

“Ye Must Be Born Again”

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“You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’”—(John 3:7)

For your conviction, consider these few things:

REGENERATION IS ABSOLUTELY necessary to qualify you to do any thing really good and acceptable to God. While you are not born again, your best works are but glittering sins; for though the matter of them is good, they are quite marred in the performance.

Consider, that without regeneration there is no faith, and “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6). Faith is a vital act of the new-born soul. The evangelist, showing the different entertainment which our Lord Jesus had from different persons, some receiving Him, some rejecting Him, points at regenerating grace as the true cause of that difference, without which never any one would have received Him. He tells us, that “as many as received him,” were those “which were born of God” (John 1:11-13). Unregenerate men may presume, but true faith they cannot have. Faith is a flower that grows not in the field of nature. As the tree cannot grow without a root, neither can a man believe without the new nature, whereof the principle of believing is a part. Without regeneration a man’s works are dead works. As is the principle, so must the effects be: if the lungs are rotten, the breath will be unsavoury; and he who at best is dead in sin, his works at best will be but dead works. “Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, is nothing pure being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:15,16). If we could say of a man, that he is more blameless in his life than any other in the world, that he reduces his body with fasting and has made his knees as horns with continual praying, if he is not born again, that exception would mar all. As if one should say, “There is a well-proportioned body, but the soul is gone; it is but a dead lump.” This is a melting consideration. You do many things materially good; but God says, “All these things avail not, as long as I see the old nature reigning in the man,” “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Gal 6:15).

If you are not born again:

(1) All your reformation is naught in the sight of God. You have shut the door, but the thief is still in the house. It may be you are not what once you were; yet you are not what you must be, if ever you see heaven; for “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

(2) Your prayers are an “abomination to the Lord” (Prov 15:8). It may be, others admire your seriousness; you cry as for your life; but God accounts of the opening of your mouth as one would account of the opening of a grave full of rotteness, “Their throat is an open sepulchre” (Rom 3:13). Others are affected with your prayers, which seem to them as if they would rend the heavens; but God accounts them but as the howling of a dog: “They have not cried unto me with their hearts, when they howled upon their beds” (Hos 7:14). Why, because you are yet “in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity!” All your struggles against sin in your own heart and life, are naught. The proud Pharisee afflicted his body with fasting, and God struck his soul, in the mean time with a sentence of condemnation (Luke 18). Balaam struggled with his covetous temper, to that degree, that though he loved the wages of unrighteousness, yet he would not win them by cursing Israel: but he died the death of the wicked (Num 31:8). All you do, while in an unregenerate state, is for yourself: therefore it will fare with you as with a subject, who having reduced the rebels, puts the crown on his own head, and loses all his good service and his head too.

Be convinced, then, that you must be born again. The Scripture says that the Word is the seed, whereof the new creature is formed: therefore take heed to it, and entertain it, as it is your life. Apply yourself to the reading of the Scripture. You that cannot read, get others to read it to you. Wait diligently on the preaching of the Word, as by divine appointment the special means of conversion; for “it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:21).

Receive the testimony of the Word of God concerning the misery of an unregenerate state, the sinfulness thereof, and the absolute necessity of regeneration. Receive its testimony concerning God, what a holy and just One He is. Examine your ways by it; namely, the thoughts of your heart, the expressions of your lips, and the tenor of your life. Look back through the several periods of your life; see your sins from the precepts of the Word, and learn, from its threatening, what you are liable to on account of these sins.

By the help of the same Word of God, view the corruption of your nature. Were these things deeply rooted in the heart, they might be the seed of that fear and sorrow, on account of your soul's state, which are necessary to prepare and stir you up to look after a Saviour. Fix your thoughts upon Him offered to you in the Gospel, as fully suited to your case; having, by His obedience unto death, perfectly satisfied the justice of God, and brought in everlasting righteousness. This may prove the seed of humiliation, desire, hope and faith; and move you to stretch out the withered hand unto Him, at His own command.

Let these things sink deeply into your hearts, and improve them diligently. Remember, whatever you are, you must be born again; else it had been better for you that you had never been born. Wherefore, if any of you shall live and die in an unregenerate state, you will be inexcusable, having been fairly warned of your danger.