

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

How Firm Our Foundation

Scripture: Ephesians 2:4–10; James 1:18

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Let me ask you a theological question: Are you born again which results in your believing in Christ, or does your faith in Christ result in your being born again? Maybe you think I'm just playing with words, but how you answer that question significantly affects what you believe about man's sin, God's salvation, and more important, your eternal security.

Natural Born Sinners

The Bible is crystal clear about our condition before we came to Christ. All of us come from a different personal background. I may be from a poor family, whereas you come from a rich family; others of us lived moral lives, while still others lived shameful, ungodly lives. Whatever the case, we were all sinners in need of a Savior.

That's exactly what the Bible tells us in Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-18 and Ephesians 4:17-19. Those passages reveal a couple of important truths about our sinful nature.

First, we were separated from any true, intimate fellowship with God, and we lacked spiritual understanding of His ways. For example, Romans 3:11 says, "There is none who seeks after God," and Ephesians 4:18 speaks to how we were "darkened," "alienated," "ignorant," and "blind." Sounds harsh, doesn't it.

Second, we were spiritual rebels. Romans 3:18 specifically says we had "no fear of God" before our eyes; and Romans 1:18 explains how we all suppressed the truth of God, trying to excuse away our obligation to Him. Rather than choosing to live in obedience to God's laws, we willingly gave ourselves over to lewdness and uncleanness.

In short, when we were all without Christ, *we hated God and wanted nothing to do with Him.*

If our salvation had been left up to us, we would never have sought it. Nothing could have persuaded us or moved us to faith in Christ, not even the most eloquent preachers or the most compelling arguments. We would have cheerfully continued living lives in willful disobedience to God.

That's a bleak description, but according to the Bible, it is the spiritual reality of all people, without exception. The only hope we have is a miracle—a profound and radical change of our hearts and minds.

Born Again from Above

Thankfully, the Bible tells us the miraculous change we need has happened before, and it continues to happen. In theological terms, the change is called *regeneration*. Regeneration occurs when God's Spirit performs a supernatural work to change our hearts. In [a sermon on the subject of regeneration](#), John MacArthur described it as God producing *new life*.

For those of us who have experienced the miracle of regeneration, we testify to the reality of a new spiritual life. We no longer desire to seek a sinful lifestyle, but we turn toward belief in the gospel and the pursuit of godliness. It's a work that turned us from being God haters to being God lovers.

You'll find the doctrine of regeneration throughout the Scriptures.

Notice how the apostle John describes regeneration as *new birth*. In John 3:1-15, Jesus told Nicodemus that to see the Kingdom of God, he had to be "born again," or "born from above." Jesus continued to explain the new birth as a divine work, something God does. John later used that same terminology, "born of God," in his first epistle— 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, and 18.

Paul wrote about regeneration in terms of being *raised from the dead*. Ephesians 2:5 says sinners who were once "dead in sins" have been "*made alive with Christ*" (cf. Colossians 2:13). And in Titus 3:5, Paul is explicit—"He saved us, through the washing of *regeneration* and the renewing of the Holy Spirit."

James uses the expression *brought us forth* to describe regeneration in James 1:18, and Peter used a description similar to John's when he defined regeneration as *born again* or *begetting anew* in 1 Peter 1:23.

Thinking About Our New Life

If we consider what the Bible teaches about the sinful state of men and our need for regeneration, the certainty of our eternal security comes into sharp focus.

First, regeneration is a divine work. It originates with our omnipotent God. He alone is the one who initiates the work of regeneration, changing our sinful hearts to seek out His Son for salvation. I like how the apostle John put it in his gospel, "who were born [that's regeneration], not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13).

When God performed His regenerating work in our hearts, He implanted a new principle of righteousness. We are re-oriented toward God so that we now understand spiritual things and no longer wish to pursue ungodliness.

Paul pictures this divine work as a new creation. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that if we are in Christ, "we are a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." By definition a "new creation" is something that never before existed.

As Christians, you and I are something *new*, specially brought into existence by God. As new creations, we now see things with an eternal perspective. Old desires, beliefs, philosophies, and mindsets are "done away with."

Since God is the author of regeneration, His power is the guarantee that the new life He created will carry out the characteristics of that new life. God did not bring new creations into existence so they would continue pursuing sin.

So, think about it. If we could lose our salvation, what does that say about the power of God to change us? How could we trust God in other areas of our lives, or in *anything*, if His saving power may end up being powerless?

Second, regeneration is a purposeful work. Paul explains in Ephesians 2:4-10 that the key reason God raised us up in regeneration was so His grace, love, and kindness would be on display. We are “God’s **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2:10). God has regenerated us for a purpose: to display His glory in our lives. If we could lose our salvation, which would defeat the purpose of God changing us to begin with, then what would be the point of saving us? How could passages like Ephesians 2:10 still be true?

Third, regeneration is permanent. All the passages about God’s regenerating power reveal it as a *permanent* work. In fact, so permanent is His work that Paul can speak of our future glorification in the past tense – Romans 8:30; God has predestined, called, justified, and *glorified* us. Our salvation is so certain, so sure, it’s like we are already in heaven with God!

Now, let me come back to the question I raised at the beginning. What’s the sequence—do we first believe in Christ, and *then* become born again? Or, are we born again and *then* put our faith in Christ? What you believe about that sequence has everything to do with your understanding of the new birth, and more to the point of this series, the permanence of divine salvation.

If faith comes first, and then the new birth, it will be easy for you to fall into the error of conditional security. After all, if your personal faith initiated your new life in Christ, it makes sense that your faithlessness can remove you from that relationship too. (I say it makes sense because it’s a logical conclusion, but it has no biblical support.)

However, if you understand and accept what the Bible teaches about the new birth, you recognize it was God and God alone who produced your new life in Christ. And that makes all the difference in the world.

If the almighty God brought you forth by the word of truth (James 1:18), if the sovereign God purposed to elect and glorify you—and God’s power and purpose are *never* thwarted—then you have a rock-solid foundation for absolute confidence in divine salvation. If you are truly saved, then you truly possess *eternal* life.

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