

REGENERATION:
QUESTIONS ANSWERED

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ABSTRACT

Regeneration: Questions Answered

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This thesis answers five questions in regards to Christian regeneration: (1) what is it; (2) what is it like to experience it, (3) how is it described throughout history, (4) why is it important, (5) and how does one know that one has experienced it. The thesis explains what regeneration is through Systematic Theology and what regeneration is not-water and Spirit baptism. It describes sociologically why individuals pursue the path to regeneration and further illustrates experiences with conversion stories. It addresses the consistency of regeneration's description throughout history. It explains the benefits of being a regenerate Christian. It explains how one can know if he is part of the visible or invisible church and what behaviors are consistent for a regenerate Christian. The concluding chapter sums up these five aspects of the thesis through an illustration of an individual changing from a searcher to a regenerate Christian.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and mentor, Alice Patricia Geary, my cheerleader and sister-in-Christ, Leslie Ann Steen, and all my friends and family that watched me read Theology books in the corner for the past seven years.

Thank you for your support and patience.

I can play now

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DEFINITION OF REGENERATION

INTERNAL EXPERIENCE:

- Holy Spirit plants seed of new spiritual life in human.
- Person prepared through early Christian experiences.

EXTERNAL EXPERIENCE:

- Human hears and asks questions when he hears external Christian call.
- Human starts to understand message of Gospel and how it relates to personal sinful behavior.
- Holy Spirit illuminates sinful behavior and promises Divine redemption.
- Human makes choice and reacts to life changing event.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Christians and non-Christians are unclear about the Holy Spirit's role in regeneration, as well as what regeneration is. Until one has experienced regeneration, it seems like a lot of excitement about nothing. Yet the Holy Spirit is integral in opening the heart and mind for the human and making the change from a heart of stone to a heart focused on God. Without this change, one cannot really call oneself a Christian—a follower of Christ.

Much of the information on regeneration is either from Systematic Theology books or it focuses on the bookends of regeneration: water baptism or baptism in the Spirit. There has been an inordinate focus on Spirit baptism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which has muddied the understanding of regeneration for countless new converts and searchers. The emphasis on God's election has made some new converts discouraged in their Christian walk. They are not sure that they are God's chosen and they are not sure if they have experienced regeneration, as there is no clear discussions on it.

This thesis will provide the reader a broad overview of the concept of regeneration in five chapters. In the second chapter, we will review how this work of the Holy Spirit is described in systematic theology. We will address free will versus predestination—if we have a choice to follow God or if it has already been decided for us. We will define water baptism and Spirit baptism, and how they are integral components in the regeneration process. One happens at the beginning of the Christian walk, and one happens later when the Christian matures.

The third chapter will review the psychological and sociological aspects of Christian conversion so the reader will have a better understanding why many individuals go through this process of conversion and regeneration. We will review seven examples of individuals that have had this experience of regeneration, and see if there is any consistency in these experiences. We will also review an experience of one individual that thought he was regenerate, but his actions and responses showed that he was not.

In the fourth chapter, we will review how regeneration has been defined through the eyes of nine prominent theologians. We will also review what the Old Testament promised about the new covenant and regeneration of the human spirit. Finally, we will analyze regeneration through the New Testament. We will review what Jesus said prior to his crucifixion about the regenerative work of the Spirit, and that His teachings remained consistent through his disciple's teachings.

The fifth chapter will explain why regeneration is important. We will learn that sin must be removed from the human soul in order to begin a new life in Christ. We will discover that regeneration is the beginning of a personal relationship with God. We will see that this relationship will satisfy our emotional needs and need for control. We will learn that this is the only way that the soul can turn toward God.

Finally, we will discuss possible reasons why it is not a universal Christian experience, and how the believer can know that he or she has experienced it. The Christian must bow his will to God's will and that may be more than some individuals can bear. We will discuss the visible and invisible church as well as behaviors that are consistently displayed by regenerate Christians. The nonbeliever can allow him or herself to open up to the experience and allow the Holy Spirit to join human with God, and bring the human back to proper relationship with God.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS REGENERATION?

Regeneration Defined

Regeneration is often described as a work of God that we have absolutely no say in and have no active role in at all. It is akin to saying that we had no say in being physically born. We did not choose to be born, but we are grateful that it occurred nonetheless.¹ Yet if we did not choose to be born, and had no ability to acquiesce, then there would be no concept of free will. God's will would overpower all people and He could have easily manufactured fleshly automatons instead of loving, fighting and thinking faulty humans. Therefore, we humans must have some sort of say or interplay with our regeneration.

Father David Coffey, a leading theologian in the study of the Holy Spirit and Trinitarian theology, addressed this issue. Father Coffey refers us back to John 6:44: "No one can come to (Jesus) unless the Father who sent me draws him." Those that are ignorant to the need for Christ are dependent on the Holy Spirit bringing them as they cannot come to Christ by their own resources.² Humans are unable to believe, understand, or regard the Gospel as true based on their own abilities. The greater the diligence and earnestness humans wish to understand these spiritual things by their own reasoning abilities, the less they understand and believe.³ The Holy Spirit is sent out from the Father and the Son of the Trinity to the soul of the human.

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 699.

² David Coffey, *Did You Receive the Holy Spirit When You Believed? Some Basic Questions on Pneumatology* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005), 83, 102-103.

³ Alister E. McGrath ed., *Theology: The Basic Readings* 2d.ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 114.

In Systematic Theology, we learn that once the Holy Spirit is sent out, He implants the principal of the new spiritual life in the human.⁴ This is akin to implanting a seed into the ground or idea in the mind of a person. The external call, or having exposure to the Gospel and the Word, coincides with this implanting. God generates a change to the inner disposition of the human's soul. The mind begins to question and thoughtfully listen to the message of the Gospel while the ear is enabled to hear the call of God for the salvation of the soul.⁵ The Holy Spirit becomes operative in worship and prayer; through the working of the Holy Spirit, God can "hear His own voice". God addresses Himself through the operation of the Holy Spirit within the mind of the human.⁶ The unbeliever starts to understand the message of the Gospel, something heretofore thought to be ridiculous and implausible. This conflicted "believing in the unbelievable" has been present since the beginning:

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. (1 Cor. 1:21-22)⁷

The desire to resist God's call becomes a desire to obey. The human yields to the persuasive influence of the spoken Word through the operation of the Holy Spirit.⁸ This is called effectual calling. God speaks powerfully to us and the Holy Spirit works powerfully in us.⁹

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 468.

⁵ Berkhof, 471.

⁶ McGrath, 123.

⁷ Kenneth L Barker ed., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 1770.

⁸ Berkhof, 471.

⁹ Grudem, 700.

Father Coffey writes that this is the spiritual and emotional environment where the Holy Spirit self-communicates with the Father and the Son. The self-communication of the Son takes place through physical sense and as a perceptible action. Examples are preaching of the Gospel (sound and hearing) and administration of the Eucharist (smell, taste, hearing, touch and sight). The Son offers His Spirit to the potential believer. By accepting the offer, the human is drawn into dual union with Christ and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ This drawing in can take place over a long period of time (a slow pulling process) or a short period of time (a yanking process).

The next act of the Holy Spirit during exposure and acceptance of the external call is to show the human his sins and lead the human into repentance. The Holy Spirit is the illuminating part of the Godhead who imparts spiritual intelligence, reason and wisdom to humans.¹¹ During exposure to the external call, the human clearly recognizes sinful behavior. The Holy Spirit then communicates the divine message of redemption to the human whenever the Gospel is heard. He communicates the promise of forgiveness and salvation, and shares the invitation to accept Christ in repentance and faith.¹²

The human reacts to this internal illumination from the Holy Spirit by experiencing a life changing event. It results in an instantaneous event that occurs once in a person's life. It results in a conscious and deliberate act by the person—to accept the teachings of the Holy Spirit, to accept the message of redemption and receive the promise of salvation. God, through the Holy Spirit, awakens spiritual life within the person in an unseen, invisible way. The person typically starts displaying these types of traits, immediately, or it is observed over a period of time: (1) the

¹⁰ Coffey. *Did You Receive the Holy Spirit When You Believed?* 99.

¹¹ Archimandrite Eusebius Stephanou, *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit: an Orthodox Understanding* Orthodox Renewal Series, no. 55 (Destin: Orthodox Brotherhood and Renewal Center, 1997), 6, 12.

¹² Berkhof, 455-460.

person starts talking about Christ, sharing how she believes her sins are forgiven and her trust in Christ for her salvation; (2) the person has a desire to read the Bible and pray, and believes that these are both meaningful activities; (3) she enjoys Christian worship; (4) she has a desire for Christian fellowship; (5) and she has a sincere desire to be obedient to God's Word in scripture.¹³

Since the new Christian has experienced what is commonly called "regeneration" of the spirit, the person is now prepared to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. He is the part of the Triune God that is indwelling in the person, and unifies the person to the Father and the Son.¹⁴ Thinking of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote that each person can be the temple of God, and the Holy Spirit can dwell within each of us (1 Cor. 3:16).¹⁵ The person's union with God is the basis of man's self-fulfillment. It is the conscious and deliberate act of will to remain in a close relationship with God and to increase that closeness of that relationship between Creator and creature.¹⁶ The human's faith—that of accepting the promise of salvation—is not only her doing but God's doing. The human's act is the acceptor of God's grace. God is the bestower of His grace to us. Grace is the Father's gift of the Holy Spirit, who in turn, forms willing humans into children of God.¹⁷ Refer to table iiv for a summary of the definition of regeneration.

Father Coffey points out that it is always possible for the human to refuse the gift of the Holy Spirit, but when she does she must bear the responsibility of refusal. God cannot make humans His children. It is extremely unlikely for God to regenerate people against or

¹³ Grudem, 701.

¹⁴ Coffey. *Did You Receive the Holy Spirit When You Believed?* 103.

¹⁵ Barker, 1772.

¹⁶ Stephanou, 8.

¹⁷ David Coffey, *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2011), 108.

independent of their will. This would abuse their freedom and destroy their humanity. God can regenerate a human only in cooperation with her free response, which is through faith.¹⁸ Since no two individuals are mentally or spiritually alike, the probability is that God speaks to each person and the Holy Spirit works in each person in an individual manner.¹⁹ This is most likely the reason why some individuals convert slowly while other individuals have a seemingly instantaneous conversion.

Regeneration is a spiritual process that occurs in a person's life. The Holy Spirit plants the seed, God the Father waters it and God the Son feeds it. The recipient person wills the seed to live and grow. The process grows as the person grows and understands. The result is a cleaning out of sin from the person so that the Holy Spirit can dwell inside. The person can have a personal relationship with the Triune God.

Do You Have a Choice? Predestination vs. Free Will

Much of the previous chapter reviewed what the Triune God does in the human's conversion, and what the human does as accepting this outpouring of grace. Father Coffey stated that we have a choice in our participation in regeneration. Not all theologians believe so. Some assert that our belief and regeneration has been decided before the beginning of time. Others believe that the gift of God's grace is available for all, and God is waiting for all the recalcitrant Christians before sending out Christ again.

Augustine of Hippo was one of the first Christian theologians that wrestled with the concept of free will. Augustine taught that man was always free in that he can freely choose the

¹⁸ Coffey. *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit*, 108-109.

¹⁹ Joseph Pomeroy Windey, *The Way of Life: Holiness Unto the Lord; the Indwelling Spirit* (Charleston, SC: Bibliolife, 2003), 40.

life course he will pursue. Because his will acts on his motives, his choices may be limited to the select motives he has. If he is sinful, he chooses sinful objectives. If he has accepted God's grace, he is open to making good choices.

Since God is omnipotent, He already knows in advance what motives and circumstances will influence man's will. God will know if man will accept or reject His grace, based on the man's situation or character. Augustine defined "free will" as man having the ability to be free from sin and temptation and is free to live a godly life. God's foreknowledge ends once He knows—based on the man's character—if the man will accept the grace given to him or not. God has mercy on those that he wishes to save, and hardens those that he doesn't wish to give grace to by putting those men in situations that they would not accept God's grace.²⁰

John Calvin wrote extensively about predestination. He believed that God adopts some people for eternal life with Him and sentences others to death and damnation. Calvin indicated that God based this decision on His foreknowledge—his eternal and present decree on what type of life and experiences He has willed for each man.²¹

God had a history of choosing some individuals and not others. In the Old Testament, God choose to favor Jacob and not Esau. He allowed events to occur so that the younger Jacob would receive the birthright instead of his brother and God continued the nation of Israel through Jacob. God chose the nation of Israel to be His people.²² Jesus chose some individuals over others in the New Testament. Jesus selected those particular men and women to follow Him to be His disciples during His earthly ministry. In John 15, Jesus told the disciples that they did not

²⁰ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1978), 366-369.

²¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christina Religion*. vol 2. ed. John McNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 926.

²² Calvin, 928-929.

choose Him, but He choose and appointed them. In John 17, Jesus said that God granted Him authority over all the people that God had given Him.²³ In Romans 9:18, Paul states, “Therefore, God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.”²⁴

Calvin noted that the Holy Spirit is the one who provides grace. A man’s election is only confirmed by his response in faith. Those that truly believe in God will not fall away from Him.²⁵ Calvin concluded that the unregenerate are known by their actions and responses to hearing the Gospel. When the Gospel is preached to non-believers, it irritates some and is spurned by others. Those that do not obey God’s word when it is made known to them through general calling will be charged against the depravity of their hearts.²⁶

Systematic theology tells us that there have been many incidents in the Old and New Testaments where God has made a sovereign decision to pass over some persons and decide to not save them or punish them for their sins, and thereby manifest His justice. The decision to save or the decision to not save is decided by God. The grounds for election are God’s grace and the grounds for reprobation are God’s justice. Everyone has a job to do, that God has made ahead of time.²⁷ Those that are condemned to reprobation may be present in order to help an elect person grow and receive God’s grace.

Father Coffey agreed with some of the theological teaching of predestination. He agreed that God the Father makes the choice for whom to receive salvation. The basis of this choice is

²³ Calvin, 940, 942, 966.

²⁴ Barker, 1753.

²⁵ Calvin, 967, 973.

²⁶ Ibid., 981.

²⁷ Grudem, 684-687.

not on the works of humans but on the sovereign freedom of God. Those chosen may be said to be chosen by grace and that choice was made before the beginning of time.

However, Father Coffey disagreed with other points of predestination theology. He noted that both the Creator and the human make a choice in our regeneration. The purpose of the choice is threefold: we are saved through sanctification by the Holy Spirit, obedient to Christ and in covenantal relationship with God. God's choice is to pour out on humans His Spirit, which makes us adopted children of God the Father. God's calling takes place in the world through the preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel, through general calling, is shared with all.²⁸ The human's choice is when and if we each accept the calling from God.

Father Coffey noted that no one can know with absolute certainty whether anyone is predestined or damned, or even if there are any individuals are reprobate. We all experience our Christian conversion in our own time, and may have to work out our salvation by way of a harder road. Even those Christians that become regenerate may grieve the Holy Spirit and fall into sin. No individual has salvation guaranteed. Sin is abhorrent to God and there are always individuals present in the world that have sinned against God and his fellow man.²⁹

Father Coffey stated that Augustine of Hippo has a doctrine of predestination and it is summed up in four points. First, God wills all people to be saved and extends the offer of salvation to all. Second, in order to be saved, humans must cooperate with God by freely accepting his offer of salvation. Third, if a person is lost, the failure is on the part of the person,

²⁸ Coffey, *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit*, 255-258.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 260.

in freely refusing to cooperate with God. That person condemns himself. Fourth, if a person is saved, salvation is entirely the work of God, who has predestined the human's cooperation.³⁰

Father Coffey asserted that this doctrine only makes sense if you define what type of grace is provided in the second and third points. In the second point, efficacious grace – grace that brings about the work desired by God – is the grace provided. This would be equivalent to effectual calling and would provide a response from the human receiver. In the third point, sufficient grace – grace that is present but does not provide the desired response – is the grace provided. This would be equivalent to general calling. The message of the Gospel goes out to all, but it may not provide a change in the human receiver.³¹

Both Father Coffey and Calvin are correct in regards to predestination. Calvin is correct in that God does have a history of setting aside some individuals and not others. Election is only confirmed by one's response in faith. Father Coffey is also correct in that no one can know God's plan on who He will save and who He will condemn. In both the Old and New Testament, God has changed His decision and saved someone He had previously condemned because that person or nation had responded in faith. Augustine pointed out that there is always an opportunity for the individual to receive God's saving grace and choose to respond to the Holy Spirit's instruction. If God promised Abraham to not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if there were ten righteous people there, then conversely, God may wait until all but the last ten humans become regenerate.

³⁰ Coffey, *Grace: The Gift of the Holy Spirit*, 259.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

Regeneration Bookends: Water Baptism
And Spirit Baptism

Regeneration is a part of an individual's spiritual growth. Water baptism may have occurred when the individual was a baby, or it may occur sometime after the person is regenerate. Water baptism is the outward display of an internal change. Spirit baptism can occur on the same day a person is regenerate, or can occur many years after the person makes a decision to follow Christ. Spirit baptism is an internal change for a divine mandated external project or task.

Water baptism is a sacrament performed either in a church or in front of a church congregation. The baptism receiver has either water sprinkled on her, poured on her or she is fully immersed in water and brought out of the water. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19 that people who followed Him should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.³² It is usually performed once in a person's spiritual life.

Baptism is a purification rite. It purifies the person from the pollution of guilt and sin. It signifies and seals the person into union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. The rite consists of two parts—covering the person with water and then drawing the person out of water. Both parts of the rite points to baptism's power and effect. It signifies the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man.³³ Baptism engrafts the believer into the adoptive family of Christ—the Christian church.³⁴

The external visible action (baptism) needs to coincide with an internal spiritual change. In adults, the grace signified and sealed is inseparable from the existence of intelligent faith and

³² Barker, 1517.

³³ F. Samuel Janzow, *Luther's Large Catechism* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 107.

³⁴ John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980), 3, 5-6.

repentance. Administering baptism to adults in church required those adults to provide intelligent and credible confession of faith.³⁵

Martin Luther insisted that water baptism was a required sacrament and mandated by God for all Christians. He cited Mark 16:16: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”³⁶ He asserted that baptism is ultimately a divine act; it is established by God and not something made up by man. Even though the action of pouring water over the person is performed by human hands, the water is comprehended by God’s Word and made holy. When the word is joined with the element or action, the outcome is a sacrament.³⁷

Baptism is a seal on the receiver of it. It authenticates, confirms and guarantees the reality and security of God’s covenantal grace. The sign and seal of baptism is empty without the reciprocal belief from the convert: she is mindful of God’s covenant, she embraces its promises, she performs covenantal obligations, and she has faith in the faithfulness of God. Infant baptism is a prospective seal. The baby does not have faith at the moment of baptism, but may grow into it. Babies were included in the Old Testament Abrahamic covenant without responding in faith. Through baptism, infants receive the external seal and sign of the new covenant.³⁸

Spirit baptism is described in Acts 1-2. Jesus promises His disciples that they will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. After His ascension to heaven, the disciples experienced a violent

³⁵ Murray, 84-87.

³⁶ Barker, 1558.

³⁷ Janzow, 98-100.

³⁸ Murray, 84-89.

wind and “tongues of fire” rested on their heads. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and Peter preached to those assembled with eloquence and with power.³⁹

The power of the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission. Without the gift of Spirit baptism, they would not have the power to succeed.⁴⁰ The Great Commission was three tasks: preach the Gospel, heal the sick and cast out demons. Many Christians that have received Spirit baptism have received spiritual gifts that are called “power encounter ministries.” They provide power healing, provide instantaneous healing to the Christian faithful; they provide power deliverance, discern oppressive spiritual realities and exorcise them in the name of Jesus; and they provide power evangelism, or missional engagement with unbelievers whereby they preach and provide miraculous signs and wonders.⁴¹

Reuben A. Torrey, an international revivalist preacher in the early 1900’s, defined what Spirit baptism was. He stated that baptism in the Holy Spirit was a definite experience. He noted that the Holy Spirit’s work in regeneration and His work in Spirit baptism were two separate and distinct works. He pointed out that Spirit baptism is always associated with testimony and service.⁴² Descriptions of “baptism in the Holy Spirit” will be reviewed later in this thesis.

Torrey recounts that in John and Acts, Jesus stated that His disciples were “clean,” or empty of sin. In John 20:19-23, Jesus returns to His disciples. His first act with them as the resurrected Lord was to breathe the Holy Spirit on them.⁴³ Note that not until Acts 1 will Jesus

³⁹ Barker, 1678-1682.

⁴⁰ Stephanou, 15.

⁴¹ Amos Yong, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 41.

⁴² Donald W. Dayton, *Late Nineteenth Century Revivalist Teachings on the Holy Spirit* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1985), 10-15.

⁴³ Barker, 1664-1665.

tell them about baptism with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had to come to the disciples and indwell in them so that they could have an intimate relationship with the Triune God.

Throughout the book of Acts, Jesus's disciples pray over clearly regenerate individuals and those people receive baptism in the Holy Spirit. Torrey concludes that one may be a believer—a regenerate person—and still not have experienced Spirit baptism. This may be because the person may not be mature enough in his Christian growth, or it may be because the time is not right for the Holy Spirit to activate the Christian into God's service.

Torrey argued with a specific theological teaching popular in his day: Christians should expect Spirit baptism as a "second blessing" and it can be "instantaneously received." He agreed with both these statements, as they could be authenticated through the Bible. He disagreed with the belief that Spirit baptism eradicates human sinful nature. He stated that the person must be cleansed from sin and regenerate prior to Spirit baptism, as it was primarily for empowering the Christian for service.⁴⁴ One cannot mend other broken and sinful souls if one is not past that stage and ready to help others.

Regeneration is the vital component that is between the two baptisms—water and Spirit. Water baptism is an external rite and may be before or just after a spiritual change. Spirit baptism is an internal change so that God can send forth the Christian to perform her service towards the Great Commission. On occasion, newly regenerate individuals participate in water baptism. The person had a spiritual change so that she could receive the seal and grace from God through water baptism. For those that have received infant baptism, regeneration comes many years after the sacramental experience.

⁴⁴ Dayton, 15-17.

On occasion, regeneration and Spirit baptism can coincide within a very short period of time. This has caused confusion to some individuals, as they have defined Spirit baptism the vehicle that opens the person's ears, cleanses the person's souls and realigns the person's thinking toward God. As we can ascertain from this chapter, regeneration stands alone as the vehicle of the Holy Spirit for human personal growth and salvation. Spirit baptism is an additional blessing, but not a requirement to become a Christian.

CHAPTER THREE

CONVERSION: WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE REGENERATE?

Explaining your regeneration experience and conversion to being a Christian is akin to reiterating how you and your spouse or your best friend met. Some individuals can't remember when they started having a change to their beliefs and initiated a personal relationship with the Triune God. Others can tell you exactly what events occurred in their lives thereby initiating the process and how they felt when they participated with the Holy Spirit in their own conversion. Either way, the regenerate Christian would be able to tell you that the decision to accept to have their sins forgiven and to align their will with God's was the best decision that he or she made and wouldn't want to change it.

This section will review how some social scientists define individualized spiritual conversion. We will review four conversion stories from Acts where individuals became regenerate or were regenerate and received Spirit baptism. Finally, we will review seven personal conversion stories-two excerpts from Acts 8-9 in the New Testament, two prominent theologians and four American college students. For comparison, we will also include an excerpt from Acts 8 about a Christian convert who remained unregenerate.

Psychological View of Conversion

As spiritual seeking and awakening are intensely personal and individualized experiences, sociologists cannot explain what motivates a person's religious quest or their personal response in it. However, they can track patterns in conversion. Two sociologists, John

Lofland and Rodney Stark, have constructed a seven point model that accounts for conditions of an individual's conversion. The person must be in a situation of enduring, acutely felt tension-spiritual or emotional. The person must normally operate within a religious problem solving perspective, or he can see religious dimensions or analogies in events around them. The person must consider himself to be a religious seeker or open to learning more. The encounter with the belief system occurs during a turning point in his life. Emotional bonds are formed to individuals that adhere to the particular belief system. There are no other religious or cult attachments to counteract the conversion. The person will have extensive interaction with individuals that adhere to this particular belief system.¹ Although helpful for a starting point to discuss why people seek God and convert, this model is not Christian-specific enough.

Scot McKnight proposes a six dimensional model of Christian conversion-context, crisis, quest, encounter, commitment, and consequence.² The context as to what other things are going on in the convert's life affects the process of conversion. These may be social, societal or familial relational issues that affect the conversion. For conversion to take place, some sort of crisis has to emerge. Crisis can range from an emotional upheaval to a quiet discomfort and questioning. There is some sort of tension between a person's expectation and reality. The quest is the person's search for answers to internal needs. An individual's quest could range from passively absorbing information, reacting to information they encounter or actively searching for answers. The person encounters an advocate for the Christian faith and interacts with that

¹ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 5-8.

² Scot McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 49-50.

advocate. The advocate could be a family member, close friend or someone that the individual respects.³

All of the aforementioned experiences can be experienced in any order, but they all come before commitment. Conversion ultimately involves a decision, even if progressive, of turning from one way of life to another and a dramatization of that commitment in some ritualized format.⁴ The convert commits to a specific religious persuasion, or recommits to the denomination that he or she was born into. Finally, as with any commitment, there are consequences to making a decision. There may be broad consequences at the sociocultural level or at the personal level. Conversion needs to be ongoing if it is to be permanent. Ongoing implies that it is a settled impact on a person's identity and behavior.⁵

When a person undergoes a religious conversion, they experience a personal change. There are three categories of personal change: alternation, conversion and transformation.⁶ Alternation is a limited form of change that develops from one's previous behavior. It does not involve a rejection of the past but a change to the present and future. Conversion is a radical change in which past affiliations are rejected and a new commitment or identity is embraced. Some conversion experiences are conversional. The individual had a realization that the lifestyle he was living was not conducive to following a life of Christ and therefore they had to leave it. These conversion experiences are difficult to sustain as individual behavioral patterns have been learned and the person has to actively focus on the change. Transformation is also a radical change, but there is no rejection of the past experiences; instead there is an altered perception of

³ McKnight, 59, 66-67, 74-75, 84.

⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁵ Ibid., 103-105.

⁶ Gaventa, 9-13.

past and present experiences. A transformation involves a changed way of understanding and interpreting God and world. Most conversion experiences are transformation stories, as the individual has been living a life that was parallel to a Christian life but he was not fully understanding or committed to it. These conversions fare much better as there is some sort of infrastructure for the Christian to follow and continue.

Many Christian conversions are rededications of an individual. Christian experiences like church and Sunday school occurred in their lives when they were young and unable to truly comprehend their importance. Sometime in their teens or twenties they had a transformation of identity, involving both affirmations and behaviors. The Holy Spirit aroused interest and curiosity. Each person works out conversion in his or her own way. Forcing the issue endangers spiritual fulfillment. God meets each person wherever he or she is. God will take His chances on winning or losing the convert. He would prefer someone to be lost than to interfere with the decisions and free will of that human being.⁷

Psychologically speaking, conversion of the regenerate person occurs at a period in his or her life where the individual is seeking answers to their emotional or spiritual turmoil. The Holy Spirit has unearthed internal strife and the individual wants to find a way to quiet it. God allows the potential convert to ask questions and provide personal guides or resources so the individual can come to his or her own conclusions. The individual goes through a transformation and sees the world in a different way.

⁷ McKnight, 9-14.

Conversion Stories

Every Christian loves a good conversion story. It binds Christians together in solidarity and gives each Christian a shared originating point. By definition, conversion resolves some kind of crisis in a person's life—from an extensive to a limited scope in a person's life, from an external to an internal source, or from a radical change to one marked more by continuity.⁸ Eight narratives will be included in this section—seven stories of conversion and regeneration and one example of a reprobate. Two of the conversions stories are from the book of Acts in the Bible—the Ethiopian's conversion and Saul's conversion. Two of the conversions stories are from the lives of prominent theologians—Martin Luther and Charles Finney. The final three conversions stories are excerpts from Scot McKnight's book, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels*. The Christian conversion stories display examples of external factors promoting internal change, personal crises that caused a change, change through spiritual education, and an example of instantaneous conversion and regeneration. The other story is an example of an individual that thought regeneration could be achieved through his own merit. This story is also from the book of Acts—Simon the Sorcerer.

Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:4-25)

Sometime after the Holy Spirit baptized the apostles at Pentecost and Steven was stoned by the Sanhedrin for his faith in Jesus, Peter and John encountered Simon the Sorcerer.⁹ He amazed the Samaritans with his magic and had a large following. When Phillip came to Samaria and preached the Gospel, many Samaritans believed and were baptized. The Samaritans heard the

⁸ McKnight, 133.

⁹ Barker, 1691-1693.

Gospel and hearts were changed. They were baptized to show an outward sign to an inward change.¹⁰ Simon himself believed and was baptized by Phillip. He followed Phillip everywhere and was amazed by Phillip's power deliverance and power evangelism.

The order of events with the Samaritans follows the pattern of baptism and indwelling Spirit. Sometime later, when Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans accepted the word of the Lord, Peter and John were sent to share the baptism in the Spirit. Peter and John spent time with these Samaritan converts and were satisfied in their belief that the majority were regenerate.¹¹ Peter and John prayed over the converts that they would receive the Holy Spirit. Peter and John placed their hands on the converts and the Samaritan Christians received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon the Sorcerer saw that the Holy Spirit was given to converts by the laying of hands, he offered Peter and John money so that they would teach him that trick. Simon witnessed Phillip perform healings and exorcisms, but he didn't respond in this way and ask Phillip to teach him. It is possible that the Samaritan Christians began speaking in tongues when they received Spirit baptism, just as the converts in Jerusalem did in Acts 2. This would have impressed the sorcerer and his unrepentant heart would not have seen this experience as a spiritual gift.¹²

Peter was shocked to think that Simon thought he could buy the spiritual gift of God. Peter told Simon to repent and pray for forgiveness of such a thought. By his statement, Peter could see that Simon was still captive to sin and he was not regenerate. This focus on performing works for God is still prevalent to this day. Those that profess that they believe in God but do not

¹⁰ Howard M. Ervin, *Spirit Baptism: A Biblical Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 71.

¹¹ Ervin, 72-73.

¹² *Ibid.*, 73-74.

show their conversion through their words and actions are really not members in the body of Christ.

Phillip and the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40)

An angel of the Lord instructed Phillip to travel 50 miles south of Jerusalem. On his way, he met an Ethiopian dignitary and a Gentile convert coming back from Jerusalem.¹³ Phillip heard the Ethiopian reading Isaiah 53 aloud during his return trip. Phillip was prompted by the Holy Spirit to talk to him. He used that opportunity to preach the Gospel to the Ethiopian. Phillip's preaching converted the heart and soul of the Ethiopian, who in turn asked to be baptized. Phillip baptized the Ethiopian and the Spirit of the Lord sent them both on different paths: Phillip on his way to the city, Azotus, and the Ethiopian on his way back to Ethiopia, rejoicing. The Holy Spirit used Phillip's evangelical skill to convert a prepared heart that could convert many in Ethiopia. This is an example of the regular pattern of conversion by the Holy Spirit: conversion, baptism, regeneration of the human spirit, and finally baptism in the Holy Spirit for power in missions.¹⁴

Saul's Conversion (Acts 9:1-31)

Saul was a member of the Sanhedrin, and was an observant Jew, born in Tarsus.¹⁵ He imprisoned any disciple of the Way (early Christians). On the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, he encountered a blinding light and fell to the ground. During that moment, Saul had a

¹³ Barker, 1693.

¹⁴ Ervin, 74-75.

¹⁵ Barker, 1693-1695.

conversation with the resurrected Jesus. The men traveling with him heard the voice but saw no one. After the conversation, Saul got up but could not see. His companions led him by the hand to Damascus.

After Saul's dramatic experience, he was left to contemplate his life and what he had done. He didn't eat or drink anything and he could not see for three days. During that time, he was praying. He received a vision from the Holy Spirit that a man named Ananias would visit him and restore his sight.

The Holy Spirit called to Ananias and said he was to pray over Saul and use his spiritual gift of power healing. Ananias knew who Saul was and was afraid that he would be persecuted. The Holy Spirit shared with Ananias that Saul would be His chosen disciple to preach to the Gentiles, to the Gentile kings and before the people of Israel. Reassured, Ananias went to where Saul was staying and placed his hands on Saul. Ananias healed Saul, Saul regained his sight back and was baptized as a Christian. Saul had become a regenerate Christian.

Saul had a dramatic transformation—from a member of the Sanhedrin persecuting Christians to an apostle of Jesus, sent to preach to the Gentiles. He received all gifts by the Holy Spirit: conversion, healing, baptism, regeneration of the human spirit, and finally baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ The Jews in Damascus were shocked about this change. When he went to Jerusalem, the disciples were afraid of him. Barnabas, a Levite priest from Cyprus, vouched for Saul—now renamed Paul—to the Christian apostles in Jerusalem. The Christian church grew among the Gentiles through Paul's spiritual gift of power evangelism.

¹⁶ Ervin, 76.

Martin Luther's "Righteousness of God"

Martin Luther's Father Superior, Vicar General Johannes von Staupitz, recognized Luther's aptitude.¹⁷ Staupitz sent Luther out of the monastery in October 1512. He ordered Luther to receive his Doctorate in Erfurt and then serve the Augustinian of monks in Wittenberg as a preacher and teacher of theology.

Around this time, Luther struggled with his faith. He was tormented in his uncertainty of his soul and struggled to know God's love in his heart. He concluded that scripture reinforced his Middle Ages viewpoint of a wrathful and punishing God. He felt unable to obtain enough merit or good works to appease his presumed vision of God. His struggle resulted in physical illness and insomnia. Yet in his struggle and searching, Luther was growing in faith. Looking back on this time in his life, Luther wrote:

The assaults (of his despair) robbed (him) of all certainty, until (he) found no place to go except to the God of Mercy and Grace.¹⁸

Around 1517, Martin achieved his inner peace and certainty while studying the meaning of Romans 1:17. He struggled with his interpretation of "the righteousness of God" as a righteous God that punishes sinners, and was driving himself mad with his guilt, anger and remorse. After meditating both day and night on the verse, he realized that the content of the sentence was a passive righteousness. He realized that God is merciful and He justifies by faith. Luther wrote:

This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From that moment, the whole face of Scripture appeared to me in a different light.¹⁹

¹⁷ Alister E. McGrath ed., *The Christian Theology Reader* 2d.ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 418-420.

¹⁸ Martin Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004), 30.

Luther was an Augustinian monk, who professed to be a Christian. Yet, he clearly had a transformative, life changing Christian experience. He had an internal struggle that brought about a change. This change was integral to his spiritual life, because a few years later he struggled against those he felt were denigrating the Catholic Church and stood up to the Pope.

Charles Finney: All Inclusive Conversion.

Charles Finney was apprenticed to be a lawyer in upstate New York in the 1820's. He started reading the Bible, in relation to his law studies. During this time, he started questioning his own spiritual response to God.

One October morning in 1821, he decided to isolate himself in the woods to pray and give his heart to God. After a great internal struggle, and a realization of his own sinfulness and pride, he humbled himself and cried out to the Lord. He put his faith in the promises of specific Bible verses that were prominent on his mind at the time. Suddenly, Finney experienced a great sense of peace and a complete absence of feelings of condemnation. He felt an overflowing love for God.²⁰

Finney had experienced regeneration. He was prepared to read the Bible, through his law studies. Through his reading, he went on a quest for answers and experienced a crisis of faith. He decided to isolate himself in the woods to pray, and went through an internal struggle whereby the Holy Spirit showed him his sinful nature. He was led to repentance by the way of putting his

¹⁹ McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 419.

²⁰ John Leroy Gresham Jr., *Charles G. Finney's Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 9.

faith in Bible verses that were placed in his mind. He experienced an instantaneous transformation. At that point, he received the indwelling Holy Spirit into his life.

That evening, Finney went back to the law office to pray. During that time, he had a vision of Jesus Christ standing before him. He started praying at the feet of Jesus. After some time praying, Finney retired to another room. He stated that he received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit. He wrote that it felt like electricity was streaming into him. His heart felt wondrous love. He started crying uncontrollably, due to the emotional nature of the Spirit baptism.²¹ His experience of Spirit baptism occurred on the same day, but subsequent to his regeneration experience. Finney quit law school and was ordained a Presbyterian pastor in 1823. The spiritual gift he received was the gift of power evangelism, as we shall see in the next chapter.

B.J.'s Conversion Story

The following three conversion stories are selections from McKnight's book, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* and are personal examples he provided.²²

B.J. had a disadvantaged childhood. His single mother was working all day and he had no father figure. His grandmother was his caretaker when he was very young and initiated his first introduction to Christianity. She spoke about the Lord to him and made him read a chapter out of the Bible each day before he could go out to play.

Because of his environment, his male role models were gang bangers, drug dealers and street ball players. By the time he was in Junior High, he was hustling drugs and making money. He made less money than his friends because his mother made sure that he got on the school bus every day. Once on the bus, it was too inconvenient to get back to his neighborhood.

²¹ Gresham, 9-10.

²² McKnight, 64-66.

The summer after tenth grade, he was arrested for trespassing. He was released from Juvenile Correction into his aunt's custody, and she gave him a lecture on the way home. Later that summer, he was a bystander in a drive by shooting. His cousin was with him and the cousin received two stray bullets to the head. This event was very traumatic for B.J. and he started thinking about his life's direction. He was only fifteen years old.

B.J. decided to hang out with his friends on the basketball team at school instead of the friends he grew up with. He finished high school and received a college basketball scholarship. Upon his return home from his first year of college, he began attending church with his grandmother and aunt. He said that he now loves to go to church because every sermon relates to him.

B.J.'s context shapes his conversion. Redemption for B.J. meant a life without drug dealers and death. It meant refocusing his life on more meaningful pursuits, and centering his life on his aunt and grandmother, his spiritual advocates. He is now open and interested in faith and church participation. Although not as dramatic a conversion as the prior cases, B.J. is, if not already, on his way to becoming a regenerate Christian.

Rosanna's Conversion Story

In Rosanna's junior year, she tore her anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in her right knee.²³ It derailed her high school basketball career. She had successful knee surgery. During her recovery period, she slowly started to turn to God. She began praying and asking Him to help her in her recuperation. Her recovery after surgery went well; she was able to walk and run. Unfortunately, her doctor said she wasn't going to be able to rejoin the basketball team in her junior year. She was very disappointed and swore that she wouldn't attend church. This wasn't a

²³ McKnight, 70-71.

hardship for her as she didn't like attending church. As a child, Rosanna was forced to attend Catholic mass. Her family was devout Catholics and she despised going to church.

Early in Rosanna's senior year, she tore her ACL in her left knee, and she was again told that she would not be able to play basketball. On the day that she was going in for knee surgery, her boyfriend had been murdered outside his apartment by a rival gang. She knew he was in a gang and tried to overlook it. She then realized that if she had not had surgery that day, she would have been murdered alongside him.

She realized that all the obstacles that had been in her way were set as warnings about her need to change her viewpoint, her selfish outlook and her life. She realized that God allowed challenges in a person's life to help her grow. She began reading the Bible and attending church. She believed that her spiritual journey was a roller coaster because she only allowed God to work in her when it was convenient for her. She came to the conclusion that God had to be present in her life at all times and not when she was going through a crisis.

Amazingly, both her knees had a full recovery. She was strong enough to return to basketball within five months of her second surgery. She played the last half of her senior year. She knew that it was a miracle in response to answered prayer. Her doctor had told her that her knees would not have healed before the end of basketball season.

Rosanna had experienced two crises in her life-physical injury and the tragic death of her boyfriend. During that time, the Holy Spirit led her to repentance and Rosanna recognized her sinful nature. Her actions show that she has become regenerate because of her trust in God and her desire for Christian worship. God granted her a miracle-the ability to play basketball at her school during her senior year.

Sophie's Conversion Story

Sophie was raised in the church with Christian parents.²⁴ She didn't feel that the Sunday morning sermons impacted her or her behavior when she became a teenager. However, she did have a dramatic spiritual experience at church camp. She went to chapel assembly and she listened with rapt attention to the message of the speaker at chapel. She found herself staying after morning and evening chapel services to speak to him.

During this camp experience, she was able to acknowledge God's gracious love for her. She was able to accept herself and allow others to accept and love her, something that she was unable to do in the past. She believed that it was through the passion and amazing speaking ability of the speaker at her church camp. Through him, she was able to rededicate her life to God on the last day of camp.

Prior to attending this particular church camp, she was angry and dismissive in her interactions with her parents. When she got off the bus, she saw her father there to pick her up. She ran to him and threw her arms around him and started crying. She felt that God was leading her to the two people that loved her and whom she needed most.

Sophie's experience was changed with effectual calling through a vibrant encounter. During that time at the church camp, she was led to repentance by the Holy Spirit and she recognized her selfish sinful nature. She had a significant change in her behavior and a new dedication to a relationship with God.

In all of these conversion stories, we see the proof of regeneration. Christ drew each of these individuals to Him. They all had early religious experiences (Jewish or Christian), so there was opportunity for the principal of new spiritual life to be implanted when they were young. They each received an external call through written word or attending church services. Each had

²⁴ McKnight, 101-102.

some sort of change through crisis, which resulted in a quest for more information or an encounter with a loved one or person that he or she respected. Each struggled with their sinful nature which resulted in a life changing event. Note that not all of these stories included a Spirit baptism, as this is specifically for bestowing spiritual gifts. Conversions can be exciting or rather quiet, but true conversion results in regeneration of the human and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is probably the indwelling Holy Spirit in each of us that loves to hear the retelling of how He first met each Christian.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW HAS REGENERATION BEEN DESCRIBED THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY

Now that the concept of regeneration is defined, we must ascertain if the definition has changed over the years. Have Christian authors and theologians changed their understanding of regeneration over time? Or has there been a stronger emphasis on the sacrament of baptism or the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit?

In this section, we will review how regeneration has been defined through the eyes of nine prominent theologians—from the 1200s to the current century. The theologians are Thomas Aquinas from the 13th century; Jonathan Edwards and William Law from the 18th century; Charles G. Finney, Dwight L. Moody, Reuben A. Torrey, Wilbur Chapman, and Joseph Pomeroy Windey from the 19th century; and Amos Young from the 20th century. Although each theologian has his focus or emphasis on Christian conversion, surprisingly the understanding of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration has been consistent throughout the years.

We will also review what the Old Testament promised about regeneration. This review will range from a specific and individualized example, to the promise of a new covenant with the children of Israel. A description of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration will be exemplified by a Psalm of David and through the writing of a prophet. Finally, we will review what Jesus said prior to his crucifixion about the regenerative work of the Spirit, and that His teachings remained consistent through Peter in Acts and Paul in his pastoral letters.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas was a medieval theologian of 13th century Europe. He was born in 1225 into a noble Italian family. As a young child, he was sent to school at the nearby Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino.¹ In 1239, the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope began hostile negotiations and the battle was taken to Monte Cassino, not far from the abbey that Thomas was enrolled in school.² In order to protect his son, Thomas's father took him out of the Benedictine abbey and enrolled him in a new liberal arts university in Naples. Here, Thomas was introduced to Aristotle's natural philosophy in Arabic, with Islamic commentaries.³ His education prepared him for presenting and arguing theological concepts in the form of logic based proofs.

In 1243, Thomas decided to join the new Catholic order-the Dominican friars. Established by the Catholic Church to teach and preach the Gospel, the friars lived amongst the people in cities instead of being sequestered away from society.⁴ The Aquino family was horrified and attempted to change Thomas's mind through kidnapping and imprisonment for a year. Eventually, his family relented and Thomas joined the Dominican Order.⁵

Thomas taught in universities in Paris, Cologne, and Naples. While in Paris, Aristotle's works were rediscovered and debated over by the arts faculty and theological faculty. As he had become familiar with Aristotle's works in his youth, Thomas decided to integrate Aristotle with

¹ Fergus Kerr, *Thomas Aquinas, A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8

² Kerr, 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

Christian doctrine.⁶ He applied rational and ordered logic to the truths of the Christian faith in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*.⁷ He evaluated Christian doctrine in an orderly and logical fashion in his *Summa Theologiae*.⁸

During his time teaching and learning at the major universities of the day, Thomas addressed many theological issues. One of these issues was the construct of the Trinity. He wanted to address and negate the heretical teaching on the Trinity, and used scripture to rebut these heresies.

He rejected Sabellian's definition of the Trinity as "one God, three aspects (modes) of God" and explained that the Trinity of God is composed of three persons that have specific functions in the Godhead.⁹ God *knows* through the Father, He *wills* through the Son with His Word, and He *loves* through the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Union of Man with God is achieved through the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thomas emphasized that the proper effect of the mission of the Holy Spirit is to lead the faithful to the Son, and the proper effect of the mission of the Son is to lead the faithful to the Father.¹¹ He believed that the Son and Holy Spirit imprinted on the souls of the saints, and by the gift of grace, the saints are joined to God in order to know and love Him.¹²

⁶ Kerr, 15-16.

⁷ Ibid., 28-29.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel Keating and John P. Yocum, eds. *Aquinas on Doctrine* (London, UK: T & T Clark International, 2004), 56-57.

¹⁰ Weinandy et. al., 58-59.

¹¹ Ibid., 61.

¹² Ibid., 61-62.

This implies that those that have joined to God have repented and turned to God, and therefore have become regenerate. Thomas believed that the Holy Spirit “infuses” with His people in order to prepare our hearts and minds and prompt us inwardly to faith. He believed that indwelling and possession of the Holy Spirit is absolutely indispensable in order to be a Christian.¹³ Not only does the Holy Spirit inwardly instruct us, but He moves us to accomplish what we are taught. His instruction is not a type of coercion, nor does it impede or remove the free deliberation of the will of our actions. He just shows us the truth of the word and prepares our ears to be receptive to the Word and our minds to understand and align to the divine nature.¹⁴

The Holy Spirit has its own operations that it completes as part of the Trinity. Aquinas believed that it is through the Holy Spirit that we are regenerated as children of God.¹⁵ He taught that the Holy Spirit always comes before and prepares the way for any response on our part. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the basis of the Christian life.¹⁶

Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards was a revivalist preacher and Reformed theologian. He was born in 1703 in Connecticut, the son of a Protestant minister. He entered Yale in 1716 at the age of 13. In 1727, he was ordained a minister in Northampton, Massachusetts, and assistant minister to his maternal grandfather. From 1733 through 1741, Edwards was involved in a number of Protestant revivals in New England.

¹³ Weinandy et. al., 149-150.

¹⁴ Ibid., 150-151.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 150.

In Edward's book, "The Great Awakening," he pointed out that there was some confusion as to how to distinguish those with the true Spirit of God indwelling and how to identify the disingenuous. He noted that people were enamored with external signs of a religious experience-fainting or visions of prophets-but that did not equate to the actions of those with the indwelling Holy Spirit.

He cited some universal experiences and actions observed of those that had the indwelling Holy Spirit and were regenerate. Those that are regenerate will confess the Gospel freely and thereby establish and confirm their testimony.¹⁷ A regenerate person's interests and focus will change from a pursuit of pleasures, profits and honors in the material world, to a concern about the invisible world, a revulsion to sin, and earnest seeking for the kingdom of God.¹⁸

Edwards noted that Christians of his time looked forward to a resurgence of the days of the Apostles when they received the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. He pointed out that "God communicates Himself in His own nature more to the soul in saving grace in the heart, than in all miraculous gifts."¹⁹ To become regenerate, by the work of the Holy Spirit, one receives a much better gift and experience than any other spiritual outward sign or gift. Because of this union with the indwelling Holy Spirit, Man can have fellowship with God and partake in His Divine nature. The miraculous gifts, such as speaking in tongues and prophesy, detract from the true gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit.²⁰

¹⁷ C.C. Goen, ed. *Jonathan Edwards: The Great Awakening* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 249.

¹⁸ Goen, 251.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 280-281.

Edwards pointed out that regenerate Christians have a God-centered focus. The Holy Spirit interacts with the human soul and changes the human's outlook from a worldly one to a spiritual one. The Holy Spirit changes the focus of man and prepares man to share in the divine nature and relationship with God.

William Law

William Law was an Anglican priest and theologian that stood by his convictions. He was born in Northamptonshire, England, in 1688. He attended Emmanuel College at University of Cambridge in 1705, was ordained in 1711 and stayed on to teach at the university. He refused to take the oath of allegiance to King George I in 1714 and therefore lost his commission at Cambridge. His writings influenced future theologians of the 18th century. His work, *A Humble, Affectionate and Earnest Address to the Clergy* (1761) was his last work. He encouraged Christian leaders to focus on the fundamentals of faith—repentance of sin, dependence on Christ, and obedience towards instruction by the Holy Spirit.

Law pointed out that salvation can only come through the Holy Spirit. One cannot turn to God without having the nature of God inside. The Holy Spirit sows the seed of divine union in every man, and religion (or hearing the Gospel) grows and nurtures the seed to its fullness.²¹ This spiritual change cannot be performed by man, and it cannot be seen by others as an outward physical change.²²

²¹ Andrew Murray, ed. *The Power of the Spirit: Selections from the Writings of William Law* (Minneapolis, MN: Dimension Books, 1977), 6-7.

²² Murray, 20-21.

Christ's redeeming power in man is an inward spiritual work of the Holy Spirit. The work alters, changes and regenerates the life of the soul that it affects.²³ The Holy Spirit assists in bringing forth a spiritual death to the old life and is the midwife to a new spiritual life. Man cannot hear the message of Christ's redeeming work without the previous preparation of the soul by the Holy Spirit.²⁴ Law pointed out the following:

For what else are the apostolic Scriptures, but those very instructions and teachings put into writing, which they affirmed to be but bare planting and watering, quite powerless in themselves, till the living Spirit of God worked with them?²⁵

Law reminds his readers that the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) are not different or separate from the Holy Spirit Himself. He has no other way to make Himself known to us except for assisting us in changing our attitudes and perceptions so we can display the fruits of the Spirit. Law wrote, "If the Spirit is not always working in us, His fruits must be as absent from us as He is."²⁶

Law noted that to resist the Holy Spirit in His work is to commit the sin of all sins, as it stops His work of redemption of the soul and separates man from union with God. Man would never have any saving knowledge of God by his own merits and work.²⁷ He would be stuck with limited knowledge, under the power of his fallen nature, never free from personal desires and insecurities, and could truly say, "Through my turning and trusting to something else than the

²³ Murray, 19.

²⁴ Ibid., 37.

²⁵ Ibid., 59.

²⁶ Ibid., 68.

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

grace and inspiration of God's Spirit, I am what I am."²⁸ He cautions against turning to secular poets, orators, philosophers and critics to have one's mind enriched, as they can only share spiritual darkness instead of enlightenment of the soul.²⁹

William Law shared great spiritual truths with his contemporaries about the work of the Holy Spirit, and how the regeneration of our souls are totally dependent on His work. He reminded the pastorate that humans are powerless to establish a relationship with God through our own work and merit. Finally, he warned against resistance against the work of the Holy Spirit. Without Him, humans would never experience saving grace or understand the Gospel message and souls would be lost.

Charles G. Finney

Charles G. Finney was a Presbyterian minister. He led church revivals from 1825-1835 in upstate New York. In 1835, he taught at Oberlin College in Ohio and became the President of the college from 1851-1866. He was born in Connecticut in 1792. He had a dramatic religious conversion experience in 1821-regenerate and baptized in the Spirit on the same day- during the time he was apprenticed to be a lawyer in upstate New York. He left the law profession for the ministry and was ordained to be a Presbyterian pastor in 1823.

In 1824, he became an itinerant pastor and preached all over western New York. In 1827, he became well known for his forceful revival preaching. From 1829-1832, he had a revivalist East Coast tour. In 1832, he became a pastor of a Presbyterian church in New York City and published his many sermons and lectures. In 1835, Finney left the Presbyterian Church and became a Congregationalist. Also in 1835, he moved to Oberlin College and was there from

²⁸ Murray, 34.

²⁹ Ibid., 109.

1835-1872. During his time there, he was a teacher of theology, the pastor of Oberlin Congregational church and President of the school.

Finney was a person of his time. He valued individualism, freedom, self-reliance and optimism. However, he did not want these values to convert to lawlessness and anarchy. He saw revivals as a way of saving souls and transforming individuals. He believed that regeneration of the soul resulted in spiritual as well as moral transformation and would energize converts to actively reform all areas of society.³⁰

Finney's original focus was evangelism to the unconverted. Because of his own regeneration experience and baptism of the Spirit, in 1840 he started to eventually direct his attention to the needs of Christians rather than the unconverted.³¹ Finney lectured widely and taught that sinners could not be converted apart from the Holy Spirit, and that Christians need to pray for a general outpouring of the Holy Spirit in order to see revival come and sinners converted.³²

He emphasized to Christians their need of the Holy Spirit. He presented the abiding, indwelling presence of the Spirit as something that they should pray for. He claimed:

Many Christians are not "filled with the Spirit" or do not "have the Spirit". A "Christian" without the Spirit may indeed not be a real Christian at all. If he is, and continues without the Spirit, he will surely not remain a Christian. Those Christians who oppose revivals... are clearly without the Spirit.³³

Finney stated that a Christian needs the Spirit for personal sanctification and for becoming useful in doing God's work. These were his steadfast themes in his preaching. Since

³⁰ Gresham, 1-3.

³¹ Ibid., 12.

³² Ibid., 14.

³³ Ibid., 15.

his experience of regeneration and baptism in the Spirit coincided on the same day, Finney did not differentiate the two experiences. He preached that regeneration was basically a change of heart. The soul and the will consciously choose to change from selfishness to benevolence, or from self-gratification and self-indulgence to entire consecration to God. This change comes about by the Holy Spirit showing the truths of the Gospel, and these truths are pressed down on the consciousness of the sinner. This cleanses the regenerate's heart and soul and changes the person's moral character.³⁴

Unfortunately, Finney believed that the regenerate person would constantly struggle with sin. He believed that the struggle of will would end and consecration to God would occur once the regenerate Christian experiences baptism in the Spirit. At this baptism, the regenerate's soul would receive the Holy Spirit as guide and teacher, temptation to sin would be removed and the soul would receive union with Christ.³⁵

When asked to explain why regeneration does not ensure the converts sanctification (they can fall back into sin) or why the believer's initial faith fails to ensure baptism in the Spirit, Finney explained that new converts usually do not have a large enough view of Christ and the gospel. For Finney, regeneration is identical to conversion. It is a moral transformation and not a spiritual transformation. He noted that regeneration is experienced at the beginning of the Christian life, but that a fuller experience with the Holy Spirit was promised by both Jesus and John the Baptist. Therefore, baptism in the Spirit must be a distinct and subsequent experience.³⁶

Finney's early religious experiences colored his theology. Because he was regenerate and baptized in the Spirit on the same day, he did not clearly differentiate the two experiences. He

³⁴ Gresham, 33-34.

³⁵ Ibid., 34-38.

³⁶ Gresham, 54-55.

saw that some converts did not seem to show the fruits of the Spirit in their actions and supposed that they struggled with sin because they had not been baptized in the Spirit. However, he did understand that baptism of the Spirit occurs for the mature Christian, and is a way to empower the Christian for a special service or task for God.

Dwight L. Moody

D.L. Moody was one of two successors to Finney as a prominent American evangelist. He was born in 1837 in Northfield, Massachusetts. His father died when he was four, and he was sent off to work for his room and board. He and his seven siblings were raised in the Unitarian church.

When he was 17, he moved to Boston to work in his uncle's shoe store. He attended a Congregational Church while in Boston. In 1855, he experienced a Christian conversion when he was 18 and it began his revivalist career. Moody conducted revival campaigns internationally from 1873 to 1876. He was the pastor of the Chicago Avenue Church—now the Moody Church. His books and sermons were widely read and published by the Chicago Bible Institute—renamed the Moody Bible Institute ten years after his death.

Moody believed in the same manner as Finney that regeneration was equivalent to conversion. He presented an analogy from Exodus (Exod. 40:1-36) where Moses prepared the tabernacle for God per His instruction. Once the tabernacle was completed, then the presence of God moved in. Moody wrote:

I believe firmly, that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and self-seeking, and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Ghost will come and fill every corner of our hearts; but if we are filled with pride and conceit, and ambition and self-seeking, and pleasure and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God;... and when the heart is turned upside

down, and everything is turned out that is contrary to God, then the Spirit will come, just as He did in the tabernacle, and fill us with His glory.³⁷

Moody's emphasis was how to encourage Christian men and women to prepare themselves for baptism in the Spirit and become spiritual warriors. He believed that Christians had the indwelling Spirit; they were regenerate only by way of their profession to being Christians and believing the Gospel. Unfortunately, they were not emotionally or spiritually ready to have the Holy Spirit "dwell within them in power."³⁸ He felt Christians were lacking in knowledge of the Bible. Christians would discuss their personal experiences, theories and "pet ideas" with the unchurched, but would not share the Gospel. He concluded that Christians were not well versed in Scripture and therefore could not be used as conduits for God's message.³⁹

However, he did recognize that the regenerate Christian would display the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) prior to Spirit baptism. He wrote that the work of the Holy Spirit is to impart love and hope and liberty.⁴⁰ Moody echoes Christ's sentiment in Matthew 15:10-11, that the words and actions that come from a man clearly show his inner thoughts. If a Christian in a prayer meeting publicly points out faults in others, he may not be regenerate. If a Christian tries to generate love toward God based on his own power and will, he may not be regenerate. Moody points out that love toward God and fellow man will be spontaneous when "the Holy Spirit kindles love in your heart."⁴¹

³⁷ Donald W. Dayton, *Late Nineteenth Century Revivalist Teachings on the Holy Spirit* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1985), 31-32.

³⁸ Dayton, 34-35.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20-27.

⁴¹ Dayton, 21.

Moody asserted that no regenerate Christian is without hope. Those without hope are not useful for God's work and are out of communion with the Holy Spirit. His concept of liberty is the freedom to speak about and perform service for the Lord. Christians that are not regenerate are too afraid to speak about Christ in public, or witness for the Holy Spirit when He encourages them. The regenerate Christian unconsciously witnesses about Christ to others and is no more afraid to speak of God in public than speaking about any other family member.

Moody's theological focus was on evangelism and Spirit baptism. He believed that the Christian had to have a conversion experience prior to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and not the other way around. He encouraged Christians to prepare their hearts and minds for Spirit baptism.

However, he did recognize that there were certain consistent behaviors of the regenerate Christian. If a Christian was truly regenerate, and the Holy Spirit had prepared the Christian's mind and soul to turn toward God, then the person would impart love, hope and liberty. The regenerate Christian would spontaneously impart love towards others, would not become discouraged, and would witness to others about the Gospel without fear or trepidation.

Reuben A. Torrey

R. A. Torrey was the second of two successors to Finney as a prominent American evangelist. He was born in 1856 in New Jersey. He graduated from Yale in 1875 and from Yale Divinity School in 1878. He was ordained as a Congregationalist minister directly after graduation.

Torrey joined D.L. Moody at the Chicago Bible Institute in 1899 and became pastor of the Chicago Avenue Church (now the Moody Church) in 1894. He conducted his own revival

meetings internationally from 1903-1907. From 1912 to 1924, he was Dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola University).

Torrey's theology was similar to Finney's in that he believed that regeneration was akin to conversion. He also agreed with both Finney and Moody that regeneration proceeds the separate and distinct experience of Spirit baptism. Regeneration is the cleaning of sin from the soul, and Spirit baptism is the activation of the regenerate's soul for service to the Lord.⁴²

Torrey's theology, in regards to regeneration, is the most diluted and indeterminate in comparison to Finney's and Moody's. He quotes Acts 2:38: repent, be baptized, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴³ He focuses more on the gift of the Holy Spirit, and less on how the unregenerate repent for their sins. This may be due to his revivalist preaching, as his writing does not address how man is helpless to save himself but focuses more on how man will be transformed after baptism in the Holy Spirit.

However, Torrey noted that Christians have the ability to slide back into sin. He explained that this occurred not because the Christian is weak in his understanding of the gospel, as Finney believed, but because the Christian is weak in his faith. It could occur at any time in the Christian's walk in faith-even after Spirit baptism.

The indwelling Holy Spirit would withdraw His power from the Christian if the following situations occurred: (1) when the Christian breaks his word and turns his back on his consecration to the Lord, (2) when the Christian purposely disobeys God, (3) when the Christian falls back into self-indulgent, self-centered and prideful behavior, (4) or when the Christian

⁴² Dayton, 12-13.

⁴³ Ibid., 37.

discontinues to nourish his connection with God through prayer and reading the Bible.⁴⁴ This theology was scripturally based, as he cited many Old Testament and New Testament references. God abhors sin and cannot abide in a sinful environment. Logically, the Holy Spirit would withdraw power and relationship with a human that sled back into sin.

Torrey reminded Christians that the relationship between the indwelling Holy Spirit and the person was just that- a relationship. Loving, mutually up-building relationships are carefully tended and nurtured. One sided relationships, where one partner does not invest or share, are destructive emotionally and do not last long. Salvation may be once and for all, but the relationship between Creator and creature is ongoing.

Torrey acknowledged the existence of regeneration of the Christian, but he didn't address the behaviors of what that entails. Many of the behaviors previously described- cleansing of the soul, illumination and a transformed life- are associated with his description of Spirit baptism. He believes that these are behaviors of a transformed Christian, but his dividing line of when it occurs is less clear than his contemporaries.

Torrey does address the believer's ongoing relationship with God. This had not been overtly addressed by theologians prior and he brings up an extremely important theological concept for all Christians. Just because one is regenerate, it does not mean that one can never sin or stray away from God. The relationship between creature and indwelling Spirit is continuous and nurturing as long as the creature continues to have open and honest communication with God. We mature in our relationship and learn to trust and rely on God.

⁴⁴ Dayton, 66-77.

Wilbur Chapman

John Wilbur Chapman was a contemporary of both Moody and Torrey, He was also an American Evangelist. He was born in 1859 in Indiana. He attended Quaker Day School and Methodist Sunday School. In 1874, he experienced a Christian conversion when he was 17 and it began his theological career. In 1881, he was ordained a Presbyterian minister and completed seminary at Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. He received a doctorate of Divinity at the College of Wooster in Ohio.

He began preaching on the evangelist circuit with D.L. Moody in 1893, towards the end of Moody's career. In 1904, he started running tent revivals in Pittsburg, PA and Syracuse, NY. In 1908 and 1909, he conducted mass evangelism crusades in the New England area and internationally. His final revival tour was in 1918.

Chapman clearly understood that regeneration of the soul and baptism of the Spirit are two separate experiences. The former "secret and inward, within closed doors... never repeated" and the later "open and outward in its manifestations... repeated over and over according to the measure of our faith and of our desire."⁴⁵

In his writings, he provides a summary for the seeker of how one can prepare himself to receive and accept the indwelling Spirit. The first step is to allow the Holy Spirit to have power over the individual. This is the relaxing of the human will against the teaching and training that the indwelling Spirit provides. Chapman writes that the Holy Spirit will cleanse the soul, if He is allowed to do so. The second step is to surrender fully to the will and instruction of the Holy Spirit. Chapman shares his experience during his surrendering process, and how he released his will towards his personal ambition, his family and his personal comfort. After releasing his will and aligning it toward God's will, he was able to experience the living reality of a relationship

⁴⁵ Dayton, 81.

with God through the indwelling Spirit. The final step is for the new Christian to have faith in the Triune God.⁴⁶

Chapman carefully points out that Christians that yearn for the baptism in the Spirit are putting their will in front of their relationship with God. He thoughtfully asserts:

Not infrequently the children of God go mourning after this blessing and find it not, and for the reason that they are seeking the consciousness of the blessing rather than the Spirit Himself. We have nothing to do with the consciousness: we are to have faith in God, believing in the indwelling Spirit when with great emotion and much enthusiasm we are working, as well as when without (emotion and enthusiasm) we do His bidding. Consciousness of power may be a very dangerous thing. Let us just believe God, and let Him be conscious of all that we may accomplish. It is ours to be submissive.⁴⁷

Chapman clearly understood that the Christian must go through the regeneration process in order to accept the Gospel and become a worker for Christ. He wisely states that Spirit baptism is done by the will of the Holy Spirit, and not by human will. The gift of Spirit baptism is only given when the Christian is receptive, willing and ready to take on the tasks God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10).

Joseph Pomeroy Windey

Joseph Windey was a doctor, educator and founder of the western division of the Church of the Nazarene. He was born in 1841 in Ohio. After high school, he attended Miami University in Oxford, Ohio where he majored in Classics. In 1861, he left college to join the Union Army in the Civil War. He served as a medical corpsman on ships patrolling the Mississippi River. He was discharged in 1862 for medical reasons.

⁴⁶ Dayton, 84-88.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 83-84.

He moved to California and returned to college in 1865. He graduated at the head of his Medical School class at Toland Medical College (now University of California-San Francisco) in 1866. He moved to Southern California in 1868. He founded the Los Angeles County Medical Association and was Los Angeles's first Public Health officer. He was the founding Dean of the University Of California School Of Medicine. He was a cofounder of the western division of the Church of the Nazarene in 1895. In 1899 he was the pastor of the Nazarene Methodist Episcopal church. He resigned from the pastorate in 1911.

Windey recognized that each person's experience in regeneration was individualized as, "no two of God's children are mentally or spiritually alike, and the probability is that God speaks to no two in exactly the same manner."⁴⁸ However, he pointed out that even though these spiritual experiences are individualized, there are consistent characteristic traits of all regeneration experiences. He noted that the convert believes in repentance for remission of sins, that Christ is the divine son of God and that Christ's atoning work offers pardon for sins.

Once regenerate, the Christian is very much like a child. God will be a supportive Father and allow the child to struggle out his spiritual growth.⁴⁹ To take away that spiritual struggle will arrest the growth process of the fledgling Christian. The supportive Father will send the Holy Spirit as "teacher, guide and schoolmaster."⁵⁰ The Holy Spirit will illuminate what has already been taught in the Old and New Testaments for the new Christian.⁵¹

Windey points out that sanctification is truly the goal. Each Christian grows in his individual relationship with the indwelling Spirit, and each person develops a deeper and

⁴⁸ Windey, 40.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 55-57.

⁵¹ Ibid., 118-119.

personal relationship with the Triune God. Once the human will is set aside and the Christian grows and bends his will to God's, then he will display the outward change through the fruits of the Spirit. Windey notes that "men are little skilled to analyze, and give name to, the successive stages of their own spiritual experience."⁵²

Windey is more interested in the individual's Christian growth. This is in contrast with Moody's and Torrey's emphasis on the Christian's Spirit baptism and revivalist outreach to the unchurched. Windey is very clear on what experiences constitutes the regeneration of a Christian. He does not pinpoint what the works of the Holy Spirit are in this transformative process, but is content to say that it is a mystery and it occurs over time.

Amos Yong

Amos Yong is an Asian-American Pentecostal Theologian. He was born in 1965 in Malaysia and immigrated to the United States when he was ten years old. His parents were missionaries to Chinese speaking immigrants in Northern California. In the last decade, he has become one of the most prolific writers among Pentecostal theologians in the Assemblies of God. Pentecostalism is a modern church movement that emphasizes Spirit baptism. The core doctrines of the Assemblies of God are salvation by faith, Holy Spirit baptism, Divine healing and the imminent Second Coming of Christ.

Yong received his B.A. from Bethany College in Santa Cruz, CA, his M.A. from Western Evangelical Seminary in Portland, OR, and his PhD. From Boston University. Since 2014, he has been the professor of Theology and Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA.

Pentecostal Spirituality identifies three fundamental "works of grace": justification (regeneration of the heart), sanctification (perfection in love), and Spirit baptism (empowerment

⁵² Windey, 98-100.

for service).⁵³ The divine gift of grace bestows forgiveness, cleanses the conscience and removes guilt in the new believer. The removal of sins anticipates the outpouring of the Spirit. Justification and Spirit baptism are two sides to the coin of God's redemptive work in human hearts and lives.⁵⁴

Pentecostals believe in the Holy Spirit that changes hearts and minds in order to have people confess that Jesus is Lord. They also believe that the Holy Spirit provides spiritual gifts to believers to the benefit of all in order to fulfill the Great Commission. They believe in the words of the resurrected Christ when He went to visit the Eleven:

And these signs will accompany those who believe in my name: they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people and they will get well. (Mark 16:17-18)⁵⁵

Spirit baptism cumulates a Pentecostal believer's four-fold understanding of Christ. He is Savior, He is Sanctifier, He is a great Healer and He is the coming King. Pentecostals acknowledge the saving, sanctifying and baptizing work of the Triune God. Receiving the Spirit depends on God's desire to give of His divine self.⁵⁶ Reception of the Spirit is the reception of Divine love that fulfills the life of faith and drives hope in God's capacity to transform the world.⁵⁷ Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit gives two gifts to His people. The first gift of the Spirit turns people to God and is the initiation into the Christian life. The second gift of the

⁵³ Amos Yong, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 77.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁵ Barker, 1558.

⁵⁶ Yong, 63-64.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

Spirit–Spirit baptism–sends the (now regenerate) believer back into the world with spiritual gifts to bear witness in the power of the Spirit and the saving work of Christ.⁵⁸

Pentecostals have an understanding that a believer has to be regenerate before they receive Spirit baptism. They know that the believer has to have had some experience whereby the believer has sins removed and that he understands the Gospel and confesses that Christ is Lord. The just are more focused on and anticipatory of the experience of Spirit baptism.

The gift of the Spirit (as in Spirit baptism) generates other gifts (like the fruit of the Spirit). Divine grace is self-perpetuating. The result is love in action.⁵⁹ Pentecost is the gift from the Holy Spirit for the empowerment of creatures to participate in the divine love and share the gospel with the world.⁶⁰

The redemptive power of the Holy Spirit makes possible altruistic activities. The Holy Spirit enters into the death of the world–or worldly pursuits–in order that resurrection, renewal and redemption may come forth. We die in the world so we can live in Christ.⁶¹

Old Testament Promises

Although there were a few individuals that either had the Holy Spirit come upon them, or they were dedicated to and set apart by the Holy Spirit, the Old Testament was not focused on the third person of the Triune God. Yet, the Old Testament contains a few verses about the promises of the new covenant and regeneration of the believer’s soul. These verses promise that the Holy Spirit will melt an unbeliever’s heart and change the unbeliever’s mind.

⁵⁸ Yong, 89.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 97.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 154.

⁶¹ Ibid., 154.

Most of the Old Testament incidents whereby the Holy Spirit came and prepared the heart of the person were for specific reasons or for a specific task that God wanted completed. The Holy Spirit aligned the person's heart and mind for the task God had given him. In Exodus 31:2-3, God told Moses that he had filled craftsmen with the Spirit of God in order to give them skill, ability and knowledge. He used their skills to decorate the tabernacle in His temple. In Deuteronomy 34:9, God filled Joshua with the Spirit of God and gave him wisdom as the next leader of Israel.⁶²

Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, experienced the first clear description of regeneration. The Israelites begged God for a human king to lead them in battles (1 Samuel 8). God appointed Saul to be that king, and instructed his prophet, Samuel, to anoint and prepare Saul's heart for the indwelling of His Spirit. Samuel stated to Saul:

The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you with power, and you will prophesy with (a procession of prophets); and you will be changed into a different person. (1 Sam 10:6) As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. (1 Sam 10:9)⁶³

It is interesting to think that God had to prepare the heart of His first earthly King. Although Saul was one of God's chosen people, his heart and spirit were not aligned in obedience toward God's commands. On the other hand, God did not have to prepare the heart of David, Saul's replacement as King of Israel. David was already prepared and aligned with the will of God. The Holy Spirit came to David at the day of his anointment by Samuel when he was

⁶² Barker, 396, 400-401.

⁶³ Ibid., 391.

still a boy. (1 Sam 16:13)⁶⁴ Throughout David's life, he consulted with God and when he erred he accepted God's punishment.

In Jeremiah 31:31-34, God promises that He will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah. This covenant will be different from the Abrahamic covenant. God points out that the Israelites had already broke this covenant. In Jerimiah 31:33, the prophet records God saying, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people."⁶⁵ In the Abrahamic covenant, God instructed the Israelites to love Him in the same manner as they would a sovereign—through respect and loyalty, but not love in a personal sense. In the promised new covenant, the relationship would change. His laws would already be in the mind of His people, and therefore less likely to be broken by neglect or lack of knowledge. The relationship between sovereign and subject would be more personal in nature. This is God's description as to how the Holy Spirit will convert and regenerate His people.

The next Old Testament description of the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration is found in the middle of David's prayer of forgiveness to God in Psalm 51:

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all of my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. (Psalm 51:7, 9-12)⁶⁶

In this psalm, David prays for his own forgiveness and cleansing of his sins. However, this section outlines all of the tasks that the Holy Spirit does in regeneration. The Holy Spirit cleanses the soul from sin, He creates a pure heart for the sinner and teaches the sinner to have a

⁶⁴ Barker, 402.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1188.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 844.

willing and steadfast spirit. Once the person is prepared, the Holy Spirit can dwell with the soul of man.

Three Old Testament verses describe the Holy Spirit's work of cleansing the believer's heart in the promised new covenant. In the Abrahamic covenant, every male member of the covenant was circumcised as instructed in Genesis 17:9-14. The covenant in the man's flesh was to exemplify God's everlasting covenant.⁶⁷

The promised future covenant was declared through Moses in Deuteronomy 30:6: "The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul and live."⁶⁸ Instead of man cutting their flesh to show that they had commitment to God's covenant with him, God would do the cutting. God would cut away the sin and unloving nature in the soul of His people so that they could have a changed heart in order to love Him.

The best description of the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration comes from Ezekiel 11:10-20 and Ezekiel 36:25-27. Ezekiel was a prophet that lived during the time of the Babylonian captivity. This chapter was a message about the future hope for God's people.⁶⁹ He brought this message to God's people on two occasions from the Lord Himself:

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people and I will be their God. (Ezek. 11:19-20)⁷⁰

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all of your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put

⁶⁷ Barker, 32-33.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 278.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1238.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1253.

a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezek. 36:25-27)⁷¹

Both are clearly the blueprint of regeneration and the Holy Spirit's part of this process. Baptism, or the outward demonstration of an internal change, is cited first. Then, God says He will cleanse the soul of sin. God will change the heart of the sinner so he will be able to respond to God in love; He will prepare the sinner's soul and mind so he would accept and understand the need for God. Finally, God states that He will put the indwelling Holy Spirit in the previous sinner, now believer. The Holy Spirit will teach the new believer to a new understanding of God.

Even though the Paraclete had not officially come to God's people, He had made appearances in the Old Testament. He gave individuals specific skills for tasks that God had set before them. God told his chosen prophet and King of Israel about how the Holy Spirit will change the hearts and minds of His people in the future. God shared with the people of Israel His plan for establishing a personal relationship with them.

New Testament Promises

On Maundy Thursday, Jesus shared with His disciples what God's plans were after Jesus completed his atoning work. In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26:17-46, Mark 14:12-41, and Luke 22:14-45), Jesus established the new covenant through the installation of the Eucharist. Afterwards, He and the disciples went to the Mount of Olives to pray before His arrest.⁷² In John's gospel, Jesus conversed for four chapters (John 14-17) wherein He comforted His

⁷¹ Barker, 1290.

⁷² Ibid., 1510, 1550-1554, 1609-1611.

disciples, explained His atoning work to them and prayed for them.⁷³ Only in John’s gospel does Jesus give an explanation on Maundy Thursday of what the work of the Holy Spirit is.

On the night before his trial, Jesus comforted the disciples, stating that He “will not leave you as orphans,” but will send “another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.” (John 14:16, 18)⁷⁴ He explained that the Holy Spirit could not come to them until after Jesus finished His atoning work:

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26)⁷⁵

Jesus delineated more about the work of the Holy Spirit in John 15:26, John 16:8 and John 16:13. In the following excerpts of these verses, Jesus stated:

When the Counselor comes...He will testify about me. He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come.⁷⁶

In the last hours that Jesus had with His Disciples, He explained how the new Covenant would be established and how it would be individualized. The Holy Spirit would be sent out by the Father to His chosen people. The Holy Spirit would cleanse His people from sin by guiding them to the truth of Christ’s redeeming work and expose their sin. He would be a teacher and educate God’s people. This was similar to what was taught in the Old Testament in regards to the New Covenant. Unfortunately, it was not recorded in John’s gospel that the Holy Spirit would

⁷³ Barker, 1652-1659.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1653.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1654.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1655-1656.

create a new heart in God's chosen people. Perhaps if Jesus had more time, he could have fleshed that out. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and breathed on them to disperse the Holy Spirit. (John 20:22)⁷⁷

Peter and Paul were two of Jesus's apostles. They continued to share the message of the Holy Spirit to future converts. In Acts 2:14-36, Peter shared the Gospel message with the crowd. The people felt grief about the crucifixion of Jesus and their involvement in it. The crowd asked Peter what they should do. Because of their response, Peter could ascertain that their hearts were moved by the Gospel message. He confidently explained how they could be regenerate by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit:

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off-for all whom the Lord our God will call. " (Acts 2:38-39)⁷⁸

Peter also pointed out that the Holy Spirit's is given to all who are God's chosen. When the Counsel at Jerusalem met to standardize church teaching, they discussed if the Gentile Christians should follow the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision. After much discussion, Peter pointed out that God made a choice to allow the Gentiles to hear and understand the gospel message. God knew these Gentile's hearts, He accepted them and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell with them. Peter said, "He made no distinction between us and them, and He purified their hearts by faith." Therefore, God did not require the Gentiles to follow the Abrahamic covenant. (Acts 15:1-21)⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Barker, 1665.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1682.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1707-1709.

Paul, the Apostle for the Gentiles, had his own regeneration experience. (Acts 9:1-30)⁸⁰ He went on four missionary journeys to plant churches in Greece, Rome, Macedonia, Turkey, Cyprus and Syria. He wrote letters to the fledgling churches to clarify church doctrine and to give advice and encouragement.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthian Church, he addressed church doctrine. He reminded the church in Corinth:

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Cor. 1:21-22)⁸¹

Paul's letter to the Ephesians was written as a general letter to the church. It described the nature of the church and gave instruction about the Gospel message. He believed the people in the church should be unified in purpose, and understand their roles in society and familial interactions. The Gospel message addressed the Christian's relationship with Christ. He noted that Christians are saved by grace through faith, and not by personal will or work. (Eph. 2:8-9)⁸² Christians are fellow citizens of God's people and members of God's household. "And in (Christ) you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit." (Eph. 2:19, 22)⁸³

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the message of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration has been surprisingly consistent. The directive that the Holy Spirit-part of the Triune God- is sent to prepare the sinful person's heart and mind so that he can hear and

⁸⁰ Barker, 1693-1695.

⁸¹ Ibid., 1798.

⁸² Ibid., 1827.

⁸³ Ibid., 1827-1828.

understand the message of the Gospel has not changed. Man cannot understand the message of the Gospel without instruction and interpretation by the indwelling Spirit.

Understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration has not been changed over the years in Christian doctrine. Each theologian taught that a Christian converts and then grows in relationship with and understanding of God and Christian doctrine through the Holy Spirit's instruction. All agreed that the Holy Spirit has a part in the elimination of the Christian's original sinful nature. Some believed that regeneration is just a rite of passage prior to receiving Spirit baptism. Others believed that regeneration is the goal and that Spirit baptism only occurs when the Christian is mature enough and has a specific use for God in His Kingdom "which God had prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph.2:10)⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Barker, 1827.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHY IS REGENERATION IMPORTANT?

In the second chapter, we discovered the general process of how an unregenerate human makes a conscious decision to become a Christian and receives the indwelling Holy Spirit. In the fourth chapter, we learned that this process of regeneration has been taught rather consistently from Old Testament times to present day. This is interesting academic information, but it is unclear as to why regeneration should be such a vital aspect of a Christian's life.

The most important reason why regeneration is so indispensable for the Christian life is the release from sin in the human soul. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, the human's perception of her life in sin has changed. The Holy Spirit allows the human the ability to hear the gospel, show the human her sins, open her spiritual eyes to her sin, and lead her into repentance. God's grace saves the human and she is now dead to sin, and alive in Christ through the work of the Triune God.

In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul explains that the new Christian used to be dead in sin. Now, due to the grace of God and the Christian's faith in God's promises, she will not be a receiver of God's wrath.¹ In 1 Corinthians 2:10-14, Paul reveals that the indwelling Holy Spirit enables us to understand God's spiritual truths. He only shares this truth with those that He has given the grace of salvation.² Removal of sin and the gift of God's grace and forgiveness is an academic exercise to those individuals that have not been spiritually enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

¹ Barker, 1826-1827.

² Ibid., 1771.

Without the grace of God's redemption and the spiritual understanding of what has been granted us, the Christian experience will be hollow and colorless.

For many people that attend church services during the week, they focus more on the social aspect and less on the spiritual aspect. Discussions about church is perfunctory. Many people that attend church believe that they should profess that Jesus was born over two thousand years ago, died for our sins, and we are free from sin and death. Professing Christians should be upstanding people and try to do what is right. Christian church missionaries are sent out to the unchurched in foreign countries, to places where people have never heard of Jesus Christ. Individuals that have verbalized these statements currently attend American churches. Note that the visible versus invisible church will be addressed in the next chapter.

Although on the surface, the above paragraph contains true statements about the Christian church, these statements would not be the first ones said by a regenerate Christian. When thinking of one's closest friends and family, physical address and birthdate are probably not the immediate thoughts that come to mind. How those individuals make you feel in relationship with you, and admirable traits that they have, are more likely to spring to mind. That is because these individuals have a history with you, you have grown in relationship with them, and you have some sort of emotional investment. So it is with a regenerate Christian. She has a history, a story of how she was changed, and how she grew in her relationship with the Triune God through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The regenerate Christian has an investment with God because she is in a relationship with God.

Humans are inherently alone. Most individuals cannot hear and know the thoughts of other humans. We can be, and often are, emotionally hurt by the actions of other people in our lives. We may be confronted by our singularity in times of emotional and physical crisis. We

hunger for emotional connection, pure love and true acceptance. We search for this through interpersonal relationship with other humans. Most humans, sometime in their life, search for meaning to their existence.

Experience Perfect Love

Father Henri J. M. Nouwen, Dutch Catholic priest and theologian, wrote extensively about how each individual has his own unique brokenness and emotional needs. He wrote of a time when he had been emotionally dependent on another broken human and the person left him. The relationship could not survive under the pressure of his demands from the other person. As he worked through his pain and anguish, he realized that he needed perfect love from that other person, and his need was not fulfilled. He recognized that the deepest desires of his heart could only be fulfilled by God's perfect love, and he renewed his relationship with God. He realized that the Holy Spirit unites, heals, restores and reconciles us. Once he aligned his need for perfect love and true acceptance toward God, his other interpersonal relationships aligned as well.³

God understands the human need for perfect love and true acceptance. The Holy Spirit calls each one of us through our individual sense of emptiness and alienation.⁴ He is present to be our help and companion during our times of trial. He communicates our needs and longings to the Triune God.⁵ Paul shared this with us in 2 Cor. 1:3 in that God comforts us in our troubles so we can, in turn, comfort others with the comfort we have received from God.⁶ John wrote that

³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 70-82, 108.

⁴ George R. Brunk II ed., *Encounter with the Holy Spirit* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), 236.

⁵ Don Anderson, *God Wants a Relationship, Not a Performance* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1989), 242-246.

⁶ Barker, 1797.

love came from God. If someone is unable to love then he does not know God. (1 John 4:7-8) He also added the following about love and fear:

Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:16, 18)⁷

Johnathan Edwards noted that in these verses from 1 John, love is spoken of as if it is the very highest nature of the Holy Spirit. Love from the Godhead can be generated from the indwelling Holy Spirit in all regenerate Christians. Edwards wrote that the Holy Spirit makes the human soul to long after God and Christ-their presence, their acquaintance and their conformity—in order to please and honor them. This type of God-centered love shines through the regenerate Christian and distinguishes him from “counterfeits” because theirs is a humble and not self-serving love.⁸ Edwards went on to write that regenerate people from all walks of life develop the same God-centered love. They have the same “judgements, dispositions and affections,” so he concluded that they all must be influenced by the Spirit of God.⁹

In human relationships, we always try to please those whom we love. We concentrate on their preferences, their needs and their dislikes in our interest in being near them. We meld our needs and preferences in obedience to theirs in order to please them. In the same way, once we are in a relationship with the Triune God through the indwelling Spirit, we mold our preferences and dislikes in obedience with God.¹⁰ Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, “The man who loves God is known by God.” (1 Cor. 8:3)¹¹

⁷ Barker, 1949.

⁸ Goen, 255-257.

⁹ Ibid., 262-263.

¹⁰ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable: Power and Renewal in the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1985), 204-205.

Experience Trust and Reliance

Having a relationship with God means that each of us can share in the peace of God. Christians consistently interacting with the indwelling Spirit have the potential to enjoy quiet, sustaining rest in God which comes when we're willing to trust Him to handle our circumstances. It's the realization that someone greater than ourselves is in control, and He has our best interests at heart. This can be refreshment, surrender and contentment as long as we keep our mind and heart focused on God.¹²

However, it is very easy for humans to backslide into a struggle for control of their own lives and situation, particularly when God is not forthcoming with memos and PowerPoint presentations. Ego and fear make individuals believe that we each are alone in making personal decisions. When challenges arise, many individuals put their faith in their own abilities instead of relying on God's plan. As Paul wrote in Romans:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. (Romans 8:5, 8-9)¹³

A Christian cannot have a convenient partnership with God, in the same way that a married person cannot pretend that her actions and decisions don't affect her spouse. Once the person makes a choice to be a Christian—to be converted—and becomes regenerate, then she has to contend with the consequences of that decision. One of the consequences of a relationship

¹¹ Barker, 1778.

¹² Lloyd-Jones, 203.

¹³ Barker, 1750.

with God is to realize that the Creator has power over your life. Opportunities and blessings may abound, or challenges may occur. Surrendering to God means following the decisions and plans that God has for your life.

Becoming regenerate, for a human, starts out with a choice. The Holy Spirit meets us at whatever point we are in our spiritual and emotional development, to encourage and preach to us. Each individual suffers through her own struggle with her sinful nature. Each person makes a realization that she needs help and makes a conscious and deliberate decision to believe that her sins are forgiven. Regeneration releases the human from sin and bondage. The human is led to her spiritual repentance and she realizes that God chose her and she chose God. The relationship begins between human and God by way of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Now the relationship starts. The regenerate Christian has to develop trust and experience within this relationship. She has to trust in God, and God allows her to trust her actions in the Creator- creature relationship. She learns about God through prayer, reading the Bible and attending a church. If this becomes a superficial relationship, as in she does not contribute to the growth of the relationship, the indwelling Spirit will leave her, and she will be lost in her own sins. She will be powerless to change her self-serving behavior.

If the regenerate Christian invests in the relationship, then the benefits are significant. She will experience emotional connection, pure love and true acceptance from an unfailling source. She will not feel fear in love and not base her entire self-value system on a faulty human. She will start healing her personal brokenness. She will want to rely more on God, turn to Him when challenges and disappointments occur, and trust in Him when the future looks fuzzy. Her behavior and outlook will change, and she will have a more God-centered life. This list of benefits is not all inclusive.

This is the reason why regeneration is so important. The first step is the decision to have a personal relationship with God. The second step is to actually have a personal relationship with God, through the Counselor, Comforter, and Paraclete. The third step is to continue to grow in relationship with God. The human is finally living the life that God had intended for her.

CHAPTER SIX

HOW DO I KNOW I HAVE EXPERIENCED IT?

Now that we understand that being a regenerate Christian has valuable benefits, we have to wonder if we have really experienced it. An individual may enjoy attending church and have memorized many Bible verses, because they were raised in the church, but they may not be regenerate yet. A person may have been raised in a Christian environment, profess that they are a Christian, but not feel that God has a close emotional relationship with him.

From the previous chapters, we understand that there is a specific individualized process for regeneration of a Christian. God calls you to receive His grace and forgiveness. Each individual moves toward God at his own pace. God provides opportunities in one's life to turn toward Him and to ask questions. Those that turn toward God see His handiwork everywhere, both in the miracle and in the mundane. Some professed Christians cannot see God's work, or they move glacially towards Him, because they are unwilling or afraid to release their will to God.

Faith vs. Ego

Jesus spoke of believer's reliance and faith in two different incidents in the Synoptic Gospels that illustrate this issue. The first incident was in Matthew 18:3, where Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."¹ This same sentence was recorded in Mark 10:15 and Luke 18:17. Here, the

¹ Barker, 1493.

Gospels are in agreement. The Christian must be able to be submissive in spirit and unshakable in faith.

The Christian has to let go of the persona or identity that he has developed over the years. This may be difficult because the believer may have to let go of a fully formed personality. This personality incorporates all of one's beliefs, attitudes and commitments. It is one's public and private self-image, established over a lifetime.² This is akin to the death of the person as he knows it, and can be very frightening if the person's soul and will are not ready for that step.

This is why the Holy Spirit meets each person where they are in their own personal growth and development. This change cannot be forced as this could do more harm than good for the individual. If conversion is forced, a person's integrity, individuality and identity are either questioned or violated. When this occurs, persons develop into "permanent religious adolescence."³ Instead of growing into spiritual identity, the person's spiritual maturation comes to an abrupt stop and abandonment of faith. The violated soul suffers and the convert may respond with anger, fear or withdrawal.⁴

This may also be one of the reasons why some professing Christians do not become regenerate. "Dutiful Christians" are people who have done their best to turn to God, but they find the joy, peace and freedom that should characterize the Christian life is largely absent from their lives.⁵ Faith gives one the ability to interpret the instruction of the Holy Spirit as a new and

² Donal Dorr, *Remove the Heart of Stone; Charismatic Renewal and the Experience of Grace* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1978), 104.

³ McKnight, 182.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 182-183.

⁵ Dorr, 106.

deeper encounter with God. The psychological process of letting go to one's deepest self can be the way one lets go to God.⁶

The second incident in the Synoptic Gospels can be found in Matthew 19:16-29, in Mark 10:17-30 and in Luke 18:18-30. A rich young man asked Jesus what he must do to receive eternal life. Jesus told the rich man to keep the Ten Commandments. The man said that he had. Jesus told the man to sell his possessions, give the money to the poor and follow Him. The rich man sadly went away. "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.'"⁷

Scot McKnight points out that there are two interpretations to this passage. One interpretation is that the young man loved money and wealth more than following Jesus. This is a plausible explanation. However, a more likely explanation was that Jesus was asking the rich young man to share his wealth with the poor and the growing community of followers and become a poor and marginalized member of that group. Jesus was asking the man to give up his status and prestige in the Jewish community and become a humble worker.⁸ This potential convert chose to remain as he is, maintaining his prestige and personal value in Jewish society, and decided to not follow Jesus. This encounter dramatizes the options of converting to Jesus as well as the process of conversion itself.⁹

This second incident in the Synoptic Gospels underlines the reluctance individuals have to make a true commitment to God and chose a different life than the one the professed Christian is leading. Many Christians—both regenerate and unregenerate—struggle with the release of their

⁶ Dorr, 109-110.

⁷ Barker, 1495-1496.

⁸ McKnight, 155-156.

⁹ Ibid., 157.

old, worldly life. The old nature doesn't go away. Our instant gratification age instills people with unrealistic expectations. Some Christians believe that once they convert, they will be instantly and permanently transformed and holy.¹⁰ They do not realize that following Jesus is a daily—and sometimes hourly—recommitment to a growing relationship. When sin has separated our relationship with God, we may just be going through the motions of being a Christian. We may fake our way through it, but we don't feel connected to God on any level.

As we grow in our relationship with God, we make choices to recommit to Him. We change our lifestyle and our friends so we can spend more time within the body of Christ. We pray for forgiveness and turn from our sinful nature. Nothing saves permanently without tending and focus. Our response to God's grace ebbs and flows, waxes and wanes. Faith is not something you profess, but something you practice.¹¹

Visible vs. Invisible Church

Since we are all in different points in our Christian walk—the seekers, the converts, the “Dutiful Christians,” and the regenerate—the Christian church is populated by the visible and invisible church. Calvin points out that the church is populated by the community of Christian believers. These are the faces in the church. He notes that the invisible church is the regenerate or elect within that church body. These people are only truly known to God. Calvin stresses that all believers are obliged to honor and remain committed to the visible church, on account of the elect.¹² Having a community where the Word of God is preached and sacraments administered

¹⁰ Anderson, 211-212.

¹¹ McKnight, 13.

¹² Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 206-207.

allow the regenerate and the not-elect-yet grow in the body of Christ. Paul points out in 1 Cor. 3 that the visible church is also a safe place to grow in the Holy Spirit, from infants in Christ to mature Christians.¹³

Jesus's parable of the sower is in the Synoptic Gospels and illustrates the purpose of the visible church. This parable is found in Matthew 13:1-23, in Mark 4:3-20, and in Luke 8:5-15. Seeds were thrown indiscriminately in a field. Some fell on the path, some fell on rocky ground, some fell among the thorns, and some fell on good soil.

Jesus interpreted the parable for the disciples. The seed, or the general calling of the gospel message, was sown for the elect and the unregenerate. The seeds that fell on the path were received by those that didn't understand the message. For the seed that fell on rocky ground, the hearer received the gospel message with joy, but he fell away when troubles occurred. For the seed that fell among thorns, the hearer received the message, but he was choked with the worries of life and the gospel message didn't grow in his heart and mind. When the seed fell on good soil, the listener heard the gospel message, understood it and took the message to heart. (Matt. 13:1-23)¹⁴

The regenerate Christian takes the gospel message to heart and receive special gifts for spiritual growth by the Holy Spirit. The believer will receive seven gifts: understanding, counsel, fortitude, piety, respect or fear, knowledge and wisdom.¹⁵ These gifts from the Holy Spirit will ultimately result in a radical change in the life and ethical behavior of the Christian.¹⁶

¹³ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1979), 34-35.

¹⁴ Barker, 1485-1486.

¹⁵ Edward Leen, *Grace and the Supernatural Life* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward Publishers, 1937), 81-86.

¹⁶ Gaventa, 137-142.

Galatians 5:19-21 describes the acts of a sinful nature (idolatry, hatred, jealousy, selfish ambitions, envy, etc.).¹⁷ These are the behaviors of a sinful nature: being disrespectful of your spouse, pocketing the extra change given by mistake, criticizing and gossiping about others, etc.¹⁸ Christians must guard against the old nature and turn towards positive and fortifying behaviors. Paul reminds us “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Eph. 4:29)¹⁹

Galatians 5:22-23 describes behaviors that are called “fruit of the Spirit”: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.²⁰ These behaviors come from the Christian naturally as response of a changed heart and soul. Christian virtue shines out for the regenerated soul, as she is reflecting the divine love from the indwelling Holy Spirit.²¹ The Spirit produces true beauty of character. The Christian is free of vain honor, hatred and envy. In place of the sinful nature, she has a spirit of peace, a sincere disposition, and a pure heart with love for others.²²

As the regenerate Christian grows in relationship with the Triune God, she slowly has a change in her nature. She leaves behind the sinful behaviors and displays the fruit of the Spirit behaviors. This doesn't happen overnight, but over time. Her changed behavior is a reflection of the loving relationship she has with God.

¹⁷ Barker, 1819-1820.

¹⁸ Anderson, 212.

¹⁹ Barker, 1831.

²⁰ Ibid. Pg. 1820.

²¹ Goen, 256-257.

²² Brunk, 88-91.

The person may not have realized that she has become a regenerate Christian, but her behavior has changed so much that those around her will know that she is a Christian before she does. She will be in a real and ongoing relationship with God. She will have a submissive spirit and unshakable faith in God. She will willingly give up her previous life and status for a Christian life. She will turn toward God for comfort and guidance. She will feel joy and peace in her decision of accepting the love of God.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The concurrent theme in this thesis about regeneration is that it is a real relationship with the Divine creator. God knows each person's personality and has instilled in each person a nature that will quickly turn toward Him, or slowly turn toward Him. Often, God has placed an individual in an environment that makes him unlikely to turn toward God. Examples of this are growing up in an environment without hope or in an abusive environment. We saw an example of this in B.J.'s conversion story. God can also place the person in a situation where he socially has been raised to reject Christianity. We saw the example of this in the conversion of Saul. Yet God used both of these experiences to bring a potential convert close to Him.

It all starts when the spiritual seed is planted in the person's mind by the Holy Spirit. This seed can be planted through infant baptism, by association with Christian friends at elementary school, or by instruction at the mother's or caregiver's knee. The Holy Spirit continues to provide opportunities to have the potential convert start formulating questions about God and observe the difference in emotional and ethical responses between people.

As the individual grows, he will develop close and deep friendships. He will learn to trust in others and rely on others. Eventually, he will experience disappointment when interacting with his close personal friends or his family, and he will feel a loss and experience a need for unconditional love. He will wonder if there is anyone perfect for him, so that he can experience unconditional love. The Holy Spirit may be stirring this need in him to bring him to God.

As the potential convert starts a quest for unconditional love, he may have interactions with Christians that will share the love of Christ with him. The Christian friends may start him on an internal search for a different value system than the one he currently has or refresh his interest in the value system he previously had. They may invite him to church or church related activities so that he can encounter general calling of the Gospel message. He may even become part of the visible church membership. Here, the Holy Spirit slowly walks him toward crisis or questioning, depending on his nature. He will eventually come to a point where he will feel dissatisfaction or encounter a crisis so that he will have to make an internal decision.

This internal decision is the individual's alone. The person will have to make a decision about the message of the Gospel, and how it relates personally to him. This decision process may take a while, but God's patience is infinite. The person has to accept the unconditional love that God offers, the forgiveness of sin, and the change to his personality and status as an individual. This decision cannot be forced, as it may result in permanent religious adolescence as we reviewed in chapter six of this thesis.

There is a possibility that the individual may either postpone or reject the gifts that God offers. That can mean that there might be another opportunity to change his mind in the future, or he may lead a life of sin and may turn away from God. This is the individual's choice. The individual has the free will to make that choice. God had given the individual the means, motive and mental capacity to make that choice.

If the individual makes a decision to commit to a life of following God, then he is ready for his conversion. The Holy Spirit will expose his personal sin to him and show this that he can receive forgiveness from it. He can pray for forgiveness and align his spirit with God's will.

Thus starts the regeneration process and the personal relationship with God. This was exemplified in the conversion stories of chapter three of the thesis.

Because of his new life in the body of Christ, he will have certain changes in his personality. He will start displaying these types of traits: (1) starts talking about Christ and his trust in Christ; (2) has a desire to read the Bible and pray; (3) and enjoys Christian worship and fellowship. He will start to display the “fruit of the Spirit” as listed in Galatians 5:22-23.¹ His attitude and outlook will change, and those around him will perceive the change.

All that is left is for the individual to be open and honest in his relationship with the Triune God. He will learn to be trusting and reliant on God, and make his will subservient to God’s. If his skill set is needed, God can send the Holy Spirit to bless him with Spirit baptism, and give him spiritual gifts that are called “power encounter ministries”: power healing, power deliverance, or power evangelism.² Although Spirit baptism is not required to be a regenerate Christian, it is a blessing to those that have received it.

Finally, this thesis has answered many questions that Christians have about regeneration. It has explained what regeneration is and its relation to water and Spirit baptism. It has explained what it is like to be regenerate through stories of conversion and psychological explanation. It described how the concept of regeneration has been consistent throughout history. It explained why it is important in the creature-Creator relationship. It gave assurance to the Christian to ascertain that he or she had experienced it. All that the Christian needs now is to enjoy his or her growth in relationship with God.

¹ Barker, 1820.

² Yong, 41.

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