

Worldwide: please use the online downloads worldwide without charge.

In **North America:** please write for a printed copy sent postage paid and completely without charge.

Chapel Library does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal positions of the authors it publishes

We do not ask for donations, send promotional mailings, or share mailing lists.

© Copyright 2007 Chapel Library; Pensacola, Florida.

Must We Be Born Again?

Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

“Ye must be born again.”—John 3:7

For your conviction, consider these few things:

Regeneration is absolutely necessary to qualify you to do any thing really good and acceptable to God. While you are not born again, your best works are but glittering sins; for though the matter of them is good, they are quite marred in the performance. Consider:

1. That without regeneration there is no faith, and “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6). Faith is a vital act of the new-born soul. The evangelist, showing the different entertainment which our Lord Jesus had from different persons, some receiving Him, some rejecting Him, points at regenerating grace as the true cause of that difference, without which never any one would have received Him. He tells us, that “as many as received him” were those “which were born—of God” (Joh 1:11-13). Unregenerate men may presume; but true faith they cannot have. Faith is a flower that grows not in the field of nature. As the tree cannot grow without a root, neither can a man believe without the new nature, whereof the principle of believing is a part.

2. Without regeneration a man’s works are dead works. As is the principle, so must the effects be: if the lungs are rotten, the breath will be unsavory; and he who at best is dead in sin, his works at best will be but dead works. “Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, is nothing pure—being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Ti 1:15-16). If we could say of a man, that he is more blameless in his life than any other in the world, that he reduces his body with fasting and has made his knees as horns with continual praying, if he is not born again, that exception would mar all. As if one should say, There is a well proportioned body, but the soul is gone; it is but a dead lump. This is a melting consideration. You do many things materially good; but God says, All these things avail not, as long as I see the old nature reigning in the man, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Gal 6:15).

If you are not born again:

1. All your reformation is naught in the sight of God. You have shut the door, but the thief is still in the house. It may be you are not what once you were; yet you are not what you must be, if ever you see heaven; for “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

2. Your prayers are an “abomination to the Lord” (Pro 15:8). It may be, others admire your seriousness; you cry as for your life; but God accounts of the opening of your mouth as one would account of the opening of a grave full of rottenness, “Their throat is an open sepulchre” (Rom 3:13). Others are affected with your prayers, which seem to them as if they would rend the heavens; but God accounts them but as the howling of a dog, “They have not cried unto me with their hearts, when they howled upon their beds” (Hosea 7:14). Others take you for a wrestler and pre-vailler with God; but He can take no delight in you nor your prayers, “He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man: he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck...he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol” (Isa 66:3). Why, because you are yet “in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity” (Act 8:23)!

3. All you have done for God, and His cause in the world, though it may be followed with temporal rewards, yet it is lost as to divine acceptance. This is clear from the case of Jehu, who was indeed rewarded with a kingdom, for his executing due vengeance upon the house of Ahab, as being a work good for the matter of it because it was commanded of God, as you may see (2Ki 9:7); yet was he punished for it in his posterity, because he did it not in a right manner, “I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu” (Hos 1:4). God looks chiefly to the heart (1Sa 16:7): and if so, truly, though the outward appearance be fairer than that of many others, yet the hidden man of thy heart is loathsome. You look well before men, but are not—as Moses was “fair” to God (as the margin has it, Act 7:20). O what a difference is there between the characters of Asa and Amaziah! “The high places were not removed; nevertheless, Asa’s heart was perfect with the Lord all his days” (1Ki 15:14). “Amaziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart” (2Ch 25:2). It may be you are zealous against sin in others, and admonish them of their duty, and reprove them for their sin; and they hate you, because you do your duty; but I must tell you, God hates you too, because you do it not in a right manner; and that you can never do, whilst you are not born again.

4. All your struggles against sin, in your own heart and life, are naught. The proud Pharisee afflicted his body with fasting, and God struck his soul, in the mean time, with a sentence of condemnation (Luk 18:9-14). Balaam struggles with his covetous temper, to that degree, that though he loved the wages of unrighteousness; yet he would not win them by cursing Israel: but he died the death of the wicked (Num 31:8). All you do, while in an unregenerate state, is for yourself: therefore it will fare with you as with a subject, who having reduced the rebels, puts the crown on his own head, and loses all his good service, and his head too.

Without regeneration there is no communion with God. There is a society on earth, whose “fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1Jo 1:3). But out of that society, all the unregenerate are excluded; for they are all enemies to God, as you heard before at large. Now, “can two walk together, except they be agreed” (Amo 3:3)? They are all unholy: and “what communion hath light with darkness—Christ with Belial” (2Co 6:14-15). They may have a show and semblance of holiness; but they are strangers to true holiness, and therefore “without God

in the world" (Eph 2:12). How sad it is, to be employed in religious duties, yet to have no fellowship with God in them! You would not be content with your meat, unless it nourished you; nor with your clothes, unless they kept you warm: and how can you satisfy yourselves with your duties, while you have no communion with God in them?

Regeneration is absolutely necessary to qualify you for heaven. None go to heaven but those who are made meet for it (Col 1:12). As it was with Solomon's temple (1Ki 6:7), so is it with the temple above. It is "built of stone made ready before it is brought thither"; namely, of "lively stones" (1Pe 2:5), "wrought for the selfsame thing" (2Co 5:5); for they cannot be laid in that glorious building just as they come out of the quarry of depraved nature. Jewels of gold are not meet for swine, and far less jewels of glory for unrenewed sinners. Beggars, in their rags, are not fit for kings' houses, nor sinners to enter into the King's palace, without the raiment of needlework (Psa 45:14-15). What wise man would bring fish out of the water to feed in his meadows? or send his oxen to feed in the sea? Even as little are the unregenerate fit for heaven, or heaven fit for them. It would never be relished by them.

The unregenerate would find fault with heaven on several accounts. As:

1. That it is a strange country. Heaven is the renewed man's native country: his Father is in heaven; his mother is Jerusalem, which is above (Gal 4:26). He is born from above (Joh 3:3). Heaven is his home (2Co 5:1); therefore he looks on himself as a stranger on this earth, and his heart is homeward, "They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly country" (Heb 11:16). But the unregenerate man is the man of the earth (Psa 10:18); written in the earth (Jer 17:13). Now, "Home is home, be it never so homely"; therefore he minds earthly things (Phi 3:19). There is a peculiar sweetness in our native soil; and with difficulty are men drawn to leave it, and dwell in a strange country. In no case does that prevail more than in this; for unrenewed men would quit their pretensions to heaven, were it not that they see they cannot make a better bargain.

2. There is nothing in heaven that they delight in, as agreeable to the carnal heart, "For there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth" (Rev 21:27). When Mahomet pronounced paradise to be a place of sensual delights, his religion was greedily embraced; for that is the heaven men naturally choose. If the covetous man could get bags full of gold there, and the voluptuous man could promise himself his sensual delights, they might be reconciled to heaven, and made meet for it too; but since it is not so, though they may utter fair words about it, truly it has little of their hearts.

3. Every corner there is filled with that which of all things they have the least liking for: and that is holiness, true holiness, perfect holiness. Were one that abhors swine's flesh bidden to a feast where all the dishes were of that sort of meat, but variously prepared, he would find fault with every dish at the table, notwithstanding all the art used to make them palatable. It is true, there is joy in heaven, but it is holy joy; there are pleasures in heaven, but they are holy pleasures; there are places in heaven, but it is holy ground. That holiness which is in every place, and in every thing there, would mar all to the unregenerate.

4. Were they carried thither, they would not only change their place, which would be a great heartbreak, but they would change their company too. Truly, they would never like the company there, who care not for communion with God here, nor value the fellowship of His people, at least in the vitals of practical godliness. Many, indeed, mix themselves with the godly on earth, to procure a name to themselves, and to cover the sinfulness of their hearts—but that trade cannot be managed there.

5. They would never like the employment of heaven, they care so little for it now. The business of the saints there would be an intolerable burden to them, seeing it is not agreeable to their nature. To be taken up in beholding, admiring, and praising Him that sits on the throne, and the Lamb, would be work unsuitable, and therefore unsavory to an unrenewed soul.

6. They would find this fault with it, that the whole is of everlasting continuance. This would be a killing ingredient in it to them. How would such as now account the Sabbath day a burden, brook the celebration of an everlasting Sabbath in the heavens!

Regeneration is absolutely necessary to your being admitted into heaven (Joh 3:3). No heaven without it. Though carnal men could digest all those things which make heaven so unsuitable for them, yet God will never bring them thither. Therefore born again you must be, else you shall never see heaven; you shall perish eternally. For:

1. There is a bill of exclusion against you in the court of heaven, and against all of your sort, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:3). Here is a bar before you, that men and angels cannot remove. To hope for heaven, in the face of this peremptory sentence, is to hope that God will recall His Word, and sacrifice His truth and faithfulness to your safety; which is infinitely more than to hope that "the earth shall be forsaken for you, and the rock removed out of its place" (Job 18:4).

2. There is no holiness without regeneration. It is "the new man which is created in true holiness" (Eph 4:24), and there no heaven without holiness, for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Will the gates of pearl be opened to let in dogs and swine? No; their place is without (Rev 22:15). God will not admit such into the holy place of communion with Him here; and will he admit them into the holiest of all hereafter? Will He take the children of the devil, and permit them to sit with Him in His throne? Or, will He bring the unclean into the city whose street is pure gold? Be not deceived; grace and glory are but two links of one chain, which God has joined, and no man shall put asunder. None are transplanted into the paradise above, but out of the nursery of grace below. If you be unholy while in this world, you will be for ever miserable in the world to come.

3. All the unregenerate are without Christ, and therefore have no hope while in that case (Eph 2:12). Will Christ prepare mansions of glory for those who refuse to receive Him into their hearts? Nay, rather, will He not "laugh at their calamity," who now "set at nought all his counsel" (Pro 1:25-26)?

4. There is an infallible connection between a finally unregenerate state and damnation, arising from the nature of the things themselves, and from the decree of heaven which is fixed and immovable as mountains of brass (Joh 3:3). "To be carnally minded is death" (Rom 8:6). An unregenerate state is hell in the bud. It is eternal destruction in embryo, growing daily, though you do not discern it. Death is painted on many a fair face, in this life. Depraved nature makes men meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the damned, in utter darkness.

The heart of stone within you is a sinking weight. As a stone naturally goes downward, so the hard stony heart tends downward to the bottomless pit. You are hardened against reproof; though you are told of your danger, yet you will not see it, you will not believe it. But remember that the conscience being now seared with a hot iron, is a sad presage of everlasting burnings.

Your unfruitfulness under the means of grace, fits you for the axe of God's judgments, "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mat 3:10). The withered branch is fuel for the fire (Joh 15:6). Tremble at this, you despisers of the Gospel: if you be not thereby made meet for heaven, you will be like the barren ground, bearing briers and thorns, "nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned" (Heb 6:8).

The hellish dispositions of mind, which discover themselves in profanity of life, fit the guilty for the regions of horror. A profane life will have a miserable end. "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:19-21). Think on this, you prayerless persons, you mockers of religion, you cursers and swearers, you unclean and unjust persons, who have not so much as moral honesty to keep you from lying, cheating, and stealing. What sort of a tree do you think it is, upon which these fruits grow? Is it a tree of righteousness, which the Lord has planted? Or is it not such a one as cumber the ground, which God will pluck up for fuel to the fire of His wrath?

Your being dead in sin makes you meet to be wrapped in flames of brimstone as a winding-sheet; and to be buried in the bottomless pit, as in a grave. Great was the cry in Egypt, when the first-born in each family was dead; but are there not many families, where all are dead together? Nay, many there are who are twice dead, plucked up by the root. Sometimes in their life they have been roused by apprehensions of death and its consequences; but now they are so far on in their way to the land of darkness, that they hardly ever have the least glimmering of light from heaven.

The darkness of your minds presages eternal darkness. O the horrid ignorance with which some are plagued; while others, who have got some rays of the light of reason in their heads, are utterly void of spiritual light in their hearts! If you knew your case, you would cry out, Oh! darkness! darkness! darkness! making way for the blackness of darkness for ever! The face-covering is upon you already, as condemned persons, so near are you to everlasting darkness. It is only Jesus Christ who can stop the execution, pull the napkin off the face of the condemned malefactor, and put a pardon in his hand. "He will destroy, in this mountain, the face of the covering cast over all people" (Isa 25:7)—that is, the face-covering cast over the condemned, as in Haman's case, "As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face" (Est 7:8).

The chains of darkness you are bound with in the prison of your depraved state (Isa 61:1), fits you to be cast into the burning fiery furnace. Ah, miserable men! Sometimes their consciences stir within them, and they begin to think of amending their ways. But alas! they are in chains, they cannot do it. They are chained by the heart; their lusts cleave so fast to them, that they cannot, nay, they will not shake them off. Thus you see what affinity there is between an unregenerate state, and the state of the damned, the state of absolute and irretrievable misery. Be convinced, then, that you must be born again; put a high value on the new birth, and eagerly desire it.

The text tells you, that the Word is the seed, whereof the new creature is formed: therefore take heed to it, and entertain it, as it is your life. Apply yourself to the reading of the Scripture. You that cannot read, get others to read it to you. Wait diligently on the preaching of the Word, as by divine appointment the special means of conversion; for "it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe" (1Co 1:21). Wherefore cast not yourselves out of Christ's way; reject not the means of grace, lest you be found to judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life. Attend carefully to the Word preached. Hear every sermon, as if you were hearing for eternity; take heed that the fowls of the air pick not up this seed from you, as it is sown. "Give thyself wholly to it" (1Ti 4:15). "Receive it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God" (1Th 2:13). Hear it with application, looking on it as a message sent from heaven to you in particular.

Receive the testimony of the Word of God concerning the *misery of an unregenerate state*, the sinfulness thereof, and the absolute necessity of regeneration. Receive its testimony concerning *God*, what a holy and just One He is. *Examine your ways* by it; namely, the thoughts of your heart, the expressions of your lips, and the tenor of your life. Look back through the several periods of your life; see your sins from the precepts of the Word, and learn, from its threatening, what you are liable to on account of these sins.

By the help of the same Word of God, view the corruption of your nature, as in a glass which manifests our ugly face in a clear manner. Were these things deeply rooted in the heart, they might be the seed of that fear and sorrow, on account of your soul's state, which are necessary to prepare and stir you up to look after a Saviour. Fix your thoughts upon Him offered to you in the Gospel, as fully suited to your case; having, by His obedience unto death, perfectly satisfied the justice of God, and brought in everlasting righteousness. This may prove the seed of humiliation, desire, hope and faith; and move you to stretch out the withered hand unto Him, at His own command.

Let these things sink deeply into your hearts, and improve them diligently. Remember, whatever you are, you *must* be born again; else it had been better for you that you had never been born. Wherefore, if any of you shall live and die in an unregenerate state, you will be inexcusable, having been fairly warned of your danger. ❧