



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“The Holy Spirit in Regeneration, part I”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer by Dr. Hudson Armerding] We thank you, too, for this opportunity to learn more about Thy Word. And we just pray, Lord, that we look into its pages with ease; that we may as it were, hear Thy voice speaking to us. And note the number of needs represented in this group here this evening, and we just pray, Lord, that somehow, through the working of Thy Holy Spirit, that which is before us may prove to be a blessing to us. And such a blessing, Lord, that we, in turn, may be able to be a blessing to others. To this end, bless then thy servant our dear brother Dr. Johnson. Grant, Lord, that we might have holy liberty in Thy presence.

For we ask these things with thanksgiving in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

[Johnson] Thank you very much, Dr. Armerding. Tonight we are beginning a two-part series in the work of “The Holy Spirit in Regeneration”. And so will you turn in your Bibles to John chapter 3 and will you listen as I read beginning with the third verse, from the well-known interview that our Lord had with Nicodemus. John chapter 3 in verse 3,

“Jesus answered and said unto him; Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him; How can

a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born? And Jesus answered; Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”

Now, we have been considering, in our study of the theology of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Spirit in other ages. And then last week, we considered his work in this age, but in the world. We spoke about common grace, and we spoke about how the Holy Spirit ministers common grace to all men. And then at the conclusion of the hour, we spoke about efficacious grace.

Now, tonight, we want to begin a consideration of the Spirit’s work in the church, though, of course, his work of efficacious grace is preparatory to that particular work. But we want to begin now to study the work of the Spirit in the church in detail. Although his work in efficacious grace is also his work in the church, we want to go beyond that and ultimately touch the consummation of life among and in the saved, and we want to begin with the doctrine of regeneration.

Now, this is a big topic. It is not so simple as to turn to John 3 and simply say, “Ye must be born again.” There is a great deal more to it than that, and we want to go into it in some detail, and so we will take at least two of our Monday nights in the study of this doctrine. So my outline for tonight is simply the first three points of a seven-point outline, by which we hope to cover the doctrine in some detail. And we want to begin tonight by, first of all, looking at the divergent views of regeneration that had been held in professing Christianity. And we’re only attempting a brief introduction, but I hope that it

will, at least, point up to you the fact that men have held different views of the doctrine of regeneration.

And, first of all, our old friends, the Pelegians. Now, we’ve talked a lot about the Pelegians, and so I want to tell you what they thought about regeneration. The Pelegians have believed that regeneration is simply moral transformation or reformation which man can accomplish of himself. And so according to Pelegian doctrine, it is not necessary that man be born of God, but this moral reformation is something which man can accomplish of himself.

Now, most of our liberals are Pelegians in one way or another. They feel that there is sufficient in man to enable him to accomplish a moral reformation, and by means of this, he can make himself acceptable to God. Now, that is the basic error of a works kind of salvation. But, nevertheless, parading under Christianity, a large company of people down through the years have maintained that this is the teaching of God. We know that it is not, I hope, by now.

B, the Church of Rome. Regeneration for the Church of Rome is a doctrine that includes justification and forgiveness of sins. And so to the Romanists, the doctrine of regeneration is a broader doctrine than simply the doctrine of the communication of spiritual life. It includes justification. It includes forgiveness of sins. And this is the most important thing: this regeneration is accomplished by baptism -- by water baptism. Consequently, since it is accomplished by water baptism, you can see that their view of regeneration is similar to the Pelegian view with the exception that that which man accomplishes for himself is a divine ordinance. And so in the final analysis this comes down to a work salvation, too. Now, the Romanists also believe that a person who has been born again may lose his regeneration by falling into sin.

The Anglican Church. Now, there are two groups within the Anglican Church. One group within the Anglican Church essentially agrees with Rome. They believe that regeneration is something that is accomplished by baptism and, further, that it also can be

lost. But there is another group within the Anglican Church which does not agree with this. They believe that regeneration – they – they actually believe in two kinds of regeneration, this other group, they believe in a regeneration that consists in a mere change of one’s relation to the Church and the means of grace. In other words, when a person is baptized, he becomes a member of the church and he is now related to God in something of the same way that a Jewish man was related to the covenant of Abraham when he was circumcised. It is an outward relationship, and it is a relationship that pertains to the church.

But then there is a group within the Anglican Church who are more evangelical, and they believe that regeneration is a new birth in a higher sense. That is, a definite change is wrought by the Holy Spirit in the moral character of a person who believes and it is not necessarily connected with baptism, although even some of them believe that it is at the point of baptism – at that moment of baptism – that God communicates the new life on the basis of their faith.

Now, I think you can see that, within the Anglican Church, there is a great deal of confusion over the doctrine of -- just of regeneration. And if you will go to the Anglican Statements of Faith and, also, the things that they have published – individuals have published regarding this, I think you will see that it is borne out.

Let’s move on to the Lutheran Church. The Lutheran Church believes that baptism is the usual means of regeneration, but it is not the necessary means of regeneration. Sometimes the preaching of the Word accomplishes regeneration in the Lutheran Church. But, generally speaking, they believe that baptism is the means of regeneration. They do not believe that the baptism does it, but that it is accomplished in the act of baptism. And so you can see that, just like the Roman Catholic Church, just like the Anglican Church, there is a very close connection between water baptism and the new life.

Now, the Lutheran – Lutherans do believe that man is passive in regeneration. That is, it is something that is wrought in him by God. He cannot, of himself, contribute

anything to it, but he does -- like the Anglican and like the Romanist -- he does believe that one may lose one’s regeneration. But the Lutheran believes that it can be restored without baptism, so Lutherans do not believe in eternal security. They believe then that baptism is ordinarily accomplished during the moment of water baptism, but not necessarily, and one may lose his regeneration.

Now, the Arminian view. The Arminian view permeates several different churches, but when I think of an Arminian, I think of a church like the Nazarene Church, which has been, basically, evangelical in its theology, but it is Arminian in its theology. There are -- according to the Arminian view, regeneration is not exclusively God’s nor man’s work, it is the fruit of man’s choice to cooperate with divine influences exerted by means of the truth. In other words, the Arminians believe that when the Word of God is preached, it is the responsibility of us to cooperate with the Word of God as it is preached and with the divine influences that come to us and to make a decision of the will on our part to receive the blessings that God wishes to confer upon us. So the work of man – his decision of the will – is prior to the work of God. And so the Word of God comes with its influence and our responsibility as a man who has free will is to respond out of our free will cooperating with the will of God.

Now, I have a hunch that almost all evangelicals who have never thought theologically really accept that idea of regeneration. Now, the Arminians do believe that that regeneration may be lost. They do not believe in eternal security. But I believe if you were to speak to the average evangelical today, you would probably find out that they believe that it was necessary for them, of themselves, in an act of the will, to cooperate with the grace of God found in the preaching of the Word. But that is, essentially, an Arminian position, and that is a position which, I think, is not a scriptural position.

Now, the Wesleyan Arminians – and we would think of them as Wesleyans or some of the Methodists. The Wesleyan Arminians altered the Arminian view to stress that

regeneration is the work of the Spirit, although in cooperation with the human will. But the Wesleyan Arminians did assume a prior operation of the Spirit, which enlightened, which awakened, which drew men, and man response – man’s responsibility was to respond to the prior operation of God in the heart and believe the message that was given. The Wesleyan Arminians did, however, believe that man could resist, and resist victoriously, the grace of God. They do not believe in irresistible grace. They do not believe in efficacious grace. They do not believe in infallible grace. They believe that it is possible for man to resist the grace of God forever, even ideal -- ideally, those who are the elect. Now, the Wesleyans also believe that regeneration could be lost.

Now, you can see from the things that I have been teaching you, that I do not agree with any of these views, because I do believe that there is such a thing as infallible grace. And I do believe that there is a sense in which the Holy Spirit moves in our hearts, and when we were unwilling, transforms us to such an extent that we are made willing, who were unwilling. In other words, I accept the Calvinistic view of regeneration. I do not believe that regeneration can be lost, but it is something that God works in our hearts, and he works it entirely himself.

Now, I did want to say just a word about the liberal view. And by the liberal view, I mean the view that an ordinary theologian of the twentieth century might hold who is not too biblically oriented. And as you can see, that includes a large number of people. Most liberals today, as I said in the beginning, are Pelegians. That is, they believe in good works. They believe man can make himself acceptable to God by his good works. They believe that regeneration is not a new -- is not a new birth, in the evangelical sense. They do not believe that it is something that God produces by the importation of new life, a kind of life that he never possessed before.

But the liberals believe that regeneration is simply an eth -- is simply, an ethical change in human character produced through a consciousness of our potential divinity and guidance by this higher principle. In other words, as soon as we become convinced

of the dignity of man and of the potentiality of our human nature under God’s creation and come under the guidance of this wonderful principle of our human dignity, at that point regeneration begins to work within us. An ethical change is wrought in us, and we become better people than we were before. It’s not something wrought by God. The only thing about it is it is a form of human enlightenment which makes -- enables us to understand just how good we are. And when we discover how good we are, and live by that great principle, then regeneration begins to operate in us.

One liberal theologian has given instructions about how to get regenerated. He has said, “Let your whole life get warm, glowing and growing into blossom, and coming to fruit in the sunshine of Jesus’ love.” Does that startle you? Let me read it again. This is the way you get right with God, “Let your whole life get warm.” Now, how do you let your whole life get warm? “And glowing and growing into blossom, and coming to fruit in the sunshine of Jesus’ love.” Now, isn’t that a wonderful term of salvation? Suppose we preach that on Sunday morning in Believer’s Chapel. I wonder what kind of response we would have?

Well, let’s turn to what the Bible has to say about regeneration. So we’re coming to Roman II, The Meaning of Regeneration. Now, this truth you will notice from the study of the Scriptures is principally in John’s writings. I wish we had time to have a little discussion at this point because I would like to ask you, “Why do you think that this truth of regeneration, the truth of the new birth, is principally a Johannine doctrine?” And I would like to ask you, “What is the significance of that?” It would be interesting to hear some of your answers to it, or maybe you just would be confused by that. But think about it, and next week, well, maybe you can tell me something about it.

The word “regeneration” occurs twice in the New Testament. Now, however -- there are, however, similar expressions. The two occurrences point us to two facets of the truth, and so we’re going to look at the two occurrences. And under Capital A, the Regeneration of the Creation, let’s turn to Matthew chapter 19 in verse 28. Matthew

chapter 19 in verse 28. Now, this is one of the two occurrences of the word “regeneration.” We’re just going to look at this and drop it, because it really does not belong to the major part of our teaching on the subject of regeneration. Matthew chapter 19, and let’s read verse 27 with it,

“Then answered Peter and said unto him; Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee. What shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them; Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

And so the promise of our Lord gives to the apostles is that they will be able to sit upon the throne of -- of twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory.

Now, putting other passages together with this, it seems evident that what our Lord is speaking about is the age of the kingdom upon the earth. And when the kingdom comes, and our Lord rules and reigns, then the twelve shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, and that is called the regeneration. So the regeneration is a term that refers to the physical rebirth of nature. It is that which is produced when our Lord comes in his second advent, and God transforms the creation in order to prepare it for the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Further details are given of this in some of the great chapters of the Bible like: Isaiah chapter 11, Romans chapter 8. So that the term “regeneration” then is a term that applies to the physical creation. It is a reference to the renovation of that earth for the kingdom of our Lord upon the earth in which the apostles shall participate, and which you and I shall have a part, because we belong to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it also has an earthly future too. Now, that is the

regeneration -- that aspect of the regeneration we shall drop, because we’re interested in regeneration at is -- as it applies to us personally, primarily.

So let’s turn now to the other place in the New Testament in which we have the term “regeneration.” It’s Titus chapter 3 and verse 5. Titus chapter 3 in verse 5. Now, this is one of Paul’s personal letters to one of his apostolic legates -- a man by the name of Titus who, surprisingly, does not appear in the Book of Acts, though I’m sure that he had a very, very important part in the ministry of Paul. Now, that is evident from the epistles. But Titus receives this communication from Paul. And let’s begin reading at verse 3 of Titus chapter 3 -- verse 4. That would be better.

“But after that, the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.” [By the way, the first part of that verse rules out all Pelegians as being biblical.] “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

Now, these two expressions, “washing of regeneration” and “renewing of the Holy Ghost,” might be thought to refer to the beginning of the Christian life, and the continuation of it, for regeneration refers to the new birth, and renewing refers to a process of making new. And so the two together, might be thought to mean that it is by the mercy of God that we have been saved through being brought into new life by being born again, and then through the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit in renewing us.

And he would renew us through the word and through other ministries. But I think that in the light of the fact that Paul has said, “According to his mercy he saved us - in the past - by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost,” I think that second expression, “the renewing of the Holy Ghost,” is really, further explanation of what it means to be regenerated. So that included within the idea of regeneration is not

only the importation of new life but a renewing of a man, so that he is a new creation, as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Remember there he said,

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.”

He has been born again. He has been renewed by the Holy Spirit. He is, in effect, given a new nature. He still possesses his old nature, which he derived from Adam, but he possesses a new nature now, which comes from God. Now, this is why John really, I think, says in John 3, “Except a man be born from above,” for this is a divine birth that is produced in us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing ministry of the Holy Spirit. This then is Paul’s way of saying that we are born of the Spirit of God.

Now, what does this mean? What then is regeneration? Let me give you a couple of definitions that have been given. Charles Hodge was one of our fine theologians of the nineteenth century. His name, everyone should be familiar with who is taking theology, and that’s what you’re doing. Charles Hodge. Charles Hodge was a Presbyterian theologian. He was professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary for many years. He has written a three-volume set on theology that is still worth reading, though it’s over a hundred years old. Professor Hodge has said that, “Regeneration is, quote, the instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life -- the instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life.”

Now, I’m not going to try to define all these terms, because next Monday night, if I’m still living, and if you are still living, we’re going to talk about the details, and we’ll talk about how regeneration is an instantaneous act. It is not something that we feel itself, though we may feel some results of it ultimately. But Hodge’s definition is, “The instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life.”

A Bible teacher of the last generation or so, by the name of A. J. Gordon, defined regeneration in this way. He said, “Regeneration is the communication of the divine nature to man by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word.” “Regeneration is the communication of the divine nature to man by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word.” Well, that’s not a bad definition. It’s a little broad, as we shall see next week, but, still, it certainly expresses the essence of the truth. I think a better definition would be this: “Regeneration is the divine act” -- I’ll say this a couple of times, if you want to write it down and think about it -- “Regeneration is the divine act of instantaneously communicating spiritual life to a man convicted of sin.” “Regeneration is the divine act of instantaneously communicating spiritual life to a man convicted of sin.”

Now, the reason I have added those words, “to a man convicted of sin,” is because this is a necessary preparation for regeneration. Now, such a person who is convicted of sin and has been regenerated is a person who, in a sense, is past-less and future-full. In other words, his past is wiped out, insofar as his condemnation before God is concerned, and his life is a life that is full of the future. “I wish” -- someone has sung, “I wish there were some wonderful place called the Land of Beginning Again, where all our mistakes and all our heartaches and all our poor selfish grief could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door and never out on any more.”

Well, the Bible teaches that there is such a thing as “A Land of Beginning Again,” and that comes when a person is regenerated, when God instantaneously by his power, communicates spiritual life to one who is dead, but who through the ministry of the Spirit, has come under conviction for sin. Some years ago I read a story in one of Mr. Wolsten’s books, and I never have forgotten it because it touches this matter of the new birth so nicely. He tells the story of a doctor who had lived a long and helpful life, and how the time came and he was dying. And he became very much concerned about his sins. He sent for a minister.

And Mr. Wolsten said, “I think he sent for the wrong kind.” And he told the minister he was deeply concerned about his sins. He said, “I’ve diagnosed thousands of sick people. I know my own condition, and I’m not going to live, but my sins are troubling me.” And the minister said, “Why, you’ve lived such a helpful life. You’ve done so many good to so many people.” And he went along like that trying to comfort the doctor. And the doctor said, “It won’t do. I know my sins. They are staring me in the face. I want to know what to do about my sins. Doesn’t the Bible say something about being born again?” And the minister said, “Yes, but you don’t need that. You’ve been such a good man. That might be for some people who are awful sinners, but it’s not for you. You’re a good man.” The doctor said, “You know, I’ve brought great numbers of children into this world, and there’s one thing that always fills my mind when a child is born. That child had a future, but it had no past.”

Why, I’d never thought about that until I, some years ago, saw this – a little illustration here. You can imagine an obstetrician bringing children into this life and thinking, “This child has a future, but it doesn’t have any past.” And then he said, “You know, it seems to me, if I could be born again, as that Bible phrase said, all my past could be taken care of, and I wouldn’t have anything but a future.” And the poor minister was unable to help the man who needed some help.

Now, there is such a divine operation that makes it possible for us, as a human being, to have a past that is wiped clean of its guilt, and to have nothing but the glorious future of new birth. Now, you cannot be with that with the law. Now, you can bring the Ten Commandments to bear upon someone, but it cannot help you in this regard, for you may – for example, if you owe a bill to your grocer, and you may go to your grocer and say, “I’m sorry. I owe you money, and I’m going to do the best I can to keep my bills paid from this time on, and I want to let you know that that is my resolution.” And I’m sure the grocer would say, “Well, I’m very glad to hear that. I’ve been wanting to get cash from you for a long time. But what are you going to do about the old bill?”

And you see, the law is like that, because if we put ourselves under the law, we’re under condemnation, and we cannot make any new resolutions. We cannot come to God and say, “Now, I’m going to make a new start. I’m going to turn over a new leaf, and begin all over again”, because God says, just like the Scriptures say, “God requires what’s past. What are you going to do about what is past?” That’s why no one can ever get to heaven on the basis of what they are going to do, because if we have ever failed him once, we stand under divine condemnation. “The man who attempts to live under the law”, Paul says, is under the curse, because you see, the man who is under law is required by God to keep the law perfectly. I don’t know whether you’ve ever noticed those words of Paul in Galatians chapter 3, but they are extremely strong. He says, “As many as – this is Galatians 3:10:

“for as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, for it is – for it is written; Cursed is everyone one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them.”

Now notice. If you can this any harder than Paul makes it, I don’t see how you could. He says, “Cursed.” That is, under divine condemnation, is everyone who does not continue. Now, in other words, we have to -- once we are under law, we have to stay under law. But he doesn’t stop there. He says, “Continueth not in all things.” Everything written in the law. Furthermore, he says, “Law.” And if Paul uses “law” here as he does in other places, law means the whole of the Old Testament scriptures, not just some particular set of commandments -- such as we find the Ten Commandments to be -- but the whole of the Mosaic Law and all of its facets. And we have to continue in it, and continue in it, and continue in it, until we do not draw one further breath.

In other words, from the beginning of our lives when we have drawn our first breath, to the end of our lives when we have drawn our last, we must present God with a

perfect keeping of the law, if we hope to get to heaven as the Pelegians do. Now, that’s not a very nice term for salvation. That’s not a good Gospel to preach, because that means that we are hopeless and helpless and under divine judgment.

Now, let’s move on to Roman III: The Necessity of Regeneration. And I want to talk, first of all, about the condition of humanity. Modern liberal theology denies the need of regeneration because it believes man is essentially good. Or if he does admit the sinfulness of man in part, he divine -- he denies divine judgment for it. Now, this afternoon, I thought that I wanted to give you a -- an illustration of a modern theologian and what he has to say about salvation, because I know that some time or other you must think, “Well, Dr. Johnson, I wonder if he’s really giving us the straight stuff about contemporary theologians, because they seem such nice fellows. And after all, they’re religious too.”

So I took down a recent theology written by John McQuarrie of Union Theological Seminary in New York City. And Professor McQuarrie has written a book called “Principles of Theology.” It was issued in 1966, and so it’s a relatively new book, and in this book he has presented his plan of salvation. Now, I’m not going to read all that he had to say about his plan of salvation, but I just want to point out to you, first of all, that Professor McQuarrie’s ideas of sin are not nearly the ideas that we shall find in the Bible. But the way in which Professor McQuarrie attempts to deny the need of regeneration is in his denial of the necessity of a final judgment.

Now, I’m going to read, and he has been talking about the steps in salvation. And by the way, in his points on election, he points out this unique doctrine that everybody is elected. Everybody is elected. Now, why anyone would go around preaching -- preaching the gospel, if everybody was elected, I do not know. What’s the point in bothering if everybody is elected? Well, that really is the thing that has produced the situation in our churches, because many do believe this, and so why preach the gospel if everybody is elected? And so the gospel is not preached in many of our churches.

Now, this is what he says. He just said some words about – about the future, and he says now, “These remarks might seem to favor the doctrine usually known as conditional immortality, for we seem to be saying” -- He doesn’t seem to know what he’s saying. He says, “For we seem to be saying that if the individual achieves selfhood, and so is caught up into the constructive movement of being, then he has his place in that structure of being that transcends the passage of time.” Now, you’re getting it? Now, this is -- this is good theology, you know. “And the implication seems to be that if the individual fails to achieve selfhood ...”

Now, the way we achieve selfhood, according to Professor McQuarrie, is to lay hold on the potentiality of our existence. And so if we lay hold on the potentialities of our existence, by this we achieve selfhood, and if we achieve selfhood, then everything’s all right. But if we don’t achieve selfhood, everything’s all right too, because ultimately we were -- we’re going to be all right, as we see in just a moment. So he says, “If the individual fails to achieve selfhood, then he slips back into the nothing out of which he had come. A doctrine of conditional immortality is at least preferable to the barbarous doctrine of an eternal hell. And of this, more will be said later.”

You’ll notice, by the way, that a modern theologian always attempts to prove his point by slandering biblical theology. He just says, “This is a much better doctrine than that horrible doctrine of hell.” He doesn’t seek to disprove hell from the Bible. He knows he cannot do that, and so he slanders it, knowing that his audience does not -- and his readers do not have a very good understanding of the Bible. And if they don’t, then they’re inclined to believe him, because they don’t know all of those thousands of texts that just shoot his theory full of holes. So he can just look at it that way. It’s at least preferable to that barbarous -- barbarous, that’s not Barbara -- barbarous doctrine of an eternal hell. “And of this, more will be said later.” He doesn’t say much more later, actually.

“Perhaps the Christian hope can carry us further even, than a belief in conditional mortality.” Now, conditional mortality means, if we achieve our selfhood and being, then we shall live, but if we don’t achieve our selfhood and being, we’re going to die. Maybe, but we really are not. That’s conditional mortality. Conditional mortality would be, that we would sink back into nothing, but he doesn’t really believe that, as we shall see. “If God is indeed, ‘absolute letting be’” -- did you know that, that was a name for God? Absolute letting be. That’s what God does. He creates us. He lets us be. And so he’s not going to decide -- consign us to hell. He’s going to let us be. And so how can you say, “Our absolute letting be who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name”? Now, isn’t that some name for God? Absolute letting be. And now, let me go back. I’m – I’m doing the same thing to him, he was doing to my biblical doctrine, am not I?

“If God is indeed ‘letting be’, and if his letting be has power to overcome the risks of disillusion, then perhaps in the end -- so we must speak -- no individual existence, that has been called out of nothing, will utterly return to nothing, but will move nearer to the fulfillment of its potentialities, as the horizons of time and history continually expand. And it is set in an ever wider reconciling context. In other words, we prefer a doctrine of universalism, to one of conditional immortality.”

So he has said, “What we have been saying to you might suggest conditional immortality. If we achieve our selfhood and being, we shall live. If we don’t achieve it, we sink back into the nothing from which we came. But I really don’t accept that”, he said. “I think that really the case is that, as history continues to unfold, we will not return to nothing, but we will move nearer to the fulfillment of our potentialities in the ever-wider reconciling context of the future.”

And so Professor McQuarrie believes in universalism. Now, universalism is a doctrine that everybody is going to be saved, so why bother about anything? If everybody’s going to be saved, what difference does it make how you’re going to live in this life? After all, who counts the billows if the shore is one? And so let’s just live as we

please. We’re all going to be saved. It may take you a little longer to get there than me, but you’ll get there. So why not enjoy yourself down here now? This kind of doctrine you see, is utterly immoral, in the final analysis, although Professor McQuarrie would be ang – very angry if I said that to him. But that’s what he says.

“In other words, we prefer a doctrine of universalism to one of conditional immortality and this seems more in line with the eschatological hope that all things will indeed, find their fullness in God.” These remarks imply that, after all, achievement of selfhood and fullness of being is a matter of degree. In other words, there is no -- there is no -- here -- “Here are the Christians and here are the non-Christians”, or there is no, “Here are the righteous and here are the unrighteous.” That’s precisely what he said. “And a sharp dividing line cannot be drawn between the righteous and the wicked. Just as we must -- may suppose that, on the one side no individual human existence is irretrievably lost, it seems that we must likewise suppose on the other side that no individual existence comes to complete perfection.”

Now, the sad thing about this, my dear friends, is that this man is a man who is instructing, and has for years instructed ministers who preach in pulpits where there are supposed to be preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s the sad thing. It would be sad, of course, if this man held these views and claimed to be a Christian theologian, but to be a man who instructs other young men who are to preach the word of God, and instructs them in this way, why it’s obvious why our Lord makes some very strong statements about those who are blind leaders of the blind.

Now, let’s see if the Bible really says that the condition of humanity is such that they need regeneration.

So Capital A, the Condition of Humanity. There are compelling reasons for a new birth according to Scripture, and I’m going to now -- for the few minutes that remain, I’m going to ask you to turn to a pass -- a series of passages of Scripture. I think this is the

most effective thing in the final analysis, so let’s first of all, turn to Ephesians chapter 2 in verse 1. Ephesians 2, verse 1. Paul writes to the Ephesians and he says,

“And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sin.”

Notice, men are dead before they believe. Turn to Colossians chapter 1, verse 21. Colossians 1:21. Paul writes to the Colossians,

“And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.”

Alienated and enemies. Men are dead. Men are alienated, and they are enemies of God. They are alienated from God. They are enemies of God.

Do you remember what happened in the Garden of Eden when man sinned? Well, when God came down into the midst of the garden, Adam did not rush out and say, “Lord, I prepared the tea that we usually have this afternoon when you come down in the cool of the day.” No, he put fig leaves upon himself in order to cover his nakedness, which now was a reproach to him as a result of sin. He was beginning to feel the effects of the sin and separation from God. And he hid himself in the garden. Sin produces a sense of guilt, and that leads to the desire to flee the presence of God. We don’t love God. We hate God. We become his enemy.

And I know from my own personal experience, because for twenty-five years I was in a church, but I did not love the things of the Lord. And whenever the word of God was preached, that was the last place I wanted to be. And if many of my friends ever got religious, that was the last I wanted of them as my friend. And the whole story of the Bible is how God seeks out men who are running from him, who are -- who are alienated from him and enemies. And so men are dead. Men are alienated and enemies.

Let’s turn over to Ephesians chapter 4 in verse 18. Ephesians 4:18. Paul writes of the Ephesians again; Gentile – the Gentiles,

“Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.”

Men are blind. Men do not see the truth. One of the reasons Professor McQuarrie does not see the truth, is that he is blind. He is dead. He is alienated from God. He is blind. Men are hardened. Notice the nineteenth verse.

“Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”

Men are dead. Men are alienated and enemies. Men are blind. Men are hardened. Turn back to chapter 2, verse 13. In verse thirteen, we say much the same thing that we said by alienated, but there are smaller words,

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off.”

Men are separated from God. Men are far off. Turn to Romans chapter 6, verse 20. Romans chapter 6 and verse 20 Paul writes, speaking of the Romans in their former life,

“For when ye were the slaves of sin ye were free from righteousness.”

So men are the slaves of sin. Men are dead. Men are alienated. Men are enemies. Men are blind. Men are hardened. Men are the slaves of sin. Men are far off.

And Ephesians 4:18 remember, said they were also ignorant. Let me read it again for you.

Ephesians 4:18,

“Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them.”

So men are ignorant of God, and men are of the evil one. 1 John chapter 3, verse 8 and verse 10. 1 John 5:19 where we read,

“And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” [Or as the Greek text probably should be translated, “of the wicked one.”

Verse 8 of chapter 3 says -- 1 John,

“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

Verse 10,

“In this, the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

Now, I would think that the way John is separating the children of the devil from the children of God, that there is such a thing -- in spite of what Professor McQuarrie has said -- about a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. And it’s a very sharp dividing line, it seems to me.

Now, I think that all we need do, is just to ponder those texts to realize that man is in a desperate condition, and he stands under the judgment of God. In order to prove that last point, let’s turn over to 2 Peter. We were in 1 John. Just turn back a few pages to 2 Peter chapter 2, and let’s read verse 9. 2 Peter 2, verse 9. Page 1318 in my edition, the King James version.

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust.” [By the way, there’s a sharp distinction again, isn’t it? The un-] “how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.”

And so men who are not among the godly, who have never believed in Jesus Christ, are destined for judgment. They stand under judgment. Actually, that text in the Greek says, “under judgment.” And then chapter 3, verse 7 of the same epistle,

“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”

So men, my dear friends, are in a desperate condition. They are dying, and they are destined to die if something doesn’t happen, and then they face the judgment. It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this, the judgment. They are dead. They are alienated. They are enemies. They are far off. They are hardened. They are blinded. And that’s not all.

Now, Capital B, the Character of Holiness. Regeneration is necessary because of the condition of humanity, but it is necessary because of the character of holiness. Will you turn back for a moment to Isaiah chapter 59 in verse 12. Isaiah chapter 59 in verse 12. Here the prophet says,

“For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them.”

Our transgressions separate us from God. Notice the second verse. “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God.” Holiness separates unholy men from God.

Now, this is at the heart of the failure of many to see that God is going to judge. God is a holy God. In the twentieth century, we do not like to think about God as a holy God. We like to think of him only as a loving God. And because we like to think of him as a loving God, we like to assuage our consciences with nice thoughts about God. Why, God is not the kind of person of could ever send anyone to hell -- this barbarous doctrine of eternal hell. God is a loving God, which of course, is true. God is a loving God, but God is also a righteous God, and that note is lost in almost all of our modern theology. And I might say too, because of the influence of theology that is liberal, in many of our evangelical circles, we are not giving attention to the holiness and righteousness of God that we should.

Holiness separates, thus we do not need simply to be altered, to enter into the presence of God. We do not need simply, to come under divine influences to be prepared for the presence of God. We do not simply need to be reinvigorated. We do not simply need to be reformed. We need a new life, a new nature. We need to be born again. That’s why Jesus said, “Ye must be born again. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the spirit is spirit. Marvel not. It’s no marvel.” I’ll never forget a sermon I read by A. T. Pearson, one of the great Bible teachers of a few generations ago. It was entitled, “The New Birth: No Marvel”. “Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again.” It’s no wonder why we know what we are. It’s no wonder at all. It has to be, if we’re going to ever enter the presence of God.

And finally, the character of heaven demands regeneration. Not only our condition, not only the character of holiness, but the character of heaven itself, demands regeneration. Will you turn with me to the last book of the Bible; next to the last chapter in the Bible; the last verse of that next to the last chapter in the last book of the Bible. Revelation chapter 21 in verse 27, and listen. And John is describing the New Jerusalem and he says,

“And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth.” “There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they that are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

The elect shall enter because the elect shall be holy, and there shall not enter into that holy city anything that defileth. And John’s language, you will notice, is very strong. I’m looking up the Greek text right now, because I want to read it as it really is.

“And there shall by no means.” [This is the strongest way a Greek had of expressing a prohibition.] “There shall by no means enter into it any common thing, or anything that makes abomination and lie, except they who have been written in the book of life of the Lamb.”

Now, if there is anything stronger, I don’t know how it could possibly be stronger than that. There shall in heaven enter in nothing that defileth. That means, my dear friend, if you enter into heaven as you are now, you will be cast out immediately. Mr. Spurgeon used to like to say, “If a thief were to get into heaven, the first thing he would want to do would be to pick the pockets of the saints, and God is not going to allow anyone into heaven who does not have a change of nature, and who has not been transformed and made holy by the grace of God.”

Now, next week we’re going to talk about the nature of regeneration, and continue our study of it. Our time is up. Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these wonderful truths, and we sense, Lord, that it is Thy desire through the Scriptures, to convince us from Thy mouth itself, that we are lost and undone and under judgment, and we must be born again if we are to enter the kingdom of God.

Father, we pray that we may be able to think the thoughts of God after Thee. Deliver us from the errors of men who do not follow the teaching of Holy Scripture. Give us the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, and enable us, O Father, by Thy power, to be subject to it. We thank Thee for our time of study tonight. May it be useful to us. We thank Thee that Thou art a holy God and that heaven is a holy city, and that by grace we shall one day enter holy also.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.