

Scriptures and Doctrine :: (Spurgeon) On Regeneration**(Spurgeon) On Regeneration, on: 2007/8/8 19:40**

On Regeneration

Charles H. Spurgeon

The first work of the Spirit in the heart is a work during which the Spirit is compared to the wind. You remember that when our Savior spoke to Nicodemus he represented the first work of the Spirit in the heart as being like the wind that "blows where it wishes;" "so" he says, "is every one who is born of the Spirit." Now you know that the wind is a most mysterious thing; and although certain definitions pretend to explain the phenomenon, all of them leave the great question of how the wind blows, and the cause of its blowing in a certain direction, where it was before. Breath within us, winds around us, all air movements are mysterious to us. And the renewing work of the Spirit in the heart is exceedingly mysterious.

It is possible that at this moment the Spirit of God may be breathing into some of the thousand hearts before me; yet it would be blasphemous if anyone should ask, "Which way did the Spirit of God enter into such a heart? How did it enter there?" And it would be foolish for a person who is under the operation of the Spirit to ask how it operates: you do not know where the storehouse of thunder is located; you do not know where the clouds are balanced; neither can you know how the Spirit goes forth from the Most High and enters into the heart of man.

It may be that during a sermon two men are listening to the same truth; one of them hears as attentively as the other and remembers as much of it; the other is melted to tears or moved with solemn thoughts; but the one, though equally attentive, sees nothing in the sermon except that certain important truths were clearly declared; as for the other, his heart is broken within him and his soul is melted. Ask me how it is that the same truth has an effect upon the one, and not upon his fellow: I reply, because the mysterious Spirit of the living God goes with the truth to one heart and not to the other. The one only feels the force of truth, and that may be strong enough to make him tremble, like Felix; but the other feels the Spirit going with the truth, and that renews and regenerates him, and causes him to enter into that gracious condition which is called the state of salvation.

This change takes place instantaneously. It is as miraculous a change as any miracle we read about in Scripture. It is supremely supernatural. It may be mimicked, but no imitation can be true and real. Men may pretend to be regenerated without the Spirit, but they cannot be regenerated in actuality. It is a change so marvelous that the highest attempts of man can never reach it. We may reason as long as we please, but we cannot reason ourselves into regeneration; we may meditate until our hairs are gray with study; but we cannot meditate ourselves into the new birth. The new birth is accomplished in us by the sovereign will of God alone.

"The Spirit, like some heavenly wind,
Blows on the sons of flesh,
Inspires us with a heavenly mind,
And forms the man afresh."

Ask the regenerate man how: he cannot tell you. Ask him when: he may recognize the time, but as to how he knows no more than you do. It is a mystery.

You remember the story of the valley of vision. Ezekiel saw dry bones lying scattered here and there in the valley. The command came to Ezekiel, "Say to these dry bones, live." He said, "Live," and the bones came together, "bone to his bone, and flesh came upon them" but they did not live. "Prophecy, son of man; say to the wind, breathe upon these slain, that they may live." They looked just like life: there was flesh and blood there; there were the eyes and hands and feet; but when Ezekiel spoke there was a mysterious something given that men call life, and it was given in a mysterious way, like the blowing of the wind. It is even so today. Unconverted and ungodly persons may be very moral and excellent; they are like the dry bones when they are put together and clothed with flesh and blood. Nevertheless, they needed the divine breath of the Almighty--the divine pneuma, the divine Spirit, the divine wind--to blow upon them to make them live.

Say, my hearers, have you ever had such a supernatural influence on your heart? For if not, it may seem that I am being

harsh with you, but I am simply being faithful: if you have never had more in your heart than you were born with, you are "in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." No, sir, don't sneer at that remark; it is as true as this Bible, for it was taken from this Bible, and you should listen carefully to this for further proof: "unless one is born again (from above), he cannot see the kingdom of God." What is your response? It is useless for you to talk of causing yourself to be born again; you cannot be born again except by the Spirit, and you must perish unless you are. You see, then, the first effect of the Spirit, and by that you may answer the question.

And, my brethren, it is quite certain that no man ever begins the new birth himself. The work of salvation was never started by any man. God the Holy Spirit must begin it. Now, the reasons why no man ever started the work of grace in his own heart, are very plain and palpable: firstly, because he cannot; and secondly, because he will not.

The best reason of all is because he cannot--he is dead. Well, the dead may be made alive, but the dead cannot make themselves alive, for the dead can do nothing. Besides, the new thing to be created has no being. The uncreated cannot create. "No," but you say, "that man can create." Yes, but can hell create heaven? Then sin may create grace. What! Will you tell me that fallen human nature that has come almost to a level with the beasts, is competent to rival God; that it can emulate the divinity in working as great a miracle, and in imparting as divine a life as even God himself can give? It cannot. Besides, it is a creation; we are created new in Christ Jesus. Let any man create a fly, and afterwards let him create a new heart in himself; until he has done the lesser he cannot do the greater.

Besides, no man will. If any man could convert himself, there is no man that would. If any man said he would, if that were true, he is already converted; for the will to be converted is in great part conversion. The will to love God, the desire to be in unison with Christ, is not to be found in any man who has not already been reconciled with God through the death of his Son. There may be a false desire, a desire grounded upon a misrepresentation of the truth; but a true desire after true salvation by the true Spirit is a certain indication that the salvation is already there in the germ and in the bud, and only needs time and grace to develop itself.

But it is certain that man neither can nor will, being on the one hand utterly impotent and dead, and on the other hand utterly depraved and unwilling; hating the change when he sees it in others, and most of all despising it in himself. Be certain, therefore, that God the Holy Spirit must begin, since none else can do so.

When God first begins the work of changing the heart, he finds man totally averse to any such thing. By nature man kicks and struggles against God: he will not be saved. I must confess I never would have been saved, if I could have helped it. As long as I could I rebelled and revolted, and struggled against God. When he would have me pray, I would not pray: when he would have me listen to the sound of preaching, I would not. Moreover, when I did listen and the tear rolled down my cheek, I wiped it away and defied him to melt my heart. When my heart was a little touched, I tried to divert it with sinful pleasures. And when that would not do I tried self-righteousness, and would not have been saved until I was hemmed in, and then he gave me the effectual blow of grace, and there was no resisting that irresistible effort of his grace. It conquered my depraved will, and made me bow myself before the scepter of his grace.

So it is in every case. Man revolts against his Maker and his Savior; but where God determines to save, save he will. God will have the sinner, if he designs to have him. God has never yet been thwarted in any one of his purposes. Man resists with all his might, but all the might of man--tremendous though it is on account of sin--is not equal to the majestic might of the Most High when he rides forth in the chariot of his salvation. He irresistibly saves and victoriously conquers man's heart.

To sanctify a man is the work of the whole life; but to give a man a new heart is the work of an instant. In one solitary second, swifter than the lightning flash, God can put a new heart into a man, and make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. You may be sitting where you are today as an enemy of God with a wicked heart, hard as a stone, and dead and cold; but if the Lord wills it, the living spark shall drop into your soul, and in that moment you will begin to tremble--begin to feel; you will confess your sin, and fly to Christ for mercy. Other parts of salvation are done gradually but regeneration is the instantaneous work of God's sovereign, effectual, and irresistible grace.

You may educate a nature until it attains the highest point, but you cannot educate an old nature into a new one. You may educate a horse, but you cannot educate it into a man. You shall train the bird that sits upon your finger but you cannot train a limpet into an eagle, nor is it possible for you to train by the best instruction the natural man into a spiritual man. Between the two there is still a great gulf fixed.

Can the natural man, by great and sustained efforts, at last come to be spiritual? No, he cannot.... Therefore, you may make yourselves the best of natural men. You may become the most patriotic of statesmen, you may become the most sober and discreet of moralists, you may become the kindest and most benevolent of philanthropists, but into a spiritual man you cannot bring yourself. Your very best efforts are useless, because there is a division, wide as eternity, between you and the regenerate man.

Can another man help us out of such a nature into a state of grace? By no means! As man is powerless for himself, so is he powerless for his fellow. How, then, is it to be done? The Spirit of God alone can do it. O, sirs! This is a great mystery, but you must know it if you would be saved; it is a solemn secret, but it is one that must be known in your consciences, or else you must be shut out from heaven. The Spirit of God must make you new; you must be born again. "If a man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." The same power which raised Christ Jesus from the dead must be exerted in raising us from the dead, the very same Omnipotence, without which angels or worms could not have had a being, must again step forth and do as great a work as it did at the first creation in making us anew in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There have been continuous attempts to get rid of this unpleasant necessity. Constantly the Christian Church itself tries to forget it, but as often as this old doctrine of regeneration is brought forward with clarity, God is pleased to favor his Church with a revival. The doctrine which looks at first as though it would hush every exertion with indolence, and make men sit down with listlessness and despair, is really like the trumpet of God to awake the dead, and where it is fully and faithfully preached, though it grate upon the carnal ear, though it excites enmity in many against the man who dares to proclaim it, yet it is owned of God. Because it honors God, God will honor it.

This was the staple preaching of Whitefield, and it was by this preaching that he was made as the mighty angel flying through the midst of heaven, preaching the everlasting gospel to every creature. He was always great upon that which he called the great R--Regeneration. Whenever you heard him, the three R's came out clearly--Ruin, Regeneration, and Redemption! Man ruined, wholly ruined, hopelessly helplessly, eternally ruined! Man regenerated by the Spirit of God, and by the Spirit of God alone wholly made a new creature in Christ! Man redeemed, redeemed by precious blood from all his sins: not by works of righteousness, not by deeds of the law, not by ceremonies, prayers, or resolutions; but by the precious blood of Christ! Oh! We must be very pointed, and very plain about regeneration, for this is the very heart of the matter -- "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Notes:

1 Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Holy Spirit and the One Church," The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol. 4 (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1997), 35-37.

2 Ibid., "The Work of the Holy Spirit," vol. 4, 185-186.

3 Ibid., "The New Heart," vol. 4, 667-68.

4 Ibid., "Natural or Spiritual," vol. 7, 872-74.