

## DOCTRINAL STUDIES

### IMMEDIATE, HOLY SPIRIT REGENERATION

**This is the first installment of an article which will be concluded in the next issue.**

*A note about the study of doctrine*

We live in a very superficial age, theologically speaking. In my opinion we need much diligent study and preaching on the great doctrines of the faith. However, it is easy to fall into the trap of considering our doctrine from a purely intellectual perspective, while it has no discernible effect on our lives and spirits. This is not the way to study and preach doctrine. We need to realize that when we study doctrine we are not dealing with intellectual abstractions; we are dealing with **glorious, eternal truths!** Doctrinal preaching should have at least two effects on us.

First, it ought to often overwhelm us with praise to the God of all grace. It is striking that in Paul's writings he often breaks out into doxologies. In introducing the glorious doctrine of election, for example, he says in [Eph 1:3](#) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ..." This is a spiritual song of praise.

Secondly, the great doctrines of grace should inspire us to holy living. It is amazing to me that most of the great Christological passages in the New Testament are in a practical context. For example, the exalted passage in [2Co 8:9](#) "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich," is in the context of encouraging the Corinthian saints to give of their financial resources for the benefit of the poor saints in Jerusalem. Many more examples of this could be given. **Great doctrine** should move us to **great worship** and to **great living**. I once read a poem which included this line: "Doctrine without duty is like a tree without fruits; duty without doctrine is like a tree without roots."

In the subject we have under consideration, Immediate, Holy Spirit, Regeneration, let us be careful to study it in the correct way. May this great truth lead us to praise. Let us express our gratitude to the One Who has "called you out of darkness into his **marvellous light.**" The Lord Jesus said to some who had been born from above "But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."[\(Mt 13:16\)](#).

May this truth also encourage us to righteous living. If we have been given the precious gift of spiritual life, let us show that in our behavior. Let us say with the man in [Jas 2:18](#) "shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."

### *Definition of terms*

**Regeneration-By** regeneration I mean the initial giving of spiritual life. I agree with Michael Gowens in his book, *BORN AGAIN: The Doctrine of Effectual Calling*. He said, "*Regeneration, new birth, quickening, effectual calling, and irresistible grace* are synonymous theological terms referring to the work of the Holy Spirit in the radical transformation of the soul." Regeneration is giving of spiritual life to one who has been dead in trespasses and sins.

**Immediate-I** am not using the term, immediate, here in the sense of being sudden, even though regeneration is a sudden or instantaneous act. The word, immediate, is used here in the sense of "having nothing come between; with no intermediary." This means that the Holy Spirit is the **sole agent** in regeneration. Here it will be good to quote Arthur W.

Pink in his book, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 56,57:

In His work of "quickenings," by which we mean the impartation of spiritual life to the soul, the Spirit acts immediately from within, and not by applying something from without. Quickenings is a *direct* operation of the Spirit without the use of any instrument: the Word is used by Him afterwards to call into exercise the life then communicated...The soul, then, is quickened into newness of life by the **direct** and **supernatural** operation of the Spirit, without any medium or means whatever...No, men are not "quickenings" *by* the Word, they must be quickened in order to receive and understand the Word.

Pink says on page forty-nine of the same book:

In regeneration one of God's elect is the subject, and the Spirit of God is the sole agent. The subject of the new birth is **wholly passive**: he does not act but is acted upon. The sovereign work of the Spirit in the soul precedes *all* holy exercises of heart- such as sorrow for sin, faith in Christ, love toward God... This great change is not a gradual and protracted process, but is *instantaneous*: in an instant of time the favored subject of it passes from death unto life.

**Note:** A number of Sovereign Grace groups agree with what we Primitive Baptists teach on the so-called Five Points, but very few agree with us on the doctrine of Immediate Regeneration. There are some, notably the Protestant Reformed denomination, W. G. T. Shedd, a Congregationalist, A. W. Pink, W. E. Best, and a few others. Some theologians seem to talk out of both sides of their mouths. In some places in their theology books they seem to teach Immediate Regeneration while in other places they plainly teach Gospel Regeneration.

**A word of criticism from a friendly critic:** I am afraid that in our rightful defense of Immediate Regeneration, some of us Primitive Baptists have not put enough emphasis on the work of the gospel, which is **conversion**.

We are afraid that if we call on someone to repent, as Peter did on the day of Pentecost, that we will be accused of teaching Gospel Regeneration. We must beg God to help us restore the **balance of truth**. We must positively teach the truth and not just react against error.

To demonstrate this I am including here a message that Elder David Pyles wrote a brother on email.

### SERMON ENDINGS

I would like to address your question concerning reasons why the unregenerate should be addressed in our sermons. Though you have asked specifically about sermon endings, what I have to say would apply to any part of a sermon.

Though the natural man will not receive the gospel into his unregenerate heart ([1Co 2:14](#); [Ro 8:5](#); [Joh 8:43-47](#); [10:25-27](#)), I believe there are yet two reasons why the gospel should be addressed to him. I feel fairly sure Elder Thompson was motivated by these reasons. The reasons are:

1) The natural man has a memory. Certain of the things preached to him while within unregeneracy will lodge into his natural memory. These things will simply be "head knowledge" unto him in this state, but when God changes his nature in the new birth, those things the preacher formerly taught him will become the joy and rejoicing of his heart ([Jer 15:16](#)).

The same principle would apply in training our children. We teach them the way of the Lord while knowing we cannot transform them into spiritual beings, but we sow the seed in hopes that God will quicken it to bring forth fruit. Elder Omar Strickland used to tell of how his father made him study the Bible when he was a boy. His father told him that he could not put the word into his heart, but only into his head, but when God put it into his heart, he would then be thankful that his father had put it into his head.

2) It is our role to warn the wicked so that they will be left without excuse, and so that our negligence will not be the occasion of their condemnation. This principle is expressed in:

[Eze 3:17-19](#) Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

18 When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

19 Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

I think the following paragraph from the Preface to the 1689 London Confession expresses these principles well:

And verily there is one spring and cause of the decay of religion in our day which we cannot but touch upon and earnestly urge a redress of, and that is the neglect of the worship of God in families by those to whom the charge and conduct of them is committed. May not the gross ignorance and instability of many, with the profaneness of others, be justly charged upon their parents and masters, who have not trained them up in the way wherein they ought to walk when they were young, but have neglected those frequent and solemn commands which the Lord hath laid upon them, so to catechise and instruct them that their tender years might be seasoned with the knowledge of the truth of God as revealed in the Scriptures; and also by their own omission of prayer and other duties of religion of their families, together with the ill example of their loose conversation, having, inured them first to a neglect and the contempt of all piety and religion? We know this will not excuse the blindness and wickedness of any, but certainly it will fall heavy upon those that have been thus the occasion thereof; they indeed die in their sins, but will not their blood be required of those under whose care they were, who yet permitted them to go on without warning - yea, led them into the paths of destruction? And will not the diligence of Christians with respect to the discharge of these duties in ages past rise up in judgment against and condemn many of those who would be esteemed such now?

Finally, I think it is improper to address the unregenerate in any way which would leave improper theological impressions (e.g. urgings to get born again, etc). I believe Elder Thompson was generally careful not to do this.

To what extent should a minister address himself to the unregenerate, and how should it be done? I believe the answer to these questions can be found in the book of Acts. There are several sermons recorded there. We should use these as our pattern. Certainly, the indecent pleas of the Arminians are nowhere to be found in these sermons. At the same time, there will indeed be parts of these sermons serving to warn the wicked.

I hope this helps.

May God bless, David Pyles