

REGENERATION AND REPENTANCE

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QUESTION 1: DOES REGENERATION PROCEED FAITH?

“This question is the heart of reformed theology.” – R.C. Sproul

Total Depravity inhibits man’s ability to exhibit “saving faith”. Man cannot “choose correctly” (as Jesus being the object of his saving faith) without God acting FIRST on the believer. (Ephesians 2:1-9)

All world religions require “Faith” as a work for the “eternal reward” however faith apart from a preceding regeneration is completely empty and will surely not save.

Therefore, Regeneration is entirely the work of God and not the will/work of the believer, specifically the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of God the Father and is entirely by grace alone.

Regeneration is also known as “being born again”, (John 3:3, 3:5)

Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3)

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ (John 3:5-7)

When water is used figuratively in the OT, it habitually refers to renewal or spiritual cleansing especially when used in conjunction with “Spirit”

I don’t think one can study doctrine of Regeneration without first understanding where it is placed within the order of salvation.

In studying the order of salvation, it is interesting to point out that Conversion or Saving Faith is actually 4th on this list, not first like some might think, (how often do we hear repeated calls to “have faith” or “Don’t all religions have faith?”, “How is Christianity any different?”) However, we can conclude that it is only AFTER regeneration we are able to respond in Faith to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This certainly sets Christianity apart and is another glorious demonstration of God’s grace and love for his people.

ORDER OF SALVATION

1. Election (God’s choice to be saved)
2. The Gospel Call (proclaiming the message of the Gospel)
- 3. Regeneration (being Born Again)**
4. Conversion/Repentance (Saving Faith)
5. Justification (The Right Legal Standing)
6. Adoption (Membership in God’s family)

7. Sanctification (Right conduct of life)
8. Perseverance (remaining in Christ)
9. Death (going to be with the Lord)
10. Glorification (receiving a resurrection body)

It is also important to note that the order of salvation is a single monolithic pour, **believers do not control ANY of these items**, nor can the believer/unbeliever help the process along by any work. Upon our salvation, we receive all these items together, but then is played out in real-time. We are always working FROM truth, never TOWARDS truth.

There is a long-standing debate about if regeneration *proceeds* faith, happens *simultaneously* with faith or *succeeds* faith.

Regeneration **before** saving faith is God giving us the ability in which we did not previously possess on our own to respond in saving faith to the Gospel.

Wayne Grudem correctly notes: “when we say that it comes “before” saving faith, it is important to remember that they usually come so close together that it will ordinarily seem to us that they are happening at the same time.”

From our perspective it is hard to tell the difference.

Regeneration **after** faith is commonly misunderstood by many evangelicals because one’s results can be noticeable or measurable.

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

What actually happens during regeneration is unknown to us, but one thing is clear. It is entirely by God. We must not look at the Christian for results of regeneration, but only to Jesus.

QUESTION 2: WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

It could be said that after our regeneration and upon conversion, there are two sides: one being our response in faith, the second, our repentance.

So what is repentance? Wayne Grudem defines “Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ.”

But what does this mean and how do we know if we are doing it?

Repentance is always produced out of our regeneration. We cannot on our own volition simply repent but not exercise faith. At the same time, we cannot exercise saving faith apart from repentance. These two ideas are connected and inseparable.

Like regeneration, repentance/saving faith is entirely by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It is from God; therefore, a believer cannot squelch or reject the work in which God has done in the believer.

FALSE IDEAS OF REPENTANCE:

Legalist theology tends to ratchet this idea up to a new level and put back on the believer or unbeliever the “duty” to repent. Either the believer is not repenting enough, or the unbeliever better get on it right away or stand the preeminent wrath of God. Unfortunately, this is a false idea of repentance.

It is true for believers that the repentance is a lifelong exercise, however let us not forget it was initially produced as fruit from our regeneration by God and will be equally sustained by God until the end of the believer’s life. In other words, we are ALWAYS repenting! (Whether or not we know it)

As for the unbeliever, the Christian can (and we do) certainly pray for God to lead them to repentance, so they might enjoy the peace and eternal grace imparted to us, however no one “slips through the cracks” so to speak. All of God’s people will certainly be with Christ in the end.

Free Grace/Non-Lordship theology separates the idea of faith and repentance. Their argument is that a Gospel with both repentance AND faith includes works. (Which thereby is a works righteousness Gospel)

The Lordship (faith/repentance are inseparable) view is thought of as a false Gospel. They assert one can submit to Christ as Savior, but not as Lord. Faith is exercised just as an intellectual decision, and that Jesus is “made” Lord subjectively to the believer if they so shall desire.

Seeing as faith and repentance are a fruit of regeneration and come entirely from God, how could this be salvation by works? Jesus *is* Lord, (not made so by us) our saving faith and repentance is nothing more than *our* acknowledgement of what is already true concerning Christ, sin and death. Saving Faith/Repentance appropriates the redemptive provision that God has set forth for his people.

Grudem, Systematic Theology 699-705, 709-717

Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology 352-354

MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible 2nd Edition 1360

The Lockman Foundation, New American Standard Bible