



Regeneration

Note: The Scripture references in this hand-out are taken from the New King James Version.

What are we talking about when we speak of regeneration?

This is the work that God does in us when we are saved. This is also referred to as the “new birth.”

What is the difference between conversion and regeneration?

The two events are closely related but there is a key doctrinal difference between them... In all of God’s dealings with mankind, there is a divine side and a human side. For example:

2 Peter 1:21 - prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The human side here is “holy men of God spoke” and the divine side is “they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” There was a human and divine side to Jesus Christ. Likewise, there is a human and divine side to our salvation, the human side is conversion, the divine side is regeneration.

Let’s take a look at one of the most important passages that helps us understand our new birth... the occasion where Jesus had an interview with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin:

John 3:3-8

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

8 "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."

What does Jesus say must happen to you to see the kingdom of God? (John 3:3)

You must be born again. This phrase literally means "born from above."

What is the kingdom of God?

In context, this is primarily a reference to participation in the millennial kingdom at the end of the age which was fervently anticipated by the Pharisees and other Jews.

What did Nicodemus think Jesus was talking about when He said you must be born-again? (John 3:4)

Nicodemus’ response regarding physical birth indicated that he had no idea what Jesus meant and was incredulous at what he was hearing.

How does Jesus describe what it means to be born-again?

Jesus describes this as being born of the water and the Spirit.

What does the water in John 3:5 refer to?

The term water is another reference to the Holy Spirit, or the cleansing and life-giving activity of the Holy Spirit.

- This is reinforced by the Greek grammar which indicates that the two items are one concept.
- It is appropriate that Jesus said we are born-again by the water and the Spirit because the cleansing effect of the Holy Spirit is often represented in Scripture by water.

What is the difference of being born of the flesh and born of the Spirit?

Humans can only produce more flesh. Only God, the divine Spirit can give spiritual life. At the same time God puts his Spirit in us, we are given a new regenerated human spirit. Our role is to listen to and obey the Holy Spirit whom we are now able to understand because we are a new creature in Christ.

What does the comparison of the wind which blows where it wishes tell us about those who are born of the Spirit?

Jesus’ point was that just as the wind cannot be controlled or understood by human beings but its effects can be witnessed, so also it is with the Holy Spirit. He cannot be controlled or understood, but the proof of His work is apparent. Where the Spirit works, there is undeniable and unmistakable evidence.

How is being born-again a re-creation?

2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Those who are born again have a whole new life.

What has passed away for the believer?

For the believer, certain things have passed away such as old values that are focused on the material world which itself is passing away...

1 John 2:17 - And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Our perspective changes to view all things in the context of eternity. Our values begin to be aligned with God's.

How is being born-again a resurrection?

1 Thessalonians 5:23 - Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We usually think of resurrection in terms of our bodies but as God is three persons and we are made in the image of God, people have three components.

What is the distinction between the body soul and spirit?

The body is that part of us that relates to our environment; the soul is our inner self, the seat of our emotions and personality, the spirit is that part of us which has the capacity to commune with God. Since God is Spirit, we need a spiritual component to know Him. The Bible helps us to make this distinction...

Hebrews 4:12 - For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

How does the Bible help us to distinguish between what comes from our soul and what comes from our spirit?

If our human spirit is tuned into the Holy Spirit, our thoughts are going to be consistent with the Bible since it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Our soul may give us ideas that we may even think are from God but can not be if they contradict God's Word.

What was resurrected when we were born-again?

If God saved us, He has saved all of us... body soul and spirit. The saved don't have to wait for the resurrection of our human spirits as we do our souls and bodies...

Eph 2:1 - And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

People are born with dead spirits. While all people have a human spirit, only those God has saved have a regenerated human spirit. Before they are born spiritually, all people are dead to the things of God.

How does having a born-again spirit enable us to see things from God's perspective?

1 Corinthians 2:14 - But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to

him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Having a regenerated human spirit which is able to respond to God's Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to see things from God's perspective...

Romans 8:16 - The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

Is this automatic, do we instantly start seeing things from God's perspective?

Seeing things from God's perspective is not automatic because we still have our old sin nature while we're in these mortal bodies. But being born again renews our mind so that we may choose God's way. Without a regenerated human spirit, we had no choice but to take the selfish path and do what is contrary to God. So as born-again believers, the Scriptures remind us...

Romans 12:2 - do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

What is given to us when we are regenerated?

Ezekiel 36:26 - 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.

God imparts to us a new heart... He removes our dead human spirit and gives us a new human spirit that is alive to Him.

Does this mean that we should no longer have a sin nature?

No, our sin nature is resident in our soul:

Micah 6:7 - Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

The soul will not be resurrected until our body is.

Acts 2:31 - he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.

Back to our text in John, why must we be born again?

The greatest necessity of being born-again is to be able to enjoy eternal life in heaven. Jesus made this very clear in our text...

John 3, 5 - Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

The kingdom of God is where God is, heaven. Jesus said that without being born-again a person can not even see heaven much less enter in.

How did God make us born-again? (John 3:6)

- When we are born-again, God's Holy Spirit breaths life into our human spirit. Jesus said, "*that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" (John 3:6)
- If your human spirit is not alive to God, you are not really alive. Those who are not born-again have a **still-born spirit**. Most do not know it because they are among the walking dead...
Ephesians 2:1 - And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins

While it is the Holy Spirit who breaths life into our human spirit, what instrument does He use to help us come to the knowledge of the truth?

1 Peter 1:23 - having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

The Word of God is what the Holy Spirit uses to reveal the truth to us:

James 1:18 - Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth,

It is the Holy Spirit who authored the Word of God and He uses it to reveal Christ to us.

How do we know that we've been born again? Do we need some sort of supernatural experience to confirm this?

There may well be some sort of supernatural experience accompanying your being born again but I believe this is the exception rather than the rule.

- And consider this: the very fact that you have changed your attitude toward God is supernatural.

The greatest way we know we've been saved is that we now have faith in God's Word where we didn't before.

1 John 5:4 - For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith.

Our faith is very real to us because...

Romans 8:16 - The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

How do born-again believers know that they have a capacity to understand the truth?

They discover that they can now understand God's Word where before it was dry and worthless to them, now it is alive...

1 Corinthians 2:14 - But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

They find they have a hunger to know God's Word

1 Peter 2:2-3 - as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

What kind of evidence of being born-again should there be to the world?

There will be changes in your life. This is why many people refuse Christ because they like their life of sin and don't really want to change.

Ps 34:8 - Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

Jesus reinforced this when He said:

Matthew 11:29-30 - "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

So does it mean we are perfect when we are born-again?

When we are born-again and still in these mortal bodies, we still have our old sin nature so we will not be immune to sin, but there should be visible changes where habitual sins are no longer displayed over time...

1 John 3:9 - Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

God sees us in our eternal state which will not have a sin nature, that is why the Holy Spirit is able to dwell in us. However, as a near term practical matter in the world, we have to make choices to sin or not which while our eternal destiny is a settled matter, our sins have consequences both now and in eternity.

Conclusion

How does Jesus' description of how we enter the kingdom of God correct human hopes that we may somehow inherit goodness from our parents, or earn it by good behavior or church background?

At some point we must answer the question: Have I been born of the Spirit?

Are the words of Jesus, "you must be born again" a challenge or an invitation?

Both - it is a challenge because you can not enter into the Kingdom of God without being born again. It is also an invitation in that it is not something we can do on our own, Jesus is saying, "allow me to do this for you".