

Spiritual Birth

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By David Simpson



Bible Text: Titus 3:1-7

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Narrator: This message was recorded May 26, 2013. The speaker is David Simpson.

It's good to see all of you this morning. Would you take your Bible please and turn to the little book of Titus. We're going to depart from Moses today and I want to bring you a few thoughts concerning the Bible doctrine of what it means to be quickened or awakened or born again, regenerated, all those words pertaining to this same doctrine. There is a place here in Titus 3 where we find the word "regeneration." Paul said to Titus, verse 1,

"1 Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, 2 To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. 3 For we ourselves also were sometimes," or meaning at one time in the past, "foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. 4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, 5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; 6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord; 7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Would you turn in your Bibles to the place of our reading, the book of Titus and chapter 3. I want to talk with you about the subject of spiritual birth or the quickening of the Spirit. I will use the word "regeneration" simply because it's an easy word to use. However, the word "regeneration" only appears two times in the New Testament: one time it is used by our Lord concerning the last times or when he comes again, but Paul uses it here concerning the new birth so we're going to look at this particularly in this passage. What we mean by new birth, spiritual birth by regeneration is we're talking about the act of God whereby he enters into man, whereby he enters into the soul of man.

I think that it's very important that we distinguish between regeneration and the effectual calling of grace. Though new birth is essential to the effectual calling of grace, there is a

distinction between the two. And I use the word “effectual” which is a word that means that God powerfully and irresistibly and effectually did call whom he pleased to himself and it’s best understood maybe in its distinction from the general call. For example: Jesus said that “many are called but few are chosen.” When he used that phrase “the many” that represents the general call of the gospel that goes out to all men; it’s sent out no matter where a person is or the color of their skin or the level of their education or their background. Nothing matters. No external matter is under consideration when we send out the gospel. There is just nothing that has to do with that. However, the general call of the gospel alone never results in repentance, it never results in true faith because it is external. It is not internal, it is not met or attended with the power of God.

So, that’s the general call and we see it in many places where men are told to repent. Jesus, for example, said, “Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.” But Jesus knew they weren’t going to repent but he gave them the warning that if you don’t repent, you’re going to perish and yet God did not enable them to repent. So, it’s external. It’s outside. It’s a general call that goes out to all men. When Paul preached in Acts 17 on Mars Hill to the Athenians, it was a general call that went out to all men, all kinds of men, but only a few were met with and attended with the power of God.

So, that’s the general call. The effectual call then in that verse would be the “few chosen.” “Many are called but few are chosen.” The few chosen represents the one, first of all, that God chose before the foundation of the world. It also represents the very same ones that were given to the Lord Jesus Christ in order that he might redeem them, that he might justify them, that he might reconcile them from enmity with God and adopt them to be the sons and the daughters of God. It also, then, is attended with, not only the external call but then with the internal call. There is something that happens internally within the person and it always results in true repentance and true faith. So, one never does and the other always does.

Still, I would say to you, the calling is more than regeneration. Regeneration is essential to the calling but it is more than calling. It’s intended with God’s acts of providence to instruct the mind. It’s attended with the promptings of the Holy Spirit to move the affections. It might be to happiness or to sorrow concerning sin, but it’s always met with the mind being instructed and the affections being fired and the will being moved and never leaves the person in their original state of darkness and ignorance before God.

Now, since there is no effectual calling without regeneration, we can also understand that the truth of regeneration and the truth of effectual calling overlap and there is an inter-relationship between the two. However, oftentimes, what we see in the Scripture is a reference to the effectual call and it is often equated with regeneration but it is important that we have some distinction between them.

I didn’t make up the ideas of when; I’m not the first one to come along and talk about when justification occurs. It’s just that we explain it differently so it falls upon the ears and men say, “I’ve never heard it like that before.” But I’m not the first one to speak of when and I’m not the first one to speak of the when and the how of regeneration. For example,

Catholics believe in a sacramental regeneration. They have seven sacraments that begin with the baptism of an infant and they believe that regeneration commences with, that's the way they put it, that it commences with the baptism of the infant. You could also look at Methodists and Presbyterians and Nazarenes and the Churches of Christ and various others and they believe in baptismal regeneration. Not exactly like what the Catholics hold to, but similar to. They believe that when a person is baptized, that's when the Spirit of God comes upon them and awakens them and regenerates them. Then you have a whole host of people such as Baptists of all kinds and many today who would be Independent churches or Community-type churches or Fellowship churches and they believe in decisional regeneration. Not exactly different from but still a little bit different. They believe that it takes a decision, that you pray a prayer, that you have a decision in your heart and when that decision in your heart is made, they believe then that God will quicken you.

Well, what about us? Where do we fit into all of this? Certainly, we don't hold to any kind of sacraments. We don't believe in baptismal regeneration nor do we believe in decisional regeneration. We believe, rather, that regeneration just like election and just like justification, is a free and sovereign act of God. We believe that it is what God does himself in the heart of the soul of the individual.

I want you to look with me just for a moment here at our text and then I want to talk with you about this subject. In verse 1 and 2, you see Paul saying to Titus something about what a pastor is supposed to do. He's to be sure that his people live an orderly life, is what he's saying, being "subject to principalities and powers and magistrates and they are to be about every good work," and they are "to speak evil of no man." They are not to be "brawlers" or fighters, rather, we're to be "gentle, enjoying all meekness unto all men." So, that's what he says about a pastor's life.

Then he said something about their past life in verse 3. "We ourselves were one time foolish and disobedient and deceived and we served various or different kinds of lust and pleasures and lived in malice and envy and we were hateful and hated one another." Certainly, between the Jews and the Gentiles, that last would have been true.

From verse 4-7 then, he talks about their present life and he says "but" and that little word is always a big word, especially when it begins a verse, this conjunction that says "after," so he connects it, "After that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared." All kinds of men, Jews and Gentiles. And here's what we learned about his appearing: that "none of it is by works of righteousness which we have done." Not a righteous prayer, not a righteous thought, not a righteous decision, not a righteous act such as being baptized. No kind of righteous act whatsoever which we have done. That's as broad as you want to make it, "but according to," or consistent with and by "his mercy he saved us." That's as broad as we can extend it. Then he said "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

Now, I'm going to come back and talk about those words here toward the end of my message but before I do, I want to talk with you in a general way about the meaning of

what it is to be regenerated, what it is the Bible says about being awakened. Let me do it by asking some questions. The first question that I would ask is: what is the meaning of the word “regeneration”? To me, it is fundamental that we begin with words when we’re looking at a particular subject because words are building blocks and from words we come to understand the broader meaning and context of things. This word “regeneration” has the root word in it for “genesis” which is a word for “life” or the word for “beginning,” and at the beginning of that word is the word for “new.” So, the Greek word is *paliggenesia* and so it is, again, “new” and “birth,” so that’s why it’s translated “new birth.” This is the word for “new birth,” though here it is translated by the word “regeneration.” Since it means a new birth, it implies an old birth and that old birth, of course, is the physical birth. So, no one is subject to be born again unless they’ve been born first. You cannot be born unless you’ve been born. It sounds ridiculous to talk like that but that’s the way it is described in the New Testament when Jesus talks about being born of water, born of the spirit, he’s talking about physical birth, he’s talking about spiritual birth.

This regeneration, first of all, is typified in the Old Testament and I just want to show you one place. I want you to go with me back to the book of Genesis and I want you to look with me in the second chapter of Genesis. You’ll look in chapter 2 and in verse 7 and these first seven verses are like an enlargement of what you see in the first chapter though he spoke of greater creation in these first seven verses, he speaks particularly of the creation of man. I just want you to look at one verse. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Now, you’ll notice that God took dust, what he had made, and made him a man. So, he took that which was not and he made dust and he took dust and he made a man. Later we’re going to find that man is going to return to dust which you read over in the third chapter which is going to tell us about our future. So, we’re going to return to dust and none of us are going to avoid that.

He took dust and he made a man. So, there’s a man, there he is in bodily form, laying there before God. No strength in his body, no life in his body. God then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul. When he became a living soul, he became capable of physical life and all that goes along with physical life. Most of us pretty much enjoy our physical life; we’re glad we’ve got it. We’re not interested in giving it up too quick. I notice people want to keep on living. We keep on eating and we keep on living. We seem to relish our physical life.

So, he gave to him the capability of physical life but he also gave to him the capability of mental life. The capability of mental life would be to reason and to feel. Our reasoning is not very good. We have problems with our reasoning and our feelings are a problem because we’re fallen creatures but nevertheless, this man became a living soul, a soul represented by that which is inside of the man: his mind, his affections and his will. We also know that he was a willful being because what we’re going to find out what God says to him that he shouldn’t do and then he goes ahead and does it. So, he’s a willful being.

God gave to him a body, he gave to him a mind, he gave to him affections, he gave to him a will. One thing that God did not give him right at this point is he didn't give him a conscience. He did not know right from wrong; he didn't have any law. So, how could there be any right and wrong when there was no law because you can't commit something that's wrong unless there's a law? So God, we're going to see, deals with the man by law. I'm not going to talk about that, but that's what you have to understand about this whole story is that he made a man and eventually he's going to give him a conscience and that conscience is going to be what he acquires when he disobeys God.

Now, my point is to talk with you for a moment about how this compares to regeneration. You'll notice that he "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living soul." I want to say to you about 5 or 6 things quickly about it. First of all, it was a sovereign act. What do I mean when I say it was a sovereign act? Well, I mean that God purposed it and God executed it. That's what I mean when I say God is sovereign. He purposed it and he executed it.

The second way that it is typical of regeneration is that it was a secret act. What I mean by that is that it was inside the man. He breathed into his nostrils, he breathed into him and gave him life. It was inside of him. Not outside of him but inside of him.

The third thing about this is that it was a passive act. Adam was not capable of exercising mental activity toward what God was doing. He was not capable of responding in his affections or in his will. He didn't have one; he was passive.

So, in regeneration it's a sovereign act, it's a secret act, it's a passive act. It also was an immediate act. When God breathed into him, it simply says that he "became a living soul."

The fifth thing, it was a life-giving act. A living soul. So, again, I say to you that the purpose of it was to give him life: life to his body, life to his mental capacities, his reasoning, his affections, his will.

Then it was an initial act. What I mean by that is that Adam was going to grow and develop. He wasn't going to stay just what he was. We know that. He changed. He became more than what he was. Regeneration is the beginning. Regeneration is not the end. Regeneration sets the basis and the platform for what happens in the heart and the mind of God's elect to be able to be responsive to God.

So, that's a little bit about the definition of regeneration. I hope you see the connection of what I'm saying. Let me ask another question, not only what is the definition of regeneration but what is the need of regeneration? Well, I want you to go with me to the book of John. Let me show you just 2 or 3 things. Look in the first chapter, please. If you look at verse 11 of the first chapter, he's been talking about the world that he made in verse 10. "He came unto his own," probably that means his own world, "and his own received him not," that would be the Jews. He came unto his own heritage, his own bloodline. He came unto his own world but his own people received him not.

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” This is one of the places where those who believe in decisional regeneration would pitch their tent and they’d say, “As many as received him,” and they’d say to you, “You can see it right there. If you will receive him, he’ll give you new birth.” That’s the way they would reason. But, of course, you have to go on just a little bit, don’t you, because he doesn’t stop there. The word “receive” is a very important word because it’s the Greek word lambano and that word simply means “to take.” For example, I just now took my Bible in my hands and lifted it up. That’s what the word “take” means. Or, I could say, “I took my pencil from my pocket.” That’s what the word “take” means. It’s a literal word but it’s also used metaphorically and that’s the way it’s used here. When it’s used as a metaphor, it means to take in a spiritual way. I like to use the word “embrace.” It means they did not embrace him, he came to his own people, but his own people didn’t embrace him. He was around them but they didn’t embrace him. They shunned him. They turned him away.

“But as many as embraced him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” Why does John say that? Because he’s talking about whether you’re a Jew or a Gentile but then go on to verse 13, who is it that has embraced him? Those “which were born.” Those which were born. Then he gives three negatives: “not of blood,” literally the Greek word “blood” is “bloods,” it’s a plural word and I think what he means by “bloods” is he means that it doesn’t have to do with your bloodline, it doesn’t have to do with lineage. In other words, there is one blood for the Gentiles and another blood for the Jews. So, it doesn’t have to do with your blood. Some think that he means circumcision by this and that is possible, I couldn’t debate it but since it’s a plural word, it seems to me that it doesn’t have to do with your bloodline, no matter where you’re from it’s not of blood.

“Nor of the will of the flesh.” So, it doesn’t have to do with you being influenced by others. Not the will of the flesh. Others persuading you, others leading you, others guiding you.

“Not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.” Two times he uses the word “will” in a negative way. So, it’s neither by will from the outside nor is it will from the inside.

“Which were born,” look what he says at the end of the verse, “but of God.” So, if you’re born of God, that is the one who will embrace him. That is the one that God gives the power to become the sons of God. To know himself as the Son of God. That’s the one who believes on his name. That’s the meaning of those two verses. That isn’t a free-will passage, that is in a decisional regeneration passage, that is a passage, rather, that declares the sovereignty of God.

The first reason that I would say to you for the need of regeneration is that man is impotent. He can’t do anything. He can’t do something and he can’t exercise his will to be born again. He’s impotent.

Then, I want you to look here in the third chapter to something that Jesus said in verse 19. Not only is man spiritually impotent but he is in spiritual darkness. Verse 19, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light," and it is shown, "because their deeds were evil." You see, man has the problem: he hates what he ought to love and he loves what he ought to hate. The question is: how is God going to get a man to hate what he ought to love and love what he ought to hate? Here is a man that the Lord Jesus said, "Man in his natural state loves darkness." We naturally are religious beings and we go to the easiest form of religion which is free-will religion but man is in spiritual darkness.

Then turn with me to the book of Ephesians 2. If you'll look in verse 1 you'll notice that the words "hath he quickened" are italicized so what does that mean? That means they're not in the original language. He simply said in verse 1, "And you who were dead in trespasses and sins." I don't think I need to elaborate on that. We know what death means. It means there's no life. Our natural estate when we come into this world is to be dead in our sins, to be dead in our imputed sins from Adam's sin and to be dead in our own natural sins.

Then please look with me over the fourth chapter of Ephesians. Not only is man spiritually impotent, in spiritual darkness and spiritually dead but he also is spiritually blind. Actually, Paul puts more words than that together but, "Having the understanding darkened." By that, he doesn't mean just shaded he means they don't have understanding of the truth. "Alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Men are blind. Now, you and I enjoy vision. Wouldn't it be a sight to lose your vision, if you just lost your vision all of a sudden. I mean, I love to look at you, see you. I love to look around and see the world but to be blind, that's the way he says that spiritually we are blind. Not only all those other things but we just can't see. I could go on. There are other things, but what I'm saying is, the need of regeneration: man is impotent, he's in darkness, he's dead and he's blind.

Let me start, I have a few more minutes here and I need to get on with this if I can. Not only what is the definition and what is the need but what is the relationship of the Holy Spirit to regeneration. Now we're beginning to get something here. First thing I would say to you is that the Holy Spirit was promised. If you just listen to me while I read a couple of verses from the book of Ezekiel 36:26, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh," meaning a feeling, "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." In other words, it's not going to be just obeying the law as a hard, cold law but it's going to be in the heart and the heart is going to lead us to obedience.

Now, Ezekiel is talking while they're in the Babylonian captivity and I would say to you without question that this is typified as a promise for them to return from Babylon to their home land but ultimately this is looking toward the coming of Jesus Christ, the accomplishment of his work which would lead to the Spirit of God coming into the world to do his work.

So, that's in Ezekiel 36 and if you went to chapter 37 in Ezekiel, do you know what you find there? The story of the Valley of the Dry Bones. What he does is he pictures Israel as laid out in a valley of bones all over the place and if you read that story it says that he told the bones to rise up and for the bones to connect together and he put sinews to the bone and he put flesh to the bone and the Spirit of God came into the body. Listen to what he says in Ezekiel 37:14, "And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD." The Lord is the one that made them to live. So, the Spirit of God is promised, illustrated and typified in the Old Testament of his coming to give life to his people.

If you'll turn back with me to John 3 and I'll look at this quickly and then I'll stop. John 3, still talking about the relationship of the Holy Spirit to regeneration. This is the story of Nicodemus and Jesus called him the teacher of Israel but no matter how smart he was, no matter how educated he was, no matter how much he did in reading the Bible or teaching the Bible, this man needed to be born again. There are some who think when you come to this that Jesus is saying to Nicodemus when he says you must be born again, he's saying to him, "Why Nicodemus, you must be born again if you understand this much." Others think that he's saying to him, "Nicodemus, you've got to do something to be born again."

Well, I just want you to reason with me a little about what Jesus said. Verse 5, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water," physically, "and of the Spirit," spiritually, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." In other words, to understand, to know who I am, to enter into my kingdom, a man must be born again. Then he says this to show the mystery and secret and the sovereignty of regeneration, "The wind bloweth where it wills, and you can't tell where it's coming from, you can't tell where it goes, so is," this is a comparison, "so is every one that is born of the Spirit of God." You can't will the Spirit of God into your soul; you can't pray the Spirit of God into your soul; you can't be baptized making the Spirit of God come into your soul. It is a sovereign powerful internal act of God. He alone does this. He alone draws us to the Lord Jesus Christ by spiritual birth.

When we come back, I want to talk with you about a few more things about the relationship of the Holy Spirit to this and then I want to talk with you about the relationship of the gospel to regeneration.

Would you stand with me, please.

Our Father, we are humbled when we look in the Scriptures knowing how pitiful and impotent and darkened is our mind. Would you enable us to worship and pray for those who are not with us. Bless our time and our fellowship together. May Christ Jesus be honored. In his name we pray. Amen.

