

Biblical Regeneration

Various

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Bible Text: John 3:3

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So in John 3, we have this religious man named Nicodemus that comes to Christ by night and he is desiring to know more about the kingdom of God. I mean, if Jesus is actually that promised Messiah, then Nicodemus wants to know more from him about this kingdom of God and so Nicodemus is wanting to know about the kingdom but Jesus is actually going to answer the question, "Nicodemus, what about you going into the kingdom?"

So we're going to read here the first seven verses of John 3 and I want to remind us in verse 5 that when it says that, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit," the water refers to the word of God and the Spirit there does, I believe, refer to the Holy Spirit. So what are the two instruments? The instruments are the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Godhead, and the word of God. This is how this happens. So John 3:1,

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that you are doing, except God be with him. 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again [or born from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus said unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto you, You must be born again.

Now let's turn to 2 Corinthians 4 and we'll read here the first six verses where Paul brings up this concept of being born again. He doesn't use that term itself, he uses really this recreation. 2 Corinthians 4, beginning in verse 1,

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry [that is, this glorious ministry that is way more glorious than the law of Moses], as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 But have renounced the hidden things of

dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world [or the god of this age] has blinded the minds of them which do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of God, and not of us.

So we're kind of bringing ourselves up to this month of October where we're going to be giving our emphasis here on the five solas of the Reformation in honor of that 500th anniversary of that event. But in preparation of that, I'm wanting to again even though we've looked at this recently within the last 6 or 7 months, bring to our minds the things that these men and women and children during that time, are you ready for this? Gave their lives for. This is something that they gave their lives for. Many of them were tortured, many of them were persecuted to various degrees, and yet by God's grace they stood for this justification, being declared righteous by faith alone, in Christ alone. That's huge.

We are coming now in a day in our own nation where men and women who hold to this historical orthodoxy, this is not novel, this has always been the cornerstone of genuine Christianity, where we too are coming under greater and greater intensities of persecution because of what Jesus Christ himself has said. Many of you are probably aware of Bernie Sanders, a Senator who has on a regular occasion for various nominees for offices within the government, has been raising the litmus test of religion and I'm paraphrasing but he gave the intimidation, if not the actual statement, that people who believe in what you and I believe, people who hold to what we hold, that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, that he's the only way, the only truth, the only life, that we believe that a person must be regenerated by the power of God and to kind of put it very bluntly, that this is the only religion, he has put them under the category of hate speech and hate groups and extremists, and has said that they are, are you ready for this? Unfit to serve in our government.

Now, brethren, this growing sentiment has filtered down even into our society. I don't know if you've had any recent conversations with your neighbors or younger people and you bring up the fact of Jesus Christ and they're kind of okay about that as long as you're speaking in general terms, but when you get down to the point where you are actually saying that they must repent, that they must put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, they will get quite a different look about them about this because what they have been taught in our public schools and by the media and in the atmosphere of our culture, is that you and I are wrong to stand in condemnation of anybody else's religion.

Now, brethren, you've got to realize that when people say that, if you are testifying what God has said, they're actually saying that not about you but about who? But about God himself. They are saying to God that God has no right to judge the authentic, genuine practice of authentic religion; that God has to accept all forms of religion whether they be right or wrong or whether they be exact or not, and if God doesn't do that, then God and his word is just put in the category of extremist hate groups.

And I just want to remind us what we already know: God is love, right? God is love and it is loving, brethren, to warn people about what God has said. And I want to remind you, we read this morning for our Scripture reading that Abel was persecuted for his faith in that fact by Cain, and Cain got so violent about this that he actually did what to Abel? The Bible says that he picked up and butchered his brother. He didn't just slay his brother, he just didn't like take, you know, a knife and put it through his stomach. He butchered him. He, as it were, mangled him over and over and over and God said that Abel's blood cried to him from the earth. And brethren, that occurred not after several generations but that occurred with Adam's own children. I mean, we're not that far away from the garden of Eden, right? We're not that far away from Adam and Eve telling their children not about what happened 6,000 years ago but what happened last year, right? And yet Cain was so mad at his brother and so mad at God that he actually butchered the messenger of God to him about that.

Brethren, I know that this is frightening and I know that this can cause us to shut our lips but we can't do that. We love too much to close our mouths. How in the world can we say that we love someone else and not tell them about the Savior, right? You say, "Well, I love them too much to tell them." No, you don't love them, you're just using that friend for your own personal satisfaction. That's not love. And if this thing takes root in our country, we are in danger of a future where you and I are really going to have to rely upon God and part of that reliance is because we believe that a person must be born again.

We saw last week that conversion is our repentance plus faith; it's our whole-hearted persuasion of the truth of God and the ability of Christ to deliver us from our sins. It's our knowledge of him as the Son of God. It's our knowledge of him that he is our prophet, that is he has the word of God, he is the Word of God embodiment. He is our priest, amen? That's the book of Hebrews. He's our high priest. And like Matthew says, he is our King. He is the Ruler over this kingdom of God. These things are the types of things that we ought to be confessing to other people.

So you take our faith, that is our absolute persuasion of those things, and you take our repentance, that is a voluntary change of mind about our thoughts about God, our ways toward God, and we accept what the Bible says about God, that God is who he says that he is, not who we think he is, not that he's like us. He's not like us, thank God for that. But what the Bible says God is like. So we take those two things and when those two things come together, it results in a man or a woman or a boy or a girl, it doesn't matter what age it is, to be, we call this conversion. A turning from sin and a turning from self. Now it doesn't make them sinless, right? It doesn't make them selfless. I'm talking about

in their entirety. But we still, we have this broken thing to our moral inability, our bondage to sin and death, that's broken and snapped and our minds about God have been changed and we are persuaded about that and now we are selfless in the sense that now we have the life of God to begin to really be truly loving and truly selfless. But there's still a lot of self in there, isn't there? So conversion is the subjective side, it's our human responsibility concerning the salvation of God. It is this, "Turn. Turn, my people. Believe me. I am the Lord. I do not change. Look unto me all the ends of the earth and be saved. I, the Lord, am your salvation." It is those things that are out before us.

Now, regeneration is the objective side of salvation. Regeneration is the implanting – now please, this is critical – it is the implantation of spiritual life into the heart of a person. It's the implantation of life, brethren, not just merely now a person makes a decision to come to church or he can quote some Bible verses or now he's saying prayers. Lost people can do all those things. It's not just that he adopts some kind of God talk now, now he can talk about God, he can talk about Jesus in some kind of generic way. Nicodemus had all that, didn't he? Nicodemus, do you think he could quote the Bible? Do you think that he attended synagogue? Do you think that he was raised in a religious tradition? The answer to that is yes. Do you think he said his prayers? Do you think he fasted? Do you think he talked about Adonai, the Lord, Yahveh, God? He talked about all that. Do you think he knew about Moses and Elijah and Isaiah? He knew all that, didn't he? And yet Jesus told him, "Nicodemus, you must be born again." And Nicodemus was surprised. He was shocked about this. This is why the Lord said, "Don't be amazed about this, Nicodemus."

I think it's amazing that a person who was exposed to the Scriptures would be ignorant of this and yet, I was just reading an article, didn't finish it but it was in the Wall Street Journal on Friday, the Jewish people are approaching the days of Yom Kippur and the days of atonement, and they were talking about how they for ten days they fast and confess their sins to God, and it was interesting, it says they actually open up, as it were, the book of life and they just hope and pray that their good deeds would be seen by God, that at the end of the day that their name would be in that book of life. So at the end of those ten days and they don't lose their life, then they come to Yom Kippur, that Day of Atonement, and they thank God that God in his mercy has not slain them. But the point of the matter is, brethren, they've missed the whole boat. Salvation is not about our righteousness, it's about God's righteousness, Paul says. And Paul says about them, "They have a zeal for God but they're ignorant concerning the righteousness of God in the situation." They're so busy trying to get whose righteousness? Their own righteousness, that they fail to consider the righteousness of God. Oh, they do know that they're not like God and they do know that they sin but they miss the mark. And brethren, Nicodemus missed the mark, didn't he? And he wasn't even aware of these types of things.

This is what our Lord calls being born again. In John 3:3, Jesus says, "Verily, verily." This means he's drawing attention to something that he's about to say that you and I had better pause and give intense listening to. He says, "I say unto you, Nicodemus, except a man be born again, born twice, he has no ability to even see the kingdom of God." Can't see it. His eyes aren't open. He's blind to this.

Then he repeats it when Nicodemus expresses his amazement. "How in the world can a man be born when he's old? I've never seen such a thing." You see, Nicodemus is still thinking natural, he's still thinking physical, he's still thinking about this earth. He's still thinking about flesh, isn't he? And Jesus brings to him and says, "Except," verse 5, "a man be born of water," that is of the word of God, "and of Spirit," that is by the third member of the Godhead, "he can't not only see the kingdom, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," and the reason for that, verse 6, is this, "That which is born of the flesh is," what? "Flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Brethren, there is a vast gulf between us as created beings and of the flesh and God. You can't take a vessel of flesh, work up its own fleshly righteousness and go to God. You must have a work from another time and another place that's ruled by grace and ruled by his love. You've got to have something come from God to enter into you and just like this physical world was created by the word of God, so the recreation of a human soul is by the same word that comes from the living God.

God likens this to the creation of the world. He likens it to conception. Until God speaks life, your soul of the vessel of your body is dead. It cannot bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. Just like in creation, the earth was formed, there was no habitation on it, it wasn't formed with life, it's just this massive dirt ball. So what does God do? He speaks to that earth, "Bring forth vegetation." What does the earth do? Brings forth vegetation by the word of God. This must happen in the soul of any person who comes to God. That word must enter into their spirit and soul and bring forth fruit or that person will not see the kingdom of God and he will not enter into the kingdom of God. I don't care how many church services you've been to. I don't care how much of the Bible you can quote. I don't care how much of the Bible you think you know, how many prayers that you pray to God, how much of your life that you actually change so that you become more earthly moral before God. I don't care how much money you give to the church. I don't care how many good things you do for people. I don't care how involved you get into medical so that you're alleviating people's sufferings. I don't care how much sponsorship you go or raise money for cancer or anything like this. It fails until the life of God enters into the soul of a man, woman, boy or girl.

Do we still believe that? Do you still believe that because, I'm telling you, people out there don't believe that and for you and I to say things like that is considered condemnatory, it's considered hateful, and you will feel the ramifications of this. Brethren, until you and I really believe that, then we are still blind. The god of this world has blinded your mind to see the beauty of God in all of his glory in the face of the person of Jesus Christ.

This regeneration is not caused by an act of your will. The earth did not do anything to receive life. This is a total act of God. This regeneration is not caused by you and God cooperating together. It's God doing something in your life. This regeneration is not you yielding to God to help you be righteous. Sometimes I actually hear people pray that in prayer for salvation. They'll say, "Now, God, I want to be saved now. Help me to be righteous." No, that's not regeneration. God's not helping us to be righteous, he's actually

imparting righteousness to you. He's declaring you righteous. It's not caused by ethnic distinctions. It doesn't matter if you're Jew or Gentile. It doesn't matter if you're an American or a European. It's not caused by the color of my skin. It's not a caucasian thing. It's not an African thing. It's not an Asian thing. It's of God, something God does in our heart.

Brethren, I think we understand that a morally dead man to God can't contribute anything to being morally regenerated by God. It's a birth. It's a regeneration that comes to us by the word of regeneration into the soul of a human being. You can pray as many prayers as you want but you must be born again. And when that regeneration comes, the Bible actually calls it a new creation. If any man be in Christ he's, what? New creation. It's not a remodel of the old creation, it's a new creation and it affects the whole of a person. It affects his understanding, his will, his mind, his affections, his nature. Now, that's important because you have people today that are saying that a person can be born again but show no signs of life.

Now brethren, you know how foolish that is. You ladies that have been pregnant, if you were pregnant and you gave birth to a child and the child had no signs of life, would you just say, "Well, they just need to make a decision later on"? No, you would be upset about that, wouldn't you? You'd be disturbed about that. You would say, "My child, my child!" You would cry out in anguish and yet the church of Jesus Christ today and I'm not talking about something that's not near to us, I'm talking about in our own circles, will actually say that a person can come to know Christ and show no evidences of conversion, of life inside of them. That is a contradiction to the very words of the New Testament. That's like being an unbelieving believer. It can't be that way. Believers are by the very word believing, amen? And it changes them.

So this is an act of God and, again, I just want to repeat emphatically that the Bible teaches, doesn't matter how you feel about this, doesn't matter what you think about it, doesn't matter what you've been taught, you've got to go back to the authority. The authority is not me. The authority is what does the Scripture say and the Scripture teaches that nobody goes to heaven, nobody possesses eternal life, nobody can claim the label of a Christian apart from the regeneration of God in conversion. It can't be.

Now, this event of regeneration is entirely an act of God. You're here in John 3, go back one chapter and look at verse 12 of chapter 1, 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," people who believe on his name were born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of," who? Where did this come from? "God."

Now there was, in fact, in the 1800s, early 1900s, a man named Charles Finney who denied this. He said that conversion was completely an act of man's will. He said all it is is a man or a woman being convinced like a lawyer would go in a courtroom and present the evidence and once they're mentally convinced of that evidence, then by an act of their will they become a Christian. That was a denial of the doctrine of regeneration and, brethren, don't think that you perhaps don't have Christian friends who don't believe in

regeneration. The church of Jesus Christ is filled with people who have just made decisions but they have not received the life of God in the soul of man. It's amazing, isn't it? So this is an entire act of God.

John 3:5, we've already read it. This regeneration occurs through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is involved in this. And 1 Peter 1:23 says that this occurs through the means of the word of God. So we hear the word of God and the Holy Spirit through that word comes to us and regenerates us by the very voice of God. So regeneration is a total act of God, by the Scripture, through the Holy Spirit. So the Scripture is the means by which this occurs and it affects us.

I want you to take your Bibles and turn to 1 Corinthians 2. Some of the results of being regenerated is that it affects in our intellect. In 1 Corinthians 2:12 Paul writes, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God," now why have we received this spirit which is of God, so "that we might know," does everybody see that? "So that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." Knowledge comes to us through our minds, through our intellect. So this regeneration causes sinners who were once blind to the things of God and blind to the glory of God, ignorant of spiritual things, now they not only see it and know it and can glory in it, but they actually comprehend things about God and they are precious to them because their minds have been moved from the god of this world having blinded them to this knowledge, to now the veil is gone and they can behold that knowledge in the face of Jesus Christ. What a blessing that is. Brethren, that's one reason why Christians love their Bibles. They love their Bibles because it's through the mirror of the Bible that they get to behold the things that they love. Christ himself. Because eternal life is not a geographical location, eternal life is the knowledge of the one true God and of his Son, Jesus Christ. So it changes us intellectually.

Let's take our Bibles and turn to the book of Romans 6. It changes us volitionally and in verse 12 Paul says, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God because sin does not have dominion over you." A sinner and his volition is completely enslaved to sin but now having been regenerated, saved by the grace of God, that bondage has been broken to now we actually can yield our members unto the righteousness of God.

So it has been broken. It enables us, it gives believers the ability to be freed from the moral lordship of sin to now that we can truly yield ourselves not to building our own righteousness but to the righteousness of Christ and his working in our life. What a blessing that is. That happens in regeneration. So our intellect is open to the things, to know and love the will of God, and now knowing that will of God we are enabled to pursue the things of Christ, to have that lived out in our lives, that our hatred against God is now replaced by a passion to glorify God through Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, it changes our emotions. A lot of talk about emotions today, our feelings. Regeneration changes us emotionally. It takes our disoriented, fallen affections and feelings that are anti-God and implants in us a life of God-ward affections and desires. So once I really didn't care about God, I just wanted my own way whether I'm doing that in church or whether I'm doing that on my own apart from church. I had no love for God other than, okay, he's out there and, okay that there's some knowledge out there, but now being regenerated, I love God and I love his Son and my affections, there is something inside of me that draws me to him and that something is that new life, it's the Holy Spirit inside of us. That's what religious people only don't have. They don't have that pull.

And brethren, even though there are commands in our Bibles, a lot of our New Testament is made up of exhortations. Why? Why that? Why don't we just wait around for God to command us to do stuff? Because Paul and Peter and John can come alongside of us and exhort us by teaching us about the one that we love and there is something inside of us that is wooing us, drawing us, bringing us there. Yes, we want that because of this life that is inside of us. People who aren't regenerated, you know, church, they can take it or leave it. Devotions, they can take it or leave it. They come to church, they sit in church, they listen in church, they can even thank God like the Pharisee in the temple, "I thank God that I'm not like other men. I go to church. I read my Bible every now and then." But they have not been born again. They are still anti-God. And brethren, I don't care how sweet you are, how cute you are, or how nice you are, I don't care how many people there or beside you and support you, unless you're born again, you will not enter into the kingdom of God.

I remember for years I heard the word "born again." To me as a child of 12 when I walked an aisle at a crusade, I asked them, "What must I do?" and they said, "Well, you pray this prayer," and that's what I did. After I prayed that prayer, they declared me saved. I said, "What do I do now, now that I'm a Christian?" They said, "Well, you need to read your Bible." I said, "Okay." They said, "You need to pray." I said, "Okay." They said, "You need to be in church." Well, that was hard. I was 12 years old, I was at home, neither one of my parents attended church. So I went home and started reading my Bible. Do you know what? That was about the most boring thing I've ever done. I didn't understand it. It didn't do anything for me except condemn me. I prayed. I didn't know whether Christ heard my prayers or not. I mean, it was like praying into the air. And finally after about a year of that, I said to myself, "Do you know what? This thing isn't real. I'm just going to quit having the pretense and I'm going to go back to going my own way, doing my own thing." I took my Bible, shut it up, put it in a drawer, closed it, went my own way. After several years went by if somebody would ask me, "Are you a Christian?" I finally was there, I'd just say no because I knew. I knew a Christian should not be living the way I was living, thinking like the way I was thinking. I knew something had to happen and the people I saw around me who professed to be Christians, I knew that they didn't have it either. Now I didn't know what you had to have, but I knew that what they said they had, if that was it, I didn't want it because they weren't living any other way than I was living. But when I was 20, this man who really knew the Lord witnessed to me. Something was working in my heart and life. I was being drawn. And I remember on that day on October 5th after listening to all that Al had communicated to

me, after looking at the text that was there, I remember getting on my knees and I just said, "You know, Lord, I've asked you to save me so many times, I don't even know the number of them, but this time it's final. If you're not real, then I'll just die and go to hell where I belong. But Jesus Christ, I believe you died for me and I believe that you have the ability to save me and I want you to save me."

Now brethren, the prayer didn't save me. You call on the name of the Lord, Romans 8, because you have believed. God had done a work in my heart and life. I didn't say anything. Just went to bed, got up the next day. My first thought was, "Something's different." There was peace in my heart and my immediate desire, this is amazing, my immediate desire upon getting out of bed was, "Where's my Bible?" I opened up my Bible to the Gospel of Matthew and started reading it and do you know what? It wasn't boring anymore. It wasn't just some exercise like some school teacher gave me a book I had to read and I was just reading it because they told me to read it. It fed me. It nurtured me. Why? Because God had regenerated me. I had been converted by the power of God.

And brethren, we've got to have that regeneration that changes us intellectually, volitionally, emotionally, and morally. It frees us from our depravity and our enslaving passions. It initiates in us a progressive transformation into the image of Christ into how you behave and how you think and how you make decisions. It's not sinless but it's definitely different.

And then, fifthly, it changes us relationally. I love this. It establishes a genuine fellowship with God, right? When you're lost, you're at enmity against God. You think God's mean. You're certainly not going to go there. When a person is regenerated, it establishes a genuine fellowship with God. 1 Corinthians 1:9, we won't turn there. 1 John 1:3, John says, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." And because of that fellowship with the Triune God, now you have genuine fellowship with the people of God. Once before, church, take it or leave it. But now there is something about being with the people of God that is so refreshing because that regeneration has occurred into your heart, into your life. We have been brought into the fellowship of the saints and that means that there is something inside of you that says, "Do you know what? Ought to be in church." No one told me after I got born again that I needed to be in church. I just knew I needed to be in church and I've been pretty much in church probably I don't know what percentage, probably 99% of my life. Every Sunday morning. Every afternoon service. Every midweek service. You say, "Well, you're a pastor. You've got to be there." I'm not pastor because it's a job. I'm not here because it's my job, I'm here because I want to be here. It's part of the fellowship with God and fellowship with the saints. God moves a person from being in darkness which is isolation, and he brings them into the light where there is fellowship one with another.

Now brethren, wouldn't you say to me that regeneration is absolutely a must? You must be born again. So that brings us, lastly, to a question that pretty much every person that stands to be ordained into the Gospel ministry has to answer. Now, fortunately I did not have to answer this question at my ordination and that is this question: what comes first, faith and repentance or regeneration? Or does regeneration come before faith and

repentance? In other words, what is the logical sequence? And I don't know why this is but every ordination council that I've been on eventually they ask the young preacher this question and he, I think only one time was a person prepared for it. I don't know why that is.

So what do you think? Don't answer out loud, just think in your head. Which do you think happens first? Are you regenerated before faith? Many many Bible believing, genuinely saved people hold to that position. I mean, it makes sense that a sinner must be given new life in order to be able to believe, right? Lazarus couldn't walk out of the tomb until he was given, what? Life. Amen?

Well, there are other Bible believing, genuinely saved people who believe that faith and repentance come before regeneration. In other words, I believe and repent and because of that I am regenerated. In other words, truly you have to believe to possess eternal life. I mean, there are statements like that in your Bible, right?

So again, don't answer out loud. I'm just asking you which one is it? And depending on the preachers that are before you, it depends on how they respond to what you say. So which is it? Well, let's think about it logically. If regeneration precedes faith, then that means that I could be a believing unbeliever, right? I mean, if I'm given life, there are people who teach this, that when babies are born, that they are baptized, these are pedobaptists and they believe that at that baptism, the implantation of life is in them and it won't be seen until later, until when they actually make a decision for Christ. Well, if that's the case, then they would be a believing unbeliever part of their life, right? Now if faith is before regeneration, then that means that you could be an unbelieving believer. In other words, faith, then there's this gap, even if it's a microsecond, and then you get regenerated.

And folks, I don't believe either one of those are accurate. I think that regeneration in faith or regeneration in conversion happen at exactly the same moment; that if you believe, you have been, what? Regenerated and if you have been regenerated, you have also believed. That it happens at the exact same instance when you believe you're regenerated, when you're regenerated, you believe. And brethren, there are...most people are divided in one of those two camps but historically there have been men of caliber, of reputation, that have held to this instantaneous regenerative conversion. One of those men is Charles Ryrie in his systematic theology. He holds to that. But another one of these men is probably a man that you've heard of and his name is Charles Spurgeon and Charles Spurgeon himself on December 17, 1865 in an evening service, that's over 150 years ago, said this and I quote from his sermon: "Every man who trusts the Lord Jesus has been born again. The question was once brought up in an assembly of divines," that is of theological personages, "as to whether a person first had faith or regeneration, and it was suggested by those divines that it was a question that must forever be unanswerable that the process, if such it be, must be simultaneous; that no sooner does the divine life come into the soul than it believes in Christ." He goes on and he says, "You might as well ask whether the human body, there is first the circulation of blood or the heaving of the lungs." Both are essential ingredients in physical life and they happen at the exact same,

what? The exact same time. "If I believe in Jesus Christ, I need not ask any question as to whether I am regenerated for no unregenerated person ever could believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and if I am regenerated, I believe in Jesus, for he who does not do so is clearly dead in sin." So the question is not, okay, is it regeneration preceding faith, nor is it faith preceding regeneration, it's what? It happens at the exact same, what? Moment.

He goes on in another sermon some two years later, again in an evening service on May 15, 1887. He says this, "They who believe in Christ receive a change of nature. They were born heirs of wrath, but, by Grace they become children of the Light of God. 'You were sometimes darkness, but now are you light in the Lord,' as soon as you have believed in Jesus Christ! This new birth, this regeneration, is a great puzzle to many poor sinners. One asks, 'How can I make myself a new creature in Christ?' Of course, you can do nothing of the kind! This is a miracle--it is as much a work of God to make us children of light as it was to make light at the creation! Only God can work this miracle, but mark you this, there never was a soul, yet, that truly believed in Christ, but at the same time it underwent the change called the new birth or regeneration. Christians have often been asked about which is first, faith or regeneration, belief in Christ or being born again. I will tell you, when you answer me this question--When a wheel moves, which spoke moves first? 'Oh, they all start together!' you say. So these other things all start together, whether it is the hub of the wheel, which is regeneration, or the spokes of the wheel, which are faith, repentance, hope, love etc. When the wheel moves, it all," what? "It all moves at the same time. If you believe in Jesus Christ and Him crucified, in the moment that you believe, this great change of nature is effected in you, for faith has, in itself, a singularly transforming power."

So this isn't just something that, you know, I'm sitting at my desk and get this revelation from God and there is nobody else that holds to this. But brethren, doesn't that make sense? "It is God who is at work in you both the will and the doing of his good pleasure," Philippians 2. God working in us is regeneration and at the same moment, there is the believing and the calling upon the name of the Lord to be saved.

But brethren, I want to repeat to you: praying a prayer in and of itself can't be the cause of your regeneration. God has to work inside of you. How does that happen? Through the word of God and the Holy Spirit. And brethren, I want to encourage you: you should not cease your pursuit of God whether you're a boy or a girl or an older person, younger person, middle-aged person, until you see the life of God in your soul because it's the life of God in your soul that is the proof of your being regenerated.

And brethren, that's what happens when a person comes to join a church. When a person comes to join a church, they make a profession of, what? Profession of faith, and that faith when you accept that person into the membership of your congregation, what you are telling that person is this: yes, we as a church believe that you're born again and that some evidences of the life of God is being seen in your life and you are welcome in our church.

You say, "Well, what if there aren't any evidences?" Well, that's what we call church disciplines. When you discipline a person out of your congregation for various sins that the Bible tells us to do like fornication, what you are saying to that person is: you may say that you're a believer but we as a church, we don't know that you're a believer because you're living like a, what? An unbeliever. And that's what makes it so embarrassing when a genuine church of God actually tells someone that professes to be saved, "You can't be a member of our church." Now we don't know for sure, for sure. If the person repents, that's good, amen? But if they don't repent, they're just confirming their own lostness regardless of how many prayers they might have prayed.

So brethren, do we believe you must be born again? We've got to because the Bible explicitly states that. And may God visit everyone here. May we be regenerate by the power of God. May our children have the mercy of God upon them to see that power on their lives so that they might be the children of God.

Let's pray together.