

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
"A New Creation" – Part 1
Taught by Dr. Bruce Bickel
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Good morning, men! Let's go before the Lord as Don sets the mood for it. Just be still and know that the Lord is the Lord.

[MUSIC]

Have mercy on me, the sinner. Have mercy on me, the sinner. Father, we just pray that you'd be pleased this day to let us enjoy your presence at a level that we've never enjoyed before. We recognize your omnipresence. We just pray, Lord, that this day, you'd be pleased in your mercy and your grace and compassion to us as sinful people, that you would bathe us in the salve of your grace, and that we'd be overwhelmed with two things this morning—your omnipresence and your omnipotence. Help us understand the magnificence and the mystery of our salvation, and may we give honor and glory to you as we just pray that you'd be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

I ask you to turn in your Bibles to the book of 2 Corinthians chapter 5. We're coming toward the end of the 5th chapter of the book of 2 Corinthians. We're going to be looking for the next couple of weeks over this very, very important verse, which is just rich in the omnipresence and the omnipotence of a gracious God. 2 Corinthians 5:17 is a very familiar passage, which often times is misunderstood because we just treated it so lightly. I hope that the Lord will be pleased to have his Holy Spirit teach us today and not treat it so lightly.

Please look at 2 Corinthians 5:16-17, "¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." That's a very familiar passage that we just sort of flippantly talk about becoming converted.

I want you to understand, in the next couple of weeks, we need to understand the difference between regeneration and conversion. We need to understand, in this passage, it deals with both of those issues. We've just kind of mixed them together, but there's a difference, and I hope that the Holy Spirit will guide us in our understanding of that.

You'll notice the regeneration side is a side that basically says if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creature. Something happened to you in the magnificent mystery of the power of God's regenerating Spirit by the Holy Spirit that creates us anew. The conversion part is the old is gone, the new has come. We need to take a look at each side of that verse.

We're coming to the conclusion of chapter 5, and Paul kind of gives us, in that verse, a summary of what he's been teaching us so far about life in the triumphant living series. This is really a summary of the statement of everything Paul's been teaching us up to this point about the Christian life.

Just as a quick review, he's told us that the Christian life is a shared life concept. God shares his life with us. (2 Corinthians 4:7) We have the treasure in earthen vessels, treasure in jars of clay. It's a shared life experience. Then in 2 Corinthians 5:1, he said it's also a sacred life experience. We have the heavenly life in an earthly dwelling. A heavenly life in an earthly dwelling. (2 Corinthians 5:1) Then he told us that

it's a sacred life. Then he told us in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that it's a sightless life. We live by faith and not by sight. Then he told us that it's a singly focused life in 2 Corinthians 5:9. He gives us four descriptions of the Christian life. It's a shared life experience, it's a sacred life experience, it's a sightless life experience, and it's a singly focused life experience.

That's what Paul has been teaching us all the way up to this particular verse. It's a single life experience because our goal is to please him. As a result of God sharing his life with us in those summary statements I just gave you, we have an entirely new motivation, and that motivation is the fear of God and the love of Christ. That now motivates us. We no longer see ourselves the same way we did and we see other people differently just as we saw Christ differently. It's an experience that Paul has been teaching us that summarizes this statement of 2 Corinthians 5:17.

The event that changes all of the things that we've just reviewed, changes our motivation, is our personal identification with the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. You'll see that in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. It's our personal identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Paul should know a lot about that. Something happened to him radically when he says, "Behold, when you become a Christian, you become a brand new person; the old is gone, the new is come." Remember that Paul, at one time, was a persecutor of the people of Christ, and now he is the primary preacher for the person and work of Christ. He went from the persecutor of the people of Christ now to the primary preacher of the person and work of Christ. Something supernatural happened to Paul that he records in 2 Corinthians 5:17. That's why Paul tells us that when a person who by faith has made Christ's death, burial and resurrection their own, that person is declared righteous. That person is in fact a new creature.

There are three truths that we want to explore over the next couple of weeks. You have this in your outline. First of all, we need to notice the believer's condition. The believer's condition is that you are in Christ. Then we need to look at the believer's character—a new creature. The believer's condition is in Christ, the believer's character is a new creature, and then the believer's changes would be the old is gone, the new is come. Those are the things we're going to look at in the next couple of weeks. The believer's condition, the believer's character and the believer's changes.

Let's take, first of all, the believer's condition. We are in Christ. There are three stages or three possible conditions for every human in relationship to the person and work of Christ. You can be without Christ. That is the state of one's condition before one's regeneration. You can be without Christ. You can be in Christ. That is the state of grace that Paul is writing about. Then you can be with Christ. That is the state of glory. You're in the state of wrath, the state of grace or the state of glory. Those are the three possibilities that somebody can have a relationship with Christ—without Christ, in Christ and with Christ.

Without Christ, this is the condition in which we are born, and until reborn from above, or regenerated, that condition remains. Paul explains that and defines it thusly in Ephesians 2:12, "*remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Now that's the condition of the description of a person who is without Christ. That's condition number one.

One can attend church. You might have your Bible at your desk or at your bedside. You might read it on occasion. You might pray now and then. But until you're regenerated, born from above, you are not in Christ. You will always be without Christ.

One writer says this, “It is inconvenient to be without money, miserable to be without your health, lonely to be without a friend, wretched to be without a good reputation, but to be without Christ is the most horrible condition in the entire world.” You see, that’s one possibility—people are without Christ.

Listen to how the Scripture makes a description of this. The reason I’m going through this, brothers, is because I want you to understand the magnificent, omnipotence of what God’s going to do through regeneration. You’ve got to compare yourself to what you were and now to who you are in Christ. That’s why I’m going through what it means to be without Christ.

Here’s how the Scripture defines a person who is without Christ in another description. First of all, in Matthew 12:34, we’re told that the person without Christ can’t speak a good word on his own. Cannot speak a good word on his own. In John 6:44, a person without Christ can’t believe on his own. Can’t even believe on his own. In Romans 8:7, a person without Christ can’t obey on his own. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, the person without Christ can’t understand anything on his own, of a spiritual nature.

In summary, without Christ, the person who is unregenerate can neither know, understand, believe, obey, think or speak or do anything that is ever pleasing to God. That’s the condition of what it means to be without Christ. The reason? That person is on his or her own. One Puritan writer writes it this way, “Until you have faith in Christ, your deepest senses, soundest reason and most important desires are nothing but glorious sin.” That’s what it means to be without Christ.

We need to understand that because we’re going to talk about what Paul is radically saying. Something radically and royal happened when he went from being a new person in Christ, the old is gone. He’s just describing what the old was. In summary, again, the person without Christ can neither know, understand, believe, obey, think, speak or do anything that is ever pleasing to God because they’re on their own.

The second condition we want to examine is what does it mean to be in Christ. We did a series on that a couple of months ago, so this is just going to be a little bit of a review. The second condition is to be in Christ. This condition leads to the third condition of being with Christ. The third condition, being with Christ, can never be reached unless you have the second condition of being in Christ. The person who is out of Christ will never reach the third condition of being with Christ. If not found in Christ, you’ll never found with Christ later.

What does it mean when we talk about being in Christ? In the purest definition, the purest definition of a Christian is the term “in Christ.” The Christian is somebody who is “in Christ Jesus.” It’s a far more accurate term than the term Christian. You’ve heard me say over the years in our study on in Christ, Paul uses the word Christian three times to describe a group of people, and he uses the phrase, “in Christ” or “with Christ,” 129 times to describe a person who has a saving relationship to God the Father through God the Son.

Let me give you some examples of these 129 verses to help you understand the significance of when he says in Christ. When somebody says, “Are you a Christian?” that may mean anything to what they decide. But when you say you are in Christ, they either know what that means or they don’t. Walk down the street of Pittsburgh and say, “Are you a Christian? Why are you?” you’ll probably get as many answers to that question as you would people you ask. But if you stop and ask somebody, “Are you in Christ?” they’ll either know what you mean or they’re going to think that you’re some sort of a zealot. There is such a distinctive description difference between saying “I’m a Christian” versus “I’m in Christ.” That’s the significance of this particular verse.

Let me give you some verses that will help us understand, just in a quick review, the blessings that we receive by being in Christ. I'll take you, first of all, to Ephesians 1:3-4. Paul writes this to the church at Ephesus, "³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."

Notice, the blessings start before you were born. The blessings you have now because you are in Christ started before you were born. That's the wonderful doctrine of election. You see, that's your first blessing. If you are in Christ, those blessings started before you were ever born. But there's more.

How about 2 Timothy 1:9, "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." Where did your blessing start? Not only in the wonderful doctrine of election, before you were born, but also the blessings you now receive in Christ were yours before the world even began. Do you understand the significance of your salvation and the blessings you have? Do you understand the omnipotence of God in doing something that's so magnificent and mysterious as this? That you receive blessings before the world began because you are in Christ? In his mind, that's the way he looked at you.

How about 1 Corinthians 1:30, "But by His doing," now notice, "by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." You see, you receive blessings at your conversion, when he became your sanctification and your righteousness and your wisdom. That's a blessing that you have because you are in Christ. Contrast that against the person who's without Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:10, "who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him." There are blessings in the future. We have blessings before we were born, blessings before the world began, blessings at our conversion and blessings in the future.

Then one summary, 2 Timothy 2:10, "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory." There's the blessing of your salvation.

Look at the blessings that Paul is referring to in Ephesians. He's saying every spiritual blessing you have...I just listed several of them...the blessing that started before you were born, the blessings before the world began, the blessings at your conversion, the blessings in the future, the blessings at your salvation.

One more I'll give you, Colossians 2:10, "and in Him," meaning in Christ, "you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority." There is the blessing of the completeness of grace. The completeness of God's grace.

Brothers, you need to understand that magnificence of what Paul is saying when he's saying that to be in Christ you receive these blessings. That's why it's much more definitive to say when somebody says, "Are you a person of faith?" say, "I'm in Christ," as opposed to saying, "I'm just a Christian." They'll have their own definition of what a Christian is. Paul is very, very specific when he says, "If you're in Christ, that defines who you are because of the blessings that you've received."

This union with Christ can be illustrated I would say by the example of a will. A person can set up a will, can set up a trust in his will, that will take effect after his/her death. The children can say this, with full confidence, that their inheritance is in three different ways. They inherit it because it was the will of the father, they can inherit it because it was written in the trust language, and they can inherit it when they get it and acquire the results of the trust, so they can take actual position.

Our union with Christ starts, using that illustration, in the heart of God. It is put in trust at the cross, and it is applied at our conversion. Another way of looking at it is this—what God the Father ordained, the Son accomplished, the Holy Spirit applied. What the Father ordained, the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applied. He did not make your salvation possible at the cross. What did he do? He accomplished your salvation at the cross. What did he accomplish? He accomplished that which the Father gave him to do. What the Father ordained—your salvation before you were born, before the creation of the world, all the blessings I just gave you—that was the ordination of the Father. The Son accomplished that. That's why he said at the cross, "It is finished." What did he finish? He finished what the Father gave him to do.

In John 17, he says this, one of the great leadership principles of all time is this, "I brought you glory on earth by finishing what you gave me to do." Did he do everything he could have done, that we think he should have done? He did everything his Father gave him to do. You don't see Jesus ringing his hands in heaven saying, "Oh, I wish I had one more day." He's not saying, "You know, if I had one more day, I could have preached to another thousand people." He's not saying, "If I had one more day, I could have fed another 500 people." He didn't say, "If I had one more day. If I just had one more day, look at the people I could have healed." What does he say? "I brought you glory on earth by finishing what you gave me to do." What was that? It was to go accomplish our salvation at the cross. That's the magnificent omnipotence that Paul is talking about in this verse. What the Father ordained, the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applied.

What are the consequences of being in Christ? Let's just do a quick review. Let me give you a couple. First of all, being in Christ is the basis of our acceptance. You're now acceptable in the Beloved, the Scripture says. (2 Corinthians 3:3) What Christ did at the cross, when you and I take by faith, becomes the basis of our acceptance with God. It's what he did for us that makes us acceptable to God; it's not what we do with him. It's what he did with us. He accomplished our salvation at the cross.

God doesn't accept you the way you are. He changes you to become like he is. How often do you hear somebody, "Well God just accepts me the way I am." If he did, then why did he die for you? You see, God doesn't accept you the way that you are. He changes you to become like he is. That's transformation. That's regeneration. You're now accepted in the Beloved. Your acceptance is not based upon your performance, but based upon a person. Do you realize that? Our acceptance by God is not based upon what we do; it's based upon who Christ is, who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. (Hebrews 13:8)

You see, dear friends, if you and I are in Christ today, you don't need to worry about being accepted. Your union with Christ secures the fact that you are now accepted in the Beloved, because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. That's one of the blessings of being in Christ, one of the consequences.

Audience Member: *Aren't you looking at that from the heavenly perspective? Earthly perspective, isn't just as I am, I mean, as far as [UNCLEAR]...*

That's a nice song.

Audience Member: *It's what I grew up with.*

We all did. We all grew up with that song. Now there is some truth to that. I'm sure the Lord will use any amount of truth. All I'm trying to say is God does not accept you the way you are. He transforms you to be like he is.

Audience Member: *But that doesn't happen until [UNCLEAR]...*

That's what I'm saying. That's what it means in Christ. If you're in Christ, that's what's happening. We'll get into that in greater detail. But certainly, looking at it from the heavenly perspective...my acceptance before God is based upon the person and work of Christ of Christ, not on what I do, so I am acceptable in Christ. That's what Paul is saying.

John: *[UNCLEAR] it's okay to come...you come to the cross as you are, but you can't stay as you are. You have to change. You have to [UNCLEAR], you have to grow in likeness to Christ.*

You're changed before you come to the cross.

John: *But you have to continue [UNCLEAR]...*

No, there's a difference...

John: *The regeneration occurs before the cross.*

Absolutely.

John: *You have to have it, you have to have that renewed Spirit. You have to be brought to life in Christ, and then you can place your trust in him, but you, once that occurs, you start that process of sanctification [UNCLEAR], you don't stay who you are.*

Exactly. Now you see, there's a difference. The reason you come to the cross to be converted is because you were regenerated. There's a difference. If anybody is in Christ, he's a new creature. That is regeneration. The old is gone, the new has come. That's conversion. We need to understand the difference. We just milled the two together and say, "Oh I came to Christ." Why did you come to Christ? It was because you were regenerated. You can't come to the cross until you have life.

Audience Member: *And that's, looking at it from heaven's point of view...*

I'm looking at it from my personal point of life as a human being.

Audience Member: *But the sinner doesn't know that and he's coming...*

That's what the Gospel does. The Gospel brings them to that point. The Gospel is what brings them... how is a person converted? It's through the Gospel of Christ. That's what regeneration does. God uses the means of the Gospel as a means to regenerate people so they will come to the cross and be converted. We need to understand regeneration occurs before your conversion. Conversion is a continual process. I'll get into that in a minute, but you're right.

My point is this—we flippantly say, just as a means of justification and rationalization, “God accepts me the way I am.” I’m going to give you an illustration in just a moment of a Christian who has said that, and I’ll give you some contrast between what I’m saying the Scripture teaches us and what people say about themselves, so hang on for a moment.

My point is this—the basis of our acceptance is found in a person, not in my performance. Do you understand that? That’s the point that we need to make. It is found in a person, not in my performance.

The second consequence of being in Christ for our review would be he is the source and power of our spiritual life. (Galatians 2:20 and 2 Corinthians 3:5) We enter into Christ by faith because of regeneration. Then Christ enters into us through power, through the Holy Spirit. We enter into Christ by faith through regeneration, and then Christ enters into us through power.

Have you ever seen a tree grunt, to bear fruit?

Don: *On the Wizard of Oz.* {LAUGHTER}

You see, it’s the most natural thing in the world for a tree to bear fruit. Why is that? It’s because a tree has the power of life within it. It is the most natural ingredient for you and I as people who are in Christ to bear fruit because of the power of Christ that is in us. We enter into Christ by faith; he enters into us through the Holy Spirit through power.

Then also I would say the consequence of being in Christ is not only the basis of our acceptance, the basis of our spiritual power, but it’s also the basis of our spiritual activities. (2 Corinthians 5:9) What we are now forms what we do. We are pleasing to God and now we have a desire to do those things that are pleasing to God. Character precedes conduct because who we are determines what we do. God changes our character, so that our conduct changes.

What is the character of the believer? We’ve seen the condition of the believer—in Christ. Now let’s take look at the character of the believer. He says we’re a new creation. Our new character is defined by a very definitive change. Our new character is defined by a very definite change. It’s so radical that it bears the terminology, “a new creation” or “a new creature.” It’s a royal work. What is the change? There are many changes that a person can go through, but it may not mean that it can be defined radically enough to say that they are a brand new person.

You see, the drunk person can become sober. That’s a change. The rotten habits can become normal. That’s a change. But that may not mean that that person is regenerate or been made a new creature. You see, what Paul is saying is something that is so omnipotently mysterious, that changes in a person’s life, that they now bear the moniker “a new creature.” So radically different because it’s a royal work.

A person may give up every outward sin, and yet, unless the change goes deeper than the outward life, that person is not saved, he is not a new creature, he is not in Christ. It’s got to go deeper than just the external conduct. That’s what Paul is saying, and that’s why it is such a radical term when he says, “a new creature.”

This definite change, Paul teaches us, this radical change, is called many things in the Scripture. Everywhere in Scripture people are divided into two camps, into two categories. Here are some of the categories. You have the sheep lost and you have the sheep found. You have the guests refusing and the guests feasting. You have the wise virgins and the foolish virgins. You have the sheep and the goats.

You have people dead in their trespasses and sins and people alive to God. You have people in darkness and people in light. You have children of wrath and children of God. You have those who are condemned and those who are not condemned.

You see, Scripture teaches us such a radical change in the contrast that that change is referred to as many different things in the Scripture. In John 1, it's referred to as a new birth. In Ephesians 1, it's referred to as a quickening, or the beginning of life. In Galatians 6, it's referred to as a creation. In Colossians 1, it's referred to as a translation. In 1 John 3, it's referred to as passing from death unto life. In 1 Peter 1, it's referred to as being begotten again.

My point of giving you all those illustrations is to talk about the Scripture reaffirming this concept that something radically happens in your life that is so royal and so radical because it's a royal work, that it's got to be called a "new creation." It's something that is absolutely brand new and so radical that that's the terminology that he uses.

This radical change that Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is not a physical change. It's a great inward change that begins inside the heart. It is not the person who passes away, but the person's former principles, motives, aims, habits and desires that pass away, and they are replaced by new ones. Replaced by new ones. That is radical. It's a complete reversal of the whole tenor of a person's life.

Now it's not a change in constitution, but it's a change in direction, course and desire. It's not a change of your constitution, but it's a change in the course of your life, the direction of your life and the desires of your life. Every part of your physical body still works, but you can say it works in reverse order. It's like a steam engine that has a reversing gear in it. The ship is going in one direction, but by the action of the reversal of the gears, all the gears, the same rods, they work the same way, but they're just working in a different direction. You were going this way, now you're going that way. Now such as that description is so radical that it deserves a term call a new creature or a new creation.

In the new birth, the facilities of a person are not destroyed, but they're made new or re-made. That is a new creation. They are thoroughly changed—not in substance, quantity—but in quality, nature and disposition. Now instead of desiring the things of the world, you have a greater desire to desire the things of the Lord because you're acceptable, you know that you are in Christ and your desire is to please him.

Regeneration is the change of the entire nature of the person from top to bottom and all their senses. That's what we're talking about regeneration. I'll give you some definition. Let me show you some contrasts. Here are three statements made by people who are professing believers, whose testimonies have been on Christian radio or TV. I'm using the word professing because there's a difference between professing Christian and a confessing Christian. A professing Christian is somebody who makes a statement about their faith. A confessing Christian is somebody who agrees with what has already been said about their faith. There's a difference.

Here are people who "profess" saving faith. Here's one movie star who said this, "In many ways, I'm happier than I was before the divorce because I'm my own person now, making my own decisions, building my own career, living for myself." She went on to say, "I don't believe my Christian faith affects my marriage in any significant way." And they say, "Oh praise Jesus, she's a Christian."

Contrast it with what you have said about regeneration, changing everything in your life. Is that a regenerated person? Based upon those words, you can say all she can do is profess Christ, but she's

certainly not confessing Christ. She's not agreeing with what the Scripture says about a person who is in Christ. You see the difference?

Here's another one. Here's a singer, a Christian singer said this, "My conversion to Christ did not affect the music I sing at all. God accepts me where I am and I can sing what I want. I'm a Christian. I get to do what I want. My conversion doesn't affect me at all." That's a Christian singer on Christian radio. That's his testimony. "My conversion to Christ does not affect the music I sing at all. God accepts me where I am and I can sing what I want."

How about this one. Let's bring in an athlete. A baseball player said this, "I play for Jesus Christ. He's number one. I'm a Christian, but I'm not born again." "I play for Jesus Christ. He's number one. I'm a Christian, but I'm not born again." That's what people say about being a Christian.

What does Paul say about being a Christian? It's a radical change. It goes deep into your soul and it changes the course, the direction of your life. All the fibers of your being have been radically re-made. This is just not whitewashing you and changing the outer externals; it's changing the inside of the heart. That's what regeneration is.

Let me give you some definitions of regeneration from some of our Puritan friends. Contrast with what you just heard these people in America say about their conversion experience. "Regeneration is a direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit on the soul of the person." Regeneration—we're talking about regeneration, not conversion yet. You can't be converted unless you're regenerated. "A direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit on the soul."

Another theologian says this, "Regeneration is a single act complete in itself and never repeated. Conversion as the beginning of holy living, is the commitment of a series, constant, endless, progressive activity." There's a difference between your and my regeneration, which is a single act, an immediate act of the Holy Spirit's work upon the soul of a person, that now puts you in position of being converted, which is continually and always changing. That's why Paul says, "the old is taken away, the new comes." That takes some time. Conversion is always going on. Regeneration is a single act of the Holy Spirit immediate and specific upon the soul of a person.

Here are some others. Stephen Charnock says this, "Adoption gives us the privilege of sons, regeneration gives us the nature of sons." Adoption gives us the privilege of sons, regeneration gives us the nature of sons. It's a radical change. It's a royal work. Do you understand the omnipotence of what has to happen? This is only something that God can do.

What did Jesus tell the Pharisees in Matthew 19? They said to him afterward, "Who then can be saved?" and his response was, "Oh just invite Jesus into your life." No, he said, "With man it's impossible; with God it's possible." It's a royal work. Regeneration is something that God does solely because of his blessings upon us as a reflection of the desire of his own heart.

Regeneration is a spiritual change; conversion is a spiritual motion. Here's another one, "Spiritual life is the consequence of spiritual quickening. The baby cries because it is born. It is not born because it cries." Martin Luther, "When God works in us the will, being changed and sweetly breathed upon by the Spirit of God, desires and acts not from compulsion, but responsively." Just as in the beginning God said, "Let there be light and there was light," so at the moment he appointed for our new birth, he said, "Let there be life and there was life."

We are as helpless to cooperate in our regeneration as we are to cooperate in the work of Calvary at the cross. You don't cooperate with regeneration. That is a royal work that God does in our heart to change us. It is so radical that it is described as being a new creature. "Let them pretend what they say, what they please, the true reason why people despise the new birth is because they hate the new life," John Owen.

"A dead man cannot assist in his own resurrection." A dead man cannot assist in his own resurrection. "Regeneration is essentially a changing of the fundamental taste of the soul, and by taste we mean the direction of a man's love, the bent of his affections and the trend of his will." "Mere outward reformation differs as much from regeneration as whitewashing an old, rotten house differs from pulling it down and building a new one in its place."

You see, when God regenerates a soul by a direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit upon that person's soul, the change in that person is so radical that the only way you can describe it is it's a new creature. Brand new creature. That is something that God alone can do.

Grace recreates us. Being in Christ is not a piece of cloth sewn onto the old garment of our life. It is casting the old one aside and taking on a new one. "Being a new creature," Paul says, "is not putting on new varnish or new paint on old material to make it appear as new; it is a new creature, not a mended creature."

One other statement from one of our Puritan friends, "We should assume someone to be regenerate only when there is clear and credible evidence of a new creature. To do otherwise may delude the souls of thousands and lead them to eternal perdition. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature, Paul says, that is he has experienced a radical change because of a royal work known as regeneration."

When I was studying my doctorate work in England, looking at the great works of the Puritans, I was taken by one of my mentors to a park in England. It was famous for its debates. It was carried on by politicians and orators. He told me the story one day of a communist who was speaking at this platform. He saw a drunken man, stupor in his drunkenness. He pointed over and said this, "Communism can put a new suit on that man," and a man who had just been regenerated under the ministry of Charles Spurgeon stood up and said, "But Christianity can put a new man in that suit." That's regeneration.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, forgive our meager efforts to describe such a royal work as regeneration. Forgive us in our ineptitude to try to even make this understandable. We just pray that your Holy Spirit would teach us to the point of understanding. Father, help us realize as we consider the two characteristics that we see of your nature in our salvation, and that would be your absolute omnipresence, you are always with us, and your absolute omnipotence, that you do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, and that is to recreate us, regenerate us, give us a new heart, take the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh that is now sensitive to spiritual things. Father, may we rejoice and just understand the magnificence and the mystery of our salvation in Christ Jesus. Becoming a believer is not making a new start in life, but it's receiving a new life with which to start. Father, never let us take away the mystery of our regeneration because when we take away the mystery of regeneration, we take away the majesty of our salvation. May it be so that we rejoice in your omnipotence to do only what you could do, a royal work called regeneration. And may it be so for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!!!