

# Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Salvation, Session 10, Regeneration

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on salvation. This is session 10, Regeneration.

We continue our lectures in soteriology or the doctrine of salvation, moving from calling to regeneration.

After a brief biblical prologue, we work with the systematic formulations of regeneration. Regeneration described, regeneration and our need, regeneration in the Trinity, regeneration and Jesus saving work, regeneration and the Word of God, regeneration in baptism, regeneration in faith, regeneration and the Christian life. We'll wrap it up.

The biblical summary is all too short. We find in the Old Testament the language and promise of regeneration in the circumcision of the heart, in the promised gift of the Spirit in Ezekiel 36, and in the New Covenant promise of the transformation of the heart in Jeremiah 31. Ezekiel 36:35 through 37, we should read this, God promises, Ezekiel 36:25 through 27.

After promising to regather Israel, that's the context here, I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols. I will cleanse you and I will give you a new heart and a new spirit. I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

We're probably not as familiar with that as the great New Covenant passage in Jeremiah 31 through 31, 31 to 34. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord, for this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. Both in John's gospel and his first epistle, we find the language of birth or regeneration to

describe the new life of believers. The regenerating work of God is the work of his sovereign will.

Regeneration in Paul is a work of the Holy Spirit, Titus 3:5, and is described by him and elsewhere as a resurrection or the new creation work of God. We see both in 1 Peter and James that God regenerates believers through his word, through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ—regeneration, systematic formulations.

Regeneration described. Scripture uses many images of God's bringing grace to bear on sinners' lives, including regeneration. In other words, the whole application of salvation, which we distinguish from God planning salvation in eternity past, election, from God accomplishing salvation in Jesus' death and resurrection in the first century, the application of salvation, God actually bringing his grace to bear, his causing us to know the Lord, that is expressed in many ways which we are studying in this course.

It is him uniting us to his son. It is him calling us, summoning us effectively through the gospel call. It is his giving us new life and regeneration.

It is his converting us, turning us from sin to Himself as offered in the gospel. Conversion is shorthand for repentance and faith. It is his justifying us, declaring us righteous.

It is his adopting us into his family. It is his sanctifying us once and for all and in lifelong progressive sanctification. It is his keeping us saved, preservation.

All these are different ways of talking about the same reality, that is, salvation applied. And now we're doing it in terms of life, background, spiritual death, regeneration is spiritual resurrection, or God giving new life to those who are dead in their trespasses and sins. Scripture uses many images of God's bringing grace to bear on sinners' lives, which I just summarized, including the image of regeneration.

Regeneration is God's gracious act of giving new life to those who are spiritually dead. Ephesians 2 verses 4 and 5, God made us alive with Christ, even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace.

The epitome of grace for the Apostle Paul is God bringing life out of death. For God, for his making those who are spiritually dead, that is devoid of the life of God, making them alive, quickening them, making them alive to God and to the things of God, and to other believers. Many Christians know the sad situation, happy and sad together, of speaking with another believer coming from an unsaved background, an unsaved family or friends, speaking with another believer for half an hour, and feeling as if you know them better than people you've known your whole life, with whom you cannot communicate on a spiritual level.

That is the result of the old folks, of those who don't know the Lord, not old in age especially, those of the former life, being dead spiritually, and you and your new Christian friends being alive spiritually. That is the work of regeneration. John taught that regeneration is supernatural by contrasting it with natural birth.

John's Gospel chapter 1:12 and 13. For all who did receive him, Christ, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not of natural descent or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but who were born of God. John 1:12 and 13.

Jesus taught that regeneration is instantaneous. Quote, truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life. John 5:24.

Paul compares regeneration to circumcision of the heart, an Old Testament concept. Quote, a person is a Jew, Paul writes in Romans 2:29, who is one inwardly and circumcision is of the heart by the spirit, not the letter. Romans 2:29.

God warned rebellious Israel in Deuteronomy 10:18, circumcise your hearts and don't be stiff-necked any longer. That's a command. Mercifully, God told Israel he would circumcise their hearts so that they would love him with all their hearts and all their souls.

That is, the command of Deuteronomy 10:16 is later turned to be indicative in Deuteronomy 30 and verse 8. God promised to renew his people inwardly, replacing hardened hearts with receptive ones. In the new covenant, his spirit indwells his people and prompts their obedience. Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

That is the New Testament phenomenon of the imperative. Indicative, these are moods or modes of Greek verbs that have become a terminology to speak of number one, the indicative, which is a mood of expressing how things are, a simple statement of fact. I'm oversimplifying, of course.

That speaks of what God has done for us, his recital of his mighty deeds in both Testaments. The imperative is God's enjoining his people to live for him based upon the indicative. So, the so-called indicative tells what God has done.

The imperative is based upon the indicative and calls God's people to live based upon what God has done. He commands them. He expects them to live for him because he has saved them.

Regeneration and our need. I find that each aspect of the application of salvation is best understood in light of its corresponding need. If every one of these aspects is a

way of talking about salvation, then every one of the pictures of our need is a way of talking about our sin.

So, union with Christ, a way of talking about salvation, our need, this picture of sin in terms of union as separation from Christ. Calling, God summoning us in the effectual call through the gospel call. The need is we were spiritually deaf and dumb, or we spiritually didn't have eyes to see and ears to hear.

But God gives us that. He opens our eyes. He unplugs our ears if you will.

And we'll find that for each of the aspects. Justification. We were condemned, and God declared us righteous in Christ.

Adoption. It is not just that we were orphans, as some popular ministries and somewhat healthfully communicate, but we were slaves, God says. And he set us free and adopted us as his spiritual sons and daughters.

Sanctification. We were unclean. We were spiritual lepers pounding our chest and saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

And he constitutes us as his saints, giving us his spirit and working in our lives. Every aspect of the application of salvation corresponds to a need. In this case, being born again, before being born again, we were spiritually dead.

In great kindness and love toward us, quote, not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, God poured out his spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, Titus 3, 5, and 6. Spiritual death heads up the list of our need for salvation. Quote, you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you previously walked. According to the ruler of the power of the air, we, too, all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, and we were by nature children under wrath, Ephesians 2, 1 to 4. Our need for regeneration is simple.

Before regeneration, we were dead spiritually. We lacked God's life and could not make ourselves alive. Regeneration and the Trinity, it should come as no surprise that with every aspect of the doctrine of salvation, it is the work of God, the Trinity.

Each person of the Holy Trinity plays a role in our regeneration. God the Father wills that we are born anew, 1 Peter 1:3. It's good to turn there because this is a wonderful passage on regeneration. 1 Peter 1, 3 and following, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is

imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. God the Father wills that we are born anew. He caused us to be born again to a living hope.

God the Son's resurrection unleashes the power of the new birth. The Father caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Father causes our regeneration.

He's the architect behind his mercy, that which causes us to be born again. The power for the resurrection, the actual life, is the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit plays the most prominent, I didn't say most important, but most prominent role in regeneration.

The work of all three persons is very important, but looking at counting noses and looking at regeneration passages, the Spirit predominates. In the context of John 3, Jesus makes a play on words. For the same Greek word, *pneuma*, can mean breath, wind, or spirit.

Small s or capital S. The wind blows where it pleases, Jesus says, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone who is born of the wind. I wouldn't translate that way, but it's the same word.

So it is with everyone who is born of the Holy Wind of God, the Spirit, capital S, John 3:8. As the blowing wind is beyond our control, so it is with the Holy Spirit's bringing people from spiritual death to spiritual life. Those regenerated are born of the Spirit, verse 8. Indeed, Jim Packer, who is now with the Lord, underlines the necessity of the Spirit's role in the new birth. From Packer's *Knowing God*, 20th-anniversary edition, pages 62-63, quote, without the Holy Spirit, there would be no faith and no new birth.

In short, no Christians. The light of the gospel shines, but, quote, the God of this world, quote within a quote, but the God of this world has blinded the minds of them who do not believe, 2 Corinthians 4:4. And the blind do not respond to the stimulus of light. Because the Spirit bears witness in this way, people come to faith when the gospel is preached, but without the Spirit, there would not be a Christian in the world.

Packer, *Knowing God*. Our need for regeneration is spiritual death. Regeneration is the work of the Holy Trinity.

The Father plans it and, in his mercy, causes it. The Son is the dynamo. His resurrection life is the life that infuses us and brings us from death to life.

The Spirit is the actual agent of the Father and the Son in applying new life to us. If the Father owns the power company and the Son is the dynamo, then the Spirit comes to our house and plugs us in. He hooks us up to the power grid, as it were.

Of course, the three persons work together in harmony as always. Regeneration and Jesus' work. If regeneration is part of the application of salvation, it is based upon the work of Christ, the accomplishment of salvation.

So, it is in this case as within every other one. Jesus' death and resurrection are the basis of regeneration. Surely, we could say, no plan of God, no regeneration, but more immediately, no work of Christ, no regeneration.

Paul contrasts Adam and Christ. The second Adam, Romans 5.:8, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone. Even as Adam's, that's Romans 5.18, even as Adam's primal sin plunges the human race into condemnation, so Christ's one righteous act, his death on the cross, brings justification and eternal life to all believers.

Jesus' death brings life. Christ's death must not be severed from his resurrection, which also is the basis of regeneration, as we just saw in 1 Peter 1.3. The power that gives us new life comes, quote, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. After affirming that, quote, Christ has been raised from the dead, 1 Corinthians 15.20, Paul again contrasted to Adam's.

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ will all be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. The risen Christ makes spiritually dead people alive now, and his resurrection will be the cause of their resurrection at the end of the age.

The work of Christ is absolutely essential for every aspect of the application of salvation, including regeneration. Regeneration and the word of God. This reminds me of calling.

God makes his effectual call through the gospel call, the preaching of the gospel. Twice, we have seen that the Holy Spirit is God's agent in regeneration. We now add that the Spirit uses the word to give new life.

The gospel, according to Romans 1:16-17, "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes," and this includes salvation when viewed as regeneration. 1 Peter 1:23, Peter teaches that God uses the living word to create new life, quote, you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but imperishable through the living and enduring word of God. 1 Peter 1:1 Peter 1:23. James, underscoring God's

sovereignty in regeneration, teaches that God uses the word of truth to make us alive, quote, by his own choice he gave us birth by the word of truth so that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures, James 1:18. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand the relationship between regeneration and preaching.

Mysteriously and sovereignly, the Spirit uses the preaching of the word to give new life to men and women who are dead in their trespasses and sins. Jesus, speaking to Nicodemus, correlates regeneration and the kingdom of God, quoting, truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God, John 3:3.

Regeneration is God's door into the kingdom, God's reign begun by the Messiah. When in God's grace, we enter the kingdom, we experience it, become its citizens, and long for its full manifestation at Christ's return.

Regeneration and Christian baptism. Several Christian traditions have erroneously taught that infants or believers are regenerated in baptism. This is called baptismal regeneration.

Infant baptismal regeneration is taught by the Roman Catholic Church and by Lutheran churches. Believers' baptismal regeneration is taught by the so-called restorationist churches such as at least some of them; I'll try to be fair that way, the Churches of Christ and the independent Christian churches. Baptismal regeneration, whether it be of infants or believers, says God automatically conveys spiritual life through the waters of baptism.

The appeal was made to several scriptures, one of which contains Jesus' words, quote, truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God, John 3:5. Taking John 3:5 to refer to baptism. Many New Testament exegetes think it does not refer to baptism. Jesus expected Nicodemus to have knowledge of the new birth.

Jesus could not expect him to know about a not yet existent practice, Christian baptism. Jesus in John 3 probably refers to Ezekiel 36:25 to 27, which we read previously. So, being born of water refers to eschatological cleansing, and being born of the spirit refers to the spirit's regenerating work in human hearts.

Ezekiel looked forward not only to the regathering of Israel from captivity but to the new covenant without using the word as Jeremiah did in chapter 31. The concepts overlapped, however, in which God in the last days, that is the eschatological times, would by his spirit bring about a great cleansing from sin. This is fulfilled in the new covenant and regeneration, and Jesus expected Nicodemus to have an idea of this rather than be totally in the dark about it.

Jesus refers to Ezekiel 36:25 to 27, so that being born of water refers to eschatological cleansing. I will wash you with clean water and you will be clean,

Ezekiel said. And I will give you my spirit and circumcise your hearts and take out the heart of flesh and give you, take out the heart of stone, sorry, and give you a heart of flesh.

Take out the heart of, that doesn't work. Remove the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. That is a basic picture of what happens in regeneration, my goodness.

From stone to flesh, from death to life, being born of the spirit refers to the spirit's regenerating work in human hearts. The appeal was also made to Titus 3:5 and salvation through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. We agree that this refers to baptism, but not baptismal regeneration, because, as noted above in the New Testament, people believe, and then they are baptized in the case of the missionary situation that we find, such as in the book of Acts.

Regeneration and baptism: Christian baptism is important, I would understand it to be not only an ordinance but a sacrament, a holy sign of God, parallel to the preaching of the word of God and subordinate to the preaching of the word of God, through which means, along with the Lord's Supper, God truly gives grace to believing participants, but I would not understand grace to be so tied to it that God automatically regenerates those who are baptized any more than he automatically saves those who partake of the Lord's Supper. Regeneration and faith. Believers agree that regeneration and faith are simultaneous.

However, they debate as to which has causal priority. That's a much better way to say it than that which comes first. If they're simultaneous, they normally happen at the same time.

Is faith the cause of regeneration, the Arminian view, or is regeneration the cause of faith, the Calvinist view? Let's take a light switch. We flip the switch and let's just assume everything's working properly for this illustration, and the lights come on in the room. Is the flipping of the switch faith and the illumination regeneration, or is the flipping of the switch regeneration and the illumination faith? For the sake of this illustration, please don't be an electrician; get technical with me.

Or is starting your car turning the key regeneration and the car starting up faith, or is the turning of the key faith and the car starting regeneration? Again, please don't assume a car that won't start. You got to be careful in these examples here, my goodness. And you can find many others, starting your TV and so forth.

Simultaneous, but is there a causal priority of one over the other? 1 John seems to answer these questions. We see a pattern established in 1 John 2:29, 3:9 and 4:7. In these places, it speaks of those who have been born again, have been regenerated. The perfect passive of the Greek *genoto*, to bear, to give birth.



1 John 2:29. If you know that he is righteous, probably Christ, I say probably because 1 John is notorious as to the antecedent of some of these pronouns, and certainly both God and Christ are righteous. But anyway, that's not significant for what I'm doing right now.

If you know that Christ is righteous, you know this as well. Everyone who does what is right has been born of him. I retract that.

It's probably the father because he's the author of the new birth. If you know that God is righteous, you know this as well. Everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

Where the new birth is the cause of doing what is right, no Protestant would say you do what is right in order to be born again. That's called salvation by works.

1 John 3:9. Everyone who has been born of God, same perfect passive, perfect has been, has passive, been born of God, does not sin because his seed remains in him. He is not able to sin because he has been born of God. Once again, the new birth is the cause of the holy life.

1 John 4 7. Dear friends, let us love one another because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The same perfect passive tense of this verb, to be born. No Protestant would say you love God in order to be born again.

No, the new birth is the cause of loving God, not practicing sin and doing what is right. The new birth results in holiness and in loving one another. Now, what does this have to do with regeneration and faith? I'm glad you asked that question class.

The answer is, is given in 1 John 5:1. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. It's the same perfect passive of Genao. Believing that Jesus is the Christ is one of John's ways of saying, believing in Jesus for salvation.

He could say, believing in Jesus as the Christ, believing him in him as savior, believing in him. I'm forgetting some other ways 1 John does it, but he varies that. Believing he's the son of God is another way.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, everyone who believes in Jesus for salvation has been born of God. Following the pattern of the three previous verses, we see that being born of God results in faith. John refers to our faith as an evidence of our being born of God.

Regeneration and faith are not to be separated chronologically as they occur at the same time, but they should be distinguished in that regeneration is a picture of

salvation that stresses God's work in giving us new life, whereas conversion is a picture of salvation that stresses our response of faith toward God. My understanding of the connection between regeneration and faith is regeneration is the flipping of the switch, the turning on of the stereo, the turning of the key to start the car, and faith is the illuminating of the room, the music beginning, or the car starting up—lastly, regeneration and the Christian life.

Regeneration produces much fruit in believers' lives. Paul tells how the new creation spawned by Christ's death and resurrection issues forth in good works, Ephesians 2.10. The Spirit gives life, 2 Corinthians 3.6, and transforms believers into Christ's image from glory to glory, verse 18. Peter praises God the Father, who regenerated us into a living hope of an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for believers.

Because we've been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God, we, quote, show sincere brotherly love for each other from a pure heart and love one another earnestly, 1 Peter 1:22.23. 1 John continually applies their teachings on regeneration to the Christian life. John teaches that the new life affects what believers believe, what people believe, how they live, and how they love. Regeneration affects faith, for John enjoins, Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

This is how you know the Spirit of God, 1 John 4:1-3. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God, 1 John 4:1-3. John assures his readers that those who've been born again do believe in Jesus, 1 John 5:1. Regeneration affects lifestyle, for God is light, and there's absolutely no darkness in him, 1 John 1:5-7. If we say we have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. If we walk in the light as he himself was in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus' Son cleanses us from all sin, 1 John 1:5-7. Walking in the light means putting God's truth to work and living a holy life. A godly life does not mean sinless perfection but involves regular confession of sin, 1 John 1.8-10. Regeneration shapes whom and how we love, for the new life shows up in love for God and for fellow believers.

Samuel Nigawa of Kenya puts it well: quote, belief, and practice are inseparable. The sincerity of one's belief in Jesus is demonstrated by one's love for God's other children, close quote. African Bible commentary, Samuel Nigawa, 1 John, page 1535.

This is because love is an essential characteristic of God. God is love, 1 John 4:8. John Stott says it simply quote: God's love, which originates in himself, 1 John 4:7-8, was manifested in his son, 1 John 4:9-10, and is made complete in his people, verse 12. More specifically, John is stressing that God is love.

He seeks the good of others and eternally gives of himself for their good. His love is intrinsic, eternal, and related to all his divine attributes. It is expressed within the Trinity as the father loves the son, the son loves the father, each loves the spirit, and so forth.

This intrinsic love flows out to others as well, even us. Indeed, the indwelling spirit communicates God's love to us, particularly displayed in Christ's coming and saving work. The spirit gives us new birth and communicates God's love through us back to God.

We love God because he loved us first. The fact that we love God shows we are born of God, and our love for others shows we are born of God, 1 John 4.7-8. Robert Yarbrough notes that God's love, quote, gives rise to love in those whom God grants spiritual rebirth. Yarbrough, 1-3 John, page 235.

Jonathan Edwards explains, in a quote, that when the spirit, by his ordinary influences, bestows saving grace, he therein imparts himself to the soul in his own holy nature. By his producing this effect, the spirit becomes an indwelling, vital principle in the soul, and the subject becomes spiritual, close quote. Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits, Soli Deo Gloria*, 2.5.7.

Such divine grace reaches to the, quote, very bottom of the heart, so to speak. It consists in a new nature, and therefore, it is lasting and enduring, Edwards again. In other words, the spirit communicates God's love to us.

The spirit communicates God's love through us back to God, and the spirit communicates God's love through us toward others. The spirit also communicates God's love to others. He is communicating God's love through others back to God, and he is communicating God's love through others toward us.

We're a part of God's people, the church, and the community, which are characterized by love. As such, we not only give love, we receive it too. The love we give and the love we receive all flow ultimately from God's own love.

Just as God genuinely seeks the good of others and gives himself for their good, as his people, we, too, genuinely seek the good of others and give ourselves for their good. Christopher Morgan, quote, how does the Trinity's love shape our love for one another? In a book entitled *Love of God*, pages 130-142. It's in the series *Theology in Community*.

This ends our presentation of regeneration, and in this lecture, Lord willing, in our next lecture, we'll begin the doctrine of conversion.

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