

I. You Must Be Born Again

- A. The term *regeneration* is synonymous with being born again. Our Lord used the phrase "born again," recorded in John, the third chapter. In the dialogue recorded there, to whom was Jesus speaking? (Read John 3:1-3.)

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin.

How did the man come to Jesus? Why?

Secretly — because he did not want others (Pharisees) to know that he wanted to have anything to do with Jesus.

What does this tell us about people who are thinking about the Christian faith?

They may be embarrassed that they need help or instruction. They often are concerned about what others may think about them. This is especially true of the highly educated and socially prominent — as Nicodemus was.

Did Jesus wait for him to ask a question before providing him with an answer?

No. He immediately went to the root of Nicodemus' need by telling him "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Why do you suppose Jesus said what is recorded in 3:3?

Because He knew what was on Nicodemus' mind even before he told Him. He also knew that only those God had already quickened (regenerated) would be able to truly understand what He was going to tell Nicodemus. He was implicitly offering a positive challenge to a respected religious leader to consider that he was dependent on God to understand even the most basic truths of the kingdom of God.

- B. Read 1 Corinthians 2:14-16 and Ezekiel 11:19 and comment on what they tell us about men prior to regeneration.

Paul explains to the Corinthians that "natural man" (unregenerate man) cannot truly understand spiritual truth. Ezekiel describes the heart of an unregenerate man as a "heart of stone." He goes on to describe what happens in regeneration as the "heart of stone" is replaced with a "heart of flesh." This is a description of regeneration as the "heart of flesh" is receptive to the Word of God.

Read Jeremiah 13:23 and discuss what it explains regarding man's inability to truly change his nature of his own accord.

Man's fallen nature is just as inalterable as the pigmentation of one's skin. The point is, of course, that only God can change a man's heart.

- C. Returning to the third chapter of John, read John 3:15-21 and discuss what Jesus explains regarding those who do not believe in Him.

Those who believe in Jesus will be saved, but those who reject Him as Savior and Lord remain under condemnation. (Note that they are already under judgment even before rejecting Christ.) The fact that a man rejects Jesus as He is offered in the gospel reveals the state of his heart. Those who reject Jesus are unregenerate. Jesus actually provokes hostility in the unregenerate because he exposes the wicked state of their hearts. Light always hurts the eyes of those who have been living in extreme darkness.

D. R.C. Sproul describes regeneration in his book, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. He writes:

“Regeneration is the theological term used to describe rebirth. It refers to a new generating, a new genesis, a new beginning...the work of the Holy Spirit upon those who are spiritually dead...The Spirit recreates the human heart...In regeneration, God plants a desire for Himself in the human heart that otherwise would not be there.”

Does regeneration (being born again) occur before or after conversion?

Logically speaking, regeneration must precede conversion. Chronologically speaking, the two events (regeneration and conversion) may in fact be simultaneous events. What is clear is that regeneration cannot logically follow conversion!

When someone is referred to as a born-again Christian, what sort of person is being described?

The phrase ‘born-again Christian’ is actually redundant since all people must already have been born again in order to trust in Christ. Notwithstanding that, the description is calling our attention to the fact that Christians are not born into the faith but must be reborn into the faith.

E. If men must be born again in order to understand spiritual truth, is there any point in speaking about spiritual truth to unbelievers? (See Matthew 7:6 and Acts 17:16-32.)

In Matthew 7:6, our Lord makes it clear that unregenerate men not only won’t receive spiritual truth but may react in derision and hostility. In spite of that, Paul did not hesitate to speak on Mars Hill about the existence of God and religious truth. Luke wrote of Paul’s experience, “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, ‘We shall hear you again concerning this’” (v33). Then in the next verse, “But some men joined him and believed”(v34). God uses His Word in unexpected ways, but the wise man (witness) will be aware of the spiritual condition of those he is speaking to. He will anticipate that some — perhaps most — will reject the truth of the gospel.

F. For further discussion:

1. Can you remember a time in your life when spiritual truths that you now live by seemed like foolishness to you?

***requires a personal response**

2. Is there anyone in your life now that seems to be incapable of understanding even the most basic and fundamental truths of Scripture? (for example, that the scriptures teach that all are sinners or the particulars of the gospel)

***requires a personal response**

3. If men must be acted on by God the Holy Spirit (regenerated) in order to truly hear spiritual truths, what is the most important thing believers can do for the lost?

They can pray that God will open their hearts and minds by regenerating them.

4. Does a better understanding of regeneration encourage or discourage you as you seek to understand redemption more thoroughly?

It should encourage believers as they realize that God loved them, as evidenced by His initiation of the application of redemption through the effectual (internal) call of the gospel and regeneration. It also is an encouragement to understand why some folks simply *don’t get it!*

5. Is it necessary that a man be born again in order to understand the facts of the gospel? (that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day)

Any person capable of listening can know the facts of the gospel and, at some level, even attest that they are true. In order for a man to see his own sin as God sees it and

recognize his need of Christ as *personal* Savior, he must be born again. When a person understands the application of the gospel in an intensely personal way rather than merely as hypothetical information, God is at work.