

Regeneration and the New Jerusalem

Regeneration as an Entrance

According to the revelation of the New Testament, regeneration is an organic entrance, an entrance that involves life and that ushers us into the realm of life. Regeneration is a new birth carried out in the believers through the imparting of the divine life into their spirit by the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of life and the life-giving Spirit (John 3:6; Rom. 8:2; 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:6). As such, it is the commencement of God's salvation in its organic aspect, i.e., in the aspect of life. Romans 5:10 says that, having been "reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life." This reveals clearly that God's salvation is of two aspects: the judicial aspect, accomplished through Christ's redeeming death, which satisfied the judicial requirements of God's righteousness, and the organic aspect, accomplished by the imparting of the life of God as a new element into our entire being by the life-giving Spirit. We did not receive the divine life through our first birth, our human birth, but acquired it through regeneration, our divine birth. Hence, regeneration is an organic beginning, an organic entrance into a new realm, the realm of the divine life. The assurance that we have entered through regeneration into the divine realm of the divine life is the fact that we love both God and our brothers in Christ: "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers....Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God, and everyone who loves Him who has begotten loves him also who has been begotten of Him" (1 John 3:14; 5:1).

The realm of life into which regeneration ushers us will consummate in the New Jerusalem, the city of life and of the glorious expression of life (Rev. 22:1-2; 21:11). Thus, it can be said that regeneration is the entrance into the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is not a physical city but a corporate person, an organic constitution of the processed and consummated Triune God mingled with His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite elect throughout all the generations (see "The New Jerusalem—A Corporate Person," *Affirmation & Critique* V.2 (April 2000): 45-65). Such an organic entity needs regeneration to be its organic entrance. By itself, redemption through Christ's death cannot bring us into the

New Jerusalem, because redemption, although it includes the releasing of life (John 19:34), does not in itself impart life into the believers. Thus, after receiving Christ's redemption by "washing our robes" in the redeeming blood of Christ, the spotless Lamb of God, we still need to "enter by the gates into the city" (1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 22:14). To enter by the gates into the New Jerusalem is to enter by regeneration through the death-overcoming and life-imparting Christ.

To Enter into Is to Become

Before developing further the matter of regeneration as the entrance into the New Jerusalem, there is a need to consider what it means to enter into the New Jerusalem. Since the New Jerusalem is not a literal, physical city, we should not think that we can enter into it in a physical way. To enter into the New Jerusalem is actually to become the New Jerusalem. Our becoming the New Jerusalem is our entering into it. In order to enter into the New Jerusalem, we must become the New Jerusalem; otherwise, we can never enter into it.

First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." In this verse, the sense of the preposition *into* is "to become," or "to be." We were baptized into one Body, with the result that we have become one Body. Thus, our entering into the Body is our becoming the Body. It is not that the Body is apart from us and we are put into the Body through baptism. Rather, it is that we have become one Body through our believing in Christ and our being baptized in the one Spirit.

It is in the sense of becoming, or being, that we speak of entering into the New Jerusalem. This is consistent with the biblical truth that the New Jerusalem is not a physical entity that is outside the believers, into which the believers can enter in an objective way; rather, the New Jerusalem is a composition of all the believers of both the Old Testament dispensation and the New Testament dispensation, who are united, mingled, and incorporated with the Triune God in a subjective way. The New Jerusalem is what we are becoming today through the process of God's complete salvation; it is not a physical place to

which we are going in the future. Regeneration is the beginning of such a becoming.

The Pearl Gates of the Holy City

The things unveiled in the book of Revelation are made known to the reader by the apostle John through the use of signs, which are symbols with spiritual significance (1:1). The entire book of Revelation is composed mainly of signs, and the New Jerusalem is the greatest and ultimate sign in this book and in the entire Scriptures as a whole. Since the New Jerusalem is a sign, every detail in the description of the New Jerusalem must also be a sign. Thus, the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem (21:12, 21) are not literal, physical gates but are signs with spiritual significance.

The twelve gates are for entering into the holy city (22:14). That each gate is, respectively, of one pearl signifies that the entrance into the city is unique and is once for all. The pearls themselves signify that entrance into the New Jerusalem is gained through the once-for-all regeneration accomplished by Christ's overcoming death and life-dispensing resurrection (John 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:3). The significance of the pearl is found in the manner in which it is produced. A pearl is produced by an oyster, a living creature that dwells in the sea. After being wounded by a small rock or a particle of sand, the oyster reacts by secreting an organic substance that surrounds the wounding particle layer upon layer, thereby forming a precious pearl. This is a vivid picture portraying the way in which the New Jerusalem is produced and the way in which we enter into it. In this picture Christ is the living One who came to live in the Satan-usurped world, signified by the sea, and was wounded on the cross by sinners, signified by the particle of sand. After dying on the cross for sinners, Christ "imprisons" the believing sinners in His death (cf. Rom. 6:4; Phil. 3:10), signified by His wound, and "secretes" His life essence, His resurrection life, into them to transform them gradually from "grains of sand" into priceless "pearls" for the building of the New Jerusalem. Thus, the pearl gates of the New Jerusalem signify not Christ directly but the produce of Christ in His redemptive death with His life-secreting resurrection to be the entry into God's building. This produce is a living composition of all Christ's believers, not as individuals but as a collective entity.

The producing of the believers as a collective pearl by Christ in His redemptive work is allegorized further in the blood and water which flowed out of Christ's side when He was pierced on the cross (John 19:34). Blood is for redemption, and water, symbolizing the life-giving Spirit, which Christ became in His resurrection (7:37-39; 1 Cor. 15:45), is for regeneration by the imparting of the divine life into the believers (John 3:6). Such an impartation of

life through regeneration leads to the believers' being transformed into precious materials for God's eternal building.

When we first believed in the Lord Jesus, we were regenerated, born of God to be the children of God with His divine life and divine nature (John 1:12-13; 2 Pet. 1:1-4). This was the initiation of our entering into the New Jerusalem. In reality, our entering into the New Jerusalem is a process that begins with our being regenerated in our spirit and ends with our being glorified, transfigured, in our body at the Lord's coming back (Rom. 8:23, 30; Phil. 3:21). Between these two ends is a lifelong process of transformation, in which the divine element is gradually wrought into our soul through the growth of the divine life in us, and we are changed into the glorious image of Christ, God's firstborn Son (Rom. 12:2; 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). This process is well illustrated by the formation of a pearl, as described above. The longer the particle of sand remains in the wound within the oyster, the more the oyster secretes its life essence around the grain, adding its life element to the element of the grain, with the result that the two elements are combined to form a pearl. Likewise, by our abiding in the death of Christ to experience and enjoy the dispensing of His resurrection life into our entire being (Gal. 2:20), the divine element of Christ is added and even mingled with our human element, and we are gradually transformed into "pearls" for the building of the New Jerusalem. The more we are conformed to Christ's death (Phil. 3:10), the more Christ's Spirit, who is the reality of Christ in His resurrection (John 14:16-20), operates in us (2 Cor. 4:10-12; cf. 1 Pet. 3:18) to transform us (2 Cor. 3:18). Thus, our subjective experience of Christ's death and resurrection through the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8:13), by which we daily grow in the divine life unto its maturity, becomes our complete entry into the New Jerusalem. The more we are made pearls, the more we are in the New Jerusalem, i.e., the more we become the New Jerusalem.

Regenerated to Enter into the Kingdom of God

According to John 3:5, the unique way for us to enter into the kingdom of God is through regeneration, i.e., through the new birth: "Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Water here signifies the death of Christ, into which we have been baptized to terminate and bury the natural life of our old man (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). The Spirit in this verse, as the Spirit of life, the life-giving Spirit, signifies resurrection, in which we are germinated with the divine life to become the children of God (1 Pet. 1:3), the constituents of the kingdom of God. Thus, to be born anew is to be born of water, signifying the death of Christ, and of the Spirit (John 3:5-6), signifying the resurrection of Christ (the

Spirit being the reality of Christ's resurrection, i.e., of Christ in His resurrection—John 11:25; 14:6, 16-20; Rom. 8:9-11). It is by such a divine birth that we enter into the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is the reign of God. This divine reign is a realm not only of the divine dominion, in which God rules through His divine power and His divine authority, but also of the divine life, in which are all the divine things. The animal kingdom is the realm, the totality, of the animal life with all the activities of that life. Similarly, the kingdom of God is the realm, the totality, of the divine life with all its activities. To enter into the divine kingdom and to live in that kingdom, we must be born of God, i.e., regenerated, to have the divine nature and life. Such a new birth makes us the sons of God as the divine species, the constituents of the divine kingdom (Matt. 13:36-38). After regeneration the growth of the divine life in us unto its maturity becomes the development of the kingdom unto its full manifestation (Mark 4:26-29; 2 Pet. 1:3-11; Rom. 8:19).

According to the revelation of the New Testament, the kingdom of God in the present age is the church (Matt. 16:18-19; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20). In the coming age, the age of the millennium, the kingdom of God will be a reward as an inheritance to be enjoyed by the overcoming believers (Matt. 5:3, 10; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). The consummation of the kingdom of God, as the realm of the divine life, is the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth. The center of the New Jerusalem is the throne of God and of the Lamb for the divine administration, out of which flows the river of water of life, along which grows the tree of life, to supply the city with the riches of the divine life for eternity (Rev. 22:1-2). Furthermore, all the redeemed ones of God, as the constituents of the New Jerusalem, will be kings reigning forever and ever (v. 5). Thus, the New Jerusalem will be God's eternal kingdom, in which the Triune God will rule over the universe with His sons as His co-kings, and will dispense Himself freely into His chosen and redeemed people to be their life, life supply, and everything for His eternal expression. Hence, regeneration, as the entrance into the kingdom of God, is also the entrance into the New Jerusalem.

Regenerated to Be Christ's Bride

Regeneration makes the believers a part of the bride of Christ, which is the increase, the enlargement, of Christ (John 3:3, 5-6, 29-30), as Eve was the increase and enlargement of Adam (Gen. 2:18-24; 5:2). As the Bridegroom, Christ gives the immeasurable Spirit and the unlimited eternal life to His believers to make them components of His bride (John 3:34, 36). Christ increases by regenerating the sinners whom He redeemed, making

them the same as He is in life, in nature, and in expression but not in His Godhead, that they may match Him to be His bride, His wife. Christ's bride is His increase, indicating that even today, through regeneration Christ is still increasing.

In the present age, the age of grace, the bride of Christ is the church as the Body of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-32). In the coming age, the age of the millennium, the bride of Christ will consist of the overcoming believers, who will be joined to Christ in marriage and participate in the marriage dinner of the Lamb as a reward for one thousand years (Rev. 19:7-9; 20:4). In eternity future, the eternal age, the bride of Christ will consummate as the New Jerusalem, a living composition of all the believers in Christ throughout all the ages, who have been fully mingled with the Triune God, to be Christ's wife for eternity (21:2, 9-10; 22:17). Since regeneration makes us a part of Christ's bride, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem, it also makes us a part of the New Jerusalem.

Regenerated to Be Sons of God

In the new heaven and the new earth there will be two categories of human beings on the positive side. (On the negative side, a third category will be the unbelieving sinners who have perished in the lake of fire.) The first is the peoples mentioned in Revelation 21:3, who are the nations in 21:24 and 22:2. They will not be regenerated but will be restored by God to man's original created state and will live forever in the created human life on the new earth outside the New Jerusalem (see "A Brief Presentation of a Biblical Eschatology," *Affirmation & Critique* V.2 (April 2000): 88-92). The second category is the sons of God mentioned in 21:7, who are the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified saints throughout the generations. They will be the constituents of the New Jerusalem and will live by the divine, eternal life of God to express God in His glory and participate in all the eternal blessings of the holy city. Thus, the New Jerusalem will be a composition of all the sons of God who have been regenerated by God and ultimately glorified by Him. Since regeneration produces children of God (John 1:12-13), and the children of God as the sons of God are the components of the New Jerusalem, it can be said again that regeneration is the entrance into the New Jerusalem.

Regenerated unto a Living Hope

According to 1 Peter 1:3, God has regenerated us "unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The living hope mentioned here is not the hope of "going to heaven" or of any material blessing; rather, it is the hope of life, even the eternal life, with all the endless divine and spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ

(Eph. 1:3). This hope is based on the divine life received through regeneration:

The living hope, the hope of life, brought to the regenerated believers through regeneration, can be likened to the various expectations for the future brought to parents through the birth of a newborn babe; all such expectations hinge on the life of the newborn child. Likewise, the life that we, the believers, have received through regeneration enables us to have a hope, with numerous aspects, for this age, for the coming age, and for eternity. In this age we have the hope of growing in life, of maturing, of manifesting our gifts, of exercising our functions, of being transformed, of overcoming, of being redeemed in our body, and of entering into glory. In the coming age we have the hope of entering into the kingdom, of reigning with the Lord, and of enjoying the blessings of the eternal life in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. In eternity we have the hope of being in the New Jerusalem, where we will participate fully in the consummated blessings of the eternal life in its ultimate manifestation in eternity. This living hope, the hope of life, hinges on the eternal life, which we received through regeneration. Only the divine life can enable us to grow in the divine life until we grow into the reality of the hope that is brought to us by that life. Thus we will obtain the various blessings mentioned above as our inheritance, which is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading and is kept for eternity (vv. 3-4). (Recovery Version, 1 Pet. 1:3, note 6)

The living hope brought to every believer in Christ through regeneration will ultimately be realized in the New Jerusalem, of which all the believers are constituents and in which they will enjoy the fullness of the divine life and express the glory of the divine life for eternity. Regeneration is the entrance into such a hope and is the basis of such a hope.

Regenerated by Drinking the Life-giving Spirit

To be regenerated is to drink the life-giving Spirit as the living water (John 7:37-39; 1 Cor. 12:13). After writing concerning the matter of regeneration in John 3, in chapter four the apostle presents the case of a Samaritan woman who was regenerated by drinking the living water offered to her by Christ. In verse 14 the Lord Jesus said to the woman, "But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water gushing up into eternal life." This word points to the flowing Triune God, with the Father as the fountain (Psa. 36:9; Jer. 2:13), the Son as the spring, the emerging of the fountain (John 16:28; 4:10; 7:37), and the Spirit as the river that issues forth from the Son as the gushing spring (cf. John 7:38-39; 19:34). Through regeneration the flowing Triune God is installed in the

regenerated spirit of the believers to become in them a fountain, a spring, and a river.

The flowing of the Triune God in the believers is "into eternal life." Here the word *into* speaks of destination, indicating that the destination of the flowing Triune God is the eternal life. The New Jerusalem is the totality of the divine, eternal life. The eternal life eventually will be the New Jerusalem, and every component of the holy city will be saturated with the eternal life. Thus, *into eternal life* means *into the New Jerusalem*. The Triune God flows in us and with us to a marvelous destination—the New Jerusalem. When we drink of the life-giving Spirit, the consummation of the Triune God, as the living water, we are regenerated, and the Triune God becomes a fountain in us that gushes up and flows in us into, or for, the New Jerusalem, causing us to become the New Jerusalem. It is in this sense also that regeneration is the entrance into the New Jerusalem.

Conclusion

The greatest wonder in the entire universe is that human beings can be begotten of God and sinners can be regenerated to become children of God. It is by such an amazing divine birth that all the believers in Christ receive the divine life and the divine nature and are ushered into the enjoyment of all the riches of the Triune God in the realm of life. The growth of the divine life in the believers unto maturity by their daily and constant experience of Christ in His death and resurrection through their enjoyment of the indwelling life-giving Spirit will eventually constitute them to be the mature sons of God as the God-men, the constituents of the New Jerusalem, which is a great, corporate God-man.

Regeneration is an irreversible experience; once a person has been regenerated, he can never go back to his unregenerated state, and his ultimate destiny is forever determined and guaranteed by the divine life received through regeneration. Such a life, which is the processed and consummated Triune God as the life-giving Spirit, is infinitely capable and fully able to transform all the regenerated ones into gold, pearls, and precious stones for the building of the New Jerusalem. Thus, through regeneration we become the New Jerusalem, the eternal enlargement, expansion, and expression of the Triune God. This is the good pleasure of God's heart and the great goal of God's eternal economy.

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Works Cited

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