

INTRODUCTION

- Experience of recent spiritual declension; almost 18 years as a Christian, 10 years in ministry
- Out of that experience, the essential and foundational truths of Christianity have become more precious to me
- John 1:10-13 ... "Children of God" related to two things in the passage: the new birth (1st hour) and adoption (2nd hour)
- Another term that I may sometimes use is "regeneration" (only in Titus 3:5) – a "spiritual revival or rebirth" (AHD).
There is no question at all but that from our standpoint this doctrine [of the new birth], together with the doctrine of the atonement, is incomparably the most important doctrine of all, and there is a sense in which we simply cannot understand Christian doctrine and Christian truth without being clear about the doctrine of regeneration. (MLJ, Holy Spirit)
- I have a **specific agenda** - I do not anticipate teaching you anything that you do not already know to some degree
- What I want is for you to feel, be in awe at, be moved with the truths that we will look at today
I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with. (Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*)
- If not, we are in danger of drifting toward a Christian Gnosticism which separates the mind from the emotions, and so dividing what God has put together

TEACHING

I. OUR ABSOLUTE NEED FOR A NEW BIRTH

A. The Death of the First Man – Genesis 2:17

- Death in Adam – Gen2:17
- The devil assures that this will not take place - Gen3:4
- There is a sentence of physical death 3:19, but it is postponed for several hundred years
- But it is evident that something has gone very wrong, evidenced in the subsequent history of the human race
- Sin, like a horrible plague of the heart, spreads wherever human beings spread, and there is great misery as a result

B. Our Death in the First Man – Romans 5:12

- All sinned in Adam as a representative and made sinners through disobedience – Rom5:12, 19
- This results in two kinds of death, as we are two basic kinds of being; material and immaterial

C. Our Life as the Living Dead – Ephesians 2:1-3

- This is probably the fullest description of this spiritual death - death is "in" trespasses and sins
 - o It is a walking in the course of "this world", according to the prince of the power of the air
 - o It is a spirit working in disobedience, in those known as the "sons of disobedience"
 - o It is a way of life, of "conduct", according to the desires of the flesh and mind; not just ugly gross sins, but simply living according to the senses, without faith and without a real relationship with God
 - o It is what we are by nature, and puts us under wrath so that we are called "children of wrath"
 - o There is a camaraderie in this, "just as the others"
- From this description, we see things as actually worse than death; we consider death as an inactive principle, but here death is described as an *active and contrary principle*
- So there are living, breathing, moving, acting, singing, dead people who are living without God according to their own desires; some of them match up pretty well to Christian principles (at least outwardly), but who are still dead
- It is because of this Jesus said we must be born again
- ***This is the condition in which every single person in this room either is or has been***

II. THE EXCLUSIVE SOURCE OF THE NEW BIRTH – John 3:1ff

- Some have mistakenly understood Jesus statement to Nicodemus that one must be born again as a command
- lit. "if not one is born from above, he is not able to perceive the kingdom of God"
- the closest it comes is v.7, "you must be born again", but even this is not an imperative, but statement of fact, and it is in the passive – also, it is "from above", thus only something God can do
- Genesis 2:7 is the Divine pattern; He formed man (physically), but he was dead; but then He breathed into Him the breath of life, and man became a living being
- Giving instructions on "How to Be Born Again" is like giving instructions to an unconscious person how to give themselves CPR, or a dead person how to raise themselves from the dead

- If there is to be any reconciliation with God, any new life, then something must happen that does not originate with ourselves

*The dead may be made alive, but the dead cannot make themselves alive, for the dead can do nothing. ...can hell create heaven? Then sin may create grace. What! Will you tell me that fallen human nature that has come almost to a level with the beasts, is competent to rival God; that it can emulate the divinity in working as great a miracle, and in imparting as divine a life as even God himself can give? It cannot. ...Let any man create a fly, and afterwards let him create a new heart in himself; until he has done the lesser he cannot do the greater. (Spurgeon, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*)*

*...if it is possible for me to do something which will eventually lead to my regeneration, I do not need regeneration. If I, by myself, as I am as the result of the fall and of sin, can appreciate spiritual truth, if I can appreciate the gospel and say "Yes I'm going to pay attention to that", then, as the result of my paying attention, I am born again, well then, I do not need the gift of life." (MLJ, *Holy Spirit*)*

- This is also taught in [John 1:12-13](#) [1Peter 1:3](#)

III. THE DUAL MEANS OF THE NEW BIRTH

- If not by an act of a dead man's will, how then is it received or experienced?
- It is a sovereign act of **the Father**, by use of **the Word of God** and **the Spirit of God**, both given as a provision from the life and death of the **Lord Jesus Christ**

A. The Spirit of God – John 3:6 6:63

B. The Word of God – 1Pet1:23-25 James 1:18

- Not all agree with this assessment, and the writers are split as to whether it is an immediate work of the spirit apart from the Word, or both (I am of the latter view)
- It seems that [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#) is a legitimate paradigm to use
- Having said all of this, there is still **great mystery** to the Spirit's work, as seen in [John 3](#)

*Now you know that the wind is a most mysterious thing; and although certain definitions pretend to explain the phenomenon, all of them leave the great question of how the wind blows, and the cause of its blowing in a certain direction, where it was before. Breath within us, winds around us, all air movements are mysterious to us. And the renewing work of the Spirit in the heart is exceedingly mysterious. (Spurgeon, *The Holy Spirit and the One Church*)*
- We should thank God for our Bibles, and for the Holy Spirit, for they are the means of the blessings we have in Christ
- Let me now go back and clarify something from earlier that could be easily misunderstood
- Someone could take what has been said about our inability and conclude that we can therefore do nothing
- If someone is to be saved, then we have to simply wait to see what God does – anything else is usurping His work
- But since **the Word of God** is part of the means, and there is no new birth without it, and you have the ability (I assume) to read it or have it read to you, then there is where you start
- This is true of how we direct someone to salvation, urging them to take up the Scriptures and read
- I also assume that you can **pray** and ask Him to do the work which He alone can do by His Spirit
- We should plead with the Lord, as His children, for the power of the Holy Spirit to do what we cannot do ourselves
- This may seem like a contradiction to you, and someone may say "well, we won't do that unless we are already born again", and I won't squabble with you over it; however I will say to someone

Seek the Lord, while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. (Isaiah 55:6)
And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:13)

IV. THE POWERFUL RESULT OF THE NEW BIRTH

- Now what is the actual result, the consequence of the new birth? What does it do?
- It does not change anything physically, it does not add some other sense, but does do something supernatural to the faculties of soul that we already have

*The implanting of new life in the soul. (MLJ, *Holy Spirit*)*
[The new birth is] that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. – Berkhof

- There is a new, living, and active principle that begins to work in the one who is born again – it is divine life 2Pet1:3-4
- The following three things are difficult to separate, but I have tried to put them in what seems to be a logical order

A. The Enlightening of the Mind

- The mind is the human capacity to understand, to think, to reason, to take in information and associate it
- Often not new information (my own testimony), but a true enlightenment – “the light comes on”]p
Now, all of us are blind by nature in this respect... Accordingly, it cannot penetrate into our minds unless the Spirit, as the inner teacher, through his illumination makes entry for it. (Calvin, Institutes)

B. The Igniting of the Affections

- The affections is the human capacity to desire, to love, to hate, including the emotions which generate desires
- As a result of the enlightening of the mind, the affections are stirred with abhorrence of the idea of eternal punishment (now understood and believed)
- the beauty and glory of God in the face of Christ is now an aroma of life which is desired, and the love of God treasured
...the first effect of the power of God in the heart in regeneration is to give the heart a Divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the Divine nature. (Edwards,)
- there is more here than the mind, but a creation of holy affections and desires

C. The Liberating of the Will

- The will is the human capacity to make choice; before regeneration the will was in bondage, in large part because of the truth that the will always chooses according to the understanding and desires
- But with the enlightening of the mind and the igniting of holy affections, the will is liberated from choosing that which is death to choosing that which is eternal life in Christ Jesus
No new faculties are created, but instead the powers of the soul are spiritualized and made alive unto God, fitted to enjoy God and hold communion with Him...This regeneration introduces the elect into a capacity for the enjoyments which are peculiar to the spiritual world...(Pink, Holy Spirit)
- This is something which, when it is real and a work of God, never ceases John 11:25-26
- Eternal life just thinking about what will happen in heaven, but is in present possession for the one who is born again

APPLICATION

- We will come to look at adoption in the next hour, but in our becoming children of God He does something that no adoptive parent can do – He imparts by His Spirit His own life
- How does this affect you as you think about it? (a question I have asked myself)
- Is it something that continues to move us deeply? To realize our fallen condition? To see the great power that works in us.
- If you, like me, are a bit dull and slow to respond in enraptured worship, then I pray that for you - Eph1:19-20
- It is the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead that is no more miraculous than the other
- Why is it so easy for us to get into a rut, to go on day by day in a kind of mediocrity and indifference?
- Why are people so relatively hard to the Gospel? They have not yet sufficiently realized their condition!
There have been continuous attempts to get rid of this unpleasant necessity. Constantly the Christian Church itself tries to forget it, but as often as this old doctrine of regeneration is brought forward with clarity, God is pleased to favor his Church with a revival. The doctrine which looks at first as though it would hush every exertion with indolence, and make men sit down with listlessness and despair, is really like the trumpet of God to awake the dead, and where it is fully and faithfully preached, though it grate upon the carnal ear, though it excites enmity in many against the man who dares to proclaim it, yet it is owned of God. Because it honors God, God will honor it. (Spurgeon, "The Natural or the Spiritual")
- Have you been born again? What is the disposition of your mind, affections, and will toward God?