

*A Position Letter from the Elders at Grace Community Church
Regarding Regeneration*

Regarding the Doctrine of Regeneration

At Grace Community Church, we enthusiastically and unashamedly affirm that God saves by His grace alone. The way God does this is by causing dead things to come to life, causing hard hearts to become soft, causing fallen natures to become holy natures—something Scripture refers to as *regeneration*. On a cosmic scale, regeneration is the renewing work of God in all of creation, but here we are specifically referring to the regenerating work that God does in the souls of those people who are being saved. We believe Scripture clearly teaches that regeneration *precedes* faith—God regenerates us so that we may certainly respond in faith. God’s work of regeneration is the thing that causes everything else. Yet when we say regeneration precedes faith, we mean that it precedes it in order, though the timing may be indistinguishable—in other words, God’s regeneration happens first, but our response of faith may (and often does) seem to take place immediately.

This doctrinal position on regeneration is quite closely related to the other elder letter concerning our church distinctives, but this current letter is offered by way of explanation about regeneration specifically. What follows below is hardly a comprehensive list by any stretch, but it provides some of the contours of how Scripture describes the miracle of regeneration.

God causes believers to come to life through regeneration

Regeneration is found throughout Scripture:

⇒ Deut 30:6—And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Regeneration is a promise:

⇒ Jer 31:33–34—“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (see also Ezek 11:19–20)

Christ taught regeneration:

⇒ John 3:3–8—Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind

blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Regeneration is an act of God’s mercy:

- ⇒ Eph 2:4–5—But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—
- ⇒ Col 2:13— And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...

Regeneration makes a “new creation” in Christ:

- ⇒ Gal 6:15—For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.
- ⇒ 2 Cor 5:17—Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
- ⇒ Titus 3:5—...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...
- ⇒ Jas 1:18—Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.
- ⇒ 1 Pet 1:23—...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God...

Without regeneration, no one seeks God:

- ⇒ Rom 3:9–12,18—What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,¹⁰ as it is written:
“None is righteous, no, not one;
¹¹ no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.”
¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Without regeneration, no one can obey God:

- ⇒ Rom 8:7–8—For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Without regeneration, no one can understand God:

- ⇒ 1 Cor 2:14—The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Without regeneration, no one can come to God:

⇒ John 6:44a—No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Without regeneration, we are dead in our sins:

⇒ Eph 1:17–18—...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

⇒ Ps 51:5— Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

⇒ Ps 58:3—The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

⇒ Gen 8:21—...the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.

⇒ Jer 17:9—The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

⇒ Eph 2:1–3—And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

⇒ Col 2:13—And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses

⇒ John 8:34—Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

⇒ John 8:44a—You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

⇒ Romans 8:7–8—For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⇒ Eph 2:12—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

⇒ John 3:19–20—And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

We always bear fruit in keeping with our nature (for good or bad):

⇒ Job 14:4—Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one.

⇒ Mat 7:16–18—You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

⇒ Matt 12:33—Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.

- ⇒ Mark 7:21–23—“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”
- ⇒ Jas 1:13-14—Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

God draws us to Himself:

- ⇒ Eph 5:8a—...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.
- ⇒ Eph 2:13—But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.
- ⇒ 2 Tim 2:25a–26—God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.
- ⇒ John 6:37-39,44—³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. [...] ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.
- ⇒ 1 John 4:9–10—In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
- ⇒ Romans 5:8–10—...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.
- ⇒ John 17:6–12,19—“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.
¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate [set aside] myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

The doctrine of regeneration is not a high-minded academic affair for ivory towers, nor either is it a cold and dusty doctrine of systematic theologians. Instead, regeneration is our joyful confession that our hearts were without life, without hope, enslaved to sin, and in rebellious hatred against the God who made us. We were unwilling and unable to seek Him, and if left to ourselves we would never try. Yet God, being rich in mercy, reached down to draw our hearts to Himself in love—this is our confession of regeneration, which is something God does first that we might seek Him in faith.

Signed,

the Elders of Grace Community Church
Battle Creek, MI
Soli Deo Gloria