

Regeneration, Sanctification and Resurrection

Rockey Jackson, April 22, 2018

“Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”” (John 3:3)

Regeneration, Sanctification and Resurrection are three big theological words. This essay explores the meaning of these three words and their relationship with a person's spirit, soul and body. The purpose of the article is to affirm, liberate and empower God's redeemed saints.

In biology, regeneration is the regrowth of tissue to replace damaged or worn out cells. Regeneration in theology is spiritual rebirth. It is what Jesus was talking about when in the third chapter of John he told Nicodemus that he must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus, thinking in the biological sense, questioned how he could return to his mother's womb to be born a second time. Jesus made it clear that he was referring not to a natural rebirth, but to a spiritual rebirth. Nicodemus' spirit needed regeneration, it was dead and needed to be made alive, it needed to be born again.

To sanctify means to set something apart as holy unto God. In the spiritual sense, redeemed saints are made holy and righteous before God by the sacrifice of the innocent blood of the Perfect Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. They are set apart unto God when they receive him as their Lord and savior. In the world, holy refers to moral and spiritual excellence. In contrast, unholy means sinful and wicked. At conversion a person may be at any point on the spectrum of perfection between holy and wicked. Sanctification in the material sense is the lifelong process that begins at the point of conversion and continues as the redeemed saint allows God to change them into the image of His Son. As it is written in Romans 8:29-30:

“From the distant past, His eternal love reached into the future. You see, He knew those who would be His one day, and He chose them beforehand to be conformed to the image of His Son so that Jesus would be the firstborn of a new family of believers, all brothers and sisters. As for those He chose beforehand, He called them to a different destiny so that they would experience what it means to be made right with God and share in His glory.”

Resurrection is the revitalization or revival of something. For Jews and Christians it refers to eternal life after physical death. Here are a few biblical references to resurrection:

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2)

“And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:14)

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:28,29)

“And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” (Acts 24:15)

Many don't realize that there will be two resurrections that occur on the opposite sides of the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. This is detailed in the 20th chapter of Revelation. The first resurrection will be for those who are spiritually alive and the second for the spiritually dead. Redeemed saints will be resurrected or raptured (depending on whether they are physically dead or physically alive) before the millennium begins. Their invitation to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is their name written in the Lamb's book of life. They will live eternally with God in Heaven. Sinners are resurrected at the Last Judgment that occurs at the end of the millennial reign of Christ. They are judged based on their works. No one except Jesus Christ has lived a perfect life, no one is righteous by their works. At the Last Judgment everyone who is judged by their works, everyone whose name is not found in the book of life, is cast into the lake of fire and eternally separated from God.

People are triune beings. They have spirits, souls and bodies. The human spirit was given when God breathed his life into Adam and made him a spiritually living being. From this comes the term “breath of life.” The Greek word is pneuma and it means breath or spirit. From it comes the word pneumatic which means operated by air or related to the spirit. The Greek word for soul is psuche. It is the root for the English word psychology. So the soul is the residence of the mind, will and emotions. Metaphorically it may be thought of as the heart of a person. Both the spirit and the soul are metaphysical. In contrast, the body is the physical flesh and blood of a person. It is the temporary dwelling for the soul and the spirit while a person is physically alive.

The spirit comes from God and like God it is eternal. It can be in only one of two states: alive or dead. If the spirit is submitted in right relationship with God, then it is alive. If the spirit is separated from God in rebellion, then it is dead. To become alive again a person's spirit must be regenerated. It must be born again. At conversion, the spirit immediately changes from dead to alive. The spirit of a person is either holy, separated unto God or it is unholy, separated from God. It has a binary state and it does not move up and down on the spectrum of perfection. Therefore, the spirit does not go through the process of sanctification. Neither is the spirit resurrected because it is eternal and it doesn't die in the same way that a physical body dies.

The soul is well described as a person's mind, will and emotions. All together it may be thought of metaphorically as the heart of the person. At any point in life the soul may be anywhere on the spectrum from wicked to holy. There are exceptional stories where a person's heart is dramatically changed at conversion. However, it is most common for a redeemed saint's mind, will and emotions to be essentially the same after conversion as they were before conversion. They then grow in holiness through the rest of their lives. The soul goes through the process of sanctification as it is changed over time into the image of the Lord. As it is written in 2 Corinthians 3:18, ***“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”***

The body is physical, it is of the earth. It lasts a lifetime because it regenerates in the biological sense. When physical death comes, the spirit carries the soul into eternity, but the body is left behind. It then decomposes and ceases to exist as the body of a living being. In the spiritual sense, the body is not regenerated or redeemed. It is not born again. Neither is the body sanctified. The flesh does not get better, it only gets dead. The body requires something different, it must be resurrected. However it is not resurrected as a physical body. It is not the molecules of the physical body that defines it, but the information coded in the person's DNA. The body will be resurrected as a spiritual body. This is expressly stated in 1 Corinthians 15:40-44, ***“There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”***

Romans 6-8 gives a vivid description of the flesh, soul and spirit. It begins with the depravity of the flesh. Then tells of the war that goes on in the soul as the person's mind, will and emotions referee between the desires of the flesh and the drawing of the spirit to do God's will. It finishes with a grand explanation of life in the spirit. The world displays this as a devil and an angel setting on a person's shoulders encouraging them to do good or evil. Now angels and demons may add their influence, but a person's own flesh and spirit are continually pulling the individual to do God's will or their own will. At creation God set the priority as spirit, soul, and flesh with the spirit subject to His will. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, they set their mind and the desires of their flesh over their spirits. Each person is able to decide which part of their being will rule. To live as God intended, redeemed saints must command their spirit to line up under the Holy Spirit of God, their soul to line up under their spirit and their flesh to line up under their soul.

In summary, the spirit is regenerated at conversion, transitioning from death to life. Rebirth is an event. The soul is being sanctified as it is transformed into the image of Christ. This

sanctification is a process that begins at conversion and doesn't end until death. The body will be resurrected. The flesh is not redeemed, it dies and disintegrates. The physical body must be replaced with a spiritual body for eternal life. The resurrection is a future event. When a sinner becomes a redeemed saint it begins with regeneration of the spirit, continues with sanctification of the soul, and transitions to eternal life with resurrection of the body.

How do we live life with the Lord? What is the criteria for sin? That is the topic of the next article in this series that looks at the law of the Lord and His grace. It is entitled “[Two Witnesses](#).”

(If you'd like a fuller discussion of the Rapture and resurrection, the author wrote about it in a larger article some years ago. Here is a link to “[The Case of the Missing Saints](#).”)