

Intro to Conversion

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[0:00] As you all know, we just spent quite a bit of time talking about the new birth or being born again from above.

! And actually we started that, I think, on January the 11th. So we spent a lot of, I think, quality time looking at the various aspects of the doctrine of regeneration.

That's a great doctrine to study. So tonight marks an ending and a beginning. We spent all these weeks on the doctrine of regeneration.

And it is a great work that involves the salvation of a person and all three persons of the Trinity are involved in that. And we are going to leave behind the doctrine of regeneration tonight.

Sort of. Sort of. Now, I'll be the first to say that I use that word sort of. One, it's kind of an attention getter.

[1:23] But the other thing is, you really, as Christians, we can never leave behind the doctrine of regeneration. Because of that, we're here.

Born again. Born from above. You can't leave that behind. It's what made us Christians. It was our first step into a genuine and an eternal relationship with the true God revealed to us in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Regeneration has made us what we are. But again, it is the first step. And there's some more steps that follow. And as I will point out, follow quickly.

After legitimate, true, genuine regeneration. Follow quickly. Our overall study, which started last fall, has been on the Ordo Salutis.

I like to use that word because it's the only Latin phrase I pretty much know now. Meaning the order of salvation. And so tonight, we're going to take the next step in the salvation process.

[2:46] Regeneration was a step, and now we're going to go with the other foot and take a step. It comes immediately after regeneration.

In fact, it's so quick it's connected. Because we're walking, and we take the next step. And it is referred to as conversion.

We must be converted. When I use that word immediate, I mean immediate. Conversion follows regeneration immediately.

Some people have the impression that they're born again, and then return to the life that they had. And 20 years later, they're converted.

And then 5 or 10 years after that, they're justified. Well, it doesn't happen like that. That's not the biblical description of conversion, or of regeneration, or any other great doctrines in dealing with salvation.

[3:52] It just doesn't work that way at all. When God saves a soul, and it is God doing the work. We've already looked at that at length. When God saves a soul, the process of salvation listed in the Ordo Salutis moves rapidly.

Step, step, step, until we get to sanctification. Now, it's not going to be so rapid for us, because we're going to be in the fall before we get there. But in the actual event, it moves quickly until we get to sanctification.

Now, we do move into sanctification, as we will learn this fall, just after justification and adoption into the family of God.

Those moved quickly. But sanctification, as I think we all know, is a lifelong process, and it will not end until our glorification in heaven.

And we're going to be talking about glorification at some point next winter. And that's getting toward the end of our study. Now, we've already looked at the effectual call, which led to our regeneration.

[5:21] Why is it effectual or effective? Because God does it. God does it. I always remember the Sunday night when Mike says, Pastor Mike said, Why should we believe the Bible?

And every time Mike would have a question, Jackson would go, You remember that? And finally, Mike said, I've got a call on him. I can't keep it. He said, Jackson, why should we believe the Bible? And he says, Because God wrote it. And oh my gosh, Mike looked at me and I said, Do a hymn invitation? Let's get out of here. You can't top that.

Let's go. We can go to Monterey House and get some nachos. He nailed it. Jackson nailed it. So we've looked at this effective call.

That is done through the preaching of the gospel. By that method, God imparts spiritual life to the sinner. That spiritual life changes the nature of the person.

[6:22] And it brings that person from death to life. Remember Genesis chapter 3? New nature. Sin nature came in. I could tell Diane, Eve got us in all kinds of trouble.

And then she says, Adam who was with her and should have been protecting her. And then we go in. So I've quit bringing that up to her. Our nature is changed in regeneration.

And we are brought from death to life. That's why it's called a life-changing encounter. It's life-changing. And the Bible says and describes it as we take on a new nature and we become new creatures in Christ.

Sometimes they put in the word new creation or new creature. But again, this brings us from death to life. And the very first thing that happens after a person is regenerated is referred to conversion. We are converted. And what happens at conversion is very interesting and very important. At conversion, God places in the heart of the new convert a new desire, a new nature.

[7:50] I want to go another direction than I've been going. And it is the things that he places in the heart of the new convert is a desire to repent from sin and embrace Christ by faith.

And I will promise you that all the men in here that are converted, and I trust it's all of us, we didn't get regenerated and then converted and say, okay, now, let me think.

On the Ordo Salutis, I've got to repent and believe, have faith. We didn't know that. But God knew that. And he puts in those hearts this desire to repent and to believe.

And I'll say this many times. Believe and faith are the same word in the Greek language. So they're used interchangeably. At least in my lessons. And God places that in the heart of the new convert, though we probably didn't, certainly we didn't understand it in any depth.

I mean, I knew who I was, and I knew something was happening. And I let God do the work. Now, when we say we have faith in Christ or believe in Christ, we mean the same thing.

[9:14] We experience at conversion a spiritual awakening. That's become a very popular term. I don't know if you all are following MacArthur and Sproul and Steve Lawson, but spiritual awakening has become a very interesting term here.

And we don't understand that in any depth because we're newborn babies. We're babies. We need milk.

We crave milk. We can't crave meat. We're babies. We're babies. And so we're not talking about this great sudden depth of knowledge.

That's sanctification. That's a lifelong process. But we can't handle solid food, so to speak, at this point. But immediately following rebirth, the Holy Spirit converts us and gives us spiritual eyes.

And, you know, when I think back at mine, and I got converted, saved at 30. I imagine most of you long before then. I know, Mike, you did. Pastor, I don't know.

[10:35] You probably were younger. I got saved at 30. Pretty old, you know. But I got a set of spiritual eyes, and I could at least to a degree see me for what I was.

And it wasn't pretty. I didn't like it. And I wanted it to change. I wanted it to change. And I was an FBI agent, and a lot of profanity in that law enforcement profession, and a lot of just wild stuff.

But we get these spiritual eyes to see who we are. And I saw the bankruptcy of my sin. And I saw the worthiness of Christ Jesus.

Not to a great depth, but I started appreciating more and more who He was. And that's been a continual process. That's part of the sanctification process. But Paul spoke of this in his conversion experience.

And we remember that, right? Road to Damascus. Listen to what Paul says back in Acts 26. In this connection, I'm in verse 12, starting in 12.

[11:56] In this connection, I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests says, At midday, O king, I think he's talking to Agrippa here.

At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven brighter than the sun. Now that's pretty bright. Can't even look at it.

That shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

It is hard for you to kick against the goads. And I got to thinking, what in the world is that thing?

Well, a goad, oxen can get real stubborn.

I guess today we have electric prods. But it's a stick, a sharp stick. And if an oxen just said, I'm not going to take another step, they jam him with it.

[13:02] That was a goad. And the Lord Jesus said, don't be kicking against those goads. You'll pay a price. Paul goes ahead and says, and I said, who are you, Lord?

And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now at that point, Paul broke out in a cold sweat. Why? He's been killing, arranging for the deaths and imprisonment of followers of Christ Jesus.

Think back to Stephen. And now he's having a conversation with this same Jesus. Jesus goes on and says, but rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have been sent and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people, that's Jews, and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

You know what most righteous Jews would have said at that point? Gentiles? They're the dogs. You're going to send me to Gentiles? That's what Paul was probably thinking. I want to draw your attention to those words where the Lord says He is opening the eyes so they can turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan.

That's what happens at conversion. That's conversion right there, guys. Paul offers a very great commentary on the passage of Acts over in 2 Corinthians 4-6.

[15:06] For God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That's conversion. Christ is perfectly and fully and completely capable of forgiving our sins and providing the righteousness needed for eternal life in Him.

Because this new thing has come from regeneration, we are converted and are given the ability to see reality as it is.

It was only when Paul became blind that he could see. He had to be blinded in order to see. That's what happened in his conversion. And we don't do this to perfection.

We don't do it to perfection on the day of conversion or the last day before we go to glory. But it's our new direction. And as I said earlier, two things happen at genuine conversion.

[16:23] One, a turning from sin. Doesn't mean we become sinless. but a turning from sin and unbelief and that's called repentance.

And two, we embrace Christ and that's called saving faith. When these two things come together from God, they make up the single act of conversion and it is in fact a very beautiful thing.

Now, one thing that should be apparent to all of us is this. Faith and repentance are not just intimately related, they're also inseparable from one another.

You can't divide them. It has been said and rightly so that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. Two sides, same coin.

You cannot have genuine repentance without genuine faith. Maybe baby faith and baby repentance but it's genuine.

[17:37] And you cannot have genuine faith without genuine repentance. Follow this logic. You cannot turn away from something without turning to something else.

I mean, right now I'm facing the wall behind West but if I turn this way I'm going to face the wall over here. I mean, you can't, you're going to face something. You're going to face something.

As fallen human beings we cannot turn away from sin successfully through conversion and still refuse to turn to Christ.

This is logic. Just follow the logic. But more than logic it is also a theological reality. That's even more important.

In fact, it is a theological necessity. It has to be this way. It has to be this way or all we're doing is building a house of cards.

[18:45] And they're going to come falling down. now follow me on this. It is impossible for someone to have their eyes opened by the triune God and see their sin for what it is and Christ for who he is and what he has accomplished for that person while he was on the cross and turned a blind eye to it all.

If we see that clearly and grasp it, and the reformers call that irresistible grace, the irresistible grace of God, that means it can't be fought against.

I wrestled for a long time, but God overpowered me, just like he did, who was that, Jacob that he wrestled with? The elect of God will come to him and embrace him through the Son.

Now, at this point, it helps to remember that regeneration is a spiritual transplant. It's a spiritual transplant.

I went through a heart transplant or heart surgery and I took veins out of my legs and they put new ones in there because I had all this blockage.

[20:07] I remember John asked me one time, did they take your heart out and take it to a lab somewhere? I said, I hope not. I was asleep at the time, but I hope they didn't.

But I went through a bypass surgery. People do have heart transplants. They get a whole new heart. But this really is transplant surgery on the part of God.

He's transplanting a new heart in us. It is a radical renewal of our desires and our affections. We get new desires, new affections.

We go through this transplant surgery performed by the Spirit of God. Paul says all things become new. when our heart is renewed through regeneration and conversion, the beauty of Christ's glory. Paul says it's like the noonday sun which blocks out and keeps even the stars invisible. The stars are out there right now. We can't see them because of the sun. The sun's glory blocks it out and the stars are invisible to us.

[21:25] to desire to continue to live in our sins though newly converted and given a new heart is to suggest that our sinful desires are more attractive to us than is Christ.

Than is Christ. I'm not talking about sinless perfection. But that would be inconceivable. but we're not sinless.

We know that. I am teaching the fact that new desires take us captive if regeneration is real. And I had some really great advice from a great man who's now with the Lord.

And he said if you're a new convert read 1 John every day for 30 days. And I remember doing that. That really helped me.

And you learn a lot of things in 1 John. A lot. But new desires take us captive if regeneration is real.

[22:29] I want you to consider some passages. Here's two of them. Matthew 13 44. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up.

then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. And then in Matthew 13 45 and 46 again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls who on finding one pearl of great value went and sold all that he had and bought it.

That's what we're talking about. it's worth its weight in gold. It's worth pearls. The Holy Spirit the author of the written word expressed it quite well in these verses of scripture.

He used Paul to write these down in Philippians 3.8 Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. And the New Testament translators really cleaned up that word rubbish which is dung or manure and it can even be translated more graphic if you get my understanding.

[24:05] Thus the faith that saves mark this down the faith that saves is a repentant faith. And again we see this word repentance.

The repentance that saves the faith that saves is a repentant faith and the repentance that saves is a believing repentance. a faithful repentance.

Now at this point I want to say something very important. We will come back to this in a future lesson. Repentance and faith are grace gifts of God given at conversion.

If it depended on me guys I would never have been converted. I know me. See that's two problems I have in life. I know Jesus and I know me. That's just the truth.

These are grace gifts of God. Now we're going to build on them through sanctification. We're going to build on that repentance. I'm having my son make me a sign for the house. Repent daily. Rabbi Zacharias said he starts every morning at 7 o'clock repenting of any sins he committed the previous day.

[25 : 19] And he says if I can't think of any I tell the Lord well you know what they are. But these are grace gifts of God. But the repentance you express to God through prayer and confession has not yet been perfected.

And the faith we express is not yet perfected. We are to strive toward perfection as we grow more like Christ Jesus being conformed to his image.

True perfection of course will occur at glorification as John expressed it in 1 John 3.2 Beloved we are God's children now. You don't have to wait until a future date.

We're children now and what will be has not yet appeared. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

And for reasons I don't understand I always like to invoke Jesse Duplantis at this point who bragged about going up to the highest heaven and remember I told you the story saw Jesus crying and weeping and he said what's the matter Jesus he said well I'm failure you know all these people are going to hell he said oh we got everything you're not a failure we're going to take care of you we got you covered we got you covered the real irony is that about a year and a half later or a year later he wrote his autobiography and he forgot to mention that he'd been called up to heaven in the present I think you would remember that in the autobiography I would probably put that in chapter 1 and there wouldn't be a chapter 2 so the gospel call which is essential to all of us is God summoning us to repent and believe he's calling us he called us to salvation through regeneration and now he's calling us you got to repent and believe that's the next

[27 : 21] I picture it as a path a narrow path with turnstiles and regeneration was a turnstile and God opened it for us and now we got another turnstile conversion faith and repentance and we're going through that turnstile God is summoning us then the new convert repent and believe and Mark spoke about this in the gospel that bears his name Mark 1 15 the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand repent and believe in the gospel repent and believe in the good news concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and everything about him his perfection his death his burial his resurrection his ascension and his present ministry today which is interceding for his children he ever lives to intercede for us Paul's parting words to the elders at

Miletus bore this out in Acts 20 starting in verse 17 now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him and when they came to him he said to them you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia that's Turkey serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you in public from house to house testifying both to Jews and to Greeks what was his testimony to them of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus

Christ that was his testimony to the unconverted to people that he was witnessing to repentance and faith and you know when we witness if we don't share those two aspects that's crucial but I start out with you must be born again the message that Paul was preaching he received from Christ Jesus himself he got this directly from the Lord Jesus Christ he was commissioned by Christ to bring this message to both Jews and Gentiles Gentiles and this is the very thing that Paul toward Agrippa when he stood before him Jesus had instructed Paul to go to the Gentiles and preach to them repentance and faith this was also the message that Paul delivered to the church at

Thessalonica 1 Thessalonians 1 9 for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how we turn to God from idols to serve the living and true

God well what does that mean turning from idols there's no one way you can do that you gotta repent you turn from idols by repenting and they did that and then they were able to turn to God that's faith so again we see the two sided coin repentance and faith and they're always together in true conversion there is always a turning from sin that's repentance and a turning to God in Christ faith and it is impossible to occur one without the other why because they are grace gifts of God that come together in us at conversion now we're going to be examining at some length repentance and faith but essentially I'm going to treat them as two subjects even though they're really joined we're

going to start by looking at repentance and that may in fact with my schedule bring us to the conclusion of men's night for this season and not pick it up until the fall but I'll be giving you homework throughout the year but then if the schedule holds we will pick it up in the fall by examining faith now this is all flexible things can happen this wouldn't be the first time we canceled our trip to

Gatlinburg although it will be the last if we do because we lose all our money and then when we complete the study of repentance of faith we will continue with our study of the ordo salutis the next major study which will not occur until the fall for sure is justification by faith gigantic subject and we'll spend a number of Monday nights talking about justification by faith it's what started the reformation the just shall live by faith Luther looked at that and said what did that say I've got to read that again I've got to read that again he wasn't taught that in the Roman church still not taught it in the church at Rome then we go to adoption maybe one lesson maybe two then sanctification that'll be a few lessons and then glorification