

BIBLE 1201 KNOWING YOURSELF

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SPIRITUAL REGENERATION

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

Death. When Adam tumbled from the gracious presence and favor of God onto the rock-hard reality of personal guilt and sin, he sustained a fatal wound. Just as in an automobile accident the worst wounds are internal, so it was in the Fall. Deep down in the innermost regions of his being, where the source of his life flowed refreshingly from the heart of God, something died. The spirit of man that had so vigorously pulsated with the life and breath of God convulsed in an attack of death.

The effect of Adam's spiritual death is that every man since then has come into the world lacking spiritual vitality. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Having been created with a spiritual capacity, man became spiritually inert. And so instead of functioning as a trichotomous being, unregenerate man functions **dichotomously**; he lives in that state of perpetual incompleteness.

Spiritual death, however, should not necessarily be thought of as spiritual nonexistence. Man's spirit lies within him like a corpse being borne to its sepulchre. To eternal death it will go unless the Christ of Galilee touches the bier with His life-giving hands.

Life. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)" (Ephesians 2:4,5).

The plan of God to restore man to spiritual life is one so touching, so inspiring, so overwhelming as to drive us to our knees by its sheer glory. This plan centers

around the work of Jesus on this earth. The Old Testament pointed toward it. The new Testament grew out of it. This was the work of all works by the Lord of all lords.

It is not within the bounds of this study to discuss the condition of man's spirit under the Old Covenant, nor is this condition fully given for our understanding. There was, to be sure, a measure of spiritual life, but to what extent, we are not called to declare. We do know, however, that the full restoration of man's spirit to life was only made possible by the redeeming work of Jesus and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The record of Jesus' confrontation with Nicodemus provides us with some very clear teaching concerning the regeneration of a man's spirit. You are probably familiar with the imperative Jesus gave, "Ye must be born again" and with Nicodemus' mistake in thinking Jesus meant a natural birth.

Enlarging on His statement, Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that He spoke of the birth of a spirit, not the birth of a body. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." (Man's begetting power lies only in the blood and bones of his mortal existence.) In contrast to this, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6). God, who is Spirit, is the Father of spiritual life. For man who is spiritually dead to enter the kingdom of God, he must be made spiritually alive. *Spirit must beget spirit.*

The implication of Jesus' statement is clear—man's *only* hope for spiritual life is in having a spiritual Father.



Write true or false.

- 2.1 _____ The death and birth of man's spirit is easily explained.
- 2.2 _____ Man's spirit died in the Fall.
- 2.3 _____ We come into this world spiritually dead.
- 2.4 _____ The spirit of an unregenerate man is nonexistent.
- 2.5 _____ The full restoration of man's spirit to life was not possible without the work of Calvary and Pentecost.
- 2.6 _____ Man can produce spiritual life in himself.
- 2.7 _____ Only Spirit can give birth to spirit.

In Section One we noticed that the pull of man's lower nature upon his body is downward, away from God. In this section so far, we have studied concerning man's spirit—how it became dead and to what source it must go for spiritual life. And now we will see how man's spirit is a link to God through which God can exert an upward pull toward Himself.

Man's spirit was given to him to enable him to fellowship with heaven. Jesus told the Samaritan

woman, "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Although worship is a function of the spirit, the whole man is often involved. In singing, for example, both the body and the soul may participate. Worship, however, is a spiritual function.

While the unregenerate man is spiritually dead and can never find true spiritual expression, he does not lose his longing for an object of worship. His spirit lies

cold and dead in function, but the desire for spiritual life and fulfillment does not die. This desire is a token of the upward pull to God, a thirst, however indescribable, for spiritual life.

One of the most pathetic sights in this world is the attempt of a spiritually dead person to satisfy his spiritual hunger without accepting spiritual life. He may strain his soul with emotional stimulation or perhaps with emotional starvation. He may strain his body such as the worshipers of Baal did before Elijah. Or unwittingly he may set up the idols familiar in American life—money, business, or pleasure. But his “worship” does not satisfy. A man may show all the right-looking bodily and soulish characteristics of worship, but he is still spiritually dead—alienated from God. His deep hunger for true spiritual worship persists. And only when his spirit is quickened and indwelt by God does he find spiritual fulfillment.

This longing for worship, even in an unregenerate man’s spirit, is the upward tug of God.

The Upward Pull

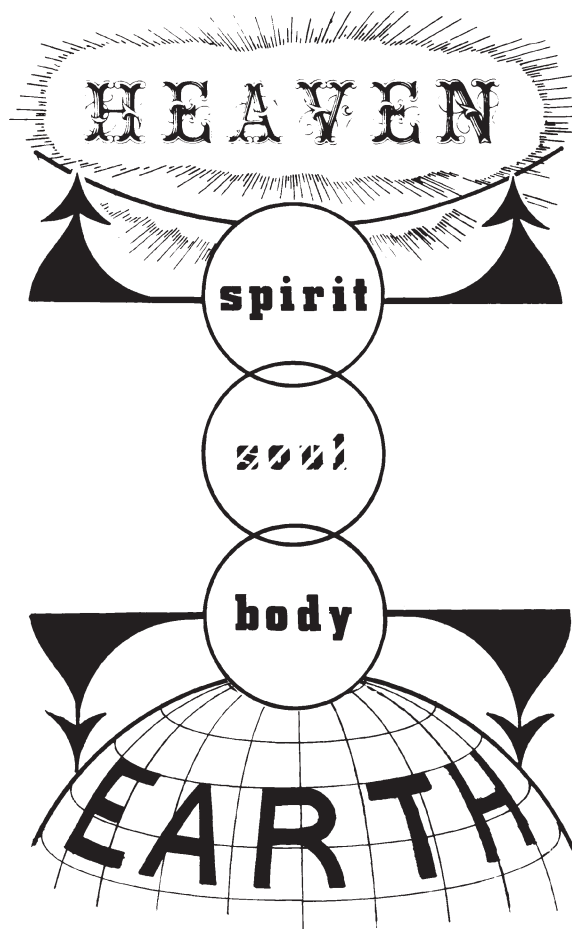
This upward pull makes unregenerate man miserable. Not only does it call for worship, it also cries out against his unlawful methods. This crying out is understandable. If man’s spirit is his capacity to

worship, it is also his capacity to *hear from God*, and it will have stirrings from that direction as well. This we know as *conscience*.

In a spiritually dead man, the conscience, of course, may be in **sordid** disarray or may even be rendered nearly inactive; but when touched by the living Spirit of God, the conscience shows the first signs of spiritual life and hope.

(It is important here to mention that the conscience should not be equated with man’s beliefs concerning right and wrong. Beliefs vary considerably. The conscience is not those beliefs; it is more the capacity to have them. It is the moral **arbitrator** itself, not the laws it goes by. You may think of the conscience as sitting above both knowledge and will as a *moral ability* to know there is right and wrong.)

The dullness and misery of a spiritually dead person has little resemblance to the glory and vitality of one spiritually alive. The birth of the spirit marks the beginning of the man’s conquest over his carnal nature. Certainly, the battle is not won. It has only begun. But in spiritual regeneration, the provisions for victory are made available. These provisions are available the moment man’s spirit is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit carries the infinite authority and power of God.



With this Holy Spirit, we are commanded in Biblical terminology to be filled (Ephesians 3:19; 5:18). What this means for you in experiential language is that the Holy Spirit must control your whole person. He is to take charge of your worship, revital-

ize your conscience, **permeate** your soul, and command your body; He is to fill you. But we must invite Him in and allow Him to have absolute control in our lives. He will not rule in areas of our lives that we withhold from His control.



Read Romans 7:1—8:28 without interruption. Describe in one paragraph the life portrayed in Chapter 7. In another paragraph describe the life portrayed in Chapter 8. Make a notation concerning the type of life with which you most closely identify. Enter your comments in your LIFE notebook.

SPIRITUAL FOOD AND EXERCISE

Your spirit, when it is alive, needs food and exercise in a similar manner to your body. Spiritual food, of course, does not come via the body, but via the spirit. As you open yourself to the Holy Spirit of God, He floods you with spiritual nourishment.

What “food” does He provide?

Jesus said, “I am the living bread.” Later to His disciples, Jesus further clarified this statement. “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63b). In a promise which is strikingly appropriate to this study, Jesus connected His life-giving words with the work of the Holy Spirit in man’s spirit. “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

For the apostles, this promise was realized in the revelation and writing of the New Testament. But to us the promise comes also, for the teachings of Jesus are now written and can be ours through reading and study. *The words of Jesus are the **staple** of a man’s spiritual diet.*

As you open your spirit to the words of Jesus, and as you digest His Word, your spirit will grow strong. With strength comes exercise, and with exercise comes increasing strength. The Apostle John wrote, “That which we have seen and heard of the Word of life declare we unto you” (see 1 John 1:1-3). Those whose spirits have fed on the Word will exercise their spiritual strength in declaration of the Word. That declaration will be by mouth, by action, and by cleansed, sanctified attitudes.

Another spiritual exercise for which we need

spiritual food is discernment. “Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14). Discernment is an exercise which must have the spiritual food of the Word. A man cannot untangle the confusion of morals in our world unless he feeds daily and abundantly on the milk and meat of the Scriptures.

Prayer is another spiritual exercise. And again, our prayers arise out of our absorption of spiritual food. The man who is often in the Word is the one most often on his knees. Spiritual food not only awakens within him a greater capacity but also a greater necessity for prayer.

In one of the most touching invitations of the New Testament, Jesus says, “Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). Communion with Jesus is both exercise and refreshment. In spiritual exercise we adore Him, and in spiritual refreshment He feeds us. Prayer, therefore, is an exercise of the spirit.

Any attempt at spiritual exercise without spiritual food leads inevitably to spiritual failure. A plant cannot live without water; a baby cannot live without milk, and *your spirit cannot live without the Word of God.*

A poisoned diet is as serious as no food at all. You must guard your spirit against the distorted teachings of men. False teachings make for a sickly, malfunctioning spirit. Those who feed on unscriptural words will declare a false message, they will have distorted discernment, and their prayers will reflect their inner errors.



Answer these questions.

- 2.8 Where in man is true worship expressed? _____
- 2.9 How does the man’s spiritual hunger for worship act as an upward pull toward God? _____
- 2.10 How is the conscience itself different from beliefs concerning right and wrong? _____
- 2.11 What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? _____