

Quickening

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Only when we take a wide view of our fallen estate can we realize in an adequate way the complete havoc that has been wrought by sin, or the fulness of God's answer to it all which reaches us in the Gospel. We have already seen that sin has brought in: —

guilt, and so **forgiveness** must reach us;

condemnation, so **justification** is needed;

bondage, and we need **redemption**;

alienation from God, so we need **reconciliation**;

peril of many kinds, so we need **salvation**;

profanation and pollution, so we need **sanctification**;

corruption, which has affected the deepest springs of our nature, so we need the **new birth**.

We have now to see that it has plunged us into spiritual **death**, and we must be **quickened** if we are to live to God.

Our state is set forth in Ephesians 2: 1, as "dead in trespasses and sins." The next verse remarkably enough goes on to speak of walking in those trespasses and sins; but that is because the death there spoken of is death **towards God**. Those who are dead Godward are very **much** alive to "the course of this world," and "the prince of the power of the air," who operates in the "children of disobedience." To be dead towards God is entirely consistent with being alive towards the world and the devil: indeed the one springs out of the other.

This is the fact that underlies the solemn statement made in Romans 3: 11, that, "there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." That there should be none righteous (verse 10) is bad: it is worse that none should understand, for that means a state not only of ignorance but

insensibility. It is worst of all that none should desire to understand or seek after God, with whom is righteousness and understanding and life. To the natural man there is nothing that is desirable in God. Man is not right: he does **not** understand that he is **not** right: he has **no** desire after God who is right. In one word he is **dead** towards God.

Once these solemn facts lay hold of us, we realize that our only hope is in God taking the initiative with us in His sovereign mercy. We are quite well able to take the initiative in evil, but as regards all that is of God we are dead; and hence all movement must spring from Him.

God then must act. But **how** must He act? Will reformation, education or instruction meet our case? By no means: there can be nothing until He quickens, for quickening simply means the giving of life. The very word translated "quicken" in the New Testament is one compounded of the noun "life," and the verb "to make" — to make to live.

Now it is a striking fact that Ezekiel 36, which shows the **corruption** and moral filth in which Israel lay, and prophesies as to the **new birth** which consequently must be theirs, is followed by the vision of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. This sets forth the **death** towards God, in which Israel lies as a nation, and it prophesies concerning God's work of **quicken**ing, which must touch them before they enter into millennial blessedness. They will be brought up by Him out of the graves among the nations where they lie. There will be a national resurrection, and, says the Lord, "Ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it" (verse 14). Once they are quickened they will **understand** and they will at once **seek** the Lord.

The "wind," or "breath," of verse 9 seems to be identified with "My Spirit," of verse 14: indeed, the same Hebrew word is translated, wind, breath or spirit, according to the context. It is interesting to compare these verses with John 3: 8. There the blowing of the wind is connected with the Spirit's action in new birth. Here it is connected with His action in quickening. This should show us how closely new birth and quickening are connected one with the other, and that they must not be divided from each other, though they should be distinguished and separately considered, as they are in chapters 36, and 37 of Ezekiel.

Now if John 3 answers to Ezekiel 36, John 5 answers to Ezekiel 37. That chapter opens with the cure of the impotent man. It was as though a fresh stream of life entered his powerless limbs, and he took up his bed and walked. When challenged as to this miracle, the Lord Jesus proceeded to speak of far greater works than this which were His to do — the quickening of whom He will and the raising of all men. The former is a limited work. Those among the spiritually dead who hear the voice of the Son of God — and only those — shall spiritually live. The latter is universal. All in the graves shall hear His voice and come forth in two classes, to life and to judgment respectively. This will take place at different times, as we learn from other scriptures.

In verse 21 of this marvellous chapter in John, quickening is attributed to both the Father and the Son whereas in the next verse the work of judgment is said to lie wholly in the hands of the Son. The Son, and the Son alone, came forth into this world to suffer and be set at naught. To Him alone then shall the supremacy and majesty and honour of executing judgment belong. In the giving of life however the Son acts according to His own will equally with the Father and — we hardly need add — in fullest accord with the Father. Equally with the Father is He the Source of life, for verse 26 is evidently parallel with verse 21 in its sense. As 1 Corinthians 15: 45 says, "the last Adam . . . a quickening Spirit."

Verses 24 and 25 give us the way in which the Son acts in life-giving power at the present moment. He quickens by means of His word. There are those who really hear His word; that is, they

hear in it "the voice of the Son of God," and consequently they believe on the Father who sent Him, and they live. Quickening is not presented here as a work of the Son altogether apart from the use of means. Were it so presented we should read, "they that live shall hear." But what we read is, "they that hear shall live." Life is indeed His gift, but it reaches us in the hearing of His voice in His word.

In the light of this chapter we believe we may speak of quickening as the most deep-seated and fundamental aspect of God's work in us. Such is its importance that the Father and the Son act together as to it in a special way. A wrong use is sometimes made of our Lord's statements in verses 19 and 30; "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do;" and "I can of Mine own Self do nothing." These words do not mean that He disclaimed all power, just as a mere prophet might have done. They expressed in the first place the fact that in becoming Man the Son had taken the place of dependent service, acting wholly by the Spirit in subjection to the Father. This thought seems specially prominent in verse 30. But in the second place they also emphasized the fact that His essential place in the unity of the Godhead was such that it was impossible that He should act apart from the Father. This thought seems more prominent in verse 19.

From this inner and more hidden aspect of things it was as though He said, "I am so essentially one with the Father that it is in the nature of things impossible that I should act apart from Him." It was really the strongest possible affirmation of His essential Deity. The Father and the Son must ever act together as the end of verse 19 says. Thus did the Lord **accept** the charge of "making Himself equal with God," and not only accept it but **amplify** the thought of it. So both the Father and the Son act together in life-giving power.

In John 6: 63, we discover that the Spirit of God also quickens. The first occurrence of the word "Spirit" in that verse should evidently be printed with a capital, the second occurrence of the word is rightly printed without a capital. Comparison may be made with verse 6 of chapter 3, where the distinction is rightly made. The very words of the Lord are spirit and life but it is the Spirit Himself who quickens. We may say therefore that the whole fulness of the Godhead — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — is involved in the work of giving life to such as ourselves.

One further thing has to be noted. We meet with it both in Ephesians 2: 5, and Colossians 2: 13 — we have been quickened "together with Christ." Being "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2: 1), and "dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh" (Col. 2: 13), nothing short of quickening would meet our case. Quickening was thus a necessity, but there was no necessity that we should be quickened **together with Christ**: that is the fruit of the counsels of God in grace.

Life "together with," — in association with - Christ was His thought for us, and this goes far beyond the bare necessity of the plight we were in. Life of **some** sort we must have, if ever we were to be in conscious blessedness; but life of this sort is the highest and most intimate that can be known by the redeemed creature. Therefore it is that we read of this quickening as being the fruit of the richness of God's mercy, and because of His great love wherewith He loved us. **Rich** mercy and **great** love are thus expressed.

We have been made to live in association with Christ, inasmuch as our life as quickened is of His own order — His life is ours. Since this is so, it is possible for us to be raised up and made to "sit together in heavenly places" in Him. Having life of such an order as this, we are fitted for such exalted seats. The wonderful story of our quickening ends in our sitting in heavenly places in the life of our Quickener.

In the Old Testament we read of quickening. Ten times or more the Psalmist speaks of it in Psalm 119. Are we to differentiate between that and what we find in the New Testament?

We believe that we have to do so. The Psalmist says that God's Word has quickened him in verse 50, yet again and again he desires to be quickened. The word is evidently used more in the sense of being revived, of being restored to more vigorous life. In Old Testament times man was still under probation. The law had been given to test him, and life on earth was still proposed as the result of perfect obedience to the law. Only when we come to the New Testament is the probation period over, and man formally pronounced to be dead in trespasses and sins. Hence only in the New Testament does the full truth of quickening appear.

Some have thought that quickening is very advanced truth; that, for instance, a man may be born again and yet quickening lie ahead as something to be reached much later, as a kind of climax to God's work in him. Does Scripture indicate this?

It clearly does not. Until quickened by Divine power we are dead. It is the very beginning of God's work in us rather than the climax. It would however be true to say that it is truth into the full import of which we are slow to enter. Almost invariably we begin by understanding truth as to the forgiveness of sins and salvation. This matter of life, and more especially life together with Christ, begins to impress us later in our spiritual history. We must not however attribute to **the thing itself**, what may quite rightly be stated as to our **apprehension** of the thing. The thing itself is the fruit of a Divine act: our apprehension of it the fruit of Divine teaching.

In John 5: 26, we read that the Father (1) raises up the dead, and (2) quickens them. Are we right in differentiating between the two things? And, if so, what is the difference?

We believe that there is a distinct difference. In John 11: 25, the Lord Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life." Resurrection is one thing and life another; though **for us** they are very intimately **connected**. For the unconverted dead they will be **divorced**. They will be raised and their once dead bodies reanimated, though not quickened, since their resurrection will be that of judgment and not of life, as verse 29 shows. Colossians 2: 12, 13, also presents resurrection and quickening as quite distinct things. We are quickened already but resurrection in its fulness is before us. When that moment comes our bodies will be instinct with life, in keeping with what has already taken place as to our souls.

We have in Romans 8: 11, a word about the quickening of our "mortal bodies." Is that something that takes place in the present, or is it to be in the future?

That is in the future. It is that God "**shall** also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." In the previous verse we have, "The Spirit **is** life because of righteousness." Both statements refer to the indwelling Spirit. He is life to us in an experimental and practical way now. He **will** quicken our mortal bodies presently, whether He does it in resurrection, for the saints who have died, or by the change of which 1 Corinthians 15: 51 speaks, for the saints alive when Jesus comes.

Some people however claim that this quickening of our mortal bodies has to do with the healing of disease: that it is what shall be done for us in the present, if only we claim the fulness of the Spirit.

Yes; and in so saying they read into the passage what is not there. There is nothing about disease or healing in the context. It is not our diseased bodies but our mortal bodies that are to be quickened. In our present condition our bodies are liable to death; when quickened they will no longer be subject to death. If the mortal body of the believer really were quickened now, he would be immortal as to his body; that is, **beyond death**, and not merely beyond disease.

So our reply can be twofold. First, there is an "if" in the verse, but it is not, if we claim the fulness of the Spirit, but, if the Spirit dwell in us — which He does, if we really are believers. Second, it is not healing that is in question but the giving of life from a Divine source. When quickened the mortal body is no longer mortal. It is perfectly obvious that this has not yet taken place with any saint living on earth. If Paul's mortal body had been quickened, for instance, the heads-man's axe would never have laid him low. He would still be walking amongst us!

The Lord Jesus, as the Last Adam, quickens according to 1 Corinthians 15: 45. We are right, are we not, in connecting this with the present?

Certainly. He stands in contrast to the first Adam in that verse; not merely in being "spirit," in contrast with "soul," but in that He is not merely "living," but the **Life-giver**. Verse 36 of this chapter reminds us that quickening only applies to that which is dead. Now we were dead spiritually, and quickening of a spiritual sort has already reached us from the last Adam. As the Head of a new race, He has already imparted life — His own life — to us who are of His race.

But then this chapter goes on to consider the case of our bodies which are still mortal. We must bear the image of the heavenly Adam even as regards our bodies, and so the great change will reach us at the coming of the Lord. Then "this mortal" will "put on immortality," and this will be the quickening of our mortal bodies, of which Romans 8: 11 speaks.

When that is accomplished, and "Death is swallowed up in victory" (verse 54), the work of quickening as regards ourselves will be carried to its final completion. Then the word that we "shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5: 17), shall be fulfilled. Not only **in** life, but **reigning** in it, and that **for ever**.