a love for those who bear a similar image as we do, as they too have been begotten by God...
13. Those who love God necessarily love those begotten of God—thus what our Savior said of Himself is likewise true of all Christians...
14. Jn.8:42—“Jesus said to them, If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God...”
15. Albert Barns—“The general idea is, that as all Christians are the children of the same Father; as they constitute one family; as they all bear the same image; as they share his favor alike; as they are under the same obligation of gratitude to him, and are bound to promote the same common cause, and are to dwell together in the same home forever, they should therefore love one another. As all the children in a family love their common father, so it should be in the great family of which God is the Head...”

III. Three Summary Lessons

A. A lesson to those unsure

1. Here I refer to those who may not be clear whether they have or have not been born again—notice the order—birth, faith, love...
2. How does a person know whether or not they have been born again—well before I answer this, how would you have answered it...
3. I know I’m born again because—I’m born into a Christian home—because I attend a good church—because I don’t act like others I know...
4. Notice our text—“whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...”—have you, and are you, presently believing upon Christ...
5. Have you abandoned all hopes of salvation but Christ—have you found in Him a righteousness that covers the whole of your naked soul...

B. A lesson to the unborn

1. Here I refer to those who have yet to be born again by the Spirit—those who no nothing of faith in Christ and love towards God...
2. But at this point, someone here might object—If man lacks the ability to regenerate himself then why tell him he needs regeneration...
3. Let me answer this objection by reminding you that our Savior Himself told unregenerate sinners they needed to be born again, Jn.3:7—“do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again...”
4. Let me suggest several reasons—[1] God saves sinners not stones—by this I mean, He addresses them as rational creatures and not stones...

5. As we have seen the Holy Spirit gives life to a soul in relation and connection to the word—thus no sooner does a person have life do they believe the gospel...
6. Furthermore, as I previously stated, oftentimes it pleases the Spirit, to accompany the soul, prior to regeneration, with preparatory works of conviction...
7. Thus all of this necessitates that we address the unregenerate from the pulpit—and that we press to their consciences the demands of the law and the promises of the gospel...
8. Notice [2] God uses man's inability to drive him to Himself, Jn.3:7—"You must be born again..."—that is, Nicodemus, you need God to give you life...
9. Now there are those who think its wrong to tell an unregenerate sinner that they are in need of being born again—an opinion that our Savior apparently did not share...
10. You see—the reality that man can not regenerate himself, is not God's fault but man's—for man's inability is due his own stubbornness...
11. We find the same thing with reference to repenting and believing—can native man repent and believe if left to himself...
12. No—these are gifts of the Holy Spirit—and yet the Scriptures repeatedly exhort man to repent and believe and renders him guilty for refusing...
13. Thus man's inability to is due his own sin—for example, think of a man who because of foolish living finds himself in debt...
14. Now the fact that he can not repay his debt in no way lessons his obligation to pay this debt—are his creditors wrong to hold him responsible for his debts...
15. Of course not—his inability to pay his debtors in no way removes his obligation and responsibility towards these debtors...
16. In fact it may not be until he is thoroughly convinced of his inability and poverty, that he seeks out someone who can pay his debts for him...
17. Likewise—the fact that man can not regenerate himself, nor repent or believe of himself, in no way lessons his obligation and responsibility to believe...
18. In fact it may be the reality of this inability that may drive a dead sinner away from himself to the one in whom is eternal life...
19. It's for this reason that our Savior told Nicodemus—"you must be born again..."—you are in need of God granting you or giving you new life...
20. Thus I conclude that while it is not wrong to tell people they need to be born again, the overall emphasis of Scripture is not—You must be born again—but, You must repent and believe...

C. A lesson to the regenerate

1. Here of course I refer to those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, and love both Him who begot and him who is begotten...
2. Let me close with a few words to you—[1] clarify your understanding of regeneration—let us be relevant Christians and speak to the needs of our day...
3. Notice [2] let us bless God for the reality and results of regeneration—"whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him..."