

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity
By John Gill
Book 6—Of the Blessings of Grace, and the Doctrines of It.
Chapter 11—Of Regeneration

Regeneration follows adoption, being the evidence of it; regeneration describes the persons who have received the power to become the sons of God (John 1:12, 13), and though these are distinct things, yet they are closely connected together; where the one is, the other is also, as to enjoyment and experience; and they bear a similarity to each other. Regeneration may be considered either more largely, and then it includes with it effectual calling, conversion, and sanctification: or more strictly, and then it designs the first principle of grace infused into the soul; which makes it a fit object of the effectual calling, a proper subject of conversion, and is the source and spring of that holiness which is gradually carried on in sanctification, and perfected in heaven. Concerning regeneration, the following things may be enquired into:

I. What regeneration is, or what is meant by it, the nature of it; which is so mysterious, unknown, and unaccountable to a natural man, as it was to Nicodemus, though a master in Israel; now it may be the better understood by observing the phrases and terms by which it is expressed.

1. It is expressed by being “born again,” which regeneration properly signifies; (see John 3:3, 7; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23) and this supposes a prior birth, a first birth, to which regeneration is the second; and which may receive some light by observing the contrast between the two births, they being the reverse of each other: the first birth is of sinful parents, and in their image; the second birth is of God, and in his image; the first birth is of corruptible, the second birth of incorruptible seed; the first birth is in sin, the second birth is in holiness and righteousness; by the first birth men are polluted and unclean, by the second birth they become holy and commence to be saints; the first birth is of the flesh and is carnal, the second birth is of the Spirit and is spiritual, and makes men spiritual men; by the first birth men are foolish and unwise, being born like a wild ass’s colt; by the second birth they become knowing and wise unto salvation: by the first birth they are slaves to sin and the lusts of the flesh, are home born slaves; by the second birth they become Christ’s free men: from their first birth they are transgressors, and go on in a course of sin, till stopped by grace; in the second birth they cease to commit sin, to go on in a course of sinning, but live a life of holiness, yea he that is born of God cannot sin; by the first birth men are children of wrath, and under tokens of divine displeasure; at the second birth they appear to be the objects of the love of God; regeneration being the fruit and effect of it, and gives evidence of it; a time of life is a time of open love.

2. It is called a being “born from above,” for so the phrase in John 3:3, 7, may be rendered; the apostle James says in general, that “every good and every perfect gift is from above;” and regeneration being such a gift, must be from above; and indeed he particularly instances in it, for it follows, “of his own will begat he us with the word of truth” (James 1:17, 18). The author of this birth is from above; those that are born again are born of God their Father who is in heaven; the grace given in regeneration is from above, (John 3:27) truth in the inward part, and wisdom in the hidden part, or the grace of God in the heart produced in regeneration, is that “wisdom that is from above,” (James 3:17) such that are born again, as they are of high and noble birth, they are partakers of the heavenly and high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and shall most certainly possess it (1 Pet. 1:3, 4; Heb. 3:1; Phil. 3:14).

3. It is commonly called the new birth, and with great propriety; since the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, are joined together as meaning the same thing; and what is produced in regeneration is called the new creature, and the new man; and those who are born again are said to be new born babes (Titus 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph 4:24; 1 Pet. 2:2), it is a new man, in distinction from the old man, or the principle of corrupt nature, which is as old as a man is; but the principle of grace infused in regeneration is quite new; it is something “de novo,” anew implanted in the heart, which never was before in human nature, no not in Adam in his state of innocence; it is not a working upon the old principles of nature, nor a working them up to an higher pitch: it is not an improvement of them, nor a repairing of the broken, ruined image of God in man. But it is altogether a new work; it is called a creature, being a work of almighty power; and a new creature, and a new man, consisting of various parts, and these all new: there are in it a “new heart,” and a “new spirit,” a new understanding, to know and understand things, never known nor understood before: a new heart, to know God; not as the God of nature and providence; but as the God of Grace, God in Christ, God in a Mediator; the love of God in him, the covenant of grace, and the blessings of it made with him; Christ, and the fullness of grace in him, pardon of sin through his blood, justification by his righteousness, atonement by his sacrifice, and acceptance with God through him, and complete salvation by him; things which Adam knew nothing of in Paradise: in this new heart are new desires after these objects, to know more of them, new affections, which are placed upon them, new delights in them, and new joys, which arise from them (Ezek. 36:26; 1 John 5:20; 1 Cor. 2:9). In this new man, are “new eyes” to see with; to some God does not give eyes to see divine and spiritual things; but to regenerated ones he does; they have a seeing eye, made by the Lord (Deut. 29:4; Prov. 20:12), by which they see their lost state and condition by nature, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, their own ability to make atonement by anything that can be done by them; the insufficiency of their own righteousness; their impotence to every good work, and want of strength to help themselves out of the state and condition in which they are, and the need they are in of the blood, righteousness, and sacrifice of Christ, and of salvation by him. They have the eye of faith, by which they behold the glories of Christ’s Person, the fullness of his grace, the excellency of his righteousness, the virtue of his blood and sacrifice, and the suitableness and completeness of his salvation: and regeneration, in this view of it, is no other than spiritual light in the understanding. Moreover, in the new man are new ears to hear with; all have not ears to hear; some have, and they have them from the Lord, and blessed are they! (Rev. 2:11; Deut. 29:4; Prov. 20:12; Matthew 13:16, 17), they hear the word in a manner they never heard before; they hear it as to understand it, and receive the love of it; so as to distinguish the voice of Christ in it, from the voice of a stranger; so as to feel it work effectually in them, and become the power of God unto salvation to them; they know the joyful sound, and rejoice to hear it. The new man has also “new hands,” to handle and to work with; the hand of faith, to receive Christ as the Saviour and Redeemer, to lay hold on him for life and salvation, to embrace him, hold him fast, and not let him go; to handle him, the Word of life, and receive from him grace for grace: and they have hands to work with, and do work from better principles, and to better purposes than before. And they have “new feet” to walk with, to flee to Christ, the City of refuge; to walk by faith in him; and to walk on in him, as they have received him; to run with cheerfulness the ways of his commandments; to follow hard after him, and to follow on to know him; and even to run, and not be weary, and to walk, and not faint.

4. Regeneration is expressed by being quickened. As there is a quickening time in natural generation; so there is in regeneration; “You hath he quickened” (Eph. 2:1). Previous to regeneration, men are dead

while they live; though corporally alive, are morally dead, dead in a moral sense, as to spiritual things, in all the powers and faculties of their souls; they have no more knowledge of them, affection for them, will to them, or power to perform them, than a dead man has with respect to things natural; but in regeneration, a principle of spiritual life is infused; that is a time of life when the Lord speaks life into them, and produces it in them. Christ is the resurrection and life unto them, or raises them from a death of sin to a life of grace; and the spirit of life, from Christ, enters into them. Regeneration is a passing from death to life; it is a principle of spiritual life implanted in the heart; in consequence of which, a man breathes, in a spiritual sense; where there is breath, there is life. God breathed into Adam the breath of life, and he became a living soul, or a living person, and breathed again: so the Spirit of God breathes on dry bones, and they live, and breathe again. Prayer is the spiritual breath of a regenerate man; "Behold, he prayeth!" is observed of Saul when regenerated; who, just before, had been breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of Christ. A regenerate man breathes in prayer to God, and pants after him; after more knowledge of him in Christ, after communion with him, after the discoveries of his love; particularly after pardoning grace and mercy: and sometimes these breathings and desires are only expressed by sighs and groans, yet these are a sign of life; if a man groans, it is plain he is alive. There are, in a regenerated man, which shows that he is made alive, cravings after spiritual food: as soon as an infant is born, it shows motions for its mother's milk, after the breast: so newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. They have their spiritual senses exercised about spiritual objects; they have what answer to the senses in animal life, their seeing and hearing, as before observed, and also their feeling; they feel the burden of sin on their consciences; the workings of the Spirit of God in their hearts; as well as handle Christ, the Word of life; which makes it a plain case that they are alive; a dead man feels nothing. They have a spiritual taste, a gust for spiritual things; the word of Christ is sweeter to their taste than honey, or the honeycomb; they sit under his shadow with pleasure, and his fruit, the blessings of his grace, are sweet unto their taste; they taste that the Lord is gracious, and invite others to taste and see also how good he is; they savour the things which be of God, and not of men; Christ, and his grace, are savoury to them; his robe of righteousness, and garments of salvation, smell delightfully as myrrh, &c. (Song of Sol. 1:3; Ps. 45:8) and these spiritual senses, and the exercise of them in them, show them to be alive, or born again; such persons live a life of faith; they live by faith; not upon it, but on Christ, the object of it; and they grow up into him their Head, from whom they receive nourishment; and so increase with the increase of God; which is an evidence of life. In a word, they live a new and another life than they did before; not to themselves, nor to the lusts of men; but to God, and to Christ who died for them, and rose again; they walk in newness of life.

5. Regeneration is signified by "Christ being formed in the heart" (Gal. 4:19), his image is stamped in regeneration; not the image of the first Adam, but of the second Adam; for the new man is after the image of him who has anew created it, which is the image of Christ; to be conformed to which God's elect are predestinated, and which takes place in regeneration (Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10). The graces of Christ, as faith, and hope, and love, are wrought in the hearts of regenerate persons, and soon appear there; yea, Christ himself lives in them; "Not I," says the apostle, "but Christ lives in me;" he dwells by faith there; Christ, and the believer, mutually dwell in each other.

6. Regeneration is said to be "a partaking of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), not of the nature of God essentially considered: a creature cannot partake of the divine essence, or have that communicated to it; this would be to deify men: the divine perfections, many of them, are utterly incommunicable, as eternity,

immensity, & c. nor of the divine nature, or of it in such sense as Christ is a partaker of it, by the personal, or hypostatical union of the two natures in him; so that the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in him. But in regeneration there is that wrought in the soul, which bears a resemblance to the divine nature, in spirituality, holiness, goodness, kindness, &c. and therefore is so called.

7. There are also several terms, or words, by which the grace of regeneration is expressed; as by grace itself; not as that signifies the love and favour of God towards his people, or the blessings of grace bestowed upon them; but internal grace, the work of grace in the heart; and which consists of the various graces of the Spirit implanted there; as faith, hope, and love: such as are begotten again, are begotten to a lively hope, and have it, and believe in the Son of God; and love him that begot, and him that is begotten (1 Pet. 1:3; 1 John 5:1). It is called "spirit" (John 3:6) from its author, the Spirit of God; and from its seat, the spirit of man; and from its nature, which is spiritual, and denominates men spiritual men. It is also signified by "seed" (1 John 3:9). "Whosoever is born of God—his seed remaineth in him;" which is the principle of grace infused in regeneration; and as seed contains in it virtually, all that after proceeds from it, the blade, stalk, ear, and full corn in the ear; so the first principle of grace implanted in the heart, seminally contains all the grace which afterwards appears, and all the fruits, effects, acts, and exercises of it.

II. The springs and causes of regeneration; efficient, moving, meritorious, and instrumental.

First, The efficient cause of it; who is not man, but God.

1. First, Not man; he cannot regenerate himself; his case, and the nature of the thing itself, show it; and it is indeed denied of him. The case in which men before regeneration are, plainly shows that it is not, and cannot be of themselves; they are quite ignorant of the thing itself. Regeneration is one, and a principal one, of the things of the Spirit of God, and which a natural man cannot discern and understand; let him have what share he may of natural knowledge; as Nicodemus, a master in Israel, and yet said, how can these things be? and a man cannot be the author of that of which he has no knowledge: nor do men, previous to regeneration, see any need of it; as those who think themselves whole, see no need of a physician, nor make use of any; and who reckon themselves rich, and stand in need of nothing; as not of righteousness, so not of repentance; and if not of repentance, then not of regeneration. And whatsoever notion they may have of it, from what others say concerning it; they have no inclination, nor desire, nor will to it, till God works in them both to will and to do; the bias of their minds is another way; yea, their carnal minds are enmity to it; they mock at it, and count it all dream and enthusiasm. And had they any disposition of mind to it, which they have not, they have no power to effect it; they can do nothing, not the least thing of a spiritual kind; and much less perform such a work as this: this is not by might or power of men, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts; to all which may be added, and which makes it impracticable, is, that men are dead in trespasses and sins; and can no more quicken themselves than a dead man can; as soon might Lazarus have raised himself from the dead, and the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, have quickened themselves and lived.

2. The nature of the work clearly shows that it is not in the power of men to do it; it is represented as a creation; it is called a new creature, the workmanship of God created in Christ, the new man after God, created in righteousness. Now creation is a work of almighty Power; a creature cannot create the least

thing, not a fly, as soon might he create a world; and as soon may a man create a world out of nothing, as create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within him. It is spoken of as a “resurrection” from the dead; and as soon might dead bodies quicken themselves, as men, dead in sin, raise themselves up to a spiritual life; this requires a power equal to that which raised Christ from the dead; and is done by the same. Its very name, “regeneration,” shows the nature of it; and clearly suggests, that it is out of the power of man to effect it: as men contribute nothing to their first birth, so neither to the second; as no man generates himself, so neither can he regenerate himself; as an infant is passive in its natural generation, and has no concern in it; so passive is a man in his spiritual generation, and is no more assisting in it. It is an “implantation” of that grace in the hearts of men which was not there before; faith is one part of it, said to be “not of ourselves,” but the gift of God; and hope is another, without which men are, while in a state of unregeneracy; and love is of such a nature, that if a man would give all he has for it, it would utterly be contemned; it is a maxim that will hold, “*nil dat quod non habet*,” nothing can give that which it has not: a man destitute of grace, cannot give grace, neither to himself nor to another. This work lies in taking away “the heart of stone,” and giving an “heart of flesh;” even “a new heart” and “a new spirit:” and none can do this but he who sits upon the throne, and says, “Behold, I make all things new.” To say no more, it is a “transforming” of men by the renewing of their minds, making them other men than they were before, as Saul was, and more so; the change of an Ethiopian’s skin, and of the leopard’s spots, is not greater, nor so great, as the change of a man’s heart and nature; and which, indeed, is not a change of the old man, or corruption of nature, which remains the same; but the production of the new man, or of a new principle, which was not before.

3. Regeneration is expressly denied to be of men; it is said to be “not of blood,” the blood of circumcision, “which availeth not anything; but a new creature” is of avail, when that is not; nor of the blood of ancestors, of the best of men, the most holy and most eminent for grace; the blood of such may run in the veins of men, and yet they be destitute of regenerating grace; as was the case of the Jews, of multitudes of them, who boasted of being of Abraham’s seed, and of his blood: none need value themselves upon their blood on any account, and much less on a religious one; since all nations of the earth are made of one man’s blood, and that is tainted with sin, and conveys corruption; sin is propagated that way, but not grace: nor are men born “of the will of the flesh,” which is carnal and corrupt; impotent to that which is good, and enmity to it: regeneration is not of him that willeth; God, of his own will, begets men again, and not of theirs: nor are they born of “the will of men,” of the greatest and best of men, who are regenerated persons themselves; these, of their will, cannot convey regenerating grace to others; if they could, a good master would regenerate every servant in his family; a good parent would regenerate every child of his; and a minister of the gospel would regenerate all that sit under his ministry; they can only pray and use the means; God only can do the work. Wherefore,

II. Secondly, the efficient cause of regeneration is God only; hence we so often read, “which were born of God,” and “whosoever and whatsoever is born of God” (John 1:13; 1 John 3:9; 1 John 5:1, 4), and this is true of God, Father, Son, and Spirit, who have each a concern in regeneration.

1. God the Father, who is the Father of Christ; he as such begets men again according to his abundant mercy (1 Pet. 1:3), and as the Father of lights, of his own sovereign will and pleasure, regenerates with the word of truth; and as light was one of the first things in the old creation, so in the new creation, or regeneration, light is the first thing sprung in the heart by the Father and fountain of light (James 1:17,18),

and as the Father of men by adoption he regenerates; it is of him they are born again, who is their covenant God and Father in Christ; he has chosen them unto holiness, of which regeneration is the root, seed, and principle; he has predestinated them to be conformed to the image of his Son, which is done in regeneration; and it is by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he sheds abundantly through Christ the Saviour, that he saves his elect ones.

2. God the Son has also a concern in regeneration, and so great a concern, that they who are born again are said to be “born of him,” that is, Christ; for no other is spoken of in the context (1 John 2:29), he is the “resurrection and the life;” the author of the spiritual resurrection to a spiritual life, which is no other than regeneration; he quickens whom he will, as the Father does; and it is through his powerful voice in the gospel, that the dead in sin hear and live; it is his Spirit which is sent down into the hearts of his people, as to bear witness to their adoption, so to regenerate them; his grace is given to them, yea he himself is formed in them; his image is stamped upon them; and it is by virtue of his resurrection that “they are begotten” to a lively hope of the heavenly inheritance (John 11:25; 5:21, 25; Gal. 4:6, 19; 1 Pet. 1:3, 4).

3. The Holy Spirit of God is the author of regeneration, and to him it is ascribed by our Lord; “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit” (John 3:5), by “water,” is not meant the ordinance of water baptism, that is never expressed by water only, without some other word with it in the text or context which determines the sense; nor is regeneration by it; Simon Magus was baptized, but not regenerated: regeneration ought to precede baptism; faith and repentance, which are graces given in regeneration, are required previous to baptism; nor is water baptism absolutely necessary to salvation; whereas without regeneration no man can neither see nor enter into the kingdom of heaven; but the grace of the Spirit is meant by water, so called from its cleansing and purifying use, as it has to do with the blood of Jesus, hence called the washing of regeneration; of this grace the Spirit is the author, whence it bears his name, is called “Spirit;” it is the renewing of the Holy Ghost, or the new creature is his workmanship; quickening grace is from him; it is the Spirit that quickens and gives life, and frees from the law of sin and death (Titus 3:5; John 3:6; 6:63).

Secondly, The impulsive, or moving cause, is the free grace, love and mercy of God; “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, hath quickened us” (Eph 2:4, 5). Regeneration, as it is a time of life when men are quickened, it is a time of love, of open love; it springs from love, which moves mercy to exert itself in this way; it is “according to his abundant mercy God hath begotten us again unto a lively hope” (1 Pet. 1:3), and this was sovereign grace and mercy, not excited by any motives or conditions in men, or by any preparatory works in them; what were there in the three thousand, some of whom had been concerned in the death of Christ, converted under Peter’s sermon? what were in the jailor, who had just before used the apostles in a cruel manner? what were there in Saul, the blasphemer, persecutor, and injurious person, between these characters and his obtaining mercy? no, it is not according to the will and works, of men that they are regenerated, but God, “of his own will begat he us” (James 1:18), his own sovereign will and pleasure; and this grace and mercy is abundant; it is richly and plentifully displayed; it is “exceeding abundant,” it flows and overflows; there is a pleonasm, a redundancy of it (1 Tim. 1:14), and to this, as a moving cause, regeneration is owing.

Thirdly, the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the virtual or procuring cause of it; there is a power or virtue in Christ’s resurrection, which has an influence on many things; as on our justification, for which

he rose again, so on our regeneration; for men are said to be “begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3), and which also may be considered as the exemplary cause of it; for as there is a planting together “in the likeness of his death, so in the likeness of his resurrection from the dead;” as Christ’s resurrection was a declaration of his being the Son of God, so regeneration is an evidence of interest in the adoption of children; and as the resurrection of Christ was by the mighty power of God, so is the regeneration and quickening of a dead sinner; and as Christ’s resurrection was his first step to his glorification, so is regeneration to seeing and entering into the kingdom of God.

Fourthly, The instrumental cause of regeneration, if it may be so called, are the word of God, and the ministers of it; hence regenerate persons are said to be “born again by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Pet. 1:23), and again, “of his own will begat he us with the word of truth” (James 1:18), unless by the Word in these passages should be meant the Eternal Logos, or essential Word of God, Christ Jesus, since logos is used in both places; though ministers of the gospel are not only represented as ministers and instruments by whom others believe, but as spiritual fathers; “though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ,” says the apostle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:15), “yet have ye not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel;” so he speaks of his son Onesimus, whom he had “begotten in his bonds” (Philemon 1:10) yet this instrumentality of the word in regeneration seems not so agreeable to the principle of grace implanted in the soul in regeneration, and to be understood with respect to that; since that is done by immediate infusion, and is represented as a creation; and now as God made no use of any instrument in the first and old creation, so neither does it seem so agreeable that he should use any in the new creation: wherefore this is rather to be understood of the exertion of the principle of grace, and the drawing it forth into act and exercise; which is excited and encouraged by the ministry of the word, by which it appears that a man is born again; so the three thousand first converts, and the jailor, were first regenerated, or had the principle of grace wrought in their souls by the Spirit of God, and then were directed and encouraged by the ministry of the apostles to repent and believe in Christ: whereby it became manifest that they were born again. Though after all it seems plain, that the ministry of the word is the vehicle in which the Spirit of God conveys himself and his grace into the hearts of men; which is done when the word comes not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost; and works effectually, and is the power of God unto salvation; then faith comes by hearing, and ministers are instruments by whom, at least, men are encouraged to believe: “received ye the Spirit,” says the apostle, “by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith:” (Gal. 3:2), that is, by the preaching of the law, or by the preaching of the gospel? by the latter, no doubt.

III. The subjects of regeneration are next to be inquired into, or who they are God is pleased to bestow this grace upon. These are men, and not angels; good angels have no need of regeneration; they are holy angels, and continue in that state of holiness in which they were created, and are confirmed therein; they have no need of it to make them meet for heaven, they are there already; they are the angels of heaven, and always behold the face of our heavenly Father there: as for the evil angels, none of them ever had, nor never will have any share in regenerating grace; they believe indeed, but they have not the faith of regenerate ones, or that faith which worketh by love; they believe there is a God, but they do not, nor can they love him; they believe he is, and tremble at his wrath; they have no hope as regenerate ones have, but live in black despair, and ever will. They are men God regenerates, and not brutes, nor stocks nor stones; these are not subjects capable of regeneration; God could raise up children out of these, but it is not his

way and work; they are rational creatures he thus operates upon, and he treats them as such in the ministry of his word; though he is represented as dealing otherwise by the adversaries of the grace of God: but though they are men, and men only, whom God regenerates, yet not all men; all men have not faith, and hope, and love; they are a kind of first fruits of his creatures, whom of his own will he begets with the word of truth; they are such who are called out and separated from the rest of the world; they are such who are the peculiar objects of his love; for regeneration is the fruit and effect of love, and the evidence of it; they are such whom God has predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, in which image they are created in regeneration; those whom the apostle speaks of as “begotten again unto a lively hope, are first described as elect according to the foreknowledge of God” (1 Pet. 1:2, 3), and they are such who are redeemed by Christ, for they that are chosen in him, have redemption through his blood; and those are quickened by his Spirit and grace, when dead in trespasses and sins, for such is their state and condition before they are born again; they are such who are the sons of God by adopting grace, who because they are sons the Spirit of God is sent into them, as to witness their adoption, so to regenerate them, which gives evidence of it; and thus they become openly the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Let it be further observed, that though the chief and principal seat of regeneration is the spirit or soul of man, yet it extends its influence to the body and the member’s thereof; whereby they are restrained from the lusts of the flesh, as to yield a ready, constant, and universal obedience to them; or so as to “yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin;” but, on the contrary, are so under the power of the reigning principle of grace, implanted in them in regeneration, that they, “through the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body, and live” (Rom. 6:12, 13; 8:13).

IV. The effects of regeneration, or the ends to be answered, and which are answered by it, and which show the importance and necessity of it.

1. A principal effect of it; or, if you will, a concomitant of it, is a participation of every grace of the Spirit. Regenerate ones have not only the promise of life made to them, but they have the grace of life given them; they live a new life, and walk in newness of life: they partake of the grace of spiritual light; before, their understandings were darkened; but now they are enlightened by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of divine things; they were before, darkness itself; but now are made light in the Lord. In regeneration is laid the beginning of sanctification, which is carried on till completed, without which no man shall see the Lord; for the new man is created in righteousness and true holiness; the principle of holiness is then formed, from whence holy actions spring. The grace of repentance then appears; the stony, hard, obdurate, and impenitent heart being taken away, and an heart of flesh, susceptible of divine impressions, being given; on which follow, a sense of sin, sorrow for it after a godly sort, and repentance unto life and unto salvation, which is not to be repented of: faith in Christ, which is not of a man’s self, but the gift of God, and the operation of the Spirit of God, is now given and brought into exercise; which being an effect, is an evidence of regeneration; for “whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ,” and especially that believes in Christ, as his Saviour and Redeemer, “is born of God” (1 John 5:1), and such have hope of eternal life by Christ; while unregenerate men are without hope, without a true, solid, and well-grounded hope; but in regeneration, they are begotten to a “lively hope,” and have it; a good hope, through grace, founded upon the person, blood, and righteousness of Christ, which is of use to them both in life and death. Regenerated persons have their “hearts circumcised,” which is but another phrase for regenerating grace, “to love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul” (Deut. 30:6), and though before, their carnal minds were enmity to God, and all that is good; now they love him, and all that belong

to him, his word, worship, ordinances, and people; and by this it is known, that they “have passed from death to life,” which is no other than regeneration, “because they love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). In short, regenerate persons are partakers of all the fruits of the Spirit; of all other graces, besides those mentioned; as humility, patience, self-denial, and resignation to the will of God. And they are blessed with such measures of grace and spiritual strength, as to be able to resist sin and Satan, and to overcome the world, and every spiritual enemy; “For whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world,” the god of it, the men in it, and the lusts thereof; “Whosoever is born of God, sinneth not,” does not live in sin, nor is he overcome by it; “but he that is begotten of God, keepeth himself” from Satan, and his temptations, from being overcome with them; “and that wicked one toucheth him not:” being clothed with the whole armour of God, which he has skill to wield; he keeps him off, and at bay, so that he cannot come in with him; he holds up the shield of faith to him, whereby he quenches all his fiery darts (1 John 5:4, 18).

2. Knowledge, and actual enjoyment of the several blessings of grace, follow upon regeneration. The covenant of grace is “ordered in all things,” and is full of all spiritual blessings; and a grant of all the blessings of grace was made to Christ, and to the elect in him, before the world began, and they were secretly blessed with them in him as early; but then till the Spirit of God is sent down into their hearts in regeneration, to make known unto them the things which God has freely given them, they are strangers to them, and have no knowledge of them, cannot claim their interest in them, nor are they actually possessed of them. They are loved of God with an everlasting love; but then the first open display of it to them is in regeneration, when God draws them with loving-kindness to himself, as a fruit and effect, and so an evidence of his ancient love to them. They are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world; but this is not known by them till the gospel comes, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost; working powerfully in them, regenerating, quickening, and sanctifying them; when that holiness to which they are chosen, is implanted, and that image of Christ, to which they are predestinated, is stamped: there is an union with Christ, which election in him gives; and there is a legal union between him and the elect, as between a surety and debtor, in virtue of suretyship engagements for them; and there is a mystical union, as between head and members; and a conjugal one, as between man and wife: but before regeneration there is no vital union, or such an union as between vine and branches, by which they actually receive life, and grace, and nourishment, and bear, and bring forth fruit. They are the sons of God by predestination; and in covenant, the adoption of children belongs, unto them; but this does not appear till regeneration takes place, when they receive in person the power and privilege of it, and are manifestly the sons of God by faith in Christ. Justification was a sentence conceived in the mind of God from eternity; was pronounced on Christ, and his people in him, when he rose from the dead; but is not known to those interested in it, till the Spirit of God reveals the righteousness of Christ from faith to faith, and pronounces upon it the sentence of justification in the conscience of the believer; until he is born again, he has no knowledge of this blessing, no comfortable perception of it; nor can he claim his interest in it, nor have that peace and joy which flow from it. And now it is that an awakened sinner has the application of pardoning grace and mercy; for though pardon of sin is provided in covenant, and the blood of Christ is shed for it, and he is exalted to give it; yet it is not actually given, applied, and enjoyed, until repentance is given also; for they are both in Christ’s gift together; and when also it is that God blesses his people with peace, with peace of conscience, flowing from the blood, righteousness, and sacrifice of Christ.

3. Another effect of regeneration is, a fitness and capacity for the performance of good works. In regeneration men are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works;” and by their new creation, become fit

for, and capable of, performing them; the new man is formed in them “unto righteousness and true holiness,” to the acts and exercises of righteousness and holiness (Eph 2:10; 4:24), such who are born again, are “sanctified and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21), whereas, an unregenerate man is “to every good work reprobate;” he has neither will nor power to perform that which is good, till God “works in him both to will and to do.” The principal ingredients in good works are wanting in them, wherefore they cannot be acceptable to God: and, indeed, “without faith,” as these are without it, “it is impossible to please God;” nor can they that are “in the flesh,” who are carnal and unregenerate, “please God;” that is, do those things which are pleasing to him (Heb. 11:6; Rom. 8:8), without the Spirit of God, and the grace and strength of Christ, nothing of this kind can be performed; wherefore God has promised to put his “Spirit” in his people, which he does in regeneration, to “cause them to walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments, and do them:” so though they can do nothing of themselves, yet, through the Spirit, grace, and strength of Christ, they can do all things (Ezek. 36:27; Phil. 4:13) to which they must be referred; even a very heathen could say, Whatever good thing thou dost, ascribe it to God. [u](#) (footnote has clickable link to return here)

4. Regeneration gives a meetness for the kingdom of God; without this, no man can see, nor enter into it (John 3:3, 5), whether by “the kingdom of God” is meant, a gospel church state, and a participation of the privileges and ordinances of it, or the ultimate state of glory and happiness: the former may be meant, into which publicans and harlots went before the Pharisees; and which they would neither enter into themselves, nor suffer others to go in who were entering; and a removal of which from them, Christ threatens them with (Matt. 23:13; 21:31, 43). Unregenerate men may indeed, in a sense, see and enter into this kingdom of God; they may attend the word, and embrace the truths of it, make a profession of faith, submit to gospel ordinances, and become members of a gospel church; this they may do in fact, but not of right; they are such as do not come in at the right door, Christ, and true faith in him; but climb up another way, and are thieves and robbers; hypocrites in Zion, tares in Christ’s field, and foolish virgins among the wise; to whom the kingdom of God is compared. Unregenerate men have not the proper qualifications for the church of God, and the ordinances of it; these particularly, are faith and repentance; these are required to a person’s admission to baptism (Matthew 3:2, 8; Acts 2:38; 8:12, 37), and so to the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper; “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat” (1 Cor. 11:28), whether he has true repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and if such a man, devoid of these, which attend or flow from regeneration, gets admitted to these ordinances, and into a church state, of what avail is it to him here or hereafter? what does it signify now to have the form of godliness, without the power? a name to live, and yet be dead? or hereafter; for “what is the hope of the hypocrite” of what use is it to him? “though he hath gained” the name of a professor, of a religious man, and a place in the house of God, “when God takes away his soul,” these will be of no service to him? Though may be the ultimate state of glory may be meant by the kingdom of God, in the above passages; as in (1 Cor. 6:9; Luke 12:32; Matt. 25:34). An unregenerate man has no apparent right unto it; nor meetness for it. The proper right unto it lies in adoption; “If children, then heirs.” But this right, so founded, does not appear till a man is born again, which is the evidence of adoption; nor can he be meet and fit for it, without this grace of God regenerating, quickening, and sanctifying; for without holiness man shall see the Lord; and nothing shall enter into the heavenly state that defiles or makes an abomination; but when men are born again, they are, heirs apparent to the heavenly inheritance; they are rich faith, and heirs of a kingdom; and are meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the saints in light.

V. The properties of regeneration; and which may serve to throw more light on the nature of it.

1. Regeneration is a passive work, or rather, men are passive in it; as they must needs be, in the first infusion and implantation of grace, and the quickening of them; even as passive as the first matter created was, out of which all things were made; and as a dead man, when raised from the dead is; or as the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision were, while the Spirit of God breathed upon them, and then they became active; and as infants are in the natural generation of them; for men no more contribute to their spiritual birth, than infants do to their natural birth; all this appears from regeneration being a creation, a resurrection from the dead, and a being begotten and born again.

2. It is an irresistible act of God's grace; no more resistance can be made unto it, than there could be in the first matter to its creation; or in a dead man to his resurrection; or in an infant to its generation. Regeneration is of the will of God, which cannot be resisted; the Spirit, in regeneration, is like "the wind," which "bloweth where it listeth," and none can hinder it "so is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8), it is done by the power of God, which is uncontrollable; whatever aversion, contrariety, and opposition there may be in the corrupt nature of men unto it, that is soon and easily overcome by the power of divine grace; when the stony heart is taken away, and an heart of flesh is given. When God works, nothing can let; an unwilling people are made willing in the day of his power; high thoughts, reasonings, and imaginations of the carnal mind, are cast down by him.

3. It is an act that is instantaneously done, at once; it is not like sanctification it gives rise to; which is but a begun work, and is carried on gradually; faith grows, hope and love abound more and more, and spiritual light and knowledge increase by degrees, till they come to the perfect day: but regeneration is at once; as an infant in nature is generated at once, and is also born at once, and not by degrees; so it is in spiritual generation; one man cannot be said to be more regenerated than another, though he may be more sanctified; and the same man cannot be said to be more regenerated at one time than at another.

4. As it is done at once, so it is perfect; some persons speak of a regenerate and an unregenerate part in men; and that they are partly regenerate and partly unregenerate. I must confess I do not understand this; since regeneration is a new creature, and perfect in its kind. There are, indeed, two principles in a man that is born again; a principle of corrupt nature, and a principle of grace; the one is called the old man, and the other the new: the whole old man is unregenerate, no part in him is regenerated; he remains untouched, and is just the same he was, only deprived of his power and dominion; and the new man is wholly regenerate, no unregenerate part in him: there is no sin in him, nor done by him, he cannot commit sin; "the king's daughter is all glorious within:" a man child, as soon as born, having all its limbs, is a perfect man, as to parts, though these are not at their full growth and size, as they will be, if it lives: so the new man is a perfect man at once, as to parts, though as yet not arrived to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

5. The grace of regeneration can never be lost; once regenerated, and always so; one that is born in a spiritual sense, can never be unborn again; for he cannot die a spiritual death; he is born of incorruptible and immortal seed; he is born of water and of the Spirit, or of the grace of the Spirit, which is as a well of living water in him, springing up unto everlasting life: and all such who are begotten again unto a lively

hope of a glorious inheritance, are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation (1 Pet. 1:3-5, 23). To which may be added,

6. An adjunct which always accompanies regeneration, a spiritual warfare between the old and the new man, the principle of sin, and the principle of grace; the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; the law in the members warring against the law of the mind; which are, as it were, a company of two armies engaged in war with each other, which always issues in a victory on the side of the new creature; for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and sin and Satan, and every enemy, and is more than a conqueror over all, through Christ.

ENDNOTES:

1[1] ti an agaon pratths eis qeous anapemte, Bias apud Laert. 1. 1. in vita ejus

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