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Regeneration

This event of Pentecost is going to give us a place to hang several doctrines so you can remember these four doctrines. There are many, many truths associated with Pentecost, this is not exhaustive by any means, this is just the key basics. You can always remember it with the acrostic, RIBS, R meaning regeneration, I meaning indwelling, B meaning baptism of the Holy Spirit, and S meaning the sealing work of the Holy Spirit. There are other things that He does - He intercedes, He gives spiritual gifts and all the rest. But this is not a class in systematic theology, as well as not being a class in exegesis; it's to give the framework, just a basic outline of Scripture. We're going to deal with just one of these four doctrines that come out of the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the Father and the Son on the day of Pentecost.

And I can't stress enough that the contribution of dispensational theology is very important at this point because what it does: it distinguishes the operation of the Holy Spirit for the Church versus His operation for Israel. The Holy Spirit is the same yesterday, today and forever but His works differ in these ages. Unfortunately, over the history of the Church there hasn't been very careful discernment as to what commands apply to the Church and what commands apply to Israel. And this has confused Christians. Sloppy thinking always confuses Christians. One evidence of this sloppy thinking is that because the Holy Spirit doesn't change, He's the same yesterday, today and forever; therefore they grandly conclude that His way of operating is the same yesterday, today and forever, and that's not true. It's neither biblical nor logical.

Forgetting the Church and Israel distinction, let's go back in time and think of the Gentile period before the Call of Abraham. Was God's work different

before the Call of Abraham than it was after the Call of Abraham? Of course it was. Before the Call of Abraham God the Holy Spirit worked with all people, indiscriminately, no matter where they were settled. And He had Melchizedeks all over the place who were His chosen prophets to carry the Noahic Bible to every place, to every people. As these people groups resisted and grieved the Holy Spirit, He restrained their sin for a while (Gen 6:3) until the day of judgment with the waters of the global Flood. And after the Flood came and took them all away, after that period, when civilization was re-established, so to speak, and you have all the sons of Noah, Japheth, etc. go out and colonize the new world. Now we have the people groups divided, the linguistics change, they go out and colonize the new world but all during this period, both before and after the Flood God the Holy Spirit was working corporately with all the human race, not just parts of it, all of it.

But starting with the Call of Abraham that's not true. After the Call of Abraham there coexists a way of working with Gentiles and a way of working with Israel, and there's a bifurcation at that point. Obviously, the work with the Gentiles becomes very minimal and with Israel it becomes maximal, so the emphasis is always on Israel, and that's the heart of the Old Testament. What is God doing through this entity called Israel? So it should not be strange that we are saying that later in history God is working with this group called the Church that is different from Israel. The Church is the heart of the New Testament.

We've got to start in John 14 again because John 14:17 is a verse that we have to look at very, very carefully. Language is important in Scripture, sentence structure is important; here things hinge on a preposition. "The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides *with* you and will be *in* you." There's the distinction between the Holy Spirit's operation under the Old Testament economy and the New Testament economy. Notice the tense of the verb, He now, present tense, "abides with you," that's before Pentecost. Then the next verb is in the future tense, and He "will be in you," that's after Pentecost. Jesus gives a whole bunch of new truths in the rest of this discourse; the whole thing is an exposition of what's coming next. So right here, before His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, He gives them this new revelation, never before revealed, that the Holy Spirit who had been "with them," will in the future be

“in them.” Those are locative type prepositions and they’re looking at location.

The word “in” is in what? In believers in the New Testament age. So where is the base of operations of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament era? It’s no longer from heaven; the Holy Spirit’s basis of operation is the living visible Church on this planet. That’s the stunning teaching here, that the base of His operation has moved from heaven down to earth, and the Holy Spirit is now operating on earth. So there’s been, at the point of Pentecost, a shift and He has invaded planet earth, so to speak.

Now let’s take a sample from the Old Testament of how the Holy Spirit worked to help us see the difference. Exodus 31:3. Here is a classic instance of how the Holy Spirit worked in the Old Testament in a different way completely, and how He works today. Does this mean God changed His character? No, He’s the same yesterday, today and forever. It’s just that God has a variety of ways He works. Doesn’t an artist have varieties of ways they paint? Doesn’t an author have varieties of ways they write? Why can’t God have a variety of ways which He administers history? I don’t know what the problem is here. But you’ll find people who will come out of a strong Covenant Theology background just get all upset over this dispensational difference from one age to the next in the Holy Spirit. It’s almost like it’s heresy or something; I never understood what the problem is here.

Exodus 31:3, this describes a work of the Holy Spirit under the Old Testament system. Verse 2, “See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 3And I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, 4to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, 5and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship,” this is a man set apart to work on the Tabernacle. What is it the Holy Spirit does for this man in verses 3-4? Does He develop the man’s character or does he give the man skills in craftsmanship? Skills in craftsmanship. The Holy Spirit is right here injecting craftsmanship abilities to this man.

My point here in showing this is that the Holy Spirit is working with this nation for something. He didn’t do this for the Assyrians, He didn’t do this for the Egyptians, He doesn’t do this for America. He did this for only one nation,

Israel, and it was to develop this nation. This is the Holy Spirit working under the Old Testament economy. Why does He fill this man at this point? To construct the physical Tabernacle. For whom? For the nation Israel. So what is the goal and purpose of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament? It is to construct this thing called Israel so that Israel will be the center of worship of God, a conduit of the Messiah, a conduit of the Scriptures, so Israel will have impact historically on all the nations. Everything that the nation Israel needed, the Holy Spirit was providing.

Go to Psalm 51 for another difference. Here's David's confessional Psalm and this comes across in a lot of Christian praise songs and actually it's a wrong application of Psalm 51. It's nice to confess sin, and to pray, but in Psalm 51 the confession of sin that's going on here is confession of sin under the Old Testament economy. So in Psalm 51 when David's going on about his sin, you'll notice that he comes to this place in verse 11 and what does he say? He says, "Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." There have been those in the Church, who have sung this psalm for the church, and they're nice people, but they will sing, "Take not Your Holy Spirit from me." Sorry, that's not true for the Church Age. The Holy Spirit abides forever in the Church, so there's a difference.

Why was David concerned about the Holy Spirit being taken from him? What was the Holy Spirit doing in David? Think about the biography of David? Let's go back in time historically. Before David was anointed king, who had previously been anointed king? Saul. So there was a house of Saul, a dynasty of Saul. Had Saul obeyed God, presumably his son, the crown prince, Jonathan, would have attained the throne of Israel. But the old man really screwed up in his life before God, and God said that's it, I'm going to replace, not just Saul with David, I'm going to replace the dynasty of Saul with the dynasty of David. God could have killed Saul and had Jonathan sit on the throne, so it's not just a rejection of Saul; it's a rejection of the house of Saul. So you have a dynastic shift that's going on. By the way, when that happens, if you trace the references to the Spirit you'll see the Spirit depart from Saul and come on David. With the dynastic shift there's a Spirit shift. So when David, in Psalm 51 prays "cast me not away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me," he probably is also thinking, not just personally of taking the Holy Spirit from him, but he may be thinking of his

dynasty, let the Davidic dynasty endure. Of course he had a promise it would endure, 2 Sam 7, the Davidic Covenant.

But the idea here is don't read New Testament ministries of the Holy Spirit backwards into the Old Testament carelessly. Obviously the Holy Spirit did many wonderful things in the Old Testament, some of which He still does in the New Testament and beyond. For example, prior to Pentecost did the Holy Spirit sustain the universe? Yes. Does He still sustain the universe? Yes. Has He always sustained the universe? So that ministry hasn't changed. The next ministry, did He generate the Old Testament? Yes. But was He through or did He generate the New Testament? He generated a NT. In the future when the prophets are reestablished during the Tribulation, who's going to empower those prophets? The Holy Spirit. He restrained sin in the generation of Noah, it says specifically in Gen 6:3. Does He still restrain sin? Yes, so that hasn't changed.

But then He does change things up when the nation Israel is brought into existence. He had a unique role only to the house of Israel; He worked to empower Joseph as a ruler in Egypt. Is this preferring Jew over Gentile? You bet, you've got a Jewish guy on a Gentile throne. Joshua as a key leader of the nation; He gave special natural skills to the leadership, we just saw that with David. He directed the judges, prophets and kings in a special way. So that's describing the ministry of the Holy Spirit "with" them. The Holy Spirit was "with" the people by being in the leadership in a special way. That lasted all the way up to the time of the Lord Jesus Christ because what does the Lord Jesus say here in John 14? The Holy Spirit is "with you," present tense. How was the Holy Spirit with the disciples at that moment? Who was standing there with them? Jesus. And who did many of the miracles through the Lord Jesus? The Holy Spirit. So since the Holy Spirit did miracles, Jesus could say the Holy Spirit is with you. Clearly in the context of that John 14 passage He's talking about Himself, the Holy Spirit is with you.

We now move into the first of the great doctrines of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age, the doctrine of Regeneration. This gets tricky. Be careful what I am saying and be careful what I'm not saying. I am not saying that in the Old Testament there wasn't some sort of ministry of the Holy Spirit to empower people to love the Lord, empower people to pray, empower people to live righteous lives. But it was under the OT category circumcision of the heart;

that was the term. The word “regeneration” was not used, and I believe it wasn’t used for a reason. There was a circumcision of the heart ministry. We don’t know all of it, but certainly by reading the book of Psalms you know the heart of a righteous person in the Old Testament resonates with our hearts. So whatever the Holy Spirit did in their lives it was remarkably parallel to what He’s doing in our lives. So then what is unique about regeneration?

We need a definition to think, you can’t think clearly with fuzzy categories, so we want to define this term regeneration. By regeneration most biblical theologians mean *the action of the Holy Spirit whereby He imparts eternal life to human beings*. If you do a word study of the concept you’d come to these conclusions. This is not something I made up. “It means ‘born again’ in the true theological sense, not in the often sloppy use of the term for the process of conversion.” Regeneration does not refer to the human side of conversion. It’s talking about the divine side, it’s not talking about a human experience, it’s talking about a mysterious something that instantaneously is done in a microsecond of time when a person trusts in Jesus Christ. We don’t know all that’s involved, but it’s an instantaneous thing, it’s not a process, like at physical birth when the baby takes it’s first breath. It’s a moment in time so at regeneration a spiritual birth takes place at that moment. And it is purely the work of the Holy Spirit. It must be very carefully pointed out that it is the Holy Spirit’s work. It must also be pointed out, because we live in a very touchy, feely society, that it is not a feeling; you don’t get some tingly feeling come over you. It is a work that God imparts eternal life to someone in some way and we have no way of measuring it with medical equipment, you can’t go in and do an MRI on a believer and an unbeliever and see any difference that we can say is regeneration. It has to do with our human spirit, that’s what’s being born again, being re-created or re-activated. Let’s not diminish what this means, to be born again. Actually John uses a Greek word that has a nuance of being born from above as well as being born again, and you really can’t tell. John’s kind of sneaky the way he does these things, he really means both, not contradictory meanings; by the way, there’s a sense of being born again because you were born one time, now you are born spiritually. But then there’s also the sense, you’re born of heaven because you were at one time born of the earth and at regeneration you’re born from the Holy Spirit down from heaven. So you’re born from above and born again.

But the emphasis here is that it's the Holy Spirit's work and it's a miracle, it is nothing less than a miracle. You can't force it on somebody, you can convince a person of the gospel, you can pray for them, but you cannot force anyone to be born again because we don't re-create our human spirits. God the Holy Spirit does that; and He does it when He wants to do it. So from the very start, when we talk about regeneration we are not talking about something we do, we are not talking about an experience we have, we are not talking about conversion. We are talking about this impartation of eternal life by God the Holy Spirit at the moment of faith in Christ, at that instant this re-creation of our human spirit happens and we have eternal life.

Turn to 1 John where the hard stuff is because it's in 1 John particularly, where John goes into a lengthy exposition of the truth of possessing eternal life. In 1 John 5:11-12 John links eternal life with Jesus Christ. Verse 11 says, "And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is [located] in" only one place, located ONLY where? "in His Son. 12He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life." Period! Over and out! Not in Buddha, not in Confucius, not in Allah, only in Jesus Christ. So the eternal life that we are talking about is defined in terms of the Life of Christ, His life - the life that Jesus Christ lived, which was impeccable is linked to the eternal life that you possess.

Having said that let me warn you about the adjective "eternal." Eternal is also an attribute of God, when we say we possess eternal life we do not mean that suddenly we have God's eternality. Eternality means that God has no beginning and no end, and we do not mean that we have picked up that attribute. Why not? That would mean that we have become God and that would fracture the Creator-distinction. The creature always stays creature; the creature doesn't become Creator. So eternal life is not sharing the attribute of God's eternality. However, it is a finite analog to His eternality because we've seen the good/evil diagram. On this diagram does the creature have a beginning? Yes, at creation human creatures begin. But on the other end of the diagram does the creature ever get annihilated? No, the creature exists forever, a sobering thought. Sobering because there's a fork in the road and one branch goes to eternal destruction, the other branch in the road is what we're talking about, the good that dwells with God as life forever and ever and ever. That's what eternal life is talking about, it's talking about the life that qualifies for eternal fellowship with God and it can never ever be

destroyed. Eternal life, once given, can never be destroyed. This life goes on and on and on and on because it is divinely caused. So eternal life is a finite analog to God's eternity.

So talking about eternal life which is linked with Jesus Christ's life we want to review once more two things about His life; remember those doctrines, kenosis and impeccability? I said when we originally covered kenosis and impeccability we're going to revisit them. Here we go. Number one, doctrine of kenosis: what does the doctrine of kenosis say? It says that Jesus Christ gave up the independent use of His divine attributes. I said "independent use," it doesn't mean He gave up His divine attributes, that would make him a mere creature. He never gave up His divine attributes. He gave up the independent use of them, so that when He was tempted He was tempted in *all* points as we are. He didn't use His divine attributes to conquer the temptations. That in fact was the ultimate temptation, to have divine attributes and not use them. Satan wanted Him to use them because that would cut Him off from us. That would mean that He did not confront temptation and conquer sin in all points as we, and then we wouldn't have any living evidence of anyone every living the Christian life successfully. So what kenosis says is that Jesus Christ, when He faced all those trials, humbled Himself and became obedient unto death in His humanity, He trusted and relied upon who? The Holy Spirit. Jesus relied upon the Holy Spirit day after day after day in His life.

The second doctrine we want to review is impeccability. Jesus Christ was able not to sin, and Jesus Christ was not able to sin. We had a discussion about the difference and I pointed out that the verb "able," is used with a different nuance; this is not a logical conflict here, there's a nuance of difference. You can think of it this way: His deity demanded that He was not able to sin; His humanity demanded that He was able not to sin, making Him genuinely temptable. Therefore, putting the two together in one person you get the fact that He was not able to sin but He could be tempted. The fact is that because He was not able to sin but was able to be tempted, means that He faced enormous pressures, pressures far beyond anything that we can ever face. So on a pressure scale Jesus Christ faced orders of magnitude greater pressures than we have to face.

Now turn to 1 John 3:9 because we have a verse here that talks about the impeccability of eternal life. It's a very hard passage, but John is now applying this truth to regeneration. It's not easy to understand, and if you don't approach it carefully you get yourself in hot water real quick. My translation reads, what most people take it to mean, "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." I don't know what your translation says there, but the word "practices sin" is an interpretation of the present tense of the Greek verb. So let's break this down. "No one who is born of God sins," the verb is to sin, and it's in the present tense, which often means habitual action, continuous action. So the translation "practices sin" shows that they're taking it as habitual sin, no one who is born of God can habitually sin, keep on sinning. And they take it that way because the idea of sinless perfection is a radical idea and they don't want to say that, but they do want to say that we can identify who a real believer is, who really is born of God by seeing if they have habitual sin or not. No genuine believer it's argued can have habitual sin.

Then John gives the reason, "No one who is born of God sins, because His seed abides in him," His seed is referring to the nature of Christ, the eternal life dwelling in the person, what we've defined as regeneration. "His seed abides in him, and He cannot sin," he is not able to sin. Now what does that sound like? It sounds like the impeccable nature of Jesus Christ. So it does sound like he's teaching a doctrine of sinless perfectionism. But you say, now wait a minute, hold it! John the apostle just got through saying in chapter 1:8 that sinless perfection is impossible. Nobody can say they're without sin. 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, " present tense, "we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." So if I'm saying over here, I have no sin I'm not actually sinless, I'm deceived. But over in 3:9 it almost appears he is almost teaching sinless perfection. So how does this work? What do we do now? One of the things that is traditionally done is to say, the present tense in 3:9 means habitual sin, no one who is a real Christian habitually sins.

The problem with that approach, and it was pointed out many, many years ago by a Greek scholar at Dallas seminary in the middle of a debate. He pointed out if you're going to take the Johannine use of the present tense to mean habitual behavior here in 3:9, you've got to take it to mean habitual behavior here in 1:8 too, and in all other places in the epistle. And in 1 John

1:8 what would happen if we took it as habitual? “If we say that we do not practice sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” But wait a minute, if we say we do not practice sin we are deceived? I thought in 3:9 a real Christian couldn’t practice sin. Now John is telling me that if we say we don’t we’re deceived. So which is it John? We do practice sin or we don’t? Something doesn’t gel.

Then if you flip over to 1 John 5:16 look at this one. This is a real humdinger. “If any one sees his brother committing a sin,” present tense again, “practicing sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God” well now wait a minute, in 3:9 it was said that no believer can practice sin. In 1:8 it says if you say you don’t practice sin you’re deceived, and now we have a brother, notice, it’s a believer, a brother practicing sin but not unto death. What is going on here? Somehow you’ve got to get 1:8 and 5:16 together with 3:9. And you can’t do it by making the present tense habitual; that solution produces an irresolvable conflict.

So clearly John must not be using the verb sin in a habitual way. On one hand we know enough about ourselves that we’re not perfect, on the other hand, we know we commit sin habitually. So how do we resolve this? I like what Zane Hodges did with this because he shows that it can be solved by linking this with something that everybody recognizes Paul does in his writings. Turn to Rom 7, that famous passage where Paul is struggling with sin. You’ll notice that Paul, Paul isn’t John and there is a difference in the vocabulary of these two writers, but they teach a very similar thing. So let’s leave John a minute, we’ll come back to him in a few minutes, and let’s go to Paul, and watch how Paul thinks.

In Rom 7:20, here he is in the middle of that inner conflict passage, “but if I am doing the very thing I do not wish,” what is he doing, he’s sinning, but he says, “I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” What has just happened in verse 20? This is very important. It sounds like Paul just did what? Just avoided responsibility for his sin. “If I am doing the very thing that I don’t want to do then I am no longer the one doing it.” What Paul, is this some kind of cheap cop out? No, Paul assumes responsibility for sin, but there’s a powerful point that’s being made that the “I”, the real “I” does not sin, the real “I” is somehow separated from sin. Paul is using the language to communicate something here.

Let's continue, verse 21, "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good." So there's a two nature thing going on, "the evil is present, the one who wants to do good." Now why does he want to do good? Because he's regenerated, Christ's seed abides in him. Is the seed wishing to do good? Yes. What's happening here? His sin nature has overtaken. That's not who Paul really is. But his sin nature has taken over. He's responsible for the sin, we're responsible, we're not denying responsibility. But it's not who we really are? Who we are is really in Christ. This is a conceptual way of looking at yourself in Christ, and it's extremely important for victory in the Christian life. Verse 22, "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man," notice the location, "in the inner man 23but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members." So two locations, the inner man and the members of my body and they are diametrically opposed to one another.

We could go on but all I'm pointing out is that in Christ we have this inner man that wishes to do well, always wishes to do well, it's somehow separated from sin and the desires of sin and that is the same thing that John is saying when he says the born of God self does not sin because His seed abides in him. The two guys are talking about the same thing, the inner man, the seed of Christ, and it's remarkable that the same translators who translate Rom 7 have no problem whatever with Rom 7, and all of a sudden in 1 John 3:9 hit grease, when John, in fact, is apparently saying exactly the same kind of thing Paul is saying. We'll come back to John in a minute, but let's understand Paul.

He's saying that when I become a Christian and I'm regenerated, I have been moved from being "in Adam" to being "in Christ." And that is my fundamental change in identity. What all that involves is hairy and probably beyond our comprehension at this moment, but remember this section of Romans started where? In Rom 5:12 and what was Rom 5:12 all about? The shift from being in Adam to being in Christ? There's a change in identity that goes on here and Paul can distinguish his evil from before in Adam to now in Christ. Whatever has happened to him, he now has this tension in him, and the picture that he has, because for many years I thought of it this way and I was wrong. It's not that the "I" is sort of suspended between Christ and sin,

and is sort of flopping back and forth. That doesn't fit. What he's saying is the "I" here is who I really am in Christ, and this sin is in the flesh, it's still there, but fundamentally "I" am no longer that person, I am now in Christ, that's who I really am. And when sin happens the decision has been made to abandon this seed as motive and as the pattern of righteousness and go along with the flesh, the fallen nature of Adam, and sin. And we could go on over to Gal 2:20 where Paul says a similar thing, "it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me, the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God." What do you mean you no longer live Paul? He means that the one doing the living is Christ in you. It's His life being poured out through you when you respond to Him with faith. The same idea.

And before we go back to John, look at how he ends this in Rom 7:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." Some have thought that Rom 7 refers to the struggle of the unbeliever, and the reason they try to do that is because they say wait a minute, the believer has the Holy Spirit. I believe that Paul, in Rom 7:20-24 is doing a teaching thing here, as wonderful a teacher as he was, he's telling us think through a trial that you have and think about what's going on in your heart. Let's do a little inner heart study here. He says that the new nature in Christ is wanting to do good, so all this is the effect of regeneration. The regenerate nature wants to do good but the regenerate nature by itself can't do good, without what? What did Jesus rely on? The Holy Spirit. So what's Rom 8 all about? The Holy Spirit. He becomes the solution to overcoming this sinful nature.

So regeneration, vital lesson here, regeneration provides the base of operation for Christ's life, it doesn't automatically operate, it's a base of operation. Surrounding this base of operation is all kinds of sinful stuff called the sin nature and the regenerate nature cannot, of itself, subdue the sin nature. It's encased in it, so what do we have to do? We have to rely on the Holy Spirit, and that's why the New Testament admonition, walk by the Spirit.

Now let's go back to 1 John and see if this approach doesn't resolve the problem. John says we sin in 1:8. So John isn't teaching absolute sinless

perfection. But it seems like he is in 3:9. So let's go back to the context in 3:5, this is the key. "You know that He appeared in order to take away sins;" who appeared to take away sin? Clearly Jesus Christ, "and in Him there is no sin." That's the doctrine of impeccability, Jesus Christ was absolutely sinless. If He wasn't we're all in big trouble. Verse 6, "No one who abides in Him sins;" so we're talking about the abiding life, we're talking about a believer walking in fellowship, this takes on its meaning from Christ's kenosis. How did Christ navigate the Christian life successfully? By dependence upon the Holy Spirit. And John is talking about how when you depend on the Holy Spirit as Christ did then the regenerate nature that is the eternal life of Christ kicks in, His impeccable nature comes into play. Is there any sin in Christ's impeccable nature? No. So when we abide in Him is there any sin in our life? No.

This is how we know that when we come to verse 9 we're talking about the regenerate nature and he's saying that "no one who has been born of God," the regenerate self, "no one's regenerate self sins because His seed," that's God's seed, "abides in him;" in his regenerate self, "and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." The regenerate nature can't sin because that's the nature through which Christ's life is lived. What bothers people in verse 9 is that the pronoun "he" is there. Who's he? He is who we really are. "He" is our regenerate self in Christ, Christ's seed. Does Christ's seed sin? No more than Christ sins. See, this is tough stuff. I'm not saying it's easy. But all John is saying in 1 John 3 is the same thing Paul was saying in Rom 7. Who are we fundamentally? We are fundamentally God's seed now, we are fundamentally in Christ, we are no longer sinners in Adam, we are righteous in Christ. So when we sin it's fundamentally no longer I who am doing it. What's John saying? The born of God self does not sin. He's saying the exact same thing Paul said.

So John in 1 John 3:9 is not saying anything different than what Paul did in Rom 7. There's a whole difference here post-Pentecost that hinges on the kenotic and impeccable Life of Christ. Both those fantastic teachers of the word of God had the same concept, that when regeneration occurs, the miraculous act of regeneration by the Holy Spirit alters in a profound way our whole identity. And that is why in verse 10 and following he goes on to discuss how we treat our fellow brothers in Christ, he even uses an example of two brothers, Cain and Abel, and the whole point is to be able to identify

when we're walking in fellowship with our fellow brothers in Christ and when we're not. It's the idea of fellowship.

The idea is not something new but I think it handles the problem of 1 John 3:9 in a lot more linguistically honest way than saying that real Christians don't habitually sin. Of course, the whole discussion comes down to two positions. 1 John, the entire book, can only be taken one of two ways. Either this whole book is an argument to distinguish real Christians from mere professing Christians or it is to distinguish Christians in fellowship from Christians out of fellowship. And what we're talking about here is fundamental in deciding which way you approach the whole epistle. Obviously what I have said here by this solution to 1 John 3:9 shows very well which view goes with this approach, and that is that 1 John is talking about fellowship. That's why he says "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's not a gospel invitation, that's an address to believers and he's saying that if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from what? Just the sin that we confess? Or cleanse us from "all unrighteousness." All. That's something that we'll get into, this issue of confession of sin, filling of the Spirit and that sort of thing. But it's all predicated on Pentecost and what the Holy Spirit is now doing on this side of Pentecost.

So it's the whole issue of regeneration which sets this up, the idea that at regeneration we have a new life that is identified with Christ and it is He who lives through our new regenerate nature. Our nature is not sufficient in itself to overcome sin, but we have to walk the same thing the Lord Jesus Christ did and trust, walk by faith, depend on the Holy Spirit who does His thing and produces His sinless fruit. So from our side it all gets back to a walk of faith.

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