

The Divine Alchemist

In this article,¹ I want to spend a few minutes thinking about the Divine Alchemist. What am I talking about? Better: Whom am I talking about?

I remind you that an alchemist was one of those men – most of whom lived in medieval times – who were looking for a panacea, a cure for every disease. Alchemists were also trying to find a substance which would turn base metal into gold. When George Herbert, in his poem *The Elixir*, spoke of ‘the stone that turneth all to gold’, he was referring to the alchemist’s quest for that elixir. But, of course, alchemy was doomed, a forlorn hope. There is no such elixir; there is no substance that will turn base metal into gold.

However, a real alchemist does exist. In fact, he is the only true alchemist. He is the Divine Alchemist. The Divine Alchemist can actually perform the miracle – and that is what it is: a miracle! – of changing base into precious. Indeed, the Divine Alchemist can do something far greater than turn lead into gold; he can take dead sinners and turn them, change them, make them into living saints.

I am, of course, speaking of the Holy Spirit. And what I’m talking about is what the Bible calls regeneration, being born again, being born of the Spirit, being born from above, being born anew.

All men, women and children need this regeneration; and we – each and every one of us – need it from birth. For we – all of us – are born dead in sin (Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:1-3). As Jesus told Nicodemus: ‘You must be born again’. He explained: ‘You can be religious’ – indeed, Nicodemus, being a member of the ruling Jewish council, was very religious – ‘but religion, even the Jewish religion, is not enough; you need to be born again, you must be

¹ This article or tract began its passage through this world as a very short audio. See my ‘Gospel Snippets’ on my sermonaudio.com and YouTube pages.

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born again. Unless you are born again, regenerated, born from above, born anew, born of the Spirit, you will never enter the kingdom.² What is more, you will never even see the kingdom. Spiritually speaking, you are blind; you can't see. You're deaf; you can't hear. You're dumb; you can't speak. You're dead. You must be born again, born of the Spirit'.

So said Christ to Nicodemus. Here is the actual record:

Jesus answered [Nicodemus]: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God'. Nicodemus said to him: 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water³ and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you: "You must be born again". The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit' (John 3:3-8).

Here we have it – rather, here we have him: the Divine Alchemist, the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, he is so powerful that he can take dead sinners and make them into living saints. In his sovereign power, he does it by removing the heart of stone from the sinner, removing the deadness, and implanting a living heart, a living mind, a new mind, a new disposition, a new attitude, a new spirit. He makes the spiritually dead to live. As God declared through the prophet:

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. And I will put my Spirit within you, and

² The kingdom in question is Christ's realm of indescribable bliss for all who belong to it. See my 'Thoughts on the Kingdom' on my sermonaudio.com page.

³ This 'water' does not refer to baptism. As 'fire' (Matt. 3:11), it speaks of the purifying, cleansing power and effect of regeneration. See my *Infant Baptism Tested*.

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cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my just decrees (Ezek. 36:26-27).⁴

So, combining John 3:3-8 and Ezekiel 36:26-27 (among other passages), it is clear that nothing but this sovereign regeneration will do. Unless we're born again, we will never see the kingdom. It's only born-again sinners who feel and know that they are sinners. That's one mark of regeneration – conviction of sin (John 16:8-9). But it does not stop there. It is only regenerate sinners who actually repent of their sins before God. Again, only regenerate sinners can, by God's grace, by the work of the Divine Alchemist, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, trust him, and receive him as their Saviour and Lord, and so love and obey him. Moreover, not only can they trust Christ; by God's Spirit that is what they do. They are made a new creation (Matt. 19:25-26; John 1:10-13; 6:63-65; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-10; Col. 2:13; Tit. 3:4-7; 1 Pet. 1:2-3,23-25; 1 John 3:9-10; 4:7-8; 5:1-5, for instance).

Nothing but regeneration by the Spirit will do the work; nothing else, nothing less than regeneration by the Spirit, can effect it. Nobody but the Spirit can change dead sinners into living saints. Churchianity will not do it; churchianity can't do it. Sadly, today, many people (including many evangelicals) are becoming more and more accustomed to thinking that church attendance, that churchianity, will somehow do the job. It won't! No! Not religion, but regeneration! Regeneration by the sovereign grace and power of the Divine Alchemist, the Holy Spirit – the only one who can take dead sinners and turn them into living saints – is essential: 'You must be born again'.

So, I ask you: Have you been born again? Are you conscious that you're a sinner? Are you aware that you must repent? Do you repent? Will you turn to Christ and confess that you're a sinner? Will you trust him? Will you believe upon him? Will you receive and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? Unless you do, you will never enter the kingdom; you will never even see it. Only God's Spirit can effect the change. Don't think reading the Bible is enough. Don't think that praying will do it.

⁴ In new-covenant terms, these 'just decrees' are gospel commands.

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Don't think that church attendance will do it. Don't think that baptism will do it. Don't think that completing a course of instruction will do it. Nor will mere imitation. Don't think that learning the lingo will do it. It won't. Religion won't do it. Being decent won't do it.

You must be born again. And the Divine Alchemist, the Holy Spirit, is the only one who can regenerate dead sinners; in particular, he is the only one who can regenerate you. Never forget: *you must be born again*.

If my words have not been sufficient, perhaps those of Joseph Hopkins might be:

*Sinners! this solemn truth regard;
Hear, all you sons of men!
For Christ the Saviour has declared:
'You must be born again'.*

*Whate'er might be your birth or blood,
The sinner's boast is vain;
Thus says the glorious Son of God:
'You must be born again'.*

*Our nature totally depraved,
The heart a sink of sin;
Without a change we can't be saved,
'You must be born again'.*

*That which is born of flesh is flesh,
And flesh it will remain:
Then marvel not that Jesus says:
'You must be born again'.*