

Early in May, I produced a piece on the great Bible subject of **Justification**, which is one of the wonderful riches that flow to us as a result of our Lord's resurrection: "*Jesus our Lord, who was ... was raised for our justification.*" (Rom 4:24,25). However, that raises the question, 'How do we know if we have been justified?' A very important answer is found in another of the riches that result from the Resurrection: **Regeneration**. We need to be very clear on the fact that God always regenerates those He justifies, and He always justifies those He regenerates: the two go hand in hand.

So what is 'Regeneration'? The short answer is that it is all about *new life*. We are familiar with the idea of 'urban regeneration' – the bringing back to life of run-down areas; clearing pollution and rubbish left behind from long-gone industry; rebuilding new businesses and renewing old housing. We often hear of councils wanting to regenerate town centres and bring life back to run-down communities.

Bible regeneration, however, is very different. It is not about renewing society, improving peoples' lifestyles or reclaiming political agendas. Bible regeneration is a completely new and utterly different experience of an 'out-of-this-world' life! More often Christians refer to regeneration as being 'born again' to a completely new start in life.

The original New Testament word for 'Regeneration' actually occurs twice only. First, in Matthew 19:28, it refers to the "*new world*", which is later referred to as "*new heavens and a new earth*" (2 Pet 3:13). Here the word is concerned with the eternal perspective of life after death. The second use of the word, found in Titus 3:5, is "*the washing of regeneration*". This refers to the individual or personal perspective of regeneration. I guess in today's language we might call this the micro view of regeneration! This article is concerned with the individual and personal aspects of regeneration, the obvious example being our Lord's words to Nicodemus: "*You must be born again*" (John 3:7). Bible regeneration is the completely new start of an amazing and wonderful new life: "*if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*" (2 Cor 5:17)

The most important thing to realise about regeneration is that it has to be **THE DIVINE WORK OF GOD**.

The great incontrovertible reality is that only life generates new life. Deadness does not generate life. Also, we know that life only generates its own kind of life: birds do not reproduce buffaloes; plants do not reproduce people! It is as the Lord said: "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" (John 3:6). At creation, "*the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*" (Gen 2:7) Or, as the prophet Zechariah was inspired to put it, "*the LORD ... formed the spirit of man within him*" (Zech 12:1). Just as at creation God gave man his human life, so in regeneration only God can breathe the life of His Spirit into the souls of people on earth.

This brings us to the awful reality for what appears to be such a vast number of people all over the world: they do not realise that their greatest need is for regeneration! They do not understand that, in their natural state, while living on earth, they are in fact dead to God! That was also true for everyone who has become a Christian. We were all "*dead in ... trespasses and sins*" (Eph 2:1). When our dear brother Harry Sutton was called home, I went to see him at the funeral directors. There he was, laid out in his coffin, ready for burial. You may well think this very odd, but I started talking to him! I reminded him of the times we had spent together, blessings we had received, places we had been together and the fun we had shared. However, after a little while I noticed that I was getting absolutely no reaction whatsoever. The reality was that Harry was dead!

That is the state of all people with respect to God before regeneration! So even when they are warned of the wrath to come, they are not concerned; if offered salvation, they don't want it. In that state, the Bible is a closed book in terms of a proper understanding of it – and often literally too. The fallen sinful nature has no genuine desire for God. It is as God promised in the Garden of Eden: "*in the day you eat of it you shall surely die.*" (Gen 2:17) The creation life of relationship with God died that day! Every person since has been "*brought forth in iniquity*" (Ps 51:5), and by nature remains "*separated from Christ ... and without God in the world.*" (Eph 2:12).

Now, the great problem for the human race is that it cannot make itself alive to God! That is only possible by a direct intervention from God. "*God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ*" (Eph 2:4,5). The verse says, "*God ... made us alive*". And if God does not make us alive to Him, we remain dead to Him.

The way God makes those "*dead in trespasses*" alive to Himself is through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit being infused into the fallen human soul. New birth is "*by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit*" (Tit 3:5). Through the Holy Spirit, God the Father provides us with a completely new start.

We also need to realise that the regenerating work of God is directly linked to the resurrection of the Saviour. The apostle Peter was inspired to write and remind Christians of God the Father's work in them: "*According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" (1 Pet 1:3). The implication is very clear: if the resurrection of the Lord Jesus had not taken place, then there would be no being born again! This is surely confirmed by the verse quoted above, where we read "*God ... made us alive together with Christ*" (Eph 2:5). If God the Father had not made His Son "*alive*", He could not make anyone else alive together with Him! Or, to put it another way, if the Lord Jesus Christ is still dead and decayed in a tomb, we would still be dead in our sin – "*if Christ has not been raised ... you are still in your sins*" (1 Cor 15:17) – and that means still dead to God.

Just as the resurrection of Jesus depended on the divine life-giving power of God, so our regeneration depends on that same power, and therefore only God can do it. It is the "*immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead*" (Eph 1:19,20). The regeneration of the sinful dead soul requires the same power as the work of resurrection in the dead body of the crucified Jesus. And that mighty power is only found in God.

So then, our regeneration is exclusively a divine work for which we are utterly dependent on God. Unless He chooses to regenerate us, our case is hopeless. But God's great desire is to give life: "*I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn and live.*" (Ezek 18:32)

If one of the great tragedies for the human race is its failure to realise its deadness to God – a far bigger tragedy than Covid-19, awful as that is – then for us modern western Christians it is a real tragedy that we often fail to appreciate the greatness of the amazingly powerful miracle of our being born again! It is the most amazing and powerful miraculous work of the Almighty God that we will ever experience down here! Surely there is nothing more wonderful than to have "*passed from death to life*" (John 5:24) – and divine life at that.

These days, so very sadly, many have gone in the opposite direction due to the virus. However, we have read or seen on TV the reports of the happy celebration when patients have been delivered from the virus and been discharged from hospital. How much greater should be our joy and thrill at having gone from being dead towards God and passed into a life of loving relationship with Him through the resurrection power of our risen, living Saviour and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, that is not only such a great cause of joy for us, but remember that God enjoys nothing more than regenerating dead souls. If you are reading this and realise that you have never been made alive to God through the risen Lord Jesus, cry out to Him now and plead with Him to do it for you.

The next thing to take note of is that regeneration is a **DECISIVE ACTION BY GOD**.

Regeneration is definitely not a process of gradually bringing a dead soul to life. It is an instantaneous transformation: "*you were dead in trespasses and sins... But God ... made us alive*" (Eph 2:1–5) It is clearly and plainly in the past tense. Other Scriptures emphasize the same point: "*whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He ... has passed from death to life*" (John 5:24) – he or she is not still in the process of receiving eternal life or of passing from death to life! The fact is that Christians are people who "*were dead in your trespasses... [but] God made alive*" (Col 2:13). So we may well cry out in joyful praise with the inspired Peter and say, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again*" (1 Pet 1:3).

In this respect 'Regeneration' is no different to 'Justification'. God declares a sinner justified in His sight and he or she is then *justified*. Then God works regeneration in them and they are *regenerate*, born again. Both are done by Him.

This truth has a very important and practical application to the Christian life. It means that a Christian cannot be more or less born again. Nor can they be regenerate one day and not the next! Look again at the words of the Lord Jesus: "*whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and has passed from death to life.*" (John 5:24). One of the great things about eternal life is that it is eternal, it is permanent, it really does last for ever! So if you are a true Christian you ought to wake up every morning and say to yourself, "I am regenerate; I am born again; how wonderful and great is that!"

Sometimes we sing, *God forgave my sin in Jesus' name; I've been born again in Jesus' name*. Wonderful words!

Or, in the words of the apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, "*you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*" (Rom 6:11) It is in that attitude of mind, if we are Christians, that we should live our lives every day. Do you think of yourself like that? If you are a Christian, you should! Then, as you think about that, praise God that that is what He has done for you.

There is more to say about this glorious subject of 'Regeneration'; maybe we can come back to that another time...