

## Regeneration – Part I

*by Dennis Lange*

Two Jehovah's Witnesses that came to my door one day didn't know that sin is the critical problem of man. I had been gradually talking with one of them for months, asking questions and giving scripture for what she presented. But she and the other didn't have a clue about telling someone what to do to be saved. They didn't have any idea when a person was forgiven of his sins. They couldn't tell me a dividing point where a person was outside of Christ before, and inside of Christ afterwards. Their misdirected focus in their doctrine takes away from the death of Jesus, the central act of all history. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." (I John 2:2).

Sin is the largest problem facing man. Adam and Eve sinned in the garden and began paying the consequences. God said about the forbidden tree, "You shall not eat from it or touch it lest you die" (Gen.3:3). Physical death was introduced into the world when they ate because they were driven away from the tree of life. But sin has a far greater result than that. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom.6:23). That death is a spiritual death in the sense of being separated from God.

Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in the garden. But when they sinned, they were driven from it, separated from God. This is also said about the sins of others. "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God" (Isa.59:2). When Jesus took our sins upon Him on the cross, He died physically. But more happened than that. God turned His back on His Son. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt.27:46). Our sins caused a separation for the first time between the Father and the Son. Visually, this can be seen in the lost coin, separated from its owner. It can be seen in the lost sheep, separated from the shepherd and the flock. It can be seen in the prodigal son, who, when lost and in sin, was separated from his father.

Physical death is a separation. The body goes to the grave and the spirit back to God (Eccl.12:7). James said, "the body without the spirit is dead" (2:26), again showing the separation that is death. Those who are dead in sin (Eph.2:1) are not inert, unresponsive, immovable. They live and breathe and do all sorts of things. They are separated from God by their sins. Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead" (Matt.8:22). Those who are dead in sin act, but are separated from God. Paul wrote of the woman who would give herself to wanton pleasure and was "dead while she lives" (I Tim.5:6). She was separated from God, dead in sin.

Christians are dead **to** sin (Rom.6:2,11). But that doesn't mean that Christians are unresponsive, can't act, and cannot make choices. They have separated themselves from sin. Repentance results in becoming a servant of God instead of a servant of sin. As Christians, we are headed away from sin, having turned to God.

Hell is called the second death (Rev.21:8). Again, this death is a separation from God, eternal separation from Him. "Depart from Me" is the command to those who go into the eternal fire (Matt.25:41). There is a separation between the righteous and the sinner as shown by the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. A great gulf lies in between and none can cross over (v.26). Thus, we see that death in scripture is uniformly pictured as a separation.

When God forgives, life is the result. And because death was a separation from God, forgiveness brings life and reconciliation to God. The man who is forgiven of his sins is reunited with God. Visually, this can be seen when the lost coin is found and is reunited with its owner. When the lost sheep is found, it is reunited with the shepherd and the flock. When the prodigal son turns from sin and goes home, he is reunited with his father and is no longer lost, no longer separated.

Before Gentiles became Christians, they were "separate from Christ" (Eph.2:12). They were formerly "far off" (2:13). But when they were forgiven of their sins by the blood of Jesus, they were "brought near" (2:13). Both Jews and Gentiles, in Christ (in His body, the church) are saved from their sins, forgiven, no longer dead, but reconciled "in one body to God through the cross" (2:16).

Thus, the sinner is dead in sins, separated from God. The forgiven Christian has life and is reconciled to God. Paul wrote, "And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died" (Rom.7:9). Notice that he is alive without sin, and dead with sin. The wages of sin is death.

When a person is born again, has new life, is regenerated, his sins have been forgiven. The theory that he is regenerated BEFORE he believes and his sins are forgiven says that the individual has new life while still in his sins, the very thing that produces death. That teaching is false.