

The Ordo Salutis

The Order of Salvation

A Study

As of: 7/04/2021

Step 7: Regeneration

“And now we must say, that regeneration consists in this. God the Holy Spirit, in a supernatural manner—mark, by the word supernatural I mean just what it strictly means; supernatural, more than natural—works upon the hearts of men, and they by the operations of the divine Spirit become regenerate men; but without the Spirit they never can be regenerated. And unless God the Holy Spirit, who “worketh in us to will and to do,” should operate upon the will and the conscience, regeneration is an absolute impossibility, and therefore so is salvation. “What!” says one, “do you mean to say that God absolutely interposes in the salvation of every man to make him regenerate?” I do indeed; in the salvation of every person there is an actual putting forth of the divine power, whereby the dead sinner is quickened, the unwilling sinner is made willing, the desperately hard sinner has his conscience made tender; and he who rejected God and despised Christ, is brought to cast himself down at the feet of Jesus.” Charles Spurgeon

“Faith does not proceed from ourselves, but is the fruit of spiritual regeneration.”

- John Calvin

"When God designs to forgive us he changes our hearts and turns us to obedience by His Spirit."

- John Calvin

"Whatever man may do after regeneration, the first quickening of the dead must originate with God."

- A.A. Hodge

John 3:1-21

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;

2 this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.**"

4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

5 Jesus answered, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.**"

6 "**That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**"

- 7 "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'
- 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."
- 9 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"
- 10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"
- 11 "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony.
- 12 "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"
- 13 "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.
- 14 "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;
- 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.
- 16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- 17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.
- 18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
- 19 "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.
- 20 "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.
- 21 "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

Jeremiah 13:23

Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? *Then* you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.

God's Stunning Demand for the Humanly Impossible

- ✓ Can a man in love with his money enter into the kingdom of God? "**It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle**" (Matthew 19:24).
- ✓ Can the natural man welcome the things of the Spirit of God? "**They are foolishness to him and he is not able to comprehend them, because they are spiritually assessed**" (1 Corinthians 2:14).
- ✓ Can the human mind, as it comes into being and grows by merely natural processes, please God? "**The mindset of the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God**" (Romans 8:7-8).

In the midst of one of the greatest Conversations ever engaged on earth by anyone- this old leader of the Jewish religious elites blurted out in abject confusion over what the Incarnate God just told him and said.

How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

I pray you feel the shock of what Jesus was requiring of Nicodemus when He said,

John 3:7

Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.

It is impossible for a man to cause himself to be born again. It isn't hard; it isn't difficult- it is absolutely impossible! We CAN'T change the color of our skin. A leopard CAN'T change his spots. A camel CAN'T go through the eye of a needle. A natural man (lost) CAN'T welcome spiritual things. The mindset of fallen humanity CAN'T please God. And old men CAN'T be born. These things simply CAN'T be done.

To which we quickly answer (because we know the Bible),

"But God can change the color of our skin and the spots of a leopard. God can make a camel fit through a needle's eye. God can turn natural people into spiritual people who love the things of the Spirit. And God can cause people to be born again by the amazing and supernatural and miraculous Power of God the Holy Spirit."

Yes. But perhaps we say it too quickly. Perhaps we ought to sit stunned for seven days with torn clothes and dust on our head in utter silence like Job and his three friends. We should be stunned that no one will enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born twice, not just once- born by a Power that does not originate from himself that blows like the wind according to God's Will. We should be stunned that we are like shipwrecked sailors stranded on a raft with a makeshift sail made out of a shirt, utterly and absolutely lost- unless (we know not how!) this Wind blows.

So, we need to stop, and let ourselves feel the plight that Jesus said Nicodemus was in. The Lord said Nicodemus was in a room where all the door handles were too high for him to reach. And then He told this helpless man,

"Reach Up! You must reach up if you want to enter into the Kingdom of God!"

Jesus' Surprising Declaration to Nicodemus

Has it ever struck you as strange that before Nicodemus can even ask a question or state his reason for coming to Jesus by night that the Lord boldly declared to him the necessity of being born again? The context is very important here. Notice in **John 2:23** that ... [Jesus] **was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.**

... then notice in **John 3:2** what Nicodemus says when he comes to Jesus,

Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

In other words, Nicodemus was among the crowd of **John 2:23** who are impressed enough with Jesus' miracles to *believe* that He is somehow from God. So far- this is very encouraging.

But then **John 2:24&25** sets the stage for Jesus' less than enthusiastic response to Nicodemus' affirmation of faith.

**24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men,
25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.**

So, what does this mean? What did Jesus know about these so-called believers that isn't apparent to us? What did He see in them that caused Him to hold back and not give Himself fully to them?

The answer is given in the next few verses as one of these "believers" comes to Jesus by night, Nicodemus. What did Jesus know about the Nicodemus-types who only believed in Jesus as a wonder- worker? He knew that while they were curious- they were not born again. So, the reason Jesus doesn't even need to wait for Nicodemus to ask a question is, as **John 2:25** says,

... He Himself knew what was in man.

So, what we learn from **John 3:3-10** is Jesus' Own Personal View of Man's condition- Jesus' View of "**what was in man**" and His Remedy for that condition. It is not flattering to hear, but it is utterly essential. So, let's examine these two things:

- A. Man's condition
- B. God's Remedy

... as believed by Jesus Himself.

John 3:6 is the main statement about the human condition that Jesus Personally believed and taught:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

And I would paraphrase it like this:

When you are conceived and born by human parents, you share in a human nature; and when you are conceived and born by the Divine Spirit of God- you share in His Divine Nature. Your first birth makes you alive to human life. Your second birth makes you alive to spiritual life. Our first birth knits out hearts affectionately to our earthly father. Our second birth knits our hearts affectionately to our Heavenly Father. Our first birth gives us an appetite for warm milk and a cool reputation and hot sex. Our second birth gives us an appetite for God and His Holiness. Our first birth imparts a natural impulse to

save our lives. Our second birth imparts a supernatural impulse to lose our lives for Christ's Sake.

Four Things Jesus Believed and Taught About the Unregenerate

Let's ponder for a few moments Jesus' Own Personal View of people who have not been born again (the unregenerate)- people who have not been born of the Spirit but only by their parents. Four things:

- 1. They are Flesh**
- 2. They are Dead**
- 3. They will not enter into the Kingdom of God**
- 4. Their religious Efforts are Works of the Flesh**

Let's examine them closely

1. They are Flesh

John 3:6

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

This means that the entire human race- by virtue of the fact that they are all fallen are- by nature- merely human and utterly devoid of the Holy Spirit.

Jude 19

These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.

The word, "**flesh**" in **John 3:6** refers to human Nature that is out of touch with God. In **Romans 7:18** Paul describes the moral condition of such human Nature like this:

Romans 7:18

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not.

The flesh is human Nature cut off from the Spirit of God. When human Nature, with all its drives and desires and longings and needs, is cut off from the all-satisfying God, the result is "**no good thing**": utter moral corruption, total depravity.

Galatians 5:19-21

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Jesus had an extraordinarily low view of human Nature as it exists in the world apart from the New Birth. And in this Passage with Nicodemus- Jesus speaks in general terms, not just about some bad group.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

All people everywhere are cut off from God. In them is no good thing. The byways of their hearts are like a great subterranean sewer system dumping sewage into the Mississippi River.

Matthew 15:18-20

18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

20 "These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

Apart from being born again by God the Holy Spirit- human Nature- no matter where you find it- is totally depraved. There is no moral good in it at all. Fallen Man is all evil- all the time:

Genesis 6:5

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Fallen Man may have the capacity to compose symphonies or to maneuver in space with computerized jet-packs- but these achievements are of no *moral* value in God's sight. Wherever Man does not humbly rely on God for Hope and Power and Desire- the product of his brain is an idol.

Romans 14:23b

... whatever is not from faith is sin.

Believing what Jesus believes about the human heart, we ought to be astonished that Gulfport is anything more than a giant waste disposal site for the toxic emissions of human Nature. It is God's sovereign Grace that keeps the lid on the volcano of Evil in people who are not born again.

So, the first thing Jesus says about the human condition apart from the New Birth by the Spirit is that all people are simply Flesh, devoid of the Holy Spirit, totally depraved.

2. They Are Dead

John 3:6b

... that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Our first birth gives life to our flesh—we breathe, we desire, we think. But when Jesus adds,

... that which is born of the Spirit is spirit

... He implies that until then we are spiritually dead. A birth brings forth life. Prior to our new birth we are spiritually lifeless.

The Bible teaches that things were not always like this. When God created Man, He created more than mere flesh, and He created more than walking dead men.

Genesis 2:7

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Then God put Man in the garden with every good thing for his enjoyment and warned him that self-reliant rebellion would bring death:

In the day that you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall die.

But man *did* eat, and his Rebellion and Death have been the mark of his posterity to this day. Before the Fall, Man enjoyed the indwelling Presence of God's Spirit giving him spiritual Life and Unity with God. But after Man's Rebellion, the Spirit withdrew from Man and left him in a spiritually dead Condition, cut off from God, with a heart of stone toward God. Ever since that day- God's Work has been the Redemption of a new Humanity.

And in **John 3**- Jesus teaches us that God is gathering a new Humanity by bringing people back from spiritual Death. The Kingdom of God is the Reign of God over the new people of God who have been born of the Spirit into newness of Life:

Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

3. They Will Not Enter the Kingdom of God

That is the third thing Jesus says about the condition of people who are not born again: since they are mere flesh, devoid of the Spirit, and since they are dead in Sin like a stone toward God: Therefore *they will not enter the Kingdom of God*.

This means that they will *not* inherit Eternal Life (**John 3:16**) and that the Wrath of God rests upon them. These must have been terrifying words to Nicodemus. Picture the scene. Nicodemus has watched Jesus in Jerusalem. He has seen a Man of incomparable Power work miracles and a Man of incomparable Love help the needy. And he is drawn to this Man and seeks Him out at night and says:

John 3:2

Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

And before Nicodemus can take another breath, Jesus says with very unsentimental compassion:

"Nicodemus, people who aren't born again go to hell."

4. Their Religious Efforts Are Works of Flesh

The fact that Jesus says all this to *Nicodemus the Pharisee* reveals the fourth thing about Jesus' view of Man apart from the Spirit. There is a world of difference between religion and new Life in the Holy Spirit. You can see Jesus shaking His Head in verse 10:

John 3:10b

... Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?

So, it is possible to be an usher, a trustee, a deacon, a Sunday School teacher, a seminary professor, and a pastor and not be born again. Religious crowds in Jerusalem believed on Jesus as a sign-worker, but He would not give Himself to them because He knew that beneath the religious veneer there was no new Birth and no spiritual Life. They had not been born of the Spirit. They were only flesh. And all their religion was the work of the flesh.

In summary, Jesus looks out over fallen humanity and knows **"what is in them."** They are people:

- ✓ Who are merely flesh, in whom dwells no moral Good,
- ✓ Who are dead in sin, destitute of spiritual Life with no receptivity to God,
- ✓ Who are therefore excluded from God's Kingdom and Eternal Life, and
- ✓ Who often deceive themselves that all is well by being religious people and working in the Church.

Desperation and the Sovereign Work of the Spirit

Now what? Someone should ask, *"Why do you say all this? What do you expect to accomplish by telling us such things? If I am just flesh, devoid of God's Spirit, with no moral good, if I am dead in sin and a stone toward God, if I am shut out of God's Kingdom and my heart is so deceptive. I use religion as a front for my deadness, what do you expect me to do? I'm so depraved I can't do anything good. What do you expect of me?"*

For the person who honestly asks that question there is great hope. Because the response I expect is *Desperation*. I don't expect anybody to be born again who hears the Gospel but never feels a sense of Desperation. Why else would Jesus say to Nicodemus,

"You must be born again by the Spirit,"

... and then say in verse 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."

The wind is free. It obeys its own secret laws not ours. When it blows, the sailors are glad. When it does not, they are desperate. Surely this verse is meant to show us that we are utterly at the Mercy of the Free and Sovereign Spirit of God. He blows where He wills. What do I expect when I proclaim this Truth? A sense of utter helplessness and desperation. Is it an accident that the last words we hear from Nicodemus are the bewildered,

"How can these things be?"

You see, the new birth is not your own doing. It is the Sovereign, Free, supernatural Work of the Holy Spirit brooding as Creator over your soul, raising you from the dead, making you a new creature, with a heart that trusts and loves Jesus. *You* do not initiate your new birth any more than Lazarus initiated his resurrection. The resurrection of Lazarus to new life was owing to one thing: the *Word* of Jesus Christ—"Come forth!"

Therefore, Peter says to Christians,

1Peter 1:23-25

23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.

24 For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,

25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

Ever since Adam and Eve, God has been rescuing people from death. And the way He has always done it and continues to do it is by the Power of His *Spirit* and the Proclamation of His *Word*. If you are alive in Christ, you have been born anew by His Spirit through His Word. Paul says,

1Thessalonians 1:5

for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Sometimes, to my misery, the Gospel misfires in the mouth of a weak and worldly preacher. But when the Holy Spirit is upon the message, there is an explosion of life. The Word and the Spirit quickens dead hearts and brings forth faith. The Gospel is preached; and God the Creator Spirit says, "*Let there be life.*" And the eyes of the heart are opened; and a child is born; and the cries of desperation and bewilderment give way to cooing and sucking at the breast of the Spirit.

Three Applications for Today

So here are three brief applications to our life today.

1. We Should Examine Our Own Hearts and Lives

First, since religion is a common cover for not being born again (**Matthew 7:21**), each of us churchgoers should constantly examine ourselves to see if we are truly born of God (**2Corinthians 13:5**). The New Testament gives us many tests to apply to ourselves. Here are five:

- **Romans 8:7–9**, "The mind of the flesh *does not submit to God's law* . . . but you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit if the Spirit dwells in you." The test: do you have a submissive spirit to God's commands or are you rebellious?
- **1Corinthians 12:3**, "No one can say *Jesus is Lord* except by the Holy Spirit." The test: Is Jesus really your Lord? Do you key off of him each day? Do you seek his will in all things and subordinate your will to his?
- **Romans 8:15&16**, "You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have *received the Spirit of sonship*. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." The test: do you have a humble confidence before God that casts out fear and fills you with a childlike delight in knowing God as your loving Father? Do you cry out, "Abba! Father!"?
- **1Corinthians 2:14**, "The natural man *does not welcome the things of the Spirit of God*, for they are foolishness to him." The test: Do the things of the Spirit attract you? Are you hungry for his truth and his fellowship and his power in your life? Or do they seem silly and unattractive compared to other things. (Cf. **1Peter 2:2**.)
- **1John 4:7**, "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and *he who loves has been born of God*." The test: Do you love people? Do you have good will toward them in your heart? Do you find fulfillment in working for the joy of their faith? (Cf. **Galatians 5:22**.)

2. We Should Humble Ourselves

After testing ourselves for the evidences of the Spirit's Presence, the second application to make of Jesus' Words is a deep humbling of ourselves. How lowly and meek and broken and contrite will be the joy of a believer who realizes how desperate and helpless he was and is apart from the life-giving Work of God's Spirit! What a difference it will make in our fellowship if we approached every gathering with this thought: except for the Mercy of God's Spirit, I am a dead man.

3. We Should Be Desperate for the Spirit

Finally, realize that when Jesus calls us at The Covenant of Peace Church to join Him in making disciples of all nations- He is calling us to raise the dead. But only the Holy Spirit can do that. Do you see what that means? It means that we will be weak and ineffective in our witness until the Holy Spirit comes upon us with Power. And when He does, we will say with Paul, "**My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.**"

