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## Regeneration - The Root and Fruit of Spiritual Life

### 1 John 5:1-5

Please take your Bible and open to 2 Timothy 1:13. We will eventually get to 1 John 5, but I want to start with 2 Timothy 1:13. This morning we continue with our study called the sound words of salvation. I'm sorry I couldn't be here last week. I wasn't feeling well from getting the stomach bug and I thought the most loving thing I could do was to stay away for the morning, especially for those who sit closer to the front. I'm thankful for Matt Penley stepping in to teach. I heard he did a great job.

As we continue our summer study of the sound words of salvation I want to remind you why we are doing this and where we are heading. Some Christians think that the gospel is a message only for unbelievers. Once you believe the gospel and become a Christian you graduate and become a disciple of Christ who no longer needs the gospel anymore. That's not true. Christians need the gospel - not to be saved over and over again, but to keep loving and living for Christ.

In his last letter to Timothy, just before he died for his faith in Christ, this is what Paul told Timothy to keep doing. This is why we are doing this summer study. 2 Timothy 1:13-14, "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you." Paul didn't tell Timothy to stop following the sound words of salvation, but to keep following them.

What are these sound words? Sound means that they are healthy. They are used in other places in the Bible for physical and mental health. I like to think of them as kale for the soul. John Kitchen writes about these sound words, "Sound emphasizes the truthfulness, accuracy or correctness of the words. They beget health by transmitting truth and a correct view of reality. These "sound words" are those which proclaim, explain, and expound upon "the gospel" and "the testimony of our Lord" (vv. 8, 10)."

That's what Paul tells Timothy to retain or to hold fast or to keep following after he is gone. These are truths we cling to and never let go of. We were spending some time with some friends last night. We were sitting on their back patio and they have a boat. Tim grew up in Michigan and we began talking about going out on the boat with friends when we were a bit younger. I am pretty sure one of my friends who drove the boat when I was a teenager was named Diablo. His mom named him Corey but I called him Diablo because of the way he drove the boat when I was on the tube. He would try and kill me and so I held on for dear life. I learned to twist and turn and even flip across the water to try and survive.

There are many things in this life that can try and pry out grip from the gospel, but we can't let anything do it. We can't let go of the gospel. Paul told Timothy to follow the pattern of sound words that he heard from Paul and to do it in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. This is more than just an academic pursuit. We do this motivated by the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. United to Him we follow these words. **One author states it well, "Only through union with Christ and a constant abiding in Him will we not only hold to the truth, but allow the truth to hold us."**

Hopefully, by studying these words we will grow in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Now, please turn to the right in your Bible a few pages to Titus 3:5. I want you to see our sound word for the morning. **It's the word regeneration.** This is our sound word for June 18. I hope this study of this sound word nourishes your soul this morning.

In Titus 3, the apostle Paul is helping Titus help believers on the island of Crete live for Christ in the midst of a wicked world. They changed through the gospel, but their culture stayed the same. Christians are called to be set apart. It is not by becoming like the world that we show the difference Christ makes in our lives. It's by being more like Christ in the world.

Paul tells Titus to tell Christians how to live in the first two verses in Titus 3 and why we do it in verses 3-7. Can someone please read Titus 3:3-7 and listen for the word regeneration?

Titus 3:3-7

- 3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.
- 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,
- 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,**
- 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,
- 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

These verses explain the difference in our lives and why we are different. Shockingly, the answer isn't about us at all. We are not different because of our goodness or because we got our acts together. The gospel makes us different. The gospel is the only reasonable explanation as to why we're different than the world around us.

Paul includes himself in verse 3. Titus 3:3 is a brief description of our spiritual condition when God saved us. We were in verse 3 when God did this. We were just like everyone else. That's when the goodness and lovingkindness of God showed up.

Our salvation is not due to our kindness, but God's. Kindness and love means that God saw our biggest need and He met our biggest need. D.A. Carson, "If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, he would have sent an economist. If he had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent us a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, he would have sent us a politician. If he had perceived that our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. **But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death; and he sent us a Savior.** ”

God's kindness and love appeared when Christ appeared. There is a song that came out a few weeks ago by Mercy Me called Then Christ Came. I encourage you to try and find it and listen to it. It describes our brokenness and how our brokenness led to a hopeless way of life. Then the chorus comes - Then Christ came, changing everything He took my sin and shame away. Now every song I sing will be for Him ever since the moment He walked in. Then Christ came.

The only reasonable explanation for why you and I are different than our wicked world is that Christ appeared and everything changed. He took our sin and shame away. Who applies the saving work of Christ to our souls? Verse 5 says that it is God the Holy

Spirit. The Spirit's role in salvation is to apply the finished work of Christ. He convicts and He converts. He uses His Word to show us our sin and He uses His Word to show us how Jesus died and rose again to save us from our sin.

Look at verse 5. Our salvation includes the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and renewal. We need both. The washing of the Holy Spirit is a description of spiritual cleansing. It's used here and in Ephesians 5:26 where Paul describes the love of Christ for the church that includes sanctifying the church, cleansing her with the washing of water with the word.

Last night we had a kickball game with some friends. The mom's and dad's played against the kiddo's. 8 adults against about 20 kids. Our quivers were ready to battle. It got fairly competitive. There were some tears. **Epecially when a 4 year old threw me out at first base. I'm kidding. No I'm not.** These kids had been running around outside and as they kicked the ball and ran the bases you could see the bottom of their feet. They were close to black with dirt and other unidentifiable matter. What do you think happened when those kids got home? Their mom's put them in the tub and scrubbed the dirt off their little feet. A thorough cleansing.

There was always a big difference in the Gillen home between how I bathed my girls growing up and how Brianna bathed them. When I bathed them it was fun. Laughing and joking and having a good time. **When Brianna bathed our girls it was weeping and waling and gnashing of teeth.** The scrubbing was a bit more intense. Her cleansing was thorough. Friends, what kind of cleansing did we need when God saved us? The Blake Gillen weak sauce version or the Brianna I will turn your whole body red cleansing? We needed a thorough Brianna cleansing.

Sin has to be cleansed for us to be right with God. We can't cleanse it. The more we try the worse it gets. Titus 3:5 reminds us that when God saved us, He cleansed our sin. This happened at the moment of salvation. If you're saved, you're cleansed. **The washing of regeneration is done in us by the ministry of the Holy Spirit who applies the saving work of Christ to our hearts and makes us alive with Him.** That initial regeneration leads to ongoing renewal. Renewal happens by the Spirit through the Word. Romans 12:2, " And do not be conformed to this world, *but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, so that you may approve what the will of God is, that which is good and pleasing and perfect."

There is no such thing as a regenerate believer who is not being renewed. The Spirit does both in our lives. One is instantaneous and one is ongoing. One is dramatic and the other is daily. One brings life and one brings growth.

This is why we need to keep spending time with the Lord in His word privately. This is why we need to keep coming here and sitting under the preaching and teaching of the Word. This is why we need to be wise in our choice of friends and choose people who love the truth and people we can talk about what we are learning with and the difference it's making in how we live. Spurring one another on to love and good deeds. Because the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to renew us we need all the Word we can get.

*Regeneration happens in a moment, renewal lasts a lifetime*

Regeneration and renewal is the Spirit's work and they cannot be separated. You can't have one without the other. You can't have life and never grow. The Spirit moves in at the moment of regeneration and begins to use the word to make us more like Christ. He loves us too much to leave us how He found us. Regeneration describes entrance into new life in Christ the moment a person trusts in Christ and renewal describes the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit within the believer to shape us and mold us into the image of Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:18 describes the ministry of the Spirit, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

God's initial regeneration, the new life in Christ that God plants in our souls, is followed by a lifetime of learning. Learning the Word. Focusing not on yourself but on Christ to be more like Christ. Growing up I was not a reader. I was an athlete. A former athlete. **I used to be able to run 100 yards without pulling a muscle.** This might make some teachers in the room shudder but I only read one book growing up. It was in the third grade. A girl in class named Michaela Evans was winning all of the reading contests and I didn't care much for Michaela. I think she may have beat me too the swing sets during recess one time. So I read a hardy boys book as fast as I could to dethrone her from being the reading champion for the week.

Salvation back in 1995 led to me now being an insatiable reader. I love to read. I love books. I love learning. I love going deeper in theology. I'm excited for this seminary cluster starting here in August because I want you to have the opportunity to go deeper and deeper into God's Word. Not just for the sake of learning for the sake of learning.

We study God's Word to walk with God. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to do the work of God.

What's the point? This is the point of our summer study. Going back to the gospel and remembering and reflecting on how God saved us motivates us to live for Him in a wicked world. **If you are struggling to say no to what the world says yes to get a cup of coffee and review the gospel and let the Spirit nourish your depleted soul.** We strive to be different because God saved us. We don't do it to earn approval. We do it because we have God's approval. We are all unworthy sinners, but God makes us worthy through salvation.

Is this how you see yourself this morning? Deeply loved. Thoroughly cleansed. Someone in whom the Holy Spirit permanently indwells. Someone in whom the Spirit of God is working to make more and more like Christ. How we see ourselves is a really big deal. We need to see ourselves as the objects of God's kindness through Christ and the Spirit's cleansing. If you are struggling to live a consistent life for Christ in a world that rejects Christ and lives for sin, you can't keep the gospel at arms length. Bring it closer. Hug it. Love it. **View the gospel like you did your blanket when you were a baby.** Keep it close.

This regeneration and renewal of the Spirit is a New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament promises. Remember all the way back in Jeremiah, God reminds His people how wicked they are and how they can't change their own sinful condition. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God asks His people a question in Jeremiah 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? *Then* you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil." Later he reminds them in Jeremiah 17:9 that the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. God is clear that His people are wicked sinners who are responsible for their sin. They are responsible for their sinfulness, but they can't change it.

Look back in your Bible to Jeremiah 31:31. One thing I love about the Bible is how God uses bad news to set His people up for good news. God calls out His people for their sin for a long time in Jeremiah, but then he promises to turn their mourning to joy. God will punish their sin, but God also promises to purify His people.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when **I will** make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring

them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this is the covenant which **I will** make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “**I will** put My law within them and on their heart **I will** write it; and **I will** be their God, and they shall be My people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Notice all of the I will's. That's the Lord. He will do this. The people obviously can't do it. God promises to change His people from the inside out and forgive all their iniquity and remember their sin no more. Don't you love these promises? Don't you love the God who keeps pursuing His people when they don't pursue Him? Some of these promises apply to a future remnant of ethnic Israel, the house of Israel and the house of Judah. There is a future remnant that will receive these promises. But some of these promises apply to the church, to those who trust in Christ.

The author of Hebrews applies some of these verses to us who trust in Christ. Look all the way over to Hebrews 10. Look with me at Hebrews 10:11. In this section, the author is showing us the superior ministry of Christ as our great high priest. In the Old Testament the prophet spoke to the people for God. He represented God to the people. The high priest spoke to God on behalf of the people. He represented the people to God. Christ is both for us.

Look at what makes Christ superior to the OT priests in verses 11-14 and the difference it makes in verses 15-18:

#### Hebrews 10:11-18

- 11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.
- 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,
- 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.
- 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.
- 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,
- 16 “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,”
- 17 then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

The priests in the Old Testament never sat down. Why? The blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin. Jesus is different. **He is the priest who makes the final sacrifice for sin.** By one offering He perfects His people. Then notice in verses 15-18 the Holy Spirit applies some of the promises of Jeremiah 31 to us who trust Christ. What does the Holy Spirit do in those who trust Christ?

God changes us on the inside. Look at the end of verse 16, "I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds." Kent Hughes, "Instead of putting his laws on stone tablets, they are placed in the very center of the believer's being, so that there is an inner impulse that both delights in knowing his law and doing his will." That's a great explanation of the difference the Spirit makes in our lives. He changes our ought to's to want to's. I want to please God because He changed my heart. One author describes it as the expulsive inner power of a new affection. This is God's work.

So what? Trust Him. Empowerment is God's promise to everyone who turns from sin and trusts in Christ. I think one of Satan's greatest schemes is to try and convince us that we are now what we were before God saved us. He likes to remind us how sinful we all still are. I remember a pastor one time describing how Satan works. He compared it to a high school quarterback. The high school quarterback goes out on a Friday night and plays poorly and throws three interceptions. The next morning he spends time with the coaches watching game film. The coach keeps showing him those interceptions and what he did wrong. Over and over and over again. Replaying the tape of his poor decisions that cost his team the game.

Satan loves to point out our sin. Not for the purpose of pursuing purification, but condemnation. A saint who is only away of their sinful interceptions will have a hard time staying in the game and living for Christ. Satan points out our sin to condemn us. The Spirit points out our sin to cleanse us. He convicts and He points us to Christ's finished work for the one time cleansing and continual cleansing we need.

God not only promises to empower us, but He has promised to completely remove our sins. Look at Hebrews 10:17, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." No more. No more. No more. **What we can't forget about ourselves God can't remember.** He chooses not to dwell on our sins because Christ removed them. Where are all our sins this morning? They gone. They're all nailed to the cross.



Guys, nothing but the blood can do this! How precious is the flow that makes us what? White as snow. Again, do you see yourself how God sees you in Christ? Empowered by God and completely forgiven. Cleansed and completely forgiven. When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, what do I do? What do you do, friend? Upward I look and see Him there, who made an end to all my sin. Praise Him! Where there's forgiveness through Christ's final sacrifice there is no longer any offering for sin. There doesn't need to be any future offering for sin because Christ finished the work and sat down at God's right hand.

Leon Morris comments on Hebrews 11:18, "This short verse emphatically conveys the utter finality of Christ's offering and the sheer impossibility of anything further. Where sins have been effectively dealt with there can be no further place for an offering for sin. The author sees this as established by Scripture, and this is consistent with his normal use of the OT. He cites the Bible to show that since the new covenant is established, there is no room for any further sacrifice. This is the word of the prophet and must be accepted by any who see the OT as Scripture. So, the author reasons, now that the new covenant spoken of by the prophet is a reality, the prophetic word itself rules out the possibility of any further sacrifice."

The Spirit works in regeneration to unite us to the Christ who offered one sacrifice for all our sins. Now they are all forgiven and we are changed on the inside. Ok. That's awesome. What now? So what?

Now, let's finish in 1 John 5. That was a fairly lengthy intro. In 1 John 5:1-3, I want you to see three results of regeneration. This is the transforming power the new birth provides in everyone who receives it the right way. As you are turning to 1 John 5, remember in John 3 Jesus compares the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the new birth as the wind. Why wind? You can't see wind. You can't see when the Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to a sinner. It happens by the Spirit of God through the Word of God. You can't see the wind, but how do you know when it's windy? You see the effects of the wind. You know it's windy when you see trees blowing and leaves falling off the trees in the fall.

What are the effects of the new birth in the life of the believer? There are three I want to close with this morning. If you are born again, these three things show up in your daily life. Let me give them to you and then we will quickly walk through them.

1. Affirmation that Jesus is the Christ

2. Affection for Christ and the Church
3. Application of what Christ commands
4. Apprehension of ourselves as overcomers

Affirmation, affection, application, apprehension.

I want you to do some spiritual personal inventory this morning. As we read these verses hold them up to your heart and life. See if you see your reflection in this description of the power of the new birth.

#### 1 John 5:1-3

- 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.
- 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.
- 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.
- 4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.
- 5 Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Picture a dot. The dot represents the new birth. The dot represents when a sinner receives life from God. The phrase "born of God" toward the middle of the verse is in what is called the perfect tense and "believes" in the first part of the verse is in the present tense. Why does this matter? **The perfect tense of the verb *gegennētai* (Born of God) suggests a past action with results that continue in the present.** It helps me to picture a dot representing a point in time event with abiding results. Being born of God is a point in time event with abiding results. Regeneration is the root (Born of God) and conversion (Faith in Christ) is the fruit.

Even though believes comes first in this sentence it doesn't come first in our experience of the new birth. Regeneration precedes and produces faith in Christ. **James Montgomery Boice writes, "We believe, and in fact do everything else of a spiritual nature *precisely because we have first been made alive.*"** John Stott, "Believing is the consequence of the new birth. Our present, continuing activity of believing is the result, and therefore the evidence, of our past experience of the new birth by which we became and remain God's children."

The first abiding result of the new birth is that you affirm the truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ. That He is truly God and truly man who accomplished the work of redemption. John MacArthur writes, "The object of the believer's faith is Jesus, particularly that he is the promised Messiah or "Anointed One" whom God sent to be the Savior from sin." This particular teaching about Christ was under attack in John's day.

J.C. Ryle, "A man who is born again, or regenerated, believes that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour who can pardon his soul, that He is the divine person appointed by God the Father for this very purpose, and beside Him there is no Saviour at all. In himself he sees nothing but unworthiness. But he has full confidence in Christ, and trusting in Him, he believes that his sins are all forgiven. He believes that, because he has accepted Christ's finished work and death on the cross, he is considered righteous in God's sight, and he may look forward to death and judgment without alarm.

He may have his fears and doubts. He may sometimes tell you he feels as if he had no faith at all. But ask him whether he is willing to trust anything instead of Christ, and see what he will say. Ask him whether he will rest his hopes of eternal life on his own goodness, his own amendments, his prayers, his minister, or his church, and see what he will reply. Ask him whether he will give up Christ, and place of confidence in any other way of salvation. Depend on it, he would say that though he does feel weak and bad, he would not give Christ for all the world. Depend upon it, he would say he found a preciousness in Christ, a suitableness to his own soul in Christ, he found nowhere else, and he *must* cling to Him."

The second abiding result of the new birth is affection. Affection for God who causes us to be born again and the church that is a partaker of the divine nature. Look at the end of verse 1 and verse 2, "and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments." Notice all the references to agape love in these new verses. The new birth produces new affections.

The new birth produces love for the church even though at times the church can be filled with people who are hard to love. Christians are difficult people to love at times. I know because I am one and I am difficult to love at times. Especially when I talk this long and make you late for Father's Day lunch. **We keep loving one another, not because we are all so lovely, but because the fruit of the Spirit is love.**

**Being born of God produces affirmation that Jesus is the Christ and affection for Christ and His church.** This is an interesting question to close with for the morning - How do you spell love for Christ and the church? Ready? **OBEY.** That's what the new birth produces and that is what flows from love for Christ. 1 John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."

I don't think anyone here would say that doing everything Christ commands is easy. There are some difficult commands. They're not easy to keep, but they're not burdensome either. Why? The One who tells us what to do fills our hearts with His love and empowers our obedience. One author writes, "It is an act of love toward our brothers and sisters to live in obedience to God's commands and not merely according to feeling."

Finally, apprehension in versus 4-5. People who are born again view themselves differently. We are overcomers in this dark and dying world. We are in the world, but we are not of the world. What makes us different is what Christ has done for us. The one who believes that Jesus is the Christ who died and rose again is an overcomer.

Kenneth Barker, "Observe the progression of thought in what John says about how victory over the world is gained. It begins with the new birth (v.4a). It moves on to the believer's experience and act of faith (v.4b). It culminates in the confession that "Jesus is the Son of God." Victory requires the whole process. It assures us that we too can love God and the children of God and that we too can obey his commands (v.3). Belief, love, and obedience are all the marks of the new birth. And the life lived in the new birth is not a burden but a life of celebration. This was the experience of the apostles and of the early church. Paul's cry that "in all these things we are more than conquerors" (Ro 8:37) echoed throughout the Roman world."

I trust you see evidences of spiritual life. I trust you affirm the truth about Christ, you have affection for Christ and His people, you apply God's Word to your relationships and you apprehend yourself as an overcomer.

Regeneration is a sound word of salvation. Only God has the supernatural power to cause you and me to be born again. It's not something we seek after. It's something

God does. He acts and we respond. We were spiritually dead in the grave like Lazarus and God called us forth and we came forth to believe in and follow after Jesus forever. Regeneration and renewal is the work of the Spirit in us and praise the Lord when He starts working He never stops working.

R.C. Sproul, "In His mercy and grace, the Spirit of God invaded your soul and changed the heart of stone into a heart of flesh. He gave you the desire for Christ and brought you to Christ as a gift. You happened to be one of those whom the Father was pleased to give to the Son, not because there was anything pleasant about you but so that the Son might see the travail of His soul and be satisfied. How can this elicit anything from us except doxology?" Amen. Let's pray.