

REGENERATION

THE NEW BIRTH

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Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. *John 3:3*

There are many kingdoms on this earth, but there is only one kingdom of God. In our text the kingdom of God is to be understood as the kingdom of God in contrast to the kingdom of Satan. The contrast is impressive. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of righteousness, joy and peace. The kingdom of Satan is the kingdom of darkness, sin and despair.

This distinction concerns all of us, for we belong either to the kingdom of God and are in the most blessed relationship with our Maker, or we belong to the kingdom of Satan and are alienated from our Creator, and on account of sin and unbelief His wrath and displeasure do still abide on us.

In the words of our text, the Lord Jesus Christ speaks about **the only way** in which one may become a citizen of

that glorious kingdom of light and liberty. The goodness of the Lord is great, that He has entrusted unto us the precious knowledge of the only effectual way of entering His kingdom, which is by the way of regeneration or new birth.

This truth may be familiar, but few do really understand its meaning and realise the importance of taking it to heart. Let us now consider this great truth, while we ask and answer a few basic questions.

The Necessity of the New Birth

First of all, why is such a **great and radical** change necessary to enter into the kingdom of God?

The necessity of this momentous change points to the awful condition of man by nature. Many overlook the serious character of this point and take refuge in a less radical, man-made change. But, alas, that will not do! We must have a true and realistic view of man's **deep** need.

In Genesis 1 we are taught that man was created in the image of God, so he was endowed with knowledge, righteous-

ness and holiness. In Genesis 3 we learn how man lost what he possessed and enjoyed in the garden of Eden. He is no longer in a state of fellowship and communion with his Maker. In the Fall he lost this blessed character.

According to the Word of God, man's heart is now deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The carnal mind is enmity towards God. This is true concerning every member of Adam's fallen race, unless by the way of the new birth he or she has entered the kingdom of God's light.

Sin is so radical in its character that the entire heart is corrupt and rebels against God! Never will **man** be able to alter that situation. Again, here the witness of Scripture is: 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil' (Jeremiah 13:23).

It is impossible for man to correct and to purify his own sinful heart. It is absolutely necessary to realise this humbling truth.

For man to see and to enter into the kingdom of God, God Himself must supernaturally intervene in the human situation. He alone is able to bring about the so much needed change. This is the great truth that Christ makes in our text: **That which is impossible with man, is possible with God.** We can never appreciate this important truth too highly. It is indispensable for salvation.

The Nature of the New Birth

The second question we must ask and seek to answer is: What is the nature of this momentous change?

It is to be born from above. This new birth has its origin in heaven. To be born from above is to be born of God. The figurative language here illustrates the nature of the new birth. When an infant is born, it is wholly passive in the process of birth. So it is in regeneration. Not even the smallest part is man's work. It is exclusively and wholly the work of God. All the glory belongs to Him.

Christ interprets in the context: it is to be 'born of water and of the Spirit'. Water refers to the great work of cleansing the heart, the washing of regeneration. 'And of the Spirit'—this regeneration is of the Holy Spirit.

This gracious work of God is far more excellent than any human endeavour. It is the marvel of the gospel, that God comes down to the lowest depravity of man's iniquities with the grace of purification. God the Holy Spirit creates a clean heart and renews a right spirit.

The Lord does a radical and total work in the hearts of the objects of His grace. It is not one part of the human heart that is renewed and cleansed; it is the entire heart that is involved in this purpose of renewal. There is complete transformation. If any man is born of God, he is a new creature. This work of purification is a work of God's efficacious grace.

The Author of the New Birth

Thirdly, the question must be asked: Who is this great and blessed Person that renews and purifies the heart?

The Author of this work is God Himself, and more specifically, God the Holy

Spirit. He alone renews the human heart according to His sovereign good pleasure. After Christ purchased redemption, the Spirit of grace and of supplications was poured out. It is this Spirit who renews the heart.

He alone is qualified to do the great work. There is no heart so hard that the Holy Spirit cannot subdue it, none so proud that He cannot humble it, none so wicked that He cannot make it holy. The Holy Spirit displays great beauty in nature, but far greater is the marvel of His wondrous grace when He renews and sanctifies a depraved heart.

May the Lord open the eyes of many to perceive this great truth which testifies both to man's need, and to God's great power to meet this need!

The Effect of the New Birth

Fourthly: What is the effect or result of the new birth?

It is this: a heart renewed by the grace of God is indwelt, controlled and directed by the same Spirit Who renews the heart. The sinner—by nature dead in sin and trespasses—has been made alive in Christ Jesus. He has become poor in spirit, he mourns because of sin, and hungers and thirsts after righteousness. Once he belonged to the kingdom of Satan, by grace he has become a citizen of the kingdom of God. He now enjoys God's pardoning love. His heart cries out for the living God, for His grace in Christ. He walks in God's ways and loves His commandments.

Conclusion

Entrance into the kingdom of God is only by way of the new birth. How

appropriate then, in conclusion, is the question: Have we experienced this regenerating grace of God?

If by grace we have experienced this blessed cleansing power, we may rejoice with fear and trembling in Him who remembered us in our low estate and drew us with the cords of His love and translated us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His marvellous light. May we then live to His glory and praise!

But if you have never realised the need and value of this saving change, how necessary is it then to reflect seriously on your eternal destiny, and not to delay this all-important matter! For without this birth from above, there can be no communion and fellowship with your Maker in this life here below, and what is far worse, no fellowship with Him in eternity. Without the new birth, an eternity of woe will be your portion.

We are passive in regeneration, but we may not be passive or careless and indifferent about this matter that concerns our eternal well or woe! We may never rest, till by grace we know, that God has wrought this great work of purification within our hearts.

***This fearful truth will still remain,
The sinner must be BORN AGAIN
Or sink to endless woe!***

Endnote

1. Quoted by Octavius Winslow in 'From Grace to Glory'. The Reformed Reader <http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/winslow/gracetoglor/assurance.htm>, 16 May 2006.