

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
“A NEW CREATION” PART 3
DR. BRUCE BICKEL
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Merciful heavenly Father, we thank You that Your grace is greater than all of our sin. Father, as we ponder the depths of this magnificent mystery of salvation, we see that all of Your attributes are really contained in this one wonderful gracious act, known as our redemption. We see Your creation, we see Your omnipotence, Your compassion, Your justice, Your mercy, Your holiness, Your righteousness, Your omnipotence. All of Your attributes are put on display in the mystery of our salvation. So Father, as we probe the depths of Your heart, we pray that You would help us with our understanding, that You would be pleased to have Your Holy Spirit appear to us with an excessive dose of Your grace, that we might understand the mystery and the glory and the beauty of our salvation in Christ Jesus. And may it be so for Your sake and Your glory, that we understand this magnificent truth today, for Jesus' sake. Amen

We're looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 17. When a person becomes a brand new Christian, he becomes a new creation. The old things are gone; the old is past. We're looking at the three elements of that. We're looking at the mystery of salvation. We're looking at the condition, we're looking at the character of the believer, and we're looking at the changes that a believer goes through when God is pleased to regenerate us through the work of the Holy Spirit

So just as a quick review, remember the three conditions. You can be in Christ. That means you're in the state of being in the grace of God. You can be without Christ. That's the state of being under the wrath of God. And you can be with Christ. That's the state of being in the presence of God. And one can never be found with Christ unless he is found in Christ during his lifetime

And so, what we also want to learn is that the believer's character is that of a new creation. And so I want us to look today again, as we see the condition is you're in Christ. That's the nomenclature in which Paul describes our condition. Remember, there are three possibilities. You can be without Christ, you can be in Christ, and you can be with Christ. And again, just as a review, you can never be with Christ unless you're found in Christ during your lifetime

And so let's take a look now at the character of the believer. I'm describing it as a royal work. Now the change of character that a person goes through when God is pleased to regenerate him is described in such a radical way that it can only be described as a new creation. It's the work of God. Therefore, it is what I would call a royal work, because it is something that God does

Now we must understand that creation is something that God does alone. Creation is something that is the work of God alone. It must be that way. Now, if in doubt, try to create something. The potter can shape the clay, but who made the clay? You see, that's not creation, that's fashioning. The potter can fashion the pot or the jar of clay, but he didn't make the clay itself. Creation was involved in that. Creation is strictly the work of

God alone. And so it is with our becoming a new creation. That is the work of God alone. Just as in the beginning, when God said, "Let there be light," and there was light, there is a point in time in your salvation and my salvation, which is a mystery, where at the moment He appointed for our new birth, He said, "Let there be life," and there was life. John chapter 1, verses 12 and 13 describes it this way: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

And notice verse 18 of 2 Corinthians 5. When we go to that passage, and when we describe the verse we're looking at in verse 17, we see "therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is past; behold, the new has come. All this is from ...". Your willful decision to accept Christ. No, it doesn't say that. It says, "All this is from God." It's the same thing that the apostle John says, "not of the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." Our salvation is of God. That's why it's such a wonderful mystery.

Now notice what he doesn't say. The apostle John doesn't say that our new birth is the result of our blood line. In other words, you're not born into it. It's not a result of your human decision, or a matter of your human will. He says it's all of God. Our salvation is of God.

Now the inner life of the Holy Spirit, of our regeneration, is solely the work of the royal act of God Himself. No one helps the Creator make new creations, except the One who can create. Creation is something that rests strictly in the hands of God. Who helped God create? Nobody. Who's advice did He get? Nobody's. Who instructed Him in the proper techniques. No one. Here is how Paul writes about it in Romans chapter 9. "So then, it does not depend on the man who wills, or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." You see, the point is this. To go from being without Christ to being in Christ is an act of regeneration and is solely the creative act of the omnipotence of God that it strictly requires His omnipotence. He is all powerful because He alone is the Creator. That's the same thing that Paul is talking about when he has told us in Romans chapter 9 that it "does not depend on the man who wills, or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."

God's work of regeneration is sovereign. That means He has a right to rule, and a right to do it when He wants. And it is free. It is based upon His own sovereign purposes. They were created in Christ before the world began.

Take a look at 2 Timothy 1:9. Paul, instructing young Timothy to preach the gospel, gives him the content of what he is to teach. In 2 Timothy 1:9 he says, "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 He granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." When was your salvation determined? Before the foundation of the world. Remember, we talked about this last week. We have a Trinitarian salvation. When did you become a Christian? When God purposed to do that in the counsel of His own will before eternity. That's what Paul just told us in 2 Timothy. So you became a Christian when God elected

you in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world. Do you understand that? No, I don't either. So what a wonderful truth and mystery it is!

You see, that's the glory of understanding salvation. It is a mystery, and we need to let it be a mystery, and try not to make it something that man can choose to do or not choose to do. The new birth is an act of the creation of God alone, and it requires omnipotence to do it. That's why I refer to it as a royal work. It's something that only God can do.

So you became a Christian when God was pleased to elect you from before the foundation of the world. Then you became a Christian when Christ accomplished your salvation at the cross. On the cross you were on His mind, and that's because you are a love gift from the Father to the Son before eternity was created. In eternity past you became a love gift from the Father to the Son, and He accomplished your salvation at the cross. You became a Christian when the Holy Spirit applied the truth of the gospel to your life, through the gifts of repentance and faith. After your regeneration you believed, and then you repented of your sins, and trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord. That's when the Holy Spirit applied the gospel. And that's what Paul tells us in Romans chapter 1. "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe." What is the power? It is the power of the preaching of the gospel.

That's why I'm spending so much time on this particular verse, brothers, to help us understand what is the content of the Biblical gospel, not the Americanized version, the man-centered version, but a Christ-centered gospel that really talks first of all about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. You see, we're talking about something that is a glorious mystery. It is the glorious mystery of seeing all of God's 28 attributes put on display through the one act of our salvation. Omnipotence is required for us to become new creatures. To go from being without Christ to being in Christ requires an act of creation. That is what Paul is telling us in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Here is what the puritan Thomas Adams says. "Repentance is a change of the mind, but regeneration is a change of the man." Now see, that requires creation. It requires God's omnipotence to do that.

Look for a moment at John chapter 3, verse 13. Notice what Jesus says to Nicodemus. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." To be born again is the same thing as regeneration. Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. He works in us what Christ purchased for us. It is the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit inside of us applies what Christ purchased for us and He works in us. That is regeneration. It's the same thing as being born again. Born again is the same term we're talking here about regeneration, which is the omnipotence of God.

Ask yourself this question. What did you contribute to your physical birth? Nothing. You were absolutely passive. We had nothing to do with the creation of our physical birth. Well, it's the same thing with our spiritual birth. Creation is an act of God alone, through regeneration. Notice that Jesus also says, "see the kingdom of God." The word see is a very, very interesting word. It means not only to see the way to get in, but how to enter in and enjoy the benefits of. It's far more than just seeing something and looking at

something. He's saying, "You can't even see how to get there, Nicodemus, let alone how to enter in, let alone how to enjoy the benefits of getting in." That is something you can't see unless something happens to you, and that is you must be born again. And notice, see the kingdom of God comes after what?

Participant: You must be born again.

Bruce: You must be born again. That's regeneration. You see, that's the heart transfer we read about in Ezekiel chapter 36. "I will take this heart of stone, and replace it with a heart of flesh, and cause you to be obedient." That is the wonderful supernatural act of regeneration. We had nothing to do with our creation, and we have nothing to do with our new birth, in one sense. Now hang on a minute. We're going to understand the difference between regeneration and conversion, because there is a difference. I'm not talking about conversion. I'm talking about the initial act of regeneration, which is not the same thing as conversion. I will get to that in a minute, so hang on

Creation is an act of God alone. You'll notice that Jesus says you can't even see, enter or enjoy the benefits of the kingdom unless something happens to you supernaturally, and that supernatural creation is the act of regeneration.

We're not born again because we believe, but we believe because we are born again. Ekthougennatai. Look at 1 John chapter 5, verse 1.

Participant: Can you spell that, Bruce?

Bruce: I cannot. (Laughter.) Ekthougennatai. That's Greek. Aren't you impressed? (Laughter.)

Let's go to 1 John, chapter 5, verse 1. Now are you getting the idea here, guys, that there's something supernaturally wonderful and omnipotent about your regeneration, and how you can't take that for granted? That's something that God did for His own glory and purpose in the council of His own will. You and I are not the reason for it. Who is the reason for it? He is! God is the reason He does something. Look at 1 John chapter 5, verse 1. Now we translate this rather poorly in my judgment in the English. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." It's basically saying this: (Greek phrase.) "Having been born of God, you believe." That's the real way it should be translated. It means this. There is a past act in your life, having been born of God, that has the present reality and the present consequence of your what? Believing. Having been born of God, everyone believes. Which comes first, life or faith? Life comes first. That's what we're talking about in regeneration. So, everything we're learning is that this is a sole act of creation. The act of regeneration requires a royal work, because it's done through God's omnipotence, which is required for us to go from being without Christ to being in Christ. We are not born again because we believe; we believe because we are born again

Now let's take a look and distinguish the difference between regeneration, which I've been describing, (and regeneration again is this: it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the act of regeneration and sanctification in the life of the believer, where the Holy Spirit applies to us what Christ purchased for us; that's the work of the Holy Spirit.) That's what we would call the effectual call; that's when it takes place. So I became a Christian when the Holy Spirit was pleased to apply the gospel message in my heart years ago, and that is

what gave me the new birth and allowed me for the first time to say, I start believing. Your desire changes. That's regeneration

Now there is a difference between regeneration and conversion. Both are operations of the Holy Spirit, but you need to understand that they are different operations, different works of the Holy Spirit. Look at John chapter 16. Let's turn there and see this wonderful description of the work of the Holy Spirit. John chapter 16, verses 7-14. "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment. Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me, concerning righteousness because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer, concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot hear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, for whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine, and declare it to you."

Now there you see the role of the Holy Spirit. Essentially, the role of the Holy Spirit is twofold: to guide us into all truth, and to glorify Christ. It is not to call attention to Himself. Now I'm not saying we should not teach about the ministry of the Holy Spirit; yes, we should. But we always teach it in the context of what is His job description. It is not to generate enthusiasm on our part. Now, when you study the truth, hopefully that will happen to you. But His role is not to cause enthusiasm or excitement. His role is twofold: to guide us into all truth, and as a result of that, to always call attention to the Person and work of Christ, because that is how Christ is glorified. That is His job description

Now notice how He says it. The Holy Spirit was given to convince the sinners of their sin and need for salvation. The first thing He does is convince. The next thing He does is convict. He convinces sinners of their need. He then convicts us of our guilt before the law of God, and the third thing is to convert sinners to Christ. There is His ministry by proclaiming truth and glorifying Christ. It is to convince, convict and convert. And I would add one more thing from other passages of Scripture. It is to comfort us and guide us in our walk of faith. So His ministry is to convince us of our sin, to convict us of our sin and need for righteousness because we have violated the law of God, and thirdly to convert us from our sin. There is a different aspect of that than there is in regeneration. His work is to convince, convict and convert

Now go to Acts chapter 16, at verse 14. Now this is a description of one of the first converts of Asia Minor. We'll see the difference between regeneration and conversion. Acts chapter 16; look at verse 14. "And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics," (now notice): "a worshiper of God, was listening." She was listening to what? To Paul preach. "And the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Now notice: it is God who works in her the desire to come to Him. There you see the work of regeneration and the act of conversion, because conversion is different from the act of regeneration. God purposed in the counsels of His

own will, in Lydia's life, that He opened her heart that she would believe. Now notice, she was a worshiper. That does not mean that she was a follower. We have a lot of people who are worshipers, but worshipers of what? Are they worshipers of the truth of Christ? We don't know that. But you'll know that by the indication of the fruit of their lives. Have they been made regenerate? That only comes through the omnipotence and supernatural grace of God, which is greater than all of our sin, through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, which convinces, convicts people and converts us from our old way of life. So she is a demonstration of this. And notice: "Then the Lord opened her heart to respond." This was not a matter of her will. It was that something happened in her life, where He caused her to respond, and all of a sudden she began to believe, and she went from being a worshiper to a follower, because of the act of conversion

Now notice. Saving faith is not offered to man by God. It is conferred upon man by God. And God opened your heart to respond. (Greek phrase.) Having been born of God, she believed. Belief is the first evidence of your salvation; it is not the cause of it. Do you understand that? It is the first evidence. Notice Philippians 2:13. It is God who works in us the desire to come to Him. "For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

Now notice. In conversion, we consciously turn to God by the gifts of faith and repentance. Conversion takes place when a person consciously turns away from his sin to God in response to the gospel, and to the work of regeneration. That is a conscious act on our part, using the graces of faith and repentance. Did you ever notice in the Scripture the number of times that Christ offers repentance just as much as He does faith? He offers that people might be given the grace of repentance. What God does in regeneration is that He changes the desires of our hearts. He gives us a new life, and the first glimmer of that new life is our faith and repentance, and that leads to our conversion. Regeneration always precedes conversion. At the first creation God spoke things into existence. At the second creation we're describing, God works through the gospel and new creatures are called into existence. But notice, what is the cause of both situations, of both creations? It is this: that God speaks. It is the Word. He spoke, "Let there be light, and there was light." Now He speaks how? Through the gospel of Christ. That's why it's so critical, guys, that when you and I are sharing Christ, we are giving a biblical gospel. That is the voice that God uses to convince, to convict and convert through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It starts with regeneration and leads to conversion, and conversion is the conscious turning and repenting of our sin through the gift of repentance and faith that God gives us in regeneration

You see, you can't be converted without regeneration. Here's the way one of the Puritans says it. Here's Charles Spurgeon. "Conversion always follows regeneration, simply because that's the way the Spirit of God works." Now let me give you that again. "Conversion always follows regeneration, because that's the way the Spirit of God works." Now notice this. If no conversion, no salvation. If no regeneration, no conversion. See how that works? If no conversion, no salvation. But if there's no regeneration, there's no conversion.

Now do you see how all of that works? Regeneration and conversion are different. Regeneration is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, granting life to a nonbeliever. He converts us, and that is described in such a radical term as a new creature. And that alone requires a royal work

Let me try to give you an illustration about how a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. Now there is little resemblance between the two, but every butterfly has been a caterpillar. Every butterfly can say, I was like that, but I have been changed. So every believer, in the Person and work of Christ, every saint, has been a sinner. But we've changed. But a wonderful work has occurred in that person. The caterpillar/sinner knows nothing about the delights of the butterfly/saint. And the only way a caterpillar can enjoy a butterfly life is by being made a butterfly. That's the only way he can do it. In other words, he has been made a new creation. And the only way that you and I can enjoy the faith life is to be made into a new creation. That's the beauty of the understanding of the difference between regeneration and conversion. Yes, Bill

Participant: From a historic perspective, what was it that shook the curve? I mean, what you are talking about today is biblical truth, but when did the shift occur

Bruce: Perhaps Bishop Rogers can help me, but I'll give you my answer. In about the 1850's, in the United States there was a movement afoot, instituted by a gentleman by the name of Charles Finney. Now Charles Finney was the one who invented what we would call the anxious seat. And the anxious seat was a place where he would preach the gospel. He would call people up to sit in this chair because they were anxious to hear the message, and he would then ask them to repent of their sins and invite Christ into their lives. He basically created what we would call the invitation system. It was a system of inviting people to respond to the message of Christ. And so, over the years, that has just promulgated to the point where the important thing is, did you give them the invitation? What is the invitation, brothers

Participant: It's the truth of God.

Bruce: It's the truth of God that's proclaimed. That's the invitation! You don't need to say, I'm going to let you invite Christ into your life. You're doing that if you preach a Biblical gospel. That is the invitation. Biblical preaching is the invitation by itself. What Finney added was this thing called the anxious seat, or the invitation system, and now he said that you must walk forward, accept Christ, you raise your hand, sign the card, whatever you do. He created a system of that, and what we've done is that we've just perfected it. Now over the years, since 1850, that just began to be promulgated as the message of the gospel, and the point was that we were preaching for conversions, rather than preaching for the glory of God. You see, we confused the two things and we mixed regeneration and conversion into one thing. Yes, Don

Participant: Not only that, Bruce, but Charles Finney did not believe in original sin.

Bruce: That's correct.

Participant: He did not believe in justification by faith alone

Bruce: He did not believe in total depravity. That's the whole thing. Now look at the reasons why he had his message, and Don is just highlighting them. He didn't believe in total depravity. He didn't believe in unconditional election. He didn't believe in limited

atonement. He didn't believe in irresistible grace. And he didn't believe in the perseverance of the saints. He didn't believe in those wonderful Biblical doctrines known as the doctrines of grace. So when you explore his external preaching, you have to go back and understand his theological basis

The whole point of our understanding is this: You see, that's what is so important, brothers, that you and I understand that the power is in the invitation of the preaching of the biblical gospel, which really contains this—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and the work of Christ, and repentance and faith. That's how it works, and regeneration always precedes conversion. If there's no conversion, there's no salvation. And if there's no regeneration, there's no conversion

Now, tragically speaking, (and I don't mean to disparage anyone), but when you go to the Billy Graham Center of Evangelism, at Wheaton college in Wheaton, Illinois, you will see on the plaque when you first enter into the hall of evangelism this sign. It's a quote from Charles Finney, which says this: "Evangelism is not the ministry of God; it's the function of man." And here are the things you do. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. When you do those six things, you'll have revival. He said that revival is not a function of God; it's a function of man. It is what man does. Now you see, as a result of that, we have a very, very man-centered gospel. The gospel is really about me, as opposed to God and His glory. As we've seen in 2 Corinthians 4 and 5, what is the purpose of the gospel? It is to restore the glory of man to be a reflection of the glory of God. That's what the gospel does. It's not about your eternal life. Eternal life is a consequence. But the gospel message itself, in all of its power, is really to re-establish the glory of man as a new creature, a new creation, to reflect the glory of God. That's what the gospel is about. And when you begin to mess around with the gospel message, you begin to mess around with the consequences of that preaching, and people all of a sudden began to realize that it's my choice

What we're saying is that regeneration is a royal work, because it requires omnipotence to do it. You see, that is something that God alone does, because He's the Creator. He's the One who creates this creature. Now that's how you take a look at the three things we're looking at, the condition of man and the character of man, and we're going to talk about the changes next week. What are the changes that occur as a result? Bishop Rogers?

Participant: I was just going to say that, while Finney is the guy that introduced this into our culture, it goes way back to the Council of Orange. And so, it was in the life of the church that there has always been this semi-Pelagian system that puts the emphasis on man rather than on God.

Bruce: Right. The whole issue goes back to Pelagius. And so we just have different expressions. What I've picked up is the American version of it from 1850. But Paul was dealing with the same issue back in the early church. Luther was dealing with that in the early church.

Participant: It's the natural man's religion.

Bruce: It's the natural man's religion. Yes, Sig?

Participant: Is there any distinction then when Christ gives the Great Commission for us to make disciples, as opposed to go and convert, or go and give people rebirth, or am I reading too much into that?

Bruce: Well, I think that when you look into the Great Commission, there are three elements, bringing people into practical conformity to the word of God, practical conformity into relationship with the Son of God, and practical identity with the church of God. That's what that means. Three things: bringing people into practical conformity to the word of God, bringing people into personal relationship to the Son of God, and bringing people into practical and visible identity with the church of God. "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them ... and teaching" the things I have taught you. Those are the three ingredients. It's far more than just conversion. It's practical relationship, practical identity, and practical identification with the local church. That's the Great Commission, and we can't be satisfied with anything other than that. But the American version that Bill has highlighted for us is really easy believe-ism, and it's man's religion, for we've mixed the whole understanding of regeneration and conversion. We've made them the same thing, and conversion has eliminated the whole understanding of our regeneration. That's why I'm spending so much time on this, to help us understand it. Yes?

Participant: Can you give us an example in your own personal life where regeneration took place (unclear) where you shared about your father, when you said, "Dad, am I an enemy of God?" When did regeneration and conversion take place in your Christian life.

Bruce: When? You've just described it.

Participant: At the moment of—

Bruce: To the best of my ability, I mean I can't go back and say, at that moment in time. That's why, brothers, when you understand the doctrine of the assurance of salvation, all the verses that deal with assurance of salvation in your life and my life and our understanding are always present tense verbs. Do you realize that? It's never go back and say, "When did you become a Christian?" You never go back and say, "When I was in ninth grade, talking to my father on October 1st of 1957," whenever that would be, that's when I became a Christian. No, the evidence is this. I woke up this morning, and I see that my life has changed. My thought patterns are different. I view God differently, I view people differently, and I view Christ differently. You see, present tense reality is always the true indication of your true saving faith. Do you recognize that new creation in your life? Do you recognize the new changes you've gone through? And your evaluation of your own salvation is my life is radically changed. I'm no longer a caterpillar; I'm a butterfly. You know that, because of the evidence in your life, a present tense reality. So it's tough to go back and say back on such and such a day is when it occurred, but I can tell you this: from that point on, my life changed, because my desires to believe in Christ and to follow Him became all of a sudden very, very paramount. So, for me, it was when my dad explained to me that I was an enemy of God because I was not regenerate, and that's the word he used. Romans 5:10: "If, while we were God's enemies," let's turn there.

Now I just gave you a good illustration in the conversion of Lydia in Acts chapter 16, verse 14. But for my own life, Romans 5:10: “For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.” Now, in my young life, I wanted to go to the Naval Academy, so I understood the difference between being an enemy and being an ally. I was reading that verse as a young lad, and I went to my dad and said, “Dad, am I an enemy of God?” And I will always appreciate the courage and love that my father had for me to tell me the truth. And he said, “Yes, you are, in your unregenerate state.” Now I had no idea what that meant. And I said, “Dad, I don’t want to be that.” He said, “Then read the rest of the verse.” Well, we read the rest of the verse, and you can see this. “While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.” He said in your unregenerate state, you are an enemy of God. But read the rest of the verse. If you don’t want to be an enemy, realize that He has reconciled you by His death, and He’ll save you with His life. And then he explained to me the gospel of Christ. He went through the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. Don?

Participant: Yes, Bruce. I think that’s a big problem in our culture today, because most people just assume that God loves them, just like you were saying last week, or the week before, just the way you are. What’s the whole premise of the four spiritual laws? God loves you, and has a wonderful plan for your life. Not that you’re an enemy of God, but that God loves you. It’s just assumed that God is somehow a genie in the sky, a cosmic Santa Claus or something. It never occurs to people that we could possibly be enemies of God, and if that’s what you believe, you’re going to preach a whole different gospel message than if you preach what the Bible says, that we are enemies of God inherently

Bruce: Absolutely. See, that’s why we speak of the three conditions. Without Christ, what is that? It’s the state of being under the wrath of god. You are under the wrath of God if you are without Christ. Now we don’t want to tell people that, because of what?

Participant: We’ll offend them.

Bruce: We’re going to offend them. We’re going to turn them off. They’re going to say, “You’re a bible basher.” There are all sorts of nomenclatures they’re going to throw at us, so what do we do? We water that down a little bit so that we get a more receptive response, because what are we motivated by.

Participant: Numbers

Bruce: We’re motivated by the response we want them to have. You see, when you are response oriented, you are not going to be truth validated, because you are wanting to get a response, because what happens when they don’t respond and they turn you completely off? What do you say? Well, I blew it. I didn’t do it right. What should I have done? Well, you were successful. Why? Because you’ve proclaimed truth. Every time you proclaim truth, you are successful. In our modern evangelism we always evaluate things by the number of conversions that we say occurred. Let’s just take a mass evangelistic crusade. We have 36 thousand people. At the end of the week, the tallies are taken up, and we say, How successful were we? And we say, 12,000 people came

forward and accepted Christ. Now if 36,000 people were there, what about the other 24,000? You see, I would say we were successful, because 36,000 people heard the what? Heard the truth, if truth was proclaimed. That's why I would say that your evaluation of evangelism is never on the response, because if you go on the response you're always going to water it down to get the response that you want somebody to have, and you're going to adjust what you say to get the response, because your evaluation is, my success or my un-success is determined by their response. It can never be that way in Biblical evangelism. It has to be under one thing. It's what Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit. His role is to guide us into all truth. So brothers, you are successful whenever you proclaim a Biblical gospel—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. That's why you start with the holiness of God, because you help them understand the contrast between God's holiness and our sinfulness. That's the whole understanding of total depravity. That's what it means to be an enemy, in that condition. If you start with myself, you obliterate the holiness and glory and righteousness of God, and His justice. You've got to start with the holiness of God, because people have to understand that if that is what God is like, I'm not like that. That's the role of the Holy Spirit, who comes along and does what? Convinces, convicts and converts. That's the role of the power of the gospel. Yes

Participant: Bruce, this time sequence thing. Can you speak just a moment to this issue of when does it happen? We talk about regeneration, belief, and conversion. In most cases, does that happen?

Bruce: Regeneration, conversion, belief.

Participant: I'm sorry. Regeneration, conversion, belief. Does that happen in a relatively short span of time, or can that be perfected over years and years?

Bruce: All right, we need to understand this. Regeneration is a one-time act. It is a sudden, specific work of the Holy Spirit upon your soul, in your life, at a given time, and it never happens again, if it's legitimate. Regeneration is a one-time act. Conversion takes all the rest of your life, because you're being converted all the rest of your life, because of repentance and faith. The most important prayer I pray every day is this: Have mercy on me, the sinner. That's my repentance. Repentance is something you constantly do. Repentance is not a one-time event. Regeneration is a one-time event; repentance and faith are continual. That's why conversion goes on. You see the evidence of it over time. You don't see an instantaneous perfection of your life. That's where conversion comes in. But regeneration is a one-time, supernatural, specific act of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of a person, at a given time in his life, and the result of that is conversion. Conversion takes time. So you can't put a time frame on this. But I do say this: Regeneration is a one-time act. Conversion is the multiple expression of your life. Yes, please?

Participant: Would it be fair to say this, that regeneration is the secret work of the Holy Spirit, of which, at the time, we're probably not aware?

Bruce: We are passive.

Participant: We are passive?

Bruce: Absolutely.

Participant: We're not there even until He moves, and conversion, in its beginnings, at least, is that we're aware of that.

Bruce: We're aware of it.

Participant: It's the fruit, and it presupposes regeneration

Bruce: Absolutely. Charles Spurgeon said it so well. "Without regeneration, there is no conversion." Regeneration is that single act in your life, a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit, where He does that at one time, and the result of that is that your desire changes. All of a sudden, you see, I didn't have the desire to know anything about Christ until my dad explained to me what regeneration was. Then I said, "Dad, I have a desire." And that's an indication of what? Regeneration. Now I was passive at that time. Something happened to me that I had nothing to do with. It's God in His grace. That's why I had Don play the hymn, "grace that is greater than all our sin." Brothers, you need to realize that Jesus is a better Savior than you are a sinner. He's a better Savior than you are a sinner, and that's because of grace. Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, I want to thank you for helping me to understand something I've been trying to understand since I was 17 years old, and I was ordained in 1976. I remember, as a child, falling by the television crying, falling, crying, crying, crying. And my parents were in the other room and Billy Graham was preaching on TV, and I didn't know why I was crying. But whatever he was saying, that's what I wanted. But I didn't realize that all of this was like going through a big arch that says, "Whosoever will may come." And then, all these years later, as I'm listening to you, I'm looking back at that time, and I see on that arch "chosen from before the foundation of the world." It's a mystery, and I want to thank you.

Bruce: That is a mystery. Let it be a mystery, brothers. Please let your salvation be a supernatural, omnipotent mystery that only God can do. And it's the most beautiful thing in your life, because, in my judgment, you see all of the 28 attributes of God wrapped up in your salvation. Just go through our list, and you'll see some aspect of God's character, as displayed in the magnificent work of our salvation. It starts with our regeneration. Yes, Bill?

Participant: Well, I agree it's a mystery, but I think we need to keep focused on what the biblical revelation says, and not forget the fact is, it's still of God. It is a royal work. When we lose sight of that, we start making bad decisions in regard to how we interact with other people.

Bruce: Amen.

Participant: We end up with decision-based preaching, as opposed to truth-based preaching.

Bruce: Absolutely. Thank you, Bill. Good insight. Yes?

Participant: Is backsliding Biblical?

Bruce: Backsliding, is it Biblical? (Laughter.) Let's see, let's pray; we're over. (Laughter)

Participant: One more question over here, Bruce

Bruce: Wait a minute, wait a minute; hang on a minute. I've got to figure this one out first. (Laughter) We do not live a perfectly oriented life. Now we need to go to 1

John, and look at the seven tests of a true believer, and the seven traits of a person who has been truly born of God. One of them is this: If you say you've never sinned, there is no righteousness in you, and you're a liar, and the truth is not in you. We're not talking about sinless perfection; we're talking about moving in the direction of God's holiness. So there will be times in your life when you may not be as actively progressive and moving forward in your life, and if you want to call that backsliding, then that would be legitimate. But you can't use it as a defense for weak evangelism. For sometimes we have converted backsliding into saying this: She accepted Christ as her Savior, but hasn't made Him Lord yet. And so we've separated the salvation and the saving work of Christ from His Lordship. So we just have to be careful not to justify backsliding. If there is backsliding in your life, the first thing you need to say is the prayer that we read in Luke, and it's this: "Have mercy upon me, the sinner." So get back on the train. You've been given the gifts of repentance and faith; it's a grace. Repentance is a grace. Faith is a grace. Apply those conscientiously as part of your conversion on a daily basis. That will continue on. We need to take responsibility for that, should it occur in our lives. Yes, please?

Participant: Would your moment of regeneration in that conversation with your father be ordained by sovereign election?

Bruce: Absolutely. Unconditional election. That's what our brother just said. Whosoever will may come; chosen from before the foundation of the world. Absolutely. No question about that.

Now brothers, do you understand the difference between regeneration and conversion? It's really critical that we understand that. Now let me just say this, and we'll close.

Look at the wiles of Satan, Satan's devices, as you would call them. There are many things that he has, and one of the things he has in the modern church today is what I would call WMDs—weapons of mass deception. And one of those is false teaching in the pulpits of our churches. It's a mass deception, because we have taught easy believe-ism, and we've taught that salvation is something that I can choose to do whenever I choose to do it. That is a mass deception that is one of Satan's hallmarks of deceiving people into believing it's about them, rather than realizing that it is all of God. It is "but God." It's all of God. And what I'm trying to help us understand is the difference between easy believe-ism and what the Scripture says, that all these things are of God. You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you are born again, because it is of God. It's a royal work, and it's so radically described that the only description you can have is that you are a brand new creature.

Now next week, we'll talk about the changes that occur as a result of your going from having been without Christ to being in Christ. What are those changes that are so radically described only by the term "a new creature"? We'll pick that up next week.

Let us pray. Father, this is so overwhelmingly refreshing. Thank you, Father, that we were passive in our regeneration. But we're active in our conversion. And Lord, we understand the supernatural grace, the omnipotence that is required to take me from being without Christ to being in Christ, and only You can do that, because You are the One who can take something from nonexistence into existence, and change us from being without

Christ to being in Christ. May it be so, Father, that we will actively use the graces of our repentance and our faith to continue our journey, for the glory of God. Help us realize this. You have brought us to saving faith, to restore our glory so that we can reflect your glory for the world to see. And may it be so for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said, "Amen!"