

Ruin by the Fall; Redemption by Christ; Regeneration by the Spirit

By Jay Wegter

Why is the biblical Doctrine of Sovereign Regeneration missing from so many Pulpits today?

We need a new heart in order to love God. This ought to be preached when we proclaim the necessity of regeneration—the new birth is necessary in order to desire God with all of our soul’s faculties—mind, will, affections and conscience. Consider that the gospel’s call for the new birth proposes that a man cannot know God, nor be saved unless there is a massive ‘invasion’ of the *walled kingdom of self* by the God of the universe. This ‘invasion’ grants a new nature, thus it is designated, ‘being born from above’ (**Jn 3:7**). But the natural man opposes the need for the new birth, he finds it offensive because he cherishes his imagined autonomy, supposed spiritual ability, and self-righteousness. But, when the work of the new birth passes upon the soul, the tyranny of self is deposed, the natural man’s ‘sovereignty’ is dethroned. The gracious result is that the ‘government of God’ is installed in the soul—a new King then reigns there (**Col 1:12-13**). The new born man now cherishes Christ’s throne rights there.

In his book, *The Religious Affections*, Edwards presses his case stating that the truly converted man has seen Christ spiritually whereas the world has not seen Christ in this way (2 Cor 4:6).ⁱ In a genuine believer there is daily amazement that God accomplishes His glory and our good together in Christ. True salvation must have a foundation that goes deeper than self-interest. Regeneration grants a Spirit-engendered sight and savor of God’s glory. Hypocrites and false religionists lack this mark of salvation. Edwards notes that the religious affections are the fruit of a new regenerated heart and that these affections are what moves the Christian life.ⁱⁱ Satan cannot counterfeit this sentiment—no natural man sees God’s glory and the creature’s happiness woven together in Christ.

God’s sovereign grace, bestowed on the helpless sinner does not mean that the Lord does not require consecration from believers. For our Lord has said, “You must *hate your life* in this world in order to keep it to life eternal” (**Jn 12:25**). The *hating* in this context means we are releasing our cherished way of doing things, our manipulations, defenses, and trusted areas of self-protection.

Those attitudes and behaviors belong to the ‘old me’ (**2 Cor 5:17**). But, now as a new creation, I am to daily consent to receive love from the Lord that I might love Him and the brethren in return. When Paul said, “Not I but Christ,” he was constantly looking to the Savior as His ‘Source Person’—as the source of his spiritual life, vitality, righteousness, and favor with God (**Gal 2:20**).

Nothing humbles like the cross. For, in its message we discover the truth that Christ was abandoned there because of, and for, our dereliction, defilement, uselessness, and rebellion. When the Holy Spirit applies this truth in regeneration, there is a vivifying grace awakening. In that burst of understanding, a realization washes over the soul that God’s grace in the cross is perfectly suited to my situation, for my ruin by reason of my sin. Saving faith and ongoing gospel faith involve a continual consent to God’s purpose in giving Christ as my only eligibility for endless installments of grace (**Eph 2:4-7**).

Unregenerate man is spiritually dead and helpless (**Eph 2:1-3**).

It is a *moral obstacle* that prevents men from believing in Christ (Rom 5:6-8**).**

Can that moral obstacle be overcome by a decision? Or is it only overcome by sovereign regeneration?ⁱⁱⁱ Man’s decision is not separate from who and what a man is at his moral center (**Rom 2:1-5; Heb 9:14**). Jesus said that men “can’t believe when they live to receive glory and approval from one another” (**Jn 5:44**). In so doing, Jesus ties believing to other moral acts—which begs the question, is faith the ‘one thing’ that a man can do?^{iv}

What changes must take place before man can believe? Ignorance must be overcome. Jesus described the unbelieving religious leaders as ‘blind guides of the blind’ (**Mt 15:10-14**). Jesus, in that context warns, ‘Plants’ not planted by My Father will be uprooted (**Mt 15:13-14**). Our Lord also states that in order to believe savingly, there must be a desire to do the Father’s will (**Jn 7:17**). The fact remains, a man cannot ‘hear My words’ because man wants to do the desires of the devil—who is every natural man’s spiritual father (**Jn 8:43-45**).^v Thus, a decision for Christ is not separate from what a man is. And to believe on the Son savingly means that a man must:

- Stop seeking glory from man
- Start seeking glory from God

- Give up pursuing sinful desires inspired by the flesh and the devil
- Receive the moral nature of God the Father
- Understand the basic elements of the truth

The above supports the fact that faith is based on a moral change wrought by God within the sinner, namely regeneration (Titus 3:5-8). Is the sinner able to make this change? No, faith arises from the heart of a morally changed man. The sinner is powerless to make all of these changes. Note the biblical assessment of man's slavery to sin in **Romans 3:9-18**.^{vi} James Adams states, "Our Lord was not ambiguous: regeneration is a work of God—not a human work, but something God does. It is truly divine regeneration! According to Christ, regeneration is a change performed in us, not an act accomplished by us (**Jn 1:13**)."^{vii}

The natural man will not seek after God (Rom 3:9). The natural man loves darkness; hates God; loves himself. We err to think that the natural man is located on a spectrum somewhere between love and hatred of God. No, 'He that is not for Me is against Me' (**Mt 12:30**). The hatred is hatred of God's moral authority. Christ summarized a key reason for the hatred: one cannot serve two masters (**Mt 6:24**). Jesus said that the world hated Him (**Jn 15:18, 24**).^{viii}

Man's hatred of God is behind his ignorance. It is erroneous to think that if men only knew God that they would love Him. Man's ignorance is blame-worthy—it yields a bias. Jesus said that the world hated Him because He testified that its deeds were evil (**Jn 7:7**). Sinners prefer ignorance of God, a sentiment manifested by their love of darkness—not wishing to retain Him in their thoughts (**Jn 3:19-21**)—and having no sympathy for the revealed character of God.^{ix} Sinners need what only regeneration can provide:

- A new mind
- A new disposition
- A new attitude
- A new heart

From birth the sinner's mind is hostile to God (Col 1:21). His hostility keeps him from repenting. The flesh cannot please God (**Rom 8:3-8**). Faith has a moral basis—it arises out of a man's moral state. Thus, faith is not divorced from what a man is and does. The natural man cannot change himself and remove his own bias. Spiritual things have a note of folly and distaste to him (**1 Cor 2:14**).^x

God's solution to the sinner's helpless situation and dilemma is the Father's drawing by the teaching power of the Spirit (Jn 6:37). Human nature left to itself is helpless (**Rom 5:6**). The Father overcomes the natural resistance and ignorance in those He has given to the Son—those given to the Son hear and learn from the Father (**Jn 6:43-45**). The Father makes a moral change in these persons which leads them to the Savior. No man can or will come unless the Father does something. Human nature left to itself cannot do it (**Jn 6:65**). Jesus indicates in **John 6** that the Father overcomes their bias and ignorance.^{xi}

In salvation it is the Father's renewing work on the wills; without which the sinner is unresponsive. The Father's gift of some to the Son means that the Father will overcome their innate deadness, hardness, and ignorance. What is impossible with man is possible with God (**Lu 18:26-27**). God does step into many lives, intervening by way of the new birth. It is God's action (**Jn 1:12-13**). It leads to man's response which is faith in Christ. Thus, faith has a moral basis—faith is not an isolated action of the mind. Faith has roots in what a man is.^{xii}

We appeal to the sinner to turn from sin, change his ways, believe. But, will a bare notion or assent to the truth of the gospel save him? Not at all. He must be a changed man or woman to experience the mercy of God. Seek the Lord while He may be found (**Is 55:6-7**). Salvation is not by works; but only a changed heart will comply with faith and repentance (**Lu 18:22**). A false profession of faith is common (**Acts 8:21-23**). In the parable of the soils, Jesus warns of a natural, 'temporary' faith. The appeal to salvation is a moral appeal joined to a faith appeal (**Is 55:6-7**). If faith has no moral basis, and is only a solitary action of the mind, then it may exist without a commitment to Christ. But by contrast, the new creature receives Christ whole-heartedly for all Christ is. He gives himself to Christ without reservation BECAUSE he is a new creature.^{xiii}

In regeneration a man's stony heart has been replaced with a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26). The burning issue is—*What will you do with Christ?* The response of the renewed heart to Christ, and who Christ is as Lord of all, is *trust, submission, and worship*. Must I wait for a new heart from God? No! Faith and repentance are only evidences that show that a man has a new heart.^{xiv}

Marks which are consistent with the New Birth

It is the responsibility of those who have heard and accepted the Gospel as true, to test themselves so as to discover whether or not they are in a state of

grace (2 Cor 13:5; 2 Pet 1:9). God desires that the people who are truly His, know for certain that they are new creatures who have been born again, who truly possess eternal life (1 Jn 5:13, 20). The new creature in Christ has the daily testimony that *once he was blind, but now he sees* (Jn 9:25). The believer looks back at his former life outside of Christ and sees vividly the contrast between the kingdoms of darkness and light (Col 1:13; Titus 3:3-7; 1 Pet 4:1-6).

God's grace is filled with illuminating light. Among the objects that this light shines upon, is the work done by God to the soul of the regenerate. The Lord shows true believers their sonship (Rom 8:14-16). Those born of the Spirit will be able therefore to answer the following questions in the affirmative:

1) Have you been inwardly taught Who and What God is? 2) Were your eyes ever turned inward to see yourself, the sinfulness of your depraved state, the corruption of your nature, the sins of your heart and life? 3) Have your eyes seen King Jesus in His beauty, as the manifest wisdom of God in Him? 4) Has this view of Christ opened your eyes to the vanity and emptiness of all other things? 5) Has there been a change in your will, your self-control? 6) Does your heart have a new disposition? 7) Do you find that you now have a strong aversion to sin and a controlling inclination to good? 8) Is your soul turned toward God as your chief end? 9) Do you walk after the will of God as it is delineated in the Scriptures? 10) Are you heartily holding fast to Christ as He is offered in the gospel? 11) Do you love the manner in which God has wrought your salvation? 12) Are your affections changed so that your desires go out after God? 13) Are your hopes in God so that your love is set upon Him and you view Him as your true home? 14) Do you hate sin and are you burdened by offending God. Does the offense of your sin against God bring you sorrow of heart? 15) Do you fear sin more than suffering? 16) Are your desires regulated so that you 'hear God's voice' in the Word and in the rod of discipline? 17) Does Christ have the chief seat in your heart? 18) Are your greatest lawful enjoyments and comforts laid at His feet? 19) Has your conscience been enlightened so that it refuses all forms of comfort but the blood of the Redeemer? 20) Is your body consecrated to the service of God? 21) Are you walking in newness of life?

By this test we may discover whether we are born again or not.

This present world is filled with darkened souls who regard the depraved human condition as ‘normal’.

By contrast, those who have received the gospel light of the knowledge of God believe God’s testimony that the human condition is the love of darkness (Jn 3:19-21). Christ-followers understand that sin and death came into the world as a tragic intrusion. This present world is not normal! Man’s willful breaking fellowship with God **broke** mankind, and **broke** the world. Understanding this primeval defection from God is a vital part of apprehending God’s plot—for man’s revolt was the misuse of liberty and freedom, and the overt rejection of his created purpose to reflect, know, obey, enjoy, worship and serve his great God.

God’s glory story is about the rescue of man who had sinned against his Maker and had marooned himself in an impossible dead-end of guilt, revolt, condemnation, bondage and alienation. God’s plot is about the reclamation of His image—thus, the recovery of His glory in the recovery of His own untarnished image. As rebels and transgressors, our restoration to our created purpose must involve the renewal of the glory of God to us which we forfeited by our sin (**Rom 3:23**). Regeneration endows us again with the ability to behold, love, reflect, and live for God’s glory as our highest cause. God, in reclaiming His image in us, is glorified as we recover our relationship to His glory (**2 Cor 3:18; 4:6**).

But God does not seek to reclaim His image and glory in us by means of an executive pronouncement: “Let there be. . .” that would not fully reveal His perfections. His purpose of the ages required a fully qualified Rescuer who has the power and ability to repair what is broken. 2000 years ago, the Son of God entered a cursed and fallen world in order to make that repair. He came as an infant, born into the world as we are. He did not come in blazing glory, but humbly, in meekness as a suffering servant (**Is 53:3; Lu 2:7; Gal 4:4-5**).

In order to make the repair, He underwent what He referred to as a ‘baptism’, His submersion into divine wrath (Jn 12:49-53). By the laying down of His life as our Priest and sacrifice, He purchased His ‘equipment’ to save to the uttermost (**Heb 7:25**) (Jonathan Edwards). He came to seek and to save that which was lost (**Lu 19:10**). He will save all those given to Him by the Father; they will by His power, trust Him and entrust themselves to Him (**Jn 6:39; 17:1-2**).

The Paradox of the Cross, a Revelation of the Heart of God.

At the apex of God's story is the paradox of the cross. Marvel of marvels, the weakness, shame, injustice, ignominy, bloody death, and resurrection of our Lord is the means by which members of Adam's fallen race are recovered. Since our Lord is our *suffering Substitute*, His Person and work is the 'sphere' in which our dead souls are vivified and raised up in salvation (**Col 2:10-14**). All of our Rescuer's work is vicarious—accomplished in our place—His death is our death to sin, His resurrection is our resurrection to newness of life, His ascension and glorification guarantees ours (**Rom 6:4-10; 2 Thess 2:13-14**).

When His Person and work are revealed to the sinner by the regenerating work of the Spirit of God, the soul is flooded with the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). The innate darkness in the soul by reason of the devil's lie is evicted at regeneration. In a moment of time, by the 'sight' of this glory, a person comes to know God. For, the Person of Christ and His cross-work reveal the saving knowledge of God (**Rom 3:24-26**). To know God is to worship, love, obey and serve Him without constraint or pressure (**Jn 17:3**).

This remarkable plotline of God's glory story deals with the depth of the brokenness of the world's inhabitants, and is answered by the uniqueness of Jesus.^{xv} God is righteously jealous of His own image in man, an image created to reflect the rays of His moral majesty. Our creational identity as the image of God says a great deal about who we are, and our purpose, and meaning.^{xvi}

The rescue of Adam's race is about the formation of a 'new humanity' built upon, rescued by, and represented by the 'last Adam', Christ Jesus. God has not desisted from His original purpose of making man in His own image and likeness—but now He is making men and women in His image by making them new creatures in Christ (**2 Cor 5:17**). Prior to Christ's incarnation, **the perfect image of God had not been on earth for more than 4 millennia**; not since unfallen Adam and Eve (**Col 1:15**)! Now those rescued by Christ make up a new humanity, complete in their Head (**Col 2:10**). Christ, our Rescuer is the destroyer of Lucifer's deeds and rebellious story (**Jn 8:32; 1 Jn 3:8**). By this destruction of sin, Christ delivers His people (**Eph 2:7; 5:8; Heb 2:14-18; Rev 1:5-6**).

God's generous, self-giving nature, His propensity to share Himself is fully expressed in the giving of His Son (Jn 3:16). God gives Himself by the giving of His Son in order that the rescued creature might become like his Rescuer, like Christ. How remarkable, so perfectly effectual is Christ's work, that the believing lawbreaker is adopted into God's forever family by the Lawgiver Himself—all because of the merits of the Rescuer. **Adam's one deed** plunged the

race into darkness, death, and decay. **Christ's 'one act' of obedience** at Calvary brought life and immortality to light (**1 Cor 15:21; 2 Tim 1:9-10**). "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous" (**Rom 5:17-19**).

What the first Adam lost, *eternal life with God*, the last Adam restores. God's story does not terminate upon what we are rescued from, but rather what we are rescued unto. With the matchless gift of Christ, our Rescuer, comes the matchless gift of being made like Him. The divine promise of being conformed to Christ is necessary for us to fully recover our created purpose. For, conformity to Christ ultimately enables us to enjoy God in His presence perfectly, to worship God flawlessly, and to serve God superbly. That is heaven indeed (**Rev 21**).

Our Regeneration is joined to the Restoration of the Cosmos.

The recovery of the image of God in us is joined to the restoration of the entire cosmos itself.^{xvii} The timing of the cleansing of the universe of all corruption and restoring it to a pristine state is synchronized with the presentation of the sons of God (**Rom 8:18-23**). The climax of God's story is made possible because our Rescuer did His work as 'the last Adam', reversing the ruin of the first Adam. The Spirit's work in regeneration is a 'first fruits' work that makes each believer a representative of a coming new world order! The resurrection of Christ is the Father's stamp of approval upon our Rescuer's glorious work (**Rom 4:25**).

In his Pentecost sermon, the apostle Peter announces that Christ's resurrection marks the end of corruption and decay (Acts 2:24-27, 31). Think of it, the perfect obedience of Christ, the last Adam, wins immortality for His people. For, the apostle Paul states in **1 Corinthians 15**, "For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead" (**1 Cor 15:21**).

These spiritual realities form the major beats of God's story—a story beyond the comprehension of the natural man who is still in darkness (1 Cor 2:14). Due to our natural state of blindness in Adam, we cannot possibly diagnose our condition on our own. We are just too familiar and comfortable with our habitual law-breaking to be shocked by it. But Christ the Rescuer has the solution; He sends the Holy Spirit to lay our hearts bare. The Spirit exposes the plague of

sin that is attached to the inner man. The Spirit is sent to establish a guilty verdict of condemnation so that the descendants of Adam will see the beauty of, and need for the Rescuer (**Jn 16:8-11**).

This same Spirit quickens whomever He will (Jn 3:8), causing that man or woman to flee to Christ in an act of moral trust and reliance (Jn 1:12; 6:37). Then, God's Spirit comes to reside in that person—thus fulfilling God's original vision to form an order of creatures in His image who would find their highest joy and purpose in serving as God's sanctuary and dwelling place (**Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-5**). Yes, our Rescuer is forming a kingdom of priests who will offer up spiritual sacrifices to God (**Heb 13:15-16; Rev 1:4-6**). And, these sacrifices focus upon building up our fellow priests so that we might present each of our brethren as mature, complete in Christ (**Col 1:28-29**).

A man may make a profession without ever having his confidence in his own ability shattered; he has been told absolutely nothing of his need of a change of nature which is not within his power, and consequently, if he does not experience such a radical change, he is not dismayed. He was never told it was essential, so he sees no reason to doubt whether he is a Christian. Indeed, the teaching [*of decisional regeneration which*] he has come under consistently militates against such doubts arising.^{xviii} (Iain Murray).

The creative, regenerative work of God produces an overwhelming desire to turn from sin and conveys the ability to believe in Christ though initially God's regenerative work may take place below the level of consciousness.^{xix} (David F. Wells).

Nothing is more fundamental in the doctrine of the Reformers than the complete inability of man, and his absolute need of divine grace; and against nothing did the Reformers set their face more firmly than the ascription to man of native power to good.^{xx} (B. B. Warfield).

A desire of self-sufficiency is the first cause of corruption of our nature. With this independence comes man's imagined power to work his own happiness and exempt himself to the overruling providence of almighty God.^{xxi} (John Owen).

Arminians are the modern blinded patrons of human self-sufficiency. The Arminian brings in their idol with shouts preparing his throne by claiming the cause of their predestination to be in themselves.^{xxii} (John Owen).

End Notes:

- ⁱ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, pp. 86-87
- ⁱⁱ Ibid, pp. 29, 51-53, 231-233
- ⁱⁱⁱ Tom Wells, *The Moral Basis of Faith*, pp. 1-5
- ^{iv} Ibid, p. 6
- ^v Ibid, pp. 8-11
- ^{vi} Ibid. p. 12
- ^{vii} James E. Adams, *Decisional Regeneration*, p. 13
- ^{viii} Tom Wells, pp. 13-14
- ^{ix} Ibid, p. 15
- ^x Ibid, p. 16
- ^{xi} Ibid, pp. 17-20
- ^{xii} Ibid, pp. 21-23
- ^{xiii} Ibid, pp. 24-25
- ^{xiv} Ibid, pp. 26-27
- ^{xv} Greg Koukl, *The Story of Reality*, pp. 173-179
- ^{xvi} Ibid, pp. 90-94
- ^{xvii} Jay Wegter, *Christ's Pattern for His Church; Disciples making Disciples*, p. 41
- ^{xviii} Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, in James E. Adams, p. 19
- ^{xix} David F. Wells, *Turning to God*, p. 21
- ^{xx} B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, pp. 38-39
- ^{xxi} John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, p. 11
- ^{xxii} Ibid, p. 57