

Scriptures and Doctrine :: Lordship and Regeneration

Lordship and Regeneration, on: 2007/8/6 20:18

Perhaps this article shall spark a blessed discussion on the topic.

Lordship and Regeneration

by Ernest Reisinger

In the first study I pointed out that every major doctrine of the Christian faith is affected by and inseparably related to the Lordship controversy. In this study I wish to address the difference between the Lordship and Non-Lordship views in respect to the doctrine of regeneration. We will see that they are poles apart and the differences are not a few.

There is no question that the best adherents of both views would agree that regeneration is absolutely essential in order for a sinner to be saved-no regeneration, no spiritual life. However, they do not agree on what regeneration is, or what it always produces in one's life.

Regeneration is the key that opens the door of salvation and, therefore, translates the sinner out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

Non-Lordship teachers teach a regeneration that does not necessarily transform. Consequently, discipleship and obedience are optional and the biblical fruit of regeneration may or may not be evident. This means that regeneration does not necessarily regenerate, that is, it does not necessarily transform and produce a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).

Lordship teaching, on the other hand calls for a regeneration that transforms the whole man-his mind, his affections and his will. This transformation is produced by regeneration (new birth). It involves a divine miracle. The new birth is a divine miracle and always produces a change in conduct, not merely a change of mind. It opens spiritually blinded eyes. It unstops spiritually deafened ears. It raises the spiritually dead.

This supernatural change includes revelation. Paul could say, "When it pleased God to reveal His Son in me . . ." (Gal. 1:15,16). It produces repentance, faith, humility and submission. The great apostle described it in 2 Cor. 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature old things pass away; behold all things become new."

Regeneration in the Non-Lordship scheme does not necessarily result in the experience described in 2 Cor. 5:17 (a "new creation").

Since 2 Cor. 5:17 so vividly describes the results of regeneration it may be profitable to camp here for some exposition of this vivid and wonderful description of a true Christian.

"In Christ"

First, note the expression "in Christ." This expression is used 240 times in the New Testament, and is the shortest definition of a Christian in the Bible. Indeed, it is the essence of true religion. If I could only ask one question to help a person to determine his relationship to his Maker, this would be my question: ARE YOU IN CHRIST? Everything God has for you is IN CHRIST!

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

- * In Christ is our justification.
- * In Christ is our sanctification.
- * In Christ is our adoption.
- * In Christ is our wisdom.
- * In Christ is our righteousness.

"In Christ" signifies a personal relationship. It expresses the most exalted relationship that can exist-an inseparable relationship, an indestructible relationship, an unspeakable relationship that cannot be defined in word only.

Effects of Regeneration

The second important truth found in this little verse concerns the effects of regeneration: "new creation." Regeneration, (new creation) is the powerful, supernatural work of the Triune God. God the Father planned our redemption; God the Son prayed for it (John 17) and purchased it; God the Spirit effectually applies it in regeneration.

We can explain what the Spirit does, but how He does it let no man pretend to know. "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). So it is with regeneration.

Evidence of Regeneration

The third important truth found in this precious little verse is the evidence of regeneration: "Old things have passed away; behold all things have become new."

How does one know if he is regenerate? Regeneration is known by its effects. I have never known a Non-Lordship teacher to teach this about regeneration. Nevertheless, true religion cannot be less than:

1. Right thinking in relationship to God-it touches the mind.
2. Right feeling in relationship to God-it touches the affections.
3. Right acting in relationship to God-it touches the will.

Regeneration always includes: (1) the enlightening of the mind, (2) the convicting of the conscience, and (3) the renewing of the will. It is by the work of the Spirit that (1) the natural blindness is removed, (2) the natural enmity is subdued, and (3) the natural man becomes a new creature in all his views, feelings, desires, affections, aims, habits, and hopes, (although not perfectly in any one of these areas).

Lordship View Is Historic

Because of the popularity of the Scofield Bible and Dispensational teaching the Scriptural Lordship doctrine has fallen upon hard times, having been largely forgotten by the majority of fundamentalist churches. However, we must never forget that Lordship salvation has been espoused by all the historic creeds and confessions, and by such noteworthy theological giants as John Calvin, John Owen, John Bunyan, John Brown, John Murray, and thank God, embraced by many respected recent scholars and theologians, such as, Louis Berkhof, James M. Boise, John Gertsner, R. B. Kuiper, James I. Packer, A. W. Pink, R. C. Sproul and the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

A. W. Pink, in his straight-forward manner never learned how to put round corners on the square edges of divine truth. Pussyfooting was not Pink's style. He pointed out the grave dangers of the Non-Lordship teaching. He said, "In most instances the modern 'evangelist' assures his congregation that all any sinner has to do in order to escape hell and make sure of heaven is to receive Christ as his personal Savior. But such teaching is utterly misleading. No one can receive Christ as his Savior while he rejects Him as Lord. Therefore, those who have not bowed to Christ's scepter and enthroned Him in their hearts and lives, and yet imagine that they are trusting Him as Savior, are deceived" (Studies on Saving Faith, pp. 12, 13).

Confusion of Natures

The Non-Lordship teaching on regeneration does not reflect the experience described in 2 Cor. 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature old things pass away; behold all things become new." The change is "new creature," "new creation."

The Non-Lordship view teaches that a new, sinless self is implanted in the soul. This is something less than regeneration, it is not a new birth, or a rebirth of the old nature. It is the introduction of a new person altogether, a distinct psychological entity. This teaching does not make the regeneration experience a rebirth of the old soul, but rather, the making of a new, different soul. This new creature appears to be a part of the divine nature and is implanted in the soul. The result is two distinct natures in the Christian. Thus, nothing actually happens to the old nature at all. Rather, now you have two persons-one placed along side of the other.

The Lordship teachers hold that in regeneration a new disposition is implanted in the old ego, and thus the Christian is one person with two struggling principles, but not two persons in one, not two distinct natures, or selves.

In the Non-Lordship view the old nature is never changed, never sanctified at all. One question the Non-Lordship teachers do not answer is, How can the old, unchanged, depraved nature on its own exercise faith in Christ? This error of the doctrine of regeneration has a profound effect on the biblical doctrine of progressive sanctification. How can this old, com

pletely unchanged, nature yield to the Holy Spirit and become spiritual? The Non-Lordship teachers have a real problem here. How can the old nature, which is really the person, yield to the new nature? The old nature cannot do it because it remains untouched. The new nature need not yield to itself for it is altogether spiritual. This false reasoning leads to a st and-off and it undermines progressive sanctification. This would mean that a third party, a "third nature" is necessary to act as a mediator between the old and the new natures, thus making the critical choices to yield or not to yield to the ne w nature.

A regeneration that does not regenerate, but which only transplants into a person a so-called "new creature" which is not really the person and which is always separate from what the person is-this is not regeneration at all.

The Non-Lordship teachers insist on the necessity of yielding to the Spirit without any real recognition of this problem and their theological dilemma.

The Non-Lordship teachers fail to explain how a totally carnal, unregenerate will can choose to yield.

This is just one example of what I stated in our first study, that is, the Lordship-Non-Lordship issue does not stand alone but affects every major doctrine of Christianity: regeneration, repentance and faith, justification, sanctification and, assurance and our view of the Ten Commandments and their relationship to the gospel.

Old Testament Saints

The Non-Lordship teachers have a great difference among themselves with regeneration and the Old Testament saints. One of their teachers, Dwight Pentecost, taught that "the fact of the new birth (regeneration) had not been revealed in the Old Testament (The Words and Work of Jesus Christ, p. 126).

I do not know how Dr. Pentecost would interpret passages like Deut. 30:6: "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." or Ezek. 36:26, 27: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." (Chafer and Walvoord did not agree with Pentecost. See their Major Bible Themes, p. 234.)

Of course the biblical view of regeneration is the supernatural implanting of a new principle, which in turn produces a new principle of conduct which transforms a person and translates him from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light without any intermediate steps. (For Chafer's view see his Systematic Theology, Vol. 6, p. 106.) The dispensational view of regeneration has a profound effect on one's understanding of justification and sanctification and their relationship to each other.

Summary

Let me make some summary statements as to the differences between Non-Lordship teaching and Lordship teaching on the doctrine of regeneration.

These summary statements may not represent every Non-Lordship teacher because they differ among themselves on some details. Many of the best Non-Lordship teachers are now in print and what they are saying in their books cannot easily be denied. Four of the books that I have read in connection with these studies are: Balancing the Christian Life and So Great Salvation, by Charles Ryrie; Absolutely Free, by Zane Hodges and Sin, the Savior and Salvation, by Robert P. Lightner. Lightner's book is by far the best of the four. It is the most scholarly of the four.

In his book, Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, R. C. Sproul offers this definition:

Regeneration is the theological term used to describe rebirth. It refers to a new generating, a new genesis, a new beginning. It is more than "turning over a new leaf"; it marks the beginning of a new life in a radically renewed person.

Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit upon those who are spiritually dead (see Ephesians 2:1-10). The Spirit recreates the human heart, quickening it from spiritual death to spiritual life. Regenerate people are new creations.

Regeneration is not to be confused with the full experience of conversion. Just as birth is our initiation, our first entrance into life outside the womb, so our spiritual rebirth is the starting point of our spiritual life. It occurs by God's divine initiative and is an act that is sovereign, immediate, and instantaneous. An awareness of our conversion may be gradual. Yet rebirth itself is instantaneous. No one can be partially reborn any more than a woman can be partially pregnant.

Regeneration is not the fruit or result of faith. Rather, regeneration precedes faith as the necessary condition for faith. We also do not in any way dispose ourselves toward regeneration or cooperate as co-workers with the Holy Spirit to bring it to pass. We do not decide or choose to be regenerated. God chooses to regenerate us before we will ever choose to embrace Him. To be sure, after we have been regenerated by the sovereign grace of God, we do choose, act, cooperate, and believe in Christ.

Non-Lordship preachers teach that one can experience the new birth (regeneration) and not be transformed. The sinner may turn from his sin or he may not. He may change the direction of his life-style or he may not. He may be a disciple or he may not. He may love God and hate sin or he may not.

The Lordship view of regeneration is that regeneration is the supernatural work of God, whereby the sinner is transformed by the giving of new life in Christ. As a result of this new life there will also be certain changes in the sinner's life. There will be deliverance from the dominion of sin as well as a desire and a power to live a godly life. It would be impossible for one to experience regeneration and remain unchanged. Transformation is the clearest evidence of regeneration.

True conversion will result in a life that seeks after new obedience and good works. It is incredible to think that one can experience the powerful, supernatural work of regeneration and still have a rebel's heart and live a rebel's life. Certainly the new convert needs to grow in grace and knowledge and there will be a sincere desire to know and grow. His affections will be fixed on Jesus-not perfectly but purposefully. Since his will is changed in regeneration he will now have a desire to do the will of God despite of many failures. His prayer will be "Thy will be done." He will not fall into the ditch of presumption because in front of the ditch of presumption there is a hedge row of God's precepts. Nor will he fall into the ditch of despair because in front of the ditch of despair there is a hedge row of God's promises.

Yes, Christians can and do sin and sometimes grievously. Christians can stumble and fall and they make many crooked steps on their way to the Celestial City. Yes, they can grow cold and they do. Yes, there are failures and sometimes serious failures. Though the winds of temptation and weakness may blow their little ship off course, nevertheless, when the storm subsides they will always get on course again.

The Non-Lordship teaching on regeneration would hold that it is the supernatural work of God whereby the sinner is imparted new life, but not necessarily the transformation of life. Changes may or may not take place in the life of the supposed convert. There may be the power of deliverance over authority and dominion of sin or there may not be. There may be the power to live a godly life or there may not be. It could be possible to experience regeneration and remain unchanged. Transformation is not necessarily the evidence of salvation.

It must be emphasized that the differences in these two views are not minor. The doctrine of salvation is involved. The two views are as opposite as black and white, as incompatible as oil and water-a fact acknowledged on both sides of the debate. Both camps are evangelical and convinced that their position is Scriptural. One thing is clear-they cannot both be correct interpretations of the Bible.

One of the fundamental differences between the Lordship teaching and the Non-Lordship teaching is just where they place regeneration in their *ordo salutis* (order of salvation).

The Lordship teaching puts the order of salvation as follows: 1) Regeneration, 2) Faith (which includes repentance), 3) Justification, 4) Sanctification (distinct from but always joined to justification), and 5) Glorification.

The Non-Lordship teachers have much disagreement among themselves on the order of salvation; however, I do not know of one of their leading teachers who agree with the Lordship view. For further insight into the work of regeneration consult these Baptist sources: James P. Boyce's *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, pp. 373ff, and John L. Dagg's *Manual of Theology*, pp. 277ff.

Re: Lordship and Regeneration - posted by sojourner7 (), on: 2007/8/7 19:59

Without surrender of the heart and will,
there can be no conversion. Until we
are fully yielded to the authority and
Lordship of Christ, there can be no
regeneration. Regeneration is a new,
spiritual nature which is the Spirit of
Christ's purpose and work!!

Re: - posted by roaringlamb (), on: 2007/8/7 20:08

Quote:

-----Until we are fully yielded to the authority and Lordship of Christ there can be no regeneration

If this were the case, no one would be regenerated. Regeneration is the sovereign work of God in which He changes the heart so that believing in Christ, and repenting of sin are fruits of this regeneration, but they are not causes of it.

Also, if regeneration were based upon my yieldedness to Christ, then it would be up and down, and up and down, as is my yielding to Christ upon any day, or any moment. But thank God, Christ is our Mediator who intercedes perfectly for us before God. His work, and His merit alone are how we stand before Him.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2007/8/7 20:57

He who saves his life will lose it, but he who loses his life will find it...

edit

There is no resurrection without death. And a death that is not total is not death.