

THE NEW BIRTH REDISCOVERED



**DENVER
REFORMED
CHURCH**

1. Why the New Birth/Regeneration needs to be discussed.

1.1. Necessary to salvation (Joh 3:3)

1.2. Massive confusion and controversy over the order of salvation (within Reformed circles)¹.

Is it:

1.2.1. You believe (and as a result) you are born again. (OR...)

1.2.2. You are born again (and as a result) you believe. (???)

2. Which comes first.

(Eph 2:1-8; Col 2:13-14; Joh 1:13²)

In regard to the phrases “having forgiven” and “by cancelling”, Dr. Paul Rainbow writes...

“The past (aorist) participles (which make up these two phrases) indicate that forgiveness and cancellation precede the making alive...”³

According to Paul, faith (then) also precedes the new birth.

3. Where it fits.

We now know that experiencing the new birth happens after faith (not before it)—but what does that mean in the larger scheme of things? Where does the New Birth fit in the order of salvation?

3.1. A helpful guide: God’s Ordo Salutis (Rom 8:29-30)

3.1.1. Foreknew (God has a good purpose for us—v28)

3.1.2. Predestined (to conformity to Christ)

3.1.3. Called

3.1.4. Justified

3.1.5. Glorified

We can immediately rule out: 1 (Fore.), 2 (Pred.) and 5 (Glor.) since those are all things which take place either before we are alive—or after we are dead. Which means we are left with 3 (Called) or 4 (Justified) as the place where the New Birth fits. However since we already know faith precedes it, there

¹ As will be pointed out later in the outline, scholars and theologians within what has been traditionally considered the Reformed tradition have differed in their Ordo Salutis on this point.

² Why were the people in verse 11 not given the right to be adopted? Was it because they had not been regenerated? No, it was because they did not receive Christ. In verse 12 John gives God's condition for adoption: receiving Christ and believing in His name. The obvious flow of the passage is (1) Receiving Christ and believing in His name. (2) God's granting the right to become His children and being born of God. Faith, then regeneration and adoption.

³ Paul Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, p.235

is only one of these two which can WORK—and that is JUSTIFICATION (since faith precedes it as well)—CALLING on the other hand comes BEFORE faith (as that which motivates us to it).

Justification (then) is where the New Birth fits.

“Paul omits mention of regeneration...because for him [it is] subsumed under justification.”⁴

3.2. Biblical evidence (Joh 3:1-15 w/ Jer 31:31-34 to est. Eze 36:22-28; Rom 4-6; Tit 3:1-7).

The Bible demonstrates that the New Birth is the product of Justification of Christ and the fulfillment of God’s New Covenant promises.

4. Who supports this view.

The Reformers believed that the New Birth followed after faith.

Though it is uncertain when the change from seeing regeneration as the product of justification (and faith) to believing it precedes faith actually took place⁵, what is clear is that the position being presented (here) was their initial (and for most if not all) final position on the doctrine.

“Luther, (and) Melanchthon...put God’s gift of...righteousness [justification] and faith...ahead of regeneration and renewal through the Holy Spirit...Calvin’s order of salvation [also] took as its starting point the believer’s union with Christ [faith]. By virtue of this union the believer receives...justification and regeneration. [For Calvin] faith and justification precede regeneration”⁶

4.1. Martin Luther

*“Paul as a true apostle of faith always has the word ‘faith’ on the tip of his tongue. By faith, says he, we are the children of God. The Law cannot beget children of God. It cannot regenerate us. It can only remind us of the old birth by which we were born into the kingdom of the devil. The best the Law can do for us is to prepare us for **a new birth through faith** in Christ Jesus. Faith in Christ regenerates us into the children of God. St. John bears witness to this in his Gospel: ‘As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.’”⁷*

In his sermon on John 1:1-14 Luther wrote: *“But what is here said remains unchangeable: Not of blood, not of the will of the flesh nor of man, but of God, is this new birth. We must despair of our own will, works, and life, which have been poisoned by the false, stubborn, selfish light of reason; in all things listen to the voice and testimony of the Baptist; believe and obey it. Then the true Light, Christ will enlighten us, renew us, and give us power to become the sons of God.”*

4.2. Philip Melanchthon

⁴ Rainbow, p.239

⁵ Based on what I have read in the form of church history and historical creeds, my guess is that the shift did not officially take pace until sometime in the seventeenth century—after the original Reformers were dead. Possibly during the time of the Synod of Dort (1618-19) or the Formula of Helvetica (1675)—or through the writings of Stephen Charnock (1628-80) who made it clear that he believed regeneration was antecedent to faith.

⁶ Rainbow, p.234. His support: Luther and Melanchthon---confessional they wrote, *The Book of Concord*; Calvin—*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1-11.

⁷ Luther’s Commentary on Galatians.

“This special faith, therefore, by which an individual believes that for Christ's sake his sins are remitted him, and that for Christ's sake God is reconciled and propitious, obtains remission of sins and justifies us. And because in repentance, i.e. in terrors, it comforts and encourages hearts, it [faith] regenerates us and brings the Holy Ghost that then we may be able to fulfill God's Law.”⁸

4.3. John Calvin

Commenting on John 1:13, Calvin writes, **“God regenerates us by faith.... It may be thought that the Evangelist reverses the natural order by making regeneration to precede faith, whereas, on the contrary, it is an effect of faith, and therefore ought to be placed later.”⁹**

This (then) is the original Reformed position: faith precedes regeneration; belief before the new birth...

And in the words of Paul Rainbow (again)...

“It is hard to improve on the Luther-Calvinian view of how the Christian life begins.”¹⁰

5. What are the consequences of continuing to hold to the “New Birth Before Belief” View?

Because I think that after you consider what the consequences/implications ARE---it will be much easier to embrace the position I am now proposing to be the biblically correct ONE.

Here (then) is the first:

5.1. We are “in (or) with Christ” before faith or justification.

(2Co 5:17)¹¹ (Eph 2:5)

Both phrases refer to the saving relationship afforded to a person as they are united to Christ’s death (we have died “IN Christ”—Rom 6; and our lives are now “we have died and our lives are now hidden WITH Christ”—Col 3).

How is that possible until we have first believed (had faith)? And aren’t references to us sharing in His death ultimately speaking about justification (since that is what He was doing through His death—justifying us)? How (then) is it possible for US to be “made alive WITH Christ” or become a “new creature IN Christ” before either of those two things (faith or justification) has taken place?

5.2. We are in the New Covenant before faith or justification.

Remember the blessings of the new birth are the promises of the New Covenant (Jer 31; Eze 36). How do we have these covenant blessings unless we are (first) in covenant? And (like the previous point) how

⁸ Book of Concord, Augsburg Confession, Article IV (II): Of Justification.

⁹ Calvin’s Commentary on John.

¹⁰ Rainbow, p.237

¹¹ The very next verse (18) reveals who those are “in Christ”. They are those who have been “reconciled” to God. In other words, they are those who have repented and put faith in Christ and now in a right, justified standing with God. Never is the term “in Christ” used in the NT to refer to someone prior to faith, which is how those holding to the “regeneration precedes faith” view must view this phrase in 2Co 5.

can we be in covenant unless we (first) have atonement/justification---something that (again) only comes through the exercise of faith (Gen 15 before Gen 17; Exo 12 before Exo 19---atonement before covenant)—the problem is (however) this is something that only comes by faith (Rom 3:28)—the very thing NOT yet in the picture!

5.3. We are still in sin yet raised to new life.

(Eph 2:4-5¹²; Gen 3:22)

“Would God raise to indestructible life a person still in the state of guilt?”¹³

Yet that is what one must conclude based on the principle established in Genesis 3:22 and what Paul communicates in Ephesians 2:4-5: God is giving new life to those whose sin has not (first) been removed through atonement/justification.

5.4. There is nothing “new” about the New Birth.

One of the reasons people hold to the view that regeneration or the New Birth precedes faith is b/c they believe that faith is impossible without it. If (however) that is true NOW, then it must have also been true during the time of the Old Testament/Covenant (otherwise no-one ever truly had faith and was saved—including Moses—or even Abraham).

Which means that when God speaks of people gaining new spiritual states which will now believe in Him and walk in His ways, it really wasn't all that NEW—since all those saved before Christ (and the NC) had experienced it already!

5.5. We make an unnecessary and unbiblical distinction between the regeneration to new life and renewal with the Spirit.

You end with an Ordo Salutis which goes something like this: regeneration before faith and justification; indwelling (renewal) with the Spirit after.

There are promised in ONE event –not two (Eze 36). There are also communicated that way (Tit 3:5).

6. How this changes things theologically.

It means we should be embracing the following as (also) true:

6.1. The New Birth can be lost.

Since we (now) KNOW that regeneration is a part of JUSTIFICATION---and-(as we have studied and discussed in the past) justification (or our right standing) with GOD can be lost/forfeited due to unrepentant sin; then what must ALSO be true is the possibility of loss or forfeiture in this AREA as well (since once more—it is a part of the package of justification—Rom 6).

(Mat 18:18)—“bind” = people are bound once more in their sin since the gift of newness and the Spirit given to free them from such bondage (Rom 6-8) has now been removed along with their justification

¹² Again the following verses (esp. v 8) make it clear that faith and the justification which follows is the condition.

¹³ Rainbow, p.235-236

when they are disciplined out of the covenant community and therefore out of covenant relationship with God.

(Psa 51:11; 1Sa 16:14)

*(BTW) this is true (also) as it relates to our adoption (another benefit of being in a right standing w/God). Consider: (Heb 12:15-17)

6.2. The gift of God is Justification or the New Birth (a part of justification).

One of the problems Reformed people today will inevitably have in accepting the biblically correct view of the New Birth, is the fact that they have taught NOT only that regeneration/new birth precedes faith—BUT also that such is necessary in order to possess faith (in the first place). In other words, faith is the gift that GOD must give to me since (as a totally depraved sinner—dead in my trespasses and sins) I do not possess faith nor can express it in Christ.

However, further study of the primary text USED to support this VIEW (Eph 2), reveals the gift to be the justification/New Birth.

(Eph 2:1-8)

Additional support for the Justification or the New Birth as the “gift” Paul is speaking about in these verses:

6.2.1. Faith is never spoken of as a “gift” in Scripture.

6.2.2. The New Birth is spoken of as a gift in multiple places (Eph 2:1-8; Act 2:38; Rom 3:24; Luk 11:13; Joh 4:10).

6.2.3. We don’t need God to give us “faith”... we already possess it:

6.2.3.1. faith is something all people possess and practice every day of their lives

6.2.3.2. the issue is in Scripture when it speaks of faith—is not whether people possess it—but what is the object of their faith (sin and world—or Christ? To what or who are they looking for AL? Ex. Luk 18:8).

*What about the supposed argument based on what Eph 2 says about “dead in trespasses”: dead men can’t express faith? (yes they can and do all the time! This is a poor argument which attempts to rationalize Paul’s words in order to support poor theology. Using this same argument, it is also true that dead men can’t disobey God—yet in “our deadness” that is exactly what the text says we did. Rather than communicating what we “can’t do, these words speak to what we “won’t do” (we “won’t look to Christ as the object of AL) because of our bondage and blindness.

-(IOW) our addiction/bondage to sin (2Ti 2:26) and blindness inflicted by the devil (2Co 4:4) is what keeps us from exercising faith in Christ. Which means what God must give/grant to us is NOT faith but repentance (Act 11:18; 2Ti 2:24-26) [SEE DIAGRAM]

-This is what God does in calling us to Himself (He grants repentance/opens our heart to the preached Word)---which is what our next point is about...

6.3. Calling is what makes the difference.

Recalling (from last week) the Ordo Salutis given to us by God in Rom 8:29-30, this is what leads us to looking to Christ and receiving His justification: we are CALLED. Which means (as our prior diagram illustrates) that God has granted us repentance which allows us to turn from sin (as the thing we put trust in as the means to AL)—and place it instead in Christ. And this is something WHICH will happen for all WHOM GOD calls---they will put/point their faith in the direction of Christ.

6.3.1. It is an irresistible calling:

(Act 11:18)—“that LEADS to life”—that (iow) w/ its outcome.

(2Ti 2:26)—“and they come to their senses and escape the devil”—notice Paul doesn’t say “in the hopes that they come to their senses and escape”!

(Rom 11:29) (Phi 1:29) (Joh 6:44)

6.3.2. It is (however) only perpetual for the elect. Which is why some come (at first) but later fall away and as a result will not be saved/glorified but go back to their sin, lose their justification and ultimately go to Hell (2Pe 2:20-22).

(Rom 8:29-30; Mat 22:14; Joh 6:37-39 w/44)

6.3.3. This is why we are told to make sure of our “election and calling” (and not New Birth) – because (once more) this is what matters.

(2Pe 1:10)

6.3.4. It comes through the preaching of the Gospel/Word of God.

(Rom 10:14)

*Putting it all together: The only way people will ever point their faith away from the objects of this world and toward Christ (as their new hope of AL) is if God grants them repentance which opens the “eyes of the heart”. This the Bible identifies as the calling of God and it is irresistible for those who receive it—AS long as they receive it. Only the elect (however) continue to receive until they are home in heaven. For those whose calling is only temporary, apostasy will be their end since no one can maintain their new state/standing with God (in Christ) without God’s persevering call (something attested to by the Creation account of Adam and Eve and their subsequent fall into sin).

**Why God would call some people temporarily: to demonstrate the same thing demonstrated in the garden—that we cannot live without God’s grace (physically as well as spiritually/morally). And ultimately to further establish our culpability since our inability is moral versus natural—(which leads us to our next point)....

6.4. Spiritual inability is moral only.

6.4.1. Moral = Man won’t obey

6.4.2. Natural = Man can’t obey

“Moral only” has been the position of this church for some time. It is not (however) the position of most within the Reformed camp today.

Their position on inability includes natural inability as well (man can’t obey) –which has led to the writing of such heretical parenting books such as “Give Them Grace” by (Gospel Coalition member) Elise Fitzpatrick. This book states that you shouldn’t discipline your kids until they are believers since they “can’t obey”.

This has also put many Christians and churches “in bed” with Psychology since such thinking is no different than their view which makes people victims (which is where the “ I can’t” position points).

The bible (however) teaches something else (something completely in line and agreement with what we have been learning about the New Birth and calling.

(Deu 30:11-14 w/31:16; Rom 10:6-9)

*(BTW) I believe that viewing spiritual inability as natural also HAS led many to reject the Christian Faith since it doesn’t square with reality –since even pagans know (from observing general revelation) that this isn’t true—which means if they hear Christians teaching this—they will see Christianity as just escapism from reality! (How pagans know this isn’t true---and why we should too—besides the fact that Scripture doesn’t teach it: the fact that you CAN get your kids to obey while still unbelievers!!!!

6.5. Saving faith versus faith is a false dichotomy.

dichotomy = distinction

This false dichotomy/distinction is created as the necessary result of holding to the incorrect order of salvation which places regeneration before faith (as the excuse for when people apostasize and never return. We say, “they didn’t have saving faith”). Scripture (however) knows no such distinction. What matter is not the nature/measure/amount of faith you have but the object of that faith (and your perseverance in it). (Luk 17:6; Col 1:23).
