

## *Regeneration: The Great Essential*

Before we look at what Keller understands by ‘regeneration’, and how he uses his deductions from Luke 15 when actually addressing unbelievers with the gospel, particularly on the question of regeneration, and even before we get to the teaching of Scripture on the doctrine of regeneration, I want to establish that we are talking about something absolutely fundamental, not peripheral.<sup>1</sup>

The word itself is not common in Scripture. In fact, in the sense we are thinking of, it appears only once in the entire New Testament:

God... saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Tit. 3:4-7).

However, when we extend the search to include equivalent words and phrases – such as, ‘new heart’, ‘born of God’, ‘born again’, ‘born from above’, ‘new creation’, ‘born of the Spirit’, ‘(second) birth’, and the like – the concept of ‘regeneration’ is written large across the New Testament. Clearly, it is absolutely fundamental, not only to the gospel, but to personal experience – as indeed, according to Christ (John 3:3-8), it must be. Nothing in Scripture can be more vital.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to what follows, see my ‘The Spirit’s Work in Conversion’ in my *New-Covenant Articles Volume 7*. See also my *Infant, Baptist*. See also my discourses which can be found under ‘regeneration’ or under John 3 on my sermonaudio.com page. In particular, my discourses ‘A Question of Identity’ and ‘Natural or Spiritual?’

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Vital? Christ could not have made it clearer:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again [regenerated] he cannot see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water<sup>2</sup> and of 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' (John 3:3-7).

With these words ringing in our ears, nobody can have any doubt that regeneration, being born again, being born from above, is essential – both as a doctrine of the gospel, and in personal experience. No wonder that George Whitefield, when asked why he so often preached on the text 'You must be born again', replied: 'Because you must be born again'.

You can be religious, thoroughly respectable, chapel-going, church-attending, member, elder, pastor, preacher, bishop, professor of theology – anything and everything rolled into one – but this still does not alter the fact that you must be born again, and unless you are you will never see or enter the kingdom. Nicodemus ticked all such equivalent (old-covenant) boxes – religious, upright, decent, respectable, knowledgeable of the Scriptures – but even so he had to be born again.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Water' and 'washing' does not refer to baptism. See my *Infant; Baptist*. I will not repeat this note, but it applies throughout the book.