

# REGENERATION OR THE NEW BIRTH Chapter 1 ITS NECESSITY

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## Transcript

### REGENERATION OR THE NEW BIRTH

#### Chapter 1

#### ITS NECESSITY

1. The need for regeneration lies in our natural degeneration. In consequence of the fall of our first parents, all of us were born alienated from the Divine life and holiness, despoiled of all those perfections wherewith man's nature was at first endowed. Ezekiel 16:4, 5 gives a graphic picture of our terrible spiritual plight at our entrance into this world: cast out to the loathing of our persons, rolling ourselves in our own filth, impotent to help ourselves. That "likeness" of God (Gen. 1:26) which was at first stamped on man's soul, has been effaced, aversion from God and an inordinate love of the creature having displaced it. The very fountain of our beings is polluted, continually sending forth bitter springs, and though those streams take several courses and wander in various channels, yet are they all brackish. Therefore is the "sacrifice" of the wicked an abomination to the Lord (Prov. 15:8), and his very ploughing "sin" (Prov. 21:4). There are but two states, and all men are included therein: the one a state of spiritual life, the other a state of spiritual death; the one a state of righteousness, the other a state of sin: the one saving, the other damning; the one a state of enmity, wherein men have their inclinations contrary to God, the other a state of friendship and fellowship, wherein men walk obediently unto God, and would not willingly have an inward notion opposed to His will. The one state is called darkness, the other light: "For ye were (in your unregenerate days, not only in the dark, but) darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:6). There is no medium between these conditions; all are in one of them. Each man and woman now on earth is either an object of God's delight or of His abomination. The most benevolent and imposing works of the flesh cannot please Him, but the faintest sparks proceeding from that which grace hath kindled are acceptable in His sight. By the fall man contracted an unfitness to that which is good. Shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Ps. 51: 5), man is a "transgressor from the womb" (Isa. 48:8): "they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3), and "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). He may be civilized, educated, refined, and even religious, but at heart he is "desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9), and all that he does is vile in the sight of God, for nothing is done from love to Him, and with a view to His glory. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). Until they are born again, all men are "unto every good work reprobate" (Titus 1:16). By the fall man contracted an unwillingness to that which is good. All motions of the will in its fallen

estate, through defect of a right principle from whence they flow and a right end to which they tend, are only evil and sinful. Leave man to himself, remove from him all the restraints which law and order impose, and he will swiftly degenerate to a lower level than the beasts, as almost any missionary will testify. And is human nature any better in civilized lands? Not a whit. Wash off the artificial veneer and it will be found that "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man" (Prov. 27:19). The world over, it remains solemnly true that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Christ will prefer the same charge in a coming day as when He was here on earth: "Men loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:19). Men will not come to Him that they might have "life." By the fall man contracted an inability to that which is good. He is not only unfitted and unwilling, but unable to do that which is good. Where is the man that can truthfully say he has measured up to his own ideals? All have to acknowledge there is a strange force within dragging them downward, inclining them to evil, which, notwithstanding their utmost endeavors against it, in some form or other, more or less, conquers them. Despite the kindly exhortations of friends, the faithful warnings of God's servants, the solemn examples of suffering and sorrow, disease and death on every side, and the vote of their own conscience, yet they yield. "They that are in the flesh (in their natural condition) cannot please God" (Rom. 8:18). Thus it is evident that the need is imperative for a radical and revolutionary change to be wrought in fallen man before he can have any fellowship with the thrice holy God. Since the earth must be completely changed, because of the curse now resting on it, before it can ever again bring forth fruit as it did when man was in a state of innocency; so must man, since a general defilement from Adam has seized upon him, be renewed, before he can "bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:4). He must be grafted upon another stock, united to Christ, partake of the power of His resurrection: without this he may bring forth fruit, but not "unto God." How can any one turn to God without a principle of spiritual motion? How can he live to God who has no spiritual life? How can he be fit for the kingdom of God who is of a brutish and diabolical nature? 2. The need for regeneration lies in man's total depravity. Every member of Adam's race is a fallen creature, and every part of his complex being has been corrupted by sin. Man's heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). His mind is blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4) and darkened by sin (Eph. 4:18), so that his thoughts are only evil continually (Gen. 6:5). His affections are prostituted, so that he loves what God hates, and hates what God loves. His will is enslaved from good (Rom. 6:20) and opposed to God (Rom. 8:7). He is without righteousness (Rom. 3:10), under the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10) and is the captive of the Devil. His condition is truly deplorable, and his case desperate. He cannot better himself, for he is "without strength" (Rom. 5:6). He cannot work out his salvation, for there dwelleth no good thing in him (Rom. 7:18). He needs, then, to be born of God, "for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal. 6:15). Man is a fallen creature. It is not that a few leaves have faded, but that the entire tree has become rotten, root and branch. There is in every one that which is radically wrong. The word "radical" comes from a Latin one which means "the root," so that when we say a man is radically wrong, we mean that there is in him, in the very foundation and fiber of his being, that which is intrinsically corrupt and essentially evil. Sins are merely the fruit, there must of necessity be a root from which they spring. It follows, then, as an inevitable consequence that man needs the aid of a Higher Power to effect a radical change in him. There is only One who can effect that change: God created man, and God alone can re-create him. Hence the imperative demand, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Man is spiritually dead and naught but all-mighty power can make him alive. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men" (Rom. 5:12). In the day that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, he died spiritually, and a person who is spiritually dead cannot beget a child who possesses spiritual life. Therefore, all by natural descent enter this world "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18), "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). This

is no mere figure of speech, but a solemn fact. Every child is born entirely destitute of a single spark of spiritual life, and therefore if ever it is to enter the kingdom of God, which is the realm of spiritual life (Rom. 14:17), it must be born into it. The more clearly we are enabled to discern the imperative need of regeneration and the various reasons why it is absolutely essential in order to a fallen creature being fitted for the presence of the thrice holy God, the less difficulty are we likely to encounter when we endeavor to arrive at an understanding of the nature of regeneration, what it is which takes place within a person when the Holy Spirit renews him. For this reason particularly, and also because such a cloud of error has been cast upon this vital truth, we feel that a further consideration of this particular aspect of our subject is needed. Jesus Christ came into this world to glorify God and to glorify Himself by redeeming a people unto Himself. But what glory can we conceive that God has, and what glory would accrue to Christ, if there be not a vital and fundamental difference between His people and the world? And what difference can there be between those two companies but in a change of heart, out of which are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23): a change of nature or disposition, as the fountain from which all other differences must proceed—sheep and goats differ in nature. The whole mediatorial work of Christ has this one end in view. His priestly office is to reconcile and bring His people unto God; His prophetic, to teach them the way; His kingly, to work in them those qualifications and bestow upon them that comeliness which is necessary to fit them for the holy converse and communion with the thrice holy God. Thus does He "purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived" (1 Cor. 6:9). But multitudes are deceived, and deceived at this very point, and on this most momentous matter. God has warned men that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9), but few will believe that this is true of them. Instead, tens of thousands of professing Christians are filled with a vain and presumptuous confidence that all is well with them. They delude themselves with hopes of mercy while continuing to live in a course of self-will and self-pleasing. They fancy they are fitted for Heaven, while every day that passes finds them the more prepared for Hell. It is written of the Lord Jesus that "He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21), and not in their sins: save them not only from the penalty, but also from the power and pollution of sin. To how many in Christendom do these solemn words apply, "For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful" (Ps. 36:2). The principal device of Satan is to deceive people into imagining that they can successfully combine the world with God, allow the flesh while pretending to the Spirit, and thus "make the best of both worlds." But Christ has emphatically declared that "no man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24). Many mistake the force of those searching words: the true emphasis is not upon "two," but upon "serve"—none can serve two masters. And God requires to be "served"—feared, submitted unto, obeyed; His will regulating the life in all its details, see 1 Samuel 12:24, 25. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). 3. The need for regeneration lies in man's unsuitedness to God. When Nicodemus, a respectable and religious Pharisee, yea, a "master in Israel," came to Christ, He told him plainly that "except a man be born again" he could neither see nor enter the "kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5)—either the Gospel-state on earth or the Glory-state in Heaven. None can enter the spiritual realm unless he has a spiritual nature, which alone gives him an appetite for and capacity to enjoy the things pertaining to it; and this, the natural man has not. So far from it, he cannot so much as "discern" them (1 Cor. 2:14). He has no love for them, nor desire after them (John 3:19). Nor can he desire them, for his will is enslaved by the lusts of the flesh (Eph. 2:2, 3). Therefore, before a man can enter the spiritual kingdom, his understanding must be supernaturally enlightened, his heart renewed, and his will emancipated. There can be no point of contact between God and His Christ with a sinful man until he is regenerated. There can be no lawful union between two parties who have nothing vital in common. A superior and an inferior nature may be united together, but never contrary natures. Can fire

and water be united, a beast and a man, a good angel and vile devil? Can Heaven and Hell ever meet on friendly terms? In all friendship there must be a similarity of disposition; before there can be communion there must be some agreement or oneness. Beasts and men agree not in a life of reason, and therefore cannot converse together. God and men agree not in a life of holiness, and therefore can have no communion together (Condensed from S. Charnock). We are united to the "first Adam" by a likeness of nature; how then can we be united to the "last Adam" without a likeness to Him from a new nature or principle? We were united to the first Adam by a living soul, we must be united to the last Adam by a quickening Spirit. We have nothing to do with the heavenly Adam without bearing an heavenly image (1 Cor. 15:48, 49). If we are His members, we must have the same nature which was communicated to Him, the Head, by the Spirit of God, which is holiness (Luke 1:35). There must be one "spirit" in both: thus it is written, "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). And again God tells us, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9). Nor can anything be vitally united to another without life. A living head and a dead body is inconceivable. There can be no communion with God without a renewed soul. God is unable on His part, with honour to His law and holiness, to have fellowship with such a creature as fallen man. Man is incapable on his part, because of the aversion rooted in his fallen nature. Then how is it possible for God and man to be brought together without the latter experiencing a thorough change of nature? What communion can there be between Light and darkness, between the living God and a dead heart? "Can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3). God loathes sin, man loves it; God loves holiness, man loathes it. How then could such contrary affections meet together in an amicable friendship? Sin has alienated from the life of God (Eph. 4:18), and therefore from His fellowship; life, then, must be restored to us before we can be instated in communion with Him. Old things must pass away, and all things become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Gospel-duties cannot be performed without regeneration. The first requirement of Christ from His followers is that they shall deny self. But that is impossible to fallen human nature, for men are "lovers of their own selves" (2 Tim. 3:2). Not until the soul is renewed, will self be repudiated. Therefore is the new-covenant promise, "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh" (Ezek. 11:19). All Gospel duties require a pliability and tenderness of heart. Pride was the condemnation of the Devil (1 Tim. 3:6), and our first parents fell through swelling designs to be like unto God (Gen. 3:5). Ever since then, man has been too aspiring and too well opinionated of himself to perform duties in an evangelical strain, with that nothingness in himself which the Gospel requires. The chief design of the Gospel is to beat down all glorying in ourselves, that we should glory only in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:29-31); but this is not possible till grace renews the heart, melts it before God, and moulds it to His requirements. Without a new nature we cannot perform Gospel-duties constantly. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh" (Rom. 8:5). Such a mind cannot long be employed upon spiritual things. Prickings of conscience, terrors of Hell, fears of death, may exert a temporary influence, but they do not last. Stony-ground may bring forth blades, yet for lack of root they quickly wither away (Matt. 13). A stone may be flung high into the air, but ultimately it falls back to the earth; so the natural man may for a time mount high in religious fervor, but sooner or later it shall be said of him, as it was of Israel, "their heart was not right with Him, neither were they stedfast in His covenant" (Ps. 78:37). Many seem to begin in the Spirit, but end in the flesh. Only where God has wrought in the soul, will the work last forever (Eccl. 3:14; Phil. 1:6). As regeneration is indispensably necessary to a Gospel-state, so it is to a state of heavenly glory. It seems to be typified by the strength and freshness of the Israelites when they entered into Canaan. Not a decrepit and infirm person set foot in the promised land: none of those that came out of Egypt with an Egyptian nature, and desires for the garlic and onions thereof, with a suffering their old bondage, but dropped their carcasses in the wilderness; only the two spies who had encouraged them against the seeming difficulties. None that retain only the old man, born

in the house of bondage; but only a new regenerate creature, shall enter into the heavenly Canaan. Heaven is the inheritance of the sanctified, not of the filthy: 'that they may receive an inheritance among them which are sanctified through faith that is in Me' (Acts 26:18). Upon Adam's expulsion from paradise, a flaming sword was set to stop his reentering into that place of happiness. As Adam, in his forlorn state, could not possess it, we also, by what we have received from Adam, cannot expect a greater privilege than our root. The priest under the law could not enter into the sanctuary till he was purified, nor the people into the congregation: neither can any man have access into the Holiest till he be sprinkled by the blood of Jesus: Hebrews 10:22" (S. Charnock). Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Said Christ, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). For whom? For those who have, in heart, "forsaken all" to follow Him (Matt. 19:27). For those who love God (1 Cor. 2:9) love the things of God: they perceive the inestimable value and beauty of spiritual things. And they who really love spiritual things, deem no sacrifice too great to win them (Phil. 3:8). But in order to love spiritual things, the man himself must be made spiritual. The natural man may hear about them and have a correct idea of the doctrine of them, but he receives them not spiritually in the love of them (2 Thess. 2:10), and finds not his joy and happiness in them. But the renewed soul longs after them, not by constraint, but because God has won his heart. His confession is "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Ps. 73:25). God has become his chief good, His will his only rule, His glory his chief end. In such an one, the very inclinations of the soul have been changed. The man himself must be changed before he is prepared for Heaven. Of the regenerate it is written, "giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). None are "made meet" while they are unholy, for it is the inheritance of the saints; none are fitted for it while they are under the power of darkness, for it is an inheritance in light. Christ Himself ascended not to Heaven to take possession of His glory till after His resurrection from the dead, nor can we enter Heaven unless we have been resurrected from sin. "He that hath wrought (polished) us for the self-same thing (to be clothed with our Heavenly house) is God," and the proof that He has done this is, the giving unto us "the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 5:5); and where the Spirit of the Lord is "there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17), liberty from the power of indwelling sin, as the verse which follows clearly shows. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). To "see" God is to be introduced into the most intimate intercourse with Him. It is to have that "thick cloud" of our transgressions blotted out (Isa. 44:22), for it was our iniquities which separated between us and our God (Isa. 58:2). To "see" God, here has the force of enjoy, as in John 3:36. But for this enjoyment a "pure heart" is indispensable. Now the heart is purified by faith (Acts 15:9). for faith has to do with God. Thus, a "pure heart" is one that has its affections set upon things above, being attracted by "the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 17:15). But how could he enjoy God who cannot now endure the imperfect holiness of His children, but rails against it as unnecessary "strictness" or puritanical fanaticism? God's face is only to be beheld in righteousness. "Follow peace with all, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). None can dwell with God and be eternally happy in His presence unless a radical change has been wrought in him, a change from sin to holiness. This change must be, like that introduced by the fall, one which reaches to the very roots of our beings, affecting the entire man: removing the darkness of our minds, awakening and then pacifying the conscience, spiritualizing our affections,, converting the will, reforming our whole life. And this great change must take place here on earth. The removal of the soul to Heaven is no substitute for regeneration. It is not the place which conveys likeness to God. When the angels fell. they were in Heaven, but the glory of God's dwelling place did not restore them. Satan entered Heaven (Job 2:1), but he left it still unchanged. There must be a likeness to God wrought in the soul by the Spirit before it is fitted to enjoy Heaven. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). If the body must be changed ere it can enter Heaven, how much more so the soul, for "there shall

in no wise enter into it anything that defileth" (Rev. 21:27). And what is the supreme glory of Heaven? Is it freedom from toil and worry, sickness and sorrow, suffering and death? No: it is, that Heaven is the place where there is the full manifestation of Him who is "glorious in holiness"—that holiness which the wicked, while presumptuously hoping to go to Heaven, despise and hate here on earth. The inhabitants of Heaven are given a clear sight of the ineffable purity of God and are granted the most intimate communion with Him. But none are fitted for this unless their inner being (as well as outer lives) have undergone a radical, revolutionizing, supernatural change. Can it be thought that Christ will prepare mansions of glory for those who refuse to receive Him into their hearts and give Him the first place in their lives down here? No, indeed; rather will He "laugh at their calamity and mock when their fear cometh" (Prov. 1:26). The instrument of the heart must be tuned here on earth to fit it to produce the melody of praise in Heaven. God has so linked together holiness and happiness (as He has sin and wretchedness) that they cannot be separated. Were it possible for an unregenerate soul to enter Heaven, it would find there no sanctuary from the lashings of conscience and the tormenting fire of God's holiness. Many suppose that nothing but the merits of Christ are needed to qualify them for Heaven. But this is a great mistake. None receive remission of sins through the blood of Christ, who are not first "turned from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). God subdues their iniquities whose sin He casts into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Pardoning sins and purifying the heart are as inseparable as the blood and water which flowed from the Saviour's side (John 19:34). Our being renewed in the spirit of our mind and our putting on of the new man "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:23, 24), is as indispensable to a meetness for Heaven, as an having the righteousness of Christ imputed to us is for a title thereto. "A malefactor, by pardon, is in a capacity to come into the presence of a prince and serve him at his table, but he is not in the fitness till his noisome garments, full of vermin be taken off" (S. Charnock). It is both a fatal delusion and wicked presumption for one who is living to please self to imagine that his sins have been forgiven by God. It is "the washing of regeneration" which gives evidence of our being justified by grace (Titus 3:5-7). When Christ saves, He indwells (Gal. 2:20), and it is impossible for Him to reside in a heart which yet remains spiritually cold, hard, and lifeless. The supreme pattern of holiness cannot be a Patron of licentiousness. Justification and sanctification are inseparable: where one is absolved from the guilt of sin, he is also delivered from the dominion of sin, but neither the one nor the other can be until the soul is regenerated. Just as Christ's being made in the likeness of sin's flesh was indispensable for God to impute to Him His people's sins (Rom. 8:3), so it is equally necessary for us to be made new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) before we can be, legally, made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). The need of our being made "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) is as real and as great as Christ's taking part in human nature, ere He could save us (Heb. 2:14-17). "Except God be born, He cannot come into the kingdom of sin. Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of righteousness. And Divine power—the power of the Holy Spirit, the plenipotentiary and executant of all the will of Godhead—achieves the incarnation of God and the regeneration of man. that the Son of God may be made sin, and the sons of God made righteous" (H. Martin). How could one possibly enter a world of ineffable holiness who has spent all his time in sin, i.e., pleasing self? How could he possibly sing the song of the Lamb if his heart has never been tuned unto it? How could he endure to behold the awful majesty of God face to face, who never before so much as saw Him "through a glass darkly" by the eye of faith? And as it is excruciating torture for the eyes that have been long confined to dismal darkness, to suddenly gaze upon the bright -beams of the midday sun, so it will be when the unregenerate behold Him who is Light. Instead of welcoming such a sight "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him" (Rev. 1:7); yea, so overwhelming will be their anguish, they will call to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us. and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:17). And, my reader,

that will be your experience, unless God regenerates you! When the Lord Jesus said "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6) He not only intimated that every man born into this world inherits a corrupt and fallen nature, and therefore is unfit for the kingdom of God; but also that this corrupt nature can never be anything else but corrupt, so that no culture can fit it for the kingdom of God. Its tendencies may be restricted, its manifestations modified by education and circumstances, but its sinful tendencies and affections are still there. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, prune and trim it as you may. For good fruit, you must have a good tree or graft from one. Therefore did our Lord go on to say, "And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This brings us to consider.

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