

Regeneration - Addition or Change and the Extent Thereof

Written by Marty Hoskins

Friday, 23 December 2011 17:16 - Last Updated Friday, 23 December 2011 22:14

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 3:6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

Preface

I have heard it said that a preface is the author's apology for what he has written. I find it difficult to ever apologize for what I think is the truth of God's word. When I am proven to be wrong, I readily apologize for my errors. This preface is not an apology, but I would like to provide some background on how this work came about to provide some context. Hopefully this context will help the reader understand the perspective from which it was written, the reason it was written, and how God moved to provide that it be written.

In the days leading up to the writing of this short exposition on the subject of regeneration, I had been involved in conversations and studies regarding the extent of change wrought in a man, if there is any change at all, through regeneration. My personal conviction was that there is a definite and vital change. I began to read several works by preachers of the past and present on the subject of regeneration and to simultaneously seek the truth on this matter in the word of God. I discovered, despite the many works on the topic of regeneration that addressed subjects such as the immediacy of regeneration and the sovereignty of God in regeneration, there was little that directly addressed the subject of what actually happens in regeneration.

Late on the evening of July 18, 2005, I sat down with all that I had gleaned from other writings and the word of God and began to search through various scriptures that involved the soul, spirit, body, flesh, and will. I searched for all scriptural references to and types and shadows of regeneration. As I did, thoughts began to coalesce, and I began to write. In the space of the next five hours I wrote the greater part of the manuscript that you are about to read. I share this experience only to say that God was moving in that time. I have never had an experience quite like that, and may never have it again. There were times of tears and thoughts began to flow and scriptures began to open up to me in ways that I had never seen them before. I offer praise to God for having had the opportunity to experience the working of his power.

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I pray that this work will be edifying, that it is true and fair to the Biblical record, and that it might assist in the labor toward peace among God's people. Ultimately, I pray that God will be glorified in the truths that it contains. I do not believe that this work is inerrant or infallible, but I do believe it presents a Biblically sound position on the extent of change and addition that occurs in one of God's children when they are born again.

Introduction

Whenever we study the grand and glorious teachings surrounding the subject of regeneration, it would be wise to remember that regeneration is a mystery. I cannot fathom or comprehend what is involved in the creation of natural life, much less the intricacies of imparting spiritual life.

The fact that regeneration is a mystery is indicated to us by the words of our Lord in the following scripture:

John 3:8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Further, I will say that the whole subject of the soul and spirit that is in a man is a mystery as well. If I could adequately separate and divide the soul and spirit, I feel that I could likely have a much better grasp on regeneration itself. Apparently it is not our lot to be able to separate the soul and spirit.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

I believe that in this scripture, the "word of God" is the living word, Jesus Christ, not the written word, for this word is quick (alive) and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. Here Jesus is said to be able to divide the soul and spirit and since I am not he, I will not attempt to make a distinction. I would acknowledge only that man is made up of a soul, spirit, and body, but I can only discern it as the soul/spirit of man and the body of man.

Despite the fact that regeneration is a mystery, the scriptures do give us some light on the subject and that is what I would like to deal with. The question at hand is: Is regeneration an addition to the man or a change in the man?

It should be noted that the structure of the following work is not meant to establish a chronology of events in regeneration, but is rather meant to break down regeneration into component effects and discuss those components. The study of these component effects will lead us to only one conclusion. Regeneration is neither simply an addition nor simply a change, but rather it is both.

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Adam – Before and After the Fall

First, Adam was created a body, soul, and spirit. In the Eden fall, all three parts of Adam died to the things of God and the body began to die physically. As proof of this three-fold makeup of man, I would present the following:

1st Thessalonians 5:23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, if Adam, after the fall, was made up of a fallen soul/spirit and a fallen body, both being completely corrupted and dead to God, neither capable of good works and unable to rescue themselves from the fallen state wherein they stand, then it behooves us to seek out what exactly happens in regeneration to these parts. I will assume that the reader understands that when Adam fell, all humanity fell with him. Our physical and spiritual condition before regeneration is identical to that of Adam immediately after the fall.

Effects of Regeneration

The Addition

Let's dispatch the easy part first. In regeneration the Holy Ghost takes up its abode in our "heart". God moves in, in the person of the Holy Spirit, and becomes a full time resident of the child of God.

1st Corinthians 3:17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

1st Corinthians 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

These two scriptures are sufficient, I think, to establish this fact. So it is clear, that in regeneration, there is an addition to the child of God in the person of the Holy Ghost. This addition, though it is a change in the overall makeup of the man and is certainly part of making one a living child of God, does not constitute a vital change to any part of the man.

The Body

Second, I would like to talk about the body. I do not see the body of a man as solely a vessel. Yes, it is a vessel, but it also has a volition or will that is referred to in scripture as the flesh.

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This flesh is neither the soul nor spirit, but is of the body. That the flesh has a volition or will that it exerts is clear to me from the following:

John 1:13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

This scripture tells us that there is a will of the flesh that is separate from the will of man.

1st Corinthians 5:5 To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

The person that was excluded from the church at Corinth was excluded to deliver him for the destruction of the flesh. This was not to destroy the body, but rather to destroy the volition or will that is closely associated with the body which is called the flesh.

Let's settle on the concept, for now, that this body and the volition of it, which is the flesh or carnal nature, is substantially unchanged in regeneration. Let's settle on the fact that after regeneration there is a still a carnal nature and that nature is the flesh. I think the following scripture would be adequate to support the existence of this flesh after regeneration and its relationship to the regenerated spirit.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

This flesh is not the actual muscles and bones, but is rather the volition and will that is born of nature that still resides within the man. It is not the spirit and soul, but is rather that part of the man that is the will of the flesh. It has as its origin our carnal nature and remains after regeneration. The spirit here is the regenerated spirit that exists after regeneration and takes its name from the source thereof, that being the Spirit of God. Though the changed spirit is separate from the Holy Spirit, it is in close communion with it. The spirit has been renewed, washed, and changed such that it now wars against the carnal nature of the flesh.

Though we may settle on the concept that the body is substantially unchanged, we should not come to the conclusion that it is unaffected. It is the sinner, elected in grace, that is the object of the new birth. I may not be able to ascertain to what extent the body is affected, but the fact that there is an effect is certain. Consider the following:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

The regenerated child of God is called upon to present his body as a living sacrifice and that this living sacrifice can be "holy, acceptable unto God." The body of the unregenerate cannot be presented as such, so the fact that there is an effect upon the body is certain, to what degree and extent, the scripture seems to be silent. However, we can be assured that the extent is not unto perfection for in death this body will go down in corruption and be raised incorruptible.

1st Corinthians 15:41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another

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glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: 43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

The body certainly does not go into the grave perfectly cleansed, so the effect of regeneration is not to purify the body; however, the body is now an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord so it is affected.

So here we are. We have established that, in regeneration, the Holy Ghost takes up residence in the child of God, but that the child of God retains the sinful and corrupted carnal nature known as the flesh. The flesh, due to its carnality is at enmity with God and thus is at war with the Holy Spirit that has taken up residence in us. Further, the soul/spirit is changed, as we will see in the further sections of this writing, and, as a result of this change, is in communion with the Holy Spirit. The warfare that rages within us is between the old man (the flesh) and the new man (the communion of the soul/spirit and Holy Ghost). This presence of the Holy Spirit in a regenerated man will account for scriptures that indicate an addition in regeneration:

2nd Corinthians 1:21 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; 22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

2nd Corinthians 5:5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

The Soul/Spirit Changed

Next we have to account for the scriptures that indicate a new creation and a change. I will deal with those that indicate a change first as I think it will tie things together in a more coherent way.

There are many scriptures indicating that regeneration is a change. I do not think that this change can be expressed simply as a change in the whole man based on the influence of the presence of a new creature. These scriptures indicate there is an intrinsic and vital change in some parts of the man. The classic scripture that I would present would be the following:

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 3:6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

In this verse, regeneration is spoken of as a washing and renewing of the Holy Ghost. To wash is not to add something new, but is rather to take something that previously existed and make it clean. Likewise, renewal is to take something old and make it new again. This same idea is reflected in the following:

1st Corinthians 6:9-11 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of

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themselves with mankind, (10) Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Once again we see regeneration termed as washed. We are washed by the Spirit not just occupied by it. The Spirit does more than just take up an abode within us, but it works a change as well, and that change is vital. In other words, not only does the Spirit come to live in us, but it also works a work in us. Note this scripture:

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast. (10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

This verse shows that we are the result of his work. We are his workmanship. There is a work done in us. It is here termed as a creative work. However, I will leave off discussion of the creation aspect of regeneration until later.

The certainty that there is an intrinsic change within the object of regeneration is further illustrated through the following:

Hebrews 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

One cannot write upon or in something without producing a material change in the object upon or in which it was written. Further, since it is God's law that is written, there is a certain change in the moral makeup of the individual that is regenerated. We might well term this change the imparting of a moral conscience by which we know right from wrong via an internal witness of the truth.

Now that I have established that there is a change and that this change is vital and not just the result of the Spirit exerting influence on the man, we must draw some conclusions on what is changed. I think I can reasonably accept that the body/flesh is substantially unchanged except as noted earlier in this work. This leaves us with the "spirit/soul" as an object of this work of the Holy Ghost. This is the point that I have been moving toward. The work of the Holy Spirit is not only to enjoin itself to us, but to wash us and renew us. It does not wash us wholly or completely, but it does change, renew, or wash us. I believe that it changes the soul/spirit from the state in which it was before regeneration to where it is after regeneration. This change is from a state of death in sin to a state of life in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins (2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

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The soul/spirit is quickened. It is changed from its dead state to a state of life in Jesus Christ. The quality of this life is different from anything the man has ever experienced. The life that is given to us is eternal life. The soul and spirit are renewed and washed – vitally changed so that what was once dead is now alive and able to commune with the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. What is the extent of this change? I do not know, and I do not believe that any man can fully say. This, I believe, is part of the mystery of what we call regeneration.

However, even though the soul and spirit are changed at this point, the body and the volition of it, the flesh, remains. The body still has the will of the flesh that is bent toward the satisfaction of the body and all its lusts. Thus the warfare begins. The new man is the regenerated soul/spirit plus the abiding Holy Spirit, and the old man is the body and its volition, the flesh.

The New Creature

It is certain also that regeneration is a creation as well. The following scriptures will be sufficient to establish that certainty:

2nd Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Galatians 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

How is this concept of creation reconciled with what I have laid out above? In regeneration, there is the washing of the spirit/soul and the coming in and abiding of the Holy Ghost. This combination of the eternal life in the quickened soul/spirit and Holy Ghost abiding within the man is the new man. When those components are put together, in communion within the man, there is the creation of a new being that is like nothing that has ever existed in that man before.

The evidence of this communion can be seen here:

Romans 8:16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

This new creature is composed of a changed soul/spirit, not a different one. I have difficulty taking this creation to the point where we have the creation of a "new little you" inside of you alongside the old you such that parts are duplicated rather than cleansed/washed. Redemption is all about redeeming that which is lost, not about creating a new soul and spirit to take to heaven so that the old one can just be discarded.

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Circumcised in the Heart

The last thing that I have on my agenda is the circumcision concept that is raised in scripture and the concept of cutting away. Here is one scripture on this subject.

Romans 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: (29) But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

I will not, yea, I cannot deny that scripture teaches that circumcision is an Old Testament type and shadow of regeneration. However, I think that it is carrying the type too far to try and overly spiritualize the foreskin that was cut away. Circumcision is a type and shadow in many ways. 1) It was generally done on the 8th day of a male child's life meaning that the child had no control over it, 2) It was a mark placed upon those that are children of God, and 3) It is a mark that is not readily visible. The purpose of circumcision was to mark out those who belong to God and to mark them in such a way that would be representative of the inward marking by the Holy Ghost when our soul and spirit is washed. We can see the following scriptures as well:

Colossians 2:9-13 For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (10) And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: (11) In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: (12) Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (13) And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

Here again we see the concept of circumcision as a type and shadow of regeneration, but the concept of the putting away part of circumcision is included. It is not an old spirit or soul that is put away, but rather the "body of the sins of the flesh" that is put away. Prior to regeneration, the body and all its volition or will, which is the flesh, and the soul/spirit are unified in their desires and will. All three are bent toward sin and all its wicked ways and works. After regeneration, the soul and spirit are cleansed and sanctified. They are cut off from union with the will of the flesh. This is the circumcision of the heart, the circumcision not made with hands that results in a new creature. That new creature is the union and communion of the regenerated soul and spirit with the Holy Ghost within the being of the man. The cutting away is the separation of the unification of the soul/spirit from the will of the flesh. They are no longer unified in their desires.

Conclusion

With the knowledge that regeneration is both the addition of the Holy Spirit and the change of soul, spirit and body, we can see that, at death, the regenerated and quickened soul and spirit

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are separated from the body and accompanied by the Holy Spirit with which they communed and are ushered into heaven and all its glory. The body and its volition and will (the volition and will being its body of sins) die and are relegated to the grave. The body is raised in the resurrection in a new state. It is the same body that existed before death, yea it is the same body that existed before regeneration, but it is now changed. It no longer has the corruptible, carnal nature that the Bible calls the flesh as it is raised incorruptible with the blood of Jesus Christ being applied to it to wash it from its sins. This body is raised and reunited with its soul and spirit that have been glorying in heaven that all three might stand before the presence of God. Thus nothing of any that Jesus died for is left out of the redemptive plan. Every man for whom Jesus died is completely and totally redeemed. No part of him is annihilated. The only thing he loses in the process is that which he took upon himself in the fall, and that is his sins. His sinful soul, his sinful spirit, and his sinful body and volition are all redeemed to go to glory with God, though they do not go with their sinfulness intact. Everything that was who I was before regeneration was purchased by Christ and will dwell with him for all eternity, if by the grace of God I am one of his. That is the glorious truth in which we so rejoice.

I hope that what I have said is consistent with the Biblical record. I believe it is, but I am but a man, so I pray you will be charitable with me. I cannot say that I am 100% correct on all that I have stated above, but I do think it is Biblical and does present an alternative to any idea that requires that a vital part of the man is annihilated or replaced, or that regeneration is solely an addition to the man while he still retains his sinful flesh and nature such that we avoid extremes on the other side.

So, is regeneration an addition to the man or a change in the man? The clear scriptural answer is that it is both.