

## God: Source and Origin of New Birth

James 1:12-18

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The book of James, chapter 1. We will read together James, chapter 1, verses 12 through 18.

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. And when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begot he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

Now in our previous study of James, chapter 1, verses 12 through 18, we have seen that it is *people* who give birth to sin, and it is *people* who bring sin into existence. People give birth to sin, James has taught us, through a process of conception. It involves their own wrong desires being joined together with a consent of their own *will*. And when a wrong desire and a consent of the will are joined together, sin is conceived and brought to birth. And so it is in this manner that sin is begotten and brought into existence by men.

Now James is very careful to explain to us how sin comes into existence, lest people ascribe sin to God. And he makes it very clear that God is neither the source of sin, nor the author of sin, nor the begetter of sin; rather, he makes it clear that sin is brought to birth exclusively by men.

But in denying that God is the source of sin, he goes on to affirm what God *is* the source of in verse 17, when he says, “Every *good* gift and every *perfect* gift is from *above*.” Of course, all the evil gifts and all the *imperfect* gifts are from beneath. They are from *people*. But the good and the perfect is from above and “comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.” So he tells us that while God is not the source of sin, God *is* the source of every good and perfect gift. Everything that is *evil* comes from man; everything that is good comes from God, who is perfect and unchangeable in all His works and ways. As Psalm 119, verse 68, says, God is good and therefore he does good.

Now James goes on in verse 18 to tell us that the first and foremost of those good and perfect gifts which come down from above from the Father of lights, with Whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning, is the gift of regeneration. Notice, if you will, verse 18. He lists the first and greatest of the good gifts that come down from above, when he says in verse 18 regarding God, “Of his own will begot he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

And so James here is drawing out a contrast between that which *man* begets, which is sin, and that which God begets, which is sons of God. We conceive sin, but God conceives *children*—and children who ultimately will be conformed to the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So men bring that which is evil to birth, namely sin, but God brings that which is good and perfect to birth, namely regenerate children of God.

And so in bringing out this point, James is answering the question, How could it be conceivable that a consistent, perfect, immutable God, who gives us *life*, could possibly be the author of *sin*, which produces *death*? And the answer is, of course, it is entirely impossible.

So having considered together in our study last Lord's Day evening that the source and origin of good and perfect gifts is God, today we want to consider together that the source and origin of the *new* birth is God as well.

Now if God, then, does not beget sin, what *does* He beget? James now reveals to us what the most blessed of those good and perfect gifts from above is, and that is the conception and the birth of the children of God. God does not bring forth sin, God brings forth children.

Now in talking about the birth here that is spoken of in verse 18, he is not speaking here of our physical birth. Now it is true that God *plans* for and in His sovereign providence brings to pass our physical birth. None of us here are here except because of God's plan and purpose. However, the means that He uses for physical birth is natural conception between a man and a woman. But the begetting that he is speaking of here does not use that process. The beginning that he speaks of here is accomplished through the instrumentality, not of normal procreative activity in the physical realm, but with the word of truth. And so clearly, the begetting here is not a reference to physical birth, but rather to spiritual birth. He is speaking here of course of the new birth—of being born *again*, as is spoken of in John, chapter 3.

So what we have contained in this passage is a very wonderful capsule regarding the *truth* of the new birth, or as it is called elsewhere in Scripture, the process of regeneration—when a person is saved, when they are born again, when they have the old nature removed and the new nature imparted. This process of coming to life which results in repentance and faith is described very succinctly in verse 18. And so we want to consider together then this evening the process of the *new* birth, and we want to consider several facts in relationship to it that James brings out in this passage.

So in the first place then this evening, let us consider together the *cause* of the new birth—the *cause* of the new birth. Now when someone is born again, what causes that new birth? Now many will answer, and I remember reading an article many years ago by John R. Rice entitled, "How to be Born Again." And in this article, he said, What you do is, he says, you repent of your sins and you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and *then* you are born again. And of course, that is entirely inaccurate and incongruent, not only with this passage but with every passage in the Scripture that speaks as to the originating *cause*, the *instrumental* cause, of the new birth.

Now what does our text say is the cause of the new birth? Notice if you will verse 18. It says, speaking of God, "Of *his own will* begot he us." And so it was *God's* will and *only* God's will, and *exclusively* God's will that is the *cause* of the new *birth*. Just as man's will is the cause of the conception of sin, so God's will is the cause of the conception that produces the new *birth*. And so he specifically tells us who's choice was the provoking cause of the new birth coming to pass.

And so it is not because *we did something* that we were born again. It wasn't because we repented and it wasn't because we believed that we were born again; but rather, it is because God chose to impart to us the new birth, and as a result of obtaining the new birth as a sovereign act of God, we were then enabled to repent and to believe.

So in fact, repentance and belief are the *fruits* of the new birth, they are not the *cause* of the new birth. Repentance and belief don't *cause* you to be born again; rather, being *born again* is what *causes* you to repent and *believe*. You have nothing to do with your new birth, or its cause, or its initiation. It is of His *own* will that He begot us.

Now turn in your Bibles, if you would please, to John, chapter 1, verses 12 and 13. In John, chapter 1, verses 12 and 13, it speaks here of the process of salvation. And it says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood,"—and now he begins to list all the things that do not cause them to receive the new birth. They are born "not of blood"—that is, it has nothing to do with physical ancestry. The fact that your parents were Christians has no relevance as to whether or not you are born *again*. Who are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh"—it has nothing to do with your own will, which arises out of your own flesh—"nor of the will of man"—that is, somebody *else* didn't *pray* you into the kingdom, or through their activity bring about the new birth in your life. And then he rules *in* the *single* cause of the new birth. He says they are born "of God."

And so the reason why someone receives Christ and becomes a son of God, the reason why he believes on His name, is because he is born *of God*. And he specifically rules out human parentage, personal desire, or the desires of other people as being the instrumental cause of the new birth. He says they are born of God, they are not born of this, or of this, or of this, but it's God and it's God alone. So in John 1:13, the human will is expressly ruled out as the cause of the new birth. In James 1, and verse 18, the will of God is expressly *declared* to be the cause of the new birth.

And so God was not compelled by some choice that we made to save us or to bring about the new birth, but rather, it was caused by His *own free will*. In the gospel of John, chapter 3, verses 7 and 8, Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Marvel not that I said unto you, You must be born again." And so the natural question is, Okay, if I must be born again, how do I achieve that? And the answer is given in verse 8. It says, "The wind blows where *it wills*, and you hear the *sound* thereof, but you can't tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

In other words, Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, You have no more control over the new birth than you have over the *wind*. And just as you can see the wind go, and you can tell it's going by by its effects, but you don't have any *control* over it, so in the same way, you have no control over the new birth. The wind blows where it wills. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God brings the new birth to the pass in the life of the sinner as He *wills*. And so it is of *His* own will that *He* begot *us*. It is not of blood, it is not of the will of the man, and it is *not* of the will of *flesh*. It is of God.

And so God was not compelled to save any. It was of His own free choice. And God is not *obligated* to save any because there is no *merit* in any of us that *required* it. The pure sovereign choice of God with reference to the impartation of salvation and the new birth is expressly declared in Romans 9, verses 15 through 18. When God said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom *I* will have mercy, and *I* will have compassion on whom *I* will have compassion. So then it is *not* of him that *wills*, nor of him that *runs*, but of God who shows mercy."

So God expressly rules out our *willing* and our *acting*, that is our running, as being causes that determine who He will show mercy *upon*. And He shows this mercy when He issues forth this

grace and gift of regeneration. So the cause of the new birth is God's own will plus nothing. If you want to be born again, if you have a desire to be born again, there is *nothing* you can do to bring it to pass. Nowhere does the Bible ever say to you, You must do something to be born again. Now it says you must *be* born again, but it doesn't tell you to do anything to achieve it. In fact, it expressly rules out us being *able* to do anything. Rather, we must wait upon God.

And so the message of the Gospel is not, Figure out how to be born again and *do* it! The message of the Gospel is, Repent and believe. That's where *your* duty lies. Your duty does not lie in, Let's see—how can I be born again? What shall I do to bring it to pass? Your duty lies in the areas of the commands to repent and believe. And it is only the new birth that enables you to *do* that.

And so, as you apply yourself to repentance and belief, you recognize that unless God has mercy on you, and according to His own will *begets* you, that is, brings to pass the new birth *in* you, you will never be able to truly repent and believe. And so you are cast in a situation of utter helplessness and dependence upon God alone and *His* pleasure for your salvation. And it is precisely that position of humility that God wants us to be in, and in working that, is pleased to extend grace to. For the Scripture says, "God gives grace to the humble and resists the proud." And so this, then, is the cause of the new birth. It is caused by God's own sovereign prerogative, not by man's will.

In the second place then, notice together the nature of the new birth—the *nature* of the new birth. Now it says here, "Of *His* own will"—that's the cause; "begot he us"—that's the nature. The nature of the new birth is that it is a *birth*. It is a begetting. This word "begot," or "begotten," speaks here of this process of *conception*, and a bringing *by* that conception a new life into existence. And just as we were begotten by our parents through their procreative activity, in the same way, we are begotten by God by His *spiritual* procreative activity, and the result is, is that it is called a "birth," a begetting.

Now God initiates in this begetting a process of conception and a bringing *by* that conception a *new* life into existence, which is what is called in the Scripture being *born again*. Now God initiates a new creation when a man is born again by the removal of the old nature and by the impartation of a *new* nature.

Now turn in your Bibles please to Romans, chapter 6, for a description of this process. In Romans, chapter 6, Paul asks the hypothetical question in verse 1, "What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound," as saved people? And he's saying, That's impossible. Verse 2, "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin?" Now in the King James, it says, "How shall we that *are* dead to sin," speaking of our present experience. But this "being dead to sin" really, it's in the aorist tense here, and it would be better translated as the New King James translates it, "How shall we that *died* to sin live any longer therein?" When did we die to sin? Well the answer is, is when we were regenerated. And we shall see that as we read along.

He says, "Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" That is, our water baptism was a declaration of our identification with the death of Jesus. When He died, we died. "Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

So what he's saying happened to the believer in the process of salvation is that, with reference to something, the believer *died*. This old life *perished*, and it went *away*. And in the process, he was given a *new* life. Now what this consists of, the text tells us, verse 5: "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this"—now here's the statement—"that our old man *has been* crucified with him"—that's how it ought to be translated—"that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." So what happened to the old nature, here called "the body of sin"? The answer is, it was destroyed.

So what you were in your nature before you were saved *has been destroyed*. And so the old nature here is called under the term "the body of sin." And it was *destroyed*. Verse 7, "[H]e that is dead is freed from sin." And so because we died to sin, therefore the dominion of sin has been broken, and we now have this *new* life that is *different* than the old life, the old nature, that was destroyed.

For the parallel passage, look at Colossians, chapter 2. The book of Colossians, chapter 2. Now in this passage, Paul uses virtually the same language; however, he uses a different metaphor. Here he uses the metaphor not of death and burial and resurrection, but he uses the metaphor of circumcision. And he says here, verse 10 of Colossians 2, "And you are complete in him," that is, in Christ, "which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands"—now here's the circumcision described—"in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ."

And so what he is saying is that when we were brought into the old covenant, it involved the cutting off of a piece of skin and a casting of it away. Now what happened to the piece of skin? It died, didn't it? Okay. It was cast away. It died. It was completely separated from the individual and was never re-attached. It was dead and was gone. And what he's saying is that in the nature of true conversion, there is also something that is cut off and cast away, and what that is, is the body of the sins of the flesh—once again, a reference to the old nature. And he's saying here that Christ circumcises us when He saves us, and what He does in circumcising us is He cuts out and cuts away the entire old nature and casts it away.

And then he moves back to the metaphoric baptism, verse 12, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised him from the dead." Verse 13, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has he made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses."

So the nature of the new birth is described in Scripture as being a killing, a cutting off, and a casting away, and a destruction of the old nature, and an *impartation*, an infusion, of a *new* nature that gives us a whole new life. And it is this process that is called this "begetting," or this being born *again*.

Now our *will* is not involved in this process any more than a baby's will is involved in his natural *conception*. How many of you by your own will brought yourself into a state of *existence*? Well none of you did. It was your *parents'* will that accomplished that. And in the same way, none of us bring ourselves into the *new* birth by our own will. It is our *parent's* will, namely our heavenly Father, who makes that choice to beget us.

And so of His *own* will begot He us. And what He *did* to us was a begetting, it was an impartation of the *new* life, which demanded the elimination of the old life, and so is not a mere *renovation*, but rather there was a whole *new* creation. Just like you are not just somebody that was *renovated* from somebody else. When you came into being, you were a new creation. There is no other person like you. And in the same, when God begets someone, they too are a new creation.

Second Corinthians 5:17 says, “If any man be in Christ, he is a *new* creation.” The old things pass away. They’re done with. That’s the old nature, you see, that’s *gone*. “Behold, all things have become new.” And so there are new *attitudes*, there are new *values*, there are new *motives*, there are new *purposes*, all of which are manifestations of the new life. And this is the reason why someone cannot be born again and go on living in the future just like they lived in the *past*. It is an impossibility.

And not only is there a new life, there is a new direction—a radical change in behavior. Notice if you will, First John, chapter 3, verses 9 through 10. First John, chapter 3, verses 9 through 10. It says, “Whosoever is born of God”—there it is, the new birth—a description of regeneration. Of His own will, begot He us. Whoever has been begotten of God, or born of God, *does not* go on committing sin. And why can’t he? “[F]or his seed”—that is, this new nature—“*remains* in him: and he *cannot* sin”—Why?—“because he is born of God.” And you see, the new nature is of *such* a nature that it simply cannot *tolerate* continuing the same lifestyle and behavior and attitudes and values and motives and purposes that existed prior to conversion. And so it says, “In this the children of God are manifest”—who is a child of God? Someone who’s been begotten by God—“and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

So if you want to know if you’ve been born again, or someone else has been born again, just pay attention to their behavior. Don’t listen to their words. Listen to their *actions*. And if they are a people who do not go on in sin, like they did before they were saved, then you have reason to believe that this person *is* a child of God. And if they do not do *righteousness*, and they do not love their Christian brother, then you have no reason to believe they are anything other than a child of the Devil.

Now the Scripture is very clear about these things, and there’s no point in mincing any words. The nature of the new birth is that it involves a radical transformation of the individual, to the point that it becomes something entirely different than he was before. And this difference is called a *new* creation. It issues forth in a whole new *pattern* of behavior. And it is the result of the old nature being taken out and a new nature being imparted.

Elsewhere in the Scriptures, in Jeremiah 31, in verses 31 and following, it is described as God taking out the heart of stone and giving us a heart of flesh. The \* one item and the implantation of the new. And so any teaching that says we still have two natures—an old nature and a new nature, and they’re fighting with each other—is a *contradiction* of the Scriptures. We don’t still have a heart of stone and then *alongside* it was placed a heart of *flesh*. The Bible makes it very clear, the heart of stone was *taken out*, and we were given a heart of flesh.

Now you say, Well then what is that part of me that still fights against the things of God? The answer is, it’s this body of yours that has *not* been transformed by regeneration. It will be some

day. When we are with the Lord, we will have a *spiritual* body. But for now, the Bible speaks that the *flesh* wars against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these two are *contrary*, one to the other, so that you cannot do the things you would. And so Paul says, “Who shall deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

So if we, then, *through* the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live. And so the Bible makes it very clear. In Romans, chapter 8, and in verse 13, it says, “For if you live after the flesh,” that is, according to the desires of the body, “you shall die: but if you through the Spirit do *mortify* the deeds of the body, you shall live.” So in that one passage, the flesh and the body are equated with each other, thus showing their identity, that the flesh is the body, and the body is the flesh—the seat of remaining sin. The one part of our being that has not been *touched* by salvation as of yet is our bodies. The inner man has been *radically* transformed, but the outer man—the flesh, the body—still has sinful impulses and desires, which must be resisted and must be mortified.

So this, then, is the nature of the new birth. It is a radical removal of the old nature and implantation of the new nature, resulting in a whole new set of attitudes, values, motives, purposes, and behaviors, which are then manifested in the conduct of the life in the realm of sin and in the realm of righteousness. This is not to say that the new man is perfect. John himself says, My little children, these things I write unto you in order that you would not sin. But if any man *does* sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous [1 John 2:1]. And so sin will still *exist* in our experience, but it will no longer have *dominion* over us and be the dominating characteristic of our lives.

And that brings us then to my third point this evening. Having considered together the *cause* of the new birth—which is God’s will; having considered together the *nature* of the new birth—it is a *begetting*; in the third place, let us consider together the *means* of the new birth—the *means* of the new birth.

Now what is the *instrumentality* that God uses to bring about the new birth? Does He just say, “Kazzap! You are born again!” Or does He in fact use *means* to bring about the new birth? Do you become born again while you’re sleeping in bed, at night? One night, you go to bed and unregenerate, and the next morning you wake up and suddenly you’re born again? Is that how it happens? No. He makes it very clear the *means* through which he accomplishes it. Verse 18, James 1, “Of his *own* will begot he us *with* the word of truth.” So it is the word of truth *implanted* that brings about the new birth.

Now physical birth is brought about through *means*. It doesn’t just automatically happen—one day you wake up, and there’s the baby. Just like physical birth is accomplished *through* means, in the same way, spiritual birth is brought about through means also, and that is specifically, is brought to pass *through* the preaching and hearing of the word of God.

In First Corinthians, chapter 4, and verse 15, Paul says to the Corinthians, “For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” Now Paul was not the *cause* of the new birth, but he was an *instrument* of the new birth in that he preached the Gospel to the Corinthians, and it was *through* the preaching of the Gospel that God exercised His will and brought to pass the new birth.

Peter makes this even *more* abundantly clear in First Peter 1 and verse 23, when he says, You are “born again, not of corruptible seed,” speaking of the *human seed*, “but of *incorruptible*,” namely “by the word of God, which lives and abides *forever*.” So the seed which brings about conception and the issuing forth of the new birth is nothing less and nothing else than the word of God. Therefore, no one is ever born again apart from a *hearing* of the word of God. What did we read in our Scripture reading tonight in Romans, chapter 10 and verse 17? “Faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” So the word of God is the seed that produces the new birth when joined by the operation of the Spirit.

Now, just like it takes two things for a conception to take place in the physical realm, the seed of man and the seed of woman, in the same way it takes two things for the conception of sin, namely the lust and the consent of the will. In the same way, it takes two things for the conception of the new birth—the word of God and the operation of the Spirit. You remember John, chapter 3, and verses 7 and 8, “Marvel not that I said unto you, You must be born again. The wind blows where it wills, and you can the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

And so when the word of God is preached *and* the Spirit of God operates *through* that preaching upon the heart of the individual, that’s how and when the new birth takes place. And so, we can do nothing about the operation of the Spirit of God. We can’t control it, we can’t command it, we can’t *arrange* for its appearance. It always amazes me, you know, “Revival scheduled March 15th through 22nd, as though they’ve *scheduled* the Holy Spirit to show up and *do* something. You can’t schedule revivals. You can sure schedule preaching; you can schedule the *declaration* of God’s word; and you can *preach* that word. That’s what *we* can do. But the Spirit of God, then, has to join His operations *with* that word to bring about the new birth, and that’s something we have no control over.

And so we, in an effort to see the new birth occur, recognize it will be done according to the sovereign will of God, *by* the Spirit of God, in a context of the preaching of the *word* of God. And so what *we* do is we preach the word of God and pray and wait upon God to exercise His sovereign will and send His Spirit to bring to pass the new birth.

And so the Gospel *is* the word of truth, as it says in Ephesians 1:13, “In whom also you trusted after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel.” Colossians 1:5, “For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof you heard before in the *word* of truth,” which is the Gospel. So the Gospel is nothing less than the word of truth that is spoken of here in verse 18, “Of his own will begot he us with the word of truth”—what is the word of truth? Well, according to Ephesians 1:13 and Colossians 1:5, the word of truth is the Gospel. It is the preaching of the salvation through Christ. And so notice First Corinthians 1:21. It says, “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God *by* the foolishness of *preaching* to save those who believe.”

And so God’s method of conception is the process of the preaching of the Gospel. Just like not every procreative human act results in a baby, so every setting forth of the Gospel does not result in the new birth either. When does it occur? When God is pleased to bless the union of the two. But if we want to have babies, we’ve got to do something, both physically and spiritually, and the more we engage in the activity, the more opportunities there are for God to exercise His sovereign prerogative and bring to pass the blessing of the new birth.

And so this, then, is the means of the new birth. We cannot go out and cause ourselves or someone else to be born again, but what we *can* do is we can engage in the *means* God uses to bring about the new birth if He so *pleases*. And the means He uses is the preaching of the Gospel. And so those who are *called*, those who are saved, who go from seeing Christ as being foolishness and a stumbling block to being the wisdom of God and the power of God, that transforming process takes place, Paul says, by the *preaching* of the Gospel, First Corinthians 1:21.

And that bring us, then, in the fourth and final place, to the result of the new birth. Having seen the *cause*—of His own will; having seen the *nature* of the new birth—He begot us, it was a beginning; having seen the *means*—He did so with the word of truth; consider together, finally, the result of the new birth—the *result* of the new birth.

It says in verse 18, “Of his own will begot he us with the word of truth,” in order that—here’s the result—“we should be a kind of *firstfruits* of his creatures.” Well now, that’s an interesting phrase. What in the world does *that* mean? Well, the firstfruits, in the Old Testament, were the first apples, peaches, pears, lambs, whatever, that came into your hand at the beginning of the harvest. And so, you have an orchard and the trees ripen, and the very first apples that ripen, those were the firstfruits. And under Old Testament law, it was the duty of those to pick the firstfruits, which was the first tenth, or the tithe, of what they got. And they took all of that to the temple and they gave it to the Lord and dedicated it to the Lord. And it was given over, especially, to God’s worship and service, and it was dedicated to God.

For example, Proverbs 3, and verse 9 says, “Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.” So that which was the firstfruits was to be given over to the service of God, to the honor of God, and to the *worship* of God. And so when he says here that *we* regenerate people should be the *firstfruits* to God, what he is saying is that the purpose in God saving us is that *we ourselves* would be given over to the honor of God, the worship of God, and the service of God as a *result* of the new birth. And we see this declared in various passages in the Scripture.

For example, in Revelation 14, and verse 4, it says of those who are saved, “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, *being* the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb.” And so every single person who is converted is considered a firstfruit, and therefore, everyone who *is* converted is to give himself especially over to the honor, worship, and to the service of God.

Now it is true, *everything* that has breath is to praise the Lord. And that includes all the animals, that includes every unsaved person, *every* person that’s ever walked the face of the earth. Everyone has a duty to praise the Lord. But those who are *saved* are especially set aside for that purpose, and to that end and for that goal. And so we have verses like Titus, chapter 2, and verse 14, where it says that Jesus “*gave* himself for us, that he might *redeem* us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a *peculiar* people”—a people that are especially for His own possession, who are zealous of good works, who are *His* especially, in distinction to all of those others. Just like the firstfruits were particularly *God’s*, in distinction to all others. And so we read in Romans 12:1 and 2, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

And so we give ourselves over and up to be a *thank* offering to the Lord, literally, which is what the firstfruits was. It was saying, God, you've given me the beginning of my harvest. Thank you, Lord! I owe the *whole* harvest to you, but I want to especially honor you with my thanks, with reference to this first part.

And so this, then, is the result of the new birth. When someone is born again, they recognize, You know, it was *God's* will that brought about the new birth. He's the one who transformed me and took out my heart of stone and gave me a heart of flesh, made me into a new creation, broke the dominion of sin and Satan in my life. He's the one who did this through the instrumentality of the word of God and the Spirit of God. What should my response be to all that? That I give myself as an offering to the *Lord*—that my whole life is given over in thankfulness to Him, as it were a firstfruit offering. It says here that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

And so what we have here then, in verse 18, is a *declaration* of what God begets, how God begets it, and what the results of that begetting is. And this is set, you see, in *contrast* to what is said in verse 15. It says, “[W]hen lust has conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.” And so what man does and what God does are two radically different things. *We* are the source of temptation, and *we* give birth to sin. God is the source of good and perfect gifts, and He gives birth to sons of God. What a contrast.

And so the text goes on, then, and it says, “[T]herefore, . . . let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” We don't have much to be angry about, and we ought to shut our mouths and listen to that word of God that was the instrumentality of our new birth and will be the means of our growth. And we need to do a lot less talking and a lot more listening of that word, and a lot less being angry with God because of the sins and the things we struggle with in our lives, and a lot more grateful. And so the context goes on. Well, we'll deal with that next week, God willing.

But remember, if you are born again tonight, it's because God sovereignly chose to save you, and in due time brought to pass the new birth in your life through the preaching of the word of God, and *then* you were enabled to repent and believe and embrace Christ as your Savior. But God was the one who initiated the process, and you need to give your life over to Him as a firstfruit offering in recognition of that and thankfulness *for* that. Well, let us pray together.

Father, thank you so much that you *did* exercise your will to beget a people for yourself—a peculiar people, a people of your own special possession, a people in distinction to all *other* people. And Lord, we thank you that you, in time, brought to pass that purpose you had established in eternity, to bring the word of God and the Spirit of God together in their operations to cause us to die to the old life and to be given a new one. Thank you, Father, that you have circumcised our hearts, that you have cut away and cast off that old nature, and never will it be grafted in again, and you have given us a new nature. Lord, thank you for that.

Lord, we do then give ourselves as an offering to you. We do give ourselves as an offering upon the altar of thanksgiving, which is a *very reasonable* thing for us to do, since you have redeemed us from our sins. Help us, then, not to be conformed to this world, but help us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may *prove* and *know* what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God in order that we might *do* it, Lord, for that is the purpose of a firstfruit, is to serve the God to whom it is dedicated.

Lord, we pray that you would be honored by lives, and we ask, Father, also that you would be pleased to use *our* preaching of the Gospel to save those who believe. Father, use and honor and bless the word as it goes forth from this pulpit, as it goes forth from the lives of the individual people in this congregation. Bless it, Father, to the accomplishment of the new birth in the lives of many to whom we witness. Lord, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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