

# You Must Be Born Again

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**Bible Verse:** 1 John 2:29  
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We are prone to forget even the most basic of things and that's why practice is necessary. Athletes and ballerina dancers practice again and again and again and again and again so that when the time for their performance comes, muscle memory sustains them in the act of their performance and it is said that repetition is the key to learning and Scripture would agree with that idea. If you would turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter 1 with me, 2 Peter 1, the Apostle Peter who was on the brink of martyrdom when he wrote these words wrote to Christians in his day and as he was speaking to them about the nature of salvation, he said this in verse 12 of chapter 1, he said,

12 Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. 13 I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

Now beloved, I want you to see that the inspired writings of the Apostle Peter show us a man appointed by Christ for the edification of the church for all time says, "I've got things that I want to remind you of. There are urgent things of necessity that you need to know and to hear repeatedly so that after I'm gone, you are able to call them to mind and apply them properly in your Christian life." And if the Apostle Peter would do that, then how much more a far lesser pastor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century feeling the need to repeat things and to remind his fellow Christians of things that need to be at the forefront of our minds at all times, and I want to ask you a favor in the next few weeks, the next four or five weeks, I want you to remember this passage from Peter that speaks about the importance of remembering and of repetition because that's what we're going to do, we're going to do some repetition here.

For the longest time, I have sensed a need to repeat some foundational teaching that we did at the start of our church coming up on eight years ago. I want to refresh that material for those that have been with us throughout that time because you need to remember, you need to be reminded of these critical things that are foundational to everything that our philosophy of ministry is based on here at Truth Community Church and even more

important, are fundamental to Christian living. Equally important, equally important, I want to say these things in the coming weeks to help those that are new to our church, those that are stepping into a flow of life that has been going on for quite a while, I want to slow down and I want to lay the foundation for them as well. There is equal benefit here. This is for people new, this is for people that have been with us.

As I said earlier, this is essential also, these things that we're going to be talking about, this is essential for teaching that is coming this fall. Without going into the I need to lay a foundation now so that in October and November when we're talking about things and I point back to certain doctrines, that's going to be fresh in your mind and say, "Oh yeah, I remember that because he belabored the point four weeks on these different aspects that he's briefly alluding to now." There's a lot of history that goes into what we are about to address. There's the urgency of the moment in life right now and there's also, Lord willing, the plan for future teaching ahead, all of which is laying stress on the importance of coming back to the foundations of certain doctrines. What I'm about to do is I've chosen three crucial doctrines for understanding salvation, Christian living, and life in the church that we're going to review over the next four or five weeks. You could look at them from a couple of different word pictures to just give you a sense of something to categorize it in your mind to have a sense of what we're doing. You could look at this and say that this is a beginning toolbox for Christian living, and it's not all of the tools and it's not all of the doctrines that we need by any stretch of the imagination, but they are key tools that we can come and we can work with as we go through life and as we discern the world around us, and there is so much discerning that needs to be done coming up this fall. You could look at this from a different perspective and just consider it an intensive course in Christian discipleship, that over the next five weeks we're going to do an intensive course on Christian discipleship that I need and that you also need. We need this together. We come humbly to the word of God and confess our spiritual weakness and say, "Lord, help us through the truth of Your word and sanctify us in the truth. Your word is truth." Everything that we're going to talk about is critical to the philosophy of ministry, to a philosophy of life and to your own personal holiness and walking by faith. These three themes are going to fortify our approach to life in ministry and I ask you to be with us, I ask you to follow this, to track it. I'm asking you to apply yourself to what we are about to enter into because it is of urgent importance as I see things, as I see things in the world and as I see things in the church.

So there's just a lot on my mind as I trust that you can see, and so we're looking at these three themes. What are these three matters that we're going to put into our Christian toolbox as tools for intensive discipleship over the next few weeks? I'll give you these three doctrines that we're going to treat one by one. First of all, the doctrine of regeneration, which is our subject matter for today and the next couple of weeks; number 2, the doctrine of providence; and number 3, our doctrine of church life. Regeneration, providence and church life. Now those might seem, for those of you that are somewhat informed about the doctrines, they might not seem to be directly, causally, logically linked together but I think what you'll find is this, is that this actually gives us a blueprint on understanding the nature of Christianity and going forward in the Christian life as we live it out here on earth.

Think about it this way with me and I'll explain all of this later on, and we're just doing a little bit of an overview here, we're giving you the broad vista before we do a geological dig. Here's what I want you to think about it, regeneration, the doctrine of regeneration explains for us the beginning of our Christian life. Regeneration is the beginning of your experience of the Christian life. That's pretty crucial. The doctrine of providence teaches us the sustaining power that is at work in the Christian life and gives us a doctrine, gives us a mental, spiritual, scriptural framework to understand everything that happens in life to us, even if we don't understand what's happening. Is that a contradiction? No, it's not but just stay with us. Regeneration is the start of your experience of the Christian life, providence is governing everything that happens during the remaining course of your Christian life on earth, and then the doctrine of church life joins us in that pursuit of God to the broader body of God's people. So regeneration is going to introduce us to the introduction to Christian life, providence is going to tell us what is directing our life in every moment that follows, it's not just that but it certainly includes that and that will be our point of application, and then our doctrine of church life is going to show us how this is meant to be lived out with other Christians. You see, the whole nature of Christianity is this, is that it is not intended to be lived in isolation. God calls us to Christ and to the body of Christ and there are at least 20 different commands in the New Testament that talk about the "one anothers" of the Christian life. Love one another. Encourage one another. Confess your sins to one another. Pray for one another. You can't be with one another, you can't obey all of those commands of "one anothers" unless you're somehow involved in the body of Christ. So this idea that a person could live the Christian life by himself and just go off under a tree and worship God, is false. It is not the biblical idea of the Christian life, but what we need to see is how that plays out and what God says about life in a local church so that we would be able to understand that and gear ourselves and apply ourselves to it.

So regeneration, providence, and church life, that's what's coming up over the next few weeks in our time together. I'm just taking a break from everything else to focus on these things because I'm persuaded in my heart that this is what we need at this time in the life of our church because these doctrines undergird all that we believe and practice at Truth Community Church and, beloved, what I want to say to you is this, and I'll just say this one last time, I beg you to give added attention and added effort to what is going to be said and to try to be with us as much as possible over these next few weeks. This is really really important, and so with that said, we are going to start with the doctrine of regeneration today. The doctrine of regeneration. The Bible says Jesus said, "You must be born again to be a Christian." You can't work your way into being a Christian. You can't be baptized to become a Christian. You can't follow church rituals to become a Christian. You can't be moral enough. You can't be religious enough. You must be born again and Scripture makes that plain in many many ways.

You're in 2 Peter, turn over one page or two to the book of 1 John and we're going to start here with the doctrine of regeneration. How did you become a Christian? I'm speaking to the people of God today. I'm speaking as though speaking to Christians, recognizing that there are some of you here today who are not Christians, you have not been born again,

but I invite you to listen in to that which would also quicken your own heart, but we gather as the people of God and so I need to speak in that way and in those terms. How did you become a Christian? Let's start with a basic text in 1 John 2:29. 1 John 2:29, and we need to see something very very critical here. The Apostle John says,

29 If you know that He is righteous [if you know that Christ is righteous], you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

"Is born of Him," and there's this universality to it that everyone who manifests true biblical righteousness in their life is reflecting the work of God in their life that Scripture calls being born again, and the righteous life that flows after a person becomes a Christian is a reflection of the righteousness of God who saved them and caused them to be born again. That's the general idea that I'll explain more in a moment.

Now when God saved you, he made a legal declaration in justification about your life and about your soul. He justified you. We've talked about this quite recently. He imputed to you the full merit of Jesus Christ and accepts you on the basis of what Christ has done, on the life that Christ lived, on the death that Christ died. He justified you and says, "I accept you in the same way that I accept My Son because when you put your faith in Christ, you were joined with Him, you were united with Him so that the full merit of His life is counted to you in a legal way so that you will never be found guilty at the judgment court of God." Indeed quite the opposite, you have been declared righteous in the judgment court of God. It's not simply that you're innocent, it's not simply that you're not guilty. God declared you righteous. He says, "I look on you as one who is righteous in My sight and fully accepted into My presence." That's not a result of anything that you have done, this is what God has done in his gift of salvation, he made a legal declaration in justification on your behalf.

Now that's not what we're talking about here today, though. God made this legal work in you but when God saved you, he did something else as well. He also made a living change in you. He made a life change in you. He imparted something new into you. He imparted new life to you in union with Jesus Christ. That's why people change when they become genuine Christians, they change because there is a new life in them that now, to use a bad picture, now starts to bubble out, it starts to grow and it starts to manifest itself in subsequent days. And you know, and sometimes people say, "What is happening to me? What's happened to my life? Why is everything so different? Why do I see everything in such different ways that I've never seen before?" Well, sister, brother, it's because you've been born again, that's why. That's why life changes when people come to Christ. That's why when we have testimonies in the water of baptism, we expect people and we won't baptize them without it, that there is some kind of life testimony that says, "My life changed after I put my faith in Christ. I had new desires. His word became alive to me. I had a love for Christ that I had never seen before. My love for sin was broken and I changed and I repented, and this has shown up in the way that I live and the way that I think and the way that I feel." Well, that newness that is expressed in baptism testimonies is an evidence, it is a mark of regeneration, it is a mark of new life, and that is what John means when he speaks of being born of God.

Look at verse 29 with me again, here in 1 John 2:29 he says, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." Now one of the things that we talked about when we were teaching 1 John several years ago is this, is that this theme "born of God," this is the first time that John mentions it here in chapter 2, verse 29, but it introduces a dominant theme in the remainder of the epistle.

Look at chapter 3, verse 9 of 1 John where he says, "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Do you see it two times in that verse? He is born of God. The idea not being that he reaches sinless perfection but he doesn't continue in a pattern of loving sin and practicing sin. He can't do that because he's been born of God, new life is in him that is now the controlling and animating principle of life, and that changes his relationship with sin, introduces him to a new relationship with righteousness, and that's why there must be a change and that's why John can say that, it's because regeneration has taken place, because new life has been imparted into that heart and soul.

Chapter 4, verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." And as we're going to see in future messages here, the fact that God is love and the fact that he gives birth to spiritual children in salvation, means this, that those children who are born of God are going to reflect the character of God. Just like a parent, a physical parent, an earthly parent, communicates his own or her own, some of her physical characteristics in birth into the children that they give birth to, and you can see the physical traits of the parent in the child, well, in the same way in the spiritual realm, when God gives birth to somebody spiritually, there are the reflections of the character of God that start to manifest themselves in their lives. The spiritual, the moral characteristics of God start to show up. Well, if a God of love gives birth to you, truly gives birth to you, then there is going to be a mark of love that starts to manifest itself in your life. Just as God cared for you and gave himself up for you, you are going to care for those who are similarly loved by God and give yourself up for them. This is the way that it works.

In chapter 5, verse 1, we see this phrase another time where it says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." There's a lot of controversial things in this passage that I'm not going to touch on today, we might come to them down the road, but what I want you to see is this, is that God sent his Son, he sent Christ to be the Savior of the world. This is just the truth and this is the focal point of all of the existence of the universe is Christ and the cross and the Second Coming. This is how we understand history is that God has made himself known in Christ and he is saving for himself a people in Christ. Well, if you have truly been born of God, then you are going to understand something about the unique nature of Christ and you are going to believe in him, you are going to entrust yourself to him, you are going to commit yourself to him, and what Scripture says about him being God the Son and God in human flesh, you're going to believe that because this is what God has done, this is

who God is, and the one who is born of God is going to believe what God has done. That's why it's such a serious heresy and fatal to salvation to have a wrong view of Christ.

Well, this born of God, this impartation of new life is what we call regeneration, and let me give you a definition. Arguably I should have given a definition right from the start but I wanted to introduce it. What do we mean when we say regeneration in this context? I'm going to give you a definition. I'll say it a couple of times so that you can write it down and be able to reflect on it later. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit. It's a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts divine life to a sinner. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts divine life to a sinner so that that sinner will repent of sin, believe in Christ and serve Christ in newness of life. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts divine life to a sinner so that the sinner, male or female, boy or girl, so that the sinner will repent of sin, believe in Christ and serve Christ in newness of life. Everybody get that? Anybody need me to say it one more time? I'm happy to do that. Yes, good, I like that. I love the response. Thank you.

Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts divine life to a sinner so that the sinner will repent of sin, believe in Christ, and serve Christ in newness of life. The idea of it being a secret act is it's something that's beyond the powers of observation of man. It's something that the Spirit does inside the heart of a man. It's a work of the Holy Spirit, it's not something that man does to himself. This life that he gives is divine life, it's the life of God in the soul of a man, and it has a goal and an effect that is recognized because the one who formerly loved sin is now marked by repentance from sin, faith in Christ, and a changed ever increasingly transformed life as a result of that initial work of the Spirit. The Scripture that we saw in 1 John 3:9 describes it about, uses the word "seed," God's seed abiding in him, the seed of new life is planted in the heart and it begins to sprout and it begins to grow.

So let's think about this for a moment and then we're going to look at some other biblical passages here. When your mom gave birth to you, she delivered new physical life, didn't she? Before you were born, you did not exist. Nonexistence applied to you. I like to use the phrase "your nonexistence" but that sounds kind of weird. How can you have a possession of something if you don't exist? Your nonexistence before your mother conceived you, before you were born, you did not exist and yet the act of conception and the subsequent birth is the deliverance of new physical life. That's called birth, physical birth is the manifestation of the life that was planted within. Well beloved, when God saved you, he gave new spiritual life to you. You were born again. He gave something new that you did not have before. You did not possess this before and you could not make it happen on your own. God did a work in your heart through the application of his word to your heart by the Holy Spirit and created new life in you where no life had existed before. Just as in human conception new life is started that did not previously exist, when God causes someone to be born again, he brings new spiritual life into existence that had not been there before. This is what the Bible calls regeneration, being born again, the new birth, and that's our subject matter for the rest of today and the next two or three messages on Tuesday and Sunday.

Now all we're doing today, I cut out half of my message to just save it for next time. I want to go slow. I want you to get this right. I want to handle this in a way to the best of my ability that you can call these things to mind when I'm not around. This is essential for your spiritual life to understand this, to know where you came from spiritually, and what was the source of that. Some people, not all, some people take an interest in their human genealogy, they like to trace back. I enjoy this. They like to trace back and see where they came from. What are my roots? And you can only trace that back so far before it gets lost in the mist of time, of course, but if that's important in a passing earthly life to know something about our family history, how much more so is it important for us to understand where we came from spiritually? And when I say where you came from, I am not talking about the church that you were raised in, I am not talking about what your mom and dad taught you. Some of you had really great parents to take great pride in and to look back and thank God for the godly father that he gave to you, or the godly mother that he blessed you with. Some of us, some of you don't have quite that to go back on but that's not what we're talking about here. We're not talking about that which has, we're not talking about the earthly influences or the earthly channels of influence, we're talking about how did it come to pass that whereas once you were blind now you see, that once you were dead spiritually, now you are alive, how did that happen from God's perspective, from a biblical perspective? What was it that took place? And what Scripture tells us is that God did a work in your heart to give new life to you that you did not have before, that you could not buy, that you did not have human power to obtain, and the Bible uses many metaphors to describe this one reality and we're gonna look at four of them here today.

First of all, the Bible talks about it in terms of this word "regeneration." It specifically uses the word "regeneration." Look at the book of Titus 3 with me, turning back to the left in your Bibles if you've been in 1 John. We're going to look at Titus 3, just after the books of Timothy and before the book of Hebrews if you're trying to find it. Titus 3. In regeneration, you are washed from sin and the Holy Spirit renews your nature and imparts new life to you and Titus 3 talks about this, and what we're going to do, we're actually going to start in verse 3. Titus 3:3, which kind of helps us get a preliminary glimpse of the need for new birth, why it was that you could not have brought this new life about on your own. Titus 3:3,

3 ... we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

Now beloved, that's a description that is like that which we've seen in Ephesians 2:1-3, Romans 8:9 speaks in similar language, but before you were a Christian even if you were born into a Christian family, your heart, your inner man, your character, your disposition was marked by all of these things. You were foolish. You were disobedient. You were deceived. You were enslaved to your bodily lusts and your pleasures. You were full of malice. You were full of envy. You were full of hate. You hated others. You might have dressed that up on the outside so that people didn't really see what you were like inside, I certainly did that for a very long time before I became a Christian. People thought I was a

good person. They didn't know what an angry hateful man I really was. It's what was going on inside. They didn't know, people looking on me from outside didn't know that I was deceived spiritually. I thought I was a Christian. I wasn't but I thought I was. They didn't know about the desires that dominated me. They didn't know how foolish I was. Man couldn't see it on the outside but Scripture had diagnosed it all along. What's true of one man is true of every man, for we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The way that your sin manifested itself inside of you may be a little bit different than it was for me but this is the statement of Scripture about us. Look at verse 3, "we," Paul speaking to his readers, "we were foolish ourselves," and then he goes on and describes that. Beloved, this is why you had to be born again because there was no spark divine life in you, there was nothing in you that was good, there was nothing about you that was inclined to God at all, not the true God, not the God revealed in Jesus Christ who commands all men to take up their cross and follow him. You didn't know God like that. You didn't know Christ like that before even if you were a churchgoer and a basically moral person. Being moral does not mean someone has been born again.

That's so essential to know and to understand and it was in that sinful state that verse 4 kicks in, Titus 3:4 as Paul writes to these Christians and explains things to them. Chapter 3, verse 4 he said, "But when," but, by contrast,

4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us,

Look at the grammar, beloved, what is the subject, what is the verb, and what is the direct object? "He," God, subject, "saved," verb, action, "us," direct object. God did a work on you, my Christian brother, my Christian sister. God did a work on you. God did a work in you to save you.

Paul quickly says that was

not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness,

He did not save you because you got baptized. He did not save you because you did this or that. God saved you not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness but according to something else,

but according to His mercy, by the washing of [here's our word] by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

God washed you. God regenerated you. God imparted new life to you by the Holy Spirit and that is how you became Christian. That is common to every one of us that is truly in Christ. The outward effects of our testimonies are all different, your testimony on a human level is different than mine but what we must understand is that those superficial

differences, and they are superficial differences, do not obscure the underlying common reality to all of our salvations. There is only one way that a person is saved and it is when God saves them and the Spirit works in their heart to draw them to faith in Christ. Absent that, no one gets saved.

So for every true Christian in this room, we all share that in common that God did a work in our hearts and caused us to be born again. He saved us not on the basis of anything that you or I did. That is essential to understand and it's essential as you think about your testimony to look beyond the outward incidence of it, the things that you remember that occurred in time outwardly; it's all good and well to remember that but if we're going to grow in Christ, we have to look beyond that and say what happened in my heart and how did it happen for me to be born again. God saved us. God regenerated us. God imparted new life to us. Scripture describes that with the term regeneration.

There's a second term that Scripture uses in another location. Scripture calls it a new creation. A new creation and as we go through these things, just understand that these different terms are describing the same reality. It's describing the same reality using different terms. Regeneration, number 1, secondly, a new creation.

Look at 2 Corinthians 5 with me, 2 Corinthians 5 where it says in verse 17. I'll give you a moment to get there. 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says,

17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,

Notice the subject, verb and direct object again, my beloved friends. God reconciled us to himself. God gave us the ministry of reconciliation. This is the language that Scripture uses when it says the old things passed away, behold new things have come. The operative power in this new life was God who gave it to us. The operative power comes from the Holy Spirit who does a work in the inner man. This is something that is not produced by human effort. It is not on the basis of deeds that we have done. So in this new creation, beloved, Christ has transformed you. Christ has made you someone new. Your old sinful deceived nature has died. It has been put away and a new one has come.

Look at Ezekiel 36. We could speak about it this way. Ezekiel 36:26, you could even start in verse 25, God says,

25 ... I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

Praise the Lord. There's a cleansing that takes place in salvation. All your sins washed away in this great act of God. And he goes on and he says in verse 26,

26 Moreover, I will give you

Do you see it again? Who's the subject? God. What's the verb? I'll give this to you. What is it that he gives us? A new heart,

26 ... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

God by a supernatural act takes out the old stony heart and puts in a new one, a heart of flesh, one that is living, one that is warm, one that is beating toward the things in life of God. This is the new creation. The old man passes away, a new one has come.

Thirdly, Scripture describes this as a spiritual resurrection. A spiritual resurrection. Go back to the book of Ephesians now, if you will. Ephesians 2:3. Notice the universality of this. This is our shared spiritual experience.

3 Among them we too all [all, universal] formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

This is the same principles, very parallel language that we just saw in Titus 3, isn't it? This is what we were all like. Scripture condemns all men under this revelation of truth. There is no one good. There is none righteous, not even one. There is no one who seeks for God. Well how is it, then, how is it, then, that anyone is saved? How is it, then, that those who are dead are now alive in Christ? How can a dead man live? He can't make it happen himself. The corpse in the casket does not raise itself to life. It's never happened. But look at verse 4, Ephesians 2:4, "But God," again, subject, verb, direct object,

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Those first three verses of Ephesians 2 tell you that you were dead, you were spiritually dead. How, then, are you now a Christian? It is because God produced a spiritual resurrection in you. You who once were dead in sin, God raised you alive in Christ. And we could look at other passages in Ephesians and recognize that the power by which God did that is the exact same power that he exercised when Christ himself was raised from the dead, the signature moment of world history, the focal point of redemption, the resurrection accomplished by the power of God. What Scripture says is that same power God used to raise you from your spiritual death to new life in Christ. We will talk about in days to come how he did that, what the means were. All we're looking at right now is the fact of it. We're gonna go step by step and we're gonna take it slow because it is important for us to understand this so that we can always remember it going forward.

Finally, we saw regeneration, a new creation, a spiritual resurrection, Scripture, as we've been saying all along, describes it as a new birth. A new birth. God plants new life in you. Look at the epistle of 1 Peter. We were in 2 Peter, we want to look at 1 Peter for just a moment. 1 Peter 1:3 says, 1 Peter 1:3 says,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Verse 23 says,

23 ... you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All flesh is like grass... the grass withers...the flower falls off, 25 but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word which was preached to you.

Born again. New birth.

So you take this, you take these different metaphors, you put them in a frame, as it were, and you get a collage showing you different pictures describing the same reality. Those of you that have family pictures, you put up a collage of different moments and they're all speaking to a common theme of the love and relationship that you have in your family. Here what we see is that these pictures of regeneration, of a new creation, of a spiritual resurrection, of a new birth, are all testifying to a common reality. God has used his word in your heart, my Christian friend, to impart spiritual life to you. God acted on you in an unseen invisible way through the power of his word applied by the Holy Spirit to your life, to change you, to make you into someone new. He caused you to be born again. You did not cause yourself to be born again.

That's essential. That's essential, beloved. That starting point defines everything else. If you think that you somehow brought about your own spiritual birth by something that you did, your spiritual life takes one trajectory that leads you ultimately into pride and arrogance. When you realize that you were a deceived, dead, spiritual corpse that God caused and worked in you by grace, by mercy, to bring you to life and to raise you from spiritual death, when you understand that as the starting point, your spiritual life takes a completely different trajectory. This cannot be denied. One ultimately leads to pride, the other leads to genuine humility and worship, and we'll talk about that more in the days to come.

You see, beloved, when a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, truly understands the depth of their sin and their prior rebellion against God and they realize that they had no power to change that, they didn't even have the heart to change it, and you realize now that you

stand forgiven, now you've been washed, now you've been cleansed, now you belong to Christ with an eternal security and you will be at the marriage supper of the Lamb and Christ will be our bridegroom and we will be there to share in the celebration of his marriage with his people, and you realize that that has been given to you, you're humbled, you worship, you're grateful, and the whole trajectory of spiritual life is changed.

Remember the story of Lazarus? Jesus was at the grave of Lazarus in John 11 and Jesus was at his grave and Lazarus had been there for four days, his sisters were concerned, "Lord, by now he stinketh," as the King James version says. What did Jesus do? He called Lazarus from the grave. He said, "Lazarus, come forth!" And Scripture says that Lazarus came out still in his grave-clothes and new life had been imparted by the call and the command of Christ. Lazarus did not stir himself up, he didn't reach with his arms wrapped in cloths and reach over and get a fresh cup of coffee to invigorate himself. He was dead. There was nothing that he could do to escape his own grave, but when Jesus called him, "Lazarus, you come forth," by the authority of his command, Lazarus came forth, new life was imparted and a resurrection, in that case a physical resurrection, took place. That is a picture of what your spiritual resurrection was like. Somehow the Gospel came to you and the Spirit of Christ spoke with power to your heart with effectual power and said, "You, come forth! You will be alive. You will come to Me." A divine summons was placed on your life and you responded to it because the power of God was at work to make that happen, and that kind of regeneration is necessary because men are spiritually lifeless and hostile. That's why Jesus could say in John 3:3, "unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Beloved, you and I could not have come to Christ on our own power. We would not have. We were slaves to sin. We were enemies of God and yet, "But God," Ephesians 2:4, "But God." But God, oh, but God loved us and used his power to save us. But God, in the person of Christ, became a man and went to the cross and cleared out the spiritual obstacles in your life with his substitutionary death on the cross. He paid the price. God cleared the way. God loved you at the cross. God loved you at your regeneration and called you to life based on the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit in your heart.

Do you know what that means? Among many other things, do you know what that means? What that means is this, it means that God truly gets all of the glory for your salvation and you get none. God gets all the glory. Boasting is excluded, in the words of the Apostle Paul, "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works so that no one would boast."

Do you know what I think one of the greatest things about heaven is gonna be after living on this life for coming up on six decades now? Do you know what one of the things that I just increasingly look forward to in addition to being in the presence of Christ and being with my fellow believers through the ages? Do you know what else I'm looking forward to? There is not going to be a single proud arrogant person to be found there. All of the pride of life is going to have been crucified by this. There will be no one boasting about how good they are, how wise they were, the things that they did. Everyone that is there will have an even clearer vision that, "This is all to the glory of God. I boast in nothing,"

as we sung earlier. "I will not boast of anything." That's gonna be great, to be free from the arrogant pride of this world. Bring it on. Bring it on, I can't wait.

Now that's the doctrine of regeneration. Got a lot more to say about it in days to come. But I said that this was like an intensive course in Christian discipleship, right? This was like a beginning toolbox for Christian living. How do we take all of this, how do we understand this, how is it so foundational to Christian living that I would start here on a series like this? Beloved, regeneration, the doctrine of regeneration informs all of your motivations and priorities in life. I'll say that again: regeneration informs all of your motivations and priorities in life. Everything now is in a response to that prior act of God where he showed mercy to us. That's why we want to be holy. That's why we forsake sin. How could we cling to the sin which was the purpose of God to deliver us from? Scripture makes that argument in many places, in many ways.

But even more, beloved, understanding something about the doctrine of regeneration does this for you, just talking vertically, you in the presence of God and no one else, regeneration does this, it prompts love in your heart that God would be so good to a sinner like you, to a sinner like me. "You caused me to be born again? You put a new spirit in me when I was hostile to You? O God, I love You so much. Lord Jesus, I love You so much because without You that never would have happened." And love toward God is in your heart. Submission, trust is in your heart. "God, God, God, if You saved me like this, then all I can do is submit and follow You. That is Your rightful due for me to take up my cross and follow You. Of course." Submission follows on this, and along with submission, beloved, trust also follows on the heels of this doctrine. If God was this good to you in your sins, don't you think that he's going to be good to you forever? Even if you don't understand what's happening in life, isn't the greater reality of what God did in regeneration in your heart, doesn't that invoke your trust? "He saved my soul. I bet He'll take care of my earthly life in the end as well. And even if He doesn't, do you know what? I don't care, I'm gonna trust Him anyway. I'm gonna be like Job, though He slay me, I'll trust Him. How could I do anything else to the One who gave me spiritual life?" Love, submission, trust. You gratefully bow before the one who raised you to new life. You gladly bow to the one who raised you to new life. You generously bow before the one who raised you to new life. What I mean by generously is, "Lord, what would You have me do? My life belongs to You. My affections belong to You. You take me and You do with me whatever You want, Lord. I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice and I will follow You all the days of my life because You gave me life. I just give it back to You now."

But what if you're not a Christian? What if you're here and you're outside the realm of that spiritual experience? Well, there's hope but there's something that you need to understand, you're a condemned spiritual corpse, how else can I say it? I've got to play it straight with you, right? You're dead in trespasses and sins just like I was at one time. My friend, only God can deliver you from that spiritual death. This is not the time for you to say, "I'm gonna try harder." This is the time for you to realize that your efforts are all corrupt and that you need to cry out to mercy to this God who gives life and ask him for life, ask Christ to come because you realize you can't save yourself. Christ died for

sinner just like you and rose from the dead for sinners just like you. The Gospel is available to everyone who will hear it and respond to it, but I tell you, my friend, you must be born again or you will die in your sins. Right now you are in the realm of spiritual death, you're separated and alienated from God. One day you will experience physical death, separation of your soul from your body, and beyond that there will be an eternal death where God judges you for your sin and your rejection of this Gospel which has been proclaimed to you today. Death, death, death, is what happens for those who reject the Gospel. Regeneration means life, life, life, for those who will receive Christ.

My unsaved friend, Christ is calling you. He will give you this new life as you come to him. My friend, you need to come and, my friend, you need to come now.

Let's bow together in prayer.

*Father, we take just a moment to search our own hearts in response to these things. May You impart new life where death has prevailed until now. For those of us that have been born again, Father, we give You our love, we give You our submission, we give You our trust. And Father, by the help of Your Spirit, we pray, we commit ourselves and ask God that You would so keep us that we would never stray from that conviction that is in our hearts as we stand here and sit here today. We thank You for the grace of salvation. We thank You for the love of Christ who loved us and gave Himself up for us. We thank You for the sustaining power of Your Holy Spirit. We praise You in advance for the final outcome when we are with You in heaven forever. O God, thank You. In Christ's name. Amen.*

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