

THE DISCERNER



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Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.

Ephesians 5:6-12

**The Nicodemus Encounter
Five Critical Points of Information Regarding the New Birth Gleaned
from a Practical Observation of a Familiar Conversation**

THE DISCERNER
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Introduction

Three times Jesus told Nicodemus of the necessity of the new birth. First Jesus said,

John 3:3

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” NASB

Next, after Nicodemus misunderstood the new birth and related it to a physical birth, Jesus clarified that the new birth was spiritual by saying,

John 3:5-6

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” NASB

Then, for a third time, Jesus informed Nicodemus of the new birth and this time emphasized the absolute necessity of the new birth when He instructed Nicodemus,

John 3:7

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” NASB

There are many great truths to be gleaned in these statements of Christ regarding the new birth. In this study we will examine five critical points of information regarding the new birth (regeneration).

1. The Absolute Certainty of Christ’s Words (3:3, 5)
2. The Logical Order in Regeneration (Jn. 3:3)
3. The Cause of Regeneration (Jn. 3:5)
4. The Nature of Regeneration (Jn. 3:6)
5. The Necessity of Regeneration (Jn. 3:7)

Then we will note what is missing from Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus and finally we will briefly address questions related to responsibility. The Appendix contains tables depicting the biblical descriptions and differences of the regenerate and unregenerate. Thus, they show the radical nature of regeneration.

Five Critical Points of Information Regarding the New Birth

1. The absolute Certainty of Christ's Words (3:3, 5)

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

"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.'" NASB

Using the phrase, "Truly, truly" Jesus stressed to Nicodemus the absolute certainty of what He was about to say. The phrase translates the Greek phrase "Amen, amen." It is translated, "verily, verily" in the KJV and "Truly, truly" in the NASB. The single use of the word is translated "amen." Vine's New Testament Dictionary points out that *amen* is transliterated from Hebrew into both Greek and English. Thus, in both the Greek and English, pronunciation would be similar to the Hebrew.

This is an intense word that actually has the root of its meaning in the very nature of God Himself. In the Hebrew Old Testament God is called the Amen in Deut. 7:9 which is translated: "... the *faithful* God..." (the amen God); Isaiah 49:7 "the LORD who is *faithful*" (the LORD who is amen); Isaiah 65:16 "the God of truth" (the God of amen). Thus, His testimonies and precepts are *amen*, translated *sure* in Ps. 19:7; 111:7; His prophecies are amen, translated *sure* in Hosea 5:9. In Revelation 3:14 Jesus is called the Amen. **In the light of Scripture's use of the word *amen* to reflect the nature of God and His Word one must not neglect the extreme importance of Christ's use of the phrase in John 3:3 and 3:5 as He speaks of the necessity of being born again.**

Repeating the word *amen* twice in verse 3 and if we include verse 5 where it also appears twice referring to the same subject, Jesus, very intensely employs divine authority to introduce the subject of being born again. Therefore, there can be no exceptions to what follows for the subject Jesus is about to introduce to Nicodemus and the facts associated with it are as certain as God Himself. This is to say, there can be absolutely no exception of any kind to the certainty of the need of being born again in order to:

- See the kingdom of God (3:3)
- Enter into the kingdom of God (3:5)

2. The Logical Order of Regeneration (Jn. 3:3)

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” NASB

The second of five critical points of information regarding the new birth is the *logical order of regeneration*. An understanding of the context will help us understand what is meant by “logical order” as well as its importance.

In the immediate context John, at the close of Chapter 2 had just informed us of an interesting event. Jesus was in Jerusalem performing miracles and because of the miracles many believed in Him (John 2:23). Then, in the very next verse, John immediately presents us with a contrast through the use of the conjunction “but” followed by a very forceful statement as he informs us that although many believed in Jesus because of the miracles, Jesus **was not** entrusting Himself to them. In the original Greek language the word translated *entrusting* in verse 24 which refers to Christ **not** entrusting Himself to those who believed in Him is the same Greek word translated *believed* in verse 23 which refers to those who believed in Jesus. The word means believe, entrust, trust, commit, etc. It is the normal word which is used almost 100 times by the apostle John and translated “believe” the majority of times.

Note then that John is clearly setting a contrast before his readers when he writes of Christ in verse 24, *“But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them...”* The contrast is unmistakably clear and is shown to exist between those of verse 23 who are said to have believed in Jesus when they saw the miracles and Jesus Himself in verse 24. They believed **but Jesus was not** entrusting Himself to them.

Then in verse 25 John explains the reason why Christ was not entrusting Himself to those of whom it was just said *believed in His name*. Jesus did not entrust Himself to them because He knew what was in man. The fact that Jesus knew what was in man refers to the divine nature of Jesus. John introduced us to the divinity of Jesus at the opening of this letter by **declaring** Christ’s deity (1:1, 14, and 18). He then **demonstrated** Christ’s deity by writing of His omniscience (1:48-49

all-knowing), the miracles He performed which depicted Christ's omnipotence (2:7-11, 23 all-powerful) and again here in 2:25 His omniscience by the fact that being God, Christ can see the hearts of men (Compare 1 Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 17:10).¹

Because Jesus knew all men (Jn. 2:24b) He needed no one to bear witness to Him concerning the belief of these individuals. Christ saw right into their very hearts and there He saw that their belief was not genuine.

Why was their belief not genuine? Again the text informs us. It was because of "*what was in man.*" This is a reference to the sinful condition of all humanity. Such a condition is the natural state of all people apart from God. This is a condition that will be discussed more fully later but for now it is enough to say that these were those who believed in Jesus apart from a divine work of the Spirit of God. Thus they had no genuine awareness of their own personal sinful condition before the infinite holy God of creation. Consequently, Jesus did not entrust Himself to them.

Before we move away from this text take note of the order that is presented before us in verses 23 through 25. First, with their physical eyes the people saw the miracles Jesus performed and then in their natural understanding (apart from a divine work of the Spirit) they believed. Nevertheless they were not saved as revealed by verse 25.

1. They saw with the natural eye
2. They believed with the natural heart
3. They remained lost in their natural condition

This brings us to what we have described as the logical order in regeneration. Notice Christ's words to Nicodemus in John 3:3,

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

The subject which Christ introduces with such absolute certainty ("*Truly, truly*") is as concise as it is certain and in this concise or to-the-

¹ In the book of revelation John sees Jesus with eyes like a flame of fire (Revelation 1:14). This description depicts Christ's piercing vision as He is able to look into the core of a person's heart and judge one's motives.

point statement Christ expresses a logical order “... *unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” The word translated *see* is the Gk. word *eido* and it means *to know with certainty*. The word *eido* communicates the idea of having an understanding of something—in this case an understanding of the kingdom of God. We also use a similar form of speech when we say, “I see” after finally understanding something we previously did not comprehend.

Therefore, in this context Jesus is saying that **before** anyone can see (have an understanding) of the kingdom of God that person **must be** born again. Without any question, Jesus states the logical order to be regeneration (born again) then understanding (see). In Christ’s words, *understanding follows regeneration*. Furthermore, because belief involves knowledge (knowing) it too, by necessity, must in logical order follow regeneration. Note that Christ **did not** tell Nicodemus that he had to see (have an understanding of) the kingdom of God in order to be born again—the order most assumed today. However, the verse **does not say**, “Unless one sees the kingdom of God, he cannot be born again.” The order is not understanding, then regeneration. It is regeneration, then knowing, and then belief. Under the order presented by Christ a person:

1. Is born again
2. Sees (has an understanding of) the kingdom of God with the spiritual eye
3. Believes with a spiritual heart
4. Enters the kingdom of God

Notice in this logical order that faith (Believes with a spiritual heart) follows regeneration (Being born again). The reversal of the order of such concise clear words of the Master among so many evangelicals in today’s age is both shocking and appalling. Like the rebellious people in the days of Isaiah many have turned things around (See Is. 29:16).

3. The Cause of Regeneration (Jn. 3:5)

“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.’” NASB

As we saw in the last three verses of chapter 2, John presented a contrast between those who believed in Jesus’ name when they saw the

miracles He performed and Christ not entrusting Himself to them. In this case the contrast was revealed by the word “but” in verse 24, “*But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them...*” Thus, in the previous verses of chapter 2 John revealed a belief that was not genuine.

Consider now an additional contrast John presents in chapter 3. Chapter 3 begins with the same Greek word translated “but” in 2:24. Therefore, the text is communicating to us that what follows in chapter three will in some way be a contrast to the last few verses of chapter 2. The contrast in these two chapters however, is not between the people of chapter 2 and Nicodemus. The Bible nowhere explicitly tells us whether or not Nicodemus was regenerate so a contrast between the truly unbelieving people in 2 and Nicodemus is unwarranted in the immediate context. Rather, the contrast is between the cause of the non genuine belief of the unregenerate people in chapter 2 and the description Jesus gives to Nicodemus in chapter 3 regarding the cause of genuine belief. The second contrast then is between causes:

1. (2:23-25)The cause of the natural man’s non genuine belief—the sinful nature.

The text indicates that these individuals possessed no genuine commitment to Jesus. Instead, they were committed to themselves and likely only believed in Jesus after seeing the miracles because they perceived that Christ by His power could fulfill their desires. Their own satisfaction was in view as opposed to Jesus.

2. (3:3-8)The cause of the regenerate man’s genuine belief—the Spirit.

In verse 5 Jesus stated explicitly that the cause of being born again mentioned in verse 3 is none other than the Holy Spirit. It is also interesting to note again that the most commonly assumed cause among many for a person being born again is faith. But according to the words of Christ one is not born again by faith but of the Spirit. Jesus’ words were clear; to see the kingdom of God and enter the kingdom of God one must be born of the Spirit.

The phrase “born of water” has led many to believe in baptismal regeneration.² However, such a belief is not based on the text but is the result of reading a foreign meaning into the text. Jesus’ use of the phrase “born of water” is a further emphasis on the Spirit and His work using the Word of God as is evident by at least the following four reasons:

1. The immediate context

Verse 6, which provides a summary of verse 5, specifically eliminates any reference to literal water as it states explicitly, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh...” The idea implied is that anything physical (literal water in this case) can only relate to the physical and can do nothing to effect spiritual birth. Furthermore, Christ went on to say in the verse, “... that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” In this statement He further emphasized the fact that it is the Spirit of God Who causes the new birth. Again in verse 8 Jesus attributes the cause of new birth to the Spirit and does not mention water, when He says, “...so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Thus, the water mentioned in verse 5 is merely a description of either the Spirit or His work or both.

2. The Old Testament’s description of the Spirit in terms characteristic of water

Multiple Old Testament references describe the Holy Spirit in terms characteristic of water, e. g., “pour” (Is. 32:15; 44:3; Ez. 36:25-27). Jesus’ question to Nicodemus in verse 10, “Are you a teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?” implies that Nicodemus, being a teacher and therefore having studied the Old Testament should have been aware of the Old Testament’s description of the Holy Spirit in terms characteristic of water. Nicodemus therefore, should have known Jesus was not referring to anything physical.

² Baptismal regeneration is the belief that baptism by water is instrumental in regenerating a person.

3. The New Testament description of the regenerating work of the Spirit in terms characteristic of water

The New Testament illustrates the regenerating work of the Spirit in terms characteristic of water (Titus 3:5-6). Following the Old Testament's description of the Spirit in terms characteristic of water verse 6 of Titus 3 actually uses the word *poured*.

4. The New Testament references to the cleansing nature of the Word of God

It is also possible that the word *water* in John 3:5 refers to the cleansing nature of the Word of God as used by the Holy Spirit in regeneration (1 Pt. 1:23; John 15:3; Eph. 5:25-26; Titus 3:5).

Essentially, the cause of regeneration is clearly described by Jesus to be the Holy Spirit as opposed to faith, man's will or action.

Further illustrating the Spirit's independence from man in His work of regeneration is Jesus' example of the wind in verse 8. Personifying wind, Jesus said it has its own will.³ He then acknowledged Nicodemus' awareness of the wind's effects but that Nicodemus did not know the wind's origin or destination. Thus, Christ emphasized the fact He initially stated to Nicodemus, "the wind blows where it wills." And then said, "... so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." By this Jesus **did not mean** no one knows where the regenerated person comes from or is going. We know from other verses that those who walk according to the Spirit (having been born of the Spirit) do the things of the Spirit (Rm. 8:4-5). Instead, what Christ was illustrating with the wind analogy and its likeness to everyone who is born of the Spirit was the independency of the Holy Spirit as He works to regenerate. We see in the regenerate person the effects of the Spirit but cannot direct the Spirit to regenerate someone for He does as He wills. This agrees with other verses that demonstrate the **absolute independence** of the will of God concerning His work of regeneration. Note the independence of God's will in the following,

³ The Gk. word translated *wishes* in the NAS is *thelo*. It can mean *wish, desire, intend* and is often translated in the New Testament as *will*. The RSV translates John 3:8 as "The wind blows where it wills..."

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, ¹³ **who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**"

John 1:12-13

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

John 6:63

¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, **"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."** ¹⁶ **So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."**

Romans 9:14-16

"In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures."

James 1:18

Therefore, being absolutely independent, the will of God the Spirit neither cooperates with nor follows man's will when it comes to regeneration.⁴

4. The Nature of Regeneration (In. 3:6)

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

This verse indicates that regeneration is a spiritual matter as opposed to being physical. Jesus is not speaking about natural physical birth but a spiritual birth. The need for spiritual birth exists because of the unregenerate's spiritual condition.

An understanding of what the Bible says about the spiritual condition of the lost will assist us in understanding the nature of regeneration. Since the unregenerate person's spirit is dead in sin (Eph. 2:1) he is in

⁴ This further illustrates the logical order of regeneration. The Spirit is not waiting on someone to believe. He makes believers.

spiritual need of being made alive by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:6). There is at least a two-fold meaning behind being dead in sin. First, being dead in sin means that a person is unholy (not righteous). A person's unholy or sinful condition renders him separated from God. Being separated from God is the second condition of being dead in sin. However, being separated from God must be understood in conjunction with or in the light of the first condition—being sinful (unrighteous). When separation from God is properly understood in the light of being a sinful condition, separation from God is seen for what it really is—an unholy condition wherein a person is antagonistically opposed to God. Consequently, separation from God is not merely descriptive of someone who has lost his or her way and is attempting through various means to find the right way back to God. No. Separation from God is the condition of the sinner being opposed to God Who is holy and Whose way is holy. Such a person is seeking his own way not to God but to satisfy his own sinful desires (Rm. 3:10-11; 8:5-8).

Therefore, the natural man's spirit is not dead in the sense of cessation or in another word, inactivity but dead in the sense of sinful separation, alienated from God as an unholy enemy against God. As a matter of fact, Ephesians 2, in the same place the Bible refers to the spirit of the natural man as being dead (Eph. 2:1), clearly goes on to indicate that although dead, the spirit of the natural man (the person not regenerated) is very active. Verses 2-3 describe the practice of those spiritually dead by the phrases,

- Walked according to the course of this world (Eph. 2:2)
- According to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2)
- Lived in the lusts of the flesh (Eph. 2:3)
- Indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind (Eph. 2:3)

These phrases describe sinful spiritual activity. In particular and as stated in Romans 8:7, activity that is characteristic of those who are enmity against God. Such activity is the result of a **heart** that is hostile to God; hostile because it is sinful (Jer. 17:9).

Therefore, merely changing one's activity is not enough. There must be a change in heart which will result in a change in behavior by which God is honored. From a biblical perspective, and since the Bible is God's Word, the biblical perspective is God's perspective, merely changing behavior ignores the real problem. Changed behavior without a changed heart may appear good to man who sees only the outward appearance but God Who looks on the heart, sees the corruption of the inward nature and He knows that the external behavior amounts to nothing more than a masquerade to cover a wicked heart. The corrupt heart may act nobly but it can never act righteously. It may present itself in such a way as to please men but it cannot please God for the actions flow from the same unrighteous polluted source—a heart upon which is written not the law of God but the lawlessness of sin (Compare Mat. 12:33-35 and Mk. 7:14-23 with Rm. 3:9-18; Rm. 8:8).

Therefore, the need to be born again (regenerated) calls for more than a change of behavior. It demands a radical change in respect to the heart. The biblical change that is in view **is not** redirecting the heart to a new start or beginning. The change the Bible speaks of **is not**, as some have said, "Turning over a new leaf." No. What God has in mind in the new birth is the reception of a new heart, a heart upon which is written not the law of sin but the law of God (Ez. 11:19; 36:26; Heb. 10:16). Thus, regeneration is a radical change in nature. It is fundamentally making a person a new creature and this is exactly how the apostle Paul described the person who is born again,

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." 2 Corinthians 5:17 NASB

The born again person passes from spiritual death in sin (Eph. 2:1) to spiritual life in Christ (Eph. 2:5); from not being righteous (Rm. 3:10) to possessing the righteousness of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9); from being a hostile enemy against God (Rm. 8:7, 5:10) to being at peace with God and reconciled to Him (Rm. 5:1, 10), etc. (See Tables in Appendix).

5. The Necessity of Regeneration (Jn. 3:7)

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

The astute reader will note that in this conversation with Nicodemus, Christ had not prior to verse 7 used the explicit phrase “You must be born again”. However, Christ has twice communicated to Nicodemus that regeneration is a necessity. In verse 3 Jesus said, “... unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Then again in verse 5 Jesus said, “... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” In addition to these two phrases indicating that being *born again* and being *born of water and the Spirit* are in essence referring to the same thing, they also demonstrate the necessity of regeneration. Thus, Jesus from the very beginning of this conversation with Nicodemus communicated three times the necessity of the new birth. First in verse three, again in verse five, and a third time in verse seven.

Two reasons for the necessity of the new birth

1. God says regeneration is a necessity

The necessity of the new birth was briefly mentioned at the beginning of this article. It was also noted under the heading *The absolute Certainty of Christ’s Words* that both verses 3 and 5 begin with Christ’s use of the phrase, “Truly, truly...” There we saw that the word *amen* translated *truly* is characteristic of both the very nature of God and His Word. Christ’s repeated use of this word stressed the absolute certainty of His words regarding the need for a person to be born again. Thus we see the first reason for the necessity of the new birth. It is absolutely necessary because Jesus, Who is God in the flesh (Jn. 1:1 with Jn. 1:14) said it is necessary.

2. Man’s Spiritual condition necessitates regeneration

Under *The Nature of Regeneration* we saw that the condition of the unregenerate is that of a sinner who is opposed to God and is seeking his own way. It is not a way to God that the sinner seeks but it is the satisfaction his own sinful desires that the sinner seeks. Such a condition is the character of the very nature of every unregenerate sinner.

At this point some may object saying that there are people who, although not born again, are seeking God but they just do not know

exactly how or where to find Him and consequently end up sinning in their pursuit of Him by misplacing their affections. This view is usually maintained by skeptics of the biblical doctrine of the total depravity of man or those who lack a complete understanding of the doctrine. In either case it is a clear contradiction of Romans 3:11 where we read, "There is none who seeks for God." Generally, these do not view sin as the vile condition of the person that it is. They do not interpret sinful behaviors as a quest to satisfy carnal lusts. Instead, they minimize sin and interpret its various expressions as merely misguided and misplaced attempts at finding God.

A close look at John 3:7 further illustrates the falsehood of such an objection. Note how Christ personalized the necessity for one to be born again which He previously mentioned in verses 3 and 5. In verse 7 Jesus pointed specifically to Nicodemus and said, "Do not marvel that I **said to you, 'You must be born again.'**" In the Greek the first pronoun is singular referring, specifically to Nicodemus, while the second is plural. In the first case Jesus referred to what he had specifically stated to Nicodemus and in the second, Jesus included Nicodemus. Thus, He spoke to and of Nicodemus specifically as He included him in the category of the rest of humanity.

Nicodemus was a very religious man. He was a Pharisee, a leader among the Jews and a religious teacher (3:1, 10). Each of these descriptions by which the Bible identifies Nicodemus is indicative of one whose moral standard was highly esteemed. From an external standpoint, a Pharisee's pursuit of the things of God was unmatched. In that day the thought was that if anyone was going to heaven it would certainly be a Pharisee. So prevalent was this thought Jesus actually used the people's perception of a Pharisee's apparent righteousness to show that heaven's standard of righteousness was much higher. In Matthew 5:20 Jesus said that unless a person's righteousness exceeded that of a Pharisee, he would in no way enter into heaven (Mt. 5:20).

Of all people, Nicodemus certainly would have been the least misguided in pursuit of God and in need of only a small amount of course correction. Nevertheless, Jesus, instead of telling Nicodemus to keep up the good work and just make a couple of tweaks here and there

to what he was doing, told Nicodemus it was necessary that he be born again or he would neither see nor enter the kingdom of God. In essence what was true for every man (verses 3 and 5), whether he be a liar, pervert, murderer, thief, etc., was true for religious Nicodemus (v. 7).

Essentially then, in the lost person, there is nothing salvageable and nothing that merits being picked up and dusted off for heaven's use. The lost have nothing to offer either God or His kingdom. Instead, because the lost, by nature are enemies of God's holiness they deserve only to be picked up, judged and cast into the lake of fire for eternity. Before concluding that this is harsh recognize that this was exactly what Christ communicated to Nicodemus when He told Nicodemus that unless one is born again he can neither see (Jn. 3:3) nor enter into the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5) and then in verse 7 included Nicodemus. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus knew very well that a person would spend eternity in only one of two conditions—the glory of resurrection to life with God (heaven) or the grief of the judgment of God (hell)—if not heaven then hell. Consequently, the message Nicodemus heard from Christ was that if he was not born again he was at that very moment unforgiven and hell bound in spite of his religious acts.

By way of a similar example the apostle Paul recognized that his former life as a Pharisee held nothing that merited heaven or that was salvageable for heaven's use. This is why after describing his former life as a Pharisee (Phil. 3:1-6) he said all of those things that were formerly gain to him as a Pharisee (not gain for heaven), he counted as loss (Phil. 3:7) and rubbish (Phil. 3:8) and in need of being forgotten (Phil. 3:13).

According to God's own words the spiritual condition of the unregenerate renders the unregenerate useless,

Romans 3:12

*"All have turned aside, **together they have become useless**; There is none who does good, There is not even one."* NASB

The Greek verb translated useless which appears only here in the New Testament means *to make useless, render unserviceable* (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). The corresponding adjectives appear in Matthew 25:30 and Luke 17:10. The first occurrence refers to a slave Jesus said was

worthless (useless) and was to be cast into the outer darkness. The second adjective is used as a figure of speech among slaves referring to themselves as unprofitable as they did only what was commanded. According to Thayer, the slave calls himself unprofitable, “because, although he has done all, yet he has done nothing except what he ought to have done; accordingly, he possesses no merit, and could only claim to be called ‘profitable,’ should he do more than what he is bound to do.” The case of the sinner is much worse, since he cannot even do what is expected (Rm. 3:9-18; Gal. 3:10; Jm. 2:10). Thus, the word translated *useless* in Romans 3:12 captures the useless unprofitability of the spiritual condition of the unregenerate.

Therefore, the spiritual condition of the unregenerate necessitates regeneration. The lost need regeneration not recovery. They **need** regeneration which brings new life in the form of righteousness and reconciliation to God—regeneration by the Holy Spirit!

Something Missing

In this brief study we have examined the following five points:

1. The absolute Certainty of Christ’s words (3:3, 5)
2. The Logical Order in Regeneration (Jn. 3:3)
3. The Cause of Regeneration (Jn. 3:5)
4. The Nature of Regeneration (Jn. 3:6)
5. The Necessity of Regeneration (Jn. 3:7)

But there is something missing from Christ’s communication to Nicodemus regarding regeneration. An examination of verses 4 and 9 reveals Nicodemus asked Christ how one could be born again. Like most of us when faced with a dilemma, Nicodemus wanted the proverbial “how to” instructions on the matter. Perhaps he thought that if he had the instruction manual explaining how to be born again he could simply follow the procedures and by his efforts become born again.

It is interesting that Jesus never really answered this question. After Nicodemus’ first question as to how one is born again (3:4), Jesus repeated the need for one to be born again and explained that the new birth was the result of the will and work of the Holy Spirit (vs. 5-8).

However, Nicodemus still did not get it, so he asked again, “How can these things be?” Once again, Jesus, instead of answering Nicodemus’ how to question, asked Nicodemus what appears to have been a rhetorical question, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?” The question implied that Nicodemus, being a teacher of Israel should have been familiar with the need to be born again and the fact that it was a work that could only be performed by God.

In the Old Testament, with which Nicodemus would have been well versed, God commanded Israel to circumcise their hearts (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4). God even commanded them to make for themselves a new heart and a new spirit (Ez. 18:31). God gave these commands to:

1. Show the people their wicked spiritual condition.
The fact that the people needed a new heart and spirit indicated that the heart they currently possessed was wicked and needed replacement.
2. Show the people their **inability** to save themselves.
The fact that it was impossible for one to replace his/her own heart or spirit or even circumcise the heart was an indication to the people of their inability to change their own spiritual conditions.

A proper understanding on Israel’s part of their wicked condition before God and their inability to save themselves would have resulted in the people of Israel crying out to God for His grace and mercy knowing that such an endeavor as heart replacement or heart circumcision was a work only God could do. Instead, the Israelites generally concluded that it was by the works of the law (changing activity) that they could accomplish God’s requirement for righteousness (Rm. 9:31-32). In a sense they created their own “How To” manual.

Israel’s inability to keep the law perfectly both in heart and deed (Acts 15:10, context), which was God’s requirement (Dt. 27:26; Gal. 3:10; Jm. 2:10-11) should have been enough to cause them to recognize their condition and inability (Consider also the context of Jer. 13:23 for a clear statement of inability), but because of the deception of their own sinful hearts (Jer. 17:9), Israel failed to see that circumcision of the heart

could only be accomplished by the Spirit of God and not by the keeping of the Law (Rm. 2:29).

As part of the terms of the New Covenant God promised Israel He would give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them. God said **He** would remove the heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh (Ez. 11:19; 36:26). This too should have alerted them to their own inability but the pride of their heart blinded them. In the light of such history, Nicodemus should have known that the condition of being born again or regeneration was a function of the Holy Spirit as indicated by Ezekiel 36:27 and context, not a process achieved by man. Therefore there is no “How to” list.

Scripture no more explains the details as to how God regenerates a person than it explains the details as to how God spoke the creation into existence. Therefore, in one sense, asking how God makes a person born again is like asking how God brought the creation into existence by merely saying “Let there be.” The bottom line is, after God said “let there be” there was! By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God...” (Heb. 11:3). The answer as to how God spoke the creation into existence is forever hidden in the nature of God’s Sovereign will and power. Like the creation account, all we know is that regeneration is a divine work wrought by the divine power of God and His Word (Ephesians 5:25-26; Titus 3:4-7). As such, the new birth (regeneration) is not something man can achieve or for that matter, even explain how God accomplishes it. Consequently, there is no “How to” book or procedure for becoming born again. However, the fact that there is no “How to” procedure for becoming born again is not to be understood as grounds for negating either the sinner’s responsibility to believe or the Christian’s responsibility to accurately communicate the Gospel. We will address these at the close of this work.

John 3:14-15

“¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; ¹⁵ that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.” NASB

Instead of telling Nicodemus “how” Jesus told him **Who**. Using words Nicodemus would have understood Jesus gave the message of the Gospel to him. In verse 14 Jesus brought to the attention of Nicodemus a specific Old Testament account found in the book of Numbers chapter 21. In this account the Israelites became impatient with God and sinned (21:4-5). As judgment on their sin God sent poisonous snakes among them. Many people were bitten and died (21:6). Those who remained alive acknowledged their sin and the fact that they too, if bitten would die. Therefore they asked Moses to intercede with God on their behalf to remove the snakes (21:7). Moses did but God did not remove the snakes. Instead, God instructed Moses to make a snake from bronze (perhaps similar in appearance to those which had bitten the people) and place the bronze snake on a pole or standard. God then told Moses that everyone who was bitten, when he looked at the bronze snake on the pole would live (21:8). Moses followed the instructions and God kept His word so that if someone was bitten and looked at the bronze snake hanging from the pole, he lived (21:9).

How can this be? There is no explanation other than a divine work of God alone. What were those bitten responsible to do—look at the bronze snake on the pole. However, looking at the snake on the pole required more than visual observance. The person who looked to the bronze snake had to look believing he or she was under God’s just judgment because of sin and also in faith believe God’s word that He would bring deliverance from that judgment for all who looked with faith on the bronze serpent.

There is an interesting verse that appears in 2 Kings 18:4 which provides further insight into the necessity for the people in Moses’ day to look to this serpent by faith. The verse records an event that took place a little over 700 years after Moses initially made the serpent and placed it on the pole. Hezekiah became king over Judah and was removing those places and items which the people of Judah had used to worship pagan gods. The verse informs us that Hezekiah also, *“broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan”* (bronze thing). From this we conclude that some time after Moses made the serpent the people eventually quit looking at it by faith. Instead, they

began to worship the serpent itself. They saw it no longer as God initially intended—a depiction of their sin, God’s just judgment on them because of their sin, God’s deliverance and eventually, as indicated by the New Testament; a shadow of the Lord Jesus Who would come and truly atone for their sin. Rather, the bronze serpent on the pole had become to them nothing more than a “good luck” charm equivalent to the rest of their pagan idols. From the New Testament we know that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Looking at the bronze serpent in any way besides looking by faith was useless.

Note in John 3:14 immediately after reminding Nicodemus of the bronze serpent Jesus said to him, “... *even so must the Son of Man be lifted up...*” Jesus was telling Nicodemus that just as Moses lifted the bronze serpent on the pole that Christ must also be lifted up. The reference to Christ being lifted up was a reference to His death on the cross. John 12:32-34 reveals that the phrase “lifted up” was readily understood by the people in Nicodemus’ day as a euphemism for death.

Now take note that after Christ spoke of His death He said, “... *that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.*” Just as the person in Moses’ day looked to the bronze serpent by faith and was physically healed, one must believe in Jesus by faith to be justified before God (Rm. 5:1). Thus, Jesus communicated to Nicodemus the truth of His atoning death and the need for Nicodemus to believe in Him.

Just as looking at the serpent required more than a casual glance, believing in Christ for forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God requires more than merely acknowledging Jesus exists. The person who truly believes in Jesus by faith is aware he or she is under God’s just judgment because of personal sin and also in faith believes God’s word that it is God Who brings deliverance from that judgment and reconciliation to Himself through the person of Jesus and His work on the cross (His death) alone. Such a person who truly sees himself under God’s judgment because of his/her sin and understands Jesus as the only means of forgiveness and reconciliation to God and believes in Christ alone for salvation, is the person who God’s Spirit has caused to be born again. This person has been made to understand truths related to the kingdom of God.

Brief Answers to Some Questions Related to Responsibility

In essence, mankind's responsibility to repent and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ is established by the fact that God declares that all people everywhere should repent (Acts 17:30-31). Understanding of this basic biblical fact eliminates much theological wrangling about whether or not God's sovereignty over salvation and/or man's inability negates man's responsibility to repent and believe. Furthermore, the fact that God's command establishes a basis for man's responsibility to repent and believe the Gospel answers a multitude of questions associated with the subject of sovereignty and responsibility that have been generated by the entrance of the philosophies of man and vain deceit into the church.

Some may ask at this point, "Could it be that simple, that man is responsible merely because God commands him to repent, in spite of everything else surrounding his condition such as his inability?" To this we should ask, "Why must it be more complicated than that? When the sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient God of all creation utters a command to fallen man is anything else needed in order for man to be responsible? No. God's command for all men everywhere to repent is not a capricious act which ignores or is ignorant of man's condition. When the all-powerful, all-knowing God of creation, in His infinite wisdom commands his creation this is enough to establish responsibility.

Actually, the command is more than enough, for God's very existence demands the responsibility of His creation. The Bible teaches us that man is responsible to God even if God never uttered a command or spoke even a single word, "*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*" This statement from Romans 1:20 drives home the point that the reality of God's existence and His attributes are so evident through the creation that man has no excuse—he is responsible! God's very existence demands man's responsibility. The command further intensifies that responsibility!

Since God causes regeneration is man not responsible to repent?

No. Mankind's responsibility to repent and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not pre-empted by the fact that it is God Who causes regeneration (1 Pet. 1:3). We know this to be true by acknowledging two Biblical truths.

1. God's prerogative to regenerate whom He will
2. God's command for all people everywhere to repent

First, the Bible, in God's own words, communicates that it is God's just and divine prerogative to regenerate whom He will. He said He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy and He will have compassion on whom He will have compassion (Ex. 33:19; Rm. 9:15).⁵ And He does, regenerating some and leaving others to face judgment. Nevertheless and the second truth, the Bible also informs us that God commands all men everywhere to repent because He has appointed a day of judgment (Acts 17:30-31). Essentially, God's independent exercise of His prerogative to have mercy on whom He will does not negate God's command. Both remain true and therefore man's responsibility to repent still stands.

Isn't the natural man's responsibility to repent established by his innate ability to repent?

No. Man's responsibility to repent and believe the Gospel is not established by any ability of the natural man to believe for he has no innate spiritual ability (1 Cor. 2:14). He is dead in sin (Eph. 2:1).

Since the natural man has no ability to repent doesn't this negate his responsibility?

No. As seen in the answer to the previous question, the natural man's responsibility to repent is not based on ability. Therefore, the natural

⁵ The apostle Paul in Romans 9:19-21 demonstrates there is nothing wrong with God exercising His sovereign prerogative in salvation. Furthermore, it is not only God's divine and just prerogative to regenerate whom He will, it is also His prerogative to not disclose but to keep secret those He has chosen to regenerate (the elect) until He does regenerate them (Deut. 29:29; Ps. 115:3; 135:6).

man's inability does not negate his responsibility. The prevalent assumption is that since the natural man lacks ability he must therefore not be responsible. However, a biblically accurate assumption would be that responsibility to repent does not rest on ability and therefore inability does not negate responsibility. The biblical truth is that God commands every one everywhere to repent (Mk. 1:15; Acts 17:30) and holds those accountable who do not (Jn. 3:18). In essence, God is aware of the inability and nevertheless commands repentance. Furthermore, He judges those who do not (Lk. 13:1-5).

Does God's commanding of those to do what they are unable to do and then judging them for not doing what they cannot do render God unjust?

No. God commanding the unable to do what they cannot and then holding them responsible for not doing what they cannot do constitutes neither an error nor unjust act on the part of God. Consider these basic Scriptural truths.

- The natural man lacks ability (1 Cor. 2:14)
- God commands all to repent and believe the Gospel and holds those accountable who do not (Lk. 13:1-5; Acts 17:30)
- God is perfect, just and righteous (Mt. 5:48; Ps. 89:14)
- God is not unjust (Rm. 9:14)

Although someone may not understand how these truths fit together, he should not allow his lack of understanding to lead him to conclude that God is either in error or unjust. Furthermore, he should guard against worldly philosophies that attempt to answer questions posed by a lack of understanding.

Instead of polluting our minds with man's philosophies, we should be purifying our minds with God's principles. We can trust that as we do clarity will come (Ps. 119:38; Pr. 2:1-10; 4:18; James 1:5). The answer to this question should be considered in the light of the answer to the following question and the Summary.

Does disobedience to the command to repent and believe the Gospel constitute a failure of either the Gospel or God's intent behind His command?

No. Disobedience to the command to repent and believe the Gospel constitutes neither a failure of the Gospel nor a failure of God's intent in the command. Instead, disobedience to the command affirms God's truth that a person is a sinner and in need of the Gospel. Disobedience to the command to believe the Gospel is itself a sin and as such demonstrates man's love for darkness rather than light (righteousness) because his deeds are evil (Jn. 3:18-20). Thus, disobedience to the Gospel constitutes neither weakness nor failure of the Gospel. Rather, it further confirms one aspect of the message of the Gospel—people are sinners in need of the Gospel.

Regarding the intent of God, to know whether or not God's intent failed one would have to first know what God's specific intent is. Given the fact that it is difficult at best, if not impossible for us to determine even man's intentions, we should put our hands to our mouths and keep silent when it comes to determining the exact intention God seeks to accomplish in each individual case as He commands all to repent (Job 9:10; Rm. 11:33-35). However, we always know that unlike man, all of God's intentions are sincere holy and good. Therefore, while we may not know God's specific intent He desires to accomplish in each individual case by commanding all to repent, whether it is to make a person's sin apparent or serve as the effectual call, or something else, we know that in each case the command is sincere holy and good (Ps. 119:68).

Summary

Since God commands all people everywhere to repent, we know God hold's every person everywhere accountable to that command. Consequently, every person is responsible to repent of his/her sins and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Inability and failure, on the part of many to repent and believe constitutes neither a failure of the Gospel nor an error or unjust act on the part of God as He commands the unable to do what they cannot. Instead, God, by their lack of belief affirms His truth that a person is a sinner and in need of regeneration in order to believe the Gospel and be reconciled to God.

Since Christ commands believers to preach the Gospel (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15), it is the responsibility of every Christian to communicate the Gospel. The Christian obeys knowing that it is God Who causes both regeneration (1 Pet. 1:3) and growth according to His will (1 Cor. 3:6). Understanding that regeneration does not rest on cleverness of speech or the ability of the hearer but on God Who has mercy (1 Cor. 1:17-18; 2:1-5; Rm. 9:14-16) brings great hope and peace to all genuine believers as they communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost. They are not carried away by the idea of putting a certain twist on their words to appeal to the lost or discovering some new trend or method in order to make converts. In loving obedience to Christ, they preach His Gospel.

However, the comforting fact that salvation is of the Lord is not grounds for the Christian to fail to convey the Gospel accurately and thoroughly. Believers must be biblically accurate as they thoroughly communicate the proper nature of: sin being personal enmity against the holiness of God, of God's just punishment of all unforgiven sinners and Jesus' death on the cross as the only sufficient sacrifice for sin accepted by God as demonstrated by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. As Christians accurately communicate these truths and others related to the Gospel they can trust God will use them as a means in the accomplishment of His sovereign will.

Appendix The Unregenerate

The verses in the following table depict the **total depravity** of mankind and provide insight into the character of the natural (unsaved) man:

1. **Who he is.** The character of the natural condition of man apart from God.
2. **What he does and does not do.** The natural man's practice or behavior apart from God.
3. **What he cannot do.** The natural man's **inabilities**.

By total depravity it is meant that the natural spiritual condition of mankind is one of total corruption. In essence, total depravity means that the whole of man's being has been radically affected by sin. Total depravity **does not** mean from man's perspective that every person is committing every kind of sin, although in his nature he possesses the potential as well as the propensity to do so (Genesis 6:5; 8:21). Furthermore, to be "dead in sin" (the biblical phrase for total depravity, see Eph. 2:1, 5, and Col. 2:13) is not to be understood as inactivity. Rather, to be "dead in sin" is a Biblical summation of man's spiritual condition of being separated from God and opposed to Him.

That the natural (unsaved) man is spiritually dead in sin requires that spiritual life must first be given to him in order that he can reason spiritually so that he can believe. The giving of spiritual life is God's work of **regeneration**. Thus, in regeneration new life is given to the natural man, providing him with all he needs in order to believe (John 3:3). Jesus' statement could not be clearer, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In order to see the kingdom of God, that is to *perceive or understand* the truths of the kingdom; logically one must first be born again.

It therefore stands to reason that all the believer possesses as a new creature is truly a gracious gift from God. Before regeneration the natural man possessed absolutely nothing spiritual, whether in whole or in part that was useful or even salvageable for obtaining salvation (Romans 3:12). So then, faith is itself a gift which God provides in regeneration, exercised in its **logical order** following regeneration. That the Bible

clearly teaches that faith is a gift from God is evident (Romans 8:32; 1Corinthians 4:7; 2 Peter 1:3).

The work of regeneration is invisible to the natural eye. What we do see of regeneration is its necessary effect- the exercise of faith accompanied by good works (John 3:8; Ephesians 2:8-10). Therefore, it is essential that we do not evaluate the subject of salvation solely on the basis of outward appearance but on the basis of righteous judgment (John 7:24). To do otherwise is to rush headfirst into the error of exchanging truth for a perceived experience. Furthermore, neither should our judgment be based on verses removed from their context to support either an experience or a conclusion based only on observation. For instance, one should not use John 1:12 to claim a person is born a child of God because he/she believed (received), while ignoring verse 13, which shows that such a person who believed is actually one who is born of God.

UNREGENERATE (The Natural Man)		Character
Dead in sin	Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13	Biblical description of the condition of the natural man. Who he is.
Slave to sin	John 8:34; Romans 6:6	
In the bondage of iniquity	Acts 8:23	
In the flesh	Romans 8:8	
Not righteous	Romans 3:10	
In darkness	1 John 2:9, 11	
Is darkness	Ephesians 5:8	
Ungodly	Romans 5:6	
Hostility	Romans 8:7a	
Enemy of God	Romans 5:10	
Child of the Devil	1 John 3:10	
Without faith	2 Thessalonians 3:2	
Under God's wrath	Romans 5:9; Ephesians 2:3	
Hopeless	Ephesians 2:12	
Helpless	Romans 5:6	
Useless	Romans 3:12	

UNREGENERATE (The Natural Man) <i>Continued</i>		Character
Practicing sin	1 John 3:4-10	Biblical description of the practice of the natural man. What he does and does not do.
Walks according to the world	Ephesians 2:2	
Walks according to the devil	Ephesians 2:2	
Does not seek God	Romans 3:11	
Does not do Good	Romans 3:12	
Does not submit to the law of God	Romans 8:7b (<i>will</i>)	
Does not accept the things of the Spirit of God	1 Corinthians 2:14a (<i>Will</i> - see 1 Corinthians 1:18)	Biblical description of the inabilities of the natural man. What he cannot do.
Unable to understand the things of the Spirit	Romans 3:11; 1 Corinthians 2:14b (<i>inability</i>)	
Unable to submit to the law of God	Romans 8:7c	
Unable to please God	Romans 8:8	
Can do nothing (unable to bear fruit)	John 15:5	

The Regenerate

The verses in the following table depict the condition of the person **born again** and provide insight into the character of the spiritual (regenerate) man:

1. **Who he is.** The character of the spiritual condition of one born of God.
2. **What he does and does not do.** The spiritual man's practice or behavior.
3. **What he can and cannot do.** The spiritual man's **abilities** and **inabilities**.

Being born of God constitutes a new condition in the life of a person. First, the person born of God is a new creation possessing a new nature (2 Cor. 5:17). Secondly, and consequent to possessing a new nature, the person born of God has a new character.

In essence, being born of God delivers a person from the bondage of sin. Such a person is no longer under sin's dominion (Rm. 3:9). Instead, the one born of God is under grace and able to perform works of righteousness and does so (Eph. 2:8-10; 2 Tim 3:16-7; Titus 3:5). In this sense then, the person born of God does not *keep on sinning* which is the literal translation of 1 John 5:18.

Prior to the new birth the person was a helpless ungodly sinner subject to the wrath of God as His enemy (Rm. 5:5-10). Not being born of God such a person is in the flesh, sets his/her mind on the flesh and walks according to the flesh (Rm. 8:5-9). The book of Romans describes such a person as hostility (Rm. 8:7). This is not to say that the person is merely angry at God but that the entirety of the person's being is nothing but hostility toward God. Such a one cannot please God (Romans 8:8) but is hostility.

On the other hand, the person born of God is indwelt by the Spirit, is in the Spirit, sets his/her mind on the Spirit and walks according to the Spirit and pleases God (Rm. 8:4-9; 1Jn. 4:13; Eph. 5:7-10). The person who is born of God practices righteousness (1 Jn. 2:29). Such a one cannot keep on sinning, literally, "go on sinning" in the sense that sin is the impetus of the life and sinful deeds are the character of life (1 Jn. 3:6, 7, and 9).

However, this is not meant to communicate that the Christian never commits a sin. Although the believer is delivered from sin's dominion he or she has not yet been delivered from sin's presence. John makes this fact clear in 1 John 1:8, 10; 2:1.

REGENERATE (Born Again)		Character
Alive with Christ	Romans 6:11 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:5	Biblical description of the condition of the regenerate man. Who he is.
Slave of righteousness	Romans 6:18-23	
Free from sin's bondage not sin's presence	Rom. 8:2; 1 Tim. 1:15 1 John 1:10	
In the Spirit	Romans 8:9	
Possesses the righteousness of Christ	1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9	
In light	1 John 1:7; 2:10	
Is light in the Lord	Ephesians 5:8	
Godly	2 Tim. 3:12; Titus 1:1; 2 Pet. 2:9	
At peace with God	Romans 5:1	
Reconciled to God	Romans 5:10	
Child of God	1 John 3:1	
Possesses faith (Person of faith)	Rom. 12:3; 1 Tim 1:14	
Under God's grace	Romans 6:14-15	
Having hope (Person of hope)	1 John 3:3	
Able to work out salvation	Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12	
Useful to the Master	2 Timothy 2:21	
Practices righteousness	1 John 2:29; 3:7	Biblical description of the practice of the regenerate man. What he does.
Walks according to Christ	1 John 2:6	
Walks according to the Spirit	Galatians 5:16	
Seeks God	Col. 3:1; Heb. 11:6	
Does Good	Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:16	
God's law not a burden	1 John 5:3	
Taught of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 2:9-15	
Knows and understands the things of God through the Spirit	1 Corinthians 2:9-15	Biblical description of the abilities and inabilities of the regenerate man. What he can and cannot do.
Able to keep the law of God	1 John 2:4-5	
Able to please God	Heb. 12:28; 1 Peter 2:5	
Able to bear fruit	Matthew 13:23	
Can Sin	John 1:8, 10; 2:1	
Cannot Practice sin	1 John 3:6-7, 9; 5:18	

Radical Regeneration

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

The following table depicts the radical nature of regeneration.

UNREGENERATE (The Natural Man)		T O	REGENERATE (Born Again)	
Dead in sin	Eph. 2:1	⇒	Alive with Christ	Rm. 6:11 1 Cor. 15:22 Eph. 2:5
Slaves to sin	Jn. 8:34; Rm. 6:6	⇒	Slaves of righteousness	Rm. 6:18-23
In the bondage of iniquity	Acts 8:23	⇒	Free from sin’s bondage not sin’s presence	Rm. 8:2 1 Tim. 1:15 1 Jn. 1:10
In the flesh	Rm. 8:8	⇒	In the Spirit	Rm. 8:9
Not righteous	Rm. 3:10	⇒	Possessing the righteousness of Christ	1 Cor. 1:30 Phil. 3:9
In darkness	1 Jn. 2:9, 11	⇒	In light	1 John 1:7; 2:10
Is darkness	Eph. 5:8	⇒	Are light in the Lord	Eph. 5:8
Ungodly	Rm. 5:6	⇒	Godly	2 Tim. 3:12 Titus 1:1; 2 Pet. 2:9
Hostility	Rm. 8:7	⇒	At peace with God	Rm. 5:1
Enemies of God	Rm. 5:10	⇒	Reconciled to God	Rm. 5:10
Children of the Devil	1 Jn. 3:10	⇒	Children of God	1 Jn. 3:1
Without faith	2 Thess. 3:2	⇒	Possessing faith	Rm. 12:3 1 Tim. 1:14
Under God’s wrath	Rm. 5:9 Eph. 2:3	⇒	Under God’s grace	Rm. 6:14-15
Hopeless	Eph. 2:12	⇒	Having hope	1 Jn. 3:3
Helpless	Rm. 5:6	⇒	Able to work out salvation	Eph. 2:10 Phil. 2:12
Useless	Rm. 3:12	⇒	Useful to the Master	2 Tim. 2:21

UNREGENERATE (The Natural Man)		T O	REGENERATE (Born Again)	
Practicing sin	1 Jn. 3:4-10	⇒	Practicing righteousness	1 Jn. 2:29; 3:7
Walking according to the world	Eph. 2:2	⇒	Walking according to Christ	1 Jn. 2:6
Walking according to the devil	Eph. 2:2	⇒	Walking according to the Spirit	Gal. 5:16
Does not seek God	Rm. 3:11	⇒	Seeking God	Col. 3:1 Heb. 11:6
Does not do Good	Rm. 3:12	⇒	Able to do good	Eph. 2:10
Does not submit to the law of God	Rm. 3:11	⇒	God's law not a burden	1 Jn. 5:3
Does not accept the things of the Spirit of God	1 Cor. 2:14 (Will- see 1:18)	⇒	Taught of the Spirit	1 Cor. 2:9-15
Unable to understand the things of the Spirit	Rm. 3:11 1 Cor. 2:14 (Inability)	⇒	Knows and understands the things of God through the Spirit	1 Cor. 2:9-15
Unable to submit to the law of God	Rm. 8:7c	⇒	Able to keep the law of God	1 Jn. 2:4-5
Unable to please God	Rm. 8:8	⇒	Able to please God	Heb. 12:28 1 Pt. 2:5
Unable to bear fruit	Jn. 15:5	⇒	Able to bear fruit	Mt. 13:23

The radical difference of regeneration is also witnessed by observing what Scripture says concerning the disposition of the world toward Believers. When a person becomes a Christian not only does his or her disposition toward the world change (1John 2:15), but the disposition of the world toward the Christian also changes. The world is said to hate Christians in John 17:14. This is in contrast to the world loving its own

(John 15:19). In 1 John 3:1 following the regeneration (new birth) of an individual, it is said that the world does not know Believers because the world did not know Christ. The Believer, having been born of Christ (1John 2:29) is in position (spiritual sense) separated from the world (John 17:15-16). These two differences deal with the world's attitude (hatred) and relationship (not knowing) with the Believer. Now consider the area of communication. The world listens to those who are from the world (1 John 4:5). The world does not listen (In the sense of hearing truth) to those who are born of God (1 John 4:6). Compare these verses with John 1:10-11; 3:19-21, and 1 Corinthians 2:14.

NOTES

