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Regeneration

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To return to the main theme, regeneration is necessary because of imputed guilt, total depravity, and constant transgression. Only against this background of sin can one understand regeneration. Now, the next to last verse quoted, John 3:5 indicates that the spirit is the regenerating agent. Verse 8, as well as adding something from verse 7, repeats the present point. It says, "so is everyone who is born of the spirit."

Also identifying the Spirit as the agent in regeneration is Titus 3:5. Where it is supposed to say, "according to his mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." And Kevin, this partly bears on the question you asked a few minutes ago, but I'm not, I can't get, I'm off the subject too much. Anyhow, Titus 3:5 says, "according to his mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Sacramentarians and some liberals, who show favor toward the Pentecostals, use this verse as a proof of baptismal regeneration. But this would require the verse to read, "by the regeneration of washing." But it says "the washing of regeneration." It doesn't say "the regeneration of washing." Regeneration of washing would make washing the cause of regeneration. But Paul makes regeneration the cause of the washing. And this regeneration is the work of the Spirit.

Accordingly, if anyone wishes to understand the work of the Spirit, one should have some notion of regeneration. If you are told that a scientist has just invented a milli-micro-parametric-bifilar-hemostat...

Audience: I'd tell him to go see a doctor.

You would.

I'll read the first half of the sentence over again.

If you are told that a scientist has just invented a milli-micro-parametric-bifilar-hemostat, and if you're interested, you'll want to know not merely that he invented something, but also, and more importantly, how he did it and what such a contraption is. And yet a lot of Christian people don't, are not interested in what the Bible explains, They say sanctification is very good. Why? They have no idea what sanctification is.

Audience: Well most of them like to say I'm not into doctrine, I'm into application.

Yeah, I know. That's just a... I think my motto is, let's, let's what... the word went out of my mind. What is the word? Irritate. Let's irritate each other.

*[Audience Laughter]*

Audience: Provoke each other.

That's Scriptural.

Audience: [overtalking]

I'm glad you know a verse of Scriptura.

*[Audience Laughter]*

Audience: ???

Is it?

Audience: Provoke.

What is the Greek word?

Audience: I'm not a Greek scholar.

Then you don't know it is a poor translation.

Audience: I've been told it is a poor translation.

Audience: Ah, he believes his vision.

*[Audience Laughter]*

Unlike invention of milli-micro-parametric-bifilar-hemostats, unlike invention, regeneration is not a temporal process. Would you have preferred me to talk about cacti again? Can't I take another example?

Unlike inventions, regeneration is not a temporal process, but a sort of instantaneous creation. Reconstruction would be a better word than creation, for the new or renewed creature is the same man or else the sinner himself would not have been saved. Do you any group of people who have a theory of regeneration that makes the regenerated person not the same person as the sinner who previously existed?

Audience: Perfectionists.

No, I'll give the name of a group. No, that isn't true. The perfectionists don't say so. It's the sinner who becomes perfect. But there is a group. An organized group. It is worldwide. They are in England. I've met them in France and they're in this country too whose doctrine of regeneration says that the regenerated person is not the person who is a sinner. He is a different person.

Audience: Different meaning totally different?

Yeah, not the same man at all.

Audience: ???

Huh?

Audience: ???

I don't know enough about him, but I'm referring to the Plymouth Brethren. I would recommend that you read the article on the Plymouth Brethren written by the southern theologian who didn't like Hodge too well. Dabney. Read Dabney's article on the Plymouth Brethren in one of the two big volumes that have been recently published.

Audience: Would that be Darby or Irving? That would believe that. Because there's two groups. There is the closed group, the open group of the assemblies.

This goes back to Darby. I think this might be true of both groups, I don't know.

Audience: Of course that is the open group.

You get Dabney and read it. It is an article, maybe fifty pages long.

Audience: Would the group you come across be the Bullinger group?

I really don't know. And my knowledge of this is not due to any contact with Plymouth Brethren that I have talked with. I'm speaking largely because of what Dabney says.

Audience: But Dabney wrote quite a few years back, they are a changed group today.

Just because it was written last century, doesn't mean it's bad.

Audience: No, I understand, but...

If you say it's written this century, maybe it is bad.

*[Audience Laughter]*

Audience: No, I understand, but the ones I've come across would not say such a thing.

Well, maybe that's so.

Audience: Except maybe the closed group. They're very real, they are just an extreme group.

I was preaching in a mission on one occasion and there was a Plymouth Brethren there. And I was talking about regeneration as a change a nature. He got up and rebuked me. He said, "not a changed nature, an exchanged nature."

Audience: They don't believe in baptism.

They don't?

Audience: No. See there was four different gospels. They believe the gospel, they believe Paul. They're into Paul. The gospels were written to different...

Well, anyhow. There are a lot of things to learn. Just think, when we get to heaven we'll have nothing to do but study theology and play chess.

*[Audience Laughter]*

We won't have to eat. We won't eat at all. Nobody has a stomach in heaven. Doesn't the Scripture tell us that there are no stomachs in heaven? It's in 1st Corinthians, haven't you read the book?

Audience: I've read it but I don't remember the no stomach.

Read it again. I think it's in the 6th chapter, something like that, I...

Audience: First Corinthians?

Well, don't take my word for it.

Audience: You said it was not a temporal process, but an instantaneous creation.

Reconstruction I think is a better word. In order to avoid the idea that the man who was saved is a different man from the, different person from the one who was a sinner. Because... I say

reconstruction would be a better word than creation because for the new or renewed creature is the same man or else the sinner himself would not have been saved.

At any rate, although an instantaneous act is not a describable process, did I refer to something, an undescribable process previously?

Audience: Yeah.

It is possible to say what happened. The effects, of course, are the progress in sanctification, the diminution of sinning, the altered purposes, the different ideas. But as to the act itself, an illustration will be more theological than most illustrations are. In our congregation in Indianapolis, Mrs. Brady, and I have the nerve to give her name because I'm saying nice things about her, Mrs. Brady served as organist and served very well too. Each of her hands had five fingers. So do mine. There were some noticeable differences between her hands and mine. Her fingers were long and mine are stubby. Other visible differences could be listed. But beyond these there was a much more important invisible difference. By practicing for years, she had developed the skill or the habit of running up and down scales as I never could. Constant practice makes excellent performance habitual. Now then, unregenerate humanity sins habitually. Not only are the overt actions sinful, but even those acts which most people would not call sinful are so because of evil motivation.

Even the plowing of the wicked is sin. Where did that come from? Oh, someone!

Audience: ??? Proverbs.

Exactly, oh sure. Even the plowing of the wicked is sin. Then the Holy Spirit comes upon this individual and instills into him different habits. These new habits, though they may and will develop by practice, are not produced by practice. The Spirit immediately forms the habit for him. Such is regeneration. Though the academic or scholastic term is not much used these days, regeneration is the implantation of a *habitus*. The regenerated sinner now has desires and thoughts he never had before. This usage of term *habitus* is confirmed by the fact that repentance is a change of mind. The Holy Spirit has regenerated us and changed our mind. The regenerated sinner now has these desires and thoughts he never had before. This usage of term *habitus* is confirmed by the fact that repentance is a change of mind, the intellect. The Holy Spirit has regenerated us and changed our mind. To quote a line or two from the confession, enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, renewing their wills, determining them to that which is good, being made willing by His grace.

There are three dots here and there, it is not a complete.. now what is your question?

Audience: I have a question about the old nature. What happens to the old nature?

Well, it is mortified gradually and eventually at the resurrection is completely extinguished.

Audience: But it is not completely destroyed?

No. But you are given a new *habitus*.

So much for John 3 verses 3 and 5.

Audience: Dr. Clark, we're using the term nature again. Would it be helpful...

Or characteristics, yes. The characteristics, the...

Audience: Will, intellect, and emotion.

The qualities. What the thing is.

So much for John 3 verses 3 and 5. In earlier verse, John 1:13, is not so easy to understand. To quote half of the verse, or part of the verses, "them that believe on his name, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of the will of God. Now, I spoke to Mr. Hamilton about this last evening. This verse does not mention the Holy Spirit, but the idea of a new birth is explicit. It specifies three ways by which one cannot be born again. The first of these is by blood. Actually the Greek word is plural, by bloods. The singular might have suggested a particular ancestry, as if certain people, like the nobility, are such because of their birth in that family.

This exegesis is very plausible because John the Apostle might have had in mind the words of John the Baptist who said, "think not to say within yourself we have Abraham as our father." The Jewish proclivity to trust in their descent from Abraham is also seen in John 8:41, "This did not Abraham. Ye do the works of your father, they said unto him. We be not born of fornication."

The plural bloods in the Greek text could be constrained to fit the same idea, but the fit would be uncomfortable. More likely, the plural indicates a wider ancestry. Not just of the Jewish race but of all humanity. If bloods refers to the fact that we have two parents, the verse would be a denial of the notion that God save us just because we are human beings. The plural hardly suggests one nation. We say that so-and-so was born of Jewish blood, not of Jewish bloods. Furthermore, the preceding verse, in the introduction to the Gospel, envisages every man that comes into the world, not just the Jews.

Although the word flesh is used literally in some passages to mean muscles, organs, sinews, and so on, it frequently, especially in the Pauline epistles, means man's sinful nature. The statement in 1st Corinthians 1:29, "No flesh should glory in his presence," means that no human being should glory. Sin is not particularly stressed, but the wisdom of the wise and the foolish things of the world are condemned.

Audience: What did you say the translation of flesh means?

Sinful nature. Flesh does not mean the muscles.

Audience: ?? something different for 13 than he does for 14. Just back to back in John. And the word was made flesh in the next verse.

I'm not talking about that verse. I was quoting from 1st Corinthians, whatever it was.

Flesh here does not mean the muscles. Similarly, sin is not emphasized but only implied in 1st Peter 1:23-25. The new birth occurs through incorruptible seed and abides forever, where all flesh is as grass which withereth and falleth away. I am giving an explanation of regeneration because regeneration is the work of the Spirit. And I might say regeneration is the work of the Spirit, but if you don't know what regeneration is, you don't know what the work of the Spirit is. And that is what I'm trying to be specific about.

Much more definite is the case of the heretics in Colossae with their fleshly mind. That's Colossians 2:21-23. Flesh here means heresy, not licentiousness, for they were ascetics. The heretics in Colossae were not licentious people. They were ascetics. These people sinned in their theology.

Since then, the flesh as a depraved human nature inherited from Adam is sinful, it cannot generate a renewed person. It is the old man that needs to be done away with. Its complete eradication may take a lifetime, but the initiating act is regeneration by the Holy Spirit. The third method of not being regenerated, now I'm still talking about John 1 what was it 13 or something. He gives three methods by which you cannot be regenerated. One is human nature and another is perhaps Jewish ancestry. The third method of not being regenerated is the will of man. This is not precisely the same as human nature because the Greek term signifies an individual rather than mankind as a whole. This refers to a single individual rather than mankind as a whole.

This makes a trio. Nationality, humanity, and the individual. I'm talking about these verses in John. The previously quotation from the Westminster Confession said that, "man is not able by his own strength to convert himself or to prepare himself thereunto." No free will could regenerate him or give him faith. He must be born again. And no one gives birth to himself.

The New International Version makes incredible nonsense of this verse. For that matter, it makes frequent mistakes, but this is one of the worst. Its translation is, "Children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision, nor of a husband's will."

Audience: Husband's will?

Yes.

Now the word *andros*, it is a genitive case. The word *andros* can mean husband. The usage is

common in German also where a wife can refer to "Mein Mann." Even in English, one can sometimes hear "My man." But the basic meaning of *aner* or *andros* in the genitive is an individual man as distinguish anthropos, the human species. In Latin the two words are *homo* and *veer*. The Latin version has *veer*, that is Jerome's translation, you know the Vulgate. The Latin version has *veer*, an individual man. German has *eines Mannes*. To translate it as a husband's will is utter nonsense. Not only does the idea of a husband fail to fit the series, family, humanity, and x, it leaves open the possibility of a husband being regenerated by his wife's will. Though the converse is declared impossible.

Boy that would satisfy some women today, wouldn't it?

That is to say, the NIV translation does not complete the denial of how a husband may be regenerated. Women are excluded, but men have a loophole. After these negations, the verse positively asserts that only God can regenerate. Which person of the Godhead acts is not specified, the emphasis is on the negations. Perhaps it is well here to note that various divine acts are assigned to all three persons. The unity of the Godhead prevents any exclusive activity by any one of the three persons.

Now, in the New Testament, for on this point the Old Testament is of little help, the creator is most often designated as Christ. There are, however, a few references in which the Father creates. They are not immediately clear, but a little cerebration will clarify them. First, Acts 4:2 really refers to the Father. And maybe you better look up 4:2 and tell me I'm wrong.

Audience: Acts?

Acts 4:2.

Acts 4:2 really refers to the Father because verse, did I say 4:2? I can't even read what's here. It is 4:24. And it is 24 here printed out. 2, 4. So not only is the typing here sometimes bad, but the reading is also bad. Acts 4:24 really refers to the Father because verse 27 distinguishes from the son. To quote, "Lord, thou art God which hast made heaven and earth."

So far this may sound like a recognition that Christ is God and a person might be tempted to use it in defense of the deity of Christ. But such is not the case because in verse 27 the congregations continues its praise by saying, "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus whom thou hast appointed..." This shows that the Lord of verse 24 is the Father and not the Son. Paul in 1st Corinthians 8:6 assigns creation to both the Father and the Son. One God, the Father, or whom are all things.

The phrase all things is the usual Greek phrase for the universe. *Ta panta* frequently in Greek means the universe, the whole. The universe then comes into being from the Father. But there is also one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things. This, as well as other references, describes Christ as the agent or actor by whom the Father affected the creation of the world.



Next come Ephesians 1:11 and 3:9. For the first of these verses, one may go back to 1:3 to see the mention, now this is in Ephesians 1, and if you go to the 11th verse you ought to go back to see the third verse, the mention of the Father.

The first pronoun in verse 4 is again clearly the Father, and the good will of verse 5 is also the Father's good will. The whom of verse 7 is Christ. So also verse 8. But verses 9 and 10 must refer again to the Father since the he, who gathered together all things in Christ, cannot be Christ. Hence it is most probable that verse 11 speaks of the Father who works all things, and this is corroborated by verse 12 that, in that his glory cannot refer to Christ in whom we first trusted. This now seems more than probable. Any other interpretation runs into impossibilities. Hence Paul portrays the Father as the creator who works all things.

The second of these two verses is similar in that the word God must refer to the Father because Jesus Christ is distinguished from him. Add to this list, Hebrews 1:2, where the Father creates through the agency of the Son.