

REGENERATION.

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I shall define regeneration in a restricted sense, to be, an immediate act of divine power put forth upon an elect sinner, who is dead in trespasses and sins, by which act, a principle of spiritual life is implanted in the soul, and the person become a new creature in Christ Jesus. My limits will not allow a copious illustration of this important article. I shall therefore only aim at two things; to give the true idea of regeneration in as concise a manner as I possibly can, and then contrast it with offers of grace. I submit the following proposition.

The nature of regeneration excludes all preparatory exercises of the person, wrought upon by divine power. This exclusive proposition, I will support and illustrate by scripture and metaphor. The first passage I shall notice is 2 Pet. i. 4." Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by them ye might be partakers of the divine nature." I conceive that by the divine nature is meant

that divine principle which is brought into the soul at regeneration, called by another apostle the seed of God. Now we are said to be made partakers of this, which seem to imply, its absence, and its positive communication. What I wish particular to be noticed, is, that regeneration consist in something being brought into the soul by divine power, which was not there before. The reader will notice,

1. That the principle of grace is called the DIVINE NATURE. This is no doubt to mark its author, spirituality and tendency, and also to point out the difference between the holiness we possessed in Adam and the holiness we possessed in Christ.
2. This divine nature must be incorruptible. It can never be destroyed by force nor decayed by duration. Whatever is divine must be imperishable.
3. This divine nature can never be lost. The hand that introduces continue to shield it, and the good effects began will be carried on and finished. Observe, if Adam was the subject of the divine nature, how came it to perish in his bosom, or to be lost through inattention? Had he been the subject of the same grace as the believer in Christ, he would no doubt have been as secure. He could no more have fell from his innocence than a saint can fall from the situation in which he is placed by regenerating grace. The reason why Adam fell, and his believing posterity stand, is, because Adam possessed nothing more

than natural holiness, and the believer nothing less than the divine nature.

4. It seems to be a free and undeserved communication. Made partakers, saith the apostle. This seems to suggest that it is given to the destitute, and that it is given as a rich and sovereign favour; he has made us partakers. He viewed the condition and conferred the favour. Not offered it.

5. This communication was not merited, claimed, or governed, by either faith, or repentance, or both united. The promises of the everlasting covenant seem to be the source and cause of divine grace being implanted. Covenant promises were given that we might be partakers of the divine nature; and if our safety was settled by the covenant of grace in eternity, how can it be determined by offers of grace in time?

Lastly. The creature is entirely passive, and the principle is introduced by DIVINE POWER. "According as his divine power has given unto us," says Peter, "all that pertain unto life and godliness." Mark, the principle is given and implanted by divine power, and not offered upon the conditions of human power being exercised. That the creature cannot be the cause, nor the means, nor in any manner assist divine power in regeneration, observe the following things. 1. The power of God is perfect in itself, and therefore can need no assistance. 2. The sinner is I

without strength,' and therefore cannot render any. 3. He is dead, and therefore is as passive in his regeneration, as he will be in his resurrection. I will only observe if this statement is true, and divine power is the only active cause of regeneration, the point to which I have been directing the reader's attention is gained, and offers of grace, duty-faith, and general invitations, must fall to the ground.

The second scripture which I shall notice, is John i. 13. " Which were born, not of blood, (gr. bloods) nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Assuming that regeneration is the same in all ages, the following remarks seem pretty clear.

1. Regeneration is a work wrought upon the SONS of God. Spiritual relationship is the ground of all spiritual communications and favours.

2. That their new birth is not owing to any cause of an earthly or carnal nature. Not by the influence of long and dignified ancestry, for they were born not of bloods. Nor yet by physical efforts, for the will of the flesh, is explicitly denied having any influence whatever in their divine birth. Nor can the greatest efforts of the greatest men signified by the will of man, (i. e. the great man) be of any use. It is a work too great for the greatest man. Men may speak great swelling words about their free-will, and fine doings, but nothing short of omnipotent power will ever form a man for God's glory.

3. That it is entirely of GOD. Jehovah is the sole cause and agent in this great and mighty work. He is the primeval cause, the procuring cause, and the procreative cause. They were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, BUT what a turn! what a reverse! what a blow at the system of offered grace! This but, loosens all the materials, and destroys all the strong holds of Arminianism. But of God. What a thunderbolt has Christ hurled at all such carnal doctrine. Arminianism and Fullerism must receive a most terrible concussion; for it I smites the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts,' and renders them both alike untenable. I will now illustrate this subject by two or three metaphors.

First. Regeneration is compared to creation. "The new man," said the apostle, "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Eph. iii. 24. It will be seen that this metaphor illustrates the point before us in a very easy and forcible manner. The reader cannot fail to notice the following things.

1. To create, is to bring something into existence that had not a being before. Regeneration, if it answers to the figure, must denote something brought into existence.

2. When God created the heavens and the earth, he did not work upon matter that was in existence before, this would have been modifying the heavens

and the earth, and not creating them. When God regenerates a sinner, he does not work old nature into a new creature, this would not be creation, but modification. The man would have no more than what he had before; he would only have his old matter newly disposed, and not a new creature brought into the void of old nature, which seem to be the idea of the passage cited at the head of these remarks.

3. The space which is occupied by the celestial heavens and the earth, never contributed towards the formation of these existences, nor does the sinner.

4. Nothing but divine power can create, nor can any thing short of divine power regenerate.

5. Creation was not affected by offers of power, nor is regeneration produced by offers of mercy. We despise the idea in the former, why should we court it in the latter. If it is obnoxious in that, it must in this.

6. Creation was instantaneous. Jehovah said, "let there be light," and the orb of day burst into a dazzling existence, rolled its glowing car in trackless paths, and poured its beams upon the new made globe. Seated on his glowing throne, he shook his mighty torch over the great blank of nature, and kindled up the universe. 'He produced,' says Newton, 'the starry heavens at a single throw.' " He said, and

it was done." So, in regeneration, he stretches out the lamp of salvation and kindles up all the faculties of the soul. There is no offering nor proffering, tender nor entreaty. He says, "let there be light," and grace immediately lights up the mind. The sun of righteousness is fixed in the centre of the moral and intellectual system, throws its light across the mind, and kindles up the soul for God. In my way of thinking, it is as instantaneous as the shock from the stroke of an electrifying machine, sound from the strike of a hammer upon an un-fractured bell, or the emission of light from the sun in the firmament. How can offers of grace and general invitations stand with these things? 'Blest in Christ this moment be,' says Mr. Wesley; as if men could give the shock themselves; or, as if God had charged his own word or Mr. Wesley's sermons with divine power, like a coated jar with the electric fluid, but left them to grasp the conducting cord; or what seems more strange, as if they could bask in the beams of the sun, before the sun is in existence. We see, however, that notwithstanding all the offers of grace, the urgency and assurances of the offerer, and all the fleshpleasing measures of the day, the wicked will still do wickedly, the distant continue afar off, and the dead in trespasses and sins remain in the grave till they hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth and live. "I woke, the dungeon flamed with light." "Where the word of a king is there is power."

And is not that infinitely better than offers and tenders of mercy without it? Who can safely affirm, that it is not? And let it be remarked likewise that creation was a perfect work. There was no probationary essays, nor no errattas, nor no additions, nor no alterations. No improvement could be made, for he is a rock, and his work was perfect: and so is the new creation in the soul. As to improvements of grace, and all the rest of it, they seem to me as whimsical as improving the sun by the aid of a dark lantern, or augmenting its blaze by the addition of a glow-worm.

Nor can there be any progression. There is a perfection both in its nature and degree. What is instantaneously produced cannot be advanced; and if regeneration, like creation, is an instantaneous production of a new existence, there can be no more progression in the one than in the other. I formerly thought the new creation was not perfect in its degree; but after giving the subject more consideration, I have considerably modified my thoughts on that point; and I now conceive, that the new creation is as perfect and complete in its nature, parts, and degrees as the old; that it is as sudden in its production, and as complete in its execution. Nor do I think its energies are of a progressive character, though I think they may produce progressive effects, just in the same manner as I conceive the energies of the sun are always the same; and yet, owing to the

different distances and positions of its respective objects, it may produce effects, distinctly marked by the character of advancement. Thus, darkness may be gradually dispersed, and light as gradually increased; cold may be regularly diminished, and heat progressively imbibed. Or, if darkness should be the privation of light, and cold the absence of heat, yet both light and heat may be progressively accumulated, and as regularly diminished; and hence seem to arise the different degrees of light and darkness, cold and heat, to which a child of God is subject. I cannot think that the volume of grace is any larger in the believer at his natural death, than what it is at his spiriritual birth. His light may be more, and his gifts may be greater, but this seem to be the result of a perfect principle acting upon an object in an imperfect situation. It is not grace that is a child, a young man, and last of all' a father; but the believer, whose power of spiritual perception and understanding are gradually developed. But I must remember that I am not writing short and easy essays, but conducting an important enquiry.

The following questions naturally arise. 1. If divine power only is engaged in regeneration, why tell people they will be saved on condition, if they will but pray and repent. 2. If something is brought into the soul that, was not there before, must it not be absurd to offer and proffer salvation, as if men could take then when they please, and be religious without

being new creatures in Christ Jesus? 3. Is that grace which is said to be offered, what is called the new creature, or is it something suited to a mind where the new man exists? If the latter, why are they made to carnal people? and if the former, how can regeneration agree with the idea of creation? Power belongs to God, and is exercised in a manner that is worthy of his character. In his providence he speaketh once, yea, twice, though man perceive it not; but when regeneration is to be effected, he says, "let there be light!" and light as instantly appear. He speaks, and the thing is done; a new creation is effected without the consent of the subject in whom it dwell, because the subject is not consulted; and without his assistance, because he knows nothing of it until he feel its workings which lead to his conversion. The reason why he is called once and again in the former case, is because he is an acting subject, and a moral agent under the government of divine providence; in the latter, he is neither active nor responsible. Not active, because the work is wholly divine; not answerable, because creation cannot come under the notion of a law with sanction upon the creature. In the affairs of providence man is an active agent possessed of natural and moral faculties, and therefore ought to use them, not in acts of creation, but obedience. But in creating or calling into being new existences, he is by no means adapted, nor is lie any where required. Now if it is the

duty of a man to be regenerated, and regeneration is accomplished only by creating power, must it not be the duty of a man to exercise creating power? and if so, must it not be his duty to be omnipotent? and if he is damned for not doing his duty, will he not be damned for not being omnipotent? and if that is the case, must not his punishment proceed upon the ground of non-acquirements? His misery does not arise out of positive evil, but the absence of the divine attributes; and, according to this scheme, men are not punished because they have done positive evil, but because they have neglected the simple duty of making themselves God!

But further, faith can never produce regeneration, because it is an effect which arises out of the principle; and is called into exercise by the operation of the Spirit of God. Col. ii. 12. Now if it is the duty of a man to believe spiritually, it is his duty to produce a cause by the effect, and if so, it is his duty to do even what omnipotence itself can never perform. Again, if it is a natural man's duty to believe, it cannot be the duty of the Holy Ghost to work faith in him, because that would make duties clash, and thus destroy the wisdom of God. But it is as much the duty of the Holy Spirit to regenerate men, as it was the Son to redeem, or the Father to accept the ransom. Observe, however, that such obligation arose out of their free and mutual stipulations. And it seems far from being clear, that covenant

obligation can interfere with creature duty; for it cannot be the duty of the creature and the Holy Ghost, to perform one and the same thing specifically considered. Now if it is entirely the work of the Holy Ghost to regenerate men, and thus produce the grace of faith, it cannot be the duty of all men, nor of no man to believe while in a state of nature, unless it is his duty to do the work of God. Nor can I conceive how it can be the duty of a person to have by the law of nature, what is peculiar to the covenant of grace, which must be the case if all men are under obligation to believe savingly in the Lord Jesus Christ. Would my papers allow me to pursue this subject, I am of opinion that I could demonstrate the system of duty faith to be not only unscriptural, but ridiculously absurd.

” O we know they cannot do it.’ Then why exhort them to it? Why offer what they cannot receive, and exhort to what is impracticable? ’ Because we think it is their duty to be all that regenerating grace can make them.’ Then according to this the holiness and righteousness of Christ, is by no means superior to Adam’s. And if this is the case, must not the apostle be grossly mistaken, when he said, the first man was of the earth, earthy, but the second man was the Lord from heaven? And when he observed by way of distinction, ” As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of

the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." 1 Cor. xv. 47, 48, 49. Now to affirm that there is no difference between Christ and Adam with respect to their fullness and image, is like affirming that heaven and earth are synonymous terms; and that in short there is no real difference between them whatever. Such things need only to be admitted in order to be refuted.

But regeneration is compared to the resurrection of the dead. Eph. i. 19, 20. ii. 1. born vi. 4. 'The terms life and death,' says Mr. Binton, theol. p. 157. 'When applied to our moral character, are but figurative, and designed to illustrate a right or wrong state of heart. A soul is alive if disposed to love God; if to enmity it is dead; a change of disposition therefore, corresponding with this statement, is essentially regeneration." Again, " it creates no new faculty of perception, sensibility, or choice: it makes no change in the physical condition of either of these powers, it simply alters the tone of moral sentiment." Once more, " we should unhesitatingly say, therefore, that even fallen men, labours under no inability for moral action."

Now without staving to sift these unscriptural sentences, I would ask Mr. H. how simply altering the tone of moral sentiment, can square with the idea of creation? I will readily allow that the language is figurative, and therefore only analogous to natural circumstances, but still there must be some

appropriate realities, or there can be no transfer of idea. But how can simply altering an old thing answer to the idea of creating a new thing? how can the circumstances agree? Again, how can the idea of altering a thing, correspond with the idea of infusing a quickening principle into an inanimate system? For, 1. A disposition is not the principle, of either animal or moral existence; but an effect produced by an active cause. 2. The resurrection will not consist in giving a new tone to the old animal life, but in infusing a new life. 3. This new life, will produce effects beyond the scope of the first. Flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. 4. The members of the body, will be actuated in a manner which they could not by the former life, and this will arise from the change that will pass upon our sleeping dust." It is sown a natural body; it will be raised a spiritual body." 5. This will not be affected, by representing objects to the natural faculties, but by positive power. "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised." 6. Nor will it be accomplished by a general tender of everlasting things, but by the actual communications of undying life. 7. Nor will this be completed in a progressive manner. "Behold, I skew you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." 8. This life will be incorruptible and unending. Nor these seem to me as appropriate realities, being analogous and

illustrative of a spiritual resurrection, and entirely repugnant to the nature of offered grace and general invitations.

Lastly. Regeneration is compared to a being born again, John iii. Now this supposes that there is some agreement between the two births, and that the latter resembles the first. The principal circumstances of correspondence seem to be these. 1. The infant is in a state of darkness and unconsciousness; so is the sinner. 2. That in order to discover natural objects, he must quit the regions of darkness for those of light. 3. That there must be a principle of spiritual animation, resembling the principle of natural life. 4. That this principle of spiritual life, must give birth to spiritual perception, desire, choice, and action, b. That without this, the beauties, and blessings of divine grace, could no more be perceived, desired nor enjoyed, than those of nature without a natural life. 6. That the sinner no more contributes towards his second birth than he does towards his first. And this I think is sufficiently obvious, by the operations of the Spirit being compared to the wind, blowing where it listeth.

These things observed, I would ask the following questions. 1. If offers of natural things to people before they are born, would be absurd, where is the propriety of offering spiritual blessings to people before they are spiritually born, seeing the latter is as destitute of spiritual life and perception as the other

is of natural life and faculties. 2. If it would be absurd and useless to exhort an infant in the womb to hasten its birth, secure its birth, to be born and blest this moment, &c. is it not as absurd and useless, to exhort sinners to be born when they please? to hasten their conversion, &c. seeing the latter have no more control over spiritual things than the former has over natural? 3. If it would be ridiculous to invite the child to a feast before it is born, can it be either consistent or proper to invite natural men to a spiritual feast before they are spiritually born; seeing the one has no more desire, appetite, will or ability than the other? It will be of no use to say the cases are not parallel in every respect; it is enough if they are substantially alike, and that they manifestly are. I shall perhaps be told that the comparison I have made is preposterous and absurd. I maybe allowed to think (until proofs destroy my opinion) that the reason why some may think it to be ridiculous, is, because it represents a popular system in a ridiculous light.

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