

Intro: Over the next few sermons that I preach in Ephesians we will be looking at three miraculous works of God's grace toward His people: Regeneration, Freedom, and Forgiveness. In Ephesians 2:1-5 we are told that before God acted toward us in grace we were dead in sins, enslaved to Satan, and condemned to God's wrath. After God's gracious and powerfully effective work we were made alive with Christ, seated with Him in the heavens, and have become the recipients of His eternal graces. Today we will look at the secret act of God whereby He graciously and powerfully imparts new life to us: regeneration.

"Regeneration is a work standing alone and distinct from all the other operations of the Divine Spirit. It is to be carefully distinguished from conversion, adoption, justification, and sanctification, and yet must be regarded as forming the basis and the springhead of them all. For instance, there can be no conversion without a principle of life in the soul, for conversion is the exercise of a spiritual power implanted in man. There can be no sense of adoption apart from a renewed nature, for adoption confers the privilege only, not the nature, of sons. There can be no comforting sense of acceptance in the Beloved until the mind has passed from death unto life, nor can there be the smallest advance in a conformity of the will and of the affections to the image of God while there is wanting in the soul the very root of holiness. Faith is a purifying grace, but faith is only found in the heart created anew in Christ Jesus. There must necessarily be the spiritual renewal of the whole man before the soul can pass into an adopted, justified, and sanctified state." ~Octavius Winslow

The Necessity for Regeneration

The BAD NEWS (v1-3): RUIN – Dead in Sin, Regeneration is Necessary, not Optional

1. Separate from Christ We Were in a State of Death
 - a. Humanity, dead in sins, is incapable of spiritual righteousness, good
 - i. We were "being dead"
 1. (*νεκρος*), without breath, lifeless, from which Jesus was raised
 - a. Nekros (dead) has the basic meaning of powerless, even when used metaphorically
 2. "Being dead" (imperfect verb indicating a state or constant condition of deadness"
 - ii. We were dead, incapable of even seeing the kingdom of God (John 3:3) until we are born again by the passive work of God in His glorious kindness toward us
 1. Titus 3:5 – no right thing we did was the catalyst in God's salvation of us (it was according to His mercy), we were dead, cut off from any power to do good
 - b. Being dead in your trespasses (*παραπτώμα*) and your sins (*αμαρτια*)
 - i. Using both words for sins ("to step over the line" and "to miss the mark") implies both an inability and an unwillingness to submit to God
 - ii. Man's Inability to Please God:
 1. Rom 8:7-8 – mind of flesh is hostile to God, doesn't submit, not able to do so, and therefore cannot please God.
 2. Eph 4:18 – hardened hearts of stone, separated from the life of God, darkened understanding, ignorance of truth, given themselves over to every kind of impurity (also Ezek 36:26ff)
 3. 2 Cor 4:3-6 – unbelievers are blinded, unable to see the light of the gospel until God shines forth into hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
 - iii. Man's Unwillingness to Choose God
 1. We loved our sin more than we loved God
 - a. John 3:20-21 – in our nature of sin, dead, we will avoid coming to God b/c He reveals our sin; only those whose deeds are "wrought in God" come to God (and we do come to God!)

- b. 1 Cor 2:14 – the natural man cannot accept the things of God’s Spirit b/c they are seen as foolish.
 - c. Psalm 2 – the peoples plot against God to “throw off His chains” – don’t want to be ruled by God
 - d. Rom 3:10-18 (part. v10-12) – nobody seeks for God as God (fear of God, v18)
 - e. Rom 8:7 – nothing good dwells in the flesh
 - 2. “bad things comfort me”
 - 3. Self-reliance, religious or irreligious
 - a. Rom 1:17-32
 - b. We, in our sin, exchanged the glory of God for idols, so God handed us over to them as captive to these same idols, religious or irreligious, they are our saviors in which we depend upon for our “righteousness” or our “being OK”
 - iv. This does not mean that unbelievers cannot be *benevolent* or *good*
 - 1. People can give selflessly and for the benefit of others
 - 2. If God limited all benevolence merely to believers, what a nasty world we would live in. God has limited man’s evil universally by His own power and gracious mercy
 - a. Rom 1:21; 2:15 – they knew God, but did not honor Him but exchanged Him for idols – law written on their hearts, conscience bearing witness
 - b. Luke 6:31-35
 - c. 1 Tim 4:10 – Any deliverance is from God (“the Savior of all persons”) and in a special way to believers (“especially of believers”)
 - i. All truth is God’s truth
 - ii. All good ultimately comes from God (Jam 1:17) and He uses whomever He wishes to deliver it
 - v. It does mean, however, that even our most benevolent good done in the deadness of our relationship with God is still unrighteousness to God b/c it is not done by reliance (faith) upon God’s grace
 - 1. Indictment of all human virtue:
 - a. Romans 14:23b - ...everything which is not from faith is sin.
 - b. Romans 3:9-10 – all are under sin, no one is good, not even one. “no fear of God” (v18)
 - c. Romans 7:18 – nothing good dwells in my flesh (dead nature apart from the Holy Spirit), no ability
2. Remember Your Former Condition
- a. Remember your former condition so that your current condition is seen in the light of the glory of God’s grace toward you!
 - b. The more that we understand, in our hearts, our former condition apart from God’s powerful and effective act of sheer grace to raise us up from our state of deadness, the more our praise, honor, and worship is where it should be: on God alone!
 - i. Any power that is attributed to us will spur the joy-sucking belief of man-centered salvation
 - ii. If we see our salvation as dependent upon ANY wisdom of ours, or ANY prior goodness or ability, the more we rob God of His proper glory in our salvation and make Him out to be sold into the slavery of our whim, and this is thoroughly unbiblical
 - c. We recognize that we must have been born again by the Spirit to even see the Kingdom of God
 - i. John 3:3-8
 - ii. Jesus’ point is that there is no exercise of faith in himself as the supernatural Savior, no repentance, and no true discipleship apart from this new birth.

The Gracious Act of Regeneration

THE GOOD NEWS (v4-5): REGENERATION – God Has Made Us Alive in Christ,

- Regeneration is God's Work, Not Man's Work: Regeneration is a transition from spiritual death to spiritual life, and conscious, intentional, active faith in Christ is its immediate fruit, not its immediate cause

3. Recognize Your Current Condition in Christ: God Gave Us New Life in Christ

a. Being wealthy in mercy

- Abundance of mercy
- "Being", our state of deadness is contrasted with God's state of mercy
- His mercy won out over our death

"To sanctify a man is the work of the whole life; but to give a man a new heart is the work of an instant. In one solitary second, swifter than the lightning flash, God can put a new heart into a man, and make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. You may be sitting where you are today as an enemy of God with a wicked heart, hard as a stone, and dead and cold; but if the Lord wills it, the living spark shall drop into your soul, and in that moment you will begin to tremble--begin to feel; you will confess your sin, and fly to Christ for mercy. Other parts of salvation are done gradually but regeneration is the instantaneous work of God's sovereign, effectual, and irresistible grace."

~Charles Spurgeon, *The New Heart*

b. Because God loved us with HIS kind of love

- God's love goes beyond mere concern and care to a sacrificial, ravishing, and severe love
- The revelation of the greatness of one's love is tied to the greatness of the cost to love that person

c. God made us alive with Christ

- The work is all the Father's work, performed by the Spirit! These verses are all about Him and His work, to the praise of His glorious grace!!!
 - We don't know for sure how it works, only that God has said it to be true in His Word
 - John 3:8 – The Spirit blows where he wishes with unseen source (like the wind)
 - Acts 16:14 – the Lord "opened her heart" (Lydia) to respond to Paul's proclamation of the gospel
- You, the dead enemies of God, were lumped together with His Son because of His love and mercy
 - You were brought to life by the sheer grace of God
 - Regarding the new birth John Piper says this:

"[God] is a father. He does not deliver a baby. He begets an embryo. 1 Pet 1:23 says, "You have been born anew not of perishable seed but of imperishable." The doctor does not plant the seed. The father does.

God does not come on the scene when this embryo is well-formed in the womb with all its chromosomes fixed. O no! When God comes on the scene, there is no spiritual embryo. And by the miracle of generation, God fathers life. He does not deliver man-made life like an obstetrician. He begets God-made life like a father."

- You have been saved by grace alone! You did not earn it! You were not wiser than your brothers or stronger than your former father the Devil! God chose you and made you alive, bringing you up from the dead, where you were unable to save yourself and unwilling to honor God, by imparting His Spirit within you.
 - Romans 8:9-10 – if the Spirit is in a person, then they are alive in Christ; if not, then they don't belong to Christ
 - 1 Cor 2:14 – the natural (unregenerated) man cannot accept things of the Spirit of God b/c they are folly to him
 - John 6:65 – no one can come to Jesus unless it is granted to him by the Father

What is Our Response to This Truth?

The OUTCOME: REDEMPTION – The regenerated heart lives by dependence in Jesus and is redeemed from death, Satan’s power, and God’s wrath

4. Repent and Believe!
 - a. Maybe you sit here today and in the words of Charles Spurgeon, “the living spark shall drop into your soul, and in that moment you will begin to tremble – begin to feel; you will confess your sin, and fly to Christ for mercy.”
 - b. If this is your experience right now, then fly to Christ for mercy and for life. Rely upon Him alone!

5. PRAISE GOD FOR RAISING YOU FROM THE DEAD AND IMPARTING HIS SPIRIT WITHIN YOU TO LIFE!!
 - a. Do you wonder in awe and circumspect that you are a Christian? Does the very fact that you believe amaze you? Make you fall on your knees in gratitude to God? This is what regeneration shows us, that God is so superabundantly gracious to us that though we were dead to Him in our sins and rebellious hearts, He made us alive by His sovereign grace that we should be called children of God, the Body of Christ, the holy people, the Beloved bride of Christ!!! Oh! What an indescribable Savior!!
 - b. Proclaim the Word of God! 1 Peter 1:23 says that we were “born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable *through the living and abiding word of God.*”

WORSHIP!! WORSHIP!! WORSHIP HIM!!