

Ephesians 2:4-7

“Regeneration”

08.29.10

Main Idea: Regeneration is an act of God that results in us receiving a new heart, without which our hearts will remain dead to the things of God.

**Q# Why do I need it?**

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

Romans 7:18 *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.”*

Romans 8:7–9 *“because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”*

1 Cor. 2:14 *“But <sup>1</sup>a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually <sup>2</sup>appraised” (NASB).*

Ephesians 2:1 *“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,”*

Ephesians 4:21–24 *“if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”*

**Q# How do I know if I have been regenerated?**

2 Corinthians 5:17 *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”*

John 16:7-11 *“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”*

**Q# What do I have to do?**

=Repent of your sin and believe/trust in Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup>Or an unspiritual

<sup>2</sup>Or examined

Questions:

- 1) Is it possible to really change?
- 2) What is “being saved?”
- 3) Can I lose my salvation?
- 4) What does “being saved” look like?

### I. God’s Instigation – 2:4 “*But God...*”

ὁ δὲ θεὸς

A much welcome interruption to the bleak picture of v. 1-3

### II. God’s Character Described – 2:4 “*rich in mercy*”

ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει,

EXPL: πλούσιος in Eph. 2:4 may be interpreted either as degree or extent; in other words, in terms of the intensity of God’s expression of mercy or in the extent of occasions in which God shows mercy.<sup>1</sup>

Ephesians 1:7 “*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.*”

Notice that the text reads, “In HIM” not “In Him AND us.” You must realize that to come to God you must leave off any so-called goodness of your own. You must turn your attention from your accomplishments place your faith in Him and His accomplishments.

-God had mercy on us. Our hearts and minds were darkened and deadened because of sin so that we came to “suppress the truth” (Romans 1:18), “dumb on purpose.” But **God** had **mercy** on **us**. While God has an abundance of mercy, we cannot presume upon it.

### III. God’s Character Described – 2:4 “*because of His great love with which He loved us,*”

διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἣν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς

God’s abundance of mercy is not merely descriptive of His character but demonstrable in His caring.

**Q# What is the evidence of God’s mercy?** = the demonstration of His love is several fold:

- 1) Unconditional love
- 2) Undeserved love

### IV. God’s Character Extended – 2:5 “*while we were dead in transgressions,*”

καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν

“even when existing dead (in) trespasses”

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<sup>1</sup>J.P. Louw, & E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), in *Logos Library System* [CD-ROM].

- 3) Unprecedented love – Nowhere in religious history does any account even come close to paralleling the Gospel.

***Destroys the prospect of Self-Improvement***

Sure you can modify your behavior but you cannot change your heart and make your spirit desire the things of God. It is at this fork in the road that innumerable people have become confused and chosen Behavior Modification instead of pleading with God for a heart change. This leads either to:

1. Self-righteousness –
2. Disillusionment – why even try?

Self-righteousness

“The practice of the Buddha-dharma can be summed up as refraining from all evil and doing all good deeds” – Venerable Master Hua, on the Buddhist Temple, Chinatown, California

Point = Buddhism teaches that Salvation, the best they can offer is “Enlightenment,” is a mathematical formula: add “good deeds” and minimize “bad deeds.” But this begs the question, “At what point do good deeds outweigh bad deeds?” Moreover, can a good deed cancel out the negative effects of bad deeds? If so, which quality of deeds can do this and how can one accomplish this vital task?

Point = Jesus cuts through the religious fog and points us to Himself. He says, “*A man must be born again.*” John 3:3

Disillusionment – why even try?

V. God’s Power Applied – 2:5-6 “*made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*”

καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασιν συνεζωοποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, – χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι

EXPL: The first main verb in the pericope!

Here’s how God’s Power is applied:

- 1) Made our spirit alive v.5
- 2) Raised us up with Him v.6
- 3) Set us down v.6

Going from dead to alive, from out for the count to being raised up by the firm but gentle hand of Jesus and being invited to come sit in the presence of Jesus,

Philip Spencer writes:

If one doctrine of our Christian faith is essential, then it is certainly that of regeneration. This is the spring from which everything which is good in our life must flow forth.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Philip Jacob Spencer, *Von der Wiedergeburt*, ed., H.G. Feller (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf, 1963), 13. Cited in *The Biblical Doctrine of Regeneration* by Helmut Burkhardt, trans. O.R. Johnston (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978), 7.

**Q# What is it? = Regeneration**

1. Made our spirit alive v.5

EXPL: Periphrastic phrase in the Greek New Testament.

‘The periphrastic perfect construction draws attention to the resulting state of salvation...the passive voice and the emphatic reference to *grace* underscore the point that it comes as a gift of God...S.E. Porter renders ἔστε σεσωσμένοι ‘you are in a state of salvation.’<sup>3</sup>

Carl F.H. Henry writes, “Individual regeneration is not only a chief but an indispensable means of social reform.”<sup>4</sup>

**Q# Why are there so many hypocrites in the church? Or “The church is filled with hypocrites!”**

- 1) Jesus said there would be hypocrites – Matthew 7 & Matthew 13
- 2) The reality of the false does not negate the existence of the true

The truth of Christianity is not invalidated by the presence of hypocrites in the church.

- 3) There will be no hypocrites in heaven. They all go to hell. Matthew 7:21-23
- 4) Biggest hypocrite: Rejecting Jesus Christ because of people in the church who are just like them.

2. Raised us up with Him v.6

**Q# Can I lose my salvation?**

συνεζωποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ, — χάριτί ἔστε σεσωσμένοι

1) God regenerates you and produces in you what we call ‘being born again.’  
συνεζωποίησεν τῷ Χριστῷ -- 3rd, singular, aorist, active, indicative, -- ‘He made you alive.’

- 2) We are the Recipients, not the Producers of regeneration.

**Q# When can it happen? Can I get saved anytime I want to?**

Notice that without the initiation of God, Lydia would have never had the capacity to receive the Gospel! In fact, she was Paul’s first convert in Europe!! Acts 16:14 “*A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord ‘opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.’*” Notice the process. First, the Lord opened her heart. The logical conclusion is that if God did not open her heart to respond to the Gospel, she would not have been able to open her own heart. Also, Lydia was to “*respond*” to the Gospel message.

Evans and Coder:

Man therefore is not wholly passive at the time of his regeneration. He is passive only as to the change of his ruling disposition. With regard to the exercise of this disposition he is active. A dead man cannot assist in his own resurrection, it is

<sup>3</sup> O’Brien, 169.

<sup>4</sup> Carl F.H. Henry, *Perspective for Social Action*: Part II, p. 15. Cited in Budziszewski.

<sup>c</sup> Luke 24:45

true; but he may, and can, like Lazarus, obey Christ's command, and 'Come forth!' ”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus clearly explains the inscrutable process of being born again by simply noting that it cannot be fully understood by the human mind.

John 3:8, “*The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.*”

However, notice that the prerequisite for God changing a person is their receiving him through belief or faith. This raises a very important question, “What factors cause a person to come to place where they have the ability and desire to believe, repent, etc.?”

The Bible teaches (no man comes unless he be drawn by the Father).

John 6:44 “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.*”

Isaiah 55:6 “*Seek the Lord while He may be found.*”

=It's not so much that you can't turn to God whenever you want, its just that if God is not drawing you to be saved you won't *want* to get saved.

**Q# What Does it Look Like?** = Acts 9 – Paul's changed life

### 3. Set us down v.6

**Q# How do I know if I have been regenerated?**

Oswald Chambers, “The only sign that a an is saved is that he has received something from Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

**Q# Why would God do any of this when He would be totally “in the Right” to give us straight justice?**

= Because of His own merciful character.<sup>7</sup>

- 1) Mercy
- 2) Great love
- 3) Rich grace
- 4) Kindness

VI. God's Purpose Unfolded – 2:7 “*SO THAT in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*”

**Q# What is the purpose of God changing our lives?** = To direct all the glory to Him and thus, bring balance to the moral order of the universe that has been upset by sin.

<sup>5</sup> William Evans, and S. Maxwell Coder, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998, c1974), S. 155 in *Logos Library System* [CD-ROM].

<sup>6</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1999), 164.

**Q# What is so far beyond anything else? v.7 the wealth/riches of His grace**

**Q# What is grace? God's Riches at Christ's Expense**

William P. Wilson, former Professor of Psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center says, "One of the greatest causes of mental illness is unresolved guilt. Feelings of shame, inadequacy, missing the mark, not measuring up, are some sources of guilt feelings. **The answer to guilt is grace and the new birth.** The new birth leads to the forgiveness of sin."<sup>8</sup>

**Q# Why do I need to be regenerated? Why is it so necessary?**

Because without it we are:

- 1) Dead to God 2:1
- 2) Deceived by Satan 2:2
- 3) Slaves to Sin 2:2
- 4) Condemned by God because of our sin 2:3

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<sup>8</sup> Billy Graham, *How to be Born Again* (Word Books: Waco, 1977), 84.