

REGENERATION AND CONVERSION

Regeneration and conversion are Bible words. Both words identify a spiritual work in the child of God. However, they do not refer to the same thing.

REGENERATION

Regeneration is wholly of God. It is the Holy Spirit's quickening work whereby spiritual life is given to the sinner "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit 3:5). The word comes from "re" meaning "again" and "generate" meaning "to beget." Jesus identified this work of God as being "born again" (John 3:3). The Bible is emphatic that God "of his own will beget" us (Jam 1:18), even as Jesus claimed He "quickeneth whom He will" (John 5:21).

Eternal life, i.e., spiritual life, is God's sovereign gift bestowed in regeneration. While invisible to men, this life is demonstrated by man's response in conversion.

Note especially the absence in Scripture of even one command for a sinner to seek regeneration.

CONVERSION

Conversion is the response of the regenerated child of God to his Heavenly Father's will and commandments. The word means to "turn" or "turn about." Thus it was foretold of John the Baptist's ministry, "and many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God" (Lu 1:16). Those John turned are declared to be already related to "the Lord their God" but needed to turn about and obey Him.

Jesus describes the Apostle Peter's denial and recovery by saying, "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lu 22:32).

James explains the departure of a Christian brother from the truth can be corrected if another "converteth the sinner from the error of his way" (Jam 5:20).

Numerous exhortations and commandments are addressed to the saved, i.e., regenerated children of God, calling them from sin, error and ignorance to righteousness, truth and joyful assurance in fellowship with God (1 John 1:3, 7-9). A person's conversion is usually in proportion to his understanding of and obedience to Bible truth.

REGENERATION CONTRASTED WITH CONVERSION

While regeneration is a once-for-all event, conversion will occur in steps depending upon one learning to follow God's revealed will.

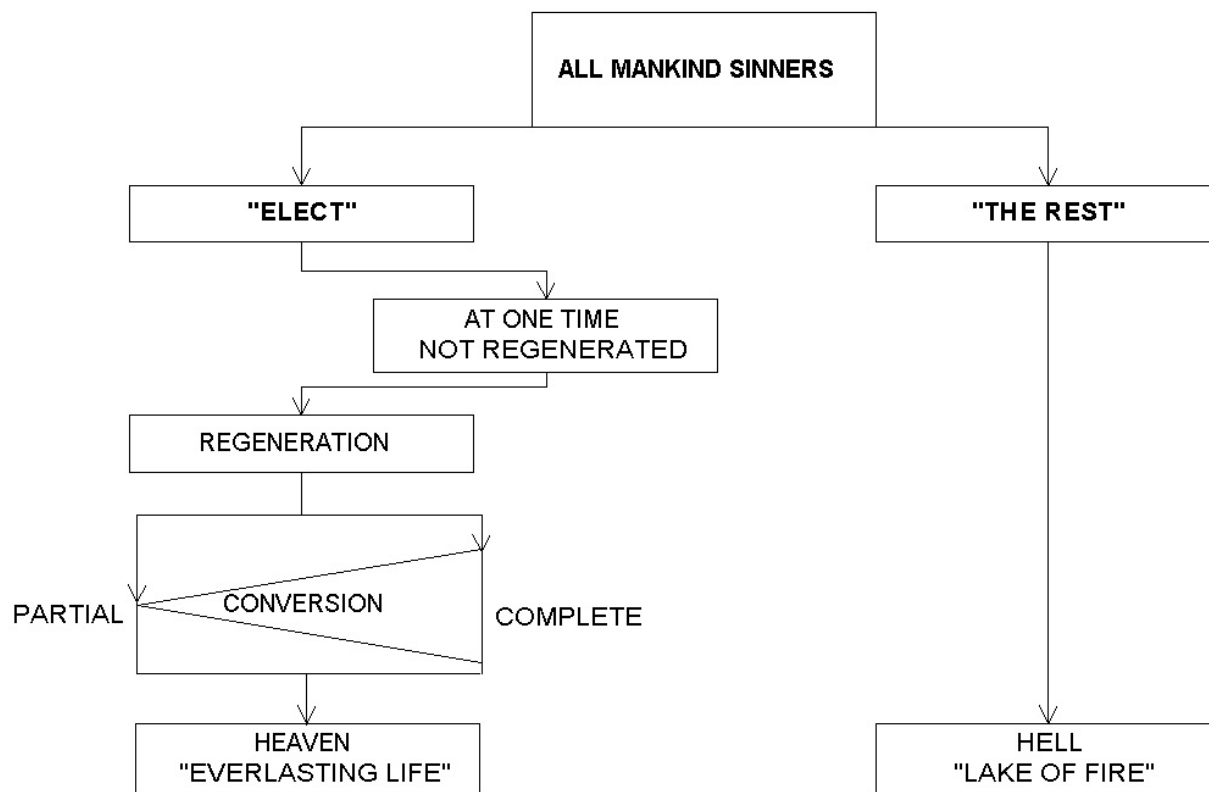
REGENERATION

God's work
Sovereignly given
Eternal life
One time
Inward Work
Complete at once

CONVERSION

Man's response
Conditional
Fellowship
Repeated
Outward evidence
Partial in steps

REGENERATION AND CONVERSION



Unless one holds to the false theory of sinless perfection, every child of God will have some area(s) where he needs to experience conversion.

That is, there will be ideas, habits or personality traits that need to be changed and replaced by God's perfect and revealed will.

RESULTS OF CONFUSING REGENERATION AND CONVERSION

Many teachers of religion confuse the words -- regeneration and conversion -- making both refer to being eternally saved or born again. Therefore, they put various conversion commands upon the unsaved.

This has resulted in the present popular theology of conditional or decisional regeneration. It is commonly preached that the sinner must do something or meet some condition before God can or will save him.

Conditions vary from one church or evangelist to another, but may include praying the sinner's prayer, confessing faith in Jesus, making Jesus Lord, water baptism, joining the church, taking communion or other works of righteousness.

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CONDITIONAL REGENERATION REFUTED

The following Scriptures mark as error this teaching of requiring a sinner to meet some condition before God can save or regenerate him.

1. Salvation is “not of works” (Eph 2:9; Tit 3:5), which excludes faith since faith is a “work” (John 6:28-29), is “of the law” (Matt 23:23) and is keeping a “commandment” (1 John 3:23).
2. Faith, love of brethren and righteous deeds all result because one “is born of God” (1 John 5:1, 4; 4:7; 2:29), and thus cannot be the means or conditions required before God saves a person. These are evidences showing one already has eternal life (John 3:36; 5:24).
3. An unsaved man cannot receive spiritual things (1 Cor 2:14), cannot please God (Rom 8:7-8) and will not come to Christ (John 5:40). He must be given spiritual life first.
4. Men are eternally saved according to God’s will (Eph 1:4-5); John 3:8; 17:2; Rom 9:15), not according to man’s will (John 1:13; Rom 9:11, 16).
5. The gospel reveals the good news of salvation only to those who “are saved” (1 Cor 1:18, 24), thus bringing spiritual “life and immortality to light” as proof and assurance of God’s salvation (2 Tim 1:10; Acts 13:48).

God’s salvation is a “free gift” without any conditions (Rom 5:15-18; 6:23!

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

If God has given you a new heart and spirit (Ezek 11:19-20; Eph 4:3-6) and written His laws in your heart (Rom 2:15), then you have been regenerated. This makes you accountable to obey God and “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

Foes that will fight your efforts to obey God in true conversion will likely include your deceitful heart (Jer 17:9), your carnal flesh (Rom 8:7), your sinful lusts (1 Pet 2:11), so-called friends (Pro 29:25) and Satan (1 Cor 11:3).

You can know and have friends who rejoice in free grace and unconditional salvation. Every inquiry will receive a cordial reply. We await the opportunity to serve you in the gospel of God’s dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Roland C. Crosby