
Question #131: How does understanding the regenerating power of God encourage you to actively evangelize those who are lost?

Regeneration is an invisible work that becomes increasingly evident over time

Regeneration occurs at the exact moment in time when the secret power of God implants new life in a person who is spiritually dead. At that moment the person is born again (regenerated). Regeneration is an instantaneous event that produces evident growth in Christlikeness (sanctification). However, it is not always possible to pinpoint the precise moment regeneration occurred. This should not trouble us as long as clear evidence of regeneration is present.

John 3:8: The wind blows where it wishes and **you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going**; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Wayne Grudem explains in chapter 34 of his *Systematic Theology*:

Exactly what happens in regeneration is mysterious to us. We know that somehow we who were spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1) have been made alive to God and in a very real sense we have been “born again” (John 3:3, 7; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). But we don’t understand how this happens or what exactly God does to us to give us this new spiritual life. . . .

Because regeneration is a work of God within us in which he gives us new life it is right to conclude that it is an instantaneous event. It happens only once. At one moment we are spiritually dead, and then at the next moment we have new spiritual life from God. Nevertheless, we do not always know exactly when this instantaneous change occurs. Especially for children growing up in a Christian home, or for people who attend an evangelical church or Bible study over a period of time and grow gradually in their understanding of the gospel, there may not be a dramatic crisis with a radical change of behavior from “hardened sinner” to “holy saint,” but there will be an instantaneous change nonetheless, when God through the Holy Spirit, in an unseen, invisible way, awakens spiritual life within. The change will become evident over time in patterns of behavior and desires that are pleasing to God.

In other cases (in fact, probably most cases when adults become Christians) regeneration takes place at a clearly recognizable time at which the person realizes that previously he or she was separated from God and spiritually dead, but immediately afterward there was clearly new spiritual life within. The results can usually be seen at once—a heartfelt trusting in Christ for salvation, an assurance of sins forgiven, a desire to read the Bible and pray (and a sense that these are meaningful spiritual activities), a delight in worship, a desire for Christian fellowship, a sincere desire to be obedient to God’s Word in Scripture, and a desire to tell others about Christ. People may say something like this: “I don’t know exactly what happened, but before that moment I did not trust in Christ for salvation. I was still wondering and questioning in my mind. But after that moment I realized that I did trust in Christ and he was my Savior. Something happened in my heart.” Yet even in these cases we are not quite sure exactly what

*has happened in our hearts. It is just as Jesus said with respect to the wind—we hear its sound and we see the result, but we cannot actually see the wind itself. So it is with the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.*²⁸

Question #132: How can we know whether someone has been regenerated by God?

Regeneration precedes faith

The Bible clearly teaches that regeneration *precedes* faith in Christ, even though many people mistakenly believe just the opposite. **Grudem** goes on to explain:

The idea that regeneration comes before saving faith is not always understood by evangelicals today. Sometimes people will even say something like, “If you believe in Christ as your Savior, then (after you believe) you will be born again.” But Scripture itself never says anything like that. This new birth is viewed by Scripture as something that God does within us in order to enable us to believe.

*The reason that evangelicals often think that regeneration comes after saving faith is that they see the results (love for God and his Word, and turning from sin) after people come to faith, and they think that regeneration must therefore have come after saving faith. Yet here we must decide on the basis of what Scripture tells us, because regeneration itself is not something we see or know about directly.*²⁹

It seemed as if we heard the Gospel and then believed because we were unaware that only those who have been born again will believe. Belief in Jesus Christ requires God's gift of faith and the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. The new birth is not something we do, but something God does. We discover this great truth after we examine Holy Scripture and understand the process of salvation. Jesus made this very clear:

John 6:63-65: ⁶³ “**It is the Spirit who gives life;** the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. ⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. ⁶⁵And He was saying, “**For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.**”

Here Jesus explains that “*some of you do not believe*” because “*no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.*” The **Bible also plainly declares** that those who believe do so because of God's enablement.

Matthew 13:11: And He answered and said to them, “**To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.**”

Philippians 1:29-30: ²⁹For **to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him**, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

²⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 701-2.

²⁹ Grudem, 703

Acts 16:14: And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; **and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.**

Question #133: In your own words, explain what the Bible teaches about the relationship between the new birth and believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. _____

The Sovereignty of God

Part 4: In Salvation

Sovereign Election

What does the Bible say?

The **Bible plainly declares** that God chooses who will be saved. The word **election** refers to God's determination, before He created the world, of who will be saved. This truth is taught throughout the Bible.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8: ⁶For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; **the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession** out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸but because **the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers**, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Psalm 33:11-12: ¹¹The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation. ¹²Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, **The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.**

Isaiah 65:9: And I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, And an heir of My mountains from Judah; **Even My chosen ones shall inherit it, And my servants shall dwell there.**

John 15:16: **You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit**, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.

Ephesians 1:3-6: ³Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵**He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself**, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Titus 1:1-2: ¹Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, **for the faith of those chosen of God** and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, ²**in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, 3but at the proper time manifested**, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior; ⁴to Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

2 Timothy 2:10: For this reason I endure all things **for the sake of those who are chosen**, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.

2 Thessalonians 2:13: But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren **beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

1 Peter 1:1-2: ¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen 2according to the foreknowledge of God the Father**, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.