

Edwards on Regeneration

Jonathan Edwards wrote the following (excerpts) on **regeneration** and **conversion**. Notice how he represents the *older Calvinistic view*, the view of **Calvin** and the view of **Alexander** (see yesterday's entry), the view that **makes repentance and conversion the same as being regenerated**.

Edwards wrote:

*"But in order to proceed in the most sure and safe manner, in understanding what is meant in Scripture by being **born again**, and so in the inferences we draw from what is said of the necessity of it, let us compare scripture with scripture, and consider what other terms or phrases are used, where respect is evidently had to the same change. And here I would observe the following things.*

*If we compare one scripture with another, it will be sufficiently manifest, that by **regeneration**, or being **begotten**, or **born again**, the same change in the state of the mind is signified with that which the scripture speaks of as affected in true repentance and conversion. I put repentance and conversion together, because the scripture puts them together, Acts iii. 19. and because they plainly signify much the same thing. The word **repentance**, signifies a change of the mind; as the word **conversion**, means a change or turning from sin to God. And that **this is the same change with that which is called regeneration** (excepting that this latter term especially signifies the change, as the mind is passive in it) the following things may show.*

*In the change which the mind undergoes in **repentance** and **conversion**, is attained that character of true Christians which is necessary to the eternal privileges of such. Acts iii. 19. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." **And thus it is in regeneration**; as is evident from what Christ says to Nicodemus, and as is allowed by Dr. T."*

*"The change of the mind in repentance is that in which saving faith is attained. Mark i. 15. "The kingdom of God is at hand, repent ye, and believe the gospel." And **so it is in being born again, or born of God**; as appears by John i. 12, 13. "But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were **born** not of blood, &c. but of God." Just as Christ says concerning **conversion**, Matt. xviii. 3. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye be **converted**, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven:" **so does he say concerning being born again**, in what he spake to Nicodemus."*

*"By the change men undergo in **conversion**, they become as little children; which appears in the place last cited: and **so they do by regeneration**. (1 Pet. i. 23. and ii. 2.) "Being **born again**.— Wherefore as **new-born** babes, desire," &c. **It is no objection, that the disciples, to whom Christ spake in Matt. xviii. 3. were converted already**: this makes it not less proper for Christ to declare the necessity of **conversion** to them, leaving it with them to try themselves, and to make sure their **conversion**: in like manner as he declared to them the necessity of **repentance**, in Luke xiii. 3, 5. "Except ye **repent**, ye shall all likewise perish."*

"The change effected by **repentance**, is expressed and **exhibited by** baptism. Hence it is called the **baptism of repentance**. (Matt. iii. 11. Luke iii. 3. Acts xiii. 24. and xix. 4) And **so is regeneration**, or being **born again**, expressed by baptism; as is evident by such representations of **regeneration** as those: John iii. 5. "Except a man be **born** of water, and of the Spirit."—Tit. iii. 5. "He saved us by the washing of **regeneration**."—Many other things might be observed, to show that **the change men pass under in their repentance and conversion, is the same with that of which they are the subjects in regeneration**.—But these observations may be sufficient."

"The change which a man undergoes when **born again**, and in his **repentance and conversion**, is the same that the scripture calls the **circumcision of the heart**.—This may easily appear by considering, that as **regeneration** is that in which are attained the habits of true virtue and holiness, as has been shown, and as is confessed; so is **circumcision of heart**. Deut. xxx. 6. "And the Lord thy God will **circumcise thine heart**, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul."

Regeneration is that whereby men come to have the character of true Christians; as is evident, and as is confessed; and so is **circumcision of heart**: for by this men become Jews inwardly, or Jews in the spiritual and christian sense, (and that is the same as being true Christians,) as of old, proselytes were made Jews by circumcision of the flesh. Rom. ii. 28, 29. "For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that of the heart**, in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God."

That **circumcision of the heart**, is the **same with conversion**, or **turning from sin to God**, is evident by Jer. iv. 1-4. "If thou wilt return, O Israel, return unto me. **Circumcise yourselves** to the Lord, and put away the foreskins of your heart." And Deut. x. 16. "**Circumcise** therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked." **Circumcision of the heart is the same change of the heart that men experience in repentance**; as is evident by Lev. xxvi. 41. "If their **uncircumcised hearts be humbled**, and they accept the punishment of their iniquity."

"The change effected in **regeneration, repentance, and conversion**, is **signified by** baptism, as has been shown; and so is **circumcision of the heart signified by** the same thing. None will deny, that it was this **internal circumcision**, which of old was **signified by** external circumcision; nor will any deny, now under the New Testament, that inward and spiritual baptism, or the cleansing of the heart, is **signified by** external washing or baptism. But **spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism are the same thing**; both being putting off the body of the sins of the flesh; as is very plain by Colos. ii. 11-13. "In whom also ye are **circumcised**, with the **circumcision made without hands**, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the **circumcision of Christ**, buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him," &c."

"This inward change, called **regeneration**, and **circumcision of the heart**, which is **wrought in repentance and conversion**, is the **same with that spiritual resurrection so often spoken of, and represented as a dying unto sin, and a living unto righteousness**.—This appears with great plainness in that last cited place, Col. ii.) "In whom also ye are **circumcised**, with the **circumcision made without hands**,—buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with

him, through the faith of the operation of God, &c. And you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him; having forgiven you all trespasses."

The same appears by Rom. vi. 3-5. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life," &c. ver. 11. "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be **dead unto sin**, but **alive unto God**, through Jesus Christ our Lord." In which place also it is evident, and by the whole context, that **this spiritual resurrection is that change, in which persons are brought to habits of holiness and to the divine life**, by which Dr. T. describes the thing obtained in being **born again**."

"That a **spiritual resurrection** to a new, divine life, should be called a being **born again**, is agreeable to the language of Scripture. So those words in the 2nd Psalm "Thou art my Son, this day have I **begotten** thee," are applied to Christ's **resurrection**, Acts xiii. 33. So in Colos. i. 18. Christ is called the **first born** from the dead; and in Rev. i. 5. The **first begotten** of the dead. The saints, **in their conversion or spiritual resurrection**, are **risen with Christ**, and **are begotten and born with him**. 1 Pet. i. 3. "Who hath **begotten** us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible." This inheritance is the same thing with that kingdom of heaven, which men obtain by being **born again**, according to Christ's words to Nicodemus; and that same inheritance of them that are **sanctified**, spoken of as **what is obtained in true conversion**. Acts xxvi. 18. "To turn them (or convert them) from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among them that are sanctified, through faith that is in me."

"So that I think it is abundantly plain, that the **spiritual resurrection** spoken of in Scripture, **by which the saints are brought to a new divine life, is the same with that being born again**, which Christ says is necessary for every one, in order to his seeing the kingdom of God.

This change, of which men are the subjects, when they are **born again**, and **circumcised in heart, when they repent, and are converted**, and **spiritually raised from the dead**, is the **same change which is meant when the Scripture speaks of making the heart and spirit new, or giving a new heart and spirit**."

"t is almost needless to observe, how evidently this is spoken of as necessary to salvation, and as **the change** in which are attained the habits of true virtue and holiness, and the character of a true saint; as has been observed of **regeneration, conversion**, &c. and how apparent it is, that **the change is the same**. Thus **repentance**, (NOT ENGLISH) **the change of the mind**, is the same as being changed to a new mind, or a new heart and spirit. **Conversion is the turning of the heart**; which is the same thing as changing it so, that there shall be another heart, or a new heart, or a new spirit. To be **born again**, is to be **born anew**; which implies a becoming new, and is represented as becoming **new-born** babes. But none supposes it is the body, that is immediately and properly new, but the mind, heart, or spirit. And so a **spiritual resurrection** is the resurrection of the spirit, or rising to begin a new existence and life, as to the mind, heart, or spirit. So that all these phrases imply, having a new heart, and being renewed in the spirit,

according to their plain signification."

"When Nicodemus expressed his wonder at Christ declaring it necessary, that a man should be **born again** in order to see the kingdom of God, or enjoy the privileges of the kingdom of the Messiah, Christ says to him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? i. e...Add to this, that **regeneration**, or a being **born again**, and the **renewing** (or making new) by the Holy Ghost, are spoken of as **the same thing**, Tit. iii. 5. "By the washing of **regeneration** and **renewing** of the Holy Ghost."

It is abundantly manifest, that being **born again, spiritually rising from the dead** to newness of life, receiving a **new heart**, and being **renewed** in the spirit of the mind, are the **same thing with that which is called putting off the old man, and putting on the new man.**

The **expressions are equivalent**; and the representations are plainly of the same thing. When Christ speaks of being **born again**, two births are supposed: a first and a second, an old birth and a new one: and the thing born is called man. So what is born in the first birth is the old man; and what is brought forth in the second birth, is the new man. That which is born in the first birth (says Christ) is flesh: it is the carnal man, wherein we have borne the image of the earthly Adam, whom the apostle calls the first man. That which is born in the new birth, is spirit, or the spiritual and heavenly man: wherein we proceed from Christ the second man, the new man, who is made a quickening Spirit, and is the Lord from heaven, and the Head of the new creation.—In the **new birth**, men are represented as becoming **new-born** babes, which is the same thing as becoming new men."

"And how apparently is what the Scripture says of the spiritual **resurrection** of the **Christian convert**, equivalent and of the very same import with putting off the old man, and putting on the new man. So in Rom. vi. the **convert** is represented as dying, and being buried with Christ; which is explained in the 6th verse, by this, that the old man is crucified, that the body of sin might be destroyed, And in the 4th verse, **converts** in **this change** are spoken of as rising to newness of life. Are not these things plain enough? The apostle in effect tells us, that **when he speaks of spiritual death and resurrection, he means the same thing as crucifying and burying the old man, and rising as a new man.**"

"And it is most apparent, that **spiritual circumcision**, and spiritual **baptism**, and the **spiritual resurrection**, are all the same with putting off the old man, and putting on the new man. This appears by Colos. ii. 11, 12. "In whom also ye are **circumcised** with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism; wherein also ye are risen with him." Here it is manifest, that the **spiritual circumcision, baptism, and resurrection**, all signify that change wherein men put off the body of the sins of the flesh: but that is the same thing, in this apostle's language, as putting off the old man; as appears by Rom. vi. 6. "Our old man is crucified, that the body of sin may be destroyed." And that putting off the old man is the same with putting off the body of sin, appears further by Ephes. iv. 22-24. and Colos. iii. 8-10.

And it is most plain, that **this putting off the old man, &c. is the very same thing with making the heart and spirit new.** It is apparent in itself; the spirit is called the man, in the language of the

apostle; it is called the inward man, and the hidden man. (Rom. vii. 22. 2 Cor. iv. 16. 1 Pet. iii. 4.) *And therefore, putting off the old man, is the same thing with the removal of the old heart; and the putting on of the new man, is the receiving of a new heart, and a new spirit.* Yea, putting on the new man is expressly spoken of as the same thing with receiving a new spirit, or being renewed in spirit, Eph. iv. 22-24. “That ye put off the old man—and be **renewed** in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man.”

I observe once more, it is very apparent, that being **born again**, and **spiritually raised** from death to a state of new existence and life, having a **new heart** created in us, being **renewed** in the spirit of our mind, and being the subjects of **that change** by which we put off the old man, and put on the new man, is the **same thing with that which in Scripture is called being created anew, or made new creatures.**

Here, to pass over many other evidences which might be mentioned, I would only observe, that **the representations are exactly equivalent.** These **several phrases naturally and most plainly signify the same effect.** In the first birth, or generation, we are created, or brought into existence; it is then the whole man first receives being; the soul is then formed, and then our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made, being curiously wrought by our Creator. So that a new-born child is a new creature. So, when a man is **born again**, he is created again; in that **new birth**, there is a new creation; and therein he becomes as a **new-born** babe, or a new creature. So, in a resurrection, there is a new creation. When a man is dead, that which was made in the first creation is destroyed: when that which was dead is raised to life, the mighty power of the author of life is exerted the second time, and the subject restored to a new existence, and a new life, as by a new creation. So **giving a new heart is called creating a clean heart**, Psal. li. 10. where the word, translated create, is the same that is used in the first verse, in Genesis. And when we read in Scripture of the new creature, the creature that is called new is man; and therefore the phrase, new man, is evidently equipollent with new creature; and putting off the old man, and putting on the new man, is spoken of expressly as brought to pass by a work of creation. Col. iii. 9, 10. “Ye have put off the old man—and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him.” So Eph. iv. 22-24. “That ye put off the old man, which is corrupt, &c. and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” These things absolutely fix the meaning of 2 Cor. v. 17. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

It appears from this, together with what has been proved above, that it is most certain with respect to every one of the human race, that he can never have any interest in Christ, or see the kingdom of God, unless he be the subject of **that change** in the temper and disposition of his heart, which is **made in repentance and conversion, circumcision of heart, spiritual baptism, dying to sin, and rising to a new and holy life**; and unless he has the **old heart taken away**, and a **new heart and spirit given**, and puts off the old man, and puts on the new man, and old things are passed away, and all things made new.

So the washing of **regeneration**, or the **NEW BIRTH**, is a change from a state of wickedness. (Tit. iii. 3-5.) Men are spoken of as **purified in their regeneration.** (1 Pet. i. 22, 23. See also 1 John ii. 29. and iii. 1,3.) And it appears, that every man in his first or natural state is a sinner;

*for otherwise he would then need no **repentance**, no **conversion**, no turning from sin to God. And it appears, that every man in his original state has a heart of stone; for thus the Scripture calls that old heart, which is taken away, when a new heart and new spirit is given. (Ezek. xi.19. and xxxvi. 26.) And it appears, that man's nature, as in his native state, is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and of its own motion exerts itself in nothing but wicked deeds. For thus the Scripture characterizes the old man, which is put off, when men are renewed in the spirit of their minds, and put on the new man. (Eph. iv. 22-24. Col. iii. 8-10.) In a word, it appears, that man's nature, as in its native state, is a body of sin, which must be destroyed, must die, be buried, and never rise more. For thus the old man is represented, which is crucified, when men are the subjects of a **spiritual resurrection**. Rom. vi. 4-6. Such a nature, such a body of sin as this, is put off in the **spiritual renovation**, wherein we put on the NEW MAN, and are the subjects of the **spiritual circumcision**. Eph. iv. 21-23."*

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