

Shunning the –“Tions”: Regeneration and Adoption

Excitement is too lame a term to describe our feelings when our first child was born. After a long night of labor, Rebekah Kaye entered the world with a temper. As parents, we were young and dumb, but we loved that little girl. And we loved the next little girl (Melinda Laree) and we loved the little boy that God brought our way (George John Leo).

We build families by producing children.

And sometimes, we build families by adopting children. Those children may not carry our genes, but they can carry our family values and spiritual genes as we show them the way of the Lord. We can love them like one of our natural children. Thank the good Lord for those that adopt children.

God lovingly builds His family through two means: regeneration and adoption. They do not stand for two different paths, but two different perspectives to look at joining the family of God. Excitement is too lame a term to describe what He feels when a person is “born from above” or adopted into His family. Both these terms, regeneration and adoption, meet our human needs.

Regeneration

We all wrestle with the question of death at different times in our lives. What comes when we die? The unknown can be terrifying for people that do not know Jesus. Is the afterlife only a memory of us in the minds of those that knew us before? Will we sleep for eternity? Does the wheel of Hinduism spin forever and ever to bring us to reincarnation repeatedly? What happens?

In an Old Testament scene in [Ezekiel 37:1-15](#), God demonstrates His power of regeneration. God brings Ezekiel to a valley filled with dry bones. “Can these bones live?” asks God. Ezekiel answers, “O Lord, you know.” God did know. With that, God commands Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones. God would cause the breath of life to enter them again, but only after bone was placed upon bone and sinews grew causing flesh to appear again. God would regenerate life in these bones, a picture of the restoration of the nation of Israel from captivity.

God is life and the source of life. While we concern ourselves with the afterlife, God first wants us to be concerned with this life. Our sin separates us from God making us walking dead people ([Romans 6:23](#); [Ephesians 2:1, 5; 4:18](#). Cf. [Luke 15:24, 32](#); [1 John 3:14](#)).

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to Jesus at night ([John 3:2](#)). Without getting to the reason he came, Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus came from God. Jesus, wading right into the depth of the conversation addressed the reason for Nicodemus’ coming. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’

As iron sharpens iron,
So a person sharpens his friends.
-- Solomon

Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3-5). Thus was born the concept of being “born again.” In 3:7, Jesus will settle the question for Nicodemus, when He says, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

What did Jesus mean when He said that Nicodemus, and for that matter, all of us must be born again? No, we cannot enter a second time into our mother’s womb and be born a second time. I find it interesting that the major translations of these verses use “born again” (NIV, ESV, NASB, KJV, NCV, NLT, GNB). Eugene Peterson’s contemporary language Bible, *The Message* and the RSV translate the words as “born from above.” That translation puts a new thought on the table of discussion.

Being born from above focuses on God’s part in our new life. The word translated “again” has a root meaning of newness from above. John’s prelude to the life of Christ puts our new birth squarely where it needs to be in 1:12-13. He says:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

When God gives us the opportunity to start our spiritual life all over, it is through His power and will that we live again. The apostle Paul understood this phenomenon when He wrote his letter to the Colossians. Note 2:11-13.

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.

In Paul’s letter to Titus as he shepherded the churches on Crete, Paul again discusses our transition from death to life, regeneration (3:3-7).

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

We are alive because Christ died and was raised by the power of God for us. When we submit our lives to His Lordship, He breathes new life into us and we began to live again (cf [Acts 2:38](#); [Romans 6:1-14](#); [8:1-17](#); [12:2](#)). Praise God! We are alive. The second death has no power over us ([Revelation 20:6](#)).

How does God build His family? He causes us to be born from above.

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Adoption

At the age of six-weeks old, Rex David Thomas was adopted by Rex and Auleva Thomas in Atlantic City, NJ. He became the founder and CEO of Wendy's and the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. God did not create us to go through this life alone. He created us to live in community, a community that begins with a family.

When a child is adopted, she/he takes on the new family name. We see the same event occur in [Genesis 17:1-8, 15-21](#). God Almighty makes his covenant with Abram and immediately changes his name to Abraham ([17:4, 5](#)). Why? Because he will be the "father of a multitude of nations." For ninety-nine years, people called him by the name of Abram. His wife is barren. No children were born to the marriage. Now El Shaddai changes his name to the "father of a multitude of nations." Verses 1-8 are forward looking. Abraham will be exceedingly fruitful ([17:6](#)). El Shaddai's covenant will be established between Him, Abraham and Abraham's offspring ([17:7](#)). El Shaddai will give the land to Abraham and his offspring ([17:8](#)).

Furthermore, El Shaddai includes Sarai in the name change. He changes her name from Sarai to Sarah, "princess" ([17:15](#)). She will provide a son to Abraham. Nations and kings of people will come from her.

Adoption, like regeneration, is a cataclysmic change in our relationship with God. Adoption answers the human need of family. "How can I belong and be a part of a family?"

Paul describes that change in Romans 8:15-17.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Cf. [Galatians 4:4-6](#); [Ephesians 1:3-5](#))

God is our Father. We are His children. We are not only His children, but we are heirs with Christ, His only begotten Son. We will receive an inheritance. We will be glorified with Christ.

God did not adopt us just to say that He had a house full of kids. He adopted us with a purpose, a purpose defined in [Deuteronomy 7:6](#) (cf. [Ezekiel 16:1-7](#)) and realized in 1 Peter 2:9. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Did you catch our purpose? "A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." As priests our responsibility is to bring people to God and God to the people. Our purpose is to "proclaim the excellencies of him who called" us "out of darkness into his marvelous light."

If we have any doubts about God adopting us and making us a part of His family, we should listen to the words of Jesus (Matthew 12:48-50).

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

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How do we face death? We face it first by being born from above. The gift of God to us through regeneration is “eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” ([Romans 6:23](#)). We need not fear our physical death, nor an eternal separation from God when Christ comes to redeem His people.

How do we overcome the fear of not belonging? God is willing to adopt us into His family, a family where we become His children, a family where we will receive an inheritance, and a family with an eternal purpose.

The blood of the Lamb has redeemed us. We have been born from above through the power of God the Father. God has adopted us into His holy, royal family.