

Answer to my letter to Brother Wayne Camp about the New Birth

Dear Brother King,

I am in agreement with the statement made by John Gill. Once again, for the sake of reference, let me point out what he wrote.

The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.

The doctrines which Christ had then been delivering concerning himself, his flesh and blood, being spiritually understood, are the means of quickening souls. The Gospel, and the truths of it, which are the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, are the means of conveying the Spirit of God, as a spirit of illumination and sanctification, into the hearts of men, and of quickening sinners dead in trespasses and sins: the Gospel is the Spirit that giveth life, and is the savour of life unto life, when it comes not in word only, or in the bare ministry of it, but with the energy of the Holy Ghost, and the power of divine grace.

Note that Gill did not leave out the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. He wrote, "The Gospel is the Spirit that giveth life, and is the savour of life unto life, when it comes not in word only, or in the bare ministry of it, but with the energy of the Holy Ghost, and the power of divine grace."

In my study of Baptist confessions of faith I find that nearly all of them indicate that the authors thereof held to the same position. They held that the gospel is used by the Holy Spirit in his regenerating work. Notice the following statement from the 1689 London Baptist Confession.

OF THE GOSPEL AND OF THE EXTENT OF THE GRACE THEREOF

Paragraph 1. The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give forth the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect, and begetting in them faith and repentance; in this promise the gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and [is] therein effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners. Gen. 3:15; Rev. 13:8

Paragraph 2. This promise of Christ, and salvation by him, is revealed only by the Word of God; neither do the works of creation or providence, with the light of nature, make discovery of Christ, or of grace by him, so much as in a general or obscure way; much less that men destitute of the revelation of Him by the promise or gospel, should be enabled thereby to attain saving faith or repentance. Rom. 1;17; Rom. 10:14,15,17; Prov. 29:18; Isa. 25:7; 60:2,3

Paragraph 3. The revelation of the gospel to sinners, made in divers times and by sundry parts, with the addition of promises and precepts for the obedience required therein, as to the nations and persons to whom it is granted, is merely of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God; not being annexed by virtue of any promise to the due improvement of men's natural abilities, by virtue of common light received without it, which none ever made, or can do so; and therefore in all ages, the preaching of the gospel has been granted unto persons and nations, as to the extent or straitening of it, in great variety, according to the counsel of the will of God. Ps. 147:20; Acts 16:7; Rom. 1:18-32.

Paragraph 4. Although the gospel be the only outward means of revealing Christ and saving grace, and is, as such, abundantly sufficient thereunto; yet that men who are dead in trespasses may be born again, quickened or regenerated, there is moreover necessary an effectual insuperable work of the Holy Spirit upon the whole soul, for the producing in them a new spiritual life;

without which no other means will effect their conversion unto God. Ps. 110:3; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 1:19,20 John 6:44; 2 Cor. 4:4,6.

On this matter the Philadelphia Confession of Faith is almost, if not an exact, repeat of the 1689 London confession.

Consider the following statement by Arthur Pink as he comments on John 6:63, the same verse on which Gill was writing. Pink said,

This confirms our interpretation of the first part of the verse. Christ is speaking of regeneration, which was the one great need of those who were offended at His teaching. They could not discern spiritual things till they had spiritual life, and for that they must be "quickened" by the Spirit of God. First, He told them who did the quickening — "the Spirit"; now He states what the Spirit uses to bring about that quickening — the "words" of God. The Spirit is the Divine Agent; the Word is the Divine instrument. God begets "with the word of truth" (James 1:18). We are born again of incorruptible seed, "by the word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). We are made partakers of the Divine nature by God's "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4). And here in John 6:63 Christ explains how this is: the words of God are "spirit, and they are life" That is, they are spiritual, and employed by the Holy Spirit to impart life. Thus, we say again, The great need of today, as of every age, is the faithful preaching of God's Word.

This statement by Pink is found in his commentary on the Gospel of John.

According to Article 7 of the New Hampshire confession of faith regeneration is accomplished in connection with divine truth.

Of Grace in Regeneration We believe that, in order to be saved, sinners must be regenerated, or born again (37); that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind (38); that it is effected in a manner above our

comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with divine truth (39), so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel (40); and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life (41).

The instrumentality of the Word of God is often mentioned in connection with regeneration in the Scriptures.

Consider these words from the Apostle Paul. **1 Corinthians 4:15 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.** The Greek word from which **begotten** is translated is **gennao [gennavw]** and, according to Strong's Lexicon, it refers to a man fathering a child or a woman giving birth to a child. It clearly has reference here to the new birth or regeneration. Paul clearly believed that the gospel was involved in the regeneration of these Corinthians.

James uses another word when he refers to the word in connection with regeneration. **James 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.** The word from which **begat** is translated is **apokueo [ajpokuevw]** and according to Strong this word means *to bring forth from the womb, or to give birth to*. So once again it seems that any inspired writer and finally connected the word with the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

Peter also connected the word with the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. **1 Peter 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.** Here Peter uses the Greek word **anagennao [ajnagennavw]**. According to Strong the word means *to be born anew or to be born again*. Some make the argument that the Word of God here refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. But the context clearly reveals otherwise. It refers to the word of the gospel. **1 Peter**

1:25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

John Gill is consistent in his position. Consider his comment on First Corinthians 4:15.

for in Christ Jesus have I begotten you through the Gospel; which is to be understood of regeneration, a being born again, and from above; of being quickened when dead in trespasses and sins; of having Christ formed in the soul; of being made a partaker of the divine nature, and a new creature; which the apostle ascribes to himself, not as the efficient cause thereof, for regeneration is not of men but of God; not of the will of the flesh, of a man's own free will and power, nor of the will of any other man, or minister; but of the sovereign will, grace, and mercy of God, Father, Son, and Spirit. The Father of Christ begets us again according to his abundant mercy; and the Son quickens whom he will; and we are born again of water and of the Spirit, of the grace of the Spirit; hence the washing of regeneration, and renewing work are ascribed to him: but the apostle speaks this of himself, only as the instrument or means, which God made use of in doing this work upon the hearts of his people; and which the other phrases show: for he is said to do it "in Christ"; he preached Christ unto them, and salvation by him, and the necessity of faith in him; he directed them to him to believe in him, and was the means of bringing of them to the faith of Christ; and it was the power and grace of Christ accompanying his ministry, which made it an effectual means of their regeneration and conversion: and which were brought about "through the Gospel"; not through the preaching of the law; for though by that is the knowledge of sin, and convictions may be wrought by such means; yet these leave nothing but a sense of wrath and damnation; nor is the law any other than a killing letter: no regeneration, no quickening grace, no faith nor holiness come this way, but through the preaching of the Gospel; in and through which, as a vehicle, the Spirit of God conveys himself into the heart, as a spirit of regeneration and faith; and God of his own will and rich mercy,

by the word of truth, by the Gospel of grace and truth, which came by Christ, so called in distinction from the law which came by Moses.

Consider also Gill on James 1:18.

with the word of truth; not Christ, who is the Word, and truth itself; though regeneration is sometimes ascribed to him; and this act of begetting is done by the Father, through the resurrection of Christ from the dead; but the Gospel, which is the word of truth, and truth itself, and contains nothing but truth; and by this souls are begotten and born again; (see Ephesians 1:13; 1 Peter 1:23) and hence ministers of it are accounted spiritual fathers. Faith, and every other grace in regeneration, and even the Spirit himself, the Regenerator, come this way: and the end is.

Brother King, I plan to enlarge on this article and published in the paper because there may be others who have the same question that you have raised. I am writing this at the house on my lap top. I'm sure that I have more references on this matter in my office. I will go out there and complete it for publication later. But I did want to answer your question tonight. Of course, I will remove any reference to you from the article. I just want to write it down any reference to any individual.

I certainly do appreciate your asking the question and giving me the opportunity to clarify the matter. I assure you that I believe the factual cause of regeneration is the power of the Holy Spirit. But I do believe that this is always in connection with the preaching of the Gospel.

May God bless you and trust that all is going well with you and yours.