

# The Need for New Birth

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**Bible Verse:** 1 John 2:29  
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Sunday we began, if you weren't with us, we began a consideration of the doctrine of regeneration. We are refreshing foundational material for Truth Community Church on regeneration, on the doctrine of providence, and on church life. We'll be doing this over the next four or five weeks. I said it's like a beginning toolbox of Christian living, a crash course in Christian discipleship, and the doctrine of regeneration teaches us about the start of our experience in the Christian life. Of course, we understand that God's choice of his people for salvation is rooted in a decision that he made in eternity past, but what we're talking about here is our experience of it, the moment at which we start to enter into the Christian life, and that is what regeneration teaches us. After we're saved, providence teaches us the sustaining power and God's direction of our life and everything else that happens in the universe, and then the doctrine of church life connects us to the broader body of Christ, and so it's my opinion that those three doctrines come together well and give us a sense of life in the church and life as a Christian in a way that I think is going to be helpful for us over time.

We looked at a fundamental text to orient our thinking and I invite you to turn to 1 John 2:29 with me, 1 John 2:29 where it says this, it says,

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

That "born of Him," born of God, a Christian is someone to whom God has given birth. God has given life to them. We saw that that phrase is used in 1 John 3:9, you can look at that with me, "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." In 1 John 4:7, it says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." And then finally in chapter 5, verse 1, it says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." And it would be good for you to have those four verses as a pattern in your mind that you know to go to when you think about what it means to be born again, 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, and 5:1; those are good verses to have as a foundation to call upon readily when this comes up in your thinking.

The phrase "born of God," or "born of Him," introduces the theme of regeneration and last time I repeated over the course of five minutes or so a definition of regeneration and I'll just read through it here really quickly to refresh your memory. Regeneration is a secret act of the Holy Spirit in which he imparts divine life to a sinner so that the sinner will repent of sin, believe in Christ, and serve Christ in newness of life. It's an act of the Spirit of God in which he takes the redemption that Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross and applies it to an individual sinner. He opens the mind, he draws that sinner to faith in Christ and thereby imparting divine life to that sinner, and the sinner's repentance, the sinner's faith is consequent upon regeneration. I like to say this, is that you believe because you were born again, you were not born again because you believed. In other words, your faith was consequent upon God working in your heart, being born again was not a reward for your self-generated faith. That's a very important distinction to have in our minds. When God saved you, he gave new life to you just as when a mother gives birth to a child and gives life to that child, God gives life to his children when he saves them and causes them to come to Christ as it's described in John 6. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him." So it requires an active act of God for someone to come to faith in Christ. They cannot do that on their own. That is really fundamental to understanding the whole nature of Christianity. You see, real Christianity, biblical Christianity, is supernatural, a supernatural God performs a supernatural act on the heart of man to impart life to them, to breathe life into their dead bones, if you like the dead bones analogy from the book of Ezekiel.

Now last time, we saw many metaphors in Scripture that describe this reality and I'm just going to do some review here of Sunday's message and I'm reviewing a lot more than I usually do because it is just so vitally important for this to be set in our minds; the fact that I'm saying it over and over again is a measure of how critical this is for you in your own Christian life and how critical it is for us as a body of believers to have this clear and settled in our thinking. So we saw many metaphors that describe this reality. In Titus 3:4 through 7, this new life is called regeneration, regeneration in Titus 3. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, it's called a new creation. A new creation. In Ephesians 2:4 and 5, it's described as God making us alive, it's a spiritual resurrection. Then in 1 Peter 1, you see it described as new birth. God has caused us to be born again, it says in verse 3. All of these terms, regeneration, a new creation, a spiritual resurrection, new birth, all of them describing new life being imparted by God and making someone new, turning that person, turning you at the time of your conversion, turning you into someone that you were not before. Regeneration is an instantaneous act that is accompanied by the believer's faith and repentance in Christ but in a logical sense that repentance and faith flows from the initial work of God in the heart, and so these are the things we looked at on Sunday.

Now let me just say one other thing about this. When we're talking about the doctrine of regeneration, we are talking about something that is distinct from and goes far beyond the outward call of the Gospel to man. From man to man. I can preach the Gospel to you, I can tell you that Jesus died and rose again to save sinners like you, that the Father accepted his sacrifice, and on the basis of the work of Christ invite you to come to Christ to repent of sin and put your faith in Christ in order that you might be saved. That's the outward call of the Gospel but a lot of people hear that and don't believe, and why is that?

It's because there is more required than simply the outward call of the Gospel to provoke a saving response to the message of the Gospel, it requires an inward work of God, it requires God powerfully working in the heart to draw that man to faith in Christ. So regeneration is the result of an inward call of God, a work in the heart, an effective call which always produces salvation in the heart of the man that God is doing the work in. When God determines to work this work in the heart, that man always comes to Christ because it is an inner supernatural work of God in which he causes that man to be born again and that is different from the human proclamation of the Gospel. God uses the human proclamation of the Gospel to work in the heart but a lot of people hear the Gospel, as you know, as you've shared the Gospel with your loved ones over and over and over again and their hearts are still cold and stony and nonresponsive to Christ, you know by experience that the mere declaration of the Gospel doesn't necessarily lead someone to Christ, and that the missing element there is that it requires a work of God in the heart, and that's why when we come together it is so good and so vital and so important for all of you, and for me as well, to be praying for the work of God to be taking place as the word of God is opened. We need to ask God and to express our dependence upon him to do the work in the hearts of unbelievers who gather under the word, who might hear it over the live stream or in subsequent media, we need to be praying together as a congregation, making this a priority in the life of our church, when you are praying in private, when we gather corporately, that there would always be a sense of priority, "God, do a work and save sinners and honor Your name through saving them and drawing them to Yourself because, Father, it is outside of our power to do that. Father, it's outside my powers as a parent to save my child, it's outside my power as a preacher to save anyone under the sound of my voice," all that we can do is present the truth and then we trust God and we are dependent upon God to do the work in the heart that only he can do, and that way, in that way God gets all of the glory for it.

If anyone is saved under the sound of the preaching of Truth Community Church we take no credit for that because God is the one who does the work and without him it does not happen. We sing a hymn here from time to time that says all is vain, and the hymn is "Brethren, we have met to worship," it's one of my favorite hymns actually for corporate worship, and there's a line or two in it that says, "All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down." It's vain, what we're doing is a waste of time unless the Spirit works and that's why it goes on to say, "Brethren, pray and holy manna will be showered all around." We have to pray. We humble ourselves before God in dependence and pray that he would do that work that only he can do. And why do we do that, why do we bother? Well, it's because we love the glory of Christ. We want to see Christ glorified in the conversion of sinners. We know that Christ came to save sinners and we want to see that work spread so that there would be more voices joining in ascribing glory to Christ as being the one who is alone the Savior of sinners, and we want that for the sake of the sinner themselves. We love sinners. We care what happens for them. We don't want them to undergo the judgment and the wrath of God throughout all of eternity, we realize this is desperately important for their own well-being. So for the glory of Christ and for the sake of the souls of men, we pray and we ask God to do a work that only he can do in regenerating the heart, and removing the stony heart and putting in a heart of flesh.

You see, one of the reasons that I'm emphasizing the doctrine of regeneration here and the impossibility of salvation without it, is to ask you as those who are members of Truth Community Church, those of you that are friends of Truth Community Church, to be refreshed and mindful of your opportunity and your responsibility to pray to this end. We've had the joy of baptizing a few people over the past several months. We're grateful for that. We should never be satisfied. What we would most enjoy was there was just a steady stream, that we ran the waters of Clairmont County dry because we were always filling the baptistery with people giving testimony of new life in Christ. We just want to be mindful of these things. We are not a social club. We don't exist simply for the sake of what we can get out of the church. We exist and proclaim the Gospel, we exist for the glory of Christ, and he is supremely glorified when sinners are saved and come to faith in him, and so we pray to that end and we ask God to do that as an ongoing facet of what we pray for together as a church, and so regeneration points us in that direction.

Now Jesus Christ himself said that no one can be saved without this miracle of regeneration. Christ himself in John 3:3 said, "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Four verses later in verse 7, he said, "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" He was saying this to Nicodemus, the teacher in Israel at the time and he said, "Nicodemus, you must be born again if you are going to see the kingdom of God." So what we see in this and what regeneration points us to is this reality that Christianity is not about simple moral improvement and trying to get people, you know, and badger people to live more righteous lives. What we are telling people is that they are spiritually dead sinners who are under judgment that need a spiritual resurrection and that unless they are born again they cannot be saved and they will face the judgment of God. So a church that doesn't believe in the miracle of the new birth, that doesn't somehow teach about the need to be born again, the need for faith in Christ, is a false church no matter what else they may be doing, and this is so critical to understand.

So that's a review of what we saw last time on Sunday, some 48 to 60 hours ago. Now that leads us to a different question and there are about three or four questions that I'm going to answer in the course of this series about regeneration, and the question for tonight is why is regeneration necessary? Why is it that no one can be saved apart from this work of God? Why is it so vital to true faith that a man be born again? And that's the question that we want to answer this evening, and I don't know how long this will take but here's the short answer to that question, why is regeneration necessary, I'm going to show you a number of passages from Scripture. The new birth, regeneration is necessary because men do not have the capacity to respond in faith on their own. They need something given to them from outside of their heart in order to be able to do that. Regeneration is necessary because men do not have the capacity to respond in faith. They are blind. They are dead and we're going to look at a number of passages that point us in that direction.

So regeneration is necessary because of the utter inability of man to respond to the Gospel on his own. That's why a man must be born again, that's why God must draw a man to Christ, it's why God must work in the heart, he has to do a work of creation to form something that otherwise would not come to pass and that is what we're going to see

and respond to, remembering that last time on Sunday we looked at numerous passages that talk about the reality of regeneration, we are assuming that now and we look now today at the need for regeneration, or you could just title it this way, "The Need for New Birth." Why must a man be born again? Why is he helpless apart from God's act of regeneration? That's what we want to look at here this evening and I'm going to give you five or six different answers to the question that like the metaphors for regeneration are saying the same thing, are making the same point but looking at it from different angles.

So first of all, why must a man be born again? First of all, the unsaved man is hostile to God and his law. The unsaved man is hostile to God and his law. You see, it's not simply a matter of a lack of information that keeps people from coming to Christ. If that were the case, we could just give people lectures about truth and the information itself would cause them to turn to Christ if that were the case. It's more than a lack of information; sometimes there is a lack of information but that's not all that there is to it.

Look at the book of Romans 3, beginning in verse 10 with a particular attention here today on verse 11. The Apostle Paul quoting from different passages in the Old Testament says this in verse 10, he says, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." Now I understand that you've seen this passage many many times, we refer to it frequently for good reason, a couple of things should stand out to you: the utter exclusivity or the exhaustive nature of this passage, there is none righteous, not even one; none who understand; none who seeks for God; all have turned aside; together they have become useless; none who does good, not even one. If you were counting, there were eight expressions of the exhaustive nature of this showing the comprehensive nature that all of humanity falls under this condemnation of Scripture. This is true of every man and there must be a recognition on the part of the sinner that he is not righteous and that he is separated from God. But in the context of what we're talking about here this evening, why is regeneration necessary, well, beloved, if no one is seeking for God, which is exactly what Scripture says, how is it that anyone is going to find him then? If no one is seeking, how is it that he will be found? Well, the answer to that is the fact that it is God who seeks out the sinners. Jesus said, "I have come to seek and to save the lost," Luke 19 in the story of Zacchaeus. God is the one seeking sinners, it's not sinners seeking after God, and the way that he seeks them and the way that he saves them is through doing this work of regeneration in their hearts that changes their hearts and directs them to himself.

In Romans 8:7, you get another expression of this, the carnal mind, the unsaved mind, the unregenerate mind it says in Romans 8:7, it says, "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so." Do you see it? There is a complete inability. There is an utter lack of power to subject yourself to God if you are in the flesh. Verse 8, "those who are in the flesh cannot please God." So the unsaved man is in this position of hostility, not seeking God, hostile toward him.

If you go back to Romans 5, I suppose we could have made a stop along the way here, you see it expressed this way in Romans 5:6, "we were helpless but at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." We were helpless, we were ungodly there at the end of verse 6. Verse 8, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Helpless, ungodly, sinners, and so what Paul gives us in Romans is this picture of the unsaved man hostile to God, unable to respond and unwilling to respond, helpless in his condition. He's a spiritual corpse. It's not that he's lying on the ground writhing, looking for help, the unsaved man is not a person who needs a life preserver thrown to him because he's struggling and about to drown. That suggests that he's alive. No, the unsaved man is a dead man at the bottom of the ocean who needs someone, he needs God to come down and pick him up and save him and give him new life and deliver him from that realm of death in which he exists, and without that he would otherwise lay under the weight of the judgment of God.

So why is regeneration necessary? It's because the unsaved man is hostile to God and his law. If you keep in mind the opening passages of Romans, you realize that that hostility can manifest itself in different ways. It can be in the terms of a rank pagan in Romans 1. It could be a moralistic person who is satisfied in his self-righteousness, it could be a person who is religious and yet dead in sin. You see, you're equally dead in sin if you're trusting in your own righteousness, as you are if you're a drunk in the gutter or somehow other just a very vile outward sinner. Sin manifests itself in a lot of ways and as Martyn Lloyd-Jones said many times in the past and I've repeated in other places, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, of course, went to heaven in 1981, he made the point that even sophisticated university professors who have all the outward trappings of erudition and being well-spoken, are people who are just as dead in sin as anybody else because they need to be born again and their hostility might not be reflected in outward profligate sin like the prodigal son, but rather it's manifested in a settled arrogance and pride and contempt toward the word of God and the people of God and the Christ of God, even if it doesn't come out in that particular way, in a way that's obvious to men. So this covers everybody and this is why everyone needs to be born again.

Now, secondly in a related way, you could put it this way: the unsaved man, the natural man does not understand the Gospel. The natural man does not understand the Gospel. So if the Gospel is the only message that can bring salvation to a man and the natural man cannot understand it, then what hope is there for him to be saved? How could he possibly come to saving faith if he cannot understand the word of God which communicates it to him? It's an impossibility.

Look at 1 Corinthians 2. Why is the new birth necessary? The unsaved man is hostile to God, secondly, the unsaved man does not even understand the Gospel. Look at chapter 2, verse 14 where it says, "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." The lone message that communicates the truth that would save his soul, he cannot understand it. It's not simply that he does not understand it, in that state he cannot understand it. It is foolishness to him.

It would be interesting to know how many of you have that kind of testimony in your own past before you were a Christian, you viewed the word of God, you viewed true Christians, you viewed the message of the Gospel as something foolish, not worth your time, a matter of contempt, a matter of silliness. I know I was like that for such a long time. I remember shortly before my conversion, I had a Gideon's Bible, it was the only Bible I owned, and I probably told this story, but I remember it distinctly, I had a Gideon's Bible and I opened it up and my eyes fell upon John 17, the Lord's high priestly prayer. I remember trying to read that and it was just gobbledygook to me. It made absolutely no sense to me whatsoever. I had no idea what that was talking about so I just kind of tossed the Gideon's Bible over onto my dresser, turned over and went to sleep. But it was foolishness to me. I could not understand it. I could not understand it because it takes the Spirit of God within a man to enable him to understand the word of God. It takes an enablement from God to be able to understand the things of God. No one knows the mind of God, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God, and so we need the Spirit of God help us and in regeneration, what the doctrine of regeneration does is it tells us that God graciously comes to a man, to an individual by name, and he opens his mind and he imparts life to him and helps him attain to a knowledge and an understanding and a faith of which he was otherwise utterly unable to get to on his own. Do you see why we sing the song, the hymn, "To God be the glory"? This is why we sing praises to God. This is why we glorify God in our songs, it's because we realize that he has done something for us that we could not do on our own and it is humbling for us to look at these things and to remember that this is what we used to be like. Now today as Christians, this is what we used to be like. Everyone of you, and me included, you used to be hostile to God. You used to not understand or appreciate the Gospel. This is the universal condition of man, the universal condition of women, if you like the inclusive language.

So when we start to see, what I want you to see is we're looking at the other side of the same coin that we looked at on Sunday. On the one side of the coin, we see these multiplied statements of how God caused us to be born again, he made us a new creation in Christ and we see this positive description that when we were dead in trespasses and sins, God made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved. That's the positive side of it. Well, what we're seeing tonight is the other side of the coin that explains for us biblically why that's necessary. It had to be an act of God because it could not be an act of man. We could not make ourselves alive, we could not raise ourselves from our spiritual death.

Thirdly. We said the unsaved man is hostile to God and his law, we said, secondly, the unsaved man does not understand or appreciate the Gospel, thirdly, there is a supernatural component to this as well and this is very sobering, even frightening, you could say, the third point is this, is that Satan blinds men to the truth of the Gospel. Satan blinds men to the truth of the Gospel and to the glory of Christ and, therefore, let's look at a passage to set that in our mind. 2 Corinthians 4, beginning in verse 3, the Apostle Paul said, "even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing," to those who are lost, in other words, "in whose case," in whose case, who's case are we talking about? Those who are perishing. He goes on and he describes something that is true about them, as it

pertains to them, this is true, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." There is a supernatural blindness, beloved, in the hearts of those who do not know Christ. They have been supernaturally blinded. They cannot see. They are worse off than a man born blind physically. They are worse off because they have a spiritual need and they don't have the spiritual eyes even to recognize it, let alone having the spiritual power to be able to effectuate it. They're in a horrible condition. In their own heart, they're hostile to God and on top of that, there's another layer that Satan has blinded them and prevents them from understanding Gospel, and Satan is a force to be reckoned with, so to speak. You know, we're not talking about a cartoon character in a red jumpsuit, we're talking about the enemies of the souls of men and we're talking about the father of lies, we're talking about the one who fell from heaven, the one who tempted Adam and Eve into sin and brought the whole human race into ruin, that Satan with supernatural powers, with a host of demons under his command perpetrating false doctrine and false philosophies and blinding men through a variety of means so that they don't see the Gospel or understand its importance. He is a grave taskmaster. He is a despot, a despicable despot over the souls of men and he blinds them so that they may not see.

Scripture, you don't need to turn there but Scripture describes this in another place as well in 2 Timothy 2. It speaks about the need of the Lord's bondservant to be patient and to be able to teach and it says in verse 25 that he should do this "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth," God needs to do something for them, verse 26, "and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." Satan holding unsaved men captive and under the chains of his captivity, having blinded them in such a way that they are utterly under his domination and control, this is the picture that Scripture describes of the unsaved man. It's not simply that he is outwardly immoral, it's not simply that he's indifferent to the Gospel, he's hostile to Christ and he's under a spiritual domination from which he cannot deliver himself. A natural man does not have the ability to deliver himself from supernatural chains. The natural slave does not have the ability to deliver himself from a supernatural wicked master.

So Satan blinds men to Gospel truth and to the glory of Christ. So in light of that, you ask the question why is regeneration necessary? What is the need for the new birth? Do you start to see the cumulative weight of everything that Scripture says about the unsaved man? He's hostile to God. He does not and cannot understand the Gospel and he is a slave to Satan. So much for a Gospel of self-esteem, right? So much for pearly white teeth preachers telling you a message to make you feel good about yourself and telling you the importance of how you can have your best life now. Do you see what a horrible delusion and deception that is to perpetrate on unsuspecting people? They need to hear that they are lost and they need to be saved by an act of God, and that they need to humbly cry out to Christ for mercy and ask him to save them because they cannot save themselves; to create a sense of spiritual thirst and even spiritual desperation that says, "What must I do to be saved?" As the jailer in Acts said, the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, to fall down

before the Apostle Paul trembling saying, "What must I do to be saved?" Well, that whole feel-good preaching does not provoke that in the human heart and therefore it simply is nothing more than a perpetuation, another weapon in the arsenal of Satan to keep people blind and deaf and unresponsive to the Gospel, all the while making them feel good in the name of Jesus. This is serious stuff and the doctrine of regeneration helps us to see that and helps us to recognize the need for a man to be born again by a power from above that is beyond his own earthly power.

Now, fourthly, the unsaved man is dead in sin and he's under God's wrath. The unsaved man is dead in sin and he's under God's wrath. Look at Ephesians 2. Why is the new birth necessary? Why can a man not be saved apart from regeneration at the initiation of God? Chapter 2, verse 1, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins," you had no spiritual life, verse 2, "in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air," there's Satan again, "of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived," and see again the universality of it, beloved, "we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." By nature, that's what you were like. By nature, your very existence of your life was like this, a child of wrath, a child of Satan, a child of death and sin. So of course a man who is dead in sin cannot produce on his own power the faith that is necessary to reach out to Christ and to be saved, it must be a gift of God, a work of God that is given to him, and Paul goes on to say that in verse 4 which, of course, I've already alluded to but, you know, you can never get too much of a good thing. Verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions," there is this picture that while entering the time at which you were spiritually lifeless, "God made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." You were dead and in that dead state God came and made you alive. That's the doctrine of regeneration. It was an act of grace, of undeserved favor to someone who deserved judgment. Verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves," this whole act of salvation including saving faith was not of yourself, it was a gift God gave to you "not as a result of works," God was not responding to you, God did not respond to your faith, your faith was a response to the prior work of God making you alive in Christ, "so that no one may boast."

So, you know, when you think it through, when someone says, "I am a Christian," if they are biblically informed when they say that, to say that you are a Christian is to utterly deny that there is anything in your life about which you can boast before God and before man, because to say, "I am a Christian," is to say that, "I was a man, I was a woman, I was a boy, I was a girl, I was hostile to God. I did not understand the Gospel. Satan has blinded me to the truth and I was dead in trespasses and sin and under God's wrath, but God saved me, but Christ had mercy on me. God drew me to Himself, imparted to me gifts of repentance and faith that I exercised and put my trust in Christ, and I have been born again by the power of God, not by anything in my own wisdom or choosing." All of that is wrapped up in the statement, "I am a Christian."

So it would be good for me to ask: are you a Christian like that? You know, there are people that use the word Christian in a self-righteous sense. "You know, I'm a Christian. I try to do good by my fellow man, you know, love my neighbor as myself and all of that," and it just becomes a means of congratulating themselves on their own self-righteousness. "I embrace, you know, the ethical teachings of Scripture." In today's world, they might say, "I'm not a Democrat." You can laugh at that if you want. There's a little humor intended in that, but to understand that all of those earthly things and these things by which we proclaim our own righteousness is a very denial of biblical Christianity and a very denial of the reality of regeneration.

So I ask you, friends, have you come to a point where you realize you have come to the utter end of yourself, the utter end of any claim to righteousness, and cast yourself fully upon the mercy of Christ trusting God to do the work in you that Scripture describes? There are two different ways that you can go astray here. One is by thinking that you're righteous because you've done certain things and therefore, "You know, I've done these things. I'm a pretty righteous person. I'm good enough," and think along that line, or you could be like I was before I was a Christian and simply define it negatively, "There are sins that I haven't committed," and while you might not express it exactly in these terms, there is this simmering thought in your mind that says, "Because I haven't committed those sins, I'm better than someone else. I'm good enough for God. I haven't broken these five commandments, let's not talk about the other five, but I haven't broken those five and so, you know, I'm okay." And then God's word comes, the Spirit of God opens your mind and you realize that Scripture says in James 2 to break one commandment is to break them all because you've violated the holiness of God that is the unifying force behind all 10 Commandments, a violation of one commandment is a violation of the holy God and therefore merits his judgment, the point being that I'm asking you here, asking you over the live stream, asking those of you in the room, have you come to that point where you realize that you have no righteousness of your own, in an Isaiah sense, "All of my righteousness is just filthy deplorable rags that are a stench and I need a righteousness given to me, I need mercy that I don't deserve. I cry out to Christ to save me because I am utterly ruined and lost apart from Him." Have you trusted Christ like that is the question, not whether you can name the name of Jesus, not whether you can look back and say, "Well, I prayed a prayer back some time ago." Do you view yourself with that kind of sense that makes you cry out to Christ alone for righteousness? That's the question. That's the need for the new birth.

There's a final thing that we could say about this, is that non-Christians are ignorant and they are hard of heart. Look at Ephesians 4:17, Paul says, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." What marks the unsaved man? Darkened in understanding, a futile mind, excluded from the life of God and on and on it goes. So you see that there must be new life given from outside by God because there is nothing within the heart of man that can produce that life on its own.

Now for thinking people there is a tension here. There is a tension here because what this means is this, it means that the Gospel, the call of the Gospel commands men to do that which is impossible for them to do. Scripture says repent and believe in the Gospel, Mark 1, it says repent and return so that your sins may be wiped away, Acts 3, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, Acts 16, and these are presented as commands to be obeyed. There is a dilemma here. Scripture points to an utter inability of man and yet assigns him responsibility to respond to the call of the Gospel. How can this dilemma, how are we to understand this dilemma? We're asking men, we're telling men do that knowing that it's impossible for them to do.

The great Reform theologian, John Murray, states the dilemma well in his book "Redemption Accomplished and Applied," I recommend that book to you. We refer to it from time to time in the church bulletin, "Redemption Accomplished and Applied." It's a little tiny book that takes like a year to read because it's so packed and intense. It is not a quick read. He states the dilemma like this, "How can a person who is dead in trespasses and sins, whose mind is hostile against God and who cannot do that which is well pleasing to God, answer a call to fellowship with Christ?" Do you get what he's saying there? Let me read that again. This is John Murray, "Redemption Accomplished and Applied," page 95. I'll shorten it. I'll condense it. "How can a person who is dead in sin, whose mind is hostile against God, answer a call to come to Christ?" Now, some people would argue, therefore based on this they would solve that dilemma by saying a man must be able to believe, he must have that power, you know, and he doesn't need the help of God otherwise the Gospel would be commanding an impossibility and that wouldn't be fair. Others, well, let me just say this, that is contrary to all of the Scripture we've seen tonight, isn't it, to say that a man is able to believe. We've seen passage after passage after passage saying hostility and death and inability and cannot understand. That can't be the answer. It appeals to the rational mind of man but it does not accord with Scripture. Arminians believe in a doctrine called prevenient grace. It's the idea that, yes, men are sinners but God has given grace to all men so that they are able to choose for themselves to accept or reject Christ. So while men were lost, God has given a boost of grace to people to impart to them an ability to believe and therefore they can choose or reject for themselves. Well, that strokes the pride of man but it denies the word of God. There's not a Scripture that says that, this is made up by theologians, and Jesus Christ specifically said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him," John 6:44. So let's just kind of picture ourselves in this, you know, in the realm of humanity and recognize the utter helpless position that we're in. Scripture says that we were helpless, that we were enemies, and who was it, who was it, then, that was the reconciler in this hostile relationship? Was it you? Was it me? Is it the sinner reaching out to God to be reconciled? No, it was God who initiated it and the tension of all of this is not answered by ascribing to man an ability that Scripture explicitly denies that he has, the tension being how is it that a man is supposed to believe if he doesn't have the ability to believe, the tension is answered in, beloved, this biblical doctrine of regeneration.

Murray goes on to say this and I quote, "It is the glory of the Gospel of God's grace that it provides for this tension. God's call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative

grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel." I'll read that again. I told you, John Murray, he's great. You have to think on what he's saying. "It is the glory of the Gospel of God's grace that it provides for this tension. God's call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel." In other words, beloved, what regeneration teaches us is this, is that when God saved you, in that moment in time when you truly turned to Christ under the influence of the Gospel, God was bringing the Gospel call to your mind. With that, he did not leave it in your inability to decide how to respond because you would have continued to be lost. As God brought the Gospel to you, along with that he brought to your heart the grace that enabled you to believe. He brought to you the grace that enabled you to respond to that which he was commanding you. In other words, he commanded it and then he gave you the grace and power that needed to be able to respond at the same time. God secures the salvation of his elect by a work of the Spirit in their hearts. He supernaturally creates life in the midst of death.

Now we're not saying that a man understands all of this is happening at the moment of his conversion. In our experience and in our understanding of it, at the moment we have the sense and there is a true sense that we're repenting and putting our faith in Christ, and we don't understand in the moment that the power of God is so much at work in that act, but we're not supposed to simply base our whole Christian life and Christian understanding on what we understood at the moment of our conversion. That wouldn't make any sense, would it? No, we're supposed to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, 2 Timothy 3:18, and as we grow and the way we grow is we read God's word, and as we read God's word, we see these things laid out for us. You come as a new Christian to God's word and God's word in a sense says, "Let me tell you what has happened to you." You were far more lost than you realized and God's power was far more great than you realized at the moment you believed, and as you grow in Scripture, you look back and you start to understand that with deeper understanding, with clearer eyes, with a clearer mind, and realize as you grow in grace and grow in understanding, even more and more a sense of pride is put away and you gladly and with understanding ascribe all the glory to God and to Christ for your salvation.

I have often used this quote from Charles Spurgeon, I'm not ashamed to use it again, where Spurgeon says and I quote, "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. 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.'" 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." "Treasury of the New Testament," volume 2, page 267.

So, beloved, what we've seen tonight here is the need for the new birth. Sunday we saw the reality of the new birth, here you could say we've seen the necessity of the new birth, but that leaves a couple of questions unanswered. Perhaps in response to this, the most important question is this: how do you know if you've been born again? How do you know that you've been miraculously changed by God in his work of regeneration? How do you know the answer to that and how does God do this? How does God bring a man from death to life? How does he do that? Those are both really important questions. How do you know? How does God do it? Those are the questions that we're going to answer Sunday and Tuesday of next week. For tonight, we simply embrace the reality of what Scripture says, it says that you must be born again and tells you why you must be born again, because of your spiritual death.

We embrace that here at Truth Community Church and what I want you to see is that this explains, the doctrine of regeneration goes a long way to explaining why we do ministry like we do. We call men to Christ, we invite them to Christ, we pray for them to come to Christ, we beg them to come to Christ, we long to see that but we don't manipulate them just to get an outward decision. We don't sing long hymns of invitation at the end of our service time and time and time again, hoping that somebody will just be worn down by the sheer weight of the repetition and come forward, because we realize that's not the real thing. We understand that God is perfectly capable of saving a man without requiring the man to walk forward to do that. We present the Gospel and we pray that God would do that which only he can do, create new life where none exists. I'm thankful that he's done that in so many of you, certainly thankful that he's done that in me, and I would ask you do you have an awareness of new birth having taken place in you, or have you just been in your own efforts trying to work out some kind of your own salvation with a little bit of Jesus mixed in? Do you know Christ? I invite you to come to him by faith, and for those of you that do and especially those of you that are a part of our church, I ask you that corporately we would join together and be mindful of the urgency of our praying to God, dependently asking him to do that which only he can do, that the power of the Gospel would be displayed through the salvation of sinners in our midst, maybe even some of you.

Let's pray together.

*Lord Jesus, we are so grateful that You had mercy on us. You were the only One who could have saved us and You did. You were the only One with the power and the ability and the sinlessness to be a Redeemer for lost men and women and You did it, and it wasn't simply that You did a work on the cross and then left us to figure it out, You sent Your Spirit to make sure that all of us, all of Your elect would be gathered in for sure and the Spirit did a work in each one of our hearts that know Christ today, did a work in our heart and we are on the receiving end of a gracious, merciful, supernatural salvation that we could not have done on our own. How we thank You for the grace that You have shown to us. We love You only because You first loved us and that's always the order. We pray that You might extend this new birth to others who have not known You, have not known the new birth, Father. We pray that they would see their sin and turn to Christ for salvation, putting their faith in Him alone as Lord and Savior that they might be saved,*

*that they might be born again, Father, and that You would receive glory by their transformed lives. Help us, Father, as a church, help us as individuals that are a part of this church, O God, help us to pray to that end to recognize that we need to express our dependence upon You, to ask You to do this, that we would not put any confidence in the flesh, any confidence in our own abilities, Father, but we would ever be mindful that salvation is of the Lord and it requires an act of Yours in order for anyone to be saved. Help us to that end and let us sing with joy now as we respond to Your word in song. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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