

The New Birth

by R.C. Sproul

The sermon emphasizes that regeneration precedes faith, and that it is a supernatural, monergistic, immediate, and effectual work of God.

Scripture: John 3:3, Romans 8:16, Ephesians 1:5, Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5

Topics: "Regeneration", "Justification"

Description

R.C. Sproul emphasizes the crucial theological assertion that regeneration precedes faith, a key distinction from semi-Pelagianism which believes man can accept God's grace without regeneration. Jesus, in His conversation with Nicodemus, highlights the necessity of being born again before believing in Him to see or enter the Kingdom of God. Regeneration is viewed as a supernatural, monergistic, immediate, and effectual work of God, rescuing individuals from sin's bondage and enabling them to have saving faith in Christ, leading to justification and adoption into God's family.

Transcript

REGENERATION PRECEDES FAITH. This assertion that captures the heart of the distinctive theology of historic Augustinian and Reformed thought is the watershed assertion that distinguishes that theology from all forms of semi-Pelagianism.

The semi-Pelagian would argue that despite the ravages of the fall, man still has an island of righteousness left in his soul, by which he still can accept or reject God's offer of grace. This view, so widely held in evangelical circles, argues that one must believe in Christ in order to be born again, and so the order of salvation is reversed in this view by maintaining that faith precedes regeneration.

However, when we consider the teaching on this issue as found in John's record of Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus, we see the emphasis that Jesus places on regeneration as a necessary condition, a *sine qua non*, for believing in Him. He says to Nicodemus in John 3:3: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The must-ness of regeneration of which Jesus speaks is necessary for a person to see even the Kingdom of God, let alone to enter it.

The weakness of all semi-Pelagianism is that it invests in the fallen, corrupt flesh of man the power to exercise faith. Here, fallen man is able to come to Christ without regeneration, that is, before regeneration. On the other hand, the axiom that regeneration precedes faith gets to the very heart of the historic issue between Augustinianism and semi-Pelagianism.

In the Augustinian and Reformation view, regeneration is seen first of all as a supernatural work of God. Regeneration is the divine work of God the Holy Spirit upon the minds and souls of fallen people, by which the Spirit quickens those who are spiritually dead and makes them spiritually alive. This supernatural work rescues that person from his bondage to sin and his moral inability to incline himself towards the things of God.

Secondly, regeneration is a monergistic work. "Monergistic" means that it is the work of one person who exercises his power. In the case of regeneration, it is God alone who is able, and it is God alone who performs the work of regenerating the human soul. The work of regeneration is not a joint venture between the fallen person and the divine Spirit; it is solely the work of God.

Thirdly, the monergistic work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit is an immediate work. It is immediate with respect to time, and it is immediate with respect to the principle of operating without intervening means. The Holy Spirit does not use something apart from His own power to bring a person from spiritual death to spiritual life, and when that work is accomplished, it is accomplished instantaneously.

Fourthly, the work of regeneration is effectual. That is, when the Holy Spirit regenerates a human soul, the purpose of that regeneration is to bring that person to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Regeneration is more than giving a person the possibility of having faith, it gives him the certainty of possessing that saving faith.

The result of our regeneration is first of all faith, which then results in justification and adoption into the family of God. Nobody is born into this world a child of the family of God. We are born as children of wrath. The only way we enter into the family of God is by adoption, and that adoption occurs when we are united to God's only begotten Son by faith.

Finally, it's important to see that regeneration is a gift that God disposes sovereignly to all of those whom He determines to bring into His family.

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