

Are You Born Again?

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1 John 2:29 has been something of a base text for us, a foundation for the things that we've been saying over the past couple of times in our corporate gathering where it says,

29 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've emphasized is that Jesus said during the course of his ministry in John 3 that you must be born again in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Without being born again, you do not go to heaven, you face judgment for your sins, and so it's not an overstatement to say that this issue of the new birth is the most important thing that you could understand and resolve and deal with in your mind. Nothing else matters by comparison. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and to lose his soul? And so we're not preaching here in a way to enhance your worldly success or your worldly prosperity or even your physical health, those are all things of minor consequence compared to this central issue of the new birth and the question can be put very simply, very directly to each one of us, the question that matters, the question that you need to answer is this: are you born again? Are you born again? Nothing else matters and, you know, it wouldn't really do us a whole lot of good, I suppose, to study this doctrine of regeneration in the abstract and just try to define its contours theologically if we never got to this point that we are at today, asking the question with kindness but with directness, are you born again?

Scripture calls upon us in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to test yourselves to see whether you are in the faith, examine yourselves. The apostle goes on and says do you not recognize that you are in Christ Jesus, unless indeed you fail the test. And so the question is are you born again which leads to this question, "Well, how could I know? How can I know if I'm born again?" Theologically we could ask the question what are the results of regeneration but what we're really asking, what we're really laying out is does your life manifest, do you know something about the new birth and does that manifest itself somehow in your life in the way that we are going to be looking at here this morning? This is the key question.

Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God and so we're left with trying to wrestle with this and I've been encouraged in what might seem to be a backward

sort of way, as these messages have provoked questions from people wondering about the reality of their salvation, saying, "I have doubts about this. I'm concerned about this." Well, I'm not glad that these people have doubts but I'm glad that those conversations are taking place because I'm sure they're representative of other things that are going on in people's minds that are not spoken. It is good for us to examine these things, to examine this doctrine and then examine ourselves in light of it, and not simply take it for granted. You see, we are preaching a new birth, we are calling people out of the world and out of spiritual death to new life in what we say. We are not preaching a mere moral reformation, an outward change of morality that might look good to men but is devoid of the life of God in the soul. We're not interested in that. That's not important in comparison that you would know that you, yourself, have been born again; that you, yourself, have experienced the miracle of regeneration.

Now what we said about this doctrine, I've defined it multiple times and I'll just repeat that to refresh our memory. We said that regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a man, in the heart of a sinner in which he imparts divine life to that sinner so that the sinner will repent of sin, believe in Christ, and serve Christ in newness of life. There is an act of God that takes place in the soul of man. It is a secret act. It is not observable with human eyes. Jesus spoke about that in terms that we'll see on Tuesday from John 3. It is a work of the Spirit of God in the heart of the man, in the soul of a woman, and bringing them to new life in Christ.

Now what we saw last Sunday was we saw that Scripture speaks about this reality a number of different ways with different metaphors. It uses the term regeneration. It speaks about new birth, a new creation, about a spiritual resurrection, and those terms create in us an expectation that is tied to life, that is tied to a dynamic within the man that changes his entire course of affections, it changes his entire perspective on life, and it is a life tied to the God who has made himself known in Jesus Christ and in his written word. You're made alive to things to which you were previously dead, you could say.

On Tuesday this past week, we saw why this new birth was necessary. Why must a man be born again? It's because the natural man is not fit for the kingdom of heaven. He does not seek God. He is hostile to God. He does not understand the Gospel. He has been blinded by Satan and is under the dominion of Satan. He is ignorant and hard of heart. We covered all of those things and the cds of the messages are available in the lobby or the audio files are available online, and we showed those things repeatedly from Scripture, I'm not going to go over it again here today. But what I want you to see is that a holy God who has his kingdom in a realm that belongs to him, that belongs to Christ, a man who belongs to Satan cannot enter into that kingdom without being completely made over, without being changed. So the natural man, the unregenerate man does not have a title deed on the kingdom of God, he is not fit for the kingdom of God, he can't just walk into the kingdom of God on his own power. He's dead. He is separated from God and, therefore, he needs the help of God in a supernatural way if ever he is to enter into the kingdom of God, if ever he is to be reconciled to the God that he has sinned against.

So we ask the question again: are you born again? How can you know if you've been born again? Let me just say this in a summary overstatement view and then we'll enter into the text more this morning. How can you know if you've been born again? Let's state it this way: your prior hostility toward God, your ignorance of Christ, is replaced by love, trust and obedience in the truth, the truth which is Christ, the truth which is his revealed word. You have been changed from hostility and ignorance, maybe indifference as you consciously experience it, toward being alive and having this principle of love toward Christ and his people in your heart. You have been changed from hostility to trust and submission to him; from a life of disobedience and defiance toward God, some of us literally having shaken our fists at the sky in defiance toward God and having that replaced by a bended knee before him, loving him, honoring him, worshiping him, and trusting in Christ alone to make that possible. You have rejected your sense of goodness. You've rejected your sense of reliance on your works and now you are trusting in mercy you do not deserve and in a righteousness that is not your own for your reconciliation to God, all of those things expressing the reality that hostility and ignorance have been replaced by love, trust and obedience, and I want to show you why that must be the case in a new birth which comes from the God of the Bible.

So let's consider it this way. First of all, let's consider regeneration and the character of God as we go back to 1 John. Regeneration and the character of God and what I want to do here this morning is not so much engage in a technical dissection of the doctrine of regeneration, but rather to give you a sense of the biblical logic which makes it absolutely necessary that these matters of change are necessary for the one who has been born again, and we can pursue it this way, we can just start with this simple reality that we can all relate to, what we all can relate to and understand is that in most instances, if not all, a physical child somehow bears the resemblance of his physical parents, a child somehow manifests the physical traits of the ones who gave birth to him or her and, you know, my kids, some of my girls look just like the Green's have looked like for generations, it's kind of cool, some of them look more like their mom's side, but there is that physical resemblance that those who are familiar with our family, even if they've never met us, could look at that and say, "That's a Green right there." And that's true of other families as well, of course, a child somehow manifests those physical traits because it is passed along from the parent to the child in the act of conception. We understand that. We get that.

Well, beloved, what I want you to see is that that which we know and is familiar in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual realm. New birth, being born again, begets a person, it yields to a person who starts to manifest God's spiritual traits. God has spiritual attributes and we've studied those in the past. He is a God of a particular kind of character with certain kinds of perfections and the aspects of his moral character which define who God is, when he gives birth to new life in the soul of a man, that man starts to manifest those spiritual characteristics as well and we're going to see this very very plainly from Scripture in 1 John.

Now let me just set the stage for this very briefly here with a look at what 1 John says about the character of God. First of all, it tells us that God is holy. God is holy.

Regeneration and the character of God, we see the statement, we see the teaching that God is holy. Look at 1 John 1:5. 1 John 1:5 says, and we're just going to look at these things really briefly, "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." Light being a metaphor for his moral purity, his moral perfection. He is perfect morally and he is perfect in truth. There is no stain of sin in him. The book of James tells us that he cannot even be tempted by sin and so there is this separate nature about God where he is totally separate from that which is deceptive, that which is sinful, that which is wrong. God is distinct and separate from that as much as light is distinct from darkness, and that is a way of describing his holiness. God is holy and we must keep that in mind when we think about the new birth.

Now secondly, 1 John also tells us that God is love. Look at chapter 4. 1 John 4:8 says, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." By very nature, he is love. His love is part of his perfection. It is the nature of God to seek the well-being of others even to the point of self-sacrifice. He gives of himself. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," and here in verse 9 you see that same spirit being expressed in the Scripture where it says in verse 9, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And so Scripture here telling us your salvation was not a result of your initiating love toward God or your initiating faith toward God, rather it was a matter of God initiating something on your behalf at personal cost for your well-being. This is God acting in love, sending Christ, Christ becoming man, Christ going to the cross, Christ suffering in your place, Christ bearing the penalty of sin on your behalf that you might be reconciled to a holy God.

Sometimes I like to just pause and take a breath because I know I get going and sometimes it may be hard to keep up with me. Do you see the love of God in this, that concern for the well-being of his people? Christ coming at the cost of sacrifice, of personal sacrifice in order to give himself for your sins and mine? This is love at its highest. This is love at its best. This is love initiated by God, not prompted by anything in you. Let's not lose sight of that, beloved. Remember who you were. Remember who sinners are. They do not seek God. They are hostile to him. They do not understand the Gospel. They are blinded by Satan. He is their father and they are ignorant and hard of heart. There is nothing in sinful man that appeals naturally to God. There is nothing about sinful man that prompts him to love us and just forces his hand that he must love us. No, everything about us is darkness and sinful and contrary to everything that his nature is, and it's when you were like that, when you were an enemy, when you were helpless, when you were a sinner that in the midst of humanity like that, God sent his Son as a gracious initiative to redeem a people for himself. That is love. That's what God is like and no man is naturally born into that condition.

So God is holy, God is love, and one more here, God is true. God is true. Look at 1 John 5:20 where it says that, "we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding." I'll slow down. I hear pages still rustling and that's fine. 1 John 5:20, "we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may

know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ." John says, "I wrote this so that you could know the true God. He is true and," he says, "I wrote this so that you would know that you are in Him, that you belong to Him." He said earlier in verse 13 of chapter 5, look up there with me, he said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." So he says, "One of the things that I want you to understand is that God is true, that you're in Him who is true," and then he sums it up, "in His Son Jesus Christ." Beloved, this is a really crucial point. The true God has revealed himself uniquely in the Incarnation of his Son. The true God has manifested himself. He has made himself known in Jesus Christ and so not simply through his attribute of holiness, not simply through his attribute of love, these Scriptures call us to face-to-face reckoning with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ if you are to know if you've been born again.

So with that little groundwork, we say once again that the new birth, regeneration produces the character of God in your life. In order for that statement to mean anything, you have to know something about the character of God, right? If you want to know what a child is going to somewhat resemble, you have to have some pictures or know the parents. You say, "Okay, I can make a comparison here. I see there's a family resemblance here." Well, beloved, when you ask yourself the question, "Am I born again? Have I been born again? Am I in this realm of salvation?" and you understand that God gives a new birth for that to happen, then you start to see the light start to go on. "Oh, there must be some kind of manifestation of the holiness that resembles God's, a love that somehow resembles God's. There must be some kind of centrality to the person of Christ who is the truth of this God who is true."

And so that's the idea and 2 Peter 1, you can turn there, it's just the book immediately prior, the letter immediately prior to 1 John, 2 Peter 1, and we've said that the new birth produces faith, it's not faith that produces the new birth, Peter speaks to this right from the start in 2 Peter 1:1, he says, "Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." You are on the receiving end of the gift of faith from God and, therefore, he is entitled to praise. We praise and honor his name. Peter goes on and says in verse 2, he says, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." Divine power has given new life to you. The outcome of that act of divine generosity on your behalf is that you partake of the divine nature, that you start to sample it, you start to resemble it, you start to reflect it in your life, and this is what, going back to 1 John, the Apostle John emphasizes as he writes to these people so that they may know that they have eternal life.

So we've covered regeneration and the character of God simply making the point that we need to know who the parent is, who the father is, so that we know what to look like, what to look for, I should say, what is it that we look forward to see if the child is actually

in the family or not, and that brings us to our second point: regeneration and the life of the believer. Regeneration and the life of the believer, and let me just say a word of encouragement for those of you that struggle with doubt, that struggle to know these things. God has anticipated the problem that you have, the problem that you're going through. He has given this book, the purpose of 1 John specifically is so that you would know that you have eternal life. God is not playing hide-n-seek, he's made these things plain and revealed in his word so that we could understand and come to a knowledge of the condition of our soul. So we're to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. You are to know that you're a Christian, contrary to what other religions might teach, and that is to bring you to a place of settled trust and security that, "I am His and He is mine," as the hymnwriter says.

So what we want to do here in our remaining time is to consider these three traits of a believer in light of the character of God that we've just seen, three traits to consider whether you, yourself, have been born again, and these things are distinct, they're not hidden, they're not difficult. At the same time, beloved, this is not a checklist that you go through, "Do you read your Bible? Do you witness? Do you do this?" Check. Check. Check. I must be a Christian. It's not like that. These are speaking to traits of your inner man, who you are inside, what your affections are, and so let's look at them in light of the character of God as we've looked at it here oh so briefly already.

We said that God is holy. God is holy. Well, corresponding to that, the new birth breaks your pattern of sin. The new birth breaks your pattern of sin. We asked the question, "Are you born again?" One of the questions that you should wrestle with, one of the questions that you should ask is, "Has my life changed from an orientation toward sin and rebellion or indifference toward God toward being alive to Him and desiring holiness?" Has there been a change like that in your life? Something like that?

Go back to our foundational text, 1 John 2:29, and we are following these in the order in which they are given in the text of this epistle is the reason for this sequence. 1 John 2:29 says, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." That is "born of Him" is an indication that you are on the receiving act of the begetting of God; that God has begotten you; that God has done something to you that you were on the receiving end of. And beloved, there is this, there is a point of grammar here that is quite significant wrapped up in that phrase, "is born of Him," is born of God. It's in the Greek perfect tense and what that means is, what the significance of that is, is that the Greek perfect tense refers to a completed past act that has continuing effects up to the time of the writing, or speaking here, if you have been born again, there will be continuing effects from that that show in your life as reflected in the context of what has been given here.

So the idea is this: if you have been born again in the past, if God has done that miraculous work and changed you into a new creation there will be effects of that that are shown in this particular way, and that's what he's saying in verse 29. If you know that he is righteous and a righteous God has given birth to someone, then you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of him. This idea of biblical holiness,

of biblical righteousness somehow starts to manifest itself in the life of the one who has been redeemed. Perhaps a man who is known for his angry, volatile temper is changed into a man much more marked by peace and reconciliation and a conciliatory spirit. Perhaps a man marked by lust and enslaved to the lust of the flesh finds himself, while not yet perfect, having a different pattern of life and rejecting and detesting that which he once loved and pursued with all of his passion. He says, "I no longer desire that. I still fall into it, I still stumble but, oh, I hate it when I do!" There's been a change away from a sinful orientation toward an orientation of righteousness. Perhaps a woman finds herself in a sinful relationship, God saves her and she says, "I can't continue in this relationship anymore. I have to break this off. This is displeasing to my God. This hurts Him. I don't like this." That being a manifestation of the new birth, an orientation toward holiness. You see, the past act of new birth carries living consequences today, in some manner, in some fashion changing a man from his prior love and pursuit of sin toward a rejection of that and a pursuit of holiness because he desires to please God and now it is holiness that gives him contentment rather than sin. You know what that's like, don't you, if you're a Christian? You should know something about that. You should know some kind of experience of that in some way in your life.

Look at 1 John 3:7. This is a matter of God versus Satan, righteousness versus sin, truth versus deception. 1 John 3:7, stating it in plain language, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you." He says, "Understand that people are going to try to deceive you on this very point. This is so clear, this is so necessary, that there will be those in the church and in the world," John is saying, "who will teach you to disregard this and treat it as unimportant, as not something significant at all." And so he places on you, he places on us, a responsibility to make sure that we're not deceived on this point. 1 John 3:7, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." Do you see the tie-in to the character of God here? Do you see the attribute of God having a necessary effect on the one that belongs to him? It could be no other way. Verse 8, "the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God," there's that perfect tense again, "No one who is born of God practices sin," continually indulges in sin without repentance, "because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin," he can't keep living in sin, "because he is born of God." He can't. It's an impossibility. There has been a change in nature that makes that impossible. Verse 10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

Now let me just give us a mental break here for just a second, give you a ridiculous example that cannot happen but that illustrates the point. That's all we're trying to do. I'm making a ridiculous example to make an important point. Suppose that you could change a man into an elephant, you could really actually change a man into an elephant. That new elephant is going to start acting like an elephant, eating peanuts and throwing its trunk up and doing whatever else elephants do in their lives. He can't keep acting like a man because he's actually been changed by nature into an elephant. Now that's a really bad example but it makes the point, it makes the point that something new has replaced

what was old and what is new lives according to the new nature rather than the old. The elephant doesn't keep living like a man because he's been changed into something new.

Now having taken that little break with a really silly example there, understand that one who has been a child of Satan and enslaved by him and hateful to God, who has been changed, who has been born again, who is made a new creation, given a new nature, he must start somehow living according to that new nature not because he's saving himself by his works, that's not the point of what we're talking about at all, what we're saying is that in genuine salvation there is an act of regeneration by God that takes place, that puts new life into that man, that gives him a new nature, makes him a new creation, and he starts living according to that principle of new life that he had never known before. The one who gave him that new principle of life is righteous and, therefore, one of the aspects of the new life is a righteousness that comports with the perfect character of God as revealed in his word.

Now let me tell you that there's two aspects to this that I want to work out by way of application. First of all, you ask yourself the question, "Am I born again?" You ask the question, "Do I desire the righteousness of God? Is that attractive to me? Do I want that even though I stumble and fall from time to time? Do I desire that or not? Is there a life change in that?" That's one aspect of it that you can deal with, there's a second aspect of application here that I have to go to, that I have to go to because it is the place where as a practical matter, many Christians will reject this doctrine even though they affirm it in their mind and we need to, we just need to lay this out and make it plain, okay? Because where the professing church and where professing Christians will reject this in practice is when they have loved ones who have made a profession of Christ in the past but are living in utterly unbroken sin. They can live in an adulterous relationship, they can live in fornication, they can live in drugs, they can live in alcohol with no compunction about it whatsoever, they show no regret, no remorse, no desire to leave it, and yet the Christian who has heard these things about regeneration will say, "I still think he's a Christian. He professed Christ. He was baptized when he was 10 on a profession of faith. He asked Jesus into his heart and therefore I'm sure that he's still a Christian." Perhaps not recognizing that they are denying everything about the nature of biblical Christianity with that statement and, beloved, you have to love God and you have to love Christ and you have to love the truth more than you love your own flesh and blood, and at the very very least say, "That life that he is living is not consistent with a claim to being a Christian." You cannot defend as a Christian one who is living in unbroken, unrepentant sin without betraying the Christ that you say you know and that you love.

So we have to be, we have to love Christ and we have to love his word enough to even if we're saying it with tears streaming down our face, "That prior confession he made could not have been the real thing because look at his life. It is filled with unbroken, unrepentant, unrighteousness and the one who does not practice righteousness belongs to Satan. He needs to be evangelized, not affirmed in Christ." And those of you with young children that are growing up in your family now, you need to embrace these things now so that you're prepared if it comes to you in the future. It's painful, I get that. It hurts to say this because the consequences of it are eternal, but wouldn't it be better to know the

truth than to affirm a lie? Wouldn't it be better to be faithful to Christ and to affirm these things according to Scripture rather than to affirm a man or a daughter in her self-deception? Scripture is not unclear about this and we need to uphold the word, we need to be faithful to Christ above all else, recognizing that Christ came, he said, "I came to set mother against daughter, father against son," that sometimes loyalty to Christ will divide families in the most intimate relationships of them all, and you as a believer, one of the ways that you live out faithfulness to this truth that we're talking about is that you don't fudge it simply because someone that you love is at stake.

Look at verse 10 with me again, chapter 3, verse 10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God." So we realize that in the new birth a pattern of sin is broken. Beloved, at this point now we're just trying to understand what the reality, what the nature of salvation is. God gives new birth to someone, they're born again, and what God does when he imparts new life to someone is he plants a holy nature in them, a nature that is disposed toward righteousness and against sin. It doesn't make us perfect in this life, perfection awaits us in the future, but it does mean this, 1 John 1:9, that we're confessing our sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The reaction to sin tells you what the nature inside is. "Oh, I sinned again! I hate that! Father, forgive me!" manifesting a man that's been born again. "Eh, it's not that big a deal," manifesting the nature of one who's never understood the holiness of God.

So your disposition toward sin changes. You are not able to sin with enjoyment. You ask the question, "Am I born again?" asking that to yourself, "Are you born again?" What's your attitude toward sin? What's your attitude toward sin. I understand what James says, we all stumble in many ways. That's not what we're talking about here. We're not talking about the perfection of your life, we're asking what the direction of your heart is toward sin. The true believer says, "I hate it. I've got this thing that clings to me like Paul said in Romans 7, but I hate it! If I could snap my fingers and be free from it, I would because I'm not clinging to it. It's clinging to me but I'm not clinging to it."

Are you born again? What's your disposition toward sin? Secondly, the new birth moves you to love other Christians. It moves you to love other Christians. Remember that we just said that God is love. Love is central, it's a central perfection of God. God is love. Well, the new birth changes you. The God who gives birth does this, he plants a loving nature in you, and what we're saying is the unified nature that God imparts in the new birth is holy and it is loving.

1 John 3:14, he says, "We know that we have passed out of death into life," we know that we have experienced the new birth, "because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death."

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." Born of God, past completed action of the new birth producing continuing effects of a loving nature in the life of the one who's been

saved. Verse 8, without that you haven't been born again. Verse 8, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

Now this God who loved the world, sent Christ, who is generous and gracious and patient and merciful in nature like that, saves a man and imparts his life into that man. There is going to be a reflection, a turn toward love in that manner in the one who has been born again because God plants a loving nature in you, and one of the ways that this shows up is that a true Christian naturally loves those who share the same nature as he does. Like attracts like, so to speak. "I've been born of God," a man says, "I've been born from this God who is love and you have too? We share something in common. We have fellowship with one another." We share this together and it's a natural response to the new birth whereas before there was perhaps a hatred toward the people of God, at least an indifference, an uncomfortable sense of being around them, "What is wrong with these people?" A man is born again and says, "Oh, now I get it. We have so much in common. I want to share life with people like that. I want to give of myself to them and let them give of themselves to me." That's the idea. If God is giving birth to a spiritual family like that, the ones who individually are members of that family are going to share in the affections and the life and the concerns of the family. The one who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love, does not know God for God is love.

So beloved, we ask the question: are you born again? Well, to take that a step further, is there a principle of love for Christians in your heart? Perhaps there's one other way that we could just try to illustrate and apply this and to think about it. It's one thing, it's one thing to be a chameleon that adopts the color of the environment that you find yourself in, it's one thing to be in a gathering like this and to do what's necessary to kind of fit in, but what is your disposition when Christianity is attacked in the world? What is your disposition when a Christian is mocked in your circle of friendship by unbelievers? Who do you naturally side with? Who do you go to the defense of? Do you join in the mocking? Do you join in ostracizing that person professing Christ? Or do you step across the line and say, "When you say that about her, you say it about me too." And you stand with the people of God even in opposition to the world. These questions are pretty searching, aren't they, but they clarify things for us.

Thirdly, finally as we come toward the end of things here. Regeneration brings you to faith in Christ. The new birth brings you to faith in Christ. Look at 1 John 5:1, and this one is purely vertical. You know, when we talk about holiness there was kind of an internal dimension to it. What is your attitude toward sin? What is your attitude toward the things of God? I love holiness or it's not that big a deal to me. In love, there's a horizontal dimension to it and how do you interact with and how do you consider the people of God. Here now when we talk about faith in Christ, the vertical dimension comes in.

1 John 5:1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." It is the exact same construction that we've been seeing all along. In 1 John 3:9, whoever practices righteousness is born of God. In 1 John 4:7, whoever loves is born of God. Now in chapter 5, verse 1, "Whoever believes that

Jesus is the Christ is born of God," the exact same grammatical construction. The new birth produces someone who believes in Jesus Christ. It produces an abiding faith in Christ who is the truth and in some ways this might be in some ways the preeminent place to start, even though it's placed at the end in the sequence. The new birth produces abiding faith in Christ who is the truth, and this is what I love to ask people who are struggling with their assurance: tell me what you believe about Jesus Christ. Tell me what you believe about his work on the cross. Tell me what you think about Christ because that takes it out of the realm of performance and puts it into the realm of faith. Faith, biblical faith is the evidence of regeneration. Saving faith shows that a man has been born again.

What is saving faith? The Shorter Catechism defines it this way, "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered to us in the Gospel." To have faith in Christ, beloved, means that you receive him and you rest in him. Christ is presented as the one who came to seek and to save sinners; that he died for sinners according to the Scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day and after that appeared to many witnesses. This is the Gospel. Saving faith hears that and receives Christ and says, "I'm a sinner. I need a Savior. I recognize that Christ is the only One. I receive Him. I rely on Him alone. And not only that, I'm not even going to try to earn my salvation anymore because I understand that Jesus paid it all and I'm going to rest in Him. My conscience finds its satisfaction in Him. I rest in Christ as a sufficient Savior and I need nothing else. I need no one else. My works cannot improve on His righteousness. My works can't pay for a single sin. Jesus, Your blood and righteousness are my hope, they're my glorious dress. I rest in a righteousness that is not my own but is given to me as a gift."

Faith receives Christ and rests upon him. There's a knowledge of the claims of Christ in the Gospel. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Faith says, "I know that." There is an intellectual component, there is a content to true faith that you know and that you understand. There is an element of belief in that. You agree with it. You affirm it. A man could know that Christ claims that and said, "But I don't agree. I think every religion leads to God." Well, that's not saving faith no matter what else you say about Jesus, but saving faith knows what Christ claims and goes further and agrees with it, affirms it and says, "Yes, what Jesus said is true."

And then finally, saving faith has an element of commitment to that. True saving faith is not a momentary emotional response to Christ, it's not a temporary mental agreement, true faith, beloved, is a conscious yielding of yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ. You come to Christ and you give yourself to him. You come to Christ with an attitude that says whether you put it in these exact words or not, "I belong irrevocably to You. I am Yours forever. I will follow You. I belong to You. I yield to You as Lord, Master and God and I will have no other God, I will have no other Master, just receive me into Your kingdom and I receive You now."

And so there is this element in true faith of knowledge of who Christ claims to be and what he has done, there is this element of believing it, "I agree with that," and true faith

goes that step to commitment that says, "Jesus, I'll take up my cross and follow You. I'll leave the world behind. I'll leave my love for sin behind. I come to You," as the hymnwriter said, "Naked, I cling to You for dress. Helpless, I look to You for grace. Christ, as You are revealed in Scripture, I receive You in exactly that way myself personally. I'm not relying on what my parents taught me. I'm not looking to the world. I am relying on You and on You alone and I belong to You and You alone. I'm Yours, You're mine forever."

Is there something like that in your heart toward Christ? Faith receives Christ. It does not contribute merit so that you earn your salvation. Faith is simply the means by which we receive him in humble, submissive faith that has a principle of love and obedience wrapped into it, "My heart will belong to You. I will obey You. I will seek You. I am Yours." That, beloved, is what God gives in the new birth. He gives someone a new disposition toward Christ that receives Christ and trusts him like that. It's supernatural. There is not the capacity in the heart of an unregenerate man to give that kind of faith to Christ because as we saw on Tuesday, the unregenerate man, hostile, does not seek God, cannot yield to God in that way. It takes a new birth to free him from those chains that he might respond to Christ with faith like that.

So are you born again? Do you know Christ in something like this way? You see, beloved, the call of the Gospel is not for you to try harder, the call of the Gospel is actually a release from that bondage. The call of the Gospel is not for you to improve your morality, the call of the Gospel is for you to confess your godlessness and immorality to Christ and ask him in mercy to receive you as an unworthy sinner and to make you his own. That's the call of the Gospel. Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

So beloved, are you born again? Well, do you prefer holiness to sin? Do you prefer love to hostility? Do you prefer Christ above all else? God help us all to examine our hearts. God lead us all to this wonderful saving faith in a wonderful Lord.

Father, may it be true for each one of us that we would be found in true faith in Christ, having been born again. Father, for those that are in Christ, may these words that we've heard today affirm them, strengthen them and encourage them and say, "Ah, those things are real, God! I do belong to You. I have been born again." For those that are struggling and do not know and still have questions in their mind, Father, may Your Holy Spirit show mercy to them and open their eyes and mind and help them. For those indifferent or hostile, Father, may You have mercy on them even as You had on me long ago, to turn their unbelieving sinful hearts toward Christ. Father, we evangelize our friends, our neighbors, our family members. We preach the Gospel in utter dependence upon this reality, that unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. We as men and women do not have the power to impart that new life to them and so, Father, we look to You to do that which You alone can do so that You alone would receive the glory, and that those who are saved under the power of Your word, under the power of Christ, would see Christ exalted, that they would forget the channel who brought them the word,

seeing only the Christ who loved them and gave Himself for them on the cross of Calvary. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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