**THE FUNDAMENTALS: A TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH**

**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 9. THE NATURE OF REGENERATION**

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**CORRECTING FALSE CONCEPTIONS**

For the better understanding of the nature of regeneration, take this along with you, in the first place, that as there are false conceptions in nature, so there are also in grace: by these many are deluded, mistaking some partial changes made upon them for this great and thorough change. To remove such mistakes, let these few things be considered:

**1.** Many call the Church their mother, whom God will not own to be His children. "My mother's children," that is, false brethren, "were angry with me" (Cant. 1:6). All that are baptized, are not born again. Simon was baptized, yet still "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:13-23). Where Christianity is the religion of the country, many are called by the name of Christ, who have no more of Him than the name: and no wonder, for the devil had his goats among Christ's sheep, in those places where but few professed the Christian religion. "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2: 19).

**2.** Good education is not regeneration. Education may chain up men's lusts, but cannot change their hearts. A wolf is still a ravenous beast, though it be in chains. Joash was very devout during the life of his good tutor Jehoiada; but afterwards he quickly showed what spirit he was of, by his sudden apostasy (2 Chron. 24:2-18). Good example is of mighty influence to change the outward man; but that change often goes off when a man changes his company; of which the world affords many sad instances.

**3.** A turning from open profanity to civility and sobriety falls short of this saving change. Some are, for a while, very loose, especially in their younger years; but at length they reform, and leave their profane courses. Here is a change, yet only such as may be found in men utterly void of the grace of God, and whose righteousness is so far from exceeding, that it does not come up to the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

**4.** One may engage in all the outward duties of religion, and yet not be born again. Though lead be cast into various shapes, it remains still but a base metal. Men may escape the pollutions of the world, and yet be but dogs and swine (2 Pet. 2: 20-22). All the external acts of religion are within the compass of natural abilities. Yea, hypocrites may have the counterfeit of all the graces of the Spirit: for we read of "true holiness" (Eph. 4:23); and "faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:15); which shows us that there is a counterfeit holiness, and a feigned faith.

**5.** Men may advance to a great deal of strictness in their own way of religion, and yet be strangers to the new birth. "After the most straightest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5). Nature has its own unsanctified strictness in religion. The Pharisees had so much of it that they looked on Christ as little better than a mere libertine. A man whose conscience has been awakened, and who lives under the felt influence of the covenant of works, what will he not do that is within the compass of natural abilities? It is a truth, though it came out of a hellish mouth, that "skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2:4).

**6.** A person may have sharp soul-exercises and pangs, and yet die in the birth. Many "have been in pain," that have but, as it were, "brought forth wind." There may be sore pangs and throes of conscience, which turn to nothing at last. Pharaoh and Simon Magus had such convictions as made them desire the prayers of others for them. Judas repented himself; and under terrors of conscience, gave back his ill-gotten pieces of silver. All is not gold that glitters. Trees may blossom fairly in the spring, on which no fruit is to be found in the harvest: and some have sharp soul exercises, which are nothing but foretastes of hell.

**NEW BIRTH STUNTED**

The new birth, however in appearance hopefully begun, may be marred two ways:

**1.** First, Some, like Zarah (Gen. 38:28, 29), are brought to the birth, but go back again. They have sharp convictions for a while; but these go off, and they become as careless about their salvation, and as profane as ever and usually worse than ever; "their last state is worse than their first" (Matt. 12:45). They get awakening grace, but not converting grace and that goes off by degrees as the light of the declining day, till it issue in midnight darkness.

**2.** Secondly, Some, like Ishmael, come forth too soon; they are born before the time of the promise. (Gen. 16:2; compare Gal. 4:22, etc.) They take up with a mere law-work, and stay not till the time of the promise of the Gospel. They snatch at consolation, not waiting till it be given them; and foolishly draw their comfort from the law that wounded them. They apply the healing plaster to themselves, before their wound is sufficiently searched. The law, that rigorous husband, severely beats them, and throws in curses and vengeance upon their souls; then they fall to reforming, praying, mourning, promising, and vowing, till this ghost be laid; which done, they fall asleep again in the arms of the law: but they are never shaken out of themselves and their own righteousness, nor brought forward to Jesus Christ.

**3.** Lastly, There may be a wonderful moving of the affections, in souls that are not at all touched with regenerating grace. Where there is no grace, there may, notwithstanding, be a flood of tears, as in Esau, "who found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. 12:17). There may be great flashes of joy; as in the hearers of the Word, represented in the parable by the stony ground, who "anon with joy receive it" (Matt. 13:20). There may also be great desires after good things, and great delight in them too; as in those hypocrites described in Isa. 58:2: "Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways: they take delight in approaching to God." See how high they may sometimes stand, who yet fall away (Heb. 6:4-6). They may be ''enlightened, taste of the heavenly gift," be "partakers of the Holy Ghost, taste the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come." Common operations of the Divine Spirit, like a land flood, make a strange turning of things upside down: but when they are over, all runs again in the ordinary channel. All these things may be, where the sanctifying Spirit of Christ never rests upon the soul, but the stony heart still remains; and in that case these affections cannot but wither, because they have no root.

**TRUE REGENERATION**

But regeneration is a real thorough change, whereby the man is made a new creature. (2 Cor. 5:17.) The Lord God makes the creature a new creature, as the goldsmith melts down the vessel of dishonor, and makes it a vessel of honor. Man is, in respect of his spiritual state, altogether disjointed by the fall; every faculty of the soul is, as it were, dislocated: in regeneration the Lord loosens every joint, and sets it right again. Now this change made in regeneration, is:

**1.** A change of qualities or dispositions: it is not a change of the substance, but of the qualities of the soul. Vicious qualities are removed, and the contrary dispositions are brought in, in their room. "The old man is put off" (Eph. 4:22); "the new man put on" (ver. 24). Man lost none of the rational faculties of his soul by sin: he had an understanding still, but it was darkened; he had still a will, but it was contrary to the will of God. So in regeneration, there is not a new substance created, but new qualities are infused; light instead of darkness, righteousness instead of unrighteousness.

**2.** It is a supernatural change: he that is born again, is born of the Spirit. (John 3:5.) Great changes may be made by the power of nature, especially when assisted by external revelation. Nature may be so elevated by the common influences of the Spirit, that a person may thereby be turned into another man, as Saul was, (1 Sam. 10:6,) who yet never becomes a new man. But in regeneration, nature itself is changed, and we become partakers of the Divine nature; and this must needs be a supernatural change. How can we, that are dead in trespasses and sins, renew ourselves, more than a dead man can raise himself out of his grave? Who but the sanctifying Spirit of Christ can form Christ in a soul, changing it into the same image? Who but the Spirit of sanctification can give the new heart? Well may we say, when we see a man thus changed: "This is the finger of God."

**3.** It is a change into the likeness of God: "We, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image" (2 Cor. 3:18). Everything that generates, generates its like; the child bears the image of the parent; and they that are born of God bear God's image. Man aspiring to be as God, made himself like the devil. In his natural state he resembles the devil, as a child doth his father. "Ye are of your father the devil" (John 8:44). But when this happy change comes, that image of Satan is defaced, and the image of God is restored. Christ Himself, who is the brightness of His Father's glory, is the pattern after which the new creature is made. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did pre-destinate, to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). Hence He is said to be formed in the regenerate. (Gal. 4:19.)

**4.** It is a universal change: "all things become new," (2 Cor. 5:17). Original sin infects the whole man; and regenerating grace, which is the salve, goes as far as the sore. This fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness; goodness of the mind, goodness of the will, goodness of the affections, goodness of the whole man. He gets not only a new head, to know religion, or a new tongue to talk of it; but a new heart, to love and embrace it in the whole of his conversation.