



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“The Holy Spirit in Regeneration, part II”

TRANSCRIPT

...thirty-one, so let's go ahead and begin our class.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the opportunity again to study the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the new birth, for the participation of the godhead within it, and we thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast brought us into new life, and through Jesus Christ we are a new creation. We pray as we consider the teaching of the Scriptures on that great act, that Thou would give us illumination by the one who has brought us into this new life. Enable us to understand, and may, Lord, the things that we learn be profitable to us in our Christian life and in our Christian witness. We commit this hour to Thee.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Now, last time we began a series of studies on the doctrine of “The Holy Spirit and Regeneration.” And I thought I would be able to finish it tonight, but due to the fact that we want to go into it a little more in detail than we did last year when we studied regeneration. I'm going to have one more study in addition to this study. But last time, remember, we began with a few words of introduction. We pointed out that there were many diverse interpretations of regeneration, and we then began to look at the

meaning of regeneration. We saw that the term occurred twice in the New Testament; that in its first occurrence, it had to do with the creation and the new birth of that creation, which God shall bring to pass at the second advent of the Lord Jesus when the kingdom comes to pass upon the earth. That is spoken of as “a regeneration.” But we pointed out that we were particularly interested not in the regeneration of the creation, which is a future event, but we are interested in the regeneration of the person. And so from that time on, we were speaking, and we shall speak, about regeneration as it affects a person.

Then we began to discuss the necessity of regeneration, and we pointed out that regeneration is needed for three reasons. First, because of the condition of humanity, we are naturally dead. We are alienated and enemies. We are blind. We are hardened. We are slaves of sin. We are ignorant. And it appears that the Bible says that if we have not been born again, that we are really of the devil, and so that the condition of humanity is sufficient to make very plain to us, the necessity of regeneration if we expect to enjoy the presence of God some day.

Then we said that regeneration is also needed because of the character of holiness; that sin separates us from a holy God, and because God is a holy God, he cannot have fellowship with sin, and we are dead in sin. And so the holiness of God separates us from him, and we need regeneration, a new birth. We need to become a new creation. And finally, we spoke about the fact that regeneration was needed because of the character of heaven itself. In the Bible, we are told in the Book of Revelation that “there shall not enter into heaven any thing that defileth.” Heaven is not like earth, and consequently, if we are to enter into heaven, we must be pure. Therefore, we need a new birth. We can -- cannot enter into heaven, dead in sin. We cannot enter into heaven the slaves of sin. We cannot enter into heaven in any way touched by sin. What we need is a perfect righteousness and a perfect holiness, and that can only come to us through a new birth, and a consequent justification of life.

Now, in this study we want to go a little further. We want to analyze something of the theological features of this great work of regeneration, and so tonight we’re going to talk about the nature of regeneration. It is the foundation of life, this doctrine of the new birth, and it is important that we learn to distinguish the things that pertain to us in this particular doctrine. And right at the beginning, we’re going to have to distinguish between our subjective conscious observations and the objective unconscious acts that occurred when we believe in Jesus Christ.

Now, what I mean is this: if I were to ask you something about your childhood -- those of you who have grown up -- you would probably tell me, “Well, I was born at such-and-such a time.” At least, the men would. And then you would tell me, “at such-and-such a place. My parents were so-and-so. And for the first few years of my life, I lived in this community, and we did this and that.” And then you probably would tell me the other things that touch your childhood until the time came when you left home to go to college or, having finished college, you left home as a grown person.

Now, you would tell me a lot of things that you would not have any firsthand information about. If I were to say to you, “Do you know that those were your parents?” Well, you would have to say, “Well, I think so. I wasn’t there actually when I was born, consciously at least.” And I might say, “Are you sure that you were born in that place?” “Well, all the information is to that -- is to that. I do have a birth certificate.” But I might say, “Do you remember it?” “No, I don’t remember it.” “Are you sure that you are just as old as you say you are?” “Well, the birth certificate says this.” “But are you sure? Could not someone have made a mistake? Have you any proof that you really are the precise age that you claim to be?” And of course really, we would have to say, “No.”

We might do a great deal of investigation, and find out that it was true, but the truth of the matter is, most of us remember our lives from about the time that we were just getting out of the high chair. And that’s about when our consciousness begins. I think the earliest thing that I can remember in my life, when I -- was when I was about

two and a half years of age, and I was highchair age. And that’s the only thing I remember. I remember a couple of events, and that is about all.

So likewise in the spiritual life. If you were to ask a person when you were born again and how were you born again, they would say, “Well, I was born again in 1941, and I was listening to a man preach, and he for the first time at least in in my understanding -- preached the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and I was deeply impressed by the things that he said. The Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, and I responded to the message. I believed in Jesus Christ, and I was saved then. I was born again at that point.”

Now, of course, we are really in -- when we are saying that, we’re only saying the subjective conscious observations that we remember about our new birth. The truth of the matter is that, from the standpoint of Scripture, you do not know, consciously, the time of your new birth. It’s like your natural birth. It is not a subjective thing. It is an objective thing. It is an instantaneous thing. It is one of those things that are in your spiritual sub-consciousness, so that you cannot remember it because it is no experience. So the Bible says.

Now, tonight, we want to talk then about the nature of regeneration. And we first wish to look at some of the characteristics of the change and then at its character. And so, Capital A in our outline: the characteristics of Regeneration. And I’m going to give you about six of these characteristics. We could make it seven, but I’m just going to make it six. And we want to talk about some things that the Bible says about regeneration, which may surprise you. And I hope tonight, at least you will be stirred up enough to go home and think about some of the things that I’m going to tell you.

First of all, regeneration is solely the work of God. It is a creation. To regenerate means to bring to birth again. It is a creation. It is a work that a creature cannot do. It should be obvious to us, if we are the creature of God, then we are not the ones who

have brought about this new birth. It is something that God does. Now, I want to turn to some passages of Scripture. And first of all, I want you to turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2.

Now, I want you to notice a couple of words which no doubt, you have noticed many times before, but we want to just try to dwell on some of the aspects of this doctrine that are presented here. Ephesians chapter 2 in verse 1, and I want you to notice the first verse. And of course in the first verse, this word is in italics. It is the word “quicken.” That means that it is not in the Greek text, but it is in verse 5, and we will look at that too. But notice verse 1,

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”

And then verse 5,

“Even when we were dead in sins hath quickened us together with Christ.”

Now, what does the word “quicken” mean? Well, the word quicken means “to make alive.” In other words, it is something that has happened to us when we were dead. We were made alive. Now, the tenth verse says,

“For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works.”

So when we were born again, we were created by God for good works. We were made alive.

Now, man is, therefore, passive in his regeneration. He does not produce it. He does not produce it any more than Lazarus produced his resurrection. When Jesus said, “Lazarus come forth,” and Lazarus came forth. For when Lazarus’ body was re-animated,

it was done purely as a supernatural work by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Lazarus did not have anything to do with it. It was solely the work of our Lord. And so in regeneration, regeneration is solely the work of God. We are created. We are quickened. We are made alive.

Now, secondly, man cannot cooperate in regeneration. Now, this naturally follows from his passivity in regeneration. Can a dead man assist in his own resurrection? No, a dead man is dead. Can a man who is at enmity with God love God? No, he cannot love God if he is at enmity with God. And Romans chapter 8 in verse 7 says that we are at enmity with God. That verse reads,

“Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

So if a man is at enmity with God, then he cannot cooperate with the love of God.

Now, what happens is that God does a work solely by his own supernatural power upon us. Now, I think if we were looking for an illustration of these things, we could look not only to Lazarus -- for he is a good illustration of this -- but we could look at some of the other miracles that our Lord performed, which are designed to teach us these things. For example, he healed blind Bartimaeus. Remember when he went into Jericho, news spread that he was coming. Bartimaeus asked -- asked who was coming, and he was told. And you remember he said, “Son of David, have mercy upon me.” And the Lord went to -- spoke to this man and said, “What do you wish that I do for you?” And he said, “I want to see again.” And Jesus said, in Luke chapter 18 in verse 42 -- if this is the -- it’s only mentioned as the blind man in that instance -- if that is Bartimaeus. He said, “Receive thy sight.”

Now, there was no receptivity in the eye of this blind man. There was no favoring condition of the organ that fill -- facilitated the restoration of sight. The causing of this

new vision of this man was wholly miraculous. It was done by the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Apparently, simultaneously with the words, “Receive thy sight,” our Lord created within this person, the ability to see. In other words, there was exertion of creative power upon the sightless eye, enabling it to see. That was a supernatural work done by our Lord Jesus Christ. So regeneration is something that men cannot cooperate in.

Third, regeneration is an instantaneous act below human consciousness. We do not feel it. Now, I do not think that anyone ever feels regeneration. It is something that happens instantaneously by the power of God. No one can say, “I felt my new birth.” It’s just as our natural birth. We do not remember when we were born, do we? Do you remember how it felt to be born? Of course not. It’s in your -- it’s below your consciousness. It is something you cannot remember. The same thing is true in our new birth. Now, we may remember some things -- some experiences we have afterwards. I know that I’m alive because of the experiences that I have, but I do not know the experience of birth. And so we do not know the experience of our new birth. It is an instantaneous act below human consciousness. We do not feel it.

Fourth, regeneration is effected without means. Now, I want to stop here, because I think if you were to ask the average Christian, “Is regeneration effected with means?” almost all of them would say, “Yes, it is effected by means of the word of God.” And I want to show you -- I hope to show you -- that, that is not the teaching of the word of God. Regeneration is effected without means. It is really a direct operation of the spirit of God upon the spirit of man. Truth cannot be the means for regeneration. Now, if we just had a few people here tonight, and we could have a little session sitting around and asking questions, I’d like to ask you a question at this point. Because most people, in answering the question, “Do you think that regeneration is produced by the Bible?” they almost all would say, “Yes.” But it is not.

Now, let’s think about what we are naturally. We are dead. We are blind. We are hardened. We are slaves to sin, and all of the other things that we’ve talked about. Now, truth -- can truth be the means for the new birth when the man -- natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God? For they are foolishness unto him. Neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. Can truth be the means of our new birth if we cannot receive truth? Come on, answer me. Can it? No, it cannot. If we cannot receive truth because we are dead in sin, because we do not have the spirit of God and cannot welcome it, cannot receive it, cannot receive the Holy Spirit, then can we say that regeneration is produced by the coming of the truth? No, we cannot receive the truth. So regeneration is effected without means. It is effected by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the spirit of man.

Now, five, regeneration affects the intellect, the will and the emotions. I guess I better turn it over a little. Regeneration affects the will -- or the intellect, the will and the emotions. And I want to say a little something first, about the way in which the regeneration affects the intellect. It illuminates the mind. It, of course, renews the will -- and we’ll say a little something about that in a moment. It elevates and re-orientates our emotions.

For example, men may understand the Bible grammatically and logically. Why, this is why, if you were to go to a theological seminary and sit in on one of the classes in which they were discussing things about the Bible, you might find that the teacher was a man who was obviously not a Christian, as you and I know a Christian to be. He would be a man who might, in the course of his exposition or explanation of what he is talking about, say that he does not accept the Bible as the word of God. Why, he might even make a few slurring remarks about fundamentalists who talk about a new birth, and he might make further slurring remarks about people who claim to have had some religious experience. And he might even say, “You can explain almost all of those experiences psychologically.”

And he might go on like this. And then he might turn to the Bible, and he might point out facts about the text of Scripture. As a matter of fact, he might even look at the Greek text. He might be a man who can look at the Greek text and can read the Greek. And as he explains the Bible, he explains it grammatically. He can say, “The subject of this sentence is this word. The verb is this. The object is this. The meaning of this statement is such-and-such.” And he can put it in grammatical words which are logical. He may even point out from the Scripture that this text says that God is merciful, and if that’s one of the doctrines that he agrees with, he might say, “Yes, God is merciful.” But he has no consciousness of God’s mercy if he’s not a Christian. Now, he can only look at that grammatically and logically. He can only look at it notionally. He does not have any real experience of the mercy of God.

Now, regeneration is something that is far deeper than that. By regeneration, the knowledge that we have of the text of Scripture grammatically and logically, or notionally, becomes experimental knowledge. Now, that is the kind of knowledge that a Christian has, and that’s why many men can look at the Bible, write books on the Bible, commentaries on the text of Scripture, even theologies, and write sentences that are logical and grammatical sentences. Can even talk about the attributes of God. Can talk about Christian ethics, but who deep down within, have no understanding of the great doctrines of the Christian faith. Their knowledge is a grammatical, logical kind of knowledge, but it is not the knowledge of that plus personal experience.

Now, by regeneration, the knowledge of the word of God becomes ours experimentally. And when it becomes ours experimentally, it reaches a higher level. Now, that kind of knowledge is the knowledge that God gives the man who is born again.

Now, let’s look at some passages of Scripture. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13. Paul speaks of a knowledge that is more than just grammatical and logical knowledge. He says in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 12 and verse 13,

“Now we [that is, we believers] we believers have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know “

Now by the way, did you notice that Paul says, “We have received the spirit of God that we might know.” He does not say, “We received this knowledge of the word of God and then God gave us the Holy Spirit.” He says, “We have received the spirit that we might know.” In other words, we could not know until we received the spirit, and therefore, we could not cooperate with God in regeneration. We did not act upon the means of the word of God, and then receive the spirit, but this is effected without means through the coming of the Holy Spirit, and now through the coming of the Holy Spirit, we are able to know the things that are freely given to us of God. “Which things we also speak,” he says, “not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

And so by regeneration, the knowledge that is purely grammatical becomes experimental. Now, we know that God is merciful, not only because it is stated in the word of God in the form of a sentence, but we know it because we have experienced the mercy of God. We know that God is faithful, not because the Bible simply says that God is faithful. That’s the foundation of our experience. But we also have that personal experience that comes because we have trusted this God. So our knowledge has reached a higher level.

Turn over to Ephesians chapter 1 in verse 18. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 18.
Now, Paul said in verse 17,

“He’s praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation and the knowledge of him. The eyes of your understanding being enlightened.”

Now, this is what happens when we are born again. Ah, the eyes of our understanding are enlightened so that we can know. Now, we did know before we are born again, but we are born again in order to know. Regeneration is the communication of new life to us in order that we might know. So our knowledge comes after regeneration. Does that surprise you?

Now, the reason it surprises you, is because you’ve been looking at it like a person who is looking at his own natural life from the standpoint of his experience. He remembers back to those days when he was sitting in the high chair, but he doesn’t remember anything beyond that. And we are inclined to look at our new birth from the light of the time when we were sitting in a Bible class or in church or wherever we were, and we heard someone preach the gospel to us. And so we link our new birth with the coming of the word of God to us.

Now, we will talk about that next time, when we talk about the order of these events in our lives, but the thing I want you to see is that something happens in us before we are able to receive any word of God. And that is the communication of life in order that we might know.

Well, let me illustrate further. Let’s take a blind man. Now, a blind man may be -- may speak to someone who can see, and he may hear the kinds of explanation of color that -- that makes sense to him. We may talk about the light waves and all of the other things that make up color scientifically. And the blind man may gain some intellectual comprehension of what it is to have color, but he can never really know color, because he has never seen color. Because, you see, color is something that you appreciate in a sensuous way, and it’s -- the knowledge that we might have about it must be attained by means of the experience. Because it is a sensuous object, it can only be known, in the final sense, by the sensation of seeing.

And so a blind man might be able to explain the technique of color more than you who know color when you see it. I’m quite sure there are many blind people that could explain color a lot more scientifically than I could, because I don’t really know how to explain it, and that’s already obvious to you, as you’ve listened to me try to explain it on the spur of the moment. I know that there are certain kinds of color -- like actinic, and so forth -- but I’ve forgotten all of that, but I know color when I see it. I see that’s yellow. Well, I see that’s blue. And I see those red hymn books, and I see that -- that red pew, and this gray or beige floor -- whatever color that is. And I know that because I have the experience of it, and so that knowledge is, of course, a higher degree of knowledge than simply the technical explanation. So regeneration affects the intellect. It illuminates the intellect so that we can understand the word of God, not only grammatically and propositionally, but also experimentally, like a blind man’s knowledge of color.

Now, next, six. Regeneration renews the will. The unregenerate man is unable to be willing. He naturally does not will to please God. He is -- by virtue of what he is naturally, he is unwilling to do the will of God.

Now, let’s turn to a couple of passages. Let’s turn to Matthew chapter 23 in verse 37. The Lord Jesus gives us this lament over Jerusalem. And he says,

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not.”

Men are naturally unwilling. Now, if you know your own heart before you were converted, you know that this is true. You know that you not only were blind to the will of God, because you did not understand the word of God, your intellect was darkened, but you know that you did not want to understand the will of God -- the -- the will of

God in the word of God. Your own will was unrenewed. It was rebellious. It was in opposition to God.

Now, by regeneration, the unwilling will is made willing. That is the work of regeneration.

Now, man cannot make his will willing naturally. That is something that only God can do. So it should be obvious to us, that we must have life before we can be made willing. Just as we must have life before we can see spiritual things, so we must have life before we can be willing to do the will of God. It is the work of regeneration then, to illuminate the intellect. It is the work of regeneration then, to renew man’s will.

The Psalmist, in the one hundred and tenth Psalm and the third verse -- you need not look there -- but, the Psalmist says concerning Israel, for he is speaking of their future rebirth. He says of them in the third verse of the Psalm,

“Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.”

They are not willing now, but they shall be made willing by the word of God.

So that means that salvation is not of human volition. Now, that should be obvious to us. It should be obvious to us that any appeal that is made to men on the basis of human volition is an appeal to that which is impossible.

Now of course, as I’ve said often, there is a sense in which one may do that. Our Lord referred to Israel’s unwillingness. And of course, the sense in which we may do it is that we may point to the reasons why men do not respond. It is because they are not willing, that they do not respond, but their unwillingness is part of their nature in Adam, which they have inherited from him. It is part of their sin nature. And what they need is not to believe with the will from the standpoint of themselves only, but they need to be made willing by God. That’s what they need. They need a work of God in their hearts

that will make their intellect see and their wills willing to believe in the Scripture. And their emotions of course, elevated and re-orientated to the love of God.

Now, I want to turn to a series of passages in order to show you that this is what the Bible teaches. Let’s turn, first of all, to John 1, verse 11. John 1, verse 11. Here we read -- John 1:11 --

“He came unto his own and his own received him not.”

Now that text, as you know, means; he came unto his own things. That is, his world, his nation Israel -- according to the promises of the Old Testament -- and his own people received him not.

“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.”

So those that believed, well, they were given power to become the sons of God. But -- now notice the next verse --

“Which were born, not of bloods, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.”

They were not born of human volition. What does he say? “They were born of God.” Born of God. That means that God wrought, by his Holy Spirit, a work in their spirits that supernaturally recreated within them life from God that enabled them to be willing to love God. To be willing to respond to him. They were made willing by God. So if I were to appeal to you on the basis of human volition, you should reply to me, “But I cannot out of my will, without this supernatural work of God, believe in God.”

Well, Dr. Johnson, that’s just one text. What about others? Well, let’s turn over to Romans chapter 9. We’ve listened to our -- the Apostle John, now let’s listen to the Apostle Paul. Romans chapter 9 in verse 14 says,

“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?” [because he said,] “Jacob have I love, Esau have I hated.” Paul says, “God forbid.”

You know, when you think – when you see a statement like that, “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated,” and the old nature rises up within you and says, “That’s unfair.” Now, you are so far from thinking the thoughts of God, that an apostle would say over the thought that arose in your mind, God forbid.” We’ve got a long ways to go to understand God, haven’t we? Because almost all of us think that. Now, that’s because we have the old nature. Verse 15,

“For he saith to Moses; I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then” [Paul says,] “it is not of him that willeth.” [Did you see that? “It is not of him who willeth.” It is not of human volition.] “Nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.”

What happens in our hearts is the result of a God who shows mercy. Not because we willed. Now, we would not will naturally, but only because he shows us mercy, gives us a new nature do we will to serve God.

Now, that’s two texts. Let’s turn over to Hebrews chapter 13. In Hebrews chapter 13 in verse 20, we have one of the great benedictions of the New Testament, and the author of the Epistle of the Hebrews says in Hebrews 13:20,

“Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect in every good work to do his will.”

In other words, in order for us to do the will of God, there must be a correspondingly previous work of God. And so may the God of peace make you perfect in every good work to do his will. Human volition is a secondary activity on the part of men. It is the response to a previous work of God.

Let’s turn to Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13. By the way, are you getting the point? Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13. Paul says,

“Wherefore my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

Now, he is talking about the working out in a Christian’s life of what God works in, for he goes on to say in verse 13,

“For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

So our willing is the product of God’s working. So when we call upon Christians to exercise positive volition, they cannot do that, apart from God’s previous work in them. That is a secondary thing. That is the product of the working of God.

Now, there are other texts that we can refer to. I think I’ll refer to just one more, since we have little time. 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 in verse 5. 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 in verse 5. Here Paul, in one of his prayers, a very simple one, says,

“And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.”

In other words, it is God who works, in order that men may love God and patiently wait for Jesus Christ. “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.” In other words, there must be a previous work of God in order for us to will to do the will of God.

So by a regeneration, God comes in a supernatural way, works in our hearts new life, so that we who were blinded are able to see. So that we, whose wills were rebellious against God, are now made willing to do his will.

Otherwise, my dear Christian friends, if we do not come to understand what really takes place when a person is born again, we’re going to fall back again into a semi-Pelegianism, believing that our salvation is due to the work of Jesus Christ, and our activity of the will, by which we receive him. And if it comes down to this, that this man is a Christian because he has exercised his will to believe in Jesus Christ, and this man is not a Christian because he has not exercised his will to believe in Jesus Christ, and if we let it stay right there, then that man is saved because of something he has, which this man does not have. And his salvation is really due to the work of Jesus Christ, plus his will, which positively responded.

Now, that is Pelegianism. That in effect, is a work salvation, because it is salvation through Jesus Christ, plus the positive activity of my will. Now, I think that should be plain to us, but the reason I’m laboring these points, is because evangelicalism today is caught up in a kind of semi-Pelegianism. And it was the thing that Augustine, and the Reformers, and all the others down through the years fought so vehemently against. But we’re so superficial in our theology in the 20th Century, we don’t even know these things exist. And thus, we do not get the full force of the teaching of the Bible, that salvation is

of the Lord. Completely. “What have we, that we have not received,” Paul said. If a man has the will to respond to the message of God, it is because God has worked in his will.

So regeneration illuminates our intellect. It renews our will. But David believed in this. Why, he often asked God to exert this power to transform his being, in order that he might do the will of God. I’m going to read you a few texts from David. Maybe you’ve never read them before. I know you’ve read them, but I mean, maybe they’ve never come home to you. I’m going to read Psalm 119, verse 36, and I want you to listen to how David puts it. He says,

“Incline my heart unto thy testimonies and not to covetousness.”

Now, what does he mean by “Incline my heart”? He means, work in my will so that I’ll obey them. Verse 37,

“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity and quicken thou me in thy way,”

In other words, renew within me. Work in my will in such a way that I move in thy way. Verse 35,

“Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight.”

Make me to go. What he’s appealing to -- what he’s praying for, is that God will make him willing. That’s what he’s praying for. That’s, by the way, what you ought to pray for. You ought to pray that God would make your rebellious heart willing to do his will, because that is the procedure by which we come to do the will of God. We first need to recognize that our own wills are perverted and rebellious against God, and then to pray that God will incline our wills to turn to him, that our wills may respond.

Now, we come back to Lydia. What happened to Lydia? Well, you remember that when Lydia heard Paul preaching, the text says,

“The Lord opened her heart so that she attended unto the words that Paul spoke.”

That again, was the work of God within her.

Now, I want to turn to the character of the change: what it is not, what it is. Just what exactly is this new life that God creates within us, that is communicated to people who are spiritually dead at regeneration? If I were to ask you, “What is the new birth?” what would you say? How would you explain it? I think all would agree, this is a very difficult and ultimately perhaps, an unanswerable question. Who can really tell exactly what has happened to them? But I know a few things it’s not. First of all, it is not a mere correction of our minds, wills and emotions. Whatever happened to us when we believed in Jesus Christ in our regeneration, was so fundamental a change within us, that it is more than the correction of our minds, the correction of our wills, and the correction of our emotions.

Further, I know it’s not a change of ego. I’m still S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. I didn’t change my name. Now, you know, out on the mission field quite frequently, Christians who are born again change their names. That’s a mistake, I think. I know what they do, why they did it. They are trying to recognize the fact, that they were born again, and they are now a new creation. But it severs the connection with the old. And you see, I still am really S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. The new birth which has come to me has not affected my ego. It’s not changed that. I’m still the same person, and you are the same human being that you were before you were born again, with the same old ego. You cannot change that. That was given you by creation. It’ll be yours forever. You will be you. You will not be anybody else. Just you. Does that make you unhappy? Well, that’s what you are, and that’s what you always will be.

Listen to Paul. In one of his statements in which he speaks about the change, he points out this doesn’t change. He says,

“For I have been crucified with Christ, and thy no longer live.” [But then he says,] “But the life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Paul’s try -- laboring under trying to express this and what he has to say finally is; I have been crucified, but I still live. And as you put all of Paul’s expressions together, and the other expressions of the New Testament, it becomes very evident that we are the same egos.

I’ll never forget the story of a man who was a perpetual thief, who was converted, but he still had his old nature, and temptation came to him shortly after he had been converted, and he was caught in the act of stealing again. And so he appeared before the judge, and the judge asked him if he had anything to say for himself. And “After all,” he thought, “Well, I can’t lose anything. I’ll just tell him about my conversion.” So he told him about his conversion, that he’d been converted, and furthermore he said, “Judge, since I’ve been converted, I now have two natures. I have an old nature, and a new nature. And, Judge, I want you to know that my new nature is not the nature that sinned. It was my old nature that was responsible for the thievery, and since I’m a new person, Judge, I don’t think that I ought to be put in jail. It was my old nature that did it.” Judge said, “That was very interesting, that he was inclined to agree with his theology.” And so that he wanted him to know he said, “I’m going to sentence your old nature to thirty days in prison, but I’m sorry, you’re new nature will have to go along to keep it company.” And in that, of course, we see illustrated, the fact that we still are the same person. We have a different nature -- a new nature now -- but we are the same person.

What then, is this new birth? Now, I think we need to distinguish between our beings and our natures. Our beings do not change. That’s what we mean when we say, “Our egos are the same.” Even though sin has corrupted man, his being is still there, with all its constituent parts. His nature is now totally corrupt. Being is that which -- which makes me a man. And nature is that which manifests the character of my being and working. If our being had been ruined by sin, we would no longer be a man. Now, when we are born again, we are given a new nature. We are given a new principle of life in operation.

Now, perhaps I can best explain what I mean by illustration. William G. T. Shedd, one of our good theologians, has used the illustration of a steam engine. He said, “Now, I want to illustrate the two things, being and nature, by the steam engine, and if when we think of being, we will look at a steam engine and think of the machinery, its cylinders, its pipes, its wheels, its screws, et cetera. That’s being. But now when the steam enters the cylinder, and we begin to see this machine in operation, that is the manifestation of its nature. And, likewise, in the human being. Our being is what we are by creation, our ego. That does not change. Our nature is the way it manifests itself.”

Now, I don’t know too much about gardening, but some things I know about gardening. And some information I have about gardening, is like the information that a blind man has about color. I know it can be done. I’ve seen it done, but I haven’t done it myself. Now, for example, I know that you can take a scion – a cultivated scion – of a camellia, for example, and you can take that, and you can graft it upon a wild trunk. In fact, I think most camellia plants are grafts, ultimately. There is a basic stalk or trunk, on which this cultivated scion has been grafted. And of course, you all have seen plants in which a branch or -- or a limb has been grafted into another plant. I have been out in California, in some places in which I have seen plants that had -- a fruit tree, for example -- that had nine different fruits on it. A beautiful illustration of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which has nine different virtues. But on one branch it was bearing apples, and on

another pears, and on another peaches, and so on. Now, I thought that was such a beautiful illustration, I wanted to turn around and go back to my car, but then shortly after, I saw a fruit tree in that same place that had eleven different kinds of fruit on it. By grafting.

Now, if we think of a cultivated scion grafted on to a wild trunk, we have something of an illustration of what is our new nature, because our new nature is a divine graft. And you know, it’s a strange thing, but you can take that cultivated scion -- that little piece of -- that little cutting from a plant, and you can put it on a wild trunk, or a wild stalk, and the flowers or the fruit that grow off of that cultivated scion are determined, not by the sap of the stalk, but are determined by the character of that scion. We all know that. For example, you can take a camellia -- a certain type of camellia. You can take a debutante, and graft it on to wild stalk, and even though the sap of that plant is not the sap of that debutante -- debutante scion, it still will bear debutante blooms. There is something in the nature of the scion -- of -- of the cultivated scion that determines the character of the blossom and the fruit. Isn’t that a striking thing? That you can take a cultivated scion, and graft it onto a wild plant, and have cultivated flowers.

Now in a sense, that is what happens in our new birth, for you see, that is what God has done. He has grafted into our wild nature -- wild because we are in Adam with all of its sin, all of its rebellion, all of its blindness, all of its hardness -- is grafted in us, a new cultivated scion which is holy. Our new nature. And the product of the new nature is determined by the supernatural character of the nature itself, of that scion which God has grafted in.

Now, we also know that if we’re not careful, that the old stalk has a tendency to have shoots come out. Now, I had an experience like that last year. I had a -- I’m trying everything in Dallas, you know. This soil in -- in Dallas is really terrible out where I am. It won’t grow anything but hackberries, and cedar elms, and things like that. But I had a red maple, which looked so beautiful in the nursery catalog, that I ordered it. And I stuck

it out in the ground, and it’s lived for a couple of years. I think it’s grown six inches in about three years. But last summer, it hauled off and died, for no reason at all. It just died. And so I looked at it and I thought, “Well, I may as well cut it down.” And I was just too lazy to do it.

Now, I was also -- I think -- a little sent -- sentimental about it. And lo and behold, I went out one day, and something was coming out from the ground, but it was not coming out with the red leaves of the red leaf maple, they were coming out green. At first I was quite happy. It was going to come back. And then I looked at the leaves, and what was happening was, that something was coming up from the wild stalk un – below. It was not part of my red leaf maple at all, and that thing is still living. Now of course, if I had the kind of plant that I really wanted to have, and it was still living, I would immediately get down there and snip that off. Now, I’m just curious. It’s been worth one illustration tonight. Maybe it’ll be worth another one soon?

But you see, that is what happens when we are born again. God gives us a new nature which he grafts in. You’ll remember Paul also says that, we are to put to death the deeds of the flesh, and so he wants us, by the power which he gives us, to snip off the shoots that come from the old nature, and allow this new scion -- this cultivated scion -- which has been grafted in to the old wild trunk, to flourish and glow -- grow and have its blooms. Now, this is something of what happens when we are born again.

Now, next time, we’re going to look at an analysis of the order in which the new birth and faith happens. It’s something we didn’t have any experience of, but I think we can make some general observations from the teaching of the word of God. I hope, if there is one thing that you have gotten tonight, it is this; that our new birth is totally the work of God. By a supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit acting upon our spirits, God has illumined our mind. He has renewed our wills. He has elevated our dispositions so that, by his grace, we now have the nature to return his love, to do his will, to give him the praise and thanksgiving that he deserves. And it is altogether the work of God. It is

not the product of our faith. That is the product of God. It is not the product of our will. That is the product of God. It is not the product of our seeing something, our enlightenment. God is responsible for that. Salvation is of the Lord. Now, this is what we call salvation by grace. Let’s close in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the teaching of Thy word. We thank Thee for the wonderful words of our Lord Jesus Christ, “Ye must be born again.” And we thank Thee for the sovereign work that Thou hast wrought in our hearts. And, O Father, as David and other New Testament authors also prayed, incline our hearts to do Thy will.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.