

**George Whitefield (1714-1770), *On Regeneration, or New Birth in Christ* (1737)**

The doctrine of our regeneration, or new birth in Christ Jesus, though one of the most fundamental doctrines of our holy religion; though so plainly and often pressed on us in sacred writ, “that he who runs may read;” nay though it is the very hinge on which the salvation of each of us turns, and a point too in which all sincere Christians, of every denomination, agree; yet it is so seldom considered, and so little experimentally understood by the generality of professors, that were we to judge of the truth of it, by the experience of most who call themselves Christians, we should be apt to imagine they had “not so much as heard” whether there be any such thing as regeneration or not. It is true, men for the most part are orthodox in the common articles of their creed; they believe “there is but one God, and one Mediator between God and men, even the man Christ Jesus;” and that there is no other name given under heaven, whereby they can be saved, besides his: But then tell them, they must be regenerated, they must be born again, they must be renewed in the very spirit, in the inmost faculties of their minds, ere they can truly call Christ, “Lord, Lord,” or have an evidence that they have any share in the merits of his precious blood; and they are ready to cry out with Nicodemus, “How can these things be?”

What we are to understand by being a new creature? It only means, that we must be so altered as to the qualities and tempers of our minds, that we must entirely forget what manner of persons we once were. How this glorious change is wrought in the soul, cannot easily be explained: For no one knows the ways of the Spirit save the Spirit of God himself.

God is described in holy Scripture (and I speak to those who profess to know the Scripture) as a Spirit; as a being of such infinite sanctity, as to be of “purer eyes than to behold iniquity;” as to be so transcendently holy, that it is said “the very heavens are not clean in his sight; and the angels themselves he chargeth with folly.” On the other hand, man is described (and every regenerate person will find it true by his own experience) as a creature altogether “conceived and born in sin;” as having “no good thing dwelling in him;” as being “carnal, sold under sin;” nay, as having “a mind which is at enmity with God,” and such-like. And since there is such an infinite disparity, can anyone conceive how a filthy, corrupted, polluted wretch can dwell with an infinitely pure and holy God, before he is changed, and rendered, in some measure, like him?

As God is a Spirit, so the happiness he has laid up for his people is spiritual likewise; and consequently, unless our carnal minds are changed, and spiritualized, we can never be made meet to partake of that inheritance with the saints in light. It is necessary therefore, in order to make Christ's redemption complete, that we should have a grant of God's Holy Spirit to change our natures, and so prepare us for the enjoyment of that happiness our Savior has purchased by his precious blood.

If he that is in Christ be a new creature, this may serve as a reproof for those who rest in a bare performance of outward duties, without perceiving any real inward change of heart. We may observe a great many persons to be very punctual in the regular returns of public and private prayer, as likewise of receiving the holy communion, and perhaps now and then too in keeping a fast. But here is the misfortune, they rest barely in the use of the means, and think all is over, when they have thus complied with those sacred institutions; whereas, were they rightly informed, they would consider, that all the instituted means of grace, as prayer, fasting, hearing and reading the word of God, receiving the blessed sacrament, and such-like, are no farther

serviceable to us, than as they are found to make us inwardly better, and to carry on the spiritual life in the soul.

If he that is in Christ be a new creature, then this may check the groundless presumption of another class of professors, who rest in the attainment of some moral virtues, and falsely imagine they are good Christians, if they are just in their dealings, temperate in their diet, and do not hurt or violence to any man. The sum of the matter is this: Christianity includes morality, as grace does reason; but if we are only mere Moralists, if we are not inwardly wrought upon, and changed by the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit, and our moral actions, proceed from a principle of a new nature, however we may call ourselves Christians, we shall be found naked at the great day, and in the number of those, who have neither Christ's righteousness imputed to them for their justification in the sight, nor holiness enough in their souls as the consequence of that, in order to make them meet for the enjoyment, of God.

Nor will this doctrine less condemn those, who rest in a partial amendment of themselves, without experiencing a thorough, real, inward change of heart. O vain man! Whoever thou art, what the Lord thy God requires of thee? Thou must be informed, that nothing short of a thorough sound conversion will fit thee for the kingdom of heaven. It is not enough to turn from profaneness to civility; but thou must turn from civility to godliness. In short, thou must not only be an almost, but altogether a new creature, or in vain thou boasteth that thou art a Christian.

If he that is in Christ be a new creature, then this may be prescribed as an infallible rule for every person of whatever denomination, age, degree or quality, to judge himself by; this being the only solid foundation, whereon we can build a well-grounded assurance of pardon, peace, and happiness. We may indeed depend on the broken reed of an external profession; we may think we are good enough, if we lead such sober, honest, moral lives, as many heathens did. We may imagine we are in a safe condition, if we attend on the public offices of religion, and are constant in the duties of our closets. But unless all these tend to reform our lives, and change our hearts, and are only used as so many channels of divine grace; as I told you before, so I tell you again, Christianity will profit you nothing.

Let each of us therefore seriously put this question to our hearts: Have we received the Holy Ghost since we believed? Are we new creatures in Christ, or no? At least, if we are not so yet, is it our daily endeavor to become such? Do we constantly and conscientiously use all the means of grace required thereto? Do we fast, watch and pray? Do we, not lazily seek, but laboriously strive to enter in at the strait gate? In short, do we renounce our own righteousness, take up our crosses and follow Christ? If so, we are in that narrow way which leads to life; the good seed is sown in our hearts, and will, if duly watered and nourished by a regular persevering use of all the means of grace, grow up to eternal life. But on the contrary, if we have only heard, and know not experimentally, whether there be any Holy Ghost; if we are strangers to fasting, watching and prayer, and all the other spiritual exercises of devotion; if we are content to go in the broad way, merely because we see most other people do so, without once reflecting whether it be the right one or not; in short, if we are strangers, nay enemies to the cross of Christ, by lives of worldly-mindedness, and sensual pleasure, and thereby make others think, that Christianity is but an empty name, a bare formal profession; if this be the case, I say, Christ is as yet dead in vain, to us; we are under the guilt of our sins; and are unacquainted with a true and thorough conversion.