

Regeneration

by Anne Dutton

Regeneration is a universal change wrought by the Spirit and word of grace, giving a new nature, a spiritual nature, in the soul's being renewed after the image of God in knowledge and true holiness.

Scripture: John 3:3, Romans 7:21, Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 2:10, Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:10, 1 Peter 1:3

Topics: "Spiritual Regeneration", "Gospel Ministry"

Description

Anne Dutton preaches about the necessity of regeneration for anyone called to the gospel ministry, emphasizing that spiritual understanding is more crucial than academic knowledge. She explains that God's work of regeneration is essential for true preaching of the gospel, regardless of one's educational background. Dutton highlights the universal change that occurs in a believer's soul through the Spirit and word of grace, leading to a new nature in Christ and a spiritual capacity to discern and delight in God's holiness and salvation.

Transcript

Dear Sir,

What shall we say to these things? Where grace and gifts meet, and God calls to ministerial work, that person should be used by Him--whether school-educated or not.

I have, dear sir, a great veneration for learning, and think it a great advantage to the gospel minister, but not that it is essentially necessary to a person's call to the gospel ministry; for let a man have ever so perfect an understanding of the original languages in which the mysteries of God are written--if he is not blessed with a spiritual, supernatural understanding--while he knows perfectly the words, he is quite ignorant of the power of the spiritual truths. This is evident from what the apostle Paul says, "The natural man receives not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." And he spoke this by experience, for by the natural man he intended not only the profane, wicked man, nor yet the weak and ignorant man, that has but little natural capacity for understanding spiritual mysteries--but also the moral man, the learned man, the man of sagacity; with the utmost natural capacity--even this man, the man of great learning, while natural, receives not the things of the Spirit of God--for they are foolishness unto him--neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The apostle Paul was far from being a profane man, a weak, or unlearned man, while a natural man; he was a Pharisee, one of the strictest sect of the Jewish religion, perfectly taught in, and exceedingly of, the law of the Fathers; he was perfectly learned in the law of Moses, who spoke of the things which concern the Lord Jesus; he was brought up in Jerusalem, at the feet of Gamaliel, insomuch that it was said unto him after his conversion, "Much learning has made you mad." And yet this man of sagacity, of morality, of much learning--while a natural man, or in his unconverted state--was quite ignorant of Christ--until God made him a spiritual man--and in a supernatural way revealed His Son in him--or gave him a spiritual capacity to understand spiritual mysteries--and then was he fit to preach the Lord Jesus. And God may thus call and use an unlearned man--if He pleases. And most of the apostles were such when our Lord first sent them out to preach.

And on the contrary, how was it with Nicodemus--a Pharisee, a strict moralist, a learned man, a teacher of the law of Moses, a ruler in Israel, one of the Jewish Sanhedrin? Alas! yet being but a natural man, how ignorant was he of the doctrine of regeneration, when our Lord preached it to him?

And how many are there, Sir, at this day, of the masters of our Israel that have not so much as a true notion of this important doctrine of regeneration, and much less a blessed experience thereof in their hearts? How many are there that think baptism is regeneration; or, at most, a wicked man's external reformation from gross immoralities, to practice the duties of morality? Is it not for this reason that they are entirely ignorant of the work of regeneration, as it is God's work upon us? They set people to amend their lives and make themselves new creatures, "which," as a worthy clergyman well says, "is preaching a way of salvation that is impracticable to fallen man." So that a person must be born again, or be a spiritual man, and as such taught of God, whether school-educated or not, before he can spiritually know or truly preach the gospel of Christ.

But, Sir, if regeneration is thus necessary, and any should say--If we cannot make ourselves new creatures, how must we become such? And in what does regeneration consist? I answer, No man can make himself a new creature; he must be wholly beholden to the Holy Spirit for that work, in which the creature is wholly passive. It is the duty of every natural man to reform his life, and abstain from every known sin, as by every sin he commits he brings more dishonor to God, and treasures up for himself more wrath against the day of vengeance. But nothing that any natural man can do will make him a new creature. As he could not give himself a being in nature--neither can he give himself a being in grace; this is God's sole prerogative, to work by His Holy Spirit on whom He pleases; for those that are new creatures are said to be "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works," to be by Him "begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead."

And who can create a new and spiritual nature in the heart but God? What man can beget himself unto a lively hope? And yet if he is not blessed with this work of God, he will not, cannot, be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, having no fitness in himself for that glorious enjoyment. And as all enjoyment springs from the agreeableness of the object to the subject, and a natural man is an unholy man--what enjoyment can he have of an infinitely Holy God? How can he who loves sin, delight in a perfect conformity to God's holy image, and an entire and eternal dedication to His sole praise, which are the felicities of saints in bliss while they behold Jehovah's face? And if these holy tempers are not wrought in our hearts here, in a begun-measure, which shall be completed hereafter--our souls will be miserable forever, for no unclean person or thing shall enter into the new Jerusalem. But, Sir, to the next thing, In what does regeneration consist? Permit me to answer briefly:

Regeneration consists in a universal change wrought upon our souls in all their powers and faculties by the Spirit and word of grace--or in the gift of a new nature, a spiritual nature, in the soul's being renewed after the image of God in knowledge and true holiness, which new nature contains in it faith and love, hope and every grace--and is our fitness for converse with new and spiritual objects. And this new and spiritual principle of grace has its seat in all the powers of the soul. The understanding, which before was darkness, then is made light in the Lord. The will, that was all rebellion against God's salvation in Christ, which is all of free grace, is then made willing to trust upon free grace in Christ for all salvation-bliss. The conscience, which was full of guilt and fear, is then sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and thus blessed with peace. The affections, which were staked down to an earthly, sensual propensity, are then raised to spiritual and heavenly objects. In a word, "old things are passed away; behold all things are become new"--in every man, who in Christ is a new creature.

That man can say in a spiritual respect, as the man who was born blind, whose eyes our Lord opened, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind--I now see." Faith is the soul's new eye, to discern sin in quite another light than what the man did before; to discern heart-sin in its hateful nature and woeful consequences; to discern God's law in its spirituality, as extending to thoughts as well as acts, in the equity of its requirement of perfect obedience, and in the righteousness of its curse for every, even the least, disobedience; and hence, to discern the insufficiency of its own obedience for the soul's justifying righteousness before a God of infinite holiness; to discern by the gospel the all-sufficiency, the all-transcendent excellency of Christ. Faith which works by love to its glorious object, the altogether lovely Jesus, submits to His perfect righteousness, disclaims its own, esteems it but loss and rubbish, and desires to be found in Him, and in His righteousness alone; and approving of the Savior, as the soul's new Head, it receives Him in His Person and office unto all the ends of grace as God's free gift to the chief of sinners, and gives up itself to be entirely His in all holy obedience unto Jehovah's praise, and the soul's present and eternal bliss.

Faith bows the knee to Christ, and reveres the Savior in all His salvation-fullness; and faith in the affections wings the soul upwards unto all heavenly objects, unto all those superior delights which are to be enjoyed in God, partially here, and completely and eternally hereafter; with a "Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none on earth that I desire besides You." The desires of that soul center in Christ, as its present and eternal portion; and delight in all things that bear His image, His word, His works, His ways and ordinances, and all His saints; and the abhorring powers of that soul resist with indignation, whatever God abhors--all sin is an abomination to that man so far as he is born again. For, Sir, the man that is a new creature in Christ is such really in all his powers and faculties, though this work as yet is but a begun-work, which is to be completed at his body's dissolution to his full salvation.

The work is perfect as to kind, and perfect as to parts, extending to all his powers and faculties--but is not yet perfect as to degree--as an infant has all the parts of a man, though it is not arrived at the full stature of the perfect man. And thus it is with souls that are new-born, which made a worthy divine say, "every regenerate man is two men"--that is, he has a new nature in him, which is wholly for God, and an old nature still in part remaining, which is wholly for sin. And these two natures residing in the same soul and in all of its faculties, which are but in part sanctified--the corrupt nature, the flesh, lusts against the spirit, or holy nature in his heart--and the spirit against the flesh; and these being contrary, the one to the other, souls that are born again cannot do perfectly the things that they desire, because of sin that dwells in them. This made holy Paul say, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." And how did he groan under this misery, with an "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

And these groans under the remaining power of sin are peculiar to the new-born; to those who have a holy, spiritual nature in them, by virtue of regeneration. And this new and holy nature in them is their fitness for discerning spiritual things, which can be known by no natural man--for begun-union with God in Christ, and a solemn dedication to His praise, as its completion, will fit them for the beatific vision of His face unto endless ages!

Happy, thrice happy then, are those who are born again! They are heirs of that glorious inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for them!

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