

BRYAN STATION BAPTIST CHURCH

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

INDEPENDENT • MISSIONARY • ESTABLISHED 1786

“Preaching the same truth since before Kentucky was a state”

VOLUME 33, NO. 3

DECEMBER, 2001

20th ANNUAL MISSION BIBLE CONFERENCE

October 22-24, 2001

Once again we enjoyed the preaching of God's word and the fellowship of the brothers and sisters in the Lord. God's people from all over the country joined with us to worship and praise Him. What a blessing—especially to our church!

HOW'S YOUR TASTE?

A Study of Regeneration

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John Ruskin (1819-1900) English art critic, author, and political economist, said that the first and last and closest trial question to any living person is, "What do you like?" Go out into the street and ask the first man you meet, what his taste is, and if he answers you honestly, you know that man in body and soul. What we like determines what we are and is a sign of what we are.

Man has a moral taste as well as physical taste; soul taste as well as body taste. What one likes in relation to God determines what he is and is a sign to others of what he is. A person can know himself and others can know him by this taste-test. Moral taste is moral desire and moral desire determines moral deeds.

David's moral taste is expressed, *"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple,"* Psalm 27:4. *"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God,"* Psalm 42:1. This desire for God, shows David to be a man after God's own heart.

Someone has said that God will reward us in eternity by making us what we want to be and are trying to be now. *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled,"* Matthew 5:6. This desire for holiness is a God created desire and God will not fail to fulfil a desire He has created.

Someone once gave a threefold test of moral character: What one reads when he is tired, what he thinks about when he is alone, and where he goes when he is away from home.

Now this taste-test reveals the necessity of regeneration for every man. Man in his natural state does not like God; the God of the Bible. *"...the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither*

indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God," Romans 8:7-8. Man in his natural state does not long for God's presence as David did; he rather shuns God's presence as Adam and Eve did after their sin. Man in his natural state would not enjoy heaven if he should go there, for he will be out of his natural element. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Regeneration is the only remedy. Every man must be born again; born from above; born of the Spirit; made a new creature, if he is to enter heaven.

The Necessity of Regeneration

The ruined nature of man makes another birth necessary. Reformation will not suffice; man may give up certain sins, but he cannot change his nature. Education will not do; education makes a bad man a worse man and more dangerous than an ignorant man. And legislation will not fit a man for heaven. We need legislation to protect men from one another. I heard of a man who entered the ministry and who left it in a few years for the medical profession. After his medical training he began the practice of medicine. On meeting an old friend who asked him how he was getting along, he said, O much better than when I was preaching. I discovered that people are more interested in their body than in their soul. But he was not long satisfied with a medical career. He entered law school and became a lawyer. On meeting the same old friend he was again asked how he was getting along. O much better than ever, he said: I have discovered that people are more interested in out-doing one another than they are in their souls or bodies.

Man is so bad that another birth is necessary to fit him for heaven. The carnal mind is enmity against God; the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; and the will will not choose Christ as Savior and Lord. There must be a new birth; a new creation.

The Nature of Regeneration

Regeneration is that aspect of salvation in which the dead sinner, the sinner with all the faculties of his soul in moral ruins, being unable to please God, is made a child of God with a taste for the things of God.

Regeneration may be defined as that gracious work of the Holy Spirit by which the heart is enabled to love the things of God; the mind is enabled to understand the gospel of Christ; and the will is brought to choose Christ as Savior and Lord.

This definition is in harmony with the New Hampshire Confession which says: "Regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is effected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit in connection with divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel; and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance and faith and good works."

John Flavel (1630-1691) says that the heart of man is his worst part before regeneration and the best part afterward; that it is the seat of principles and the fountain of actions.

Regeneration is not the bringing of a person into repentance; it is the bringing of one already in repentance. It is the second birth of the same person. Several people have experienced two births: one of the flesh, the other of the Spirit.

Nor is it the bringing of any new faculties or parts into existence. The unregenerate man has as many parts or faculties to his being as the regenerate man. No part of man was annihilated in the fall, but all parts were ruined or depraved. And so regeneration is not based upon non-existence, but upon a depraved existence. The soul is endowed with heart and mind and will and the lost man has all these faculties, although in a ruined condition. He has a heart and can and does love, but he does not love God. *"Beloved, let us*

love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God," I John 4:7. He has a will and can and does choose many things, but he does not choose Christ as Lord and Savior. He has a mind and can understand many things, but he does not understand the gospel of Christ. *"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,"* II Corinthians 4:3. The human mind is in a state of darkness concerning spiritual things. *"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,"* I Cor. 2:14.

The story is told of a little girl with defective vision from birth. Her parents were slow to discover that she could not see many objects which were familiar to others. She was almost grown before an oculist was consulted. He advised and performed an operation, and she was kept in a dark room for many weeks. One bright balmy night she stepped out alone upon the lawn and turned her face towards the heavens. Instantly she rushed back into the house exclaiming with excitement: "O come see what has happened to the sky." Her parents hurried outside but saw nothing but the familiar glory of the stars; something she had never seen before. Nothing had happened to the sky, but something had happened to her eyes.

A preacher once received a letter from a visitor to his church. The man complimented his sermon, but criticized his prayer after the sermon, because the preacher had prayed for the Holy Spirit to lead sinners to an acceptance of the truth. The man wanted to know what the Holy Spirit had to do with it. The gospel had been preached and all that any sinner needed to do was to accept it. This man's view does away with the Holy Spirit in salvation. It ignores the fact of human depravity. It does away with prayer for the conversion of any sinner. Paul prayed for his people that they might be saved. They were ignorant of the righteousness of God which Christ had provided by His obedience unto death and were trying to provide their own righteousness.

In his conversation with Nicodem-

us our Lord answered, *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,"* John 3:5. To make water here refer to baptism is to ignore or misunderstand the use of water all through John's gospel. John always uses water as a figure of something spiritual. Jesus told the woman at Jacob's well *"whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst,"* John 4:14. *"Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink"* John 7:37. *"Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean,"* John 13:10-11. *"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you,"* John 15:3. In none of these instances does he refer to baptism but uses water as an emblem of spiritual blessing.

For many years I have interpreted John 3:5 to read, "Except a man be born of water even the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It reads: *"...Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."* The conjunction "and" is quite often used as an expletive to fill in and explain. You can imagine something of my pleasure when I discovered a few years ago that it is translated this way in the Amplified New Testament. The water birth Christ is talking about is not a literal birth in water, but a spiritual birth under the figure of water. The water birth Christ speaks about is the spiritual birth. And so He goes on to say, *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,"* verse 6. In explaining what He means Christ leaves water out of it.

Let us recognize the necessity of the Holy Spirit in soul winning. We can give the gospel facts and plead with the sinner to trust Christ, but we cannot do the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as we give Christ all credit for redeeming us; we should give the Holy Spirit all credit for regenerating or converting us to faith in Christ.

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power

[or the right] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, [human descent] nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," John 1:11-13. It was the new birth that made the difference between those who received Him and those who did not.

Evidences of New Birth

If one is born of God there will be unmistakable evidences of it. First John is a book of evidences. One born of God will be a person of righteous living. *"If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him,"* 2:29. One born of God will be a man of faith. *"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him,"* 5:1. One born of God will be a man of love. *"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God,"* 4:7.

Salvation is the work of making a sinner safe and sound. That aspect of salvation that makes one safe from the wrath to come is called justification. Justification is the declaration of God that an ungodly person is righteous through faith in Christ. The work of making the sinner sound is a progressive work begun in regeneration, carried on in sanctification, and consummated in glorification. Justification is based upon Christ's work done for us received through faith; regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit in us and is also the result of Christ's redemptive death. *"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"* Romans 8:32.