

**The Doctrine of Regeneration, Part 1**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Now we are in the midst of studying some of the great doctrines of the Bible, in particular those doctrines that relate to the gospel, that relate to our salvation. And I just want to begin by reminding you that I'm not trying in each of these messages to connect or resolve the dots in every sense. When we deal with a doctrine in focus, when we look particularly at a doctrine, it obviously raises questions about how it relates to other doctrines. And there is always that age-old dilemma in the mind of every one of us of about how the sovereignty of God connects up with the responsibility of man. How it is that we can believe that God saves whom He will by His sovereign power, and yet every person is responsible to believe the gospel. And not only responsible but culpable so as to be punished eternally for a failure to do so. And that is the great dilemma, that is the unresolved apparent paradox that no one of us can ever really fully resolve. The danger comes when we don't understand how to resolve that, we try to resolve it and we wind up destroying the purity and the truth of great doctrines.

The Bible does teach human responsibility. It teaches that the sinner is guilty, the sinner is responsible for sin, the sinner is guilty enough to be punished eternally, the sinner is given the opportunity, "That which may be known of God is in them." God has revealed His law in their conscience and in their mind, the law of God written on their hearts. They are responsible to live up to that. They are responsible to believe in the true and living God, to come to faith in the gospel and through Jesus Christ to be saved. And yet on the other side, we know that those who are saved are saved because of the sovereign purpose of God.

Certainly I'm not going to be the one to resolve that, no one ever has. We've always held those great truths in tension. On the one hand then, we preach the gospel with passion and zeal, and hold the sinner responsible. On the other hand, we celebrate and rejoice and praise God for the mighty work of salvation which He alone can do. And along that line and on that side of the issue, we continue in our look of the doctrines that relate to the sovereign purposes of God in salvation. Tonight, the doctrine of regeneration, or if you will, the new birth, or being born again.

And to begin with, I want you to turn to James, the epistle written by James, the brother of our Lord, chapter 1 and verse 18. This verse, this single verse will act for us as the launch point to collect our thoughts, a point of departure, if you look at it another way, into the scriptural sky to see the wide range of the doctrine of regeneration. But verse 18 pulls together the elements that are important for us to know about this great truth. James 1:18 says, "In the exercise of His will, He brought us forth by

the word of truth so that we might be, as it were, the firstfruits among His creatures." In the exercise of His will, He brought us forth by the word of truth so that we might be, as it were, the firstfruits among His creatures, or His creation.

Now often we have heard evangelists tell people they need to be born again. You probably heard that if you've been in church, you've been told by preachers you must be born again, you need to be born again. And very often they will say here's how...and there are lots of books and articles on how to be born again. Very popular. In fact, that particular approach to evangelism is so common and so ordinary in our evangelical experience that it seems to us to be completely normal and completely acceptable. However, when the Lord chooses an analogy, He chooses it very carefully so as to make a very important point. And it was the Lord Himself who chose this analogy of new birth, being born again, or regenerated. And He did so because the concept has specificity that relates to the truth or the doctrine. And the bottom line is simply this, it is impossible for someone to do something in order to be born. The utter impossibility of such a thing as doing something to be born apparently has escaped a lot of folks. The notion that there is a way to get born again, there is a way to become born again shows how superficially we understand Scripture. We are aided and abetted, I think, in our superficiality by teachers and preachers who don't think very deeply about these matters either.

But when you're talking about being born, you're really talking about coming into existence and no one who is not in existence and comes into existence does so based upon something they did, or something they desired, or something they sought. If the Lord wants to talk about what we do, He talks about repentance. If He wants to talk about what we do, He talks about faith. But when the Bible starts talking about being born again, it no longer is talking about anything that you or I could do. The analogy itself describes a reality to which the one born can by definition make no contribution. We were all born completely apart from any consideration or effort on our part...unless you believe in reincarnation and some kind of pre-birth consciousness which, of course, is completely foreign to the Word of God and untrue. The person being born coming into existence, comes into existence apart from any desire or any action on his own behalf. Birth happens to us not because we desire it, not because we want it, or not because we followed the steps to be born. And that is exactly the point of the analogy. As I said before, when the Lord chooses an analogy, He chooses an analogy to convey a spiritual truth that is inherent in the simplest understanding of that analogy. It's not complex to say you didn't do anything to be born into this world, and then to say then you do not do anything to be born into the realm of God's world. That is the reason God chose that analogy. No one gives himself physical life, and no one gives himself or herself spiritual life. There are no steps that you do to become alive, either physically or spiritually.

So being born again or being regenerated clearly an analogy that speaks of something that happens to us apart from us. And by the way, this is not an isolated concept in the Bible, it is a fairly unmistakable, clear and repeated idea.

Now to cut to the very important bottom line, if you will, this idea of regeneration or being born again or new birth is unmistakably presented in the Scripture as the first divine act in salvation. It is primary, theologians say, in what they call the *ordo salutis*, the order of salvation. It is the first thing God does to save us. The only feature that comes before regeneration is election, and that was in eternity past before the foundation of the world. In time, in life, in reality the first thing God does when He sets to save His elect is to regenerate them. God calls the elect to Himself, we saw this last Sunday night, with an unyielding summons. Maybe the best thing to call it is power grace...power grace draws the sinner. John 6:44, Jesus said, "No man comes unto Me except the Father draw him," that's the effectual call, that's the irresistible grace. Or I like it better, that's the power grace, that's the unyielding summons, that's the divine subpoena. And all whom the Father calls come...as we saw in our study.

The question then is this, if it is true that the Father draws with power grace and He draws irresistibly and He draws effectually, or effectively, if it is true that it is an unyielding summons, it is a subpoena that you can't deny and that all who are drawn come, how can the sinner respond? Because if we look at what the Bible says about the natural condition of the sinner, we have to ask the question...what is there in the unregenerate, what is there in the sinner that can inaugurate, initiate or create a response? I mean, if you were to go into a mortuary, which no doubt you've done, or gone to a funeral...I've been in mortuaries many, many times through the years doing funerals. I've been behind the scenes when they're, you know, poking around with the body and arranging it in the casket and all of those kinds of things. And one of the things that strikes you very clearly is when someone is dead, it doesn't matter what the stimulus is. People can talk loudly, they can poke around, they can take their arm, put a ring on, take a ring off, flop one arm over the other arm, they can do anything they want to do and there is absolutely no response...none. Because death is the inability to respond. There's nothing there to respond. And the question then comes, how is it that the sinner can respond to the effectual call? If you understand the sinner's condition, that's a very important question.

Go to Romans chapter 3 and let's review a little bit because all of these doctrines are intertwined and certainly the doctrine of total depravity, or perhaps better, total inability, utter sinfulness is important to remember in the light of this particular emphasis on regeneration for it is the very work of regeneration that takes the person out of this condition. Romans 3:10, "There is none righteous, not even one, none who understands, none who comprehends," no ability to respond. "None who seeks for God, they're all turned aside, they've all become useless, there's none who does good, not even one." It goes on to describe this. We understand this as human sinfulness. There's nothing there to respond, no interest, no understanding, no comprehension.

To put it another way, Romans 8:7, "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, it does not subject itself to the law of God, it is not even able to do so." There's nothing in the heart of a person who is outside the kingdom of God to respond, there is no ability. Why? "The mind set on the flesh is

death." It is death itself and that again is the inability to respond. This is describing for us the natural person apart from God's gracious work.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians again, a very familiar verse, 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him, he cannot understand them, they are spiritually appraised, they are spiritually examined, they are spiritually apprehended and he is spiritually dead." So again there's no capability, there's no faculty there. You're dealing with a corpse. And most notably, turn to Ephesians 2 and be reminded of this very definitive description. Ephesians 2:1, and he's speaking about the condition of individuals prior to salvation, "You were dead." And again, the picture is one of absolute inability to respond. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." That's what characterized you. You walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, who is Satan, the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience. We all formerly lived in the lust of the flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath, even as everybody else was. That's your condition. It's about being dead, being in a condition of utter sinfulness, being able only to respond to the world of the dead, if you will, to Satan, to lusts in your flesh. You have no capacity to respond to a call from God, no capacity to respond to grace.

Ephesians 4, one other text which will help us a little, verse 17, "I say therefore...Paul says...this I say therefore and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer like the Gentiles also walk, in the emptiness of their mind. Their brain as far as spiritual things are concerned is a blank because they are, verse 18, darkened in their understanding. We come back to that again, it's three passages where you don't understand, you don't understand, you don't understand, you're understanding is dark. Why? Here's the key, verse 18, you are excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them and the hardness of their heart and they become callous, given over to sensuality to practice every kind of impurity with greed.

And so, in all these passages you have a picture of the condition of the sinner who is spiritually dead, spiritually incapacitated, spiritually ignorant, cannot understand, cannot examine, cannot apprehend. And in that condition one asks the question, how does this sinner respond to a call from God, a saving call, an unyielding summons, a supernatural subpoena? How does he respond to this irresistible power grace, this drawing of the fire? What faculty is there to cause him to respond? How can he repent and believe and embrace, since he is dead and ignorant and helpless like a corpse?

And that question leads us to the simple answer of regeneration. There will be no response unless the sinner is supernaturally given life because the call of God is a call to life, but there must be enough life to respond to that call. It's a call to faith. It's a call to salvation. But there must be a faculty to react. And so the doctrine of regeneration, the teaching in the Bible of regeneration says that God gives to His elect life so they can respond to the call, the effectual call, the power grace, the Father's drawing.

And again, there is great specificity and clarity in the imagery that the Bible uses. The image of death is the severest analogy possible. If you want to describe a person as not knowing God, a person who is...who is cut off from divine reality, cut off from spiritual truth, cut off from spiritual understanding, the best possible analogy you could use is they're dead. No response, no capability, no faculty, no life, no response, no existence...when it comes to spiritual things, they are a zero. Back to that statement in Ephesians, "Cut off from the life of God."

In order to respond then to the Father's drawing and to the calling of God through the Holy Spirit, the sinner has to be made alive and that is not something the sinner can do for himself. You understand that? The person who is a sinner who is apart from the life of God, who is dead in trespasses and sins, who is ignorant, who is without understanding, who is blind to spiritual truth, doubly blinded by Satan and the world as well, in that condition there is nothing he can do for himself to become alive. This is the folly of thinking that by the cleverness of our message, by the cleverness of our approach, by the style of our evangelism, by the way we craft the invitation of a sermon or the end of some kind of evangelistic meeting, by the way we play the organ, or beat out the music, somehow we're going to induce dead people to come to life. You might as well try to raise somebody at the local mortuary, or even better yet, go to the nearest graveyard and try playing an organ there, singing a few tunes, humming some lilting music, pleading with the corpses to see if they can raise themselves from the dead. It can't be done. Life has to come from the one who is the source of life, God Himself, the living God, the one who gives life. And if there's going to be any response, then there has to be a work of God prior to that response. And that is what the Bible calls regeneration.

Now it is fair to say that being regenerated or being born again or having the new birth, being made alive in Christ can refer to the whole of our salvation. I could say I'm born again, I'm regenerated. And by that, I mean the whole of my salvation. But that doesn't take away from the fact that regeneration is also a specific term related to a specific component in the work of salvation. I could say I'm redeemed and I mean by that all that my salvation is, but being redeemed is a specific element of salvation describing a specific act of God by which He pays the price to purchase us back from judgment. I can speak about being converted and I can mean by that the whole of my salvation. But...but conversion is an aspect in the technical sense of moving from one to the other. I can talk about being ransomed and I can mean that I have been saved and I can call it being ransomed. But ransom is one component by which we are bought, ransomed or redeemed by the price that Jesus paid. I can speak about being justified and by that I might mean that I'm a believer and you might understand that and you might see in the term justification the full understanding of salvation. But justification is a particular element of salvation. So you can see that these are particular features in the great panoply of the doctrines of salvation, any one of which can refer in a general sense to my newness in Christ. I can say, "Look, I used to be outside the family of God, but I have been adopted and adoption is a specific element as well, but it can speak in the general sense also."

So truly we can say we are born again and mean the fullness of our salvation. But specifically when we talk about regeneration, it's very important for us to know what exactly and particularly that means. So you say, "Why is it important?" Because the scriptures make it important by being definitive about it and the other elements of our salvation. Let's go back to James 1:18 now and I want you to look at this, this is very, very helpful material and it's going to lead to your praise of God, it's going to lead to your gratitude. It's going to divest you of any, I suppose, self-congratulations in making a wise choice to come to Christ. It's going to show you why if you're a Christian you are a Christian without any question.

Let's go down to verse 18 where we started. "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth so that we might be, as it were, the firstfruits among His creatures." Now I want to go back to verse 17, I want to kind of unfold this just little duet here of two verses. Let's get this in mind.

Verse 17, "Every good thing...every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above." Pretty clear, isn't it? If it's good, if it's perfect, it came from above. "Coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." What a great statement. And it's very comprehensive. Every good thing bestowed, which is the word...a different word for gift, a synonym of the second word for gift. You could say every gift, every good gift and every perfect gift...in fact, that's the old translation...every good gift and every perfect gift...good, agathon, the best, inherently good, qualitatively good; perfect, teleion, the end, the finish, the finale, the best, there couldn't be anything beyond this, every good thing to the most extremely good thing is from above. It's from above.

In contrast, by the way, let's go back to verse 13, in contrast, verse 13, "Let no one say when he's tempted, I'm being tempted of God. God can't be tempted by evil, and He Himself doesn't tempt anyone." Look if it's evil, it didn't come down from above, right? Because what comes down from above is good and perfect. "And everything that comes down from above is good and perfect, and everything that comes down from above is good and perfect." But, verse 14, "Sin and temptation, it comes from here, each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust is conceived, it gives birth to sin and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Don't be deceived about that, my beloved brethren."

What's he saying? He's saying, left to ourselves we are carried away, enticed by our own lust and brought to death. That's it. All that ever comes up from us is evil. All that ever comes up from inside of us is temptation, lust, sin, death. Even our supposed righteousness is filthy rags. The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. There's none that does good, no not one, as we read a moment ago. We are all dead in trespasses and sins...same thing. We are all operating according to this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, Satan who is the ruler of this world. We are all by nature children of wrath, we are all sons of disobedience. The point is, there's

nothing in us to lift us up. In contrast to that, good things and perfect things have to have another source. They have to come down from above. That is to say, they have to have their origin outside of us. Anything that is truly good, anything that is truly perfect has to come from somewhere outside of us. That is a very important statement on human depravity.

To believe that the sinner has the ability in himself to respond to the gospel is to believe a lie. Everything that is good, and everything that is perfect is from above, another. It's the same word that's used, by the way, in John 3, you must be born from above, another.

For us to experience anything really good, for us to experience anything perfect, it has to katabaino, it has to descend. It has to come from outside our world, outside our experience. And it does. Verse 17, it descends. "It comes down from above from the Father of lights." What a great title for God. Have you ever thought about what that is? Actually, that is an ancient Jewish title for God. As the Creator of the sun and the moon and the stars. God is the Father of lights in that He created them. Go back and read about day four, Genesis 1:14 to 18. God created the sun and the moon and the stars and He is the Father of lights. It emphasizes God as the one who blessed us with illumination, the sun by day, the moon by night and that has so much to do with the life in this world, the sun, even the moon, changing the tides and the stars giving a measure of light in the darkness. God sovereignly created the light which comes down from above. This is one of His great kindnesses to mankind. And if you read the book of Revelation, at the end of the age when judgment begins to fall, life on this planet becomes horrific, unbearable, panic sets in when God begins to alter the course of those lights. The moon becomes like blood. The stars start to fall. The sun doesn't shine as judgment comes.

But as good as God is, everybody knows that the sun, the moon and the stars vary and shift. Go back to verse 17. "They have variation and shifting shadows." Heavenly light comes and goes. We used to have the sun shining here today earlier, and now it's gone. And for a while as the sun was beginning to set, the sun casts shadows and we knew it was leaving us by the shifting shadows. Extreme variation in the lights that God has created extreme, they go all the way from high noon, blazing sunlight on a shadowless day to a moonless night where the stars are blocked by the clouds and it's black as pitch. And in the middle between the blackest night and the brightest day are all the degrees of light and shadow that shift and ebb and flow. And so we could say that God is the Father of lights, but the lights that He created physically are variable. They shift, they're not consistent.

However, when it comes to His good gifts, they are consistent. They never vary. They never come and go. They don't send different shadows. They don't shift and move and change. With God and spiritual gifts, there are no variation. That little term, variation, interesting word, parallago, actually parallage...parallage...para, parallel, from which we get parallel, but the word in English has come down parallage to parallax. Have you ever heard the word parallax? Some of you who work in science know what a parallax is. A parallax is an apparent displacement or difference in direction or

location of an object as seen from two different points, not on a straight line with the object. A parallax is to say you're looking at the same thing but from two perspectives and so you get two completely different views. The apparent displacement or difference, it's only apparent in the direction or location of something because you're looking at it from two different angles, that's a parallax.

Another way to explain a parallax would be to say it is the difference, the apparent difference in direction or location of a celestial body as measured from two different points.

That is to say two different people in two different places get two different perspectives on the sun though the sun is in the same place. Two people in two different point get the different perspective on the moon though the moon is in the same place and the same is true with the stars. So you have with the stars a coming an a going and an ebbing and a flowing, a shifting shadow, sometimes bright, sometimes not so bright, and sometimes dark. And you have different perspectives depending on where you are on the planet. But with God the perspective is always the same, there's never a variance, there's never a parallax. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is the Lord, He changes not. When it comes to spiritual gifts, there's no parallax. He gives only good gifts. He gives only perfect gifts. He gives every good gift. He gives every perfect gift all the time. But anything that is truly good and anything that is truly perfect has to come down from Him just like light came down from Him. And the first gift in the list, the first good and perfect gift is in verse 18, that gets you to verse 18.

So, since He is the source of every good and perfect gift, in the exercise of His will He brought us forth. Hummm...what does it mean He brought us forth? It's apokueo in Greek. It means to be the cause of. It means to produce. It means to give life. By the way, it's used in verse 15. When lust is conceived, it gives birth to sin and when sin is accomplished, here's the same verb, it brings forth death. Sin produces death...the same verb, God produces life. He brought us forth, He gave us life, to cause to be, to cause to exist, to produce. He sent down light with all of its parallax and variation. And now He sends down life without variation. The glory of this divine gift cannot be overemphasized because it is the starting point for all His other good gifts. There's a...you see, when it says in verse 17 He gives every good and perfect gift...bang, the first one in the list is life. He brought us forth. He produced us. He made us alive. And so He starts where salvation starts, does James in writing this. He understands that before there are any other good gifts, before there are any other max gifts, teleion, at the very end, the finish, before all the rest comes this. And so we've been working our way back in our doctrines of salvation, and we finally got back to this one, the first one. The reality of salvation begins with regeneration.

Now look at verse 18, and you're going to see here four questions about regeneration that are answered here. Four questions that are answered. Question number one, what is regeneration? Question number two, who is the regenerator? Question number three, how are we regenerated?



And question number four, and I think maybe I like this one best, why are we regenerated? Now those are the questions, aren't they?, the important questions you always ask. What? Who? How? Why?

Well let's start with "what?" What is regeneration? And we've already given you pretty good insight into that, but let's look at the idea. Verse 18, "He brought us forth." And then jump down to the end of verse 18, "That we might be the firstfruits among His creation, or His creatures." He created us. He made us. He gave us life. He gave birth to us. He made us live. And again as I said, regeneration can refer to the whole of salvation and should be used that way. In fact, John Calvin himself felt this word referred to the whole of salvation. So that is certainly a legitimate way to view it. But it is also a separate element that needs to be understood, just like justification and redemption and adoption all have significant and specific meaning. It is the imparting of spiritual life to the sinner. It is foundational because we could not respond to the power grace, to the drawing of the Father. We could not respond to the effectual call unless we were alive, unless there was life or we would be being poked like trying to stimulate a corpse.

But this idea of regeneration is everywhere in the New Testament. Look at 1 John, let's just ramble through a few passages here. First John...1 John chapter 2, well go down to verse 29, and we're just kind of picking up these ideas. "If you know that He is righteous...that is that God is righteous...you know that everyone also who practices righteousness...here it is...is born of Him." There's the idea of the new birth, being born of God. And again the imagery here is crystal clear. You can't make yourself born, you can't cause yourself to be born, you can't contribute to your birth and that's why this imagery is selected. You are born of Him, that is by Him, through Him. Over in chapter 3 verse 9, again this same language, "No one who is born of God practices sin." Why? "His seed remains in him, he can't sin because he's born of God." When it says he cannot sin, it doesn't mean it's impossible, it just means it's outrageous. He just can't do that. You just can't go on in an unbroken pattern of sin because you've been born of God. And what does born of God mean? It simply means that it is God who gave you His life. That changes everything. And again I say, you can't do something to get yourself born.

Verse 14, "We know we've passed out of death into life cause we love the brethren." We have passed out of death into life. Another way to say the same thing. Chapter 4 verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another. Love is from God, everyone who loves is born of God, or begotten of God." God is the source of that life. In chapter 5, verse 1, "Whoever believes Jesus is the Christ is born of God. Whoever loves the Father, loves the child born of Him." Verse 4, "Whatever is born of God overcomes the world." Verse 11, "This is the witness that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life. He who doesn't have the Son of God doesn't have the life." And again it's talking about having life and the manifestation of that life is righteousness and love and obedience.

Back in chapter 2 of 1 John, we probably ought to pick up verses 15 to 17, it's a negative approach to the same thing. "Do not love the world, nor the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life is not from the Father but from the world." So if that's what's characterizing your life, you're still in the world and the only way it could be different is if something came from the Father. Because the world, it just passes away and with it all its lusts. "But the one who does the will of God abides forever, and the one who does the will of God is the one who has been born of God." And we're back to that same idea.

So this idea of being born of God is a rich concept in the scriptures. Now I want you to go back to a passage we looked at earlier, Ephesians 2:5, because here it's just laid out with great clarity. Ephesians 2:5, well let's look at verse 4, we read the first three, pick it up at verse 4, and I could have used this passage as the basis rather than James, but James is a little more concise. I love this, verses 1 to 3, "And you...and you..." what a sad description of you, dead, trespasses, sins, walking according to the course of this world, in the language of John, loving the world, the things that are in the world, the lust of the flesh, so forth and so on, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. "You connected to the prince of the power of the air, you one of the sons of disobedience, you living in the lust of the mind, indulging the desires of the flesh in the mind, you by nature are children of wrath, just like everybody else, that's you, and you...verse 4...But God and you left to yourself, described in 1 to 3, but God.." Why? "Being rich in mercy, because of His great love, His sovereign, eternal, electing love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive." There it is, He made us alive. Together with Christ and He did it by sovereign power grace, and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenlies.

He didn't just make us minimally alive, He took us all the way up with Christ into eternal glory so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ. Even when we were dead in our transgressions, He made us alive. He raised us up. And according to the words of Peter, 2 Peter 1:4, we became partakers of the divine nature. We became partakers of the divine nature. This is just such a powerful concept and in all honesty it is a simple uncomplicated concept, to be given new life. And that's the only way we could ever respond.

Now let me just introduce, and I'll finish this next time. But let me just introduce this idea of who regenerates us...who regenerates us? Go back to our text, back to James. And we saw what it means to be regenerate, it is He brought us forth so that we become His creature, that is His creation, created by Him, given life by Him, given His life. That's what it means to be regenerate. We are now alive. We exist spiritually. We can respond to the Father's drawing. We can respond to the Holy Spirit's effectual call. We can respond to power grace.

And that leads to the second question...who regenerates us? Who is the source? Clearly, verse 18, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth." And who is He? The Father of lights. God Himself. The giver of light and the giver of life. Let me tell you something, John the Baptist never told anybody, follow these steps and you can be born again. Jesus never said to anybody, here's how to be born again. No apostle ever did that in the New Testament, no prophet, no evangelist, no writer anywhere in the New Testament ever preached or told people how to be born again. All they ever preached was repent and believe, repent and believe...repent and believe. Strive to come to the narrow gate and to enter cause there are no steps to being born again. To be born again is the work of God. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." If you're in Christ, God had to recreate you. It's about God's creation power. In fact, at the end of Galatians, 6:15, it says, "Neither is circumcision anything or uncircumcision but a new creation." The only thing that's going to get you into God's Kingdom is to be a new creation. And only God creates. You can't recreate yourself. That's the fallacy of aberrant theology, saying that the sinner has within him the capability to produce life. It's ridiculous. "Of His own will, in the exercise of His will, He brought us forth." It was His will, it was His exercise, it was His power. This is monergistic(?), not synergistic. It's not the sin of cooperating with God saying, "You know, I understand what you're doing, I'd like to get in on it." This is not synergistic...this is monergistic. In fact, maybe a word that's a little more familiar in our vernacular is this is a unilateral work of God. This is...this is not something you cooperate with. Can I tell you something about this? This is not something the sinner experiences. This is something in which the sinner is totally passive. Well what else could you be, you're dead. You can't say, "Well I was active in my new birth." No you weren't. You couldn't have been active in your new birth, you're dead, you don't exist. This is the unilateral work of the creator God and only He can give life. That's why, let's go back to John 1 for a minute. John 1, "But as many as received Him," yes, you had to do that, "to them He gave the right to become the children of God even to those who believe in His name." You would have had to do that, you had to believe. You had to receive Him. But, verse 13, "Who were born, begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of...whom?...God." Do you see how clear Scripture is on this?

And some of you are probably saying to yourself, "How did we miss this? How do we miss this?" You just have to keep looking.

You didn't come into God's Kingdom through blood, that is through genetics. You didn't come in to the Kingdom through the will of the flesh, sexual relationships are in view there. You didn't come in to exist through the will of man. That has to do with the desire of the husband to cohabit with his wife. That's how children are born. They are born because of genetics. They are born because of sexual relationships. They are born because of the will of the Father. But none of that is true in spiritual birth, none of it. You didn't become a child of God by anything that you did, or desired, or planned. It was all of God. You were born of God, begotten of God. And there's no other way.

In John chapter 5 and verse 21, this is pretty specific, "Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life," there it is again. If you have spiritual life, God gave it to you. "Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes." I guess so because dead people don't wish anything. It can't possibly be clearer than that. It is not by the will of man.

Listen to 1 John 3:1. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God." It's all according to the Father's love, Father's power. What a great love that God has for us. Listen to 1 Peter 1:3, praise, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...listen...who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again." How much clearer could you be than that? Bless God. "Bless God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His great mercy caused us to be born again."

I have to take you back to Ephesians again, Ephesians chapter 2 verse 4, "God who is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us," same thing, mercy, love, we've seen it in John, we've seen it in Peter, same thing in Paul. "Rich in mercy, great love, He loved us even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ, raised us up with Him, seated us with Him in the heavenlies. By grace, did it all by grace." Now look at verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is...what?...the gift of God. It is, in fact, the first of His good and perfect gifts." In fact verse 10 says, "We are God's masterpiece, we are God's workmanship." Monergistic again, not synergistic, we are God's workmanship, created by God in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. It is all bound up in the purpose of God and that's why it says in James 1:18, "By His will He brought us forth." We have life because He gave it to us. Staggering. When we were dead in trespasses and sin, when we were without understanding, when we were ignorant, when we were blind, when we were separated from the life of God, when we had no hope, He made us alive. To put it in the language, the magnificent language of Colossians 1, the Father, we give Him thanks for He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son. And that's why we have redemption and forgiveness and everything else. But it all really begins with His work of regeneration.

Listen to 2 Corinthians 4:6, I just keep thinking of these verses. All right, here it comes, "The God of this world," verse 4, 2 Corinthians 4, "has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, can't see the light of the gospel, the glory of Christ is the image of God," so there you are, you're dead and of course dead people are blind. You can't understand. Then verse 6, "God who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness.'" God the Father of lights who in the creation said let the light be, the God who said let light shine out of darkness is the same God who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. It was when God turned on the light on the inside and John, particularly John, loves to parallel light and life, 1 John chapter 1, did a detailed study on that, light and life are the same thing, "In Him was light and light is the life of men." Light and life are the same.

It is God who gives life, like turning on the light.

So there are people who think that anybody who's sensible, anybody who is, oh I don't know, thoughtful, anybody who is smart enough, or anybody who's approached in a slick and savvy way, like one of the leading pastors in America who says, "You know, if I know people's hot buttons, I can lead anybody to Christ." Really? That's an amazing statement. You just put yourself on the throne of heaven. Colossians 2:13, "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive."

Now some people think in spite of all this, you know, that we're all able to believe. Anybody is able to believe. And God doesn't compel anybody to believe. Hey, He just throws it out there, everybody is able. I don't think so. And I don't think you do either if you've been listening. But let me just take you, and I hate to be dragging this out, no I don't, I love to be dragging this out, well, I'm going to take one more run at this thing. John 6, I've got to be honest, it wouldn't be good. I want you to go back to John 6:44, I just want to show you a Greek word here. And we will continue this in our next session because it's an important doctrine and I'm going to take you next time into the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus which is just riveting and deals with all these issues. But in John 6:44, I want you to see this. You talk about inability. "No one can come to Me unless..."

Really, You say anybody can come, You say everybody is able to believe, they just...God doesn't compel, He doesn't push, you know, He doesn't bring you as we said last time, you know, kicking and screaming. Well it says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." That word draw, I don't know what you think when you see that word, it's kind of a benign word. I mean, it may sound in English like, "Oh come on," you know, it's kind of a gentle kind of...well in the Greek it's *elkuo*(?), it is a compelling force. And I want to give you an illustration of it because I think it's so wonderful. What kind of drawing are we talking about here? What is the meaning of this word *elkuo*?

Let me give you a couple of illustrations of it. John 21:6, you'll like this one. The disciples go fishing. Jesus comes and they can't catch any fish. So Jesus says, "Cast the net on the right hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." They cast therefore and they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. Haul it in there, that's the word, dragging. Verse 11, they actually had 153 fish and they managed to draw the net to land. You're talking about a pretty compelling dragging here. Are we saying that maybe John 6:44 should say, "No one can come to Me unless the Father drags him?" That would be closer to the meaning. It is a compelling force. It is a maximum exertion of effort. It is not a minimum exertion of effort. And it is a drawing that is irresistible.

That word is also used in John 18:10, "Simon Peter therefore having a sword drew it." Now if you're going to go to battle, you're not going...Whisst, get that thing out of there. Used to drawing a sword, you can believe he pulled that out of the case it was in ready for action. It is also used and I think notably so, there's a consistency here, and it's translated maybe the way it should be translated in

Acts 16:19, the masters of the demon possessed girl who was, you know, had a spirit of divination, following after Paul, when her masters saw...you remember Paul had cast the demon out of her, and when her masters saw their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas, and dragged them into the marketplace. This is not some kind of minimal force, this is a compelling force. They dragged them into the marketplace to deal with them. And you have the same thing in chapter 21 verse 30, "All the city was aroused, the people rushed together, taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple and sought to kill him." The verb means to drag, to force, to pull, to overwhelm and to compel. And no man comes to Me, said Jesus, unless the Father drags him. This is power grace. This is a combination of life and omnipotence. God's power is irresistible, greater than the power of sin and death. And regeneration is that mighty work of God in which He drags us out of our condition of death into life. And that's what begins everything. Then we can and will respond to His call. Then we will believe, having repented and embraced Christ.

Regeneration is new life. And the source of it is God. Next time I'm going to show you the really important passages on this subject. Okay? Let's pray.

Our Father, this is so wonderful and blessed to consider because it is not remote, it is that good gift, that perfect gift which You've given to us who are so utterly unworthy. How we bless You, praise You and thank You. What can we say? What can we say to the fact that You loved us and You determined to be merciful to us out of sheer love and not according to anything we have done so that we were born not of the will of man but of God. You gave us life when we were dead, You turned on the light when we were dark. You let us see when we were blind. You gave us understanding when we were ignorant. And then You called us and we couldn't resist and we came in repentance and faith to Christ. All of this because You chose us before the foundation of the world. Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has given us life. We thank You for this mercy and we desire to be faithful to serve You with all our being. We thank You that this is not the end but only the beginning of the good and perfect gifts that never vary and never shift. And there's never a parallax in which You appear to us different from a different angle, You're always the source of what is good and what is perfect. For this grace we cannot even muster words. We don't deserve life and we don't deserve everything that comes with it including being raised into the heavenlies with Christ who enjoy the bliss of eternal glory forever. But we praise You and we thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

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