

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: January 5, 2014

The Washing of Regeneration

by Dan Trygg

“He saved us, not out from works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

Titus 3:5,6

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’”

Matthew 19:28

“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, ²³ for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, by means of the living and abiding word of God.”

1 Peter 1:22-23

The NT Greek word translated as “regeneration” here is “*paliggenesia*”. It is a compound from “*genesis*” and “*palin*”. “*Genesis*” occurs 40 times in the Septuagint Greek translation of the OT. It means “origin, birth, generations, family, kindred”, and five times in the NT (Matt. 1:1,18; Lk. 1:14; Jas. 1:23; 3:6). The word “*palin*” means “again”, or “anew”. It occurs 186 times in the Greek versions. The compound word, “*paliggenesia*” occurs twice, once in Matt. 19:28, and also in this verse, Titus 3:5. It means “birth anew” or “birth again”. In Matthew it is translated as the “regeneration” in the NASB and KJV, and the “new world” in the ESV and RSV. This “rebirth” of the earth, when Jesus returns and sits on the throne of His glory, is a radical transformation, a new beginning. This will not be same-old, same-old. The next time it mentions that Jesus will sit on His glorious throne is Matthew 25:31. There, the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will judge them. This is an event that happens at the end of the age, when this world is destroyed and God will create a “new heavens and a new earth”. This new creation is the “regeneration”, or “new birth” of a new world.

This is important background for our understanding of Titus 3:5. What it indicates is that **the “washing of regeneration” will produce a new life within us**, a new birth, a new creation of something that is more than just a cleaned up version of what I was before. No, this new life is a radically transformed, higher form of life than what I was before. **The washing of the Holy Spirit does not just clean away the effects of sin, it creates an entirely new kind of life inside of me.** The apostle had written earlier to the Corinthians, “If any person is in Christ, he is a new creature, the old (former) things have passed away, behold new things have come to be” (II Cor. 5:17). **I am not the person I was before.** I am different. Former things that held me captive, or ruled my life, have lost their grip. Old chains had fallen off. **I am free to live and move differently, ...and I AM DIFFERENT!!**

This fits with what the apostle John wrote, “Beloved, NOW we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is” (I Jn. 3:2). Something has happened that has made us different. In vs. 9, John says, “the one having been begotten out from God does not do sin, because **the seed (lit., ‘sperm’) of God abides in him, and the new self is not able to sin, because out from God he has been begotten.**” People misunderstand what John is saying, and try to modify the language to fit our inconsistent experience. I don’t think he was saying that Christians don’t sin, ...or even don’t *habitually* sin (whatever that means). I think **John was making a statement about the nature of the new life, the unnatural, supernatural life produced by being begotten by the very sperm of God.** His point is that sin is not *at all* consistent with the nature of that new life, ...in fact, it is not *possible* for that God-generated life to produce sin. **The reality is that NOW we are children of God. This new life IS in us.** The mystery is that “it does not yet appear what we shall be”. **Somehow we have been transformed, at the very core of our being, ...even though we may not be seeing that worked out in our experience, as yet.** The Spirit is described as the “earnest money” or “down payment” of our inheritance in Christ (II Cor. 1:22).

Jesus put it this way, “every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire,” and, again, “**Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad,** for the tree will be known by its fruit” (Matt. 7:17-19; 12:33). **This is the radical genius of God’s grace. He knew we were sinners by nature, as well as by choice. We were like the bad tree.** We could never produce truly good fruit. Therefore, there is no question of our “being good enough”. **We could only produce the inferior, sick, bad fruit that comes from our defective, sinful natures.** God is the Realist of all realists. He knew how absolutely helpless we were to ever become fit for heaven. **Even if we could be cleansed from past sins, it was in our spiritual genes to only produce defective, imperfect, unacceptable fruit.** The best we could ever do is never

going to be good enough to be acceptable to a Holy God, or to be fit for heaven. From the get-go, God *never* for a moment thought that we could “be good enough” for heaven, ...nor was it *ever* possible for us to “work our way to heaven” by good works. Isaiah had written that even our attempts at righteous deeds were as abhorrent as polluted, filthy garments (Isa. 64:6). **God’s plan? Change us from the inside out. Change our spiritual DNA, so we would produce different, healthy, good and righteous fruit. How do we get our spiritual genetic makeup changed? We must be born from above.**

This brings us to the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3. Even though in the English it would appear that this passage is talking about being born *a second time*, that is not at all what Jesus was driving at. **There was a miscommunication between what Jesus meant, and what Nicodemus understood.** It revolves around the phrase, “born again”. The word translated “again” here, is a word that can mean either “again” or “from above”. **Jesus was saying, “You must be born from above”, but Nicodemus thought he meant “born again”.** Being born *again* wouldn’t solve anything, would it? I mean, we would just be younger, and would have to go through life all over again. **Being born again does not address the real problem, ...namely, that we are sinners by nature.** If we were somehow born *again*, we would *still* make sinful choices, because we are *still* sinful people. No, we must look more closely at what the Master was saying. **Jesus was teaching that we must be born from above.** Our earthly existence and natural make-up are *incapable* of a life that looks like the fruit of the Spirit. Why? Because it is human, fleshly, sinful. Jesus said, “That which is having been begotten out from the flesh *is* flesh...” (Jn. 3:6). **The flesh, the natural self, can only produce a fleshly, natural life.** So many Christians are living right there. They are trying to produce the fruit of the Spirit by using natural, fleshly means and efforts. *It won’t work*, ...not any more than you can get figs from thistle plants, or grapes from thorn bushes (Matt. 7:16). “...a bad tree *cannot* produce good fruit...” (Matt.7:18). It is foolishness to try. It will not work. The end result is guaranteed to be failure. **We cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit by the efforts of the flesh. It is only the Spirit in our lives that can produce the good fruit.**

Paul told us very clearly what the outworking of the flesh is: “Now the works of the flesh are plainly to be seen: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar... (Gal. 5:19-21). James identifies bitter envy and selfish ambition as the result of earthly and natural wisdom (Jas. 3:14,15). In I Cor. 3:3, Paul states that jealousy and strife are marks of living according to the flesh. **These are the bad fruits from the bad tree. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is:** “love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22,23). James taught that the wisdom from above is pure, peace-loving, gentle, open-to-reason, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, and without hypocrisy (3:17). The love produced by the Spirit is patient, kind, not jealous or arrogant, does not act inappropriately, does not seek its own way, is not irritable, nor resentful or unforgiving (I Cor. 13:4,5). **These are the good fruits of the good tree.** Just as “that which is born of the flesh *is* flesh”, in the same way, “that which is having been begotten out from the Spirit *is* spirit.” **If we want to bear the fruit of the Spirit, we must be born from the Spirit. Thus, Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above’” (Jn. 3:6,7).**

Peter also emphasizes the reality of the qualitative change God has brought about in our new birth. He wrote, “...for you have been born again (lit., ‘having been begotten again’), not out from perishable seed (Gk. = *sporos*), but imperishable/incorruptible, by means of the living and abiding word of God” (I Pet. 1:23). **Note Peter’s point: Our rebirth is not like our natural, physical birth.** Our natural birth was corruptible, mortal and perishable. This new birth is quite different. It is from seed which is incorruptible, imperishable, immortal. This is not simply being born *again*, or being begotten *again*. **This is being begotten from a higher source, an incorruptible, imperishable source. We are different from what we were before.** There is something different, a new, incorruptible life within us. If you look at the top of this study, you can see how this is Peter’s logical reason why we can now love one another. This kind of love is *agapaō*, the same kind of love as in I Corinthians 13 and I John 4:7f. This is *not* a natural, human love. John tells us that this kind of love is from God Himself. The one loving with this kind of love is someone who “has been begotten out from God and experientially knows God” (4:7). **Again, the transforming new birth, ...the birth from above, ...the birth out from God, the Spirit, ...the birth from incorruptible seed, has made possible a new ability**, the ability to love as God loves. Jesus’ words echo back, “Make the tree good, and its fruit good...” The *agapē* love comes from the Spirit of *agapē*. (The love in Gal. 5:22 is *agapē*, also.)

It is important to understand that we are made radically different than our previous lives, so that we will be open to doing things in new ways. This new life within us is birthed, sustained and energized by the Holy Spirit. God, however, gives us great latitude to partner with Him in walking out these new possibilities in our day to day lives. **If we think we are unchanged, we will look for nothing new. If we believe God has made us different, we will expect and ask Him to lead us into experiencing the power of the new life.**