

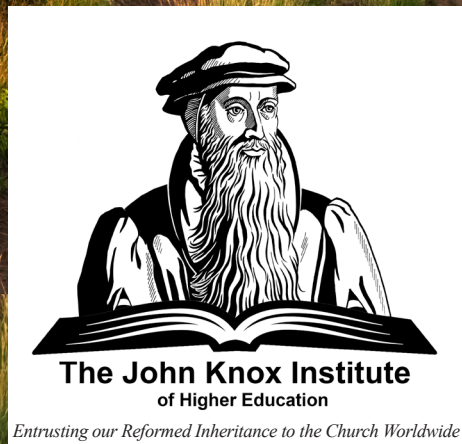
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

# *The Application of Redemption*

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture 4

## *Regeneration*



## **John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

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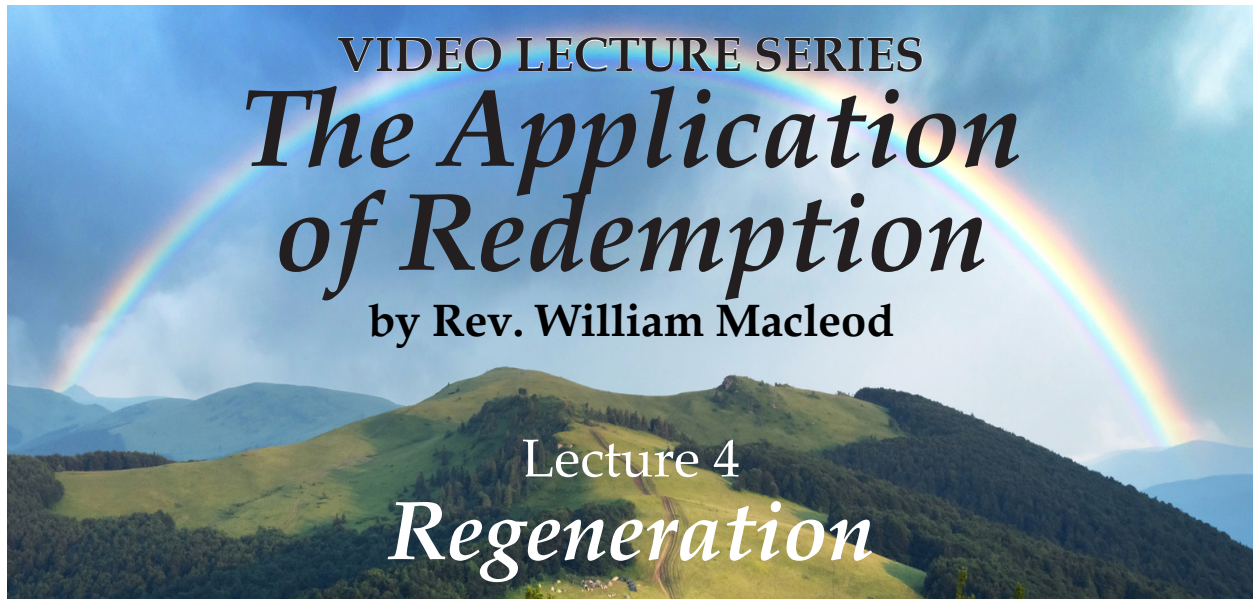
# *The Application of Redemption*

by Rev. William Macleod

12 Lectures

1. The Order of Salvation
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Our lecture today is on the subject of *Regeneration*. The effectual call is a powerful summons from a mighty God. It reaches the spiritually dead. Immediately following the call, regeneration takes place, and the sinner responds in faith and repentance. When this takes place, he or she is justified, and adopted, and sanctification begins. Several different names are given to this act of God. “Regeneration” is the one preferred by the theologians. Paul uses this term when he speaks of the “washing of regeneration” (Titus 3, verse 5). “Resurrection” is the term used in Romans 6, verses 4 to 8, or “quicken” (Ephesians 2, verse 5). He also employs the term “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5, verse 17). “New birth” is the popular term, which evangelical preachers often proclaim as vital. It is used by Jesus in the classic passage in the Gospels, to which we will now make special reference, that is, John chapter 3.

So first of all, thinking of *the Necessity of Regeneration*. Nicodemus was a good man, very religious, and indeed, a teacher or minister in the church of his day. Obviously, from the account, we can see that he had been disturbed and convicted by the life and ministry of Jesus. He came to see the Lord under the cover of darkness, because he was afraid of what his fellow Pharisees would say or think. He had questions. He asked, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John chapter 3, verse 2). Jesus responds in a surprising way, by asserting, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (verse 3). The repetition “verily, verily,” or “truly, truly” stresses that what Jesus is saying is of vital importance. The one who is not born again cannot see, but is blind to God and the great truths of the gospel. Nicodemus showed his blindness by asking, “How can a man be born when he is old?” (verse 4). Jesus repeated what he had said, in order to stress the necessity of regeneration: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (verse 5). Unless you are born of water and of the Spirit, washed from the filthiness of your sins, and transformed by the Holy Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Every one of us, no matter who our parents are, how well we have been brought up, is by nature and birth, dead to God. You and I begin our lives outside of the kingdom, and thus, in a lost condition. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (verse 6). To be “flesh” is to be sinful

and corrupt. It is the opposite of being spiritual. You need to be spirit, rather than carnal flesh to be saved and to have fellowship with God. “Flesh” here, as is often the case in Scripture, has a decidedly sinful connotation to it. In verse 7, Christ repeats, “Ye must be born again.” It is absolutely necessary. Unless you are regenerated, you remain “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2, verse 1), and on the way to eternal death and hell. Even Nicodemus, though he was a sincere, good-living, and religious man, need to be made a new creation. Good works and morality will not save. Good works are never good enough. They are not perfect, and anything less than perfection will come under God’s condemnation, and therefore, his wrath and curse.

*Where does Regeneration Come From?* Many evangelists wrongly ignore the new birth. Others speak of it as if it was something which a man could produce by himself, or at least to which he could contribute. They see it as a mere decision for Christ, or the offering up of the so-called sinner’s prayer—this is Arminianism. But just as the dead can do nothing to save themselves, nor contribute to their own resurrection, so those dead in sins cannot raise themselves up spiritually. When we were first begotten or born, we had nothing to do with it. It was not our decision. We were not consulted about our own birth, but we were completely passive in it. So also with the new birth. Real Christians are a people “which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John chapter 1, verse 13). The new birth was not by natural descent, nor by human decision. Christ makes that plain. He says, “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6, verse 44). And later, in the same chapter, Jesus, for clarity, repeats, “Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father” (verse 65). “Born again” can also be translated “born from above.” It is totally the work of God.

Well, *What Exactly is Regeneration?* What is the new birth? Nicodemus asks this question in chapter 3, verse 4. Jesus replies that it is to be born of water and of the Spirit. Some think that baptism is referred to here, in being born of water. There are indeed churches which believe in baptismal regeneration, that is, that the soul is automatically born again when the individual is baptized. But no mention is made of baptism in this passage. The sacrament of Christian baptism was not yet instituted. Others see the two births referred to here, they see that being born of water as being the first birth, that is, the natural birth with the breaking of the waters. But the reference here is to something which every person must obtain. It is something people do not have by nature. But everyone has that first birth. Rather, it is to the one experience that the term “being born of water and the Spirit” refers. What would Nicodemus think that this “water” meant? The Jews had many purification rites and cleansings with water. Surely it refers to something which would cleanse our past sins and defilement, that is, “the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3, verse 5). The Old Testament parallel passage is Ezekiel 36. Referring to the new covenant, in verse 25, God promises to “sprinkle clean water upon them,” and take away the heart of stone, and replace it with a heart of flesh. So in the new birth, there is a cleansing, and also a taking away of the dead heart, and giving of a new heart, and a new spiritual life.

At regeneration, the Holy Spirit enters the heart of the effectually called, and takes up permanent residence, never to leave again. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 8, verse 9). In the effectual call, God “callesh those things which be not as though they were” (Romans 4, verse 17). He called the world into existence at creation, out of nothing, and now he calls sinners and does a new creation work in them. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5, verse 17).

There are two actions taking place concurrently in the words “born of the Spirit.” Firstly, there

is the Father's work in begetting, putting His seed in him, His seed of regeneration (1 John 3, verse 9). Secondly, there is the act of bringing forth, giving birth, when an individual enters a new realm of existence. But we see no Scriptural evidence for separating these two in time, but some Dutch theologians try to argue for this. "The wind bloweth"—this speaks of power (John 3, verse 8), it blows where it listeth. And this indicates God's sovereign freedom to work the new birth when he chooses in those he has elected. The words "thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth," describes the mysteriousness of this new birth.

*What Follows or Flows From Regeneration?* The great change that regeneration brings is life—real spiritual life. The effectual call was a call to repent and believe, and the sinner now, being born again, immediately responds in obedience. Justification and adoption follow, and then sanctification. Everything changes when one is born again. God does the calling, but we are born again.

*Faith* is a Great Mark of the New Birth. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5, verse 1). The act of believing demonstrates that the individual is no longer spiritually dead, and has been resurrected, or born again.

*Love* is another mark. "Everyone that loveth is born of God" (1 John 4, verse 7). Before regeneration, we hated God, but now we love him. Also, we love one another. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3, verse 14).

*Holiness* would be a third mark to distinguish those born again. "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (1 John 2, verse 29). "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (1 John 3, verse 9). None are sinless in this life (1 John 1, verses 8 and 10), yet, there is a radical break with sin, so that they are no longer under the dominion of it. "One who is born of God overcometh the world" (1 John 5, verse 4); "And that wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John 5, verse 18). Satan's mastery is broken. They are no longer servants of sin. While they do still sin, they hate it, and seek the Spirit's help to stop sinning. Further, those who are born again will not sin the unforgivable sin.

A fourth mark of regeneration is *Prayer*. Prayer is vital. The first thing a new healthy baby does when it enters the world is to cry. And so, the child of God starts to pray. The regeneration of Saul of Tarsus was obvious from the words addressed to Ananias with reference to Saul, in Acts 9, verse 11—God said, "Behold, he prayeth."

A fifth mark of regeneration is *Hunger*. Hunger is a mark of the new birth. Those who are born again have an appetite for spiritual food. "As newborn babes they desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby" (1 Peter chapter 2, verse 2). Little babies are not interested in toys—they want milk.

*The New Birth is Essential*. "What must I do to be saved?"—believe, for it stands written that "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3, verse 16). Paul's answer to this vital question could not have been clearer. He said to the Philippian jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16, verse 31). Do not try to produce the new birth yourself. If you do not have the new birth, look to God for it. Seek salvation by prayer and faith. Do not let the new birth be a barrier keeping you back, rather, repent and believe the gospel. Flee from the wrath to come. Pray to Jesus and trust in him. For as Paul said, in Romans 10:13, "Whosoever shall call upon the Lord shall be saved." Leave God to perform the new birth. If you have a desire for salvation, that is an encouragement. It shows that he is already working in your life. Pray for the unregenerate—only God can regenerate them.

The new birth should not be seen as a hindrance to evangelism, but in fact, the very opposite.

It encourages us to preach and to witness to all. The most hostile enemy can be born again, as Paul was. What a transformation took place in the Apostle's life, from being a persecutor and a blasphemer, to being a humble believer. God is able to do it. This is an encouragement to evangelize. God can change anyone. He performs the new birth in connection with the communication of his Word. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1, verse 21).