

Recent weeks have seen many employees 'furloughed' and able to enjoy the beautiful May weather, getting jobs done in the home and garden. For many others, however, the 'lockdown' resulted in a significant hike in activity and responsibility. That has been especially true for those engaged in the medical and caring professions. Even many parents and guardians who have been 'furloughed' have found themselves suddenly dropped into the role of teacher or full-time nursery worker! Others, who have continued in full-time employment in the commercial and industrial sectors, have had to take on extra burdens – organising new ways of working, advising and keeping in contact with their furloughed staff, colleagues and employees. Before 'lockdown' so much of modern life seemed to be a constant round of activity, and then it got even more demanding!

This has also been true for some Christians. Those engaged in church leadership or involved in various ministries have often found, not only that they were sustaining a busy life outside of church activities, but also that they were involved in repetitive programmes of meetings and responsibilities. Sometimes it seems there is not a moment for oneself, hardly time to breathe! For some such people the 'lockdown', whilst relieving the need to be at meetings physically, has in fact resulted in increased demands. A church leader recently said how exhausted he was as a result of constantly being engaged in Zoom meetings! It is a sad thing when the Christian life seems to be little more than a constant round of activity. Therefore we need to realise what 'Regeneration' is, and what it is to be 'Born Again'.

Last time I sought to share some thoughts on this wonderful Bible theme of 'Regeneration', the second of the glorious riches that flow to us as a result of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw that regeneration is a work that God does to regenerate the degenerate soul of the sinner. Jesus described it as having "*passed from death to life.*" (John 5:24) God puts such a person in a wholly new situation: "*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come.*" (2 Cor 5:17) So Christians are described as people who "*were dead in your trespasses*" but "*God made alive*" (Col 2:13).

Regeneration then is all about a new life, which is why Christians more often refer to this remarkable experience as being 'born again'. Last time I sought to stress that Regeneration is a 'Decisive Action' on God's part. Once He has done it, it is done and remains done. Regeneration is not an ongoing process. Regeneration does, however, have very powerful and effective ongoing results.

REGENERATION RESULTS IN DAILY LIVING

So what is this new life? The first answer is that it is **eternal** life. Very often we tend to think of eternal life as life that lasts forever. We praise God that eternal life does indeed last forever, as Jesus said: "*everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die*" (John 11:26). But everyone has already a kind of life that lasts for ever – it is called immortality! That includes all those who do not go to heaven! Jesus described the unimaginably awful state of the lost as being "*thrown into hell where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.*" (Mark 9:47,48) That horrific existence will be never-ending! Therefore *regenerate* eternal life must be more than just life for evermore.

The second answer is that regenerate life is **divine** life. It is sharing the resurrected and ascended life of the Lord Jesus. Amazing as it seems, to be regenerate is to have the life of the living Saviour infused into our once-dead soul. So Paul can describe a Christian as "*Christ in you*" (Col 1:27). On being born again, the living Lord comes to live His life in the soul of the new Christian. This is why Paul is able to testify that, for him, "*to live is Christ*" (Phil 1:21).

Regeneration is the fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy: "*I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*" (Ezek 36:26) And that new heart beats with the very life of God Himself!

The great reason for our Lord's incarnation was, as He Himself said, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*" (John 10:10) The thing I want to emphasize is that the Lord Jesus came to give us **new life** and not just a new roster of responsibilities or an onerous round of duties. He didn't come to lay on people a new catalogue of commandments. He **came that we may have life**. True Christianity then is about LIVING! We read that "*just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*" (Rom 6:4).

Have you ever noticed how often the Christian life is described as a *walk*? This picture occurs about thirty-five times in the New Testament epistles. Another example would be, “*as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him*” (Col 2:6), which describes the Christian life as a step-by-step and day-to-day experience. It is living in a way that mirrors the Lord’s life, for “*whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*” (1 John 2:6) Or again, “*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him*” (Col 1:10). Genuine Christianity is daily living out the life of the risen, living Lord Jesus.

The gift of a new heart and life is given through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. So Ezekiel goes on immediately to say, “*I will put my Spirit within you*”. Or, as the apostle John was inspired to write, “*he abides in us by the Spirit whom he has given us*” and “*we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit*” (1 John 3:24, 4:13). We know, therefore, that the Christian’s “*body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God*” (1 Cor 6:19).

That then brings us to another very important question: What does this kind of life look like?

REGENERATION RESULTS IN GODLY LIVING

The straight answer to the question is to look at what God is like and how Jesus lived. The regenerate life in the Christian’s soul is God’s nature in their heart. So, since “*God is light and in him is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5), regeneration floods the Christian’s heart and mind with God’s light. “*The Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true*” (1 John 5:20). Paul describes Christians as “*having the eyes of your hearts enlightened*” (Eph 1:18).

What happens in being born again is that “*God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness”, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*” (2 Cor 4:6) Regeneration brings a Christian into the realm and kingdom of light; it infuses life and light from He who is “*the light of the world*” (John 8:12) into our once benighted souls. This is what happened to Lydia when “*The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*” (Acts 16:14)

The remarkable truth regarding Christians is that “*we have the mind of Christ.*” (1 Cor 2:16) That is not only His mind as expressed in the Scriptures, but also in the ability to grasp, understand, think and live in the way that He does. Regeneration transforms the mind so that, though “*at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*” (Eph 5:8). The Christian has the ability to think about life on earth from a heavenly point of view. We can think of all that happens to us and affects us down here in the same way as the risen and ascended Saviour thinks about them from His throne above. If you and I are Christians, let’s live day by day by thinking with His mind! What an absolutely amazing gift that is!

Christians not only have the ability to think as the risen Jesus does, but also to love as He does – though not in entirety, I agree! Nevertheless, since “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8) and in regeneration “*God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*” (Rom 5:8), we are enabled to live as “*imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*” (Eph 5:1,2). If that were not possible for Christians, the Holy Spirit would not have inspired Paul to write that they should endeavour to live in such a way! Does love for the Lord, our family, our church family and the lost characterise our daily living? I find that a very challenging question; do you?

Something else that should be a great mark of Christian living – even in days of ‘lockdown’, when some people have become very frustrated and angry – is to know and show that “*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*” (Neh 8:10) The facts of our justification and regeneration are surely great causes in themselves for us to be full of the joy of the Lord. Even in times when there seems little else to be happy about, we always have solid reasons for being joyful in our God and Saviour.

Whether we continue to live with the threat of Covid-19, or other anxieties take its place and come our way, the regenerate soul is blessed because “*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” (Phil 4:7) Being truly born again provides a deep confidence in our God and Saviour, that all is well and forever will be well in His hands.

We could go on considering the rest of the fruit of the Spirit, which are wonderful attributes that regeneration brings as part of this eternal, divine life: “*patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Gal 5:22,23). These are wonderful characteristics of the nature of our great God, and were perfectly demonstrated in the life of our Saviour and Lord. If we have his life infused into our souls, then we too should be living out these remarkable qualities, at least to a discernible degree.

The last result of regeneration that I want to mention points us beyond this life. A Christian is described as someone who has “*been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*”

(1 Pet 1:3). The sure and certain anticipation of heaven is another great quality of the eternal life planted in a Christian's heart. Paul was inspired to describe it thus: "*we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*" (Rom 5:2) True Christians should always be looking forward and upward with a sure and certain confident hope. Regeneration is everlasting life "*in the paradise of God*" (Rev 2:7); it is living the life of the risen and glorified Jesus with Jesus. In the meantime, it is the experience of "*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" (Col 1:27)

It is well worth noting that the wonderful and beautiful qualities of the life that is given at regeneration are not only an amazing blessing to the person who possesses them. There is nothing more helpful to the people of the world in which he or she lives. Deep down, in fact, the fruit of the Spirit – the result, in the Christian, of regeneration – is what non-Christians really would like; or, should I say, would love to see in everybody else! What a wonderful world it would be if everyone lived out the life of regeneration – as will be the case in heaven, "*in which righteousness dwells.*" (2 Pet 3:13) We can do no more good in our family, among friends or colleagues, than by living as born-again people.

However, whilst the wonderful qualities of regeneration life are a great help to the world, they are especially a blessing to the possessor. To have the light of God, the mind of Christ, the love and joy of the Lord and then be looking forward with living hope to enjoying them all in abundance and perfection for ever in glory, is truly an amazing thing. What a wonderful life to live for time and eternity! It really is a glorious thing to be a Christian.

Regeneration then lays the emphasis on *what kind of person the Christian is* before what kind of service they render. It is much more about *who we are* rather than what we do. In other words, it is about *living* before doing. This is so very important in the light of eternity and the fact that "*the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*" (2 Pet 3:10)

The immediate question for Christians is, therefore, "*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness*" (2 Pet 3:11)?

It seems to me that this is, so often, opposite to the way modern western people think. The concern so often is focussed on achieving, on producing, on fulfilment. Even those of us who are older are encouraged to have our 'bucket-list' and get through it! The world is taken up with actions, words and performance. Non-Christians evaluate themselves and others on the basis of what they are doing or have achieved. But "*the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.*" (1 Sam 16:7)

So, are you born again? Is this regeneration life the life you are living day by day? Are the remarkable features of regeneration being lived out in your life? If you claim to be a Christian, they should be, even though far from perfectly! Let's then take to heart the inspired words of the apostle Paul: "*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*" (Eph 5:15)

One final thought. Having emphasised that regeneration is about *living* rather than doing, we should not think that there is nothing for us to do! Ephesians 2:10 tells us that Christians are "*God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus*" – that is regeneration – but goes on to say, "*for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" For born-again people, there is always 'a work for Jesus, ready at your hand, tis' a task the Master just for you has planned.'