

This morning we left John's prologue by examining his description of Fallen Mankind in vv10-11—we learned that all men by nature, both Jews and Gentiles, are unable and unwilling to believe upon Christ left to themselves—we come in vv12-13 to the good news—that, because of God's grace, this doesn't remain true of all men, v12—"BUT as many as received Him...who born not because of the will of man...but because of God's will..."

Now—within vv12-13—we find one of the fullest descriptions of regeneration, or the new birth, within the whole of Scripture—thus I want to suggest this text teaches four things about regeneration—its first cause, basic nature, instant effect, glorious result—I then want to add a fifth point—its possible, or pastoral, problems...

- I. Its First Cause
- II. Its Basic Nature
- III. Its Instant Effect
- IV. Its Glorious Result
- V. Its Problems

#### I. Its First Cause

1. Most commentators have pointed out—that within vv12 and 13—we find two sides of the same coin concerning salvation...
2. Verse 12 described salvation from man's perspective—we become children of God by receiving Christ and believing on His name...
3. Verses 13 describes salvation from God's perspective—we become children ultimately because of God's will...
4. Thus—John first provides three possible causes of regeneration, each one is put in the negative—it's not, etc...
5. [1] Not of blood—nobody becomes a Christian by being "born of blood"—that is—through physical ancestry...
6. Here—John underscores the obvious—the birth he's referring to—is not the result of physical or national association...
7. Simply put—nobody ever became a Christian by way of "natural descent"—being born to Christian parents...
8. The birth that John here speaks about—has nothing to do with physical blood lines—or with physical descent...
9. John Gil—"Regeneration [is not] owing to the blood of ancestors, to natural descent, as from Abraham, which the Jews valued themselves upon; for sin, and not grace, is conveyed by natural generation: all men are of one blood, and that is tainted with sin, and therefore can never have any influence on regeneration; no blood is to be valued, or any one upon it, but the blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin..."
10. [2] Not of the will of the flesh—nobody becomes a Christian by being "born of the will of the flesh"—that is—man's choice...
11. Nobody—becomes a Christian simply because they "willed" it—man's will is not the determining factor in his salvation...
12. The NIV helpfully renders this phrase "human decision"—"children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision..."
13. This of course can be illustrated by way of physical birth—no baby ever "willed" his own conception or birth...
14. Now—as most of you know—no person ever believed upon Christ against his will—we are made willing to come...
15. But—here we must make the necessary distinction between regeneration and conversion—being reborn and believing...

16. Nobody every believes against his will, or without his will being in agreement—we willingly receive Christ...
17. But—in our regeneration—God overrides our stubborn and depraved "will" and regenerates or renews our wills...
18. Let me put it this way—God regenerates us without our permission—He takes the initiative apart from our consent...
19. [3] Not of the will of man—nobody becomes a Christian by being "born of the will of man"—that is—human persuasion...
20. I think the best way to distinguish this phrase from the former one—the first is inward and the second outward...
21. That is—nobody was born again because of their our will—nor were they born again because of the will of others...
22. Thus—this phrase becomes very relevant with regards to evangelistic methods which attempt to persuade sinners...
23. Now—that sinners need persuading is agreed—and that sinners must be addressed rationally—is also agreed...
24. But—here's the point—no man was ever converted as the result of mere moral persuasion, urging, or wooing...
25. Think of the way in which many conduct evangelistic meetings—too much emphasis is placed upon externals...
26. If we have the right song playing in the background—if the preacher put enough pressure upon the sinner's will...
27. But—my friends—sinners are born again—"not of the will of man"—no man can "persuade" sinners into the kingdom...
28. [4] But of the will of God—that is—this is the ultimate and first cause of regeneration—the sovereign will of God...
29. To put it more theological—regeneration is monergistic and not synergistic—it's the work of one and not two...
30. Simply put—regeneration is the direct result of God's sovereign will or choice—to give life to His elect people...
31. Christians were NOT born as the result of human descent, human decision, or man's efforts—but of God's will...
32. Jas.1:18—"Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures..."
33. Thus—regeneration is here traced back to God—to His sovereign will—to His discriminating love and grace...

## II. Its Basic Nature

1. The basic or fundamental nature of regeneration is found in the first three English words of v13—"who were born..."
2. The Gk word *gennao* simply means "to be born or begotten"—it's used of physical birth 90 times in the NT...
3. It here obviously refers to a spiritual birth or what is called regeneration—a rebirth that is by the Spirit of God...
4. The term "regeneration" means—"to re-become"—to generate means to become—thus to be regenerated is to re-become...
5. The Scriptures speak of regeneration under at least three common imageries—creation, resurrection, and new birth...
6. [a] New Creation, 2Cor.5:17—"Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new..."
7. [b] Resurrection, Eph.2:4-5—"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up together..."

8. [c] New birth, Jn.3:8—"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit..."
9. [1] Regeneration is an act of divine power—that is—regeneration is not a process but an immediate act of God...
10. Now—I trust it goes without saying—that each of these imageries portrays regeneration as a work of God...
11. In regeneration—God bares His mighty right arm—and communicates to the soul a principle of divine life...
12. [2] Regeneration is by or through the word—this means to say—He speaks life into our souls through His word...
13. This of course is illustrated in the first creation—wherein God spoke light into the darkness—"and light there was..."
14. The point being—God speaks light or life through His word—this is true in the FIRST and SECOND creations...
15. 1Pet.1:23—"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God..."
16. [3] Regeneration is the renewal of the soul—that is—in regeneration every faculty of the soul is radically renovated...
17. Now—this is an important point to remember—in regeneration no new faculty is added or given to the sinner...
18. Lost sinners have a soul comprised of understanding, affections, and will—these faculties are essential to a soul...
19. In regeneration—each faculty is renewed—but no faculty is perfectly renewed—they are each renewed in part...
20. The degree that these faculties are NOT renewed—this is called the flesh—and this principle remains fallen...
21. Thus—when a person is renewed by way of regeneration—they remain the same person—their person has been renewed...
22. They have a new heart—in that—every faculty has been radically altered—their understanding, affections, and will...
23. But—they remain the same person, with the same personality, and frankly put—allot of things remain the same...
24. For example—if they liked eating hot sauce on their eggs as unregenerate—they'll likely like it after regeneration...
25. Ezekiel Hopkins—"Regeneration is a change of the whole man, in every part and faculty, from a state of sinful nature, to a state of supernatural grace; whereby the image of God, that we defaced and lost by our first transgression, is again, in some good measure, restored..."

### III. Its Instant Effect

1. The instant or immediate effect I'm here referring to is conversion—which includes repentance and believing...
2. That is—immediately upon receiving new life—being born again—the soul receives or believes on His name...
3. Thus—having been born again (v13), the necessary and immediate effect of that new birth—is receiving Christ...
4. Simply put—sinners are not born again because they believe—but they believe because they are born again...
5. Jn.3:3—"Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God..."
6. Notice—an absolute necessity—"unless one is born again, he cannot"—that is—without new birth something is impossible...
7. Without regeneration the spiritual eyes of the heart remain blind—man cannot see without first being regenerated...

8. Or—in keeping with what we learned this morning—until the True Light shines into our hearts—we remain in darkness...
9. Now—I want to briefly point out—that John EQUATES—"receiving Christ" with—"believing in His name..."
10. [1] Faith entails the wilful acceptance of Christ—that is—no man—ever believed on Christ against his will...
11. Ps.110:3—"Your people shall be willing in the day of Your power"—in the day—He speaks life in their souls...
12. This—it's for this reason—preachers must seek to educate the mind, move the affections, and motivate the will...
13. Thus—most Reformed theologians define faith as having three ingredients—knowledge, consent, and trust...
14. [2] Faith entails the acceptance of a whole Christ—faith is "receiving HIM...believing in [on] His NAME"...
15. His name is simply another way of saying His person—all that He is—thus—faith receives a whole Christ...
16. That is—it receives all that Christ is—a prophet to teach us, a priest to save us, and a king or Lord to rule us...
17. Shorter Catechism—"What is faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel..."

#### IV. Its Glorious Result

1. The glorious result I'm referring to—is found in the middle of v12—"to them He gave the right to become children of God..."
2. Thus—what we are here considering—is the great gospel truth of adoption—of becoming the children of God...
- 3.
4. [1] Positional change—"He gave them the right to become children of God"—that is—adoption is a legal change...
5. Now—historically there's been a slight debate on the precise nature of adoption—is it positional or personal...
6. Well—simply put—it's BOTH—when we become Christians—we become the legal adopted children of God...
- 7.
8. 1Jn.3:1—"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him..."
- 9.
10. Now—this is extremely important to understand—first and foremostly—adoption is a change of legal status...
11. Those who are born again and believe on Christ—"become children of God"—the point being—they previously were NOT the children of God...
12. My friend—this text teaches very clearly—that men by nature are NOT God's children—we are spiritual orphans...
13. By nature—we are NOT the children of God—we are the spiritual offspring of Satan—he is our moral father...
14. But—there is a wonderful and amazing change that takes place when we believe—we become the children of God...
15. Thus—adoption entails taking a poor and needy orphan—and giving him all the rights of the house of God...
16. An adopted sinner becomes a true child of God with all the benefits, privileges, or rights—of a household member...
17. Thus—adoption necessarily brings with it—the many privileges or rights—of being—the children of God...

18. Shorter Catechism—"Q.35. What is adoption? Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God..."
19. LBC [ch.12]—"All those that are justified, God vouchsafed, in and for the sake of His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have His name put on them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father, yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation..."
20. [2] Personal change—now it's here that Christian adoption is unlike human adoption—for it brings a change of person...
21. That is—the person adopted not only undergoes an important positional change, but also a personal change...
22. Sinclair Ferguson—"God has done what no human can do – in adopting us He has also given us the nature of our father..."
23. MLJ—"When John says *children of God*, he is not talking of an honorary title that leaves the person unchanged. No, no! There is a real transformation. We are children of God in the sense that children are like their parents, that they have something in them of the nature of their parents, that the relationship is that between children and their natural parents. It means that we have become transformed into the likeness of God! Nothing less than that..."
24. 2Pet.1:4—" [we have become] partakers of the divine nature"—that is—we have new natures similar to God's...
25. 1Jn.3:9—"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God..."

## V. Its Pastoral Problems

1. Here—in the few minutes that I have—I want to address a few common difficulties associated with regeneration...
2. [1] Concerning evangelism—simply put—here's the problem—if people are born again by the will of God, then how are we to teach sinners they need a new birth...
3. [a] The message to sinners is NOT primarily be born again, but repent and believe—this is the message of the prophets and apostles...
4. Mk.1:14—"Jesus came...preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel..."
5. [b] The example of the Lord Jesus, instructs us that teaching sinners their need for regeneration is necessary...
6. Jn.3:3-8—"Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 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? 5 Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit..."
7. Now—this text brethren, forever settles the question, whether or not its proper to tell sinners they must be born again...
8. Notice—our Savior does not tell Nicodemus—that he must do something—that he must birth himself anew...
9. But instead—our Savior tells Nicodemus that something must happen to him, v7—"You must be born again..."
10. Thus—teaching sinners about their need FOR regeneration is never wrong—and in fact—can be very useful...
11. For it teaches sinners that salvation is from God, and that it's not something that's within their native power...

12. The same principles are true with regards to man's depravity and inability—our Savior told both to sinners...
13. Jn.6:43-44—"Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him..."
14. These truths are intended to humble the sinner—and drive him away from his ability and merit—to Christ...
15. Let me say something to parents—it's NEVER wrong to teach our children about election or total depravity...
16. These are Biblical truths found in Scripture that our Savior Himself taught rather frequently to dead sinners...
17. But—with all this—we must major, as did our Savior, on the good news—that there is salvation for them in Christ...
18. That is—we must tell them what Christ has done on the cross—that He is has satisfied the demands of the law...
19. We must teach them about God's large heart for sinners—that He has a general or generic love for all mankind...
20. In short—we must teach both the impossibility of salvation—that—left to themselves they are unable and unwilling...
21. But—we must also teach them the rather simple plan of salvation—that they must only look to Christ to be saved...
22. [2] Concerning assurance—this problem is a common one—and thus, I want to spend some time answering...
23. Simply put—here's the problem—if regeneration is a radical act of God—then shouldn't every born-again person know the precise time of their salvation...
24. Let me address this problem—by expanding upon the imagery of a physical birth—which vary in intensity...
25. That is—sometimes the birth of a baby is accompanied with long and very intense birthing pains or pangs....
26. At other times—a baby is born with comparatively little birthing pains—yet nevertheless—a baby is born....
27. Thus—the question isn't—can I remember being born again—but are there presently signs or evidences of life...
28. Though none of us are able to remember our physical birth—there are clear evidences that we are presently alive...
29. Thus—what I want to do in closing—is suggest THREE general marks of regeneration—or signs of adoption....
30. [a] Children love and trust the Father—that is—they believe everything that He says within His holy Word...
31. This is where we must begin—never being my merely examining your behavior—that is NOT where we start...
32. We must start with this question—what do we think about Christ—do we believe what the Scripture teaches...
33. 1Jn.5:1—"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him..."
34. [b] Children hate and mourn for sin—this is an exceedingly important point—what do we think about sin and why...
35. Ps.51:3-4—"For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight..."
36. [c] Children resemble their Father—all spiritual children resemble their Father—they desire the same things...
37. 1Jn.4:7-8—"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love..."