

Spiritual Death and Regeneration

(Genesis 2:17; John 3:3, Titus 3:5)

In Genesis 2, Yahweh (the LORD) God placed Adam and Eve in a Garden with a tree from which they were prohibited from eating the fruit – the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In verse 17, He told them that if they ate from the tree they would "certainly die." In Chapter 3, both ate and did not immediately die physically. Instead, their immediate consequence was a spiritual death. This is not specified in the text, however, it is seen. Both are cast out of the Garden of Eden and separated from intimate personal fellowship with God. The New Testament Apostle Paul, author of Ephesians, describes this death as: "You were dead in the trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). Adam and Eve sinned – they did not obey God. And the immediate result of their sin was they died inside. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve did what they had never done before – they hid from Yahweh God.

Hiding themselves from God was the evidence that an internal death had occurred. This is often described as a spiritual death because man is both a biological body and a spirit. The Bible presents man as more than a container of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, calcium, and phosphorus. Man is a spirit; he has a soul. Jesus said, "Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mat 10:28b). In John 3:6, Jesus told Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Paul writes about "our spirit" (Rom 8:16), and he writes about our spirit and soul in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. "And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ". Man is commanded to love God with his heart, mind, soul, and strength. Verses like this emphasize the complexity of the composition of man. The point is clear: there is a physical aspect to man and a spiritual aspect.

God is the One who orchestrates the birth of all humans. He is our Creator. Psalm 139 describes God creating humans in the womb of their mother. And the same God is the One who gives humans a second birth or makes them spiritually alive. Jesus told Nicodemus you must be born again. Nicodemus needed what Adam and Eve needed. He was born spiritually dead, and in this state of being spiritually dead, Nicodemus could not see or enter the kingdom of God. Without a birth from God – a second birth – Nicodemus will die and go to hell. All humans are born spiritually dead. Again, Paul writes about this:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. (Eph 2:4–5 CSB)

Paul calls making a believer alive "regeneration" in Titus 3:5. "God saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." Merriam-Webster defines "regenerate" as "spiritually reborn or converted." Spiritually reborn is what Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be. "Washing of regeneration" refers to the cleansing of the believer that occurs when someone is reborn. Renewal is another way of saying to make new spiritually. All this is the work of the Holy Spirit according to Jesus in John 3 and Paul in Titus 3.

From Adam to Nicodemus, all who desire to be with God, to be in right standing with God, to see and enter His eternal kingdom must be born again and from above. The NET Bible reads, "You must be born from above." They need a birth that comes from above, which is another way of saying from God. The reason "again" and "above" can be used interchangeably is the Greek word in John 3:3 and v.7 for "again" is *anōthen*. This word has a double meaning: "above" and "again." "Above" emphasizes this comes from God; "again" emphasizes this is a second birth. This regeneration is described in the OT as the circumcision of the heart. In Leviticus 26:41 hearts are uncircumcised; in Deuteronomy 30:6, God will circumcise your heart. Uncircumcised ears and hearts are ways of describing the spiritually dead. In Romans 2, Paul explains that a true Jew is more than biological. A true Jew is one who inwardly had their heart circumcised (Rom 2:28-29) or has been regenerated or born of God, anew, again, and from above.

Adam and Eve had to be regenerated before they could return to fellowship with God and inherit eternal life when they died. And, so do you. Jesus said without this regeneration, one remains in a state of being spiritually dead – there is no alternative. Before the death of Christ, OT saints (people regenerated) believed the promises God revealed to them. For Adam and Eve, it was the promise of Genesis 3:15; for Noah, it was the promise of salvation in the ark. For Abraham, it was the promise of offspring (Gen 15:6). Today, under the New Covenant, faith in the LORD Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and His death, burial, and resurrection for one's own sins is necessary to be born again.