

Born of God

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: 1 John 2:29
Preached on: Thursday, May 21, 2020

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

"I know not how the Spirit moves, creating faith in Him in my heart, how the Spirit does that, revealing Jesus through the word. creating faith in my heart, but I know whom I have believed." Those lyrics are a reference to the biblical doctrine of regeneration and that's what we're going to be studying here this evening. It's one of my favorite doctrines in Scripture and as we've been doing through this series in 1 John, I'm condensing three messages that I did earlier into a single message here on this one verse from 1 John 2:29.

Let's just kind of recapitulate where we've been so far and where we're going and we're always using as our points of orientation John's own expressions of the purpose for which he wrote. He said, "I'm writing that your joy may be made complete. I am writing that you may not sin. I'm writing that you may know that you have eternal life, joy and holiness and assurance." And it was necessary for him to write to his readers in his day because they were being undermined in their faith by false teachers that had come, introducing false doctrines about Christ and leading them away from the truth that they had originally received from the apostles. Last time we looked at one of the verses in the whole context of these five chapters that points to that reality. If you would look at chapter 2, verse 26 for just a moment, it says, "These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you." There were deceptive forces at work and as a result, people were being led away or tempted to leave the true faith, the true apostolic faith that they had heard from the Apostle John and other apostles for the sake of this false teaching which was nothing less than damning error.

So the stakes were incredibly high and so John is writing to rally the troops, to bring reinforcements of truth in to strengthen them so that they could stand firm in the faith and not go after these false gods that were being presented to them and what we saw last time as we looked at verses 24 through 28, I'm just going to summarize the points without highlighting the text simply for the sake of time, but he encouraged them to turn to Scripture, to turn to the truth that they had received from the apostles and what we said is that now in our days we find apostolic truth, prophetic truth in the 66 books of the Bible. So what John is saying to find joy, holiness and assurance when you're under assault by false teachers, start by turning to Scripture. Open up your Bible and read it and study it and be under the teaching of men who bring you the word of God. That's the first point that he made but it's really important for us to understand the fullness of the context. False teachers are attacking, they are assaulting the basic elements of the Christian life as

a result of that. John comes alongside to help his readers and by extension to help us and he says you've got to turn to Scripture. We saw also that he calls on his readers to trust the Spirit, trust the Holy Spirit because the Spirit of God is abiding in you and God, my Christian friend, God has given his Spirit to indwell you and one of the primary ministries of the Holy Spirit in the life of a true Christian is to help him discern the truth, to stay in the truth, and to abide in the truth. So we start to realize and we start, the tide starts to lift us up as we realize these wonderful spiritual gifts that God has imparted to us, we have Scripture to help us, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us.

Then in verse 28 we saw that we are to turn our attention to the Second Coming. Turn to the Second Coming we said and we will look at that verse just to kind of lead into tonight's text. It says in verse 28 of chapter 2,

28 Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again, a time that is still future to us today. Christ is going to come for his people and John and everything that he has written is in a negative sense, he is protecting them from false teachers, we want to be protected from them and at the same time in a positive dimension, he is preparing us for the Second Coming. Listen, my Christian friend, this is a source of great encouragement for us, that as we turn to Scripture together, as we trust the Holy Spirit together, we are being prepared by God for the Second Coming of Christ so that that cataclysmic event which will be a time of terror for the wicked and the unbelieving will be a time of confidence and joy and the fulfillment of all of our anticipations in Christ and that preparation, that sense of anticipation, that confidence at his coming comes through these ordinary means of grace, turning to Scripture, trusting the Spirit, and seeing that Scripture points us to a Second Coming of Christ.

Now what that Second Coming means is that Satan and his false teachers are doomed to destruction, they are doomed to fail in their efforts to undermine the body of Christ and to undermine individual Christians. They're doomed to ultimate failure but in the meantime there is a battle, you know, Ephesians 6:12 says that we wrestle not with flesh and blood but with the spiritual forces of wickedness in the high places. God has seen fit to let us engage a spiritual battle that we might learn what we have been delivered from, that we might be humbled and rid of our pride in our self-sufficiency and that we would learn to trust in him and depend upon him and to look to him and all of our resources in Christ in order to triumph in that spiritual battle. And ultimately, my friends, what the outcome of your perseverance and mine in this kind of battle against false teaching is this, is that God will be glorified by the ultimate success that he produces in us, but he calls us and he commands us and we have a responsibility to pursue these things and to walk in them and to abide in them so that we overcome the devil in the midst of our Christian battle. The Spirit helps us, the Spirit guarantees our success, and at the same time we have responsibility to walk in the Spirit ourselves.

So that's a little bit of an overview of what we looked at last time. Well, what we find is this as we now transition into tonight's text, as you turn to Scripture, as you trust the Spirit and as you look to the Second Coming, something starts to happen, something happens to you as a true Christian when you do that, God sanctifies you. God, the Holy Spirit, transforms you and makes you more and more like Christ in your moral disposition and in your moral character. As we gaze on the glory of Christ, we start to be conformed to that image and so our character is progressively changed over time from being enmeshed in some of the remnants of our sin, we are gradually changed and God conforms us to the image of his dear Son. That's what happens when you turn to Scripture and trust the Spirit like we looked at last time. Wonderful truth.

Well, now what we find is that there is a statement that flows from that and that's where John goes in chapter 2, verse 29. Let's look at it together. He says,

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

As you grow in these matters of righteousness, as you devote yourself to these spiritual priorities and that becomes an enduring aspect of your life, what John is saying here is that the overflow of that is a testimony to a great spiritual reality, it's the fact that you have been born again. You have been born of God. God has done a work in you to produce this in you. And let me just illustrate this from a conversation I had in ministry some time ago that comes to my mind about this, I was speaking with someone who was a new believer but they hadn't really grasped what had happened in their lives and they're telling me, "I have these overwhelming desires to know God's word. I want to be with God's people. This is new to me. I wasn't like this before even though I grew up under the influence of a Christian parent. I don't understand what's happened to me. I've just been captivated by all of these things." I said, "Brother, it's quite simple, you've been born again. You have been born again. That's why you have all of these new desires that you never had before. That's why you have desires for holiness whereas before you were content to walk in sin. That's why now you understand God's word and you desire God's word whereas before it had been a closed book to you." The marks of righteousness that this young Christian believer was seeing in his life was a mark of a greater reality, the invisible change that the Spirit of God had worked in him was now manifesting itself, it was blooming into observable life and his life had changed as a result of this work of the Spirit of God in his life. So as he was growing in righteousness, I had every biblical prerogative and responsibility, frankly, to explain to him what the reality was. "My friend, you've been born again, that's why you see all these changes in your life." Conversations like that are, you know, are one of the high points of Christian ministry is to be able to explain that kind of good news and that kind of spiritual riches, that spiritual wealth to people and it's that spiritual wealth that we're going to look at here this evening.

This phrase "born of Him, born of God," refers to the spiritual reality of regeneration. That's the biblical term for it, it's the theological term for it. We are considering the doctrine of regeneration as a result of coming to this verse here this evening. And what does regeneration mean? Let me give you a definition. I'll try to remember to go slowly

for those of you that are wanting to take notes. We actually studied this doctrine within the past year on Sunday mornings, as I recall. But regeneration is this, regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit, it's something that the Holy Spirit does on his own power and on his own initiative. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts new life to a sinner. Let me say that again: regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts new life to a sinner and that new life guarantees that the sinner will repent, believe in Christ and walk in newness of life. So let's unpack that a little bit. Let me just repeat it one more time. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts new spiritual life to a previously dead sinner. It guarantees, this new life guarantees that the sinner will repent, believe in Christ and walk in newness of life. And what I want to do here this evening based on this text and based on that definition is walk you through three aspects of regeneration and the implications of this biblical doctrine, three aspects of regeneration that I want you to see here this evening.

And before I do that, let me just highlight a couple of thoughts from that definition that you'll see as we unpack it in the text to come. First of all, regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit by which we mean that it is unseen by human eyes. It is something that God does deep in the heart of a sinner to change them, to convert them, to give a new heart to them, and that is something that man does not see when it happens. Jesus said in John 3 that the wind blows where it wishes but you don't know where it came from or where it's going, so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. We can't identify the source of this. We often cannot identify the precise moment at which that occurs because it happens outside the realm of human observation and even human comprehension, but as the wind is known by the way it rustles the leaves of a tree, we know the wind by the effect that it produces, well, in the same way we know by the effects what the Spirit of God has done in the life of an individual believer and that's what this text is talking to us about. Look at it there in verse 29 with me. It says if you know that he is righteous, if you know that God is light, chapter 1, verse 5, you know that God is holy and you know that that is God's character, then you know something else, you know that everyone who practices righteousness, that is in accordance with that holiness of God, you know that they had been born of God. The practice of righteousness, the love of Scripture, the trust in the Holy Spirit, the joy, the holiness, the assurance, all of those things are an effect which shows you the cause being rooted in the fact that God has given that person new life.

And one of the aspects of this, I'll get to my three points sooner or later tonight, might as well pull up a chair and get comfortable, it looks like another one of those kinds of messages here tonight. One of the aspects of this that you frequently find in young Christians and new Christians is this, is that they are overwhelmed by and they are struck by a particular reality. Now that they are truly in Christ, they look back to the days before their conversion and they are shocked by the fact that they didn't see these things then that are so clear and plain and powerful to them now. The word of God was not an interesting book to them in their days before Christ, for example, or like me in the occasional times when I tried to read the Bible as an unbeliever, it made absolutely no sense to me. I remember thinking, "This book is just a bunch of gobbledygook. This makes absolutely no sense." And so it was easy for me to toss my little Bible onto the

counter and go on my way without concerning myself with it. But now, now the young Christian who God has saved, the Spirit of God has caused them to be born again and all of a sudden the truth and the majesty and the light of Scripture is exploding like fireworks on their minds and it's the most wonderful experience that they've ever known. As we were singing in the song earlier, the word of God now works peace in my heart and I have understanding that I am reading the exact same words now with understanding that I never could make sense of back then.

Well, one of the wonderful things about being a young Christian is that you see change, you see this dichotomy, and for those of you and I know that there are some of you that are like this, this should just be wildly encouraging to you, that when you recognize that about your heart in response to the word of God, you say, "This is alive to me in a way that it never was before," well, a verse like 1 John 2:29 is describing the reality of your spiritual life. It says if you see those kinds of overwhelming righteous desires and clarity of mind and clarity of understanding then you can know something, that is an effect, I'm going to speak metaphorically here, that is an effect of the blowing of the Spirit upon your inner man and the Spirit has breathed new life into you and that new understanding of the word of God is a mark that your salvation is real, it's the true deal, it's the real thing because this is what the Spirit of God produces in the life of those that he saves. So yes, especially when you're saved as a young adult and you look back on your prior form of life and you say, "But how did I miss these things? How could I not see it?" Well, it's because now you've been given eyes to see. The Spirit of God has given you ears to hear. He's given you a new mind to understand that you did not have before and that is the mark of the reality of regeneration in your life. The practical effects of it are massive, they are wonderful to see, and as we pursue Scripture and as we trust the Spirit of God, what happens is that these spiritual realities, this spiritual desire, this sanctification, it grows stronger and more obvious and becomes even more stable in our lives as the Spirit of God roots us deeply in the word that he himself wrote.

Well, with that introduction, with that lengthy introduction, let's look at the first aspect of regeneration here in our brief time that is remaining. This first point if we want to title it, you could say this, it's the reality, the reality of regeneration, and tonight's message is simply titled "Born of God," if you like to put a message title on your notes, born of God from 1 John 2:29. That's what we have here this evening and our first point is this, it's the reality of regeneration. One of the things that I want you to see is this and to kind of view tonight's message from this perspective with these lens on your eyes: true biblical Christianity is a supernatural religion. It is not simply moralistic teaching designed to change your external behavior. True Christianity is the expression of a supernatural act that God does to change the very nature of people that he saves, and we do not have the power to bring ourselves to new life. An unsaved person does not have the power to give himself the capacity to truly understand Scripture, to truly know Jesus Christ, to truly be able to change in conformity with true righteousness. We're going to see we don't have that power. We are dead in trespasses and sins. We are born into ignorance and from the moment of our conception. We were conceived in sin, meaning that sin attached itself at the very moment of our conception to the very essence of who we are.

So we must be born again if we are going to be saved and when we speak about the reality of regeneration, we're talking about something that lies outside the power of natural man to bring to pass. This is something that God must do, it's something that only God can do, and it is something in which the sinner is passive in, by which we mean that it is something that God does to the sinner, the sinner does not cooperate in bringing himself to new life, a corpse buried in the ground can do nothing to achieve its own resurrection, rather God must call men out of the grave or they will stay there. Well, from that physical illustration to the spiritual reality, those who are sinners, those who are lost, those who are unbelievers, they do not have the power to change their own nature, they need a supernatural act from God upon their heart that they cannot force, that they cannot produce; we are utterly dependent upon God to do this for us or it will not happen at all.

That's the reality of regeneration and what you find when you understand something about this doctrine, what you find in Scripture is that there are a number of terms that the New Testament uses to describe this reality. The Bible uses many metaphors to describe regeneration and we won't take the time to look at these texts, I'll just mention them. Again, the prior messages that I preached on this about a year ago will go into all of these things in greater depth, but we see the reality of regeneration, at least four different terms that are used. First of all, the actual term regeneration is used in Titus 3 to talk about the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, speaking to that work that the Holy Spirit does. Titus 3. Another phrase that is used is "new creation," new creations that you see in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old things have passed away, behold new things have come." So there is regeneration, there is new creation. It's described as a spiritual resurrection in chapter 2, verses 4 and 5 of Ephesians. Ephesians 2:4 and 5 says that God "made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved." Verse 1, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins but God being rich in mercy has made you alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved." It's the language of resurrection. You've been made alive whereas before you were dead, and so it's the language of spiritual resurrection. And finally you see the language of new birth being described in 1 Peter 1:23.

So regeneration described by these different terms, new creation, spiritual resurrection, new birth, and you look at those terms collectively and you see these elements of life, of newness, of power that is in contrast to the deadness that existed beforehand. Death and sin and darkness are replaced by life and power and light, and so it's the difference between being born of God and not being born of God is the difference between two completely different and mutually exclusive realms. The non-Christian is of a completely different kind, a different quality than a Christian is in this manner, and in this sense a true Christian has nothing in common with the non-Christian. Oh, we share the image of God and we have physical life and we share, you know, existence on planet earth, what we're talking about tonight is not that. What we're talking about is what is the heart of a Christian that's been born again compared to the heart of someone who has not been born again. Or to bring it closer to home, you as a Christian, what is your heart like now compared to what it was before your conversion. There's no comparison. It is something brand-new. So we have different pictures in Scripture that are describing the same reality and that reality can be expressed as simply as this, is that God, this is the reality of

regeneration and I'm making myself slow down so that we don't miss this together, in regeneration God acts on a sinner's heart to give new life to him, and so man cannot believe unless God does this to him and for him. You can't believe, man is unable to believe in Christ unless God supplies this new life to him, unless he imparts this power to him, unless he shares that nature with him, the man is left in his spiritual grave unable to bring himself forth to life.

Let's look at a couple of passages just very briefly. You'll see this reality described in the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, Ezekiel 36 is where I would like you to turn for just a moment, Ezekiel 36 where it describes it in such explicit detail. Ezekiel 36 beginning in verse 26. God is speaking about the work that he will do in Israel one day but it is an expression also of the work that he does in everyone that he saves. He says in verse 26 of Ezekiel 36, he says, "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. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." Do you see what's being said here? Again as I often point out, we need to understand the simplicity of subjects, verbs and direct objects. God is doing the acting here. God is putting something new in. God is putting his Spirit into the heart of one who previously was unbelieving. This is not the sinner changing his ways and then receiving the Spirit of God. No, that's not Christian salvation at all. This is God doing a supernatural work taking out the old nature and putting in a new nature at the exact same time, simultaneously God changes the old heart, or better stated he takes it away and puts in a new heart, puts in his Spirit and the result of that is that it produces righteousness in the life. Look at that verse there again in verse 27, God says, "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes." The power of God comes supernaturally upon a sinner and changes everything about his inner man, changes everything about his prior enslavement to sin, his prior love of sin, his prior inclinations to sin, and replaces it with something that is brand-new, that is oriented toward holiness. As Peter says I believe in 2 Peter 1, that we become partakers of the divine nature. Well, my friend, if we partake, if we share something of the aspect of the nature of God, well, what is God except that he is holy, holy, holy.

So the Holy Spirit comes upon us, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us and the natural inevitable consequence of that is that holiness starts to come out of our lives, righteousness starts to come out of our lives. As we've said many times, this does not make us instantly perfect but there is a new quality of life, there is a new nature within us that responds to righteousness, that produces righteousness, that understands God's word and that's the whole reality that John is speaking about here in chapter 2, verse 29. When you see somebody with those kinds of desires, when you see it in yourself, when you see a life changing and transforming then you know that there has been a secret act by the Holy Spirit in that person to change them and to make them new, and oftentimes the change is so obvious that even unbelievers though they don't understand what has happened, they recognize the change. I remember my dad telling me shortly after I had been converted and he saw the change in my life, we had never talked about it, we had never said anything about it, he sat me down and he said, "I'm glad that you're real religious but you're taking it too far and I want it to stop." That was the way my dad dealt

with relationships, it's kind of bittersweet to look back on him. I miss the guy but that's not the point for now. The point is that without my even trying, without my initiating a conversation, my dad saw that there was a new reality about my life that was distinct from the life that I had lived before. He thought I was just trying to be religious. He didn't understand the spiritual power behind it but he saw the reality of it.

So my new Christian friend, you know, maybe you're a new Christian and I think of some of you that you've been saved out of unsaved families and you're maybe the first Christian in your family. Well, don't be surprised if you're greatly misunderstood in the midst of that, let it be an encouragement to you that when you are misunderstood, that when you are accused of having religious mania or, you know, that you've gone off the deep end or something like that, just understand that that's a testimony to the reality of the regeneration in your heart and though you're misunderstood and you're persecuted and falsely accused of things, understand, develop the ability in your heart and in your mind to look through all the outward expressions of those things and say, "What's happening here is this, what's happening is they are bearing witness to the reality of regeneration in my life and for that, Father, I give You thanks. I praise God for that. If I have been born again, it means that I'm going to be safe when Jesus comes, it means I am a child of God, it means my sins have been forgiven, it means that there is a realm of eternal blessing that waits for me that far transcends anything that I could ask or think here in this life." So when we understand the reality of regeneration we say, "Okay, things will show up in my life. There may be times where unbelievers wittingly testified to the reality of it because the power of the change is so great that it's undeniable even if they attribute it to, you know, wicked forces." So the reality of regeneration is a very important aspect for us to understand.

Now let me just emphasize this, is that because it is an act of God, because sinners are passive in it, we must understand that the Bible tells us that men are utterly unable to do this to themselves. You cannot cause yourself to be born again and yet you must be born again or you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Do you start see the dilemma here? You must be born again Jesus said in John 3 or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, you won't see the kingdom of heaven, and yet the Bible says that you are unable to do this on your own, you're dead in trespasses and sins.

Charles Spurgeon said it like this, it's an extended quote but it's a really good one and so I want to read this to you. Charles Spurgeon explains the inability of man as it relates to and as it intersects with the doctrine of regeneration. Listen to what the great Baptist preacher said well over 100 years ago. He said this, "The Gospel says repent but the unregenerate man loves his sins and will not repent of them. He presses them to his bosom and until his nature is changed, he will never look upon them with abhorrence and sorrow." Spurgeon goes on to say, "The Gospel says believe, cast away all confidence in your own merits and believe in Jesus, but the carnal man is proud and says why should I believe and be saved by the works of another? I want to do something myself that I may have some of the credit of it either by good prayers or good works of some kind." Then Spurgeon goes on to say, "Brethren, we must be born again because the truth of the

Gospel cannot be understood and the commands of the Gospel cannot be obeyed except where the Spirit of God works regeneration in the heart."

I like to say it this way: God does not give men the new birth because they believe. It's the exact opposite, men believe because God gives them the new birth. Apart from regeneration, no man has the power to believe. God must do this work and in this work he imparts the ability and the willingness to believe, then and only then does a sinner believe in a repentant, believing, saving way in the Lord Jesus Christ. So men believe because God gives new birth, think about it this way as we come to the end of our first point: to be born of God pictures that clearly.

Think about your physical life, my friends, you did not cause your own physical birth. You were utterly passive in it. You had nothing to do with it. What happened was is that, I don't want to be too explicit here but your biological parents came together when you did not exist, they came together and you were conceived in your mother's womb. You had nothing to do about that. You had no control over that. You were nonexistent. You could not make that happen. That's physical birth and that's undeniable. That's just the way it is. Well, what we need to see is that's what the Bible describes, that's the term, that's the imagery that the Bible uses to describe God bringing a sinner to life. God gives birth, God gives new birth to a man who was previously dead and so God initiates it, God is in complete sovereign control of how this gift of regeneration is dispensed. You cannot make it happen by walking an aisle at an evangelistic meeting. You cannot make it happen by raising your hand. You cannot make it happen by praying a sinner's prayer. All of that is a false distortion by perhaps well-meaning people that give the sense that somehow being born again is within your power. "Just do this act and you will be born again." Beloved, it doesn't work that way. God must do it and he does it on his own, he does not do it in response to a human act initiated in human power just as you did not create your own physical birth by your own physical power.

So one of the things that we see in this doctrine of regeneration is this, is that it's very humbling, it's very humbling to realize just how helpless we are and that is what exactly what Romans 5 says, it says while we were still helpless. Look, if you could somehow make this happen, then you're not helpless, you're not dead. To look at this any other way is to say, "I have the power to secure my own salvation." That's not helpless, that's having eternal power in your own ability to bring about your own salvation. It's a direct contradiction of the plainest of scriptural testimony. Dead in sin. Helpless. Hostile to God. Unable to subject itself to the law of God, Romans 8. And regeneration is the answer to that lost condition of the human soul.

So as a new Christian and you start to grow in these realities, you start to get a new perspective of just how lost you were before God saved you and it's humbling, it also has the effect of causing us to praise God and to thank him, "God, You did something for me. You gave me new life that I could not have produced on my own. You saved me when there was no hope for me. When I was utterly helpless, You helped me, O God." And to understand this is to set yourself on the right trajectory for a Christian life that does not

boast in anything that you have done but gives all of the glory to God. That's the reality of regeneration. God exercises his power to bring dead sinners to life.

The responsibility in regeneration. This is something where we have to think really carefully and follow biblical thinking very closely here because it's very easy to fall off either side of the balance beam, so to speak. The fact that regeneration is something that God must do for you does not change your responsibility to repent and believe in the Gospel. It does not remove your responsibility to repent and believe. Jesus said in Mark 1:15 in the language of command, in an imperative he said, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." So the sinner is in an awful predicament, God commands him to repent and believe and yet he does not have the ability to obey that command.

Now a lot of people will go different directions on that and say, "Well, maybe the sinner isn't as dead as we think," and they reason that God would not command something that the sinner is not able to do. That's the wrong way to think. Scripture is too clear that we're unable to believe and yet it's equally clear that we are responsible and commanded to believe. So let's just think about the awful predicament of the sinner and this is the awful predicament that you are in if you are not a Christian and you're hearing these words tonight or on subsequent media. God's law convicts and condemns the sinner as being guilty before God. The sinner has no ability to believe because he's dead in trespasses and sins, and yet he is commanded to believe all the same. Well, what can we say in response to this? What's the effect that that should have on someone? Some people say, "Well, then that's just a contradiction and I'm going to reject it." Well, you can respond that way but it doesn't change the truth of the matter, it doesn't change the biblical testimony to both of these realities, simply walking away or covering your ears about it doesn't help the situation at all, you're still in the same position of being dead and unable and yet being commanded to do exactly that which you're not able to do. What does that say, then? What does that say about the condition of the sinner? Here's what it says, Matthew 5:3 talks about those who are poor in spirit, bankrupt, no resources of your own. The responsibility that is side-by-side with regeneration teaches your proud heart that you are utterly spiritually bankrupt and that there is nothing that you can do and your plight is desperately bad and you cannot do anything to deliver yourself from it. That's the reality of these things. You are truly bankrupt, my friend. You have nothing with which to pay your debt to God. You are truly helpless. You have no ability of your own and yet you're required and you are liable for payment.

Think about it this way, a little human example here that maybe some of you have more direct experience of than you'd like to think of. You go out, you get credit cards and you charge them all up to the limit and you've incurred a debt and all of a sudden you don't have money to pay for it, you're utterly unable to pay for it because you have no money in the bank to pay that debt, but do you know what? You're still responsible for it. You're still responsible to pay it even though you have no ability to do so. Well, multiply that by infinity and take out bankruptcy laws that discharge debts, you know, because that's what bankruptcy laws do, forget that aspect of it and realize that's the position you're in as a sinner, having run up an infinite debt against God with your sin, utterly bankrupt to do anything about it. No good works will help you because salvation is not by works and

your works are all filthy rags anyway, Isaiah says. We're just brought into this miserable reality that if we want to be saved, we have to believe but we don't even have the power to do that. That's the sad reality. So what this teaches us is this, is that the initiating power for repentant saving faith must come from God or it will not happen at all.

Now with that said and speaking now plainly to my brothers and sisters in Christ, here's what I want you to see, and those of you that profess to be Christians, I want you to see where you find yourself deep in your heart on this contrast that I'm about to express to you. Saving faith is not, it is not a sinner proudly asserting his power to God. "I believe," and having a sense of pride that, "I figured this out and I come to You by my power and I accept Christ in my own power." That's not the reality of saving faith. The reality is this: faith is a sinner humbly receiving the power of God. So it's not a sinner proudly asserting his power to God, faith, saving faith is a sinner humbly receiving the power of God and it just results in a complete different contrast. So that's the responsibility in the midst of regeneration.

Now without going into all of the mechanics and the reality of this, where does that faith come from, then? How does it go from God to us? What is the mechanism by which it is imparted? Well, Scripture says that faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ in Romans 10. God works faith, God imparts new life to sinners through the proclamation of the Gospel that Jesus Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, that he has now ascended to the right hand of the Father from which position he asserts himself as Lord over all, Christ the only Savior of sinners having paid the price for them at the cross of Calvary, and we proclaim that message and in response to that message, the call goes out, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." Well, somehow in a mysterious, secret, hidden way God works in the hearts of sinners in response to that message, imparts new life to them, imparts to them that saving faith and now with that in their heart they exercise that faith and believe in Christ for their salvation. God imparts life, God imparts this to the human heart. Then and only then is the sinner in a position to believe.

Now what does that mean? You find yourself lost and you realize that God must do this and you have no ability to do what he commands, and that starts to pinch you like you're in a vice? That's exactly where you're supposed to be. That's exactly where it is supposed to bring you. You say, "Well, if this is true and that's true, then I am completely lost and helpless." Precisely. That is precisely the point of all of it. You say, "Well, then what can I do if I don't have the power to do this?" That is where you go humbly to God and ask him and beg him for mercy just like the repentant tax collector in Luke 18, "God, be merciful to me the sinner. I can't do anything to save myself. I have a debt I can't pay and yet I must pay it. God, be merciful to me. God, impart this life to me. Grant faith to me. I believe, help my unbelief." You're crying out in desperation for him to do something for you that you cannot do for yourself and if I can add this to it, you keep knocking and you keep asking until you're convinced that he has, that he's done that. It's not going to be any excuse to say, "Well, I asked once and nothing happened and so I went on to other things." I know young people who speak that way, "Well, I tried Christianity and it didn't work." Well, that's just such a total distortion of what it means to cry out to God for

salvation. You may have tried but you were trying in your own effort and, look, look, let's just be, let's just get out the brass tacks and just be really direct with each other, for you to say I tried a few times and it didn't work so I gave up on it, do you know what? You're just testifying to how cheaply you view the Gospel and what a low view of your own sinfulness that you really have. If you understand these things, if you understand the glory of Christ, you understand the desperate condition that you are in and you understand something about the reality of pain and eternal judgment in hell, you wouldn't just so casually cast it off and say, "Well, it didn't work out." No, what your responsibility would be would be to cry out to God again and again and again and again and again and again and again and not let go until he shows you mercy. The fact that you could come to a place of cold indifference in response to these realities is just a further testimony of how dark and lost your heart is.

So that brings us to our third point this evening, it's the results of regeneration. The results of regeneration. How can you know if you've been born again? Well, simply said, the character of God begins to manifest itself in your life. That's what we've been saying all along, isn't it? If a holy God saves you, a righteous God saves you and imparts his life to you, then aspects of his life, his character will show itself in your life. We're going to go through these far too quickly here but we can see this just from the language that John himself uses in 1 John.

What does regeneration do? How can you know if you've been born again? 1. Regeneration produces righteousness. It produces righteousness. God plants his holy nature in you and as a result something of a holiness starts to come out of your life. Look at it here in chapter 2, verse 29, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." There is a testimony of righteousness in your life. New birth creates a man who pursues holiness rather than this prior unmitigated love and pursuit of sin. So it produces righteousness.

Secondly, regeneration produces love. It produces love. God is love, John says in chapter 4, and if he puts his nature in you, this nature carrying with it the reality of his own love, then that's going to start to express itself. The new birth gives rise to a life of love. Look at chapter 4, verse 7. He says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." God being love himself plants a nature that reflects his love within you. Forgive the gardening analogy here, this is kind of a cheap way to say it, unworthy of the lofty themes of which we speak, but God plants love seeds in your heart and love therefore starts to flower out of your life. Love's righteousness flowers as a result of the seed that God plants within you. Love starts to flower as a result of the fact of what God has imparted to you. To think about it and to follow the gardening analogy, what God has planted in you starts to grow and bear fruit, righteousness and love, and you start to love other Christians because you share the same indwelling Spirit with them.

So regeneration produces righteousness, it produces love, these are the ways that you know that you've been born again. There's one more really important one found in chapter 5, verse 1 and it says this, or we can say it this way: regeneration produces faith

in Christ. Regeneration produces faith in Christ. To be born again gives birth to believing in Christ. Look at chapter 5, verse 1 where it says this, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Do you want to know if you've been born again? Well, do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe that he is the only Savior of the world? Do you believe that he is the eternal Son of God come in human flesh, offered himself on a cross as a sacrifice for the sins of his people and now he is raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God and that that reality of Christ is the hope that you have of salvation, nothing of yourself? Do you believe in Christ that way? Well, then that's the mark of regeneration.

Regeneration produces belief in Christ, it produces love, it produces righteousness, and so these things become the marks of whether we've been born again. We don't have to ask the question and you should not ask the question, "Am I one of the elect?" Because that's the wrong way to go. We'll save that for another time. Rather you should say this in your mind, when God causes someone to be born again, these fruit manifest themselves: righteousness, love and belief in Christ. And you look at your life and say is there something of those, of that triad of reality expressing itself in my life? Well, do you know what? I believe in Christ. Yeah, I do and do you know what? I have an affinity for other believers. I enjoy the fellowship of the saints. And do you know what? I'm not at all a perfect man and I still struggle with sin and I fail in so many ways but my life has changed from what I used to be beforehand. I do desire to pursue righteousness. I prefer obedience to sin even though I get that mixed up sometimes. That's the mark of someone who's been born again. That's what regeneration produces. Those are the results of regeneration as John testifies to them.

Well, only one question matters in light of these things, my friend, have you been born again? Do you know Christ in this way? If you're compelled to answer no in response to the truth that we've seen from Scripture, then your response is as we said earlier, you must go to God and pray to him and lay out your dilemma before him and ask him for mercy. Say, "Lord, I see it clearly. I see that only You can give the new birth. I can't do it on my own. I see that You're commanding something that I cannot do on my own and I see that I do not have this fruit of regeneration in my life. God, I am in a most helpless, desperate, miserable condition. Would You have mercy on me like You had on the tax gatherer in Luke 18? God, have that kind of mercy on me, I beg You. I ask You, I plead with You to have mercy on me in the Lord Jesus Christ because unless You do, I will perish miserably."

On the other hand, you look at your life and you see these things and you're rooted in Christ and you say, "Do you know what? This message is incredibly encouraging and affirming to me because even though I know I fall short, I can see that God has done this work in me." Well, the words that come out of our mouths as believers in response to this is, "To God be the glory. Great things He has done. So loved He the world that He gave us His Son. And not only did He give His Son to the world, He gave Him to me. He did a work in me to save me and now I see that Christ loved me and gave Himself up for me." And do you know what that does as you contemplate those realities and they come with power to your heart, do you know what it's going to produce in you? By now it ought to

be automatic in response to this teaching in 1 John, do you know what it's going to do for you? It's going to give you joy. It's going to help you grow in holiness. It's going to give you assurance of salvation.

So let's take these matters to the Lord now in prayer and commit them, commit each one of you to the Lord in response to what we've heard from God's word here tonight. Let's pray together.

Dear Father, for those of us that are in Christ and this message comes as such great encouragement from Your word even though we fall short of Your glory, seal us in that joy, holiness and assurance that John wrote to produce in Your children. Father, for those who have been exposed as unbelieving people even if they have previously professed Christ, they see themselves in light of Your word and see that this is all foreign to them, God, on their behalf I ask You to have mercy on them. Help them in their dead, helpless, hostile inability to You. Father, impart that new life to them which is Yours alone to grant and as You do that, Father, we will give you the praise and all of the glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.