

Effectual Calling and Regeneration

by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

From **Great Doctrines of the Bible** by Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Table of Contents

Effectual Calling

Gospel Call Universal, Effectual Call Particular

The Necessity of Effectual Calling

Not Mere Moral Persuasion But a Supernatural Operation of the Spirit

Regeneration

What Makes the Call Effectual?

A Great and Vital Doctrine

How is it Different from Conversion?

A Change of Disposition

The Change is Instantaneous

A Creative Act of God

The New Birth

A New Nature

Abiding in Christ

Why is Regeneration Essential?

How is Regeneration Brought About?

[What is the Relationship of Regeneration to the Word that is Preached?](#)

[What About the Old Testament Saints?](#)

[Can Infants Be Regenerated?](#)

[Can Regeneration be Lost?](#)

Effectual Calling

As we now proceed to consider in detail what exactly it is the Holy Spirit does to us in the application of redemption, I would remind you that I am not insisting that the order which I shall follow is of necessity the right one, and certainly not of necessity the chronological one.

‘So how do you arrive at your order?’ asks someone. My answer is that I mainly try to conceive of this work going on within us from the standpoint of God in eternity looking down upon men and women in sin. That is the way that appeals to me most of all; it is the way that I find most helpful. That is not to detract in any way from experience or the experiential standpoint. Some would emphasise that and would have their order according to experience, but I happen to be one of those people who is not content merely with experience. I want to know something about that experience; I want to know what I am experiencing and I want to know why I am experiencing it and how it has come about. It is the child who is content merely with enjoying the experience. If we are to grow in grace and to go forward and exercise our senses, as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it (Heb. 5:14), then we must of necessity ask certain questions and be anxious to know how the things that have happened to us really have come to take place.

Gospel Call Universal, Effectual Call Particular

My approach therefore is this: there is the truth of the gospel, and we have seen already that it is a part of the work of the Holy Spirit to see that that truth is proclaimed to all and sundry. That is what we called the general call — a kind of universal offer of the gospel. Then we saw that though the external or general call comes to all, to those who will remain unsaved as well as to those who are saved, obviously some new distinction comes in, because some are saved by it. So the question we must now consider is: What is it that establishes the difference between the two groups?

And the way to answer that question, it seems to me, is to say that the call of the gospel, which has been given to all, is effectual only in some. Now there is a portion of Scripture which is a perfect illustration of this. The followers of Christ who were even described as ‘disciples’ were divided up into two groups. One group decided that they would never listen to Him again. They left Him and went home. And when He turned to the others and said, ‘Will ye also go away?’ Peter said, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the word of eternal life’ (John 6:67–68). The one group disbelieved and went home, the others, who had heard exactly the same things, stayed with Him, wanted to hear more, and rejoiced in it. What makes the difference? It is that the word was effectual in the case of the saved in a way that it was not effectual in the case of the unsaved who refused it.

This, then, is something that is quite obvious. We can say that in addition to the external call there is this effectual call, and that what makes anybody a saved person and a true Christian is that the call of the gospel has come effectually. Let me give you some scriptures that establish that. The first, Romans 8:28–39 , is a great statement of this very thing. ‘We know,’ says Paul, ‘that all things work together for good to them that love God ... ’ Not to everybody but ‘ to them that love God ’. Who are they? ‘To them who are called according to his purpose,’ and Paul goes on: ‘For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.’ The saved are described as those who are called . And they have been called in a way that the others have not. That is, therefore, a scriptural statement of this effectual call.

Then, another one is to be found in 1 Corinthians 1:2 . It is a statement that you will find in other places as well: ‘Unto the church of God which is at Corinth to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints ...’. it is not simply that they are called saints, they are called to be saints. And then, in that same chapter, the Apostle repeats it. He says, ‘We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness’ — then notice — ‘but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1:23– 24). Now there are people to whom the preaching of Christ is foolishness; they are the unsaved. But the saved he again describes as those who are called .

And let me give you one other example. Take that great statement made by the apostle Peter: ‘But ye,’ he says, referring to Christian believers, ‘are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’ (1 Pet. 2:9–10). God has called them out, and because they are the saved, He has called them effectually. The call of the gospel has gone to many others but they are not the people Peter is talking about. He is talking about these people who correspond to Israel after

the flesh in the Old Testament. He applies to them the very terminology that was applied to the Children of Israel, just as the Ten Commandments and the moral law were given to them. Peter uses the same words — they are the called, the ‘Israel of God’, called to show forth His praises. Now it is obvious therefore that in these people the call has been effectual; that is the teaching of these scriptures.

But there is another argument which states this perfectly. What is the meaning of the term church ? We are members of the Christian Church. But what is it — what does it mean? What is the connotation of the term? Well, the word church translates the Greek word, ecclesia ; and the ecclesia means the ‘called forth ones’. A church is a gathering of people who have been called forth, called out, separated out as the result of this call. As Peter puts it: ‘Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’. That is the meaning of this term church . And therefore that very word in and of itself is sufficient to establish the statement that there obviously is such a thing as an effectual call, because the same message has gone to others but they have been called from the world into the Church.

What, then, is the difference between the external call and this call which has become effectual? And the answer must be that this call is an internal, a spiritual call. It is not merely something that comes to a person from the outside — it does that, of course, but in addition to that external call which comes to all, there is an internal call which comes to those who are going to be Christians, and it is an effectual call. The contrast, therefore, is between external, and internal and spiritual.

Now I want to go even further and again give you scriptural proofs of the fact that there is such an internal and spiritual call. We have only looked at it in general in the scriptures that I have given you so far, they are simply designations, descriptions. So I want to give you scriptures which specifically state that this is something that happens within; and first of all I go to the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel. Incidentally, this particular doctrine is taught much more clearly, if I may use such a comparison, by John than it is by the apostle Paul. People sometimes tend to think that this is a doctrine conjured up only in Paul’s mind, but it is much more evident in John’s Gospel and particularly in this great sixth chapter.

Here, in verse 45 , is one statement of it: ‘It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God.’ That is it; God gave the prophet this information and he recorded it. There will be certain people who shall be taught by God Himself, not taught by men only but in addition to that taught by God, taught by the Spirit. Some internal work is going to take place. ‘Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me’ (v. 45). You see the people who come to Christ are those who have been taught of God, who have learned of the Father by the Spirit, and they alone. Now that is a crucial statement. But our Lord repeats it later on in verses 63–65 . His listeners have stumbled at His words and He says to them, ‘It is the spirit that

quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life. But,' He says, 'there are some of you that believe not.' And John adds, 'For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.' They had responded to the external call and thought that they were Christians. Here it becomes evident that they were not; they had never been taught of God. They had held on to the shell, the external word, and they had not got the Spirit. John continues, 'And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.' And the Father had not given it to these people so they did not come and they went home. But He had given it to the others, so they remained and they rejoiced in it. That is a proof that there is this spiritual, this internal call. And that is what makes the call effectual. Or take another statement. It is from Ephesians 1:17 . Paul prays for the Ephesians 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him' In other words we cannot have knowledge of Him unless He gives us the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation — they are absolutely essential. And that was why Paul prayed that they might have the Spirit, it was in order that they might grow increasingly in this knowledge of God. Without this work of the Spirit we cannot attain unto such knowledge. Or again, in Ephesians 2:8 , we read, 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.' And then, of course, there is Philippians 2:12–13 , where Paul says the same thing: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do ...' God does an internal work and it is as the result of that that we are enabled 'to will and to do of his good pleasure'.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5 , Paul makes a most important statement in this connection: 'For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.' Now if you read that epistle, especially the first two chapters, you will find that the Apostle goes on repeating that statement in different ways. He says that they received the word that came to them 'not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God' (1 Thess. 2:13). But what did he mean when he said 'For our gospel came not unto you in word only'? It did come in words, of course, the Apostle was speaking, but that was not the thing that had turned those idolatrous Thessalonians into saints. What was it, then? It was that it had come 'in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance'. It is this internal work that turns people from sinners into saints; this is preaching in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

And, indeed, the Apostle makes a very similar statement in 2 Timothy 2:25 . Here he is telling the young Timothy how to handle certain people who were opposing him. 'In meekness,' he says, 'instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.' Timothy, says Paul, I want you to instruct these people who are opposing you and my reason for doing so is this: it is not to suggest to you that you by your arguments or logic can convince them. If God does not do this work in them, they will never acknowledge the truth, but if

God does work, they will acknowledge it. Indeed there is a statement that we can find more than once in the Gospels and which we have already quoted, which really says it all in one phrase: ‘Many are called, but few are chosen’ (Matt. 22:14). Take that especially in its context of the wedding feast. ‘Many are called’ — that is the external call — ‘but few are chosen’ — that is the effectual call.

The Necessity of Effectual Calling

So then, the next step which we take is this: we have seen that the Scripture teaches that the saved are the effectually called and that they are effectually called because of the work that goes on within them. ‘But,’ someone may say, ‘why all this?’ And the answer is that this is absolutely essential. Without this work within, no one would ever become a Christian; it is an utter necessity. Let me give you my proof for that. ‘For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:5). Now the Revised Standard Version puts it like this: ‘They that are after the flesh are interested in the things of the flesh and they that are after the Spirit, or in the Spirit, are interested in the things of the Spirit.’ But the natural man or woman — those ‘after the flesh’ — are not interested in the things of the Spirit at all. They find them dull and boring and uninteresting. They regard them as a waste of time and they hate them. But they that are after the Spirit are interested in the things of the Spirit: ‘For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because’ — and this is the final argument — ‘the carnal mind is enmity against God’ (vv. 6–7).

Now that is a very strong statement but it is true. Men and women, as they are by nature as the result of the fall, are at enmity against God. ‘The carnal mind ... is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God’ (vv. 7–8). To me that is a final statement. Men and women by nature are opposed to God; they hate God and they are not interested in Him, neither are they interested in the things of God. From that statement of the Apostle I deduce that the internal work of the Spirit is an absolute necessity before anyone can possibly believe in the gospel of God and accept it and rejoice in it.

However, let us go on and consider other statements to the same effect. Take the famous statement in 1 Corinthians 2:14 : ‘But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.’ That is a categorical statement, but do not suddenly become a philosopher and say, ‘Well, if that is true I do not understand this and that.’ No, let us face the statements of Scripture. We are dealing with things beyond our understanding. We are dealing with the inscrutable purposes of God, and if we are going to be foolish enough to put up our understandings or our philosophy against these categorical statements, then we deserve to remain in darkness. We must not approach the Scripture with such a conceit of ourselves that we think we can

understand everything — we cannot. ‘Great is the mystery of godliness’ (1 Tim. 3:16), and especially in this matter. But here is the statement that the natural man or woman not only does not receive it, but cannot receive it because these things are spiritually understood, judged and discerned.

Then there is the statement in 2 Corinthians 4:3–4 : ‘If our gospel be hid,’ says Paul, and it is quite clear that the gospel is hid to certain people; they hear it like everybody else but they see nothing in it, they do not want it, they blaspheme it, they treat it with scorn. ‘If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.’ And who are they? They are the people, ‘In whom the god of this world’ — the devil — ‘hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,’ lest they believe this glorious gospel. Could anything be plainer? They cannot believe because Satan has blinded their minds ‘lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them’ (2 Cor. 4:4).

And then, finally, we find the statement in Ephesians 2:1 : ‘And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins’ — dead! You cannot have anything stronger than that; that is their position spiritually. All these are statements to prove the absolute necessity of this internal work of the Spirit before the call — the external, general call of the gospel — can possibly be effectual.

So, then, what is this effectual, internal call that we are speaking about? Well, the most we can say about it is — and this must of necessity be true in the light of these scriptures — that it is the exercise of the power of the Holy Spirit in the soul. It is a direct operation of the Holy Spirit within us. It is immediate, it is spiritual, it is supernatural, miraculous. And what it does is to make a new mode of spiritual activity possible within us. Without this operation we are incapable of any true spiritual activity but as the result of this operation of the Holy Spirit upon us, we are rendered capable, for the first time, of spiritual activity and that is how this call now becomes effectual, that is what enables us to receive it.

Not Mere Moral Persuasion But a Supernatural Operation of the Spirit

Now this is very important and I want to emphasise the immediacy, the direct action. You see, what happens when the call comes to men and women effectually is not simply that the moral influence of the truth is exercised upon them. Some people have thought that; they have said that the gospel is preached and that the truth has a kind of general moral effect upon people. For instance, to take a human theme, a capable orator, a man wanting to persuade men and women to vote at an election for a given party, can put the case so well that he can exercise a moral influence upon his listeners. But it is not that. It is an operation of the Spirit upon the men and women themselves, in the depths. It is not merely that the Holy Spirit heightens our natural

faculties and powers, it is more than that. It is the Spirit acting upon the soul from within and producing within us a new principle of spiritual action.

Now it must be that; it cannot be less than that. Because these things, says Paul, are all spiritual. And that is why the natural man does not understand them; and that is why, as I have often reminded you, we should never be surprised, or to the slightest extent disappointed or put out, when somebody brings us the argument that 'Christianity cannot be right because look at this great man and he doesn't believe it!' How often have you heard that argument! Someone says, 'You know, I cannot believe this, because if Christianity were true, it could not be possible that all these philosophers and scientists and all these great statesmen and other men do not believe it.'

In the light of these things, it is very natural and we can understand it perfectly well. The greatest natural intellect cannot receive this, he is 'a natural man'. And you need a spiritual faculty to receive the wonderful truth about the two natures in the one Person; the outstanding doctrine about the Trinity; the whole doctrine of the incarnation and the atonement, and so on. This is spiritual truth and to the natural person it is utter folly, it is foolishness, as Paul says. So when the Holy Spirit does enable us to believe it, it must be something beyond the heightening of our natural faculties. It is not simply that He brings the truth of His great moral suasion to us. No, no. We need some new faculty, some new principle, and that is the very work that He does. He implants within us this new spiritual principle, this principle of spiritual vitality and activity, and it is as the result of this that the general call of the gospel comes to us in an effectual manner.

So, then, let me again give you some scriptural proofs of this, because I do have them. You will find a practical illustration in Acts 16:14 . Here is Paul, preaching in the town of Philippi. It is a very crucial passage for us because it was the Apostle's first visit to Europe and it was the first time that the Christian gospel was ever preached there. And do not forget that the first convert that the Christian gospel obtained in Europe was a woman called Lydia. She was the first person in the history of Europe to whom the call of the gospel came. How did it happen? We are told: 'A certain women named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us' — as many others did. The Apostle sat down and preached the word. There was the external call; he told them the gospel, the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ and the meaning of the facts. He said all this and we are told that among those listening was a woman called Lydia and that she heard this, as many have heard the gospel preached in a church or a chapel but have gone home in an unbelieving condition and have died as unbelievers. What was it, then, that made the difference with Lydia? Notice! '... whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.'

Now there it is perfectly. The word is preached, yes, but people do not pay attention to

it. They look at one another while it is being preached, or they write in their books or they recite poetry to themselves or they are smiling at one another. In a sense they hear it, but they do not attend to it and you cannot be saved until you attend to it. What made Lydia attend? The answer is, 'whose heart the Lord opened'. The Lord put something in her heart, this internal work, and the result of that was that she paid attention, and she saw the gospel and received it. The external call became the internal call, the general became effectual. She believed and was baptised and also her household. It is unmistakable — it was the Lord opening her heart that made the difference; but for that, she would never have believed.

And then, of course, we have a great theological statement in 1 Corinthians 2:10–15. Paul has just been saying that the princes of this world do not know God's secret wisdom, 'for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (v. 8). The princes had heard about these things but they had not believed. But we believe, says Paul. Why? What is the difference between us and the princes of the world? It is this: 'But' — and there is the contrast — 'God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so' — notice this — 'the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.' No man can know them, it is the Spirit of God alone who can know them. 'Now we have received' — we the believers, the Christians — 'we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God' — Why? — 'that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual' — and we are that, thank God — 'judgeth' — discerns, understands — 'all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.'

And again I could refer you to Ephesians 1:18 and to 1 Thessalonians 1:5 once more, and to Philippians 2:13. In other words, there are proofs positive of this statement that it is the internal operation of the Holy Spirit upon the soul and the heart of men and women that brings them into a condition in which the call can become effectual. And when the Spirit does it, of course, it is absolutely certain, and because of that some people have used the term — which I do not like myself — irresistible grace. I do not like the term because it seems to give the impression that something has happened which has been hammering at a person's will and has knocked him down and bludgeoned him. But it is not that. It is that the Holy Spirit implants a principle within me which enables me, for the first time in my life, to discern and to apprehend something of this glorious, wondrous truth. He works upon my will. 'It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.' He does not strike me; He does not beat me; He does not coerce me. No, thank God, what He does is operate upon my will so that I

desire these things and rejoice in them and love them. He leads, He persuades, He acts upon my will in such a way that when He does, the call of the gospel is effectual, and it is certain, and it is sure. God's work never fails, and when God works in a man or woman, the work is effective.

So let me plead with you to consider those great passages of Scripture that I have put before you. Study them, pray over them, meditate with them. And as you do so, I think you will agree with me that there is only one thing to say and it is this:

A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing.
—Augustus Toplady

I am what I am by the grace of God and by that alone.

Regeneration

In the last lecture, we saw that the Bible teaches that in the case of the saved there is an effectual call. That call comes in such a way that they accept it and we realised that this is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in each person; it is a supernatural work which makes the call effectual in believers, in the saved. But of course even that does not bring to an end our consideration of this question.

We must now ask: What is it that the Holy Spirit does to enable those who become believers, who are saved in this way, to believe the truth? What exactly does He do in order to make the general call effectual? And the answer is, regeneration . Now you notice the order in which we are taking these doctrines. Earlier, we spent some time in considering the order of salvation, the order in which these things should be considered, and this seems to me to be the inevitable order: the general call; yes, but effectual in the saved. What makes it effectual? The Holy Spirit regenerates.

It is interesting to notice the relationship between this effectual call and regeneration. There is a sense, of course, in which regeneration precedes the effectual call.

What Makes the Call Effectual

‘Well, why didn’t you put them in that order?’ someone may ask. It was for this reason: having started with the general call we notice that there is this division into the two groups and it is clear that it must be effectual in some and not in others. When you ask what it is that makes it effectual, the answer is, regeneration. But looked at from the eternal standpoint, they come in the other order, and what happens is that the general call is responded to by the regenerate. In other words, the call becomes effectual because they are regenerate. That is largely — a technical matter

and yet I think it is good for us to have these things clearly in our minds.

A Great and Vital Doctrine

Here, then, is this great central and vital doctrine of regeneration. There can be no question at all but that from our standpoint this doctrine, together with the doctrine of the atonement, is incomparably the most important doctrine of all, and there is a sense in which we simply cannot understand Christian doctrine and Christian truth without being clear about the doctrine of regeneration. And yet I would suggest that this doctrine is seriously and sadly neglected amongst us. Oh, I know that lip service is paid to it and that people talk very glibly and generally about being 'born again'. But to what extent do people study it? To what extent have we really looked into it and discovered what exactly it means?

No, there is undoubtedly a failure in this respect. Search the various hymnbooks and you will, I think, be struck by the paucity of good hymns on this theme of regeneration. We have seen that there is a defect in most hymnbooks with regard to strong doctrinal hymns on the Holy Spirit. The hymns we have are superficial, subjective and generally sentimental. And it seems to me that exactly the same thing can be said with regard to this great doctrine of regeneration. This is significant, I feel, because there is no doubt, as I hope to show you, that this doctrine is absolutely pivotal. Why is it that we persist in stopping with the idea of forgiveness only, and fail to realise that this other doctrine is as essential to us as the doctrine of the atonement leading to the forgiveness of our sins?

The only other general remark I would make is this: I have always been convinced, and I am now more convinced than ever, that people who are in trouble about these great doctrines of grace are generally so because they have never clearly grasped the significance and meaning of the doctrine of regeneration. If we only grasp this clearly, most of the other problems solve themselves. But of course, if we are not clear about this, if we do not realise exactly what happens to us in regeneration, then it is but natural that we should be in difficulties about the effectual call and many other subjects.

Let us, therefore, approach our subject by first of all simply looking at the various terms that the Bible itself uses with regard to this great event that the Holy Spirit produces within us. First, there is the word regeneration itself. In Titus 3:5 the apostle Paul speaks about 'the washing of regeneration'. That is actually the only instance in which the word 'regeneration' is used in the New Testament to describe this great, climactic event in the history of the saved soul.

Then there is a second group of terms which mean to beget or to beget again, to bear or to give birth; and there are quite a number of these. In John 1:13, for instance, in

the prologue to this Gospel, we read, 'Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' Then there are all those instances in our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, in John 3:3 , 4 , 5 , 6 , 7 and 8 . And you have the same word in several passages in the first epistle of John: 1 John 2:29 , 3:9 , 4:7 , 5:1 . 'Born of God' is a great statement in 1 John.

Next, there is another word which rather conveys the suggestion of bringing forth or begetting . This is found in James 1:18 , which reads, 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.' Then there is a large group of words which carry the meaning of creating . We read in Ephesians 2:10 , 'For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus....' It is also in 2 Corinthians 5:17 : 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature' — a new creation. In Galatians 6:15 we read, 'For neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature,' or a new creation; and again in Ephesians 4:24 : 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Again, that is a term used to describe this amazing event in the history of the soul: it is a new creation.

And finally there is the word to quicken . Now the example of this is in Ephesians 2:5 , where we read, 'Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved).' You may be surprised that I do not say Ephesians 2:1 which reads, 'And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins', but the expression about quickening is not there in the original, but has simply been supplied by the translators for the sake of understanding, and rightly so. And then there is just one other example of that word, and it is in Colossians 2:13 , 'And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.' It is the parallel, of course, to the statement in Ephesians 2:5 , something that we constantly find with these two epistles.

Those, then, are the actual terms which are used in the Scriptures to denote and to convey the teaching concerning this great climactic change. So, what do we mean by regeneration? Now if you read the history of the use of this term in the history of doctrine or of the Church, you will find great confusion, because it is a term that has been used loosely and even individual writers are not consistent in their use of it. Sometimes it has been used in a very restricted sense, but sometimes in a wide sense to include almost everything that happens to the believer — justification and sanctification as well as regeneration — and this is the practice, for instance, in Roman Catholic writers.

How is it Different from Conversion?

So as we consider what we mean by regeneration, the one important thing, it seems to me, is that we must differentiate it from conversion. And yet how frequently they are

confused. But regeneration is not conversion and for this reason: conversion is something that we do whereas regeneration, as I shall show you, is something that is done to us by God. Conversion means a turning away from one thing to another in practice, but that is not the meaning of regeneration. We can put it like this: when people convert themselves or turn, they are giving proof of the fact that they are regenerate. Conversion is something that follows upon regeneration. The change takes place in the outward life and living of men and women because this great change has first of all taken place within them.

You can look at it like this: there is all the difference between planting the seed and the result of the planting of that seed. Now regeneration means the planting of the seed of life and obviously that must be differentiated from what results or eventuates from that. There is a difference between generation and birth. Generation takes place a long time before the birth takes place. Generation is one act. It leads subsequently, after certain processes have been going on, to the actual process of birth. So it is good to hold the two things separately in our minds, and remember that when we are talking about regeneration, we are talking about generation, not the actual bringing forth, the birth.

Now the effectual call comes in in the actual birth, and that is what gives a proof of the fact that men and women are alive. The call is effectual: they believe. Yes, but that means that the process of generation, the implanting of the seed of life, must have already taken place. I find it helpful to draw that kind of distinction because it will help us to differentiate not only between regeneration and conversion, but between regeneration and adoption. For again, people often confuse adoption into sonship with regeneration, and yet, clearly and patently, they are two different things, as we shall see.

So then, we define regeneration as the implanting of new life in the soul. That is it in its essence. If you like a definition which is a little more amplified, consider this: it is the act of God by which a principle of new life is implanted in a man or woman with the result that the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. And then the actual birth is that which gives evidence of the first exercise of this disposition.

Having put that to you as a precise definition, let us go on to consider the essential nature of what takes place when we are regenerated. This is obviously of very great importance and therefore we must start with certain negatives so that we may be quite clear as to what regeneration does not mean and what it does not represent.

The first thing we must say, negatively, is that regeneration does not mean that a change takes place in the substance of human nature, and the important word there is substance. The doctrine of regeneration does not teach that the substance, or the raw material, of what constitutes human nature, whatever it may be, is changed.

Or we can put it like this: we must not think that some actual, substantial physical seed or germ of life is introduced. Regeneration is not a kind of injection or infusion of actual physical substance into us. It is not anything physical, it is a spiritual change. Thirdly, we must not think that it means that there is a complete change of the whole of human nature. The regenerate person does not become something entirely different. It does not mean that (and we shall see as we go on with these doctrines why all these negatives are important). In the same way, it does not mean that man becomes divine or that he becomes God.

‘Ah, but,’ says someone, ‘are we not partakers of the divine nature?’ Yes, but not in the sense that we suddenly become divine. We do not become like the Lord Jesus Christ with two natures — human and divine. We must be very careful to exclude that.

Another negative is that regeneration does not mean addition to or subtraction from the faculties or the essence of the soul. Now some people have thought that — and every one of these negatives is put in to safeguard against things that have been thought and said from time to time about regeneration. The five faculties of the soul are mind, memory, affection, the will and conscience and some people seem to think that what happens in regeneration is that an additional faculty is put in or that, somehow or another, one or more of the other faculties is taken out or is changed. But that is not the biblical doctrine of regeneration.

And my last negative is that regeneration does not just mean moral reformation. Again, some people have thought that. They have thought that all that happens in regeneration is that people’s wills are changed and that, because of this, they reform themselves and live a better life. But that is nothing but moral reformation; it is not regeneration.

A Change of Disposition

Let us, then, come to the positive. What is regeneration? It is, let me repeat, the implanting of a principle of new spiritual life and a radical change in the governing disposition of the soul. Let me explain what I mean by that. The important thing to grasp is the whole idea of disposition. In addition to the faculties of our souls, there is something at the back of them which governs them all and that is what we refer to as our disposition. Take two men. They have the same faculties, as regards their abilities there may be nothing to choose between them, but one lives a good life, one lives a bad life. What makes the difference? The answer is that the good man has a good disposition and this good disposition, this thing which is behind the faculties and governs them and uses them, urges him to use his faculties in the direction of goodness. The other man has an evil disposition, so he urges the same faculties in an entirely different direction. That is what one means by disposition.

When you come to think of it, and when you analyse yourself, your life and your whole conduct and behaviour, and that of other people, you will see at once that these dispositions are, of course, of tremendous importance. They are that condition, if you like, which determines what we do and what we are. Let me give you some other illustrations. Take people who have different interests and abilities. Take two people who are more or less opposite; one who is artistic and another who is scientific. What is the difference between them? Well, you cannot say that it is merely a difference in intellectual power, nor is it a difference in the faculties of their souls. No, but there is in every person a disposition which seems to determine the kind of person he or she is. It is this that directs the faculties and the abilities so that one person is artistic and the other scientific, and so on. Now I am making this point to show that what happens in regeneration is that God so operates upon us in the Holy Spirit that this fundamental disposition of ours is changed. He put a holy principle, a seed of new spiritual life, into this disposition that determines what I am and how I behave and how I use and employ my faculties.

Let me give you one great illustration to show what I mean. Take the case of the apostle Paul. Look at him as Saul of Tarsus. There is no question about his ability, nor about his understanding, nor about his will power. There is no question about his memory. His faculties are there and are clear and outstanding; he has always been a remarkable man. But there he is, persecuting the Church, regarding the Son of God as a blasphemer, and he goes down to Damascus, 'breathing out threatenings and slaughter', using all his powers to exterminate the Christian Church. But look at him later, preaching the gospel as it has never been preached before or since, with the same powers, the same abilities, the same personality, the same everything, but moving in exactly the opposite direction. What has changed? It is not the faculties of Paul's soul — they are still the same: the same vehemence, the same logic, the same thoroughness, the same readiness to risk all, out and out, he is the same man, obviously. And yet the whole direction, the whole bent, the whole outlook has changed. He is a different man. What has happened to him? He has a new disposition.

Now, I am emphasising this for this good reason: it is only by understanding this that we are able to understand the difference between regeneration and a psychological change and process. You see, when men and women are regenerated, they do not become all the same, like postage stamps. But when they become the victims of a psychological movement they tend to become identical — a very important distinction. When people are regenerated, the particular gifts which make them the men and women they are always remain. Paul, as I reminded you, was essentially the same man when he preached the gospel as he was when he denounced and persecuted it. I mean by that that he was the same individual and did things in the same way. We are not all meant to be identical as Christians. We are not all meant to speak and to preach and to pray in the same way. The gospel does not make that kind of change, and if you think of regeneration as doing that, then you have a false doctrine of

regeneration. What it does is to deal with and to change this disposition that is at the back of everything; this fundamental something that determines direction and way and manner. It is vital that we realise that the change in regeneration takes place in the disposition.

Then, secondly, because of the power of the disposition in us, it therefore follows of necessity that this change is going to affect the whole person. Does anybody think that I am contradicting one of my negatives? I have maintained that the whole person is not entirely changed — am I now saying the opposite? I hold to my negative, but I do say that, in principle, because of the change in the disposition, the whole person is affected. The way I use my mind will be affected, the operation of my emotions will be affected, and so will my will, because, by definition, the disposition is at the back of all those and gives direction to them. So when this disposition of mine is changed, then I am like a person with a new mind. Before, I was not interested in the gospel; now I am very interested in it. Before, I could not understand it; now I do.

But the change in my disposition does not mean that I have a greater intellect now than I had before! No, I have exactly the same intellect, the same mind. But, because the disposition governing it is changed, my mind is operating in a different realm and in a different way and it seems to be a new mind. And it is exactly the same with the feelings. A man who used to hate the gospel, now loves it. A woman who hated the Lord Jesus Christ, now loves Him. And likewise with the will: the will resisted, it was obstinate and rebellious; but now it desires, it is anxious, it is concerned about the gospel.

The Change is Instantaneous

The next thing we say is that it is a change which is instantaneous. Now you see the importance of differentiating between generation and coming to birth? Generation, by definition, is always an instantaneous act. There is a moment, a flash, in which the germ of life enters, impregnates; that is one instantaneous action. In other words, there are no intermediate stages in regeneration. Life is either implanted or it is not; it cannot be partly implanted. It is not gradual. Now, again, I do want to emphasise this point. When I say that it is instantaneous, I am not referring to our consciousness of it, but to the thing itself, as it is done by God. The consciousness, of course, comes into the realm of time, whereas this act of germination is timeless, and that is why it is immediate.

So the next thing — and this again is most important — is that generation, the implanting of this seed of life and the change of the disposition, happens in the subconscious, or, if you prefer it, in the unconscious. Our Lord explained that fully to Nicodemus (John 3). It is a secret, an inscrutable operation, that cannot be directly perceived by us; indeed, we cannot even fully understand it. The first thing we know

about it is that it has happened, because we are conscious of something different, but that means that we do not understand it and that we really cannot arrive at its secret.

Now, let me give you the authority for this. Nicodemus, like all of us, was trying to understand it. Our Lord said to him, 'Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). 'My dear Nicodemus,' He said in effect, 'you are trying to understand the difference between yourself and Me and what I am doing. Stop at once! It is not a question of changing, or of understanding, this or that particular thing, it is the governing disposition of your life that must be changed; you must be born again. It is something at the back of all these faculties that you are trying to use.'

'But,' Nicodemus said, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?' (John 3:4). He wanted to understand, and our Lord kept on giving the same reply, and Nicodemus continued to argue.

Eventually our Lord put it to him like this: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth ...' There is something sovereign about it. You do not know when it is going to come and go, it decides its own time. You do not know where it starts and where it ends. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof' — you are aware that it is happening — 'but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth' (John 3:8). You do not see it; you can hear it, you can see things waving in the breeze, but you do not understand it. There is a mystery about the wind, something inscrutable. You cannot fathom it or grasp it with your understanding, but you see the results. 'So' — like that — 'is every one that is born of the Spirit' (v. 8).

Now there are some people who completely miss this because they would translate the wind in verse 8 as 'the Spirit bloweth' — the Holy Spirit. But patently it does not mean that, it cannot mean that, because our Lord is using an illustration. He is talking about the wind, the gale, if you like, not the Holy Spirit, nor any other spirit. '[It] bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof' — you cannot see it, but you see the effects and the results — 'so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.' There is the essential nature of this great change.

A Creative Act of God

My fourth point is that regeneration is obviously, therefore, something which is done by God. It is a creative act of God in which men and women are entirely passive and contribute nothing, nothing whatsoever. We read in John 1:13 , 'Which were born' — you do not give birth to yourself — 'not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God' — entirely. God implants this principle, this seed of spiritual life. And again, of course, there are the words our Lord spoke to Nicodemus, 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That

which is born of the flesh is flesh’ — and it cannot do anything about it — ‘and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (John 3:5–6). In other words, the terms are that we are born again . It is something that happens to us; we are begotten, we do not beget ourselves, we cannot generate ourselves. It is entirely the work of God in us and upon us.

We have not yet finished our consideration of this great and pivotal and central doctrine, but I do trust that, at this point, the great thought is clear in our minds and in our understanding, that it is there, in the disposition, that God operates, and it is God through the Holy Spirit who does it. We are born of the Spirit.

Now I hesitate to use the illustration, but you remember that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary but He was conceived of the Holy Ghost. Something comparable, similar to that — not the same thing, let me be clear about that — seems to happen here. This principle of spiritual life, this change, therefore, in the disposition, is something that is done by the Holy Spirit of God. Human nature is not entirely changed by it but because the disposition is changed the whole man or woman is like a new creation. In every respect they are different people because this fundamental thing that governs all else has been changed in them.

The faculties, however, remain as before. Never try to be somebody else, be yourself. God wants you to be yourself. He has made you as He has made you, and you can best glorify Him by being yourself. Beware always of Christian people who always talk in the same way and are the same in most respects, that is more likely to be psychological than spiritual. The man or woman, each individual, remains what he or she was, and thus you have the glorious variety in the apostles and in the Christian Church throughout the centuries. All together testify to the same Saviour and the same grace, the same regeneration, the same change in the disposition, but revealed according to the gifts and faculties, the propensities and powers that God has given to each person.

What a wonderful salvation, what a glorious way of redemption! Oh, I like a word which is used by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews in the second chapter. It describes and defines perfectly what I am trying to say. Talking about this great salvation the author says of God, ‘For it became him’ — it was like Him, it was His way of doing it — ‘... in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering’ (Heb. 2:10) — it became Him! And I trust that we all, having looked thus briefly and inadequately at this great doctrine, would say the same thing; it is a way of salvation that becomes Him, the almighty God.

The New Birth

We have, let me remind you, been asking how it is that the call of the gospel becomes

effectual in certain people. And in the last lecture, we began to answer that question by saying that the call becomes effectual in men and women as the result of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. It becomes effectual because in these people there is now a principle which was not there before which enables them to respond to this spiritual truth, this divine truth, that comes to them. And that is the difference between believers and unbelievers, those who are saved and those who are not. The latter have the 'natural mind', they are in the flesh, they are not spiritual, and that is why these things mean nothing to them. But they mean everything to the others and that is because they are now spiritual, and they are spiritual as the result of regeneration. So we began considering what the Bible teaches about regeneration. We considered the terms in Scripture and then we came to examine its real nature. It is not a mere change in some of the faculties of the soul, but is something behind that; and this we defined as being a change in a person's fundamental disposition.

Now as we proceed with our consideration, I want to emphasise again the profound nature and character of the change. It is something that is emphasised everywhere in Scripture, which talks about our being given 'a new heart' (Ezek. 36:26), and 'heart' in the Bible generally means, not merely the seat of the affections, as in current usage, but the very centre, the seat, of the whole personality. So when the Scriptures talk about giving us a new heart or a clean heart, they are talking about what I have described as the fundamental disposition, the thing that controls and determines everything else, the change is made there.

This whole question of regeneration, as we saw when we considered what our Lord said to Nicodemus, is, of course, a great mystery. It is a miracle, it is supernatural. Our Lord compared it to the wind in order to get Nicodemus, and all of us through Nicodemus, to see that there is a sense in which we just cannot finally understand it. 'Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit' (John 3:8). And yet it does behove us, as I am never tired of saying, to go as far as we can. So, in an attempt to make this wonderful change more or less comprehensible to us, I pass on to you what I, at any rate, regard as the best illustration that I have come across. It is an illustration that is suggested by the Scripture itself, and it is that of the whole process of grafting.

You may be anxious, for instance, to grow a certain type of pear. Now a way in which it is often done is this: you are given just a graft, a portion, a shoot, of the variety you like. Then you take a common wild pear tree and hack into it and into that wound which you have made in the tree, you put this shoot, this sprout. Then you bind them together. And eventually you will have a wonderful pear tree, producing nothing but your chosen variety of pear.

But in the meantime you have many things to do. You do not merely leave it at that. What happens is that the strength and the power, as it were, the life and the sap that

comes up through that wild pear tree, will enter into this shoot and it will produce fruit. Yes, but below the level of the grafting, the wild pear tree will still tend to throw out its own wild shoots and branches and want to produce its own fruit. So you have to lop off these natural branches. You have to cut them, prune them right down and, if you do that, a time will arrive when the tree will produce only this wonderful type of pear that you are anxious to grow.

A New Nature

You see, at first you seem to have two natures in the one tree, but if you prune off the old the new will gradually master the whole and you will eventually have a pear tree which is producing the type of fruit that you want. Now that seems to me to be incomparably the best illustration that has ever been used with regard to this matter. You are putting new life in so that at one stage you have got one tree but with two natures — the cultured, cultivated nature, and the wild nature. Yes, but if, by pruning off these wild branches, you see to it that the strength of that tree is only allowed to go into the grafted-in branch not only will that be strengthened and bear its fruit, it will gradually conquer and master the other. It seems to have a power to send its life down into the old until eventually you have the excellent pear tree that you desired at the beginning.

Now no illustration is perfect, but it does seem to me that that goes as far as we can possibly go. That is what happens, in a sense, in regeneration. There is still only one self, there are not two selves. But this new nature is put within us. We are called upon to mortify our members that are on the earth. We have to go on pruning and keeping under that which belongs to the old nature and, as we do so, this new life will grow and develop and produce fruit and the new nature will be increasingly in evidence. I am anxious to stress this point, because I am afraid we can even go further and say that some people, who regard themselves as truly evangelical, altogether deny the truth and the doctrine of regeneration. So I want to put this very strongly. In regeneration, a real change takes place and that within us. It is more than a mere change in our relationship to truth or to a person. A change takes place in us and not outside us only, and it is as definite as the grafting of a pear shoot into a pear tree.

Nor is this a change that remains only while we remain abiding in Christ. Now there is a very familiar teaching about sanctification which is put to us like this: the illustration is taken of a poker. There is the poker, it is cold, black and hard and cannot be bent. So you take that poker and put it into a fire and leave it there. And in the fire the poker becomes red hot and malleable, so that you can bend it. Ah yes, we are told, that is all right, but the poker remains red and hot and malleable only as long as it is kept in the fire. That is an illustration of abiding in Christ, and as long as you abide in Him there will be this new life, it is said, and this new way of living. But if you take that poker out of the fire and leave it out, it reverts completely to what it was before; it

becomes black and cold and hard.

Abiding in Christ

Now all that is taught to show the importance of abiding in Christ. It tells us that if we do not do so, we revert exactly to the condition that we were in before. But that, I suggest, is a denial of the doctrine of regeneration! Those who are Christians and who are born again, may backslide; they may not abide in Christ in this mystical sense, but, even then, they do not return to where they were before. They are born again; there is this new principle in them; the change has taken place and the change is still there. They are not manifesting it fully but it is there and we must not describe those people as reverting to the precise position they were in before.

It is exactly the same with that other illustration about the lifebelt. The sinner is compared to a man in the sea who cannot swim, but, we are told, as long as he puts on the lifebelt he is held up. Yes, but if he wriggles out of the lifebelt, he will sink to the bottom. Now there again, it seems to me, is a denial of the doctrine of regeneration because it tells us that when the man is not abiding, he finds himself in exactly the same position in which he was before, as if nothing had happened to him and no change had taken place.

But as we have said, the doctrine of regeneration teaches that the change is one which takes place not merely in our relationship to the Lord or in our relationship to truth, but is something that God does within us. It is a new life put in us, a new principle of life and obedience, and therefore, of course, it is something which grows and develops and becomes progressively greater. Listen to the apostle Paul saying that: 'But we all,' he says, 'with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory' (2 Cor. 3:18). Now there, you see, is development and growth. Why? Because this principle of life has been put in. 'We are changed,' as Charles Wesley puts it, drawing upon that verse, 'from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place.' The work is within us, and we are changed, we are no longer the same. All these scriptural terms should surely have saved us from the error that is illustrated in the pictures of the poker and the lifebelt. We are talking of a rebirth, a new birth, of being born again, of a new creation. Each of us is virtually a new person.

Now I cannot emphasise that too strongly because it is not only something that is clearly taught in Scripture, but when we come on later to deal with the doctrine of sanctification, we shall of necessity see how important it is that we understand this particular teaching about regeneration. If we do not, we shall unconsciously be denying the doctrine of regeneration altogether in our anxiety to get people to abide in Christ. It is right to exhort people to do that, and we shall do so when we come to that doctrine, but we must never put it in such a way as to give the impression that regeneration simply consists in a new relationship to Christ. That is to introduce a

very real confusion.

Why is Regeneration Essential?

So, then, having emphasised the profound inward character of the change, let me go on to ask a question: Why is this change absolutely essential? On what grounds have we the right to say that it is? Well, first of all Scripture teaches that. You remember again what our Lord said to Nicodemus: ‘Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’ (John 3:3). Then he also says: ‘Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God’ (v. 5). The rebirth is an absolute, utter essential. A man cannot even see the kingdom, let alone enter it, unless he has been born again.

Paul teaches the same thing in Galatians 6:15 : ‘In Christ Jesus,’ he says, ‘neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision but a new creature.’ That is the only thing that matters: not circumcision, nor the absence of it but the new creature, the new creation. And again, in Ephesians 4:24 , Paul says the same thing when he describes the new man, ‘which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness’.

But, in many ways, one of the most important texts in this connection is Hebrews 12:14 : ‘Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.’ Holiness is absolutely essential and, mark you, holiness there does not merely mean a sanctification that you may or may not receive. Without holiness no man shall — can — see the Lord. So it is no use saying that some Christians have received sanctification and some have not, and that those who have not are still going to heaven — without holiness heaven is impossible. And it is in regeneration that this holiness is implanted in us. This new life is a holy life, a holy principle is placed within us.

There, then, are the explicit statements of Scripture. But there are other statements which teach the same thing by implication. Eternal life is defined as a knowledge of God: ‘This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’ (John 17:3). Our Lord says that He has come ‘that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly’ (John 10:10). He has come to give us eternal life and eternal life comprises this knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. And that in itself makes regeneration an absolute necessity. God is holy. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. So life eternal is to know Him and to have fellowship with Him. And, therefore, it means, of necessity, that my nature must correspond. There must be something in me which corresponds to that and can enjoy that.

Yes, but we know that, by nature, men and women as the result of the fall, and as the

result of sin, are the exact opposite of that. And again, that is why our Lord puts it so plainly in speaking to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was trying to understand and thought he could go from where he was to the next position. No, no, says our Lord, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3:4), and there is nothing in common between them at all. You cannot mix the flesh and the Spirit, it simply cannot be done. It is no use arguing, He says, the thing is impossible. There is the spiritual, here is the sinful, that which belongs to the flesh, and you cannot bring them together. You must be born again. You must be made spiritual.

So the character of God and the character of men and women as the result of sin makes regeneration essential, because there is no such thing as an innate divine spark in human beings. Of course, the people who believe in a divine spark do not believe in regeneration and they are perfectly consistent. But it does seem rather odd that people who denounce the doctrine of the divine spark nevertheless seem to think that there is something in human nature which can do a great deal and which does not make regeneration an absolute and prior necessity.

So regeneration must come at the very beginning because if it is possible for me to do something which will eventually lead to my regeneration, I do not need regeneration. If I, by myself, as I am as the result of the fall and of sin, can appreciate spiritual truth, if I can appreciate the gospel and say, 'Yes I'm going to pay attention to that,' and then, as the result of my paying attention, I am born again, well then, I do not need the gift of life. If I have already got the ability and the power and the discrimination to recognise truth and to desire it, then I do not need to be regenerated. But the fact is, of course, that I do not have such a power. Men and women, as the result of the fall and of sin, do not desire this truth. They are at enmity against God. They are opposed to God. 'You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works,' says Paul (Col. 2:21). They hate the law of God. They have nothing to do with Him. They are carnal, carnally minded. They 'mind the things of the flesh' (Rom. 8:5). So regeneration is not only essential, but is essential at the beginning; you can have nothing without it. It is impossible for anything to happen in us which can make us Christians until regeneration has taken place.

How is Regeneration Brought About?

Now that brings us on to the next question: How exactly is regeneration brought about in us? This is an interesting subject. It is not merely a question of the moral influence of the truth. Those who are not evangelical say that as people listen to the gospel, as they come under its influence and its power, it changes them. They like the ideas, they take hold of them, and the effect of the ideas and of the truth is such that they become different people; they are changed. But that is not it. We are talking about something that happens down in the depths of the personality, and this is what brings about

change.

Moral influence can, of course, make a great difference. It can make people change their ideas. It can make them change their way of living; it can turn a drunkard into a teetotaller — it has often done it. You can present arguments and the argument may go home. Someone may give up drink completely, become very sober, and an advocate of temperance, without Christ being mentioned at all. Under the moral effect of truth, and the moral influence of ideas, people can produce great changes in themselves. But that is not what we are dealing with here.

Secondly, it is not produced by baptism either. This is an old controversy, an old source of discussion. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that regeneration is produced and accomplished through the instrumentality of baptism, and only through baptism. You must be baptised before you can be regenerate. I do not want to anticipate a later lecture, but let us be clear at this point. In baptism, Roman Catholics teach that our sins are forgiven and that our moral nature is changed and renewed within us. We are told that baptism delivers us from the inherent power and defilement of original sin. You remember that, as the result of the fall of Adam and our connection with him, we are all defiled, and the power of sin has entered in upon us. Now Roman Catholics teach that when a child is baptised, it is delivered from the inherent power and pollution of original sin. All that it has inherited from Adam is washed away, blotted out, and not only that, by baptism we are made children and heirs of God.

The Anglo-Catholics also teach baptismal regeneration. And, strange though it may seem, the same is true of the Lutherans. Luther never quite got rid of this view, and neither have his followers. There is one difference between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic views. The Catholics say that you cannot be regenerate without baptism; the Lutherans say that you can but that the usual, normal manner is by means of baptism. Well, we do not teach that. We say that regeneration is not by baptism, that there is abundant scriptural evidence in the book of Acts alone to prove that the people who were baptised were those who gave evidence that they were already born again. Indeed, they were baptised because they had been born again. It was given as a sign and a seal to them because they had produced evidence of the new birth.

What is the Relationship of Regeneration to the Word that is Preached?

But to us a much more interesting and fascinating question is this: What is the relationship of regeneration to the word that is preached? There are a number of texts that suggest that our regeneration takes place through and by means of the word. Let me suggest two to you. James 1:18 : ‘Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth , that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.’ Then there is 1 Peter 1:23 :

‘Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.’ However, you will remember that in the last lecture I drew a distinction between the act of regeneration and the coming to birth and said that there may be a long interval between the two. Now I suggest to you that both these texts I have quoted are concerned about the bringing to birth. And it is certainly the word that does that. It is the effectual call, coming through the medium of the word, that, as it were, brings the seed of life to life, so that the birth takes place. But if you keep in mind the distinction between the generation and the actual coming to birth, I think you will see the difference. The word is used, not in the act of generating, but in the bringing out into life of that which has already been implanted within.

At this point some would quote the parable of the sower and the different types of ground, and emphasise that the life is in the seed and so on. But surely the whole point of that parable is to emphasise the character of the ground into which the seed is put. Is it stony ground? Is it encompassed by thorns? And so on. Or is it good ground? In other words, the teaching in that parable is that what really matters is that fundamental something which we call the disposition. And if that has been changed and put right, then, when the word comes, it will be effectual; it will lead to the result; it will yield the fruit.

Indeed, the Scriptures do seem to teach that quite explicitly. Take, for instance, John 6:65 : ‘Therefore said I unto you,’ says our Lord, ‘that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.’ Now there were the people, hearing the same word, and as we have already seen, some came, some went away — what was the difference? It is this, our Lord, says, ‘... except it were given unto them of my Father.’ And again I would remind you of what we are told about Lydia. It was because the Lord had ‘opened her heart’ that she attended to Paul and received the word. It was not the word that opened her heart, it was the act of the Lord. It was this that led to her reception of the word. That surely must be the order. And the argument of 1 Corinthians 2 , especially verses 12 to 15 , obviously teaches the same thing.

What About the Old Testament Saints?

But there are two final arguments about this which are not only of great importance, but, it seems to me, of very great interest also. What about the Old Testament saints? Now when we were dealing with the doctrine of the covenant, we were at great pains to emphasise that the Old Testament saints are in the same position as we are. There is only one covenant in the Old and in the New Dispensations. And you and I today are the children of Abraham, Abraham is our father, because we are children of faith. There is a difference, of course, in the administration of the covenant in the Old and in the New, but only one great covenant of grace. Our Lord tells us that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be in the kingdom and that others will come from the east and from the west while the Jews will be left outside (Luke 13:28–29). In other words, the Old

Testament saints were born again. David was born again, he was a new man, a new creature, and so were the patriarchs and the prophets.

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it like this at the end of chapter 11 . He said that those saints did not receive the promise in full. His argument is that it was kept back so that they should not, as it were, run ahead of us. Here it is: ‘And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect’ (Heb. 11:39–40). So we are made perfect together. But if those Old Testament saints were regenerate, as they must have been, it is clear that it is not the word that actually performs the act of regeneration. Regeneration is something that is not mediate through the word, but immediate. It was the Spirit of God who dealt with them and operated upon them.

The other argument is that about children, especially about infants. Now we all believe, do we not, that there are infants and children who have gone and who will go to heaven and spend their eternity in the presence of God. Now how can a child be saved? Obviously every infant needs to be saved. If you believe in the doctrine of the fall and in the doctrine of original sin, you must believe that every child is born in sin and ‘shapen in iniquity’ (Ps. 51:5); every child is dead in trespasses and in sins (Eph. 2:21). They all inherit original sin and original guilt from Adam, every child that is born. How, then, can any child be saved? How can any child ever go to heaven?

Can Infants Be Regenerated?

Now, if you want to insist upon the fact that regeneration always follows upon hearing the word and believing it and accepting it – how can an infant be saved? The infant cannot receive truth, it does not have the ability; it does not have understanding, it has not awakened to these things. So is there no hope for any infant? We do not believe that, we obviously reject such a suggestion. And the answer is, of course, that a child is regenerated in exactly the same way as anybody else, because it is the action of this almighty being, of God Himself through the Holy Spirit. He can implant the seed of spiritual life in an unconscious infant with the same ease as He can do it in an adult person. Therefore you see why it is important for us to consider whether regeneration is something that happens indirectly through the word or whether it is indeed the direct operation of God upon us. And I am teaching again, as I did in the last lecture, that it is immediate, direct, it is God creating anew as He created the world out of nothing at the beginning.

Can Regeneration be Lost?

And, finally, the last thing is that obviously, in the light of all this, regeneration is something that can never be lost. If you are regenerate, you will remain regenerate. It

seems to me that this is absolutely inevitable because regeneration is the work of God. Yet there are those who seem to think that people can be born again as the result of believing the truth and then, if they backslide or fall into sin or deny the truth, they lose their regeneration. But if they come back again and believe again, then they are regenerate again — as if one can be born again and die and be born again and die an endless number of times! How important doctrine is! How important it is that we should be clear as to what the Scripture teaches about these things! It tells us that regeneration is the work of God Himself in the depths of the soul and that He does it in such a way that it is permanent. ‘No man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand’ (John 10:29).

‘I am persuaded,’ says Paul, and let us notice this, ‘I am persuaded’ — he is certain — ‘that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom. 8:38–39). And when Paul says that, he is expounding regeneration. It is not merely the relationship between us, it is because God has put this life in me, that nothing can separate me from Him. And when we come to deal with the mystical union which follows directly from this, we shall see how still more inevitable this must be. This is a permanent work and nothing can ever bring it to an end.

Take those verses from the first epistle of John: ‘Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin’ — which means that such a person does not go on abiding in sin. Why? Well — ‘for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God’ (1 John 3:9). He cannot go on sinning because he is born of God. Let us be clear about that. The man or woman who is born of God, who is regenerate, simply does not and cannot continue — abide — in a life of sin. They may backslide temporarily, but if they are born of God they will come back. It is as certain as that they have been born again. It is the way to test whether or not someone is born again.

Or take that other word in 1 John 2:19 : ‘They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.’ They were members of the Church, these people, they appeared to be Christians, they said the right things and up to a point their life seemed to be right, but they ‘went out’. Why? They went out ‘because they were not of us’ — they were not regenerate. They had never been born again. That is why they have gone out, says John, in a sense, to give proof of the fact that they have never really had life.

‘But what about Hebrews 6 and 10 ?’ asks someone. The answer is that there is nothing in either of those chapters to suggest that those people were ever regenerate. They had had marvellous experiences, but there is nothing to say that they were born again. They were not, and that is the explanation. The regenerate abide. They may

backslide, they may fall into sin, they may fail, but they abide, because the life is there. The others may appear to be fully Christian but if there is no life they will not abide. Life shows itself, it gives proof of its existence — as we shall go on to see.