The Doctrine of Regeneration

Sin and its Consequences: Spiritual Death

- “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17).
- For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:23).
- And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked (Eph 2:1).
- The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1Cor 2:14).

Definition of Regeneration

Regeneration is a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us. There are five different Greek words in the New Testament that are used to describe the doctrine of regeneration.

1. **Palingenesia** (παλιγγενεσία) — *Palin* means ‘again’ and *genesis* means ‘birth’ or ‘beginning.’
   - ‘He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. (Tit 3:5 ESV)

2. **Genao** (γεννάω) used with another (ἀνοthen)—to beget.
   - Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).
   - But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God’ (John 1:12-13).
   - Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God (1Peter 1:23).
   - If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him [God] (1John 2:29).
   - No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God (1John 3:9).
   - Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. (1John 4:7)
   - Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him (1John 5:1).
   - For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith (1John 5:4).
   - We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him (1John 5:18)

3. **Apokueo**—to give birth to (ἀποκυνέω).
   - Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (James 1:18).
   - Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (James 1:18 KJV).
   - He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. (James 1:18 NIV)

4. **Ktizo**—to create (κτίζω).
   - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2Cor 5:17).
   - It is not being circumcised or uncircumcised that matters; but what matters is a new creation (Gal 6:15 NJB).

5. **Suzoopoieo**—to make alive, to quicken (συζωοποιεώ)
   - And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses (Col 2:13).
   - Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (Eph 2:5).
Features of Regeneration

1. The new birth is a mystery.
   - ‘The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes (John 3:8).

2. The new birth works through the ‘instrumentality of the word of God, and then is effectively applied by the Spirit of God.’ God the Father speaks powerfully to call us through his preached Word and God the Holy Spirit works powerfully in us to make us alive so that we can respond to his Word.
   - You have been born anew not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. That word is the good news which was preached to you (1 Peter 1:23, 25).
   - He chose to give us birth through the word of truth (James 1:18 NIV).
   - We sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul (Acts 16:13-14).

3. The new birth is entirely a work of God. We contribute nothing to it. We did not choose to be born; we don’t choose to be born again. We are entirely passive in this sovereign work of God.
   - ‘I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you…’ (Ezek 36:26-27).

4. The new birth takes place instantaneously.

Results of Regeneration

1. We no longer live in habitual sin.
   - ‘No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God’ (1 John 3:9).

2. We begin to have a genuine Christ-like love for others.
   - ‘Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God’ (1 John 4:7).

3. We begin to live a victorious life and overcome the pressures and temptations of the world that would otherwise keep us from obeying God’s commandments and following his paths.
   - ‘For everyone born of God has overcome the world’ (1 John 5:3-4).

4. We are protected from Satan.
   - ‘We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God [that is, Jesus] keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him’ (1 John 5:18).

What some famous Christians say about Regeneration

‘Faith is the evidence of new birth, not the cause of it’—John Piper.

‘While doctrines such as election, justification, and sanctification typically receive all of the attention in theological conversations, the doctrine of regeneration is often forgotten. Yet, it is this doctrine that undergirds the entire order of salvation. It is the initiatory change in regeneration that results in everything else, from faith and repentance to justification, sanctification, and perseverance. All of these other doctrines owe their existence to that first moment when God breathes new spiritual life into the sinner’s dead corpse’—Matthew Barrett.

‘Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit to unite the elect sinner to Christ by breathing new life into that dead and depraved sinner so as to raise him from spiritual death to spiritual life, removing his heart of stone and giving him a heart of flesh, so that he is washed, born from above and now able to repent and trust in Christ as a new creation. Moreover, regeneration is the act of God alone and therefore it is monergistic in nature, accomplished by the sovereign act of the Spirit apart from and unconditioned upon man’s will to believe. In short, man’s faith does not cause regeneration but regeneration causes man’s faith’—Matthew Barrett.