

our spiritual birth is “the gospel.” The apostle emphasizes the role of the preacher who first brought the regenerating Word to the Corinthians. Paul’s point is powerful: since, by God’s grace, *he* was the agent whom Jehovah used to declare the gospel which was the means of their regeneration, he ought to have a special, even unique, place in their hearts as their spiritual father: “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.”

Second, Paul speaks similarly to Philemon regarding his escaped slave, Onesimus: “I beseech thee [i.e., Philemon] for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds” (Phile. 10). Again we see the role of Paul the preacher who, while he was in prison in Rome, proclaimed the gospel to Onesimus which was the means that the Triune God used to bring to manifestation the living seed which He had placed in him.

Besides these two references from Paul, we have the statement from Peter quoted earlier: “Being born again ... *by the word of God*, which liveth and abideth for ever” (I Pet. 1:23). What is meant by “the word of God”? The preached gospel: “And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (25).

Fourth, from these three texts penned by Paul and Peter, we now turn to James 1:18, which we considered in the last issue of the *News*. It also underscores the second aspect or stage of regeneration, God’s mediate regeneration of us by His Word: “Of his own will begat he us *with the word of truth*.”

To explain things further, we should understand the two images presented in the verses of Scripture quoted above. First, there is the idea of the “seed” (I Pet. 1:23). With His fingers or Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20), God sovereignly sows the new life of Christ into the heart of His elect (immediate regeneration). Continuing the imagery, the Word of God or the preaching of the gospel acts like the heat of the sun upon the seed, causing it to germinate and manifest its life (mediate regeneration).

Besides the horticultural imagery of the “seed” of regeneration, we have, second, the idea of the spiritual begetting or new birth of a human being. The gospel is like an amazing spiritual midwife. When God’s Word is preached to those in whom the Holy Spirit has implanted new life (immediate regeneration), they are brought to birth in Christ. For the first time, as spiritual newborns and by faith, they hear the gospel of their gracious salvation, they see their glorious Saviour crucified for their sins, they taste that their covenant God is good and they become conscious of their blessed new life in Jesus (mediate regeneration). As baby Christians, “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17).

What a blessed role for the gospel of sovereign grace! It is a spiritual midwife present at the birth, helping the birth and effecting the birth of each new child of God! *Rev. Stewart*

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The Two Aspects of Regeneration

We may biblically and helpfully distinguish two stages or aspects or senses of regeneration, also known as the new birth or our being spiritually begotten.

First, there is *immediate* regeneration. At the very start of His applying to us the salvation the Lord Jesus purchased for us, God plants the seed of the new life of Christ in us sovereignly by the Holy Spirit and *apart from any means*.

Second, there is *mediate* regeneration. Jehovah sovereignly uses the *means* of His Word to bring to manifestation the new life already planted in us. Through the power of the gospel, God brings us to conscious faith in the Lord Jesus and causes us to repent of our sins against His holy law.

Both of these aspects or stages or senses of regeneration are taught in I Peter 1:23: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

The prepositions in this Scripture are crucial. First, there is “of”—we were “born again, not [out] *of* corruptible seed, but [out] *of* incorruptible.” God places the incorruptible seed of life deep inside us. The second preposition is “by”—we were “born again ... *by* the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

Both aspects or stages go together in the elect who come to the age of discretion. We were “born again ... [1] [out] of [the] incorruptible [seed], [2] by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

Herman Hoeksema makes the following fine remarks on I Peter 1:23, explaining its highly significant use of two different Greek prepositions: “The apostle makes a very careful distinction here. This is especially plain from the use of the different prepositions. We are born again, ‘not of [*ek*] corruptible seed, but of incorruptible,’ and we are born again ‘by [*dia*] the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.’ By this distinction the apostle means to describe carefully the mode of regeneration. The seed of regeneration, that is, the principle of the new life, is implanted by the Holy Spirit in the heart. From that seed or principle sprouts forth the life of regeneration ... through the ... living and abiding Word of God [that is] proclaimed” (*Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, pp. 30, 31).

Let me now show you four New Testament Scriptures on mediate regeneration, the second stage or aspect of the new birth: God’s use of the means of the gospel to bring to manifestation the inner life immediately implanted in us by the Spirit of Christ.

First, we have Paul’s moving words to the church at Corinth: “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you *through the gospel*” (I Cor. 4:15). It is asserted here that the means of

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The Idea of the Organic in Scripture (6)

The Holy Scriptures frequently deal with the whole human race as a distinct part of an organic unity. Some examples of this organic unity can easily be found.

The human race is an organic unity with Adam at its head since the whole human race is guilty for Adam's sin (Rom 5:12). The law specifically assumed the organic unity of the family when, in the second commandment, God said that He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children (Deut. 5:8-10). The armies of Israel were soundly defeated by a small group of soldiers from Ai, because in Achan's sin the whole nation had become guilty, although, in all likelihood, they did not even know of his transgression (Josh. 7). The sin of one man, David, brought God's judgment upon Israel (II Sam. 24; I Chron. 21).

This organism of the nation is the object of God's wrath when some in the organism sin and the object of God's blessing when some live in obedience to Him. In the times when good kings sat on Israel's throne, God richly blessed the land, even though there were many wicked, something evident from the rebellions of Absalom and Adonijah.

When wicked kings sat on Israel's throne, God brought famine and destruction from enemy nations; even though in the terrible days of Ahab, there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (I Kings 19:18). The wicked received outwardly the good things Jehovah sent upon the land when the righteous ruled, and the people of God suffered dreadfully when drought and disease destroyed the crops in days of apostasy. God deals organically with nations.

In Psalm 80, the nation of Israel, elect and reprobate alike, is pictured as a vine that God brought out of Egypt and blessed richly. But when they sinned, the wicked brought destruction upon the whole nation, a judgment bemoaned by the psalmist.

In the New Testament, the nation of Israel is once again compared to a vine in John 15. Christ is the vine; God is the husbandman. The entire nation constitutes the branches. The branches that do not abide in Christ are cut off, while the branches that remain in Him bear more fruit because the fruitless branches are pruned away.

This figure is picked up again in Romans 11:16-24. Paul speaks there of the nation of Israel as a "good" olive tree. With the exaltation of Christ, God grafts branches from a "wild" olive tree so that these branches bear fruit. They are the Gentiles, born in a wild olive tree but grafted into the good olive tree.

If I may stray from the main point for a moment, the "natural" olive tree, the nation of Israel, is *natural* because Christ is the principle of its life. Israel carried Christ within her from the beginning of her existence. This great truth was the hope and blessedness of believing Israel, and explains why Israel's mothers desperately wanted children, for they then participate in the coming of the promised seed. Compare the prayer of Hannah (I Sam. 2:1-10) with the similar praise of Mary (Luke 1:46-55).

To return to the main idea: Gentiles can be, and are, grafted into the good olive tree from which most of its natural branches were cut out; while believing Jews throughout

the entire new dispensation can be regrafted into their "own" olive tree, while Gentile branches, once grafted into the olive tree, can be cut out if they refuse to believe. The important truth here is that the branches are not individuals but generations.

For example, Jews are present in the church of the new dispensation throughout history, if they believe in Christ. But once a "branch" of Gentiles falls away, they are lost in their generations. God does not return to His work once those who were the objects of His grace have, in their generations, forsaken the truth.

North America and Europe once had the gospel as continents. In these modern times, in the majority of their people and their leaders, both have forsaken the gospel and are now in the process of deliberately rejecting the whole of God's law in approving the most abominable sins. God is taking away His Word in these continents, because they had it and rejected it. He is removing the gospel as the apostate church works more and more with the wicked civil governments, while the number of the faithful grows smaller and smaller, until at last they are only a scattered remnant.

That is why, in our day, by and large, God is removing His gospel from America and Europe, and is moving especially to the Orient to gather His church there.

My wife and I have a daughter and son-in-law working in the Philippines. Cries come from so many places that he and his fellow missionaries cannot answer them all: "Come and teach us the Reformed faith." Can you imagine hosts of people in America crying out to the Protestant Reformed Churches like this? or the CPRC in Northern Ireland receiving so many calls from groups of people in the British Isles who are begging to be taught the pure Reformation truth of Scripture?

As we have said, the final organism of God's purpose, realized at the end of time, has as its head Christ, who is the second Adam. Scripture teaches that the new organism has our Lord Jesus, exalted in the highest heaven, as ruler over all (e.g., Col. 1:13-20; I Cor. 15:24-28). Under Him, as the whole human race was once under Adam, are all the elect, who are His body. To this organism belongs the whole world of elect angels, who are under the elect and redeemed church as "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14).

The new heavens and the new earth will be delivered from the curse, transformed by Christ's atoning sacrifice and given to the elect as their everlasting inheritance. Christ is the head of the creation as the second Adam, whose place He took.

By the resurrection of Christ, heaven and earth are made one. Christ's resurrection took place both in heaven and on earth—united at the same time. For although He arose from a tomb in a garden, He did not come back to this world—as a misguided minister once said, who wished he had been present with a camera to take a photo—for He broke a new door from the grave that opened in heaven, for all His brothers do follow Him. By the great miracle of the resurrection, He made possible the union of the new heavens and the new earth delivered from the curse.

The history of the world is the history of God in His providence and grace working to attain this purpose. And this purpose is achieved fundamentally through the preaching of the gospel.

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