



## Effects of Regeneration

### The Fruits of Regeneration

The question can surface, how does one know that he or she is born again? To answer this question we must focus our attention upon what are known as the fruits of regeneration. These fruits are distinguishing marks whereby we may discern whether we are born again.

A first fruit of regeneration is that the focus of one's life is upon Christ. 1 John 5:1 says, "*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.*" This speaks of trust in Christ and being focused upon the Lord Jesus. It is being directed towards the living God. By nature we are turned into ourselves. In regeneration the direction of our life shifts from self to God. There are many things in daily life which will still concern us and we still have concerns about ourselves, our future and so on, but beyond these things there is surrender to God. You are focused upon the living God. That means there is faith in Christ. Connected with this focus upon the Lord is also a spiritual hunger and thirst for Christ. You desire to know the living God.

Another fruit of regeneration is love. 1 John 5:1 also speaks of love as a fruit of regeneration: "*And every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.*" There is love to God and love to the brethren. It is as 1 John 4:7 says, "*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*"

Another fruit is sorrow because of our sin. There is grief that we are not what we should be. We desire to be delivered from sin and we strive against it. There is sorrow when sin and temptation again overcome us. There is a loathing of self because of indwelling sin and a yearning to be delivered from sin. This results in a greater focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour.

Over all, we must realize that regeneration brings about a fundamental change in the direction of our life. The intellect, the will, the affections, as well as the members of the body are effected. It is as 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*" A spiritually dead person becomes alive. There is a fundamental change, although not yet a perfectly complete change, for the old nature remains and this results in a battle and struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. This is how the Canons of Dort III/IV, Article 11 states it:

*God ... powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though before dead He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, which is stubborn or unmanageable, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable.*

### The Effects of Regeneration

We may conclude that three things happen in regeneration: 1) the illumination of our mind; 2) the opening of the heart; and 3) the renewing of the will. Let us focus on these matters.

1. Our understanding is illuminated. This means that under the preaching of the Word and also by the reading of God's Word, we not only realize that God exists, but that He lays a claim upon our lives. I see that I am living outside of His grace. This weighs upon me as a burden. I find a

secluded place and I start to cry out for God and His mercy. I desire to come to church to hear God's Word preached. I recognize that I am on the broad way and I have a desire to walk on the narrow path. At times, someone under these convictions can become weary and even lose hope. But he doesn't remain in this frame because the Lord is drawing him to Himself. Such a one will still take courage in the Lord.

2. Our heart is opened for Christ and for His rule over our lives. The heart is the inner seat of the affections. Therefore, the affections of the heart go out unto Christ. There is love for the Lord Jesus and love for the triune God. There is a great desire to know God and to live for Him. The heart used to be cold, but now is opened, circumcised and is warm with affections for the Lord and His service. The heart is opened for the perfect righteousness and holiness of Christ. Everything in Him is seen as altogether lovely.
3. The will is renewed. By nature our will is in rebellion against the Lord. In regeneration the Lord overcomes the rebellious will. By nature our will is under bondage and full of animosity against God. But God renews the will and we pray: "Lord, what wilt Thou have mercy?" We learn to bow under the sovereign will of God.

### **Various External Means**

The way in which regeneration takes place in the life of a sinner can differ. The Lord uses various external ways or means. The experiences can differ in depth and in intensity. Some are converted and regenerated by experiencing the heavy terrors of the law. Others are drawn by the love of Christ. The murderer on the cross had a different conversion than the apostle Paul, Lydia, the seller of purple, the Philippian jailer, the tax collector Levi, Zaccheus, or Bartimaeus. We could cite more examples.

### **General Conviction and Saving Conviction**

We must distinguish between general convictions and saving convictions. The general convictions will lead a person to have sorrow for sin, but after sometime this wears off and the same sinful lifestyle or even worse is continued. Saving convictions weigh upon the heart and cause the sinner to cleave to God's throne of grace. Sin becomes an unbearable burden.

Some have joy when they accept God's Word and seem to make progress, but after some time they fall away. When oppression and hardships come for the sake of Christ, they give up and fall back into their previous sinful lives.

### **Various Ways**

The way can differ. Some are converted suddenly. Others are converted in a more gradual manner. With delight and reverence they embrace the truths concerning their own depravity and guilt and also the truths concerning Christ and His salvation. They have a constant view of Christ. They don't taste great pangs of terror because of sin; neither do they taste profound joys in Christ. With sweet contemplation they view Christ; with sorrow they repent of their sin and lean upon Christ. Brakel (a Dutch divine) comments that these are often the most stable Christians.

Most of God's children are converted in a gradual way. Their regeneration becomes evident by being drawn to Christ. This can take place in the way of trials and struggles. Slowly but steadily they see more and more of the saving work of Christ. More and more they lean upon His person and work.

The danger often occurs that when a person is under conviction of sin and sees the blessedness of God's people, that he tries to improve himself. He tries to convince and move God to come into his heart. Such a person will perform all kinds of religious duties and will actually try to move God to apply His grace to his heart. But we cannot move God and we do not have to move God to be gracious. We can only be saved by grace for Jesus' sake. God does not save sinners who try to

improve themselves and thereby attempt to make them acceptable to God. God saves poor lost sinners who with grief confess that they cannot bring forth any good thing that pleases God.

### **God's Work of Regeneration**

In regeneration God is active; we are passive. Yet, when we deal with regeneration, we are not allowed to be passive. We must be born again. Three directives will show this:

1. We have God's Word. It is the seed of regeneration. We have to place ourselves under the preaching of God's Word and we must read his Word. That is the way to be changed. God's Word changes people.
2. We are baptized. Baptism is a sign and seal of God's Word of promise. Baptism tells us that we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are born again. Baptism shows us that we are called to grieve about our sins and seek our purification and salvation outside of ourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord promises that whosoever believes in the crucified Christ will receive everlasting life.
3. There is prayer. In the way of prayer, the Lord is willing to give His Spirit. He is willing to grant faith and repentance. Ask and ye shall receive.

God can save to the uttermost. If in Ezekiel 37 God saved a whole valley full of dead bones, He is also able to save you and me. Gory be to God that He regenerates and we do not. If we had to renew ourselves, we would spoil it, but God does a perfect work. The work of regeneration results in the perfect and full renewal of soul and body, which will be reunited in heaven and will be with the Lord for evermore. Then God will receive all the glory.

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