

Regeneration

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GENEVIEVE BURNELL

Regeneration
Merry Christmas
Lecture Number

132

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APHORISMS IN ACTION

by

GENEVIEVE BURNELL

Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Bishop

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* Regeneration

What is the science of regeneration, and what part does it play in the administration of the illumined?

In theological language regeneration denotes a decisive spiritual transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit in the soul of man. It is not magic; it is miraculous. Perhaps you think that the miraculous and the magical are the same. People are too apt to confuse magical conditions with miraculous truths, or the other way round; and consequently they miss the valid sense of regeneration. Let us become acquainted with the distinction in terms.

The miraculous is supernatural and therefore is in accordance with nature, yet at the same time transcending nature; the miraculous is perfecting the nature of nature.

Magic, on the other hand, disregards nature altogether.

The science of regeneration is not magical and does not disregard nature. It is miraculous

*(Class lecture, December 14, 1956)

in that it perfects nature to a point of glorification. Regeneration is a spiritual transformation wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit. And the effect upon the soul is of vital importance. Where the soul formerly seemed to be estranged from God, it now becomes completely at one with God.

According to nature, man is made to the image of God; but man's spiritual generation confirms the image with likeness. To the soul, the transmission of substance seems to present a regeneration, the return of generation to God.

The Holy Spirit is Love, with a capital "L"; hence regeneration is the work of love. Love is the unifying power by which the soul becomes at one with God. In the world this at-one-ness manifests as a wonderful, supernatural friendship, wherein the soul receives not merely the image, the rational image, but also receives the spiritual likeness of Christ, Who is The Image, the substance of divine glory.

The science of regeneration conforms to generation, although transcending all limitations. It does not eliminate generation, but perfects

it. Remember that the supernatural does not discount or destroy anything of nature; instead it perfects and glorifies the integrity of nature. It transfigures nature by revealing truth.

You will also find, for the convenience of elucidation, that the sacrament which corresponds to regeneration is baptism, a second and spiritual birth. The importance of regeneration is touched on in our Lord Jesus Christ's conversation with *Nicodemus. Nicodemus was puzzled when Jesus told him of the need to be reborn, for Nicodemus knew only the limitation of human generation. So our Lord told him of a new birth necessary to all who were under the experience of a first birth into the world; these must receive a second birth, of water and of spirit, a regeneration within their generation. Nicodemus was, of course, confused and puzzled (just as you may be) because he was not familiar with other than natural birth and the limitations of natural generation. Any merely human mind is lost in a maze of mystery when spiritual truths are presented. Yet each man

*Gospel of Saint John, Chapter 3

participates in divine intelligence at the point where he is touched by that mystery beyond the mind. Nicodemus was confronted by a mystery to be accepted as such until his own mind, regenerated in the Spirit, could correspond to the Spirit.

Regeneration, in sacramental form, is baptism. In fact, baptism is called the science of regeneration. The ritual of the Sacrament expresses death to the limitations of natural experience. Natural life is measured by its limitations. But that which is not of this world is measured by emancipation from limitations. It transcends limitations for the new life is something over and above what we seem to have in our natural span of existence according to human generation, and these limitations seem to be passed on to others in the line of descent. The generation of Adam imparts to the whole race of man the conditions of culpability; and those who conceived life in these conditions, must also have that *re*-generation, that new birth, which emancipates them from human limitations.

The Sacrament of Baptism represents the burial of the Adam generation, and it symbolizes the resurrection of the Christ generation, our regeneration. But, being a sacrament, it does more than merely symbolize or represent; it *is* what it signifies. Whether we are aware of this or not, a sacrament is what it signifies. It does not depend on your knowing this. Truth is not made true by your knowing it; truth is its own truth. You do, however, find personal advantages in recognizing what is true; but you do not make it true by knowing it. Regeneration is a sacrament, and therefore it is not merely an empty sign or a symbol representing a vague hope; it is a spiritual action, a visible sign of an invisible action. You may not literally see the transformation of the soul.

Actually the only way you ever can know this miracle is when it expresses its miraculous presence externally in healing actions, in illumined life, in vitally living truth. Christianity does not consist in speaking words of truth; it consists in being the Word of Truth you speak. External action proceeds from internal action;

hence the true Christianity is, within and without, a correspondence of spiritual oneness.

The Sacrament of Baptism is a visible sign of an invisible action. You do not see the spiritual action, because it is invisible. But it becomes visible when you bring it forth into your life and actions. You make the invisible visible by living the life of illumination; not merely talking about it, not merely theorizing about its value, but by being its healing presence in living experience. People can talk all day about what they believe, but too often their actions contradict their words. If you ARE just and good and humble and meek, you do not need to preach it; your life speaks for you in accordance with truth. To speak anything that is not in accordance with truth, to think anything that is not in accordance with truth, to do anything not in accordance with truth, is impossible to one who IS truth. You could not preach that God is Love by kicking the cow in the face. If you *have* God you cannot *do* contrary to His Will. As long as you are able to act contrary

to truth, you are not participating in this new birth.

Of course, sometimes a person is baptized, and the sacrament does not seem to reveal itself in his life; sometimes it seems as though it has been a mere ritual. The fact is that the reality has not yet laid hold in the flesh; it is gestating until the seed has matured in the good ground of the soul. But the seed is there ready to lay hold. The transformation begins within the soul and is brought to birth in the flesh as exterior radiation of interior deification. To not see this does not mean that you do not have the seed, but only means that as yet it has not radiated externally. Even though one has not yet revealed his new birth in outward signs, the seed planted must, of its own infallible power, bring forth fruit. Others may say that they can see no signs of visible benefits following those who have taken up religion. Some may even imagine that they are worse off than before. But the good is there, in spite of its invisibility, ready and waiting to take hold of the soul that it may radiate forth into exterior actions. Spir-

itual instruction tends the seed planted and nurtures regeneration of body and soul.

Regeneration is not only in the soul; it pervades the flesh also. That spirit of regeneration heals the flesh. The seed is planted in the soul, concealed and nurtured there; but when the seed begins to grow and awakens the new life within you, your flesh also is regenerated by the vigor of incorruption.

Regeneration comes from the inside and radiates out. It is not a garment worn over old corruptions and egotistical dispositions. Saint Paul speaks of putting on incorruption, but not as though it were a cultivated habit wearing thin when the way becomes difficult.

Actually, regeneration begins in the disposition. When God sees the disposition, He grants the grace. God is Love; and He expresses His presence by love, never by kicking the cow in the face. Regeneration does not need to be preached. Christianity does not consist in words, but in living it and being it. Superficial boasting of power is not the regenerative spirit of the new birth, nor is professing faithfulness to

truth the test. The real test is in living it. If you live the love of God, you don't need to profess it.

The Spirit does not have to boast of what is; and when the Spirit lays hold of the soul, there is no need to boast. Peter did not boast of his loyalty after the Spirit had touched him; but before the Spirit laid hold, he did boast of his faith in Christ. Not long after, however, the cock crowed for him thrice. He felt the need of professing his faith when his disposition was weak. But later, after the Spirit had descended on him, he had no question in his mind of faithfulness; he could not have conceived of an opposite of faithfulness. Faithfulness is a matter of truth, not vehement profession. Peter had not yet been confirmed in his faith; his faith could not stand up against the weakness of his spirit.

This is all a matter of history; and we know also what happened when the Spirit descended to confirm in Peter and the other Apostles, the supernatural fortitude which enabled them to

stand firm in all righteousness in spite of persecution. Nothing that could be done to Peter then, would have made him deny his faith and his loyalty to the Lord. No longer did he need to profess faith; he could never have conceived of unfaithfulness; he did not even question faithfulness. He was indeed the rock our Lord had recognized him to be. Where the spirit had been willing and the flesh weak, now the flesh also was equal to the need. Where he had not been able to watch with the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, now he could follow the Lord even to his own cross. But the Lord knows human weakness and forgave him with all others, even as He forgives every other person who has the disposition to faithfulness. When God sees the disposition, He grants the perfection; as He did with the disciples when He sent His own Spirit to be their strength.

When the sacrament of regeneration has taken hold and is sealed with sincerity, that which is inmost strength in man comes forth into exterior radiation, and it is impossible to live contrary to truth. The inability to conceive

of an opposite of truth is the evidence of regeneration.

The Axioms are a metaphysical baptism for they wash away all preconceived limitation and prepare for the new birth in the spirit of grace. Liturgically speaking, John the Baptist is our axiomatic consciousness making straight and clear the way wherein the sacramental action proceeds. The inability to conceive of anything other than truth, opens new spiritual horizons; because everything else but truth has been washed away. It is as though you were dead to that which is not, to falsity, to lies, and to errors; and were vitally alive to truth. Even as baptism is a spiritual death to unreality and rebirth to reality, so is regeneration a falling away of what ought not to be, that the life of truth may be generated eternally.

Wonderful as it is, the science of regeneration is not magic; nor does it work magical results. It is miraculous and brings supernatural results. Magic deceives the eye, but the miraculous brings truth to light. The miraculous may look like magic to the uninformed; but whereas

magic is a trick, the miraculous is the dispersement of trickery.

Take for example the scriptural account of Lazarus brought forth from the grave with his winding sheet still on him. This was not a trick of magic such as one might view on the stage; this was a revelation of the new life generating eternally in spite of winding sheets and graves. Where did Lazarus' old sickness go? We can be sure that he did not come out of the grave retaining his old sickness. This state would be worse than the first. It is the sickness that is the trickery. The Lord does not play tricks with man. He dissolves all that is contradictory to truth. Regeneration preserves the integrity of nature and puts the spiritual seal of perfection on the flesh; only the grave clothes that trick the mind are banished as shadows.

The Sacrament of Baptism is the science of regeneration. It is your spiritual resurrection. The whole Sacrament of Baptism expropriates the limitations of a merely human generation and incorporates man in the spiritual generation. The subsistent life of Christ rises up in us

to be the vigor of incorruption. By the first birth man is always moving from life to death. By the second, the order is reversed from death to life; and the new life is subsistent because it is an incorporation into the Eternal Word of God. The first Adam has fallen away that we may receive the likeness of Christ, the Second Adam, in Whom all is life. We receive this likeness, not by imitation, but by identification; therefore it is a real likeness. We receive God's divine generation in ourselves. God creates from nothing, but He generates Himself.

Baptism is the first of the sacraments. Just as birth is the first step in the human life, so baptism is the first step in spiritual life. But baptism is the point in which death and life meet to be the death of death and the life of life. The new life does not destroy nature, but perfects it, glorifies it, and enhances it. At birth man has the appearance of beginning; he seems to receive his human generation. This merely human life is called the generation of Adam. By it man moves into external experience; and having entered into experience, he must be

emancipated from it. Human generation is not enough; one must receive also that spiritual regeneration which restores the substance.

Again let us present the example of a man standing before a mirror. He sees his image in the mirror, but actually the image is not *in* the mirror; he only sees it there. The secret of reflection is that the mirror returns the image to the substance. The return of the image to its substance is the science of regeneration.

To understand this science, we must first know generation. In the Scriptures we find the key. Let us consider the account in Genesis. Man was created to the image and likeness of God. The creation of the image was from nothing, for there is nothing beside God. Hence man's human generation is nothing. Man's nature turned towards God, like the mirror, returns the image to receive the Divine Likeness. Having received the Likeness, divine generation grants the substance.

Experience is constantly projecting and reuniting the principles which constitute life on earth; the positive and negative factors of

creativity seem to separate and reunite in human life. Man, the image and likeness, was male and female. But the objectivity of nature seems to separate the negative from the positive in such a way that natural generation developed outwardly. Man was placed in the Garden and told to multiply; to keep the Garden and to multiply. The trickery of reflection caught him in external appearances, and he lost the secret of return. So he kept going on and on, trying to keep his garden outside, generating externally in a maze of complexity. Multiplying reflections never brings likeness to the image. A reverse action is necessary. This action is sacramental.

Even as the Sacrament of Marriage restores the compound image, so the Sacrament of Baptism recollects the scattered image that oneness may regenerate the substance. No longer do the objective and subjective remain split, but the miracle of the one substance seals the image with likeness.

Rationality supplies man with the power to turn around his mind, convert his mind from the trickery of an external and superficial world

to the kingdom of reality. The Magic City can never satisfy the children of God. They seek only the jewel of reality. The Magic City may deceive the children of men, but the children of God know the miraculous Kingdom of real substance.

Insight into Old Testament history shows the running parallel between the kingdom of the children of God and the world with its children of men. They interweave and are interdominant. Sometimes it seems as though the children of God are entirely obscured by the children of men. But actually the children of God are never lost. They may be concealed, but they are never lost; because they are of the eternal truth. Of course the children of men are more conspicuous with their noisy achievements; but, actually, the world, unknown to itself, is really run by the children of God. Their prayers are actually more effectual than all the force and violence that fill the annals of history.

The sacrament of regeneration brings forth the children of God even in the midst of historical contradiction. This sacrament is not

merely a ritual; its reality is the desire for the new birth. Desire is your spiritual baptism. The form is enacted outside, but the reality *must be* within as desire of the heart for truth. This that happens within is the work of the Holy Spirit deifying the soul. The decisive change that takes place in the inmost nature, cannot remain hidden there. Ultimately, when sincerity has confirmed the illuminating presence in your heart, the flesh also radiates the vigor of incorruption. To your whole nature comes the sealing character of Christ; the image is sealed with likeness. Thus you receive the eternal generation in your own soul and body. It seems like new life to you; but, really, it is not new at all. Actually it is whole and complete generation making itself known anew in the frame of time and space.

This generation of the Word is not an event in history; it is an eternal action. Natural generation becomes an event in history; but spiritual generation, by which you become the sons of God and know it, is an advent of eternity.

Man seems lost to himself; he seems to have

lost his dignity, lost his spiritual strength, lost his sense of oneness. He lost his dignity by disobedience, he lost his spiritual strength by self-assertiveness, he lost his sense of oneness by ignorance. But when the Lord came to save the lost, all this was healed. He Who was the generation of the Word of God, lifted up human nature and restored the dignity of man. He repaired the loss of spiritual strength; He overcame the feeling of diversification. All that man had lost by human generation was restored by *re-generation*. He Who is the generation of the Word, brought us *re-generation*. The return to substance of the image in the mirror is restoration. This applied to man is *re-generation*, *re-knowing*, *re-remembering*—man fulfilling his destiny, which is God—giving back to the source and substance of life. From God, to God, and in God, is the eternal circle. This circle does not take place outside, but is within; it is within you, rather than outside, that your destiny is fulfilled.

The generation of the Word is not history; it is eternity. To confirm this statement, I am

going to quote to you a magnificent sentence. If you can take the substance of this sentence to heart and meditate upon it as your destiny, it will actually be your regeneration. The result will be healing even in the external action, for the internal perception of truth will radiate forth until you no longer live any life other than that which is the way of truth. This is the sentence:

*God never generates anything less than God.

God never generates *anything* less than God. He creates from nothing, but He generates Himself. Hence your regeneration is a divine and spiritual action in which your whole life is transfigured even though you may not at once know that it has taken place.

Your desire for baptism, your desire for truth, your desire for vital existence, plants the seed. Sincerity nurtures this seed, and it grows through spiritual study until at last you will come to discover it revealed in your life. Spiritual life is waiting to break forth even as the

*Commentary on the Aphorisms 35, by George Edwin Burnell, page 17

tree is ready to sprout. No longer will you feel a sense of loss, of depleted dignity. Disobedience, lack of spiritual strength arising from the tendency to self-assertiveness, will no longer prevail. Division and separation such as each ego seems to possess to achieve its own nature and importance, dissolves under the spiritual action; for it is the generating Word of God Who has assumed our lowliness to His majesty, our weakness to His strength, our mortality to His eternity. In this one and the same Mediator, weakness, lowliness, and mortality die that, rising out of this spiritual burial, out of this darksome sepulchre—even as Lazarus came forth from his grave—is the regenerate nature, with life no longer estranged from God, but one with Him, receiving to that created image, a divine and spiritual likeness. This likeness is not an empty imitation but is, instead, the likeness of identification, being one with Christ.

Remember, God does not generate anything less than God. Man's regeneration is the original generation of God in him, not according to history, but according to eternity. No one

can fully exist without this. It may seem to be lost; it may seem to be estranged from human beings; but, actually, for man to be at all, it must be there. Just as there is no image in a mirror without the presence of reality, so man depends on God for his being. Being, without likeness to substance, seems empty; therefore regeneration, where the image remembers substance, and divine likeness is sealed.

We seem to have in our human experience, much failure and loss; the human generations of man set up limitations and restrictive conditions. We speak of this generation and that generation according to time and space, an outward multiplicity somehow broken up and divided, a scattered image. Truth is never divided, never scattered. This deflection is something that appears in your own mind and human viewpoint. God never repeats Himself in any of His works. His action is eternal, not repetitious. Yet, according to our way of speaking, His super-Unity overflows into multiplicity; for how else can His infinity be known in our finite

existence except by the manifestation of multiplicity in being? But the multiplicity and unity are not contradictions any more than a mirror maze affects the unit of substance. Man, judging by the maze, may seem to be in a state of confusion; but each and every reflection has in it the power to identify with its source, for the seeming scattering is not in the substance, but in the reflective nature. When the image returns to its substance, likeness becomes manifest; and man remembers himself as he truly is. To man this may be felt as a psychological experience of conversion. The very principle of life is laid hold of, and a complete reversal of perceptions takes place. The turning 'round of the mind draws you back from externalities toward the source of life itself, for it is in the source that restoration takes place.

There are, we are told by the experts, certain psychological experiences that make manifest the conversion. First, there is the sense of need, which in the soul is comparable to physical hunger, for renewal of life. The old life does not satisfy because it lacks subsistence. This

sense of need breaks down pride in our hearts as we see that of ourselves we can do nothing. Pride separated us from God and from one another. Pride is the separating aspect of human life; so, with the coming of divine life, pride must be washed away that there may remain nothing in us to resist the Spirit.

The awakening soul gives significant signs. But, lest these signs remain empty and hollow, we need to understand and interpret them. From signs to symbols and eventually into sacraments, the proceeding is according to our understanding and revelation. There comes with the decisive spiritual action, an awakening of soul which is more than psychological; it is a real spiritual awakening from the darkness of forgetfulness into the light of a new day, the Day of the Lord. This awakening is our new birth. As sincerity takes hold of the heart, the new life begins to grow and strengthen until the person is quite conscious within himself both of what is not truth and of what truth is. The consciousness includes both perceptions, which are really one—what truth is not, and

what truth is. This vision becomes so clear that actually the person is unable to see anything at all but truth. So completely is the twofold perception one with him, that he can see and know nothing at all but God.

The consciousness of the "not truth" cannot be a stopping point in perception; for, psychologically speaking, this can degenerate into mere consciousness of sin. Real consciousness of "not truth" is the threshold of illumination, the darkness before the dawn. But when contrasts are set up in the mind, and a sense of reality is given to darkness as contrary to light, one's own mind and heart are tortured in trying to escape darkness so that one's experience may be light.

With real spiritual awakening comes the deliverance from contraries. It is not all against the nothing, reality against unreality, light against darkness, but the revelation that the double aspect is not a sign of duality, but a symbol of non-duality. Such an awakening of soul dissolves opposition. The nothing is not nothing because God is everywhere, and you

are aware of Him everywhere. You cannot conceive of anything contrary to truth. It is at this point that inner light breaks through darkness and regeneration fills the soul, breaking forth into flesh itself.

Man is the substantial union of body and soul; therefore the regeneration of man is not in soul only, nor in flesh only, but in the body and soul, the within and the without as the miracle of one substance.

Regeneration is not mere theory; it is practical also. It may start with theory; but as a true theory, sincerity can establish it in factual life also. So man, as a substantial union, reveals in the flesh as in a clear crystal, the soul's glory. And, as Saint Augustine says, "the vigor of incorruption" is experienced bodily. Physically and spiritually, the power of truth has laid hold. Man, with the faculties of his soul exercised in the body, cannot see, know, judge, or understand anything but truth. This is not a blindness nor a limitation; it is the freedom of the true vision. His blindness to that which is not, projects his pure vision of that which is,

into all departments of experience. He is no longer conscious of anything that obscures vision. He is no longer opposed in his perception by the contradictions of truth. Because he sees through all appearance to that which truly is, with eyes too pure to behold iniquity, his blindness to that which *seems* real becomes his vision of what is *really* real; and the blindness and the vision are at the same point. Illumination is in himself, reflected there by Light of Very Light. No longer does he judge things from the world aspect, but only from the righteous judgment which unfolds truth.

The great requisite for pure judgment is the power to see through appearances, not to be misled by opinions that confuse, but to be so confirmed in the Kingdom of God that only such a revelation has authority. Opinions cannot affect truth, but they do affect the children of the world by deflecting the power to judge. Freed from opinion, the power of judgment begins to fulfill its requirements by extirpating unreality, by understanding truth, and by expressing zeal for justice. But most important of

all in judgment is the ability to extirpate evil, for he who judges evil deflects likeness from image by an action of his own mind. True judgment rests upon the generation of the Word within, which Word is not less than God. How, then, can we ever have a judgment that is less than truth? How can we know or see anything less than that which is? How could we ever be anything less than the substance God has bestowed on us as His image and likeness?

We must remember our divine generation in its eternal circle, not as an event in history, but as an act of eternity; a circle that does not take place outside, but proceeds from within the center of being and radiates noiselessly throughout the whole system.

The point of deification is the very core of life; it is here where the miracle of regeneration is wrought by the Holy Ghost. The decisive action first takes place in your soul; for the life of the soul is God, even as, in turn, the life of the flesh is the soul. The soul, laid hold of by the spirit of truth, is regenerated with nothing

less than God. This new life throbs through your heart, illumines your mind, and radiates forth into your external manifestation, revealing—even as a tree reveals its fruits—what manner of being you are.

Regeneration begins within the soul by the revelation that there is no separation from God. Oneness with God is not by imitation, but by being what you are, the being of His Being. What you really are receives the Spirit of divine generation, and this Spirit is not anything less than God Himself. God generates Himself within you as a living reality.

The science of regeneration does not work magic; it reveals the true miracle that only that which is, is real.

Except a man be born anew of water and Spirit, he cannot know and experience, he cannot recognize nor enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But when he has experienced this new birth, this regeneration, all he can see and know and participate in is the Kingdom of God and the vital happiness thereof.

And now let us pronounce the words of truth which are the benediction of our regeneration:

*All the Presence there is,
All the Power there is,
All the Consciousness there is,
Is *Love*, the *Living Spirit Almighty*.

*Axioms: Book of Health,
by George Edwin Burnell,
page 80

