

Remarks on Regeneration  
and Justification

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The special issue of Present Truth, devoted to discussions of Justification by Faith, is the first copy of the magazine that I have seen. Its emphasis on the 'material principle' of the Reformation and its opposition to Romish theology speaks clearly to these times when the Protestant churches have largely rejected the Bible.

Among the magazine's excellent pages, however, there was one article – so it seems to me – that did not properly represent the historic Protestant view. On page 18 Rome is characterized by the phrase, “Regeneration – a necessary condition for justification;” and the Reformation is characterized by the phrase, “Regeneration – the immediate consequence and fruit of justification.” With respect to this latter phrase there are two points to be considered: (1) the article's argument from the Bible is incomplete and in places fallacious; and (2) the historical evidence necessary to conclude that the theology of the Reformation is in view is missing.

On the first point I shall try to be brief. Page 18, col. 2, after Quoting Rom. 4:5 that God justifies the ungodly, says, “This scripture certainly contradicts the notion that God justifies only regenerate saints.” The paragraph fails to show any contradiction. The following paragraph correctly states that God justifies the uncircumcised: but Rom 4:9-11 does not mention regeneration, as would be necessary for a conclusion about regeneration; and the appended explanation, which says that “the new life is the sign and witness of the blessing of justification,” does not reproduce the thought of the Romans passage, for the Scripture says that circumcision (not the new life or regeneration) is the sign. Page 19, point four, adds to Romans 5 something about a “new heart,” which is not found in the text. Finally, so far as Scripture and argument go, page 19, col. 2 says, “To those who respond to his drawing, the Spirit gives faith and repentance.” Is this not Romanism? An unregenerate sinner, totally depraved, dead in sin, who does not seek God, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, who has no fear of God before his eyes, cannot respond. He will become able to respond only after the Spirit resurrects him to newness of life.

The second point is the absence of evidence that Reformation theology makes faith prior to

regeneration. The only attempt to provide evidence is a quotation from John Wesley on page 21. But John Wesley was a disciple of Arminius, whose rejection of the Reformation doctrines was declared heretical by the Synod of Dort in 1620. Therefore Wesley's' theology is not a competent testimony to what the Reformers taught.

One of the best witnesses of what the Reformation taught is the Westminster Confession of 1645-49. Its reliability is such that thousands of ministers from that day to this have subscribed to it. The men who framed it were the most devoted ministers of their day, the most competent, and the best informed on the theology of the previous century. The Westminster Confession X, 1 and 2 states, “God ... enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God ... renewing their wills ... effectually drawing them ... they being made willing by his grace ... [are] enabled to answer this call and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.”

To which I should like to add John 5:24, “He who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come into judgment, but has [already, perfect tense] passed from death to life.” Not that when the sinner hears and believes, i.e. exercises faith, he has already been regenerated.

Further evidence that this is the Reformation view and that the theologians who remained true to the Scripture so testify will be found in W.G.T Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, page 509, “A man is not regenerated because he first believes in Christ, but he believes in Christ because he has been regenerated.” The whole chapter defends this position.

Similar thoughts are found in H.B. Smith, System of Christian Theology, page 557; and even in the wavering theologian, Augustus Strong, Vol. III, page 825.

Then finally, Charles Hodge, the prince of American theologians, in successive chapters, discusses regeneration in Vol. II, chap 14, and Vol. III chap 15. Faith comes in chapter 16; and chapter 17 continues with Justification. It is clear therefore that the article herein discussed does not correctly describe the Reformation position as against Romanism.