

## ARE YOU REGENERATE?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup>“The subject of regeneration, of being born again, is a most important one at any time. Those words of our Lord Jesus Christ to Nicodemus are very solemn, “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3). The world has gone through many changes since those words were spoken. Empires and kingdoms have risen and fallen. Great men and wise men have lived, labored, and died. But there stands the rule of the Lord Jesus, unaltered and unchanged. And there it will stand till heaven and earth shall pass: “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*”

But the subject is one which is doubly important in the present day. Things have happened which have drawn special attention to it. Surely it is a time when every Christian should examine himself upon the subject, and make sure that his views are sound. One point has to be ascertained, and only one—“*What saith the Scriptures of truth?*”

Regeneration means that change of heart and nature in a man when he becomes a true Christian. This change of heart is so complete that no word could be more fitting than “*regeneration*” or “*new birth*.” It is an entire alteration of the inner man. His will is new, his tastes new, his opinions new, his views of sin, the world, the Bible, and Christ new. He is to all intents and purposes a new man. The change seems to bring a new being into existence. It may well be called being born again.

There seems to be much confusion of ideas and indistinctness of apprehension of this simple point—what regeneration really is—all arising from simply not adhering to the Word of God. Let not the din and smoke of controversy draw your attention from your own heart. Is your heart changed? Alas, it is poor work to wrangle and argue and dispute about regeneration if we know nothing about it within.

That there is a necessity for our being regenerated or born again, is most plain from our Lord Jesus Christ’s words in the third chapter of John’s Gospel. Nothing can be more clear and positive than His language to Nicodemus: “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*”

The reason of this necessity is the exceeding sinfulness and corruption of our natural hearts. Just as rivers flow downward and sparks fly upward, and stones fall to the ground, so does a man’s heart naturally incline to what is evil. We not only commit sin, but we also love sin. We not only need to be cleansed from the guilt of sin, but we also need to be delivered from its power.

The man who denies the universal necessity of regeneration can know very little of the heart’s corruption. The vast majority of people in this world see nothing, feel nothing, and know nothing, in religion as they ought. Man naturally has no sense of spiritual things. He is like the lunatic who calls straw a crown, and dust diamonds. He says, “*I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.*” There is nothing so sad as the utter corruption of our nature.

**Men need to be regenerated—born again. It is not a little changing and outward amendment they require.** It is not merely putting restraint on raging passions and quieting unruly affection. All this is not enough. Each one needs a new heart and a new will.

You may be saved and reach heaven without many things which men reckon of great importance—without riches, without learning, without books, without worldly comforts, without wealth, without house, without land, without friends; but without regeneration you will never be saved at all. I bless God that the saints in glory will be a multitude that no man can number. I comfort myself with the thought that there will be “*much people*” in heaven. But this I know and am persuaded of from God’s Word, that of all who reach heaven, there will not be one single individual who has not been born again.

**The next step is to find out the signs and evidences by which a man may know whether he is born again**—whether his heart has been changed by the Holy Spirit, or whether his change is yet to come.

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<sup>1</sup> “Copyright 1978...from the December issue of *FAITH for the Family*. Used by permission. All rights reserved. This article may not be reproduced in whole or in part, except for brief quotations in a review, without written permission from the copyright owner.” **Note:** Dr. John Charles Ryle (1816-1900) was an influential writer and preacher in England. He was the author of such books as “*Practical Religion*” and “*Holiness*.” Original typesetting by Mrs. Carolyn Winne, Bible Baptist Church, Madison, Ohio, c. 1979. Retyped and reformatted by Mike Edwards, Feb 2009, St. Vincent, West Indies.

<sup>2</sup> [Original 1978 editorial preface: “*In a day when Scriptural terms are being perverted from their Scriptural meaning, there are multiplied thousands of people talking about being ‘born again’ who give no evidence of the regenerating grace of God. We felt that the comments of J.C. Ryle, written in the nineteenth century, should be reprinted in order to remind Christians that regeneration is a divine miracle depending upon faith in the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in a life.*”]

Now these signs and evidences are laid down plainly for us in Scripture. God has not left us in ignorance of this point. He foresaw how some would torture themselves with doubts and questionings, and would never believe it was well with their souls. He foresaw how others would take it for granted they were regenerate. He has, therefore, mercifully provided us with a test and gauge of our spiritual condition, in the first epistle of John. There He has written for our learning what the regenerate man is, and what the regenerate man does—his ways, his habits, his manner of life, his faith, his experience.

**First** of all, John says, “*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin*” (1 John 3:9), and again, “*Whosoever is born of God sinneth not*” (1 John 5:18). A regenerate man does not habitually commit sin. He no longer sins with his heart and will, and whole inclination, as an unregenerate man does. Sin no longer pleases him nor is even a matter of indifference: It has become the abominable thing. He cannot prevent it dwelling within him, but he can say that he abhors it, and the great desire of his soul is to not commit sin at all.

**Secondly**, John says, “*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God* (1 John 5:1). A regenerate man believes that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour by whom his soul can be pardoned and redeemed; that He is the divine person appointed and anointed by God the Father for this very purpose, and that beside Him there is no Saviour. He may have his doubts and fears. He may sometimes tell you he feels as if he had no faith. But ask him whether he is willing to trust in anything instead of Christ, and see what he will say. Depend upon it—he would say that, although he does feel weak, he would not give up Christ for all the world.

**Thirdly**, John says, “*Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him*” (1 John 2:29). The regenerate man is a holy man. He endeavors to live according to God’s will, to do the things that please God. No doubt he is not perfect. He finds an evil principle within him constantly warring against grace and trying to draw him away from God. But he does not consent to it, though he cannot prevent its presence. He will generally be able to say, with John Newton, “*I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world, but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.*”

**Fourthly**, John says, “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren*” (1 John 3:14). A regenerate man has a special love for all true disciples of Christ. Like his Father in heaven, he loves all men with a great general love, but he has a special love for those who are of one mind with himself. Like his Lord and Saviour, he loves the worst of sinners, and could weep over them, but he has a peculiar love for those who are believers. He and they may be very different in many ways, but they are Jesus Christ’s people. They are his Father’s sons and daughters. He cannot help loving them.

**Fifthly**, John says, “*Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world*” (1 John 5:4). A regenerate man does not make the world’s opinion his rule of right and wrong. He does not mind going against the stream of the world’s ways, notions, and customs. “*What will men say?*” is no longer a turning point with him. He loves the praise of God more than the praise of men. He fears offending Him more than giving offence to man. He has counted the cost. He has taken his stand. His eye is upon Him that is invisible. He is resolved to follow whithersoever He goeth. It may be necessary in this following to come out from the world and be separate. The regenerate man will not shrink from doing so. His first aim is to please God.

**Sixthly**, John says, “*He that is begotten of God keepeth himself*” (1 John 5:18). A regenerate man is very careful of his own soul. He endeavors not only to keep clear of sin, but also to keep clear of everything which may lead to it. He is careful about the company he keeps. He feels that evil companions corrupt the heart, and that evil is far more communicable than good, just as disease is more infectious than health. He desires to live like a soldier in an enemy’s country, to wear his armor continually, and to be prepared for temptation. He finds by experience that his soul is ever among enemies, and he studies to be a watchful, humble, prayerful man.

There is a vast difference in the depth and distinctness of these marks among those who are regenerate. In some people they are faint, dim, feeble, and hard to discern. You almost need a microscope to make them out. In others they are bold, sharp, clear, plain, and unmistakable, so that he who runs may read them. It seldom happens that all are equally manifest in one and the same soul.

But still, after every allowance, here we find boldly painted the six marks of those born of God. Without these marks it is vain to fancy you are scripturally regenerate. There must be a certain family likeness between God and His children. Without this likeness you are none of His. There must be some visible evidence of the Spirit dwelling within you, as plain as the stamp upon gold and silver, however small.

If you have these marks I have been speaking of, strive to make them more clear and plain. Let your repentance be a growing habit, your faith an increasing faith, your holiness a progressive holiness, your victory over the world a more decided victory, your love of the brethren a more hearty love, and your watchfulness over yourself a more jealous watchfulness. This is the way to be useful and happy in your religion. This is the way to put to silence the opposition of truth’s enemies. Let others, if they will, have regeneration on their tongues; let it be your care to have it shining forth in your life, and to feel it in your heart.”