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**B0526 – July 3, 2005 – Major Bible Themes**  
**Chapter 16 – God the Holy Spirit: His Regeneration**

Last week we learned that the Holy Spirit, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Trinity, is omnipresent, yet He came and took up residence in the world on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. This does not infer that the Holy Spirit was inactive during the OT. He was involved in creation of the universe, creation of man, the revelation and inspiration of Scripture, the restraining of sin, and the temporal filling or enabling of believers to fulfill services.

During the Life of Christ the Spirit was active in the conception of the God-man and the beginning of Christ's ministry at His baptism. In relation to men the Holy Spirit would come to them by simply asking. This prayer was answered on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit took up residence in the world.

On this day He brought into the world several new ministries related to both unbelievers and believers. In relation to unbelievers, the Holy Spirit began His 3-Fold Conviction of the world (John 16:8-11). During this dispensation the Holy Spirit convicts a large number of unbelievers, more than the elect but less than every individual of the facts concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. The facts concerning sin involve the conviction that the sin of unbelief is the one thing that stands between God and the unsaved. The facts concerning righteousness involve the conviction that the righteousness of Christ is required for heaven. The facts concerning judgment involve the conviction that sin has been judged on the cross and that Christ was judged and executed for them. The second ministry of the Spirit that was new to the dispensation of the church was the permanent indwelling of the Spirit (John 14:16-17). Until the Day of Pentecost the Spirit was *with them* but from the Day of Pentecost until the Rapture the Holy Spirit will be *in them*. It is unclear whether this ministry will continue into the Tribulation and Kingdom. The third ministry of the Spirit is Spirit baptism, a dry baptism that puts a person in the body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:22-23). The fourth ministry of the Spirit that began on the Day of Pentecost is sealing (Eph 1:13-14; 4:30). This ministry "seals" a

believer “in Christ” until the day of redemption, which for church saints occurs at the pre-trib rapture. At least two of these ministries are totally unique to the church dispensation (Spirit baptism and sealing). The two other ministries; permanent indwelling and 3-fold conviction of the Spirit were new but may also be present in future dispensations. When the church age closes with the rapture the Holy Spirit will have accomplished the purpose of His special advent into the world and will depart from the world in the same sense that He came on the day of Pentecost. He will again take up residence in heaven.

Today we are going to begin looking at some of the further works of the Spirit. The work we are interested in today is the work of regeneration. This is a work of the Spirit that is required for a person to enter the earthly kingdom of God (John 3:1-15). Therefore regeneration is required for all saints beginning with Adam.

## **I. Regeneration Defined**

The word “regeneration” is the Greek word *paliggenesia* and literally means “again” “to be born”. “In some languages ‘new birth’ can be expressed as ‘to cause to be born all over again’ or ‘to have a new life as though one were born a second time.’”<sup>i</sup> The word is used only twice in the NT. In Matt 19:28 “regeneration” is used of the renewal of creation during the millennial kingdom.

**Matthew 19:28** And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The creation will be “renewed” during the Son of Man’s rule on earth. The second use is found in Titus 3:5 and is related to salvation and the Spirit.

**Titus 3:5** He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Notice the connection between “washing” and “regeneration”. This is an important connection because the OT connected “salvation” with “water” and with “regeneration”. To see this turn to Ezekiel 36.

**Ezekiel 36:17-19** <sup>17</sup> "Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like

the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity. <sup>18</sup> "Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. <sup>19</sup> "Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them. **Ezekiel 36:24-29** <sup>24</sup> "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup> "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. <sup>28</sup> "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. <sup>29</sup> "Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. **Ezekiel 36:33-36** <sup>33</sup> "Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. <sup>34</sup> "The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by. <sup>35</sup> "They will say, 'This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified *and* inhabited.' <sup>36</sup> "Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places *and* planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it."

Now, if you were an OT Israelite walking with Jesus or with Paul and you heard Jesus referring to the "regeneration" or Paul referring to the "washing of regeneration" what passage would immediately spring to mind? Ezek 36. Ezek 36 shows that there is a connection between Israel's national regeneration and Christ's earthly millennial kingdom. There was a bit of confusion among Christ's disciples in Acts 1:5ff. They connected the Spirit's coming with the Kingdom but Christ implied that there would be two comings of the Holy Spirit. In connection with the Messiah's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming Israel will be washed, regenerated and taken into a regenerated creation; a creation that is likened in this passage to the "garden of Eden". We're not talking about heaven but the earth during the millennial kingdom.

So, let's conclude by giving a definition to the word "regeneration". Chafer defines it as

“the origination of the eternal life which comes into the believer in Christ at the moment of faith, the instantaneous change from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life.”<sup>ii</sup>

Ryrie defines it as

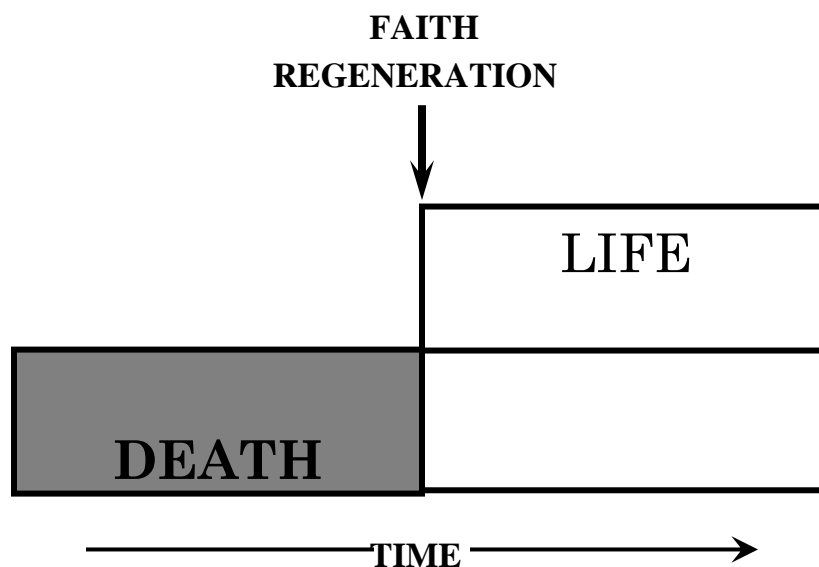
“The work of God that gives new life to the one who believes.”<sup>iii</sup>

I’ve defined it as

“The work of God that imparts eternal life<sup>iv</sup> to the one who believes at the moment they believe.”

What this all implies is that at physical birth your human spirit is dead. At your spiritual birth your human spirit is made alive. This is what Eph 2:5 teaches.

**Ephesians 2:4-5** But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),



The one who believes in Christ “has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). Crossing over from death to life is not a process but an instantaneous completed event that has ongoing results (perfect tense of *metabaino* in John 5:24). It occurs at the moment of faith. Human faith is not what regenerates. Instead, faith is the channel through which God regenerates. Ryrie says it this way,

God regenerates (John 1:13) according to His will (James 1:18) through the Holy Spirit (John 3:5) when a person believes (1:12) the gospel as revealed in the Word (1 Pet. 1:23).<sup>v</sup>

**John 1:12-13** But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

## II. Eternal Life Imparted by Regeneration

There are three figures the Scriptures use to express the concept of regeneration. First, there is the picture of being...

### A. Born Again (John 1:13; 3:3, 5, 6, 8; Gal 4:23, 29; 1 Pt 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18)

Fifteen NT verses capture regeneration by the picture of being “born again”. The most famous of these is Nicodemus in John 3:1-15 (Read). Second there is the picture of the...

### B. Resurrection (Eph 2:5; Rom 6:13; Rom 6:2; 7:4; Gal 2:19; Col 2:20; 3:3; 1 Pt 2:24)

Normally, the word resurrection brings to mind the physical, bodily resurrection of Christ and believers. But there is also a “resurrection of the human spirit” which we call regeneration. This is needed because at the point of physical birth the human spirit is dead. The Bible calls this person a “natural” or “soulish” man. “The natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them for they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14). At regeneration the human spirit is resurrected or “made alive” unto the things of the Spirit of God so he can understand (Eph 2:4-5). This resurrection of the human spirit occurs at the moment of faith but the human body is not resurrected until the rapture. This is why Paul struggled in Romans 7. The willing to do good was present but the doing of it was not. We still require the enablement of the Spirit to live victoriously. This brings us to the third picture of “regeneration”...

### C. Creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 4:24)

One of the most beautiful pictures of regeneration is God's creation of the universe. When God created everything "it was good" and when God re-created your human spirit "it was good". There are no flaws in the new regenerate nature. Also, the same power that created the universe created a new nature at the moment of faith in Christ.

**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.

Time and again, God's word identifies those "in Christ" as "new creatures". You are no longer identified with the "sin nature". Our old nature was crucified with Christ at the moment of salvation (Rom 6:6) so that we are no longer in bondage to sin but have been set free from the penalty and power of sin unto righteousness. Positionally we have one nature but experientially we have two natures. Once our experience conforms to our position at the resurrection of our bodies we will have only one nature. Thankfully, we will not be able to sin. In the meantime there is a war going on between these two natures. We'll talk more about the new nature in a few minutes. It should also be stressed that...

### **III. Regeneration is a Work of God**

While all three persons of the Trinity are associated with regeneration, the Holy Spirit is the agent of regeneration, or as Chafer said, the Spirit is the "Regenerator".<sup>vi</sup> There are six aspects to the work of regeneration. *First*, since the Spirit is the agent of regeneration the work of regeneration is a supernatural work of God. We cannot effect our own regeneration (John 1:13). *Second*, the work of regeneration is instantaneous, not progressive (John 5:24). *Third*, the work of regeneration is intimately connected with salvation so that the two can never be separated (Eph 2:1-10; Tit 3:5). Since salvation and regeneration can never be separated then *regeneration does NOT precede faith*. Reformed seminaries and churches teach that a person must be regenerated *in order to be able to believe*.<sup>vii</sup> But this separation of regeneration from faith creates problems. For example, "if a person is already regenerated then what need is there to believe?" If some answer is given to this problem then we may ask "how is it possible for a person to be regenerated but not saved?" This is never explained by Reformed writers. Instead it is dogmatically stated over and over again like a mantra. Time and again the Bible teaches the reverse order "believe and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31) not "be saved and you will believe". *Fifth*, the work of regeneration is not caused by faith but by God. While faith is necessary it does not effect regeneration. Instead, faith is the *means*<sup>viii</sup> through which God the Spirit works regeneration. It can also be noted that faith is the human condition but is not

considered a work. The Bible teaches that “faith” and “works” are opposite. **Romans 4:5** “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.” The Bible also notes that it is **his faith** and not God’s faith that is credited as righteousness. Therefore, when a person believes he adds nothing to his salvation. Faith does not add or detract from salvation. Instead it receives salvation.

#### **IV. Results of Regeneration**

##### **A. With New Birth Comes a New Nature**

This is pictured well in Paul’s battle in Romans 7 and victory in Romans 8. In these chapters Paul discovers four significant things. *First*, he desires to do what is good. *Second*, he does not have the ability to carry out the good. *Third*, the law of sin lives within his flesh. *Fourth*, the Holy Spirit has the ability to carry out the good. In this important chapter Paul demonstrates that experientially there are two natures in the believer and that they are always at war with one another. The Spirit is the way in which the new nature can be victorious over the old nature.

<u>Old Nature</u>	<u>New Nature</u>
flesh	inner man
evil present	desire to do good
law of sin	law of God
law of sin	law of mind

##### **B. The New Nature is Not Identical to Adam’s Unfallen Nature**

Adam was created with one nature that was sinless. This nature was sinless but had the proclivity toward good or evil. The new nature imparted at regeneration is different. It is sinless, just like Adam’s but it only has a proclivity toward good. It cannot sin (1 John 3:9; 5:18). It desires to do good. It strives after the things of God (Rom 7:15, 18, 19, 21, 22). The problem for Paul was that he did not have the ability to do the good that he desired. He says time and again that he desired to do good but that he did evil. He finally realized that although he desired to do good he, in and of himself, was unable to carry it out. The answer for his inability was the Holy Spirit (Rom 8).

##### **C. Regeneration is the Basis of Spirituality and Maturity**

Once regenerated there is a basis for “fellowship” with God that did not exist before. Regeneration is a part of the relationship all Christians have with God. The relationship is positional and cannot be changed. This permanent relationship provides the basis for fellowship (*koinonia*) with God. Fellowship is “walking in the light” without any known sin standing between you and God (1 John 1:7). During these times we enjoy intimacy with God.

A second aspect related to this is being “filled by the Spirit”. Being “filled by the Spirit” means yielding your will to the Lord’s will so that the Spirit controls your actions (Eph 5:18). The believer has the responsibility to yield and the Spirit has the responsibility to fill as we yield. This results in fruitfulness for the Christian (John 15:1ff).

Lastly, regeneration is the basis of eternal security. Since regeneration is the impartation of eternal life then by its very nature salvation is secure. If eternal life can be lost then it was never eternal to begin with. Since regeneration is a work of God and not of man then it cannot be reversed by anything man does. Just as a person cannot reverse his physical birth so a person cannot undo his spiritual birth. Those are irreversible events. Just as a biological father is always a biological father so when a person believes in Christ God becomes his spiritual Father and always is a spiritual Father. Just like the resurrection body can never decay so the resurrected spirit can never decay. Since regeneration is a creative act of God man cannot uncreate his new spirit.

The question of eternal security comes down to whether salvation is a work of God or a work of man. If it is a work of God then eternal security follows. If it is a work of man then loss of salvation follows. The Bible attests to the former, not the latter. Because of human autonomy and failure to understand Christ’s work on the cross many believers read a loss of reward passage and think it is teaching loss of salvation. Rewards can be lost but salvation cannot (1 Cor 3:15). At other times many believers read passages discussing the loss of physical life and think it is teaching loss of salvation. For example, it is very common for people to read into the word “save” a spiritual connotation when none is intended. People fail to check the context. The word **save** (*sozo*) can mean either save spiritually or save physically. For example, the Israelites were saved from the Egyptians. This did not mean spiritual salvation but physical salvation (also cf Matt 24:9, 13).

Today we have learned about the important work of the Spirit; regeneration.

Regeneration is the work of God that imparts eternal life to the one who believes at the moment they believe. There are three figures the Scriptures use to express the concept of



regeneration. The picture of being “born again”, the picture of being “resurrected” and the picture of “creation”. Because these are works of God and because the Scripture explicitly declares it regeneration is a work of God and cannot be undone by man. With the new birth comes a new nature. This new nature is not identical to Adam’s unfallen nature which was sinless but had a proclivity toward good or evil. The new nature is sinless but it only has a proclivity toward good. The problem is that it is not able to bring it about independent of the Spirit. Finally, regeneration is the basis of true spirituality and maturity in the Christian life.

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<sup>i</sup> Louw-Nida Greek Lexicon.

<sup>ii</sup> Chafer and Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), 98.

<sup>iii</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 630.

<sup>iv</sup> What is “eternal life”? Eternal life is a divine quality of life characterized by close intimate fellowship with God that results in joy. There are two aspects to the doctrine of eternal life. 1) *Possession* of eternal life, that’s what this verse is talking about. If you possess the Son then you possess eternal life. The moment you believed the testimony of God about His Son, that Jesus is the Son of God you received the gift of eternal life. However, there is a second aspect to the doctrine of eternal life that is not often mentioned. 2) *Enjoyment* of eternal life. Just because we possess eternal life does not mean that we always enjoy eternal life while we still live in the flesh. We can abide or not abide in eternal life (1 John 3:15) or as Paul puts it we must “take hold of eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:12) if we want to enjoy that quality of life. So, one may possess but not enjoy eternal life. But, when we are out of this flesh, at physical death or the rapture, then we will continually *enjoy* eternal life. There will be no further break of fellowship.

Secondly, “eternal life” in Scripture stands in contrast to “soul life” (1 Cor 2:14). All people who are alive on earth have “soul life” but when a person trusts in Christ as his savior God imparts “eternal life” to that person.

<sup>v</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 376.

<sup>vi</sup> Chafer and Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), 98.

<sup>vii</sup> *ordo salutis* of the Reformed statement.

<sup>viii</sup> Faith is always instrumental.

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