

**General Topics :: Regeneration precedes Faith by R.C. Sproul****Regeneration precedes Faith by R.C. Sproul - posted by BlazedbyGod, on: 2009/1/25 23:17**

One of the most dramatic moments in my life for the shaping of my theology took place in a seminary classroom. One of my professors went to the blackboard and wrote these words in bold letters: "Regeneration Precedes Faith."

These words were a shock to my system. I had entered seminary believing that the key work of man to effect rebirth was faith. I thought that we first had to believe in Christ in order to be born again. I use the words in order here for a reason. I was thinking in terms of steps that must be taken in a certain sequence. I had put faith at the beginning. The order looked something like this:

"Faith - rebirth -justification."

I hadn't thought that matter through very carefully. Nor had I listened carefully to Jesus' words to Nicodemus. I assumed that even though I was a sinner, a person born of the flesh and living in the flesh, I still had a little island of righteousness, a tiny deposit of spiritual power left within my soul to enable me to respond to the Gospel on my own. Perhaps I had been confused by the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Rome, and many other branches of Christendom, had taught that regeneration is gracious; it cannot happen apart from the help of God.

No man has the power to raise himself from spiritual death. Divine assistance is necessary. This grace, according to Rome, comes in the form of what is called prevenient grace. "Prevenient" means that which comes from something else. Rome adds to this prevenient grace the requirement that we must "cooperate with it and assent to it" before it can take hold in our hearts.

This concept of cooperation is at best a half-truth. Yes, the faith we exercise is our faith. God does not do the believing for us. When I respond to Christ, it is my response, my faith, my trust that is being exercised. The issue, however, goes deeper. The question still remains: "Do I cooperate with God's grace before I am born again, or does the cooperation occur after?" Another way of asking this question is to ask if regeneration is monergistic or synergistic. Is it operative or cooperative? Is it effectual or dependent? Some of these words are theological terms that require further explanation.

A monergistic work is a work produced singly, by one person. The prefix mono means one. The word erg refers to a unit of work. Words like energy are built upon this root. A synergistic work is one that involves cooperation between two or more persons or things. The prefix syn -

means "together with." I labor this distinction for a reason. The debate between Rome and Luther hung on this single point. At issue was this: Is regeneration a monergistic work of God or a synergistic work that requires cooperation between man and God? When my professor wrote "Regeneration precedes faith" on the blackboard, he was clearly siding with the monergistic answer. After a person is regenerated, that person cooperates by exercising faith and trust. But the first step is the work of God and of God alone.

The reason we do not cooperate with regenerating grace before it acts upon us and in us is because we cannot. We cannot because we are spiritually dead. We can no more assist the Holy Spirit in the quickening of our souls to spiritual life than Lazarus could help Jesus raise him for the dead.

When I began to wrestle with the Professor's argument, I was surprised to learn that his strange-sounding teaching was not novel. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield - even the great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas taught this doctrine. Thomas Aquinas is the Doctor Angelicus of the Roman Catholic Church. For centuries his theological teaching was accepted as official dogma by most Catholics. So he was the last person I expected to hold such a view of regeneration. Yet Aquinas insisted that regenerating grace is operative grace, not cooperative grace. Aquinas spoke of prevenient grace, but he spoke of a grace that comes before faith, which is regeneration.

These giants of Christian history derived their view from Holy Scripture. The key phrase in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians is this: "...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have you been saved)" (Eph. 2:5). Here Paul locates the time when regeneration occurs. It takes place 'when we were dead.' With one thunderbolt of apostolic revelation all attempts to give the initiative in regeneration to man are smashed. Again, dead men do not

cooperate with grace. Unless regeneration takes place first, there is no possibility of faith.

This says nothing different from what Jesus said to Nicodemus. Unless a man is born again first, he cannot possibly see or enter the kingdom of God. If we believe that faith precedes regeneration, then we set our thinking and therefore our lives in direct opposition not only to giants of Christian history but also to the teaching of Paul and of our Lord Himself.

(from the book, The Mystery of the Holy Spirit, Tyndale House, 1990

Re: Regeneration precedes Faith by R.C. Sproul - posted by BlazedbyGod, on: 2009/1/25 23:32

If regeneration precedes faith-then how is that statement reconciled with:

Acts 8: 9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. 11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 **Then Simon himself believed also:** and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.....17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. 18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money **perish with thee**, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: **for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps thou hast thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.**

And with:

Luke 8:13 They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, **which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away**

If regeneration precedes faith-then what of the individuals spoken of in Luke 8:13, which are said by Christ to "believe for awhile"? Though they believe for awhile-to believe in regeneration preceding faith; wouldn't that mean you would have to believe in saints possibly losing their salvation-based upon the story of Simon in Acts 8 and the people spoken of in Luke 8:14-

And how do these verses pertain to: John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Re: Regeneration precedes Faith by R.C. Sproul - posted by MikeH, on: 2009/1/26 4:04

Mindful that I am entering into the classic Calvinism/Arminianism debate, which are always very dangerous waters, and also that at present anyway you seem to be talking to yourself :-), I will however enter a couple of comments.

Blazed by God quoted:

Quote:
-----The reason we do not cooperate with regenerating grace before it acts upon us and in us is because we cannot. We cannot because we are spiritually dead.

There seems no question that even if we are dead, we can still hear, as Jesus says here: John 5:25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. and if we can hear then it appears that we can have faith: Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing. And as well, it appears that we can hear before we live, and living seems to be another way of saying being regenerate.

And there is a clear indication in scripture, that while we are dead, and indeed desperately wicked, something remains of what was originally created as we read here: Malachi 2:15 Yet had he the residue of the spirit.

Kind regards

Mike

Re: - posted by intrcssr83 (), on: 2009/1/26 7:04

Quote:

-----by BlazedbyGod on 2009/1/26 11:32:11

If regeneration precedes faith-then how is that statement reconciled with:

Acts 8: 9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. 11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.....17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. 18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

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If regeneration precedes faith-then what of the individuals spoken of in Luke 8:13, which are said by Christ to "believe for awhile"? Though they believe for awhile-to believe in regeneration preceding faith; wouldn't that mean you would have to believe in saints possibly losing their salvation-based upon the story of Simon in Acts 8 and the people spoken of in Luke 8:14-

And how do these verses pertain to: John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

The examples of "belief" you gave were just that: belief. What we see here is what we in our modern linguo would classify as "easy-believism"; just a momentary decision based on mere mental assent with little to nothing to show of actual divine enablement or intervention when it comes to actually being born again.

Jesus said:

Mat 7:15 Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Mat 7:16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

Mat 7:17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Mat 7:18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Mat 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Mat 7:20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Mat 7:21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Mat 7:22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'

Mat 7:23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Simon of Samaria was a clear example of what Jesus warned. He vocally professed "Lord, Lord!" He performed miracles, signs and wonders. But his motive for following Christ was the very sin he eventually exposed his hypocrisy: Sorcery. He didn't come to Jesus with brokenness and repentance over his sin; to the contrary, his motive was the hope that becoming a Christian would actually enhance his lifestyle, that he could effectively have his cake and eat it too.

When he was rebuked by Peter, it was not as a Christian admonishing a brother in the faith, but rather exposing an obvious wolf in sheep's clothing. Simon was not of those born of the spirit who would be convicted of "guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment"; he was still an unchanged captive to the spirit of sorcery.

Simon of Samaria was nothing short of a False Convert.

Period.

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2009/1/26 7:32

One of the great challenging passages in this debate is found in Acts 19:1, 2:

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

They believed, but they had not *consciously* received the Holy Spirit. They admitted the fact and then they received the Holy Spirit. To use the language of Galatians 3, they had not yet begun in the Spirit until this moment when Paul prays for them.

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

The Galatians received the Holy Spirit as a result of the hearing of faith. They knew that they had begun in the Spirit and had received the Holy Spirit. The issue with the Galatians is, why did they try to do in the flesh what can only come about in the Spirit? Some do it because they don't know any better. They have 'heard' (unlike those in Acts 19) but have not received the Spirit so they substitute legalism for the One Baptism.

So with the subject of when regeneration takes place, we have to ask if a person can be regenerate that has not consciously received the Holy Spirit? Regeneration is more than bringing a person to faith in Christ, it is the making of a New Creature. Out with the spirit that now works in the Children of disobedience and in with the Holy Spirit that works in us both to will and do His good pleasure. It is a new heart and God 'causing' us to walk in His ways. We are baptized by the Holy Spirit *into* Jesus Christ.

Can a man be in Christ that has not yet believed or received the Holy Spirit? I'm being careful now with my language so as to make a point, can a person that is not consciously able to answer 'yes' to the Acts 19 question really be regenerate?

Re: , on: 2009/1/26 7:54

Oh boy... as soon as we recover from the Christmas debate we start right in with the Calvinism debate.

The Lord's really been convicting me lately about a lot of the debating that goes on here, and the part I've played in it. That's why y'all haven't heard much from me since the end of 2008.

Krispy

Re: - posted by rbanks, on: 2009/1/26 8:51

Quote:

KrispyKrittr wrote:

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Krispy

Krispy,

I can appreciate your reply. It's good to hear from you over there in western nc, we just got snow last week over here in eastern nc.

It seems the debate will go on until the end of the age.

There is a group who seems to want to give all the glory to God by saying they are regenerated before they even believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is the other group (I'm included) who want to give God the glory for regeneration by believing on his son Jesus Christ.

I have always taken regeneration to mean being born of the Spirit. The scripture is filled with things like to those who believe in Christ Jesus has life but those who believe not do not have eternal life.

We must say what the scripture says to those who believe and is baptized shall be saved and to those who believe not shall be damned.

Romans 4:24-25 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Romans 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

I have no problem believing that God caused me to believe in his Son, caused me to be regenerated, caused me to walk in his way but to say that he regenerated me before I believed is nowhere to be found in the scripture. God will not side step his Son and regenerate a person before they believe in his Son and his sacrifice for them.

I believe a person is convicted by the Holy Spirit first. God does not have a select group that he regenerates before they believe without any responsibility to believe the record of God's Son. I believe we will be held accountable for saying things the scriptures do not say. God is very serious about his Son and the sacrifice He made. He will not regenerate anyone that does not believe in His Son. He can convict you and lead you to believe in His Son if you do not resist Him. There is no regeneration apart from Christ and his atonement and it can only be effective to those who believe.

Blessings to all!

Re: - posted by crsschk (), on: 2009/1/26 9:39

Quote:

-----So with the subject of when regeneration takes place

...

The amount of verses that flood the mind ...

Mat 13:19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

Mat 13:23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

The whole parable, *hearing* and *receiving* ... and 'understandeth'. But that is only to lift up those aspects, not tear them out from the context.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Joh 3:8

This verse has always ran right up to the front when it comes to these things. Why is it that John states that we *cannot* tell 'whence it comes' yet we being either lawyers or self inflicting brain surgeons say 'Oh yes we can'?

Hyperbole to some extent but just one more, something that came to mind the last round of ... the fight that never ends;

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 2Co 4:4

Have been wanting to stick this, slice it right into the core of these constructs - These sequential orderings ... of who does what, of our ability or inability, will or 'free-will' ... I am being careful also how I choose my words, but taking it as it is written, *now* whose fault is it? It's not a question seeking an answer, just one to muse on ...

Just as well, there is yet another that parallels it, actually a few - Plug 'blinded' into a bible search engine and see them.

The point? I think we are too analytical, too self-surgical, too didactic for our own good. There's another word that comes to mind, too easy to be misconstrued but it has to do with being overly occupied with our ... brains, our navels.

Have been reading a sort of autobiography on John Newton and it is tracking at the moment his conversion - At first something, in his mind, of a more legal transaction (*Legal*, again - think lawyers) and his decision to change his ways, make certain proscriptions going forward, holy living, etc. By his own admission he failed at all of them not soon after. I am hardly making a case to contradict myself here but he did get to a point of surrender and believed that *that* was the turning point, that he had been freed from the power of sin, if not it's effects. This is still quite early on and it doesn't take a lot of imagination having read some of his later works to recognize that this was not a sort of finality to everything. The line that stuck out was lifted from another Puritan if I recall correctly, it was on the order of this new life *being one continual conversion*.

I have no qualms with Sproul, like him actually, learned a great deal from him. I made a mention elsewhere to a brother about all this to speak in generalities, *just one more thing*. Isn't this what these things amount to? Are we academics studying faith as 'law' not in the scriptural sense, NTOT sense but as a *practice*? Or are we something akin to spiritual botanists, probing and digging around, explaining and extrapolating all the intricacies of a seed germinating and too often uprooting it with our heavy shovels?

Maybe it is just me but the results, the 'fruit' as we are to take note of because it is obvious, not as 'inspectors' as some seem to think they have been gifted as, is this not the import? A seed that starts and dies is evident by it's withered effects and one that is growing ... is it not obvious enough?

I think there is an element of pride in wanting to be able to explain all these things when they are couched and purposeful

ully surrounded in mystery. Taking it all apart, measuring it, micro-surgery, analyzing - It seems little wonder that there is so much heated argument when we scientists\academics\lawyers\brain surgeons - mostly amateurs at that come to different hypotheses and want to convince everyone that we have it all so perfectly ordered.

Random musings here, thats all.

Roberts;

Quote:
-----He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

More than received, *have*. Do you *have* something, Someone? Was not their concern not *how did you get here*, but, in a sense, 'are you here?' Do you *have* the Holy Spirit, by reception.

How long might a seed lie dormant, even in good soil before it sprouts shoots? I can still recall both here at home and growing up when some plant or flower that was long given up as dead, suddenly one year came back - "Well look at that!"

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2009/1/26 10:14

Quote:
-----I can still recall both here at home and growing up when some plant or flower that was long given up as dead, suddenly one year came back - "Well look at that!"

I really had a big smile at this point cause I can so relate to it. We have the seasons in the Midwest and sometimes we see flowers coming up and will near run them over with the mower forgetting they are there. There has to be a sermon in that somewhere... :-P

Re: , on: 2009/1/26 12:27

Quote:
-----There is a group who seems to want to give all the glory to God by saying they are regenerated before they even believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is the other group (IÂ'm included) who want to give God the glory for regeneration by believing on his son Jesus Christ.

To paraphrase Paul Washer... who cares when it happened so long as it happened?

It's better to have it, but be theologically wrong than to be theologically correct and not have!

Amen, brother?

Krispy

Re: - posted by White_Stone (), on: 2009/1/26 14:07

Quote:
-----To paraphrase Paul Washer... who cares when it happened so long as it happened? It's better to have it, but be theologically wrong than to be theologically correct and not have!

How much simpler can it be?

I have been avoiding this thread because it makes me uncomfortable to read something stated as fact and then read it refuted in the opening reply. I think this just serves to cause confusion.

Maybe some new Christian would happen to read this thread and become hopelessly confused. . .

I agree with Krispy, 100%

white stone

Re: - posted by roadsign (), on: 2009/1/26 19:17

Quote:
----- The point? I think we are too analytical, too self-surgical, too didactic for our own good. There's another word that comes to mind, too easy to be misconstrued but it has to do with being overly occupied with our ... brains, our navels.

Since this seems to be a common tendency and it can be harmful, as you point out, Mike, should we not ask: Why do we do this? Or is that an overly analytical question?

I believe that there are times when we need to exercise more careful scrutiny and times when we need to relinquish our penchant to categorize all data into definable, controllable slots.

Quote:
----- To paraphrase Paul Washer... who cares when it happened so long as it happened?

There may be truth in this, but when it comes to spirituality we don't want to swing the pendulum too far the other way!

Diane

Re: - posted by graceamazed (), on: 2009/1/26 22:41

Quote:
-----Taking it all apart, measuring it, micro-surgery, analyzing - It seems little wonder that there is so much heated argument when we scientists\academics\lawyers\brain surgeons - mostly amateurs at that come to different hypotheses and want to convince everyone that we have it all so perfectly ordered.

I get so frustrated when I hear secular, atheistic professors and scientists give lectures in their fields of study, be it botany or astrology, and proclaim with such bold certainty and self-ascribed authority all the processes and evolutions of nature. They handle their subjects as though they are above them and have somehow mastered them, yet the greatest among them can not form from scratch a simple seed and cause it to grow. They should realize they are fools in comparison to the complexity of even the simplest of plant life. How much more should we understand that the best among us will still be a fool compared to the complexity of the divine purposes of God and the depth of wisdom with which He operates in the hearts of men. Let us observe and learn and stand in awe of His greatness as we see more and more of how He o

perates, but let us not be so arrogant as to believe that we Arminians or we Calvinists have systematized the workings of God into OUR silly little acronyms and methodical explanations.

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" Romans 11:33