

1. **Introduction:** Today we will spend most of our time with comments and discussion on the issue of does regeneration occur first or does regeneration follow a person making a decision to “ask Jesus into their heart.” The reformed position is that regeneration must come first. I intend to show the why behind that position but also to emphasize the vital importance that Jesus be Lord of a person’s heart and life. I will also state my personal position concerning the relative importance concerning belief about the proper sequence of regeneration/personal decision.
2. **Physical and Spiritual Life and Death:** In his letter to believers in Ephesus, Paul says in Ephesians 2:1-2, “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² 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.*”
 - ◆ I believe Scripture declares God is sovereign and that all of salvation is through God’s actions. A person can do nothing to initiate the chain of salvation events.
 - ◆ Human life consists of a union of physical and spiritual characteristics. The two are interactive but separable by death. You can be spiritually dead but physically alive. At mortal death, a person becomes physically dead, the body goes to the grave, but their spirit survives alive and returns to God.
 - ◆ In this passage, Paul is clearly writing to people who are physically alive. Being dead in trespasses and sins then means being spiritually dead. Being spiritually dead means a person’s spirit is dead to the things of God (Romans 8:8). There is no good within themselves and no desire to submit to their Creator.
 - ◆ The spiritually dead have no way to make themselves spiritually alive. Just as a corpse cannot do anything to help himself, so no one can do anything to restore spiritual life nor do anything to cleanse themselves from sins.
 - ◆ The spiritually dead cannot even produce the desire to obey God. The spiritually dead are dead because of sin. Spiritually dead people need a life-giver. John 1:4 says of Jesus, “*In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*”
 - ◆ Because of what Jesus has done, it is possible for spiritually dead people to be made alive, and bad people to be made good.
3. **What Regeneration Does:** No one who is spiritually dead can make a decision to invite Jesus into their heart nor take any other positive spiritual action. That is why Jesus tells Nicodemus (John 3) he must be born again to see the kingdom of God.

- ◆ That which makes it possible to “invite Jesus into your heart” is regeneration.
 - ◆ Regeneration is entirely of God. No one can do anything to cause regeneration. Regeneration is not a consequence of a person’s choice.
 - ◆ When God regenerates a person, they become spiritually alive and are then able to invite Jesus into their heart. In the reformed faith that is usually referred to as a declaration of faith.
 - ◆ After regeneration, we then through God’s gift of faith, surrender control of our heart (that is our mission control center) to our Lord Jesus Christ. That is what I think of as inviting Jesus into my heart as Lord of my life.
 - ◆ Inviting Jesus into our heart as Lord of our life is absolutely necessary to be a true believer.
 - ◆ I believe Scripture says that can only happen when we have been made spiritually alive and given the gift of faith.
 - ◆ I have no quarrel with and no condemnation for any true follower of our Lord Jesus Christ who differs from that view. By their works they will be known.
 - ◆ If a person differs from the reformed view of how people come to be followers of Christ, they and those reformed will both know the right answer in heaven, but to get to heaven both must truly follow Him.
 - ◆ Many earnestly believe they follow Christ because they made their own independent decision to invite Him into their heart.
 - ◆ Of the two views on how we come to follow Christ, only one can be correct.
 - ◆ But people holding either view can follow Him and are right to do so.
 - ◆ I personally think the understanding and grasping of the correct sequence of regeneration/personal decision is one of the things Paul would call **important but not essential**.
 - ◆ The vital essential thing is to truly follow Christ. That is impossible without God’s enabling.
4. **Returning to Our Union with Christ Study:** In Union with Christ, a believer’s spiritual identity becomes united with Christ such that what Christ experienced is imputed to them as our sin was imputed to Christ on the cross.
- ◆ He died bearing and paying our sins due penalty. We died with Him to all in us that made it necessary for Him to hang on the cross bearing our sins.
 - ◆ He rose from the dead. Believers are raised from spiritual death when they are regenerated. Like Him, believers will ultimately be bodily raised from mortal death.

- ◆ **Romans 6:3-11**: *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”*
 - ◆ **Ephesians 2:4-6**: *“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—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”*
 - ◆ In the here and now, a believer’s life is hidden with Christ in God.
 - ◆ **Colossians 3:1-4**: *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*
 - ◆ A believer’s Union with Christ is a “spiritual union.” As used in Scripture, “spiritual” almost always refers to activity of the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ In the case of Union with Christ, the Holy Spirit is the bond between believer and Christ. All believers are “in Christ” and all believers are connected spiritually to one another through Christ. The spiritual bond is the Holy Spirit.
 - ◆ The indwelling Holy Spirit establishes and mediates a “bond” between each believer and Christ. The bond is through Christ’s human nature and the immaterial part of a human which survives mortal death.
 - ◆ Union with Christ has many facets.
 - ◆ Because human language is inadequate to describe Union with Christ, New Testament authors use a variety of figures of speech, especially metaphors, to supplement and clarify direct description.
 - ◆ We will look at several types of figures of speech.
5. **Figures of Speech**: A figure of speech is a word or phrase used to convey a meaning separate from its literal meaning. There are many types of figures of speech.
- ◆ **“Hyperbole”** uses exaggeration to make a dramatic effect. Examples: (1.) “I’ve told you a thousand times not to do that.” (2.) “He’s older than dirt!”
 - ◆ **“Personification”** assigns human qualities are given to non-human things or ideas. Examples: (1.) The flowers nodded. (2.) Snowflakes danced. (3.) Fog crept in.
 - ◆ **“Oxymoron”** uses two contradictory terms together. Examples: (1.) Peace force. (2.) Kosher ham. (3.) Jumbo shrimp. (4.) Sweet sorrow. (5.) Free market.

- ◆ Metaphors and similes use a quality possessed by one thing to give descriptive insight into a different thing.
 - ◆ Figures of speech are not literal descriptions but add a richness to description and enable increased understanding.
 - ◆ Metaphors and similes are closely related. Each compares two things.
6. **Metaphors and Similes**: When direct description of something is difficult for whatever reason, metaphors are often used to describe important aspects of that thing by comparing it with some different thing we already have comfortable knowledge about.
- ◆ Metaphors directly compare things that, though fundamentally different, share some properties. Value might be one such shared property. Example: Comparing literary value to monetary value. *“This manuscript is worth as much as a perfect diamond!”*
 - ◆ Metaphors use aspects known to be true of one thing to reveal something about another thing. Examples: (1.) “Time is money!” (2.) “He has a heart of stone!” (3.) “The world is a stage!” (4.) “God is light.”
 - ◆ These metaphors convey truth about the value of a manuscript, the value of time, remind that some hearts are hard and difficult to penetrate, that people’s actions in the world are somewhat like actors on a stage, that in some ways God is like light.
 - ◆ However, metaphors must not be interpreted literally. The truth of a metaphor is limited. It compares similarities and ignores differences.
7. **What is Next**: We will continue our study of metaphors and similes with emphasis on metaphors from Scripture, particularly those dealing with Union with Christ.