

C. H. Spurgeon on the Priority of Regeneration to Faith
Compiled by Michael Riley
Text in square brackets is my own commentary

Passages that favor regeneration before faith

Faith and Regeneration

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0979.htm>

So, too, in the chapter before us he insists upon a man's being born of God; he brings that up again and again, but evermore does he ascribe wondrous efficacy to faith; he mentions faith as the index [the pointer; the indication] of our being born again, faith as overcoming the world, faith as possessing the inward witness, faith as having eternal life—indeed, he seems as if he could not heap honour enough upon believing, while at the same time he insists upon the grave importance of the inward experience connected with the new birth.

“He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” We shall consider this morning, first of all, the believing which is here intended; and then, secondly, how it is a sure proof of regeneration; and then, thirdly, dwelling for awhile upon the closing part of the verse we shall show how it becomes an argument for Christian love: “Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”

II. We must now pass on to show that WHEREVER IT EXISTS IT IS THE PROOF OF REGENERATION. There never was a grain of such faith as this in the world, except in a regenerate soul, and there never will be while the world standeth. It is so according to the text, and if we had no other testimony this one passage would be quite enough to prove it. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” “Ah!” I hear thee say, poor soul, “the new birth is a great mystery; I do not understand it; I am afraid I am not a partaker in it.” You are born again if you believe that Jesus is the Christ, if you are relying upon a crucified Saviour you are assuredly begotten again unto a lively hope. Mystery or no mystery, the new birth is yours if you are a believer. Have you never noticed that the greatest mysteries in the world reveal themselves by the simplest indications. The simplicity and apparent easiness of faith is no reason why I should not regard its existence as an infallible indication of the new birth within. How know we that the new-born child lives except by its cry? Yet a child's cry—what a simple sound it is! how readily could it be imitated! a clever workman could with pipes and strings easily deceive us; yet was there never a child's cry in the world but what it indicated the mysteries of breathing, heart-beating, blood-flowing, and all the other wonders which come with life itself. Do you see yonder person just drawn out of the river? Does she live? Yes, life is there. Why? Because the lungs still heave. But does it not seem an easy thing to make lungs heave? A pair of billows blown into them, might not that produce the motion? Ah, yes, the thing is easily imitated after a sort; but no lungs heave except where life is. Take another illustration. Go into a telegraph office at any time, and you will see certain needles moving right and left with unceasing click. Electricity is a great mystery, and you cannot see or feel it; but the operator tells you that the electric current is moving along the wire. How does he know? “I know it by the needle.” How is that? I could move your needles easily. “Yes; but do not you see the needle has made two motions to the right, one to the left, and two to the right again? I am reading a

message.” “But,” say you, “I can see nothing in it; I could imitate the clicking and moving very easily.” Yet he who is taught the art sees before him in those needles, not only electric action, but a deeper mystery still; he perceives that a mind is directing an invisible force, and speaking by means of it. Not to all, but to the initiated is it given to see the mystery hidden within the simplicity. The believer sees in the faith, which is simple as the movements of the needle, an indication that God is operating on the human mind, and the spiritual man discerns that there is an inner secret intimated thereby, which the carnal eye cannot decipher. To believe in Jesus is a better indicator of regeneration than anything else, and in no case did it ever mislead. Faith in the living God and his Son Jesus Christ is always the result of the new birth, and can never exist except in the regenerate. Whoever has faith is a saved man.

Baptismal Regeneration

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0573.htm>

If you can believe that our great Father desireth us to come to him—that he panteth for us—that he calleth us every day with the loud voice of his Son's wounds; if you can believe now that in Christ there is pardon for transgressions past, and cleansing for years to come; if you can trust him to save you, you have already the marks of regeneration. The work of salvation is commenced in you, so far as the Spirit's work is concerned: it is finished in you so far as Christ's work is concerned.

Buying the Truth

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/3449.htm>

Now, avoid that, and buy the truth, which lies here, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” We hear too much nowadays of regeneration without faith—the supposed regeneration of unconscious babes, the new birth of people through drops of water, when they are not able to understand what is performed upon them. I beseech you believe that there is no new birth where there is not a confidence in Christ, and that the regeneration which does not lead to repentance and faith, which is not, indeed, immediately attended therewith, is no regeneration whatever. Buy the truth in this matter. Stand to it that it is the work of the Holy Spirit in rational and intelligent beings, leading them to hate sin, and to lay hold of eternal life.

[Spurgeon is careful to distinguish his position from baptismal regeneration. Regeneration precedes faith, but it *always* and *immediately* produces faith.]

How Can I Obtain Faith?

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1031.htm>

But is not faith a perpetual concomitant of regeneration? and what is that regeneration worth which leaves a person an unbeliever, and, consequently, “condemned already, because he hath not believed on the Son of God?” Rest assured, that as faith does not come by descent, neither

can it be produced by any rite which recognizes that descent: it comes in one way, and in one way only in every case, and that is, by the hearing of the word.

[As above, Spurgeon typically insists that regeneration is produced by the *means* of the Word of God. This is, again, in opposition to baptismal regeneration, which teaches the possibility of regeneration apart from any means at all, and which does not immediately produce faith.]

Messrs. Moody and Sankey Defended; or, A Vindication of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1239.htm>

When a man turns his eye to Jesus, and simply trusts him—for we adhere to that as being the vital matter—there is accompanying that act—nay, I must correct myself, there is as the cause of that act—a miraculous, supernatural power which in an instant changes a man, as completely as if it flung him back into nothingness and brought him forth into new life. If this be so, then believing in Christ is something very marvellous. Now, if you will turn to the third chapter of John's gospel, and also to his Epistles, you will see that faith is always linked with regeneration, or the new birth, which new birth is the work of the Spirit of God.

[One of the more unambiguous passages in Spurgeon, in which he corrects himself to insist that regeneration is the cause of faith.]

Regeneration

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0130.htm>

But now note the manner in which this regeneration is obtained. I think I have none here so profoundly stupid as to be Puseyites I can scarcely believe that I have been the means of attracting one person here, so utterly devoid of every remnant of brain, as to believe the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Yet I must just hint at it. There be some who teach that by a few drops of water sprinkled on an infant's brow the infant becomes regenerate. Well, granted. And now I will find out your regenerate ones twenty years afterward. The champion of the prize ring is a regenerated man. O! yes, he was regenerated, because in infancy he was baptized; and, therefore, if all infants in baptism are regenerated, the prize-fighter is a regenerated man. Take hold of him and receive him as your brother in the Lord. Do you hear that man swearing and blaspheming God? He is regenerate; believe me, he is regenerate; the priest put a few drops of water on his brow, and he is a regenerated man. Do you see the drunkard reeling down the street, the pest of the neighborhood, fighting every body, and beating his wife, worse than the brute. Well, he is regenerate, he is one of those Puseyite's regenerates—O! goodly regenerate! Mark you the crowd assembled in the streets! The gallows is erected, Palmer is about to be executed; the man whose name should be execrated through all eternity for his villainy! Here is one of the Puseyite's regenerates. Yes, he is regenerate because he was baptized in infancy; regenerate, while he mixes his strychnine; regenerate while he administers his poison slowly, that he may cause death, and infinite pain, all the while he is causing it. Regenerate, forsooth! If that be regeneration, such regeneration is not worth having; if that be the thing that makes us free of the kingdom of

heaven, verily, the gospel is indeed a licentious gospel; we can say nothing about it. If that be the gospel, that all such men are regenerate and will be saved, we can only say, that it would be the duty of every man in the world to move that gospel right away, because it is so inconsistent with the commonest principles of morality, that it could not possibly be of God, but of the devil.

[I include the above comment to again point out that Spurgeon's opposition was to baptismal regeneration, rather than the precedence of regeneration to faith in itself.]

And now we must say, that regeneration consists in this. God the Holy Spirit, in a supernatural manner—mark, by the word supernatural I mean just what it strictly means; supernatural, more than natural—works upon the hearts of men, and they by the operations of the divine Spirit become regenerate men; but without the Spirit they never can be regenerated. And unless God the Holy Spirit, who “worketh in us to will and to do,” should operate upon the will and the conscience, regeneration is an absolute impossibility, and therefore so is salvation. “What!” says one, “do you mean to say that God absolutely interposes in the salvation of every man to make him regenerate?” I do indeed; in the salvation of every person there is an actual putting forth of the divine power, whereby the dead sinner is quickened, the unwilling sinner is made willing, the desperately hard sinner has his conscience made tender; and he who rejected God and despised Christ, is brought to cast himself down at the feet of Jesus. This is called fanatical doctrine, mayhap; that we can not help; it is scriptural doctrine, that is enough for us. “Except a man be born of the Spirit he can not see the kingdom of God; that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” If you like it not, quarrel with my Master, not with me; I do but simply declare his own revelation, that there must be in your heart something more than you can ever work there. There must be a divine operation; call it a miraculous operation, if you please; it is in some sense so. There must be a divine interposition, a divine working, a divine influence, or else, do what you may, without that you perish, and are undone; “for except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of God.” The change is radical; it gives us new natures, makes us love what we hated and hate what we loved, sets us in a new road; makes our habits different, our thoughts different, makes us different in private, and different in public. So that being in Christ it is fulfilled: “If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.”

[While Spurgeon does not specifically mention faith as a product of regeneration, it seems clear that the person that he describes before regeneration, a person who hates God, is not a person who is exercising saving faith.]

The Mustard Seed: A Sermon for the Sabbath-School Teacher

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2110.htm>

And so, within the simple Gospel, how much lies concentrated? Look at it! Within that truth lie regeneration, repentance, faith, holiness, zeal, consecration, perfection. Heaven hides itself away within the Gospel.

[Perhaps a simple *ordo*, although I would not stress this passage heavily.]

Faith and Life

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0551.htm>

Let us begin where Peter begins, with the FAITH. You have here a description of true saving faith.

First, you have a description of its source. He says, “to them that have obtained like precious faith.” See, then, my brethren, faith does not grow in man's heart by nature; it is a thing which is obtained. It is not a matter which springs up by a process of education, or by the example and excellent instruction of our parents; it is a thing which has to be obtained. Not imitation, but regeneration; not development, but conversion. All our good things come from without us, only evil can be educed from within us. Now, that which is obtained by us must be given to us; and well are we taught in Scripture that “faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.” Although faith is the act of man, yet it is the work of God. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness,” but that heart must, first of all, have been renewed by divine grace before it ever can be capable of the act of saving faith. Faith, we say, is man's act, for we are commanded to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” and we shall be saved. At the same time, faith is God's gift, and wherever we find it, we may know that it did not come there from the force of nature, but from a work of divine grace. How this magnifies the grace of God, my brethren, and how low this casts human nature! Faith. Is it not one of the simplest things? Merely to depend upon the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, does it not seem one of the easiest of virtues? To be nothing, and to let him be everything—to be still, and to let him work for me, does not this seem to be the most elementary of all the Christian graces? Indeed, so it is; and yet, even to this first principle and rudiment, poor human nature is so fallen and so utterly undone, that it cannot attain unto! Brethren, the Lord must not only open the gates of heaven to us at last, but he must open the gates of our heart to faith at the first. It is not enough for us to know that he must make us perfect in every good work to do his will, but we must be taught that he must even give us a desire after Christ; and when this is given, he must enable us to give the grip of the hand of faith whereby Jesus Christ becomes our Saviour and Lord.

[Spurgeon explicitly says here that faith is obtained by regeneration.]

Alive or Dead—Which?

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0755.htm>

Our Lord began, in the third chapter of John's gospel, by telling Nicodemus that he must be born again, and explaining to him the mysterious character of the new birth. Whereupon Nicodemus was filled with wonder, and unbelievably exclaimed, “How can these things be?” He does not seem to have made the smallest advance towards faith by hearing of the new birth, and therefore on the selfsame occasion our Lord turned aside from the doctrine of regeneration, the inner work, to speak to him of the doctrine of faith, or the work of Christ, which is the object of saving faith. Thus it comes to pass that the very same chapter which has in it that searching passage, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” contains also these encouraging words, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal

life.” From which I gather, my brethren, that those unwise revivalists who perpetually cry up, “Believe and live!” and by their silence, and sometimes by their unguarded remarks, disparage repentance and other works of the Holy Spirit, have not our Saviour's example for so doing; and on the other hand, those conservative divines who continually cry up inward experience, and preach the work of the Spirit, but forget to publish the gospel message, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” these also have neither example nor precedent from our Lord Jesus Christ or his apostles, but mar the truth by leaving out a portion of it. If we can with all boldness and distinctness declare the inward work which the Holy Ghost accomplishes in the soul by working in us to will and to do of God's good pleasure, and at the same time can tell the sinner most plainly that the object of his faith is not the work within, but the work which Jesus Christ accomplished upon the cross for him, we shall have dealt faithfully with divine truth, and wisely with our hearer's soul. The faith which brings salvation, looks away from everything that is inward to that which was accomplished and completed by our once slain but now ascended Lord; and yet no man has this faith except as it is wrought in him by the quickening Spirit. If we can preach both these truths in harmonious proportion, it seems to me that we shall have hit upon that form of Christian teaching which, while it is consistent with truth, is also healthful to the soul.

[Although regeneration is the Spirit's work, as a preacher of the gospel I can still impress on the unbeliever his duty to believe.]

He that hath the Son, then, is a man who is trusting alone in Jesus, in whom Jesus Christ rules and reigns; and such a man is most surely the possessor of spiritual and eternal life at the present moment. It is not said “he shall have life”—he has it, he enjoys it now, he is at this hour quickened spirit; God has breathed into him a new life, by which he is made a partaker of the divine nature, and is one of the seed according to promise, and this life he has by virtue of his having received the Son of God to be his all.

I have thus briefly opened up the words of the text, and having broken the bone, let us now discuss the marrow and fatness of it. Whoever in this world possesses Christ by faith is most certainly alive unto God by a life eternal. I shall remark, in the first place, that having the Son is good evidence of eternal life, from the fact that faith by which a man receives Christ is in itself a living act. Faith is the hand of the soul, but a dead man cannot stretch out his icy limbs to take of that which is presented to him. If I, as a guilty, needy sinner, with my empty hand receive the fullness of Christ, I have performed a living act; the hand may quiver with weakness, but life is there. Faith is the eye of the soul, by which the sin-bitten sinner looks to Christ, lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; but from forth the stony eyes of death no glance of faith can dart. There may be all the organization by which it should look, but if life be absent the eye cannot see. If, therefore, my eye of faith has looked alone to Jesus, and I depend upon him, I must be a living soul, that act has proved me to be alive unto God. Looking to Jesus is a very simple act, indeed, it is a childlike act, but still it is a living one: no sight gleams from the eyeballs of death. Faith, again, is the mouth of the soul; by faith we feed upon Christ. Jesus Christ is digested and inwardly assimilated, so that our soul lives upon him; but a dead man cannot eat. Whoever heard of carcasses gathering to a banquet? There may be the mouth, the teeth, and the palate, and so forth, the organization may be perfect, but the dead man neither tastes the sweet nor relishes the delicious. If, then, I have received Christ Jesus as the bread, which came down from heaven, as the spiritual drink from the rock, I have performed an action which is in itself a clear evidence that I belong to the living in Zion.

[Spurgeon's comments here are very similar to any Calvinist today who would insist that regeneration is necessary before faith. The impartation of life is necessary before the unbeliever can believe.]

Gospel Missions

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0076.htm>

We feel persuaded that all of you are of one mind in this matter, that it is the absolute duty as well as the eminent privilege of the Church to proclaim the gospel to the world. We do not conceive that God will do his own work without instruments, but that, as he has always employed means in the work of the regeneration of this world, he will still continue to do the same, and that it becomes the Church to do its utmost to spread the truth wherever it can reach the ear of man.

[Again, regeneration comes by means, and yet Spurgeon never says that it is faith in the Word that produces regeneration.]

Children Brought to Christ, and Not to the Font

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0581.htm>

[A worthy sermon on this subject, with relevant material scattered throughout.]

The Work of the Holy Spirit

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0178.htm>

There is no power in man, though he were ordained by one who could most assuredly claim succession from the apostles—though he were endowed with miraculous gifts, though he were the apostle Paul himself—if he did assert that he had in himself power to convert, power to regenerate, let him be accursed, for he hath denied the truth and Paul himself would have declared him anathema, maranatha, for having departed from the everlasting gospel, one cardinal point of which is—regeneration, the work of God the Holy Spirit; the new birth, a thing that is from above.

And, my brethren, it is quite certain that no man ever begins the new birth himself. The work of salvation never was commenced by any man. God the Holy Spirit must commence it. Now, the reasons why no man ever commenced the work of grace in his own heart, is very plain and palpable. First, because he cannot; secondly, because he won't. The best reason of all is, because he cannot—he is dead. Well the dead may be made alive, but the dead cannot make themselves alive, for the dead can do nothing. Besides, the new thing to be created as yet hath no being. The uncreated cannot create. "Nay," but you say, "that man can create." Yes, can hell create heaven? Then sin may create grace. What! will you tell me that fallen human nature, that has come almost to a level with the brutes, is competent to rival God; that it can emulate the divinity in working as great marvels, and in imparting as divine a life as even God himself can give? It cannot. Besides,

it is a creation; we are created anew in Christ Jesus. Let any man create a fly, and afterwards let him create a new heart in himself; until he hath done the less he cannot do the greater. Besides, no man will. If any man could convert himself, there is no man that would. If any man saith he would, if that be true, he is already converted; for the will to be converted is in great part conversion. The will to love God, the desire to be in unison with Christ, is not to be found in any man who hath not already been brought to be reconciled with God through the death of his Son. There may be a false desire, a desire grounded upon a misrepresentation of the truth; but a true desire after true salvation by the true Spirit, is a certain index that the salvation already is there in the germ and in the bud, and only needs time and grace to develop itself. But certain it is, that man neither can nor will, being on the one hand utterly impotent and dead, and on the other hand utterly depraved and unwilling; hating the change when he sees it in others, and most of all despising it in himself. Be certain, therefore, that God the Holy Spirit must begin, since none else can do so.

And now, my brethren, I must just enter into the subject very briefly, by showing what the Holy Spirit does in the beginning. Permit me to say that in describing the work, the true work of salvation in the soul, you must not expect me to exhibit any critical nicety of judgment. We have heard of an assembly of divines, who once debated whether men did repent first or believe first; and after a long discussion, some one wiser than the rest suggested another question, whether in the new-born child the lungs did first heave, or the blood did first circulate. "Now," said he, "when you shall ascertain the one, you may be able to ascertain the other." You shall not know which cometh first; they are, very likely, begotten in us at the same moment. We are not able, when we mention these things in order, exactly to declare and testify that these do all happen according to the order in which we mention them; but we only, according to the judgment of men, according to our own experience, seek now to set forth what is the usual way of acting with God the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation.

The first thing, then, that God the Holy Spirit doth in the soul is, to regenerate it. We must always learn to distinguish between regeneration and conversion. A man may be converted a great many times in his life, but regenerated only once. Conversion is a thing which is caused by regeneration, but regeneration is the very first act of God the Spirit in the soul. "What," say you, "does regeneration come before conviction of sin?" most certainly; there could be no conviction in the dead sinner. Now, regeneration quickens the sinner, and makes him live. He is not competent to have true spiritual conviction worked in him until, first of all he has received life. It is true that one of the earliest developments of life is conviction of sin; but before any man can see his need of a Saviour he must be a living man; before he can really, I mean, in a spiritual position, in a saving, effectual manner, understand his own deep depravity, he must have eyes with which to see the depravity, he must have ears with which to hear the sentence of the law, he must have been quickened and made alive; otherwise he could not be capable of feeling, or seeing, or discerning at all. I believe, then, the first thing the Spirit does is this—he finds the sinner dead in sin, just where Adam left him; he breathes into him a divine influence. The sinner knows nothing about how it is done, nor do any of us understand it. "Thou understandest not the wind—it bloweth where it listeth;" but we see its effects. Now, none of us can tell how the Holy Spirit works in men. I doubt not there have been some who have sat in these pews, and in the middle of a sermon or in prayer, or singing—they knew not how it was—the Spirit of God was in their hearts; he had entered into their souls; they were no longer dead in sin, no longer without thought, without hope, without spiritual capacity, but they had begun to live. And I believe this work of regeneration, when it is done effectually—and God the Spirit would not do it without

doing it effectually—is done mysteriously, often suddenly, and it is done in divers manners; but still it hath always this mark about it—that the man although he may not understand how it is done, feels that something is done. The what, the how, he doth not know; but he knows that something is done; and he now begins to think thoughts he never thought before; he begins to feel as he never felt before; he is brought into a new state, there is a change wrought in him—as if a dead post standing in the street were on a sudden to find itself possessed of a soul, and did hear the sound of the passing carriages, and listen to the words of the foot-passengers; there is something quite new about it. The fact is, the man has got a spirit; he never had one before; he was nothing but a body and a soul; but now, God has breathed into him the third great principle, the new life, the Spirit, and he has become a spiritual man. Now, he is not only capable of mental exercise, but of spiritual exercise; as, having a soul before, he could repent, he could believe, as a mere mental exercise; he could think thoughts of God, and have some desires after him; but he could not have one spiritual thought, nor one spiritual wish or desire, for he had no powers that could educe these things; but now, in regeneration, he has got something given to him, and being given, you soon see its effects. The man begins to feel that he is a sinner; why did he not feel that before? Ah, my brethren, he could not, he was not in a state to feel; he was a dead sinner; and though he used to tell you, and tell God, by way of compliment, that he was a sinner, he did not know anything about it. He said he was a sinner; yes, but he talked about being a sinner just as the blind man talks about the stars that he has never seen, as he talks about the light, the existence of which he would not know unless he were told of it; but now it is a deep reality. You may laugh at him, ye who have not been regenerated; but now he has got something that really puts him beyond your laughter. He begins to feel the exceeding weight and evil of transgression; his heart trembles, his very flesh quivers—in some cases the whole frame is affected. The man is sick by day and night; his flesh creepeth on his bones for fear; he cannot eat, his appetite fails him. He cannot bear the sound of melody and mirth; all his animal spirits are dried up. He cannot rejoice; he is unhappy, he is miserable. downcast, distressed; in some cases, almost ready to go mad; though in the majority of cases it takes a lighter phase, and there are the gentle whispers of the Spirit; but even then, the pangs and pains caused by regeneration, while the new life discovers the sin and evil of the past condition of the man are things that are not to be well described or mentioned without tears. This is all the work of the Spirit.

And having brought the soul thus far, the next thing the Holy Spirit doth is, to teach the soul that it is utterly incapable of saving itself. It knew that before, mayhap, if the man sat under a Gospel ministry; but he only knew it with the ear, and understood it with the mind. Now, it has become part of his very life; he feels it; it has entered into his soul, and he knows it to be true. Once he thought he would be good, and thought that would save him; the Holy Spirit just knocks the brains out of that thought. “Then,” he says, “I will try ceremonies. and see whether I cannot gain merit so;” God the Holy Spirit shoots the arrow right through the heart of that thought, and it falls dead before him, and he cannot bear the sight of the carcase, so that, like Abraham said of Sarah, he exclaims, “Bury the dead out of my sight.” Though once he loved it dearly, now he hates the sight thereof. He thought once that he could believe; he had an Arminian notion in his head, that he could believe when he liked, and repent when he liked. Now, God the Spirit has brought him in such a condition, that he says, “I can do nothing.” He begins to discover his own death, now that he is made alive; he did not know anything about it before. He now finds that he has no hand of faith to lift, though the minister tells him to do it. He now discovers, when he is bidden to pray, that he would, but cannot pray. He now finds that he is powerless, and he dies in the hand of God like clay in the hand of the potter, and is made to cry out, “O Lord, my God,

unless thou save me, I am damned to all eternity; for I cannot lift a finger in this matter until thou first of all givest me strength.” And if you urge him to do anything, he longs to be doing, but he is so afraid that it should only be fleshly doings, and not the doings of the Spirit, that he meditates, and stops, and stays, until he groans and cries; and feeling that these groans and cries are the real work of the Spirit, and prove that he has spiritual life, he then begins in right earnest to look to Jesus Christ the Saviour. But mark, all these things are by the Spirit, and none of them can ever be produced in the soul of any man or woman, apart from the divine influence of God the Holy Ghost.

This being done, the soul being now weaned from all confidence, and despairing and brought to its last standing place, yea, laid prostrate on the ground, the rope being about its neck, and the ashes and sackcloth on its head; God the Holy Ghost next applies the blood of Jesus to the soul, gives the soul the grace of faith whereby it lays hold of Jesus, and gives it an anointing of holy consolation and unction of assurance, whereby, casting itself wholly on the blood and righteousness of Jesus, it receiveth joy, knoweth itself to be saved, and rejoiceth in pardon. But mark, that is the work of the Spirit. Some preachers will tell their people, “Believe, only believe.” Yes, it is right they should tell them so; but they should remember it is also right to tell them that even this must be the work of the Spirit; for though we say, “Only believe,” that is the greatest only in the world; and what some men say is so easy is just what those who want to believe find to be the hardest thing in all the world. It is simple enough for a man that hath the Spirit in him to believe, when he hath the written Word before him and the witness of the Spirit in him; that is easy enough. But for the poor, tried sinner, who cannot see anything in the Word of God but thunder and threatening—for him to believe—ah my brethren, it is not such a little matter as some make it to be. It needs the fullness of the power of God's Spirit to bring any man to such faith as that.

[Perhaps Spurgeon's most extensive comments on this doctrine. It is difficult to misunderstand when he says, “Conversion is a thing which is caused by regeneration, but regeneration is the very first act of God the Spirit in the soul.”]

Natural or Spiritual?

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0407.htm>

IV. And now, lastly, I come to THE PRACTICAL TRUTHS WHICH FLOW FROM THIS GREAT THOUGH SORROWFUL FACT.

Do you not perceive, men and brethren, that if what I have stated be true there is absolute necessity for regeneration, or the work of the Spirit? An absolute necessity, I say, because in no one single instance can it be dispensed with. You may educate a nature till it should attain the highest point, but you cannot educate an old nature into a new one. You may educate a horse, but you cannot educate it into a man. You shall train the bird that sits upon your finger but you cannot train a limpet into an eagle, nor is it possible for you to train by the best instruction the natural man into a spiritual man. Between the two there is still a great gulf fixed. But cannot the natural man, by great efforts long-continued at last come to be spiritual? No, he cannot. Let the fish in the water wish as much as ever it likes, and despite Dr. Darwin's hypothesis, I aver that no pike by all its wishing ever wished itself into an ostrich, and that no single minnow was ever known to make itself into a lark. It may get as high as its own nature can get it but not beyond; it

is a transformation which only the Divine Being can effect. So you may by your own efforts make yourselves the best of natural men. You may become the most patriotic of statesmen, you may become the most sober and discreet of moralists, you may become the kindest and most benevolent of philanthropists, but into a spiritual man you cannot bring yourself. Do what you will, and still at your very best there is a division wide as eternity between you and the regenerate man. But cannot another man help us out of such a nature into a state of grace? No, by no means; as man is powerless for himself, so is he powerless for his fellow. The priest may dip his pretentious fingers into the water which he professes to have sanctified, and may put the drops upon the infant's brow but that the child is regenerate is a lie. He may take the child in after-life into the baptismal pool if he will, and there bury him agreeably to the apostle's metaphor, but that by immersion any more than by sprinkling a soul can be regenerate, is a gross and infamous lie. He may put his hand upon his head and bless him in God's name, he may perform divers enchantments over him, and conclude at last with the final sacred greasing, and dispatch his spirit with extreme unction into another world but to regenerate another man is as impossible to our fellow-men as to create a world or to make another heaven, and rival the majesty of Deity. How, then, is it to be done? The Spirit of God alone can do it. O sirs! this is a great mystery, but you must know it if you would be saved, it is a solemn secret, but it is one which must be known in your consciences, or else shut out from heaven you must be. The Spirit of God must new make you, ye must be born again. "If a man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new." The same power which raised Christ Jesus from the dead must be exerted in raising us from the dead, the very same omnipotence, without which angels or worms could not have had a being, must again step forth out of its privy-chamber, and do as great a work as it did at the first creation in making us anew in Christ Jesus our Lord. There have been attempts at all times to get rid of this unpleasant necessity. Constantly the Christian Church itself tries to forget it, but as often as ever this old doctrine of regeneration is brought forward pointedly, God is pleased to favor his Church with a revival. The doctrine which looks at first as though it would hush every exertion with indolence, and make men sit down with listlessness and despair, is really like the trump of God to awake the dead, and where it is fully and faithfully preached, though it grate upon the carnal ear, though it excite enmity in many against the man who dares to proclaim it, yet it is owned of God. Because it honors God, God will honor it. This was the staple preaching of Whitfield, and it was by the preaching of this that he was made as the mighty angel flying through the midst of heaven preaching the everlasting gospel to every creature. He was always great upon that which he called the great R—Regeneration. Whenever you heard him, the three R's came out clearly—Ruin, Regeneration, and Redemption! Man ruined, wholly ruined, hopelessly helplessly, eternally ruined! Man regenerated by the Spirit of God, and by the Spirit of God alone wholly made a new creature in Christ! Man redeemed, redeemed by precious blood from all his sins, not by works of righteousness, not by deeds of the law, not by ceremonies, prayers, or resolutions, but by the precious blood of Christ! Oh! we must be very pointed, and very plain about regeneration, for this is the very pith and marrow of the matter—"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Another practical inference. If you and I, or any of us, have received the things of the Spirit of God, we ought to look upon that as comfortable evidence that we have been born again. What say you, my hearer? Does your faith lay her hand this morning upon the head of Christ, and take him to be your Saviour, your teacher, and your all? If so, blessed art thou, for flesh and blood have not revealed this unto thee. Or does thy spirit this morning not only agree to the truth of

divine election, of assured redemption, and of the finished work and immutable love of Christ; but dost thou love the truth in thy heart as well as agree to it in the head? If so, the natural man receiveth not these things, therefore thou art no natural man; but the Spirit of God has brought thee into his kingdom, because he has enabled thee to receive his truth. Precious is faith indeed, because it assuredly evidences to us what is beyond the reach of our senses. You can't tell whether you are born again or not, except by your faith. There will be no difference in your face, there will be no difference in your flesh, nor even in your mental characteristics; you may remain to a great extent the same man as far as mind and body are concerned; but faith—that which was not there before—faith is the grand symptom which betokens returning health; it is the flag hung out upon the castle of the soul, showing that the King is the secret tenant in the state-room of the soul, it is the light which shows that the sun has risen; it is the morning star which heralds the full illumination and meridian sunlight of eternal glory. Prize your faith, ask for more of it, but look upon it as being an evidence that you have passed from death unto life.

Apostolic Exhortation

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0804.htm>

Repentance is a part of conversion. It is, perhaps, I may say, the gate or door of it. It is that Jordan through which we pass when we turn from the desert of sin to seek the Canaan of conversion. Regeneration is the implanting of a new nature, and one of the earliest signs of that is, a faith in Christ, and a repentance of sin, and a consequent conversion from that which is evil to that which is good.

[Again, a very clear passage.]

Sharing Christ's Life

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/3401.htm>

The life which comes to us through Christ is of this sort—I trust you know it in your own hearts—it is life spiritual, given to us in regeneration. When the Holy Spirit quickens a dead soul, that dead soul then receives the life of Christ. No man is alive unto God spiritually, except through Christ. Because Christ lives, we live. When a dead soul gets into living contact with the living Saviour by the power of the Spirit, then it is that spiritual life begins. The very first evidence of spiritual life is trusting in Jesus, which shows that the first symptom is alliance to Christ, the cause of the life must be somewhere here, namely, union with Christ. One of the very first outward signs is prayer—prayer to Christ, and that, again, rises from the fact that Christ gives us of his life, and then that life goes back again to him. Brethren, if you seek the life of other souls, and desire to see them brought to God, preach Christ to them. Do you not see, “Because I live, ye shall live”? Then no sinner ever will live spiritually apart from Christ. Though you and I cannot quicken them, yet we can preach the gospel to them, and faith cometh by hearing, and where faith is, there life is. It is no use trying to raise the dead by preaching the law to them. That is only covering them up fairly with a lie in their right hand; but preach of dying love and of rising power, to tell of pardons bought with blood, and to declare that Christ died a substitute for sinners—this is the hopeful way of bringing life to the dead. It is by such instrumentality that

souls are brought to life eternal. Because Christ is alive, his elect in due time receive spiritual life by the power of the Holy Spirit, and, although once they were dead in sin, they begin to live unto righteousness.

[Notice: belief is the very first evidence of regeneration.]

Love's Logic

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1008.htm>

Our redemption, like our election, springs from the spontaneous self-originating love of God. And our regeneration, in which we are made actual partakers of the divine blessings in Jesus Christ, was not of us, nor by us. We were not converted because we were already inclined that way, neither were we regenerated because some good thing was in us by nature; but we owe our new birth entirely to his potent love, which dealt with us effectually turning us from death to life, from darkness to light and from the alienation of our mind and the enmity of our spirit into that delightful path of love, in which we are now travelling to the skies. As believers on Christ's name we "were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The sum and substance of the text is that God's uncaused love, springing up within himself, has been the sole means of bringing us into the condition of loving him.

Infant Salvation

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0411.htm>

He who shed his blood for all his people, bought them with the same price with which he redeemed their parents, and therefore are they saved because Christ was sponsor for them, and suffered in their room and stead. They are saved, again not without regeneration, for, "except a man"—the text does not mean an adult man but a person, a being of the human race—"except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." No doubt, in some mysterious manner the Spirit of God regenerates the infant soul, and it enters into glory made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. That this is possible is proved from Scripture instances. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. We read of Jeremiah also, that the same had occurred to him; and of Samuel we find that while yet a babe the Lord called him. We believe, therefore, that even before the intellect can work, God, who worketh not by the will of man, nor by blood, but by the mysterious agency of his Holy Spirit, creates the infant soul a new creature in Christ Jesus, and then it enters into the "rest which remaineth for the people of God." By election, by redemption, by regeneration, the child enters into glory, by the selfsame door by which every believer in Christ Jesus hopes to enter, and in no other way. If we could not suppose that children could be saved in the same way as adults, if it would be necessary to suppose that God's justice must be infringe, or that his plan of salvation must be altered to suit their cases, then we should be in doubt; but we can see that with the same appliances, by the same plan, on precisely the same grounds, and through the same agencies, the infant soul can behold the Savior a face in glory everlasting, and therefore we are at ease upon the matter.

[I include this section to demonstrate that Spurgeon, in rare cases, did believe in regeneration apart from means. However, he would still deny that regeneration could be followed by an extended period of time before a person came to faith.]

The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0201.htm>

And I must say, before I leave this point, that all the former part of what I have mentioned is done instantaneously. When a man is converted to God, it is done in a moment. Regeneration is an instantaneous work. Conversion to God, the fruit of regeneration, occupies all our life, but regeneration itself is effected in an instant. A man hates God; the Holy Spirit makes him love God. A man is opposed to Christ, he hates his gospel, does not understand it and will not receive it: the Holy Spirit comes, puts light into his darkened understanding, takes the chain from his bandaged will, gives liberty to his conscience, gives life to his dead soul, so that the voice of conscience is heard, and the man becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. And all this is done, mark you, by the instantaneous supernatural influence of God the Holy Ghost working as he willeth among the sons of men.

How to Read the Bible

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1503.htm>

We are begotten by the word of God: it is the instrumental means of regeneration. Therefore love your Bibles. Keep close to your Bibles. You seeking sinners, you who are seeking the Lord, your first business is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; but while you are yet in darkness and in gloom, oh love your Bibles and search them! Take them to bed with you, and when you wake up in the morning, if it is too early to go downstairs and disturb the house, get half-an-hour of reading upstairs. Say, "Lord, guide me to that text which shall bless me. Help me to understand how I, a poor sinner, can be reconciled to thee."

Compel Them to Come In

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0227.htm>

Now does anything else remain to the minister besides weeping and prayer? Yes, there is one thing else. God has given to his servants not the power of regeneration, but he has given them something akin to it. It is impossible for any man to regenerate his neighbour; and yet how are men born to God? Does not the apostle say of such an one that he was begotten by him in his bonds. Now the minister has a power given him of God, to be considered both the father and the mother of those born to God, for the apostle said he travailed in birth for souls till Christ was formed in them. What can we do then? We can now appeal to the Spirit. I know I have preached the gospel, that I have preached it earnestly; I challenge my Master to honour his own promise. He has said it shall not return unto me void, and it shall not. It is in his hands, not mine. I cannot compel you, but thou O Spirit of God who hast the key of the heart, thou canst compel. Did you ever notice in that chapter of the Revelation, where it says, "Behold I stand at the door and

knock,” a few verses before, the same person is described, as he who hath the key of David. So that if knocking will not avail, he has the key and can and will come in. Now if the knocking of an earnest minister prevail not with you this morning, there remains still that secret opening of the heart by the Spirit, so that you shall be compelled.

I thought it my duty to labour with you as though I must do it; now I throw it into my Master's hands. It cannot be his will that we should travail in birth, and yet not bring forth spiritual children. It is with him; he is master of the heart, and the day shall declare it, that some of you constrained by sovereign grace have become the willing captives of the all-conquering Jesus, and have bowed your hearts to him through the sermon of this morning.

[Spurgeon explains how the preaching of the gospel is compatible with a regeneration-before-faith theology.]

No Compromise

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2047.htm>

In the day of God's power, hearts are made willing. There can be no marriage to Jesus without a heart of love. Where shall we find this willing heart? Only where the grace of God has wrought it. Ah, then, I see how I may find beauty, too, among the sons of men! Marred as our nature is by sin, only the Holy Spirit can impart that beauty of holiness which will enable the Lord Jesus to see comeliness in his chosen. Alas! in our hearts there is an aversion to Christ, and an unwillingness to accept of him, and at the same time a terrible unfitness and unworthiness! The Spirit of God implants a love which is of heavenly origin, and renews the heart by a regeneration from above; and then we seek to be one with Jesus, but not till then. See, then, how our errand calls for the help of God himself.

God Rejoicing in the New Creation

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2211.htm>

We speak of the wisdom of God as soon in anatomy, in botany; or in astronomy; yet this wisdom is still more to be seen in regeneration—in the making of the sinner who wandered from God, to become a saint who follows after holiness, in the bringing of the opposer of Christ to become his friend and advocate. To rule the will, and yet leave it free; to guide the heart, and yet to let it choose; to reverse the law of being, and yet to violate no law of man's nature—herein is the wisdom of the Highest himself. The attributes of God are to be seen in the visible creation; but they are to be seen in a brighter and superior light in the new creation. There is no one of the attributes of God which has not its illustration under the economy of grace; and blessed shall your whole being be if you can to the full rejoice in that which God creates.

[An attempt by Spurgeon to harmonize the sovereignty of God in salvation and the true responsibility of man.]

Human Inability

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0182.htm>

"Coming to Christ" is a very common phrase in Holy Scripture. It is used to express those acts of the soul wherein, leaving at once our self-righteousness, and our sins, we fly unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive his righteousness to be our covering, and his blood to be our atonement. Coming to Christ, then, embraces in it repentance, self-negation, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it sums within itself all those things which are the necessary attendants of these great states of heart, such as the belief of the truth, earnestness of prayer to God, the submission of the soul to the precepts of God's gospel, and all those things which accompany the dawn of salvation in the soul. Coming to Christ is just the one essential thing for a sinner's salvation. He that cometh not to Christ, do what he may, or think what he may, is yet in "the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity." Coming to Christ is the very first effect of regeneration. No sooner is the soul quickened than it at once discovers its lost estate, is horrified thereat, looks out for a refuge, and believing Christ to be a suitable one, flies to him and reposes in him. Where there is not this coming to Christ, it is certain that there is as yet no quickening; where there is no quickening, the soul is dead in trespasses and sins, and being dead it cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. We have before us now an announcement very startling, some say very obnoxious. Coming to Christ, though described by some people as being the very easiest thing in all the world, is in our text declared to be a thing utterly and entirely impossible to any man, unless the Father shall draw him to Christ. It shall be our business, then, to enlarge upon this declaration. We doubt not that it will always be offensive to carnal nature, but, nevertheless, the offending of human nature is sometimes the first step towards bringing it to bow itself before God. And if this be the effect of a painful process, we can forget the pain and rejoice in the glorious consequences.

Passages that favor faith before regeneration

Your Own Salvation

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1003.htm>

If you are saved it will be "your own salvation," and you yourself will enjoy it. If you are not saved, the sin you now commit is your own sin, the guilt your own guilt. The condemnation under which you live, with all its disquietude and fear, or with all its callousness and neglect is your own—all your own you may share in other men's sins, and other men may become participators in yours, but a burden lies on your own back which no one besides can touch with one of his fingers. There is a page in God's Book where your sins are recorded unmingled with the transgressions of your fellows. Now, beloved, you must obtain for all this sin a personal pardon, or you are undone for ever. No other can be washed in Christ's blood for you; no one can believe and let his faith stand instead of your faith. The very supposition of human sponsorship in religion is monstrous. You must yourself repent, yourself believe, yourself be washed in the blood, or else for you there is no forgiveness, no acceptance, no adoption, no regeneration. It is all a personal matter through and through: "your own salvation" it must be, or it will be your own eternal ruin.

[It does seem here that Spurgeon says that without belief, no regeneration will result. There are two reasonable explanations for this. First, Spurgeon does not clearly say that the regeneration is a result of the faith. Given his usual theology, it is equally true that a person who does not exercise faith is giving sure evidence that he never was regenerated; this interpretation of this passage is quite likely. Second, Spurgeon's wording here can be explained by his preaching emphasis. He believed that God must regenerate in order for the sinner to believe; as above, however, he also believed that the sinner was completely responsible for his unbelief.]

Once a Curse But Now a Blessing

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0543.htm>

Remember, this is to be done for you, not by you. You cannot make yourself a new man. It is impossible for you to work regeneration. One look at Jesus will take away past sin, and will kill the power of sin for the future. Sprinkle His blood upon the old serpent, and it dies. Put the water which flowed with the blood from Christ, and the foulness of nature only remains to be subdued, and eventually to be cast out when the believer shall be taken up in perfection to dwell before the Father's throne. God can save you, whoever you may be, and whatever your past life may have been. No doings of your own, no prayers, no penances, no almsgivings, are required. Simply trust Jesus who died for you, and you are saved, saved on the spot—saved for ever.

[Taken on its own, this passage could easily be understood as teaching that trusting God is the means by which regeneration is produced. However, in light of the preponderance of evidence examined to this point, it is best to understand this paragraph as another appeal to the responsibility of man, which does not disallow Spurgeon's normal theology as a backdrop.]