



new creation teaching ministry: tuesday night studies 2009

the things we firmly believe

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Study 10: Fruits Of The Atonement (2) (TTWFB, chh. 20-22, pp. 123-135)

The Personal Fruit of the Atonement (cont'd)

5. Regeneration, or the New Birth

Regeneration, or new birth, is an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit.¹

There is a cluster of words in the New Testament around this idea—regeneration, renewal, new birth, being born again (or from above), new birth, new man (or new Adam). Each point to the fact that through Christ's atoning work the effects of our sinful rebellion, from Adam onwards, are 'undone'. Regeneration renewal in the image of God, re-establishment in all that we were created for in sharing in God's holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness and love. As one man says, pulling together the teaching of Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:9-10 and Titus 3:5, regeneration is presented in the Bible as:

a radical and complete transformation wrought in the soul by God the Holy Spirit by virtue of which we become 'new men', no longer conformed to this world, but in knowledge and holiness of the truth created after the image of God.²

There is a change in the disposition and thrust of the heart, from lawless, rebellious Godless self-seeking, to trusting and loving obedience to God, seeking His glory and the service of others. Through the new birth a person is no longer 'natural', that is, no longer sees things and operates according to the principles of sin, but rather 'spiritual', seeing things and operating according to the truth of God.

In the New Testament, all talk about this renewing comes is connected with the Atonement (John 3:1-16, 2Cor. 5:16-21, Gal. 6:14-15, 1Pet. 1:3, 23, Titus 3:5-7). There is no possibility of a new beginning for a person apart from the death, resurrection and glorification of Christ. Regeneration is not renovation, taking something as it is and making something a little better and more valuable from it. Regeneration happens as resurrection from the dead, and in regeneration a person dies with Christ and rises with him. Regeneration is a decisive event worked by God, and is not a process that we undertake. It 'is not explicable in terms of the combination or cultivation of existing human resources, not caused or induced by any human efforts or merit'³; it is the power of God at work in us, the same power that raised Christ from the dead. What is clear in the New Testament is that Christians are called to live decisively by the power of the Holy Spirit in the fullness of this fruit of the Atonement that God has worked in them. This work happened in us personally through the Spirit's work when we heard the gospel message (1Pet. 1:23, Jas. 1:18).

¹ J. I Packer, "Regeneration" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, ed., Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1984, p. 924

² B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, p. 351 quoted in Packer, *op. cit.*

³ Packer, *op. cit.*, p. 925

6. Adoption

In Galatians 4:4-7 Paul writes:

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

The goal of Christ’s redeeming us from the curse of the law, the condemnation of our sins, was that we be adopted as sons (and daughters) of God, knowing Him as Father in the depths of our being. Adoption means to be taken up and included in a relationship that belongs to another. Adoption in the Bible means that we are taken up and included in the relationship of God the Father with Jesus Christ. The One and Only Son, who comes from the bosom of the Father, has made Him known (John 1:14-18), and has died and risen in order to prepare a place for us in the Father’s house, so that where he is, we may be also (John 14:2-3). Without the cross and the resurrection, that place is not prepared, and adoption is not possible. So adoption is built on the firm foundation of justification from sins. If we were not sure our sins had been fully dealt with, we would always be uncertain about our place in the Father’s bosom.

7. Growth and Maturing in Love

In Titus 2:11-14 Paul teaches us that the grace of God trains us to say ‘No!’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and rather to pursue lives which are:

- *self-controlled*—not driven by impulses, enthusiasms and passions, but rather thoughtful and disciplined in seeking what is needed and right;
- *upright*—righteous, honourable and worthy; and
- *godly*—reverentially and practically pious—this word is used by James (1:26-7) to talk about the person who keeps control of his tongue, looks after the needy, and keeps separate from what is polluting in the world.

Growth and maturity is progressed often through difficulty. The trials and temptations (the same word in NT Greek) that we face in life are actually the means by which the Father is causing us to grow in practical knowledge of life in the fullness of His image. James tells us that it is through trials that faith develops perseverance, which must do its work for maturity to come (1:2-4), and so we should count it joy when we face such difficulty. Similarly the writer to Hebrews speaks about enduring hardship as the discipline of the Father who loves His children, for our good and so that we will share in His holiness (Heb. 12:7-13). He urges us not to buckle under it in petulant sulking, but to ‘strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees’.

The drive and power for maturation and growth in spiritual–moral life comes from the Atonement. ‘Growth is natural because the human person is not impeded by the guilt of sin and bondage to evil powers.’⁴ In 2Peter 1:3-11 we learn that in our life in God we have been granted everything we need for progress in life and godliness, escaping the corruption that is in the world. So, we are urged to add goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love in increasing measure to the faith we have in Christ. These are the things that make us productive in serving the Father. Peter tells us, *‘If anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.’* The secret to growth is a continued thankfulness and joy in the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. There is also no continued thankfulness and joy in Christ’s forgiveness if we refuse to pursue that in a growing life of maturity in him.

⁴ Geoffrey Bingham, *The Things We Firmly Believe*, 2nd ed., New Creation: Blackwood, 1986, p.126

Living as we do in a ‘Peter Pan’ culture, where life is lived as much as possible as a game or an adventure, growth and maturity sound very dull. In fact these are some of the most wonderful fruits of the Atonement. By them a person is enabled to more and more dynamically participate in all that God is doing in His world; by them a person finds greater and greater depths of what it means to be created in the image of God. At any point in life a person can be as mature as needed for that point, and it would be wrong to expect greater maturity than that point needs. However if growth and maturity is refused and resisted, seeking instead to remain in and prolong a stage, then that person is immediately immature.

8. Glorification

The Atonement secures our future in the fullness of the holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness and love of God. That is the future glory that awaits us.

Dear friends, now we are God’s children, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he [that is, Jesus Christ our Lord, the Son of God] appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1John 3:2).

Already conformity to the glory of God is taking place, but it is all under wraps. It awaits its unveiling when the work is done. Glorification is really the work that God is doing in us through the process of maturation and growth. We are being conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29), and that is the end goal of God’s predestining and calling and justifying us. So now, in the sufferings we endure we are being changed from one degree of glory to another (2Cor. 3:18).

The Atonement and the Gift of the Holy Spirit

Having spoken of the various fruit of the Atonement—and what a harvest it is!—we come now to the gift of the Holy Spirit. In John 7:37-39 Jesus spoke of the coming gift of the Spirit as a flowing stream that would flood up and well within those who came to him in faith, flowing out then in life to the world. John notes that this promise could not be fulfilled immediately—the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. In John’s Gospel, this glorification of Jesus is his death, resurrection and ascension, that is, it is the act of the Atonement. ‘No Atonement, then no Spirit.’⁵

So, the gift of the Spirit flows to us from the Cross of Christ. In coming to us, the Spirit brings to our spirits the fruit of the Cross so that these realities become ours and so that we *know* that they are ours. Faith and the Spirit are deeply linked—Acts 6:5, 11:24. Acts 2:38 shows that the fruit of forgiveness is linked with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Cleansing, regeneration and renewal is through the Holy Spirit—Titus 3:5. In 1Corinthians 6:11, washing, sanctification and justification are through the name of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. Adoption means that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying ‘Abba! Father!’ (Gal. 4:6). This is all in line with Jesus’ own words about the gift of the Holy Spirit—

When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you (John 16:13-14).

For all these reasons, we must see the gift of the Spirit as very closely connected to faith, and not some subsequent gift. *There is no coming to Christ, no receiving of salvation apart from the gift of the Holy Spirit.* Romans 8:9 says, ‘If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.’ It is impossible to acknowledge Jesus as Lord without the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 12:3).

⁵ *The Things We Firmly Believe*, p. 129