

How Can You Tell If You've Been Born Again?

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As we come to the word of God this morning, we are returning to our exposition of the book of 1 John in the New Testament. We're going to not quite start there. We're going to start in the Gospel of Matthew if you want to start turning to the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 7 is where we're actually going to begin our consideration of Scripture this morning dealing with this most important topic, having nothing to do with the events of this past week, we kind of deliberately have avoided talking about the affairs of the world here from the pulpit at Truth Community Fellowship. We think the word of God is more important than anything that happens in the world and so we keep our focus there. Today we're going to consider the question: how can you know if you've been born again? How can you know if you've been born again? That without question is the most important issue for your soul because as the events of the world come and go, as world leaders rise and fall, you are still left with this permanent issue that one day you are going to stand before God and give an account and the question is going to be whether you enter the kingdom of heaven or not. Jesus said in John 3:3 that there is a singular distinguishing particular issue that is involved when he told Nicodemus, "Unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." And so the important question is: have you been born again? Which leads to the question: how can you know? How can you know if you've been born again? How can you have certainty on it? Well look, if we're going to take the word of God seriously at all, we have to realize that we have to let the Bible give the answer to that question. The Bible, God's word, is alone qualified to speak to the distinguishing marks of what it means to be born again, what it means that someone has been born from above. Only the Bible can tell us that. We cannot rely on our human wisdom and sometimes, in some instances, we may need to re-examine things that we've always assumed to be true in order to know the real and accurate answer to that question: how can you know if you've been born again?

Why is this so important? Well, it's not just that being born again is the prerequisite to entering into God's kingdom, having the forgiveness of your sins, it's not just that. The problem additionally is that you and I and everyone who ever comes under the sound of Bible teaching has a great capacity for self-deception. There is a great risk, a great threat, of thinking that you know Christ, of thinking that you have been born again, when in fact, you have not and that's why I wanted you to turn to the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7, verse 21. Here's what we're going to do this morning: we're going to get into 1 John very quickly but this is kind of like being at the edge of a pier that goes

into the lake. We're going to take a running start before we jump into the water that we're going to actually be swimming in this morning. We're going to start in Matthew and just run through a couple of quick passages in the New Testament and land in the sweet waters of the book of 1 John.

Matthew 7, remembering what we're saying here is to understand that there is a great capacity for self-deception and as you think about these things, I want you to think not only in terms of your own soul, I want you to do that, but I also want you to think of the people that are around you who profess to know Christ but are living ungodly lives, people that maybe walked an aisle some time ago but never showed the fruit of any change in their lives. I want us to think about the practical ramifications of this. We're not simply setting this for academic reasons, we want to know the truth so that we can have an assurance and that we can help be accurate guides to others in their pursuit of spiritual life. One of the things that we have to realize is that one of the primary threats is this great capacity for self-deception. Matthew 7:21, Jesus speaking says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'" "In your name, in your name, in your name, we were doing it all in your name, Lord. Why are you not opening the doors to heaven for me?" Verse 23, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me you who practice lawlessness.'" Now what I want you to notice about that quite simply is that people had the name of Jesus on their lips but their lives were obviously marked by something else other than the true righteousness that comes from being born again. They said one thing, they believed it about themselves, but they were deceived.

Turn over to the Gospel of Luke 6 as we take a couple more running steps down the pier toward launching into 1 John this morning. Luke 6:46, Jesus said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" There it is again, the question of people having the name of the Lord Jesus on their lips, calling him and addressing him by that exalted title but whose lives contradict the testimony of their lips. Verse 47, Jesus says, "Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built." Verse 49, "But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great." That's a picture of final judgment. Final judgment against people who in this life are calling Jesus the Lord but not living a life marked by obedience to him, not living a life that's marked by the reality of regeneration, not showing forth the fruit of being born again.

You see, multiple generations of teachers have unfortunately conditioned people within the walls of the church to think that they can walk an aisle, pray a prayer and then their eternal soul is secured without regard to whether there is actually a life change that is produced by that supposed act. Look, there are people that legitimately get saved in the

moment that they walk an aisle and the Spirit of God is really working on their heart but nothing could be more calculated if you were going to calculate and say, "I want to deliberately deceive people into thinking they are saved when they're not," you would do exactly what so many churches do is you would tell them that one event can be the proof of salvation. Just come and pray this prayer and then go out and it doesn't matter what happens after that. Just write the date down in your notebook and you're fine. If you're trying to deceive people and lead them into deception and to make them think that they are saved when they're not, if you are trying to condition people to be the kind of people that Jesus warns against here, that would be a great way to do it. I'm sorry, that's just true. That is just true and we have to separate our thinking from the thought that doing a particular act or praying one particular prayer is the mark of true salvation and looking back into the past at something without considering whether there is the mark of being born again in your life. We just have to deal with these things honestly.

Turn to the book of Titus, further back in the New Testament toward the end of Paul's epistles after 1 and 2 Timothy and just before the book of Hebrews. Titus 1:16. We have to convince ourselves that the Bible treats this as a most serious issue, that this capacity for self-deception is much greater than we give credit for it. Titus 1:16 says, "They profess to know God," you see, there it is again, this statement on their lips, "I know God. I know Christ," "but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." It's not enough simply to have a testimony on your lips if your heart hasn't been changed. It's not enough. It's not going to stand in the torrents of judgment to have lived the life of a hypocrite. Scripture warns us about this again and again.

Turn over to 1 John now, continue on past Hebrews, past 1 and 2 Peter and we'll land here in 1 John 2:4. We'll look at a couple of verses here. Do you see how often the Scriptures point us to this? Warn us about saying one thing and living a different way? Do you see it? You have to see this. You have to take this seriously. Apparently, from the multiple times that God said it in his word, apparently there is a great capacity for self-deception so that there must be repeated warnings and instructions in the Scriptures about it lest people are deceived and walk into judgment, casually walking up as though things are going to be fine only to find out that it's way too late. We need to know if we've been born again. 1 John 2:4, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Chapter 2, verse 9, "The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. He says one thing and he lives another. He says one thing and he does another.

Here's what you need to see, beloved, about yourself and to properly interpret spiritual life around you: what a man says about himself is not necessarily a good barometer of the condition of his soul. What we say is not necessarily a good barometer of the condition of our souls and so that's why we need to deal with this question: how can you know if you've been born again? Really what we're saying is, that you have to apply the right standard to make the right evaluation. If you have a false standard that you're using to evaluate this most important question by, you're going to come to a wrong conclusion. But if you have the proper standard, the standard of God's word by which to evaluate

these things, then you're going to be in a position to understand under the leading of the Holy Spirit, to understand the reality or the falsity of the state of your soul. So we're not trying to pick a fight with anybody here, we're just trying to give voice to God's word and what he says.

In the sequential teaching of God's word here from this pulpit, we've reached the end of chapter 2, 1 John 2:29, and that's going to be our text for this morning after all of that introduction and I'm quite eager to share these things with you here this morning. 1 John 2:29,

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

Look at it again: "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." Now, last time when we introduced the doctrine of regeneration, we gave you a definition of it and I'm going to repeat it here for the benefit of those who weren't here last week or visitors here this morning. What we said about regeneration to understand it is this: regeneration is a secret act, it's an invisible, hidden act, you could say, regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts the divine nature to a sinner so that the sinner will repent of sin, believe in Christ and serve Christ in newness of life. It's a work of God on the human heart. A work of God, that's why Jesus says you have to be born again or you have to be born from above. It requires a work of God to change the sinful heart so that that person will believe in Christ and start to live in newness of life. Absent the work of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing that anyone can do to save themselves. The Holy Spirit must be involved in our conversion or our conversion does not take place. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts the divine nature to a sinner so that the sinner will repent of sin, believe in Christ and serve Christ in newness of life. That's a mouthful, I realize, but we're going to simply answer this question: how can you know if you've been born again? This verse gives us the way to understand it. What we're saying, what we're asking in this message theologically or what are the results of regeneration? What happens when God does that work in a human heart? What transpires in their life to follow?

Well, today's message has two main points, each with three subpoints. First of all, we're going to look at regeneration and the character of God. That's the first point here today: regeneration and the character of God. Let me say this, this is most fundamental to your thinking; this is the starting point and this sets the trajectory that's going to help you understand the inevitable consequences and the inevitable truth of biblical teaching: because regeneration starts with God and it is a work of the Holy Spirit where he is communicating, he is instilling, he is imparting into the human heart divine life, the fact of the matter is that what he is imparting is the life of God into the soul of man. That has consequences. That means that you must start before - listen to me - before you start to think about the human effects of what regeneration must be, it means that you must start your thinking about what regeneration means and what it looks like, you have to start it with the character of God. Because it is a spiritual act that comes from God himself, you have to start with the character of God so that you can anticipate what the effects of his

work are going to be. This is very clear, plain and direct in the Scriptures. In fact, it's very clear, plain and direct right in our verse.

Look at verse 29 with me. Notice where John begins here as he, for the first time, introduces this phrase of being born of him, being born of God. Look at what he says. He says, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." His starting point is the character of God and he says because God is righteous, therefore what God gives birth to is also going to display and manifest something of that righteous character of God. What God gives birth to is going to reflect God just as much as biological parents producing a human child, that child is somehow going to bear their characteristics. This is very simple in nature, it's very simple in the spiritual life. The reason that it's difficult sometimes for us to grasp this and understand it is because we've been so conditioned to disregard the pages and the easy words of Scripture, the clear teaching of Scripture. So that's why we have to teach it carefully. How can you know if you've been born again? Here's the simple answer to it, a one sentence answer to it. How can you know if you've been born again? Answer: the character of God begins to manifest itself in your life. You can know if you've been born from God if the character of God begins to manifest itself in your life and if, stating it negatively, based on everything that we've already seen in those passages that lead up to this, if the character of God is absent from a person's life, then it's not difficult to step back and say, "That person has never been born again no matter what they say," because we've seen Jesus teach us and we've seen his apostles tell us over and over and over and over again that what a man says about himself is not the final arbiter of whether he's truly born again or not. Look at his life. Look at his life. Look at your life, is what Jesus says. Listen: in regeneration God imparts his life to us when he gives spiritual birth to us. The Holy Spirit indwells you Scripture teaches and so the omnipotent, gracious, powerful Holy Spirit coming in and light coming into darkness is going to overwhelm what had previously been there and a new nature is going to start to manifest itself in that person's life.

Look at 2 Peter 1. Just turn back a couple of pages to the left there because 1 John comes right after 2 Peter. 2 Peter 1:2, "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," it's a complex sentence structure, I know, but watch it, "by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." When God moves in a human heart and saves them and brings them to Christ, they are delivered from the dominating power of the corruption of the world and they start to manifest out in their lives the moral character of God and this is the clear teaching of the book of 1 John as well.

Now, I'm going to give you three aspects of the character of God, very plain. We're just picking up rocks that are right on the surface of the ground here. We don't even have to do any digging to get to buried treasures here. What we're going to see is right on the very surface of the Scriptures here. What is it about the character of God that the Apostle

John emphasizes in the letter of 1 John to give us a sense of direction about what we should expect? There are three things that we're going to look at that John particularly emphasizes here. We're not going to spend a lot of time on them. What is it about the character of God that informs the work that he does in regeneration? First of all this: God is holy. God is holy. Look at chapter 1, verse 5. This verse, verse 5, is really the cornerstone around which everything else is built in 1 John. John says, "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you," here it comes, a statement about the character of God, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." God is holy. He is righteous. He is true. He is separate from all of the corruption of the world. By his very nature, he is holy, set apart and by being set apart, his nature is such that he is separate from lies and he is separate from sin. God is light. God is holy. That's the nature of things.

Look at chapter 3, verse 7 here in this regard. Another statement about the character of God along these lines. Verse 7, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you." There it is again, beloved, "the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." Okay? God is righteous. God is holy. God is the one who gives birth to Christians in regeneration. That's the character of God so just hold that thought. Number 1: God is holy. Regeneration and the character of God, number 1: God is holy. Secondly, God is love. God is love. Oh beloved, we're building up to something to come here in just a little bit. Look at 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."

Now, these statements are so clear and so simple and in one sense so familiar to us that it almost seems pedantic to even make these points. It seems like an unnecessary recitation of basic familiar principles to say these things perhaps. But listen, it's not pedantic. This is not trivial even if we and by our over-familiarity and casual treatment of the character of a holy God have made it something light and superficial, we're talking about most profound issues about the character and nature of God. He is holy and righteous. He is love, not in a sentimental way, get this, not in a sentimental way with sugary affections for all of the world. He is love in the sense that he is a sacrificial, giving God who so loved the world, look at verse 10, "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." There is a theological content to the love of God that God intervened for sinners at the cost of his own Son and sacrificially Christ gave his life, bore the wrath on our behalf so that we might be delivered from the sins that we've committed against him. Not sugary affections. A holy, gracious God intervening for sinners at the cross. That's the love of God, not the provision necessarily of circumstances or world leaders that we like, a God who sent Christ into the world. When you think of the love of God, you should think, "The love of God, Christ on the cross for me." That's the love of God. God is holy. God is love.

Look at a third point here under this, the character of God: God is holy, God is love and God is true. God is true. Look at the end of the book, chapter 5, verse 20, next to the last verse in 1 John and I can't wait to get to this passage but it will be a while before we do. Chapter 5, verse 20. Again, just looking for the simple declarative statements about

elements of the character of God. "We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know," watch this, "Him who is true." So that we would know him who is true. God who is true. God who is truth. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me." Truth manifested. God intrinsically true. Titus 1:2 says that in fact God is so true that Titus says and Hebrews says that it is impossible for God to lie. That is how impeccable his character is, that it is impossible for him to violate his own character and tell an untruth, something that is contrary to reality, something that is misleading or false. God is incapable of that because he is so perfectly true.

God is holy. God is love. God is true. Now watch this, this isn't difficult. This isn't difficult. That holy, loving, true God is the God who does the work of regeneration and the God who does the work of regeneration is implanting, is imparting, his own nature into the life of a believer. So regeneration, get this, watch this, is the impartation by God of his own holy, true and loving nature into the life of a previously dead sinner. Okay, have you got it? We're just talking basic things that are right on the surface of Scripture here. So how can you know if you've been born again? How can you know if you've been born again? The character of God starts to appear in your life. A greater power than your pre-existing life has come upon you in true salvation and that's going to have a revolutionary impact on the life of the one who is previously unredeemed. That brings us to our second point here this morning and it's all going to parallel what we just said. The second major point here for this morning is: regeneration and the life of the believer. Regeneration and the life of the believer. You're going to see things right on the surface that are right there. We're going to look at three traits in the life of the believer. The Bible here in 1 John gives us at least three, we're only going to look at three, three traits to consider whether you've been born again or not. How is it that you can tell? You need to make this most basic observation right from the start: realize that the Bible is telling us to look at our present character traits rather than looking at a past act in order to bring assurance of the reality of your salvation to you. It's not telling us to look at a past act because a past act doesn't necessarily manifest the character of God but a life will show whether the character of God is present in someone's heart or not.

John gives us three traits to look at to consider whether you've been born again; three aspects of the results of regeneration. First of all, regeneration breaks your pattern of sin. Regeneration breaks your pattern of sin. Let's go back to our text, 1 John 2:29. John says, "If you know that He is righteous," regeneration and the character of God. God is righteous. God gives birth. What does that produce? It's not difficult. This is clear and as plain as it could be. "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." Now, Scripture isn't talking about a spiritual perfection that we attain to in this life, it's talking about the fact that there is a love, an affection for righteousness in your heart, desires for holiness, aspirations to be like the God that you say has saved you and that that actually somehow fleshes itself out in your life. Being born again - listen to me - being born again gives birth to righteous living.

Look at chapter 3, verse 8. What John does is that he gives us the negative and the positive on both sides of so many issues. He gives us the negative and the positive so that

we can't miss it. 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." Now verse 9, "No one who is born of God practices sin, because," look at this, "His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." What he's saying is that the pattern of sin in a believer's life is broken, that the dominating power of unbroken sin is broken in the life of a true believer. You can't continue on in your prior sinful life if you've been born again because the seed of God has been planted within you and that seed brings forth fruit and there will therefore be a change. He's not saying that it's impossible for a believer to sin. You can see that by the context. Remember what John said earlier in the letter, chapter 1, verse 8. He's not talking about a sinless perfection when he talks here in chapter 3 and in chapter 2. We know that because he had already established other principles that set the context in chapter 1. Look at verse 8, he says, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." Verse 10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us." So what we're saying here is not that you never, ever sin ever again after you become a Christian. That's not what we're saying at all. That's not what John is saying here. But what we are saying is that there is a change. You will not continually live in sin if you have been born again. Open, unbroken sin. Open, unbroken fornication and homosexuality and other sins of the sort are the mark of someone who has not been born again no matter how much they protest to the contrary with their lips. You can't have it both ways. You can't say, "I'm born again and I'm going to live in sin and disregard the commandments of God." It doesn't work that way because God is righteous and gives birth to Christians, his righteousness starts to manifest itself in their lives.

Now, to the contrary or on the other side of it, your approach to sin is that when it occurs in your life, you confess it and you repent. This is the part of the mark of regeneration breaking your pattern of sin. Rather than continuing on in it, when sin crops up in the life of a believer, what does he do? Verse 9 of chapter 1 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Chapter 2, verse 1, speaking to Christians he says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin but if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." So when we say that regeneration breaks the pattern of sin in your life, what we're saying is this: when you examine your life in light of the doctrine of regeneration, don't look for or expect spiritual perfection. That's not what it produces. What it produces is a love and a hunger and a pursuit of righteousness in your life that stems from the fact that God has put his Spirit within you and the Spirit of God by the power that he has over the human heart, starts to generate impulses and affections in your life for righteousness. Because those impulses are now what you want, you start to pursue them and act upon them and you live differently than you did during your life of sin. Understand that it's more than simply external behavior. It is a love for the righteousness of God, a love for the righteousness of Christ, that is the compelling affection of your heart.

That's what regeneration produces. Look for the heart affection that prefers holiness over sin. Look for a pattern of life where you confess sin and seek to repent of it. Look for

those kinds of heart affections. Look for the visible fruit of those invisible desires and you'll see the mark of regeneration. That's how you can know if you've been born again. Listen my friends, if you don't care about it at all, if you never think about the righteousness of God, if you never think about whether your life is pleasing to God or not, if you're indifferent to that, if you know your life is not pleasing to God and you don't care and you want to pursue your sinful life anyway, realize that those are the distinguishing marks of who is born again and who is not. If you don't care about whether your life is sinful or not, you're not born again. You're not. You're still in your sins even if you walked an aisle and were baptized in the past. That didn't save you because if God had saved you, your life would be changed. Your life would be marked by a reflection, a growing reflection of the righteous character of God. This is inescapable. God did not save you so that you could continue to live in sin in this life. He saved you so that you would live righteously and reflect the character of his Son. Why would he save you so that you could keep giving testimony to the deeds and character of the devil? Let's not kid ourselves here, right?

Regeneration breaks the power, the pattern of sin. Not to perfection in this life. You say, "What about that sin in my life? You know, my temper flares up and I think thoughts that I shouldn't. Does that mean that I'm not regenerate?" Well, my question at that point is: what do you think about that? Do you love that temper? Do you love that angry temper? Do you love your lusts? Or do you fight against them? Do you resist them? Does it break your heart? Do you go to God in confession and say, "Oh God, here I am again but I'm so sorry and I don't want to be that way." How do you react? Look beyond the particular acts and how do you react when sin crops up in your life and you're aware of it? Is it that, "I don't want to be that way. God, I confess it. God, I repent." Or is it, "Eh, this is who I am, get used to it." If it is who you are, "Get used to it, I don't care. I'm going to do what I want," you're not born again. You're still a sinner. You're still going to hell. It's that obvious. It's that clear.

Look at chapter 2, verse 29 with me again. "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." And so, having addressed whoever is being a hypocrite here today, let me talk to you hopefully with the tenderness of a pastor to those of you who are struggling with sin and you deal with it and you hate it and sometimes it makes you wonder if you're really a Christian or not. Listen, the people who are sensitive to sin are people whom God has put his Spirit in. The Bible doesn't describe a perfection of life, it describes a direction of life. It describes a heart that says, "I want to be like this even though I'm not perfectly like this." There is an element of this. Think about it this way: if it's clear to you that you used to live a life of sin, you disown it. You want to be separate. There is a sense in which you hate your old man. You hate what you used to be like. That's the mark of a regenerate heart. I like to put it this way and I mean every word that I'm about to say: if somehow in some kind of parallel universe the old Don Green walked into this room, that hateful, angry, arrogant, sensual man, if he showed up in this room, honestly, if the old Don Green showed up in this room, I would find a ball bat and I would beat him to death. I would club him to death because I want nothing to do with him. He no longer has a right to exist. Something about your repentance should bring about in your life a look back and say, "I hate who I used to

be. I hate the reality of sin and I hate the fact that it marked me. I disassociate myself from who I used to be." You say, "That's too radical." No, that's just what Jesus said. He said, "If any man wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow after me." There is an utter self-denial that is not just a spirit of sacrifice, I deny legitimacy to the man that I used to be. Because and the reason that you're like that, the reason that that is the mark of somebody who has been truly born again, is because God has put his Spirit in you. God has put his righteous Spirit in you and you now love righteousness and hate sin and you realize that your former life was a life of sin and you can't help but hate it and you continue to hate the remnants of it that still spill out of your life from time-to-time. You disown your prior life. You don't have to be as vicious. You don't have to be as graphic to talk about it in terms of using a ball bat if that offends your sensibilities but you know what I'm saying, right? I want nothing to do with my old man. I want to be like Christ. I stumble along the way. I hate that but my desires are different and that's the mark of my new birth.

Secondly, regeneration moves you to love other Christians. It moves you to love other Christians. Remember we said that God is holy and therefore regeneration would break the power, the pattern of sin? Well, God is love and if God imparts his loving nature to you, then there is going to be the fruit of love in your life as well. Regeneration moves you to love other Christians. Being born again gives birth to loving living. 1 John 3:14. Remember, the point of this message is how can we know if we've been born again? Here it is, verse 14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life." How can we know that? How can we know that? We know that we have passed out of death into life, "because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death." Regeneration causes you to be a loving person particularly toward other Christians. Look at chapter 4, verse 7 again, "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." Again, this is rooted in – understand - this is rooted in the character of God. The fact that God is love means that if you have been born again from God, then love is going to somehow manifest itself in your life. That's the pattern. Regeneration changes your pattern of life, changes you from that prior hateful, vengeful, grudging person that you used to be. It changes that because God has planted his loving nature within you. You naturally love other Christians because they share the same nature from God that you do. You're attracted to the outward manifestation in the life of someone who knows Christ. You're attracted to that. You connect with that. You meld with that because love is attracted to love. God's love is attracted to his nature being expressed in the lives of other people.

So there you go. You love Christians because you naturally love those who share the same nature that you do. You're willing to give your life for them. You're willing to sacrifice for them. You have natural affections for them. You grieve when they grieve. You rejoice when they rejoice because there is that sympathy of love. Because your natures are coming from a common source and therefore you're naturally motivated to love and share concern and compassion and affection for people of like precious faith. But understand the reason why that must be true. It must be true because regeneration comes from God. God has a loving nature and that's what he imparts to us in the new

birth. So the consequences of this are inevitable. Somebody who says, "I want nothing to do with the church. I'll worship privately by myself. I don't care about the people of God. I don't want to be around them. I don't want to be a hypocrite like them," or whatever, that sounds so high and lofty and noble but what it is, is an open confession that, "I don't love Christians and therefore I'm not born again." Look, we realize that there are imperfections and hypocrisies that are present in the church. We get that. We understand that. That doesn't cause us to hate these people. That doesn't cause us to want to separate out from one another. It just means that we want to come together and maybe your gift can help me and my gift can help you and we share in this life together and God works through those loving relationships to make us better than what we would be apart from one another. The true Christian loves that and embraces it and the true Christian realizes that he has a responsibility and an obligation not to try to disrupt the love that's in the body, not to be divisive, because you've got such a love and a peacemaking spirit in you that you want to foster that love and see it grow. That's what regeneration does to you. It makes you want to live righteously and you do. It makes you loving and you want to express it. That's how you can know if you've been born again. Do you care about being holy? Do you care about being loving? It's not about whether you're perfect, I'll say that one last time. It's not about whether you fall short. It's about what is the powerful, what is the predominant, prevailing motivation in your life.

Let's summarize this and just make sure that you see the clarity of the connection here. Regeneration produces righteous living, 1 John 2:29, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." 2:29, "everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." Being born again produces righteous behavior. Chapter 4, verse 7, "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." You are born of God, that produces loving living. You reason back from the effects to see the cause. You see someone living a righteous life as it's biblically defined and you say, "Oh, I reason back from that that he's showing the righteous character of God, he's been born of God." Okay? You see someone living a loving life like so many of you do and our family's been the recipient of your loving gracious love in our lives, you reason back from that and you say, "Oh, they've been born again from the God who is love." You see that and this is the mark of it. This is what being born again produces.

Thirdly, as we look at this, we realize that God is true and so what truth gives birth to is true belief. The God who is true gives birth to someone who believes true things and has faith in the true one, our Lord Jesus Christ. Regeneration establishes you in faith in Jesus Christ. Being born again gives birth to believing in Christ. Look at chapter 5, verse 1, it's the exact same construction in chapter 4, verse 7, chapter 2, verse 29. Chapter 5, verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and whoever loves the Father, loves the child born of Him." Look at that first clause, "whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Regeneration plants truth in you. It plants in you an object of your affection and your faith, the Lord Jesus Christ. It plants in you the motivation and the commitment to trusting Christ. That is the fruit of being born again. Faith is the evidence of regeneration. State it this way: someone who has been born again openly trusts in Jesus Christ for his salvation and submits to him as Lord. We'll deal with this verse more in the future but what I want you to see is that whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is

born of God. Born of God. The other direction, being born of God gives birth to someone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is their Lord, their Savior, their only hope of righteousness, their only hope of heaven.

So when you ask yourself the question: have I been born again? You ask the question: where does your hope of heaven lie? If your hope is in Christ alone, that is the mark of someone that has been born again. If you say, "I think the good in my life outweighs the bad," you're not born again because the God who is truth gives birth to someone who believes the truth and who believes, we've quoted it earlier, who thinks about Christ and says, "He is the way, the truth and the life. I could not come to the Father except through Him," and the object of your hope of heaven is external to you. You are trusting in the righteousness and the blood of someone else to make you righteous before God.

So how can you know if you've been born again? From everything that we've said today, it should be obvious that what the Bible says is that it is not to look back at a past act that you may or may not have done. You don't have to know the exact date on which you were saved in order to be born again. You don't. I know people say, "What day were you born again?" Well, some people don't know exactly. It's not exactly clear to them but they manifest a life of loving Christians, of seeking to be obedient to God and their testimony is that, "Only Christ can save me. I can't save myself." Those are the marks of being born again. If you can't particularly tie a date to that, that's all right. If that were essential to have an exact date and time on which you were born again, if that were essential and without that you could not know whether you were truly saved or not, trust the word of God, it would say so. It doesn't say that. It teaches you to look for the character of God being manifested in your life: righteousness, love, truth. If those marks are true and are expanding and growing in your life, then beloved, you have every biblical ground to be assured of your salvation and to rejoice because the Lord of the universe is working in your life in order to conform you to the image of Christ and he will most certainly deliver on his promise to you to bring you to heaven when you die, to comfort you ultimately in all of your sorrows, to be gracious to you even when you fall. That's who he is. This is how we know.

As you go forward in life, understand this, as we look to an uncertain future, look to changing times for sure, understand this: everything that we've talked about here takes the fear out of that, takes the fear out of an uncertain future because regeneration is the power behind your pursuit of righteousness. God, if those things are true in your life or are increasing, then that means that God is at work in your life and he's not going to abandon the work that he's begun. So you can look forward with confidence. In your spiritual weakness, somehow the power of God is a sustaining force that's going to bring that to fruition and to completion. In sorrow and in an uncertain future, the same God who saved you and produced that spiritual fruit is going to be your rock and refuge and your protection and your shepherd to lead you and guide you and protect you, to make sure that the purposes for which he laid his hand upon you are most certainly fulfilled. So to know that you've been born again, to take yourself through that process of self-examination and come out on the other side and say, "This is the fruit of my life by the grace of God," to come out on the other side of that, is to come out and say, "This faith is

the victory that overcomes the world. I'm confident. I'm joyful. Because the God who began the work is most certainly going to finish it."

Bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, would you just be so gracious to us and help us to examine ourselves honestly, to think rightly about the world that is around us in light of these truths, knowing and having confidence that you who began the work will perfect it. You are great. You are gracious. You are holy. You are righteous. You are true. Father, for those of us that know you, bring forth the fruit of your great character with ever increasing clarity and consistency in our lives. For those that are here that your word has exposed the hypocrisy and the deadness of their soul, Father, may they hear the call of Christ to, "Come to me." Come to Christ hear. Come to Christ for eternal life. Come to him for the living waters. Father, may the exposure of the barrenness of their soul cause them to look for the one who alone has the waters of eternal life. Give them grace to that end. Bless us now as we sing to your glory in Jesus' name. Amen.

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