



FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

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If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation, even the very least, to the free will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace, and he hath not learnt Jesus Christ aright. -Martin Luther

REGENERATION is the spiritual change wrought in the heart of man by the Holy Spirit in which his/her inherently sinful nature is changed so that he/she can respond to God in Faith, and live in accordance with His Will (Matt. 19:28; John 3:3,5,7; Titus 3:5). It extends to the whole nature of man, altering his governing disposition, illuminating his mind, freeing his will, and renewing his nature.

Regeneration, or new birth, is an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8). The Bible conceives salvation as the redemptive renewal of man on the basis of a restored relationship with God in Christ, and presents it as involving "a radical and complete transformation wrought in the soul (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) by God the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:24), by virtue of which we become 'new men' (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), no longer conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), but in knowledge and holiness of the truth created after the image of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:2)" (B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 351). Regeneration is the "birth" by which this work of new creation is begun, as sanctification is the "growth" whereby it continues (I Pet. 2:2; II Pet. 3:18). Regeneration in Christ changes the disposition from lawless, Godless self-seeking (Rom. 3:9-18; 8:7) which dominates man in Adam into one of trust and love, of repentance for past rebelliousness and unbelief, and loving compliance with God's law henceforth. It enlightens the blinded mind to discern spiritual realities (I Cor. 2:14-15; II Cor. 4:6; Col. 3:10), and liberates and energizes the enslaved will for free obedience to God (Rom. 6:14, 17-22; Phil. 2:13).

The use of the figure of new birth to describe this change emphasizes two facts about it. The first is its decisiveness. The regenerate man has forever ceased to be the man he was; his old life is over and a new life has begun; he is a

new creature in Christ, buried with him out of reach of condemnation and raised with him into a new life of righteousness (see Rom. 6:3-11; II Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:9-11). The second fact emphasized is the monergism of regeneration. Infants do not induce, or cooperate in, their own procreation and birth; no more can those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" prompt the quickening operation of God's Spirit within them (see Eph. 2:1-10). Spiritual vivification is a free, and to man mysterious, exercise of divine power (John 3:8), not explicable in terms of the combination or cultivation of existing human resources (John 3:6), not caused or induced by any human efforts (John 1:12-13) or merits (Titus 3:3-7), and not, therefore, to be equated with, or attributed to, any of the experiences, decisions, and acts to which it gives rise and by which it may be known to have taken place.

Biblical Presentation

The noun "regeneration" (palingenesia) occurs only twice. In Matt. 19:28 it denotes the eschatological "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21) under the Messiah for which Israel was waiting. This echo of Jewish usage points to the larger scheme of cosmic renewal within which that of individuals finds its place. In Titus 3:5 the word refers to the renewing of the individual. Elsewhere, the thought of regeneration is differently expressed.

In OT prophecies regeneration is depicted as the work of God renovating, circumcising, and softening Israelite hearts, writing his laws upon them, and thereby causing their owners to know, love, and obey him as never before (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34; 32:39-40; Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:25-27). It is a sovereign work of purification from sin's defilement (Ezek. 36:25; cf. Ps. 51:10), wrought by the personal energy of God's creative outbreathing the personal energy of God's creative outbreathing ("spirit": Ezek. 36:27; 39:29). Jeremiah declares that such renovation on a national scale will introduce and signal God's new messianic administration of his covenant with his people (Jer. 31:31; 32:40).

In the NT the thought of regeneration is more fully individualized, and in John's Gospel and First Epistle the figure of new birth, "from above" (another: John 3:3, 7, Moffatt), "of water and the Spirit" (i.e., through a purificatory operation of God's Spirit: see Ezek. 36:25-27; John 3:5; cf. 3:8), or simply "of God" (John 1:13, nine times in I John), is integral to the presentation of personal salvation. The verb *gennao* (which means both "beget" and "bear") is used in these passages in the aorist or perfect tense to denote the once-for-all divine work whereby the sinner, who before was only "flesh," and as such, whether he knew it or not, utterly incompetent in spiritual matters (John 3:3-7), is made "spirit" (John 3:6), i.e., is enabled and caused to receive and respond to the saving revelation of God in Christ. In the Gospel, Christ assures Nicodemus that there are no spiritual activities, no seeing or entering God's kingdom, because no faith in himself, without regeneration (John 3:1ff.); and John declares in the prologue that only the regenerate receive Christ and enter into the privileges of God's children (John 1:12-13). Conversely, in the Epistle John insists that there is no regeneration that

does not issue in spiritual activities. The regenerate do righteousness (I John 2:29) and do not live a life of sin (3:9; 5:18: the present tense indicates habitual law-keeping, not absolute sinlessness, cf. 1:8-10); they love Christians (4:7), believe rightly in Christ, and experience faith's victory over the world (5:4). Any who do otherwise, whatever they claim, are still unregenerate children of the devil (3:6-10).

Paul specifies the Christological dimensions of regeneration by presenting it as (1) a lifegiving coresurrection with Christ (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13; cf. I Pet. 1:3); (2) a work of new creation in Christ (II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 6:15). Peter and James make the further point that God "begets anew" (anagennao: I Pet. 1:23) and "brings to birth" (apokyeo: James 1:18) by means of the gospel. It is under the impact of the word that God renews the heart, so evoking faith (Acts 16:14-15).

Historical Discussion

The fathers did not formulate the concept of regeneration precisely. They equated it, broadly speakin, with baptismal grace, which to them meant primarily (to Pelagius, exclusively) remission of sins. Augustine realized, and vindicated against Pelagianism, the necessity for prevenient grace to make man trust and love God, but he did not precisely equate this grace with regeneration. The Reformers reaffirmed the substance of Augustine's doctrine of prevenient grace, and Reformed theology still maintains it. Calvin used the term "regeneration" to cover man's whole subjective renewal, including conversion and sanctification. Many seventeenth century Reformed theologians equated regeneration with effectual calling and conversion with regeneration (hence the systematic mistranslation of epistrepho, "turn," as a passive, "be converted," in the AV); later Reformed theology has defined regeneration more narrowly, as the implanting of the "seed" from which faith and repentance spring (I John 3:9) in the course of effectual calling. Arminianism constructed the doctrine of regeneration synergistically, making man's renewal dependent on his prior cooperation with grace; liberalism constructed it naturalistically, identifying regeneration with a moral change or a religious experience.

The fathers lost the biblical understanding of the sacraments as signs to stir up faith and seals to confirm believers in possession of the blessings signified, and so came to regard baptism as conveying the regeneration which it signified (Titus 3:5) ex opere operato to those who did not obstruct its working. Since infants could not do this, all baptized infants were accordingly held to be regenerated. This view has persisted in all the non-Reformed churches of Christendom, and among sacramentalists within Protestantism.

Bibliography

J. Orr, "Regeneration," HDB; J. Denney, HDCG; B. B. Warfield, Biblical and Theological Studies; systematic theologies of C. Hodge, III, 1-40, and L. Berkhof,

IV, 465-79; A. Ringwald et al., NIDNTT, I, 176ff.; F. Buchsel et al., TDNT, I, 665ff.; B. Citron, The New Birth.

Regeneration: Advanced Information

Scripture terms by which this work of God is designated:

- Creating - Eph 4:24
- Begetting - 1Jo 4:7
- Quickening - Joh 5:21 Eph 2:5
- Calling out of darkness into marvellous light - 1Pe 2:9
- The subjects of it are said--
- To be alive from the dead - Ro 6:13
- To be new creatures - 2Co 5:17
- To be born again, or anew - Joh 3:3,7
- To be God's workmanship - Eph 2:10

Proof that there is such a thing as is commonly called regeneration.

- The Scriptures declare that such a change is necessary - 2Co 5:17 Ga 6:15
- The change is described - Eph 2:5 4:23 Jas 1:18 1Pe 1:23
- It is necessary for the most moral as well as the most profligate - 1Co 15:10 Ga 1:13-16
- That this change is not a mere reformation is proved by its being referred to the Holy Spirit. - Tit 3:5
- In the comparison of man's state in grace with his state by nature. - Ro 6:13 8:6-10 Eph 5:8
- In the experience of all Christians and the testimony of their lives.

Proofs that believers are subjects of supernatural, or spiritual illumination.

- This is necessary. - Joh 16:3 1Co 2:14 2Co 3:14 4:3
- The Scriptures expressly affirm it. - Ps 19:7,8 43:3,4 Joh 17:3 1Co 2:12,13 2Co 4:6 Eph 1:18 Php 1:19 Col 3:10 1Jo 4:7 5:20
- The first effect of regeneration is to open the eyes of our understanding to the excellency of divine truth. The second effect the going forth of the renewed affections toward that excellency perceived.

Proof of the absolute necessity of regeneration

- The Scriptures assert it. - Joh 3:3 Ro 8:6,7 Eph 2:10 4:21-24
- It is proved from the nature of man as a sinner - Ro 7:18 8:7-9 1Co 2:14 Eph 2:1
- Also from the nature of heaven - Isa 35:8 52:1 Mt 5:8 13:41 Heb 12:14 Re 21:27
- The restoration of holiness is the grand end of the whole plan of salvation. - Ro 8:28,29 Eph 1:4 5:5,26,27

REGENERATION: THE CHRISTIAN IS BORN AGAIN

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." JOHN 3:3

Regeneration is a New Testament concept that grew, it seems, out of a parabolic picture-phrase that Jesus used to show Nicodemus the inwardness and depth of the change that even religious Jews must undergo if they were ever to see and enter the kingdom of God, and so have eternal life (John 3:3-15). Jesus pictured the change as being "born again."

The concept is of God renovating the heart, the core of a person's being, by implanting a new principle of desire, purpose, and action, a dispositional dynamic that finds expression in positive response to the gospel and its Christ. Jesus' phrase "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5) harks back to Ezekiel 36:25-27, where God is pictured as symbolically cleansing persons from sin's pollution (by water) and bestowing a "new heart" by putting his Spirit within them. Because this is so explicit, Jesus chides Nicodemus, "Israel's teacher," for not understanding how new birth happens (John 3:9-10). Jesus' point throughout is that there is no exercise of faith in himself as the supernatural Savior, no repentance, and no true discipleship apart from this new birth.

Elsewhere John teaches that belief in the Incarnation and Atonement, with faith and love, holiness and righteousness, is the fruit and proof that one is born of God (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4). It thus appears that as there is no conversion without new birth, so there is no new birth without conversion.

Though infant regeneration can be a reality when God so purposes (Luke 1:15, 41-44), the ordinary context of new birth is one of effectual calling—that is, confrontation with the gospel and illumination as to its truth and significance as a message from God to oneself. Regeneration is always the decisive element in effectual calling.

Regeneration is monergistic: that is, entirely the work of God the Holy Spirit. It raises the elect among the spiritually dead to new life in Christ (Eph. 2:1-10). Regeneration is a transition from spiritual death to spiritual life, and conscious, intentional, active faith in Christ is its immediate fruit, not its immediate cause.

Regeneration is the work of what Augustine called “prevenient” grace, the grace that precedes our outgoings of heart toward God.

ELECTION: GOD CHOOSES HIS OWN

For [God] says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. ROMANS 9:15-16

The verb elect means “to select, or choose out.” The biblical doctrine of election is that before Creation God selected out of the human race, foreseen as fallen, those whom he would redeem, bring to faith, justify, and glorify in and through Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-39; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9-10). This divine choice is an expression of free and sovereign grace, for it is unconstrained and unconditional, not merited by anything in those who are its subjects. God owes sinners no mercy of any kind, only condemnation; so it is a wonder, and matter for endless praise, that he should choose to save any of us; and doubly so when his choice involved the giving of his own Son to suffer as sin-bearer for the elect (Rom. 8:32).

The doctrine of election, like every truth about God, involves mystery and sometimes stirs controversy. But in Scripture it is a pastoral doctrine, brought in to help Christians see how great is the grace that saves them, and to move them to humility, confidence, joy, praise, faithfulness, and holiness in response. It is the family secret of the children of God. We do not know who else he has chosen among those who do not yet believe, nor why it was his good pleasure to choose us in particular. What we do know is, first, that had we not been chosen for life we would not be believers now (for only the elect are brought to faith), and, second, that as elect believers we may rely on God to finish in us the good work that he started (1 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18). Knowledge of one’s election thus brings comfort and joy.

Peter tells us we should be “eager to make [our] calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10)—that is, certain to us. Election is known by its fruits. Paul knew the election of the Thessalonians from their faith, hope, and love, the inward and outward transformation of their lives that the gospel had brought about (1 Thess. 1:3-6). The more that the qualities to which Peter has been exhorting his readers appear in our lives (goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love; 2 Pet. 1:5-7), the surer of our own election we are entitled to be.

The elect are, from one standpoint, the Father’s gift to the Son (John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 24). Jesus testifies that he came into this world specifically to save them (John 6:37-40; 10:14-16, 26-29; 15:16; 17:6-26; Eph. 5:25-27), and any account of his mission must emphasize this.

Reprobation is the name given to God's eternal decision regarding those sinners whom he has not chosen for life. His decision is in essence a decision not to change them, as the elect are destined to be changed, but to leave them to sin as in their hearts they already want to do, and finally to judge them as they deserve for what they have done. When in particular instances God gives them over to their sins (i.e., removes restraints on their doing the disobedient things they desire), this is itself the beginning of judgment. It is called "hardening" (Rom. 9:18; 11:25; cf. Ps. 81:12; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28), and it inevitably leads to greater guilt.

Reprobation is a biblical reality (Rom. 9:14-24; 1 Pet. 2:8), but not one that bears directly on Christian behavior. The reprobates are faceless so far as Christians are concerned, and it is not for us to try to identify them. Rather, we should live in light of the certainty that anyone may be saved if he or she will but repent and put faith in Christ.

We should view all persons that we meet as possibly being numbered among the elect.

PREDESTINATION

"I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the LORD says.

"Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated...." MALACHI 1:2-3

The forty and more writers who produced the sixty-six books of Scripture over something like fifteen hundred years saw themselves and their readers as caught up in the outworking of God's sovereign purpose for his world, the purpose that led him to create, that sin then disrupted, and that his work of redemption is currently restoring. That purpose in essence was, and is, the endless expression and enjoyment of love between God and his rational creatures—love shown in their worship, praise, thanks, honor, glory, and service given to him, and in the fellowship, privileges, joys, and gifts that he gives to them.

The writers look back at what has already been done to advance God's redemptive plan for sin-damaged planet earth, and they look ahead to the day of its completion, when planet earth will be re-created in unimaginable glory (Isa. 65:17-25; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1-22:5). They proclaim God as the almighty Creator-Redeemer and dwell constantly on the multifaceted works of grace that God performs in history to secure for himself a people, a great company of individuals together, with whom his original purpose of giving and receiving love can be fulfilled. And the writers insist that as God has shown himself absolutely in control in bringing his plan to the point it has reached as they write, so he will continue in total control, working out everything according to his own will and so completing his redemptive project. It is within this frame of reference (Eph. 1:9-14; 2:4-10; 3:8-11; 4:11-16) that questions about predestination belong.

Predestination is a word often used to signify God's foreordaining of all the events of world history, past, present, and future, and this usage is quite appropriate. In Scripture and mainstream theology, however, predestination means specifically God's decision, made in eternity before the world and its inhabitants existed, regarding the final destiny of individual sinners. In fact, the New Testament uses the words predestination and election (the two are one), only of God's choice of particular sinners for salvation and eternal life (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4-5, 11). Many have pointed out, however, that Scripture also ascribes to God an advance decision about those who finally are not saved (Rom. 9:6-29; 1 Pet. 2:8; Jude 4), and so it has become usual in Protestant theology to define God's predestination as including both his decision to save some from sin (election) and his decision to condemn the rest for their sin (reprobation), side by side.

To the question, "On what basis did God choose individuals for salvation?" it is sometimes replied: on the basis of his foreknowledge that when faced with the gospel they would choose Christ as their Savior. In that reply, foreknowledge means passive foresight on God's part of what individuals are going to do, without his predetermining their action. But

- ✧ Foreknow in Romans 8:29; 11:2 (cf. 1 Pet. 1:2 and 1:20, where the NIV renders the Greek foreknown as "chosen") means "fore-love" and "fore-appoint": it does not express the idea of a spectator's anticipation of what will spontaneously happen.
- ✧ Since all are naturally dead in sin (i.e., cut off from the life of God and unresponsive to him), no one who hears the gospel will ever come to repentance and faith without an inner quickening that only God can impart (Eph. 2:4-10). Jesus said: "No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (John 6:65, cf. 44; 10:25-28). Sinners choose Christ only because God chose them for this choice and moved them to it by renewing their hearts.
Though all human acts are free in the sense of being self-determined, none are free from God's control according to his eternal purpose and foreordination.

Christians should therefore thank God for their conversion, look to him to keep them in the grace into which he has brought them, and confidently await his final triumph, according to his plan.