

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

Born to Holiness

Scripture: James 1:18

Code: 59-8

I want to welcome you to our continued study of the epistle of James, so you can take your Bible and open up to James. We have much ahead of us in this great epistle. But we're going to stop tonight for just a brief look at verse 18. Normally we would be taking another section, starting in verse 19 since we did mention verse 18 in our last study, but I want to stop for a moment and expand our understanding of James 1:18 because it is such a great great verse. This is a verse that really articulates in a very simple way the meaning of the new birth, the meaning of salvation.

I was interested this morning in the reception for our first time guests to meet a lovely young lady from Japan who understands some English, conversational English, and confessed this morning that she found it very difficult to follow what I was saying in the message. And it alerted me, not so much to the fact that the words that I say are not intelligible, as such, but the fact that the longer you're a Christian and the more you get involved in Christianity and in the Word of God, the more sort of evangelical lingo you probably develop. And somebody coming in who knows conversational English is going to have a very difficult time plugging in to what you're saying.

It's a good reminder, also, that every once in a while we need to go back to the simple reality of what the gospel really is. And that's what we want to do tonight. Let's look together at verse 18 of James chapter 1. It says this, "Of His own will-- speaking of the Father, God the Father mentioned in verse 17--of His own will begot He us with the Word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." A simple verse but one in which is bound up all of the richness of the new birth.

The Old Testament said "Be holy, for I the Lord am holy." Peter says in his epistle, "Be holy, for I the Lord am holy." In order to enter into the presence of God, man must be holy, set apart from sin unto righteousness.

Now men are not holy. That's obvious. They are not righteous. That is, they are sinful. They do not think right, speak right, act right, do right. They do not rightly perceive God. They do not rightly perceive themselves. They do not rightly perceive God's truth, God's revelation, or God's law or God's will. But even though men are not holy and they are not right with God, for the most part they do not perceive that they are not holy. They do not understand that they are not righteous. They do not willingly agree with the diagnosis of Scripture that they are sinful.

Men are not holy. And worse, they do not recognize either the need for holiness or in many cases, the absence of it. And if they do recognize that they are not holy, they usually blame someone else for that reality. And that's what we were discussing in our last look at this tremendous chapter. Indirectly, men push the responsibility for their sinfulness off on God...typically. And as we looked at verses 13 through 18, we saw that we have no one to blame but ourselves for our own sinfulness. Certainly we cannot blame God by saying, "Well, God created us, God made laws that are impossible to keep. God has allowed me to become the way I am by my environment. God put me into circumstances that put such constraints on me I can't control my behavior," etc., etc. But what James says to us is God cannot have any part in our sinfulness, either directly or indirectly.

So men have to be holy in order to have a relationship with God. They are not holy. For the most part, they don't even recognize that they're not holy. And if they do recognize that they sin, they will usually blame someone else and that someone in a very vague sense is the God who put them in the circumstances they're in and gave them the impulses He gave them and they want to shirk the responsibility.

So, James says in verses 13 to 18, you cannot blame anyone but yourself for your sin. In verse 13 he says the nature of evil demonstrates that. "No man can say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God can't be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man." You can't blame God for evil because God and evil are mutually exclusive.

And then in verse 14, the nature of man. He says man has his own problem. Man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust..and enticed. The problem is in man. It is in his sinfulness, his fallenness.

Then he talks about the nature of lust in verses 15 and 16. Lust when it conceives brings forth sin. Sin when it finally comes forth produces nothing but death. And don't you be wrong about that. In other words, understand that that is the reality of sin. So it isn't God because God and evil are incompatible. The problem is in the nature of man. And in the nature of man, the problem is his evil desire, his lust, his passion for that which is wrong.

Then in verse 17, he goes back to discussing the nature of God and says, "From God comes every good gift and every perfect gift. And that never varies and there's never any shadow cast on that." So you can't blame God because His nature is to give only good things, only good comes from God. So he says we can't blame God for our sin because of the nature of evil, the nature of man, the nature of lust and the nature of God.

Then in verse 18, he sort of sums up his argument by saying, "The nature of regeneration itself or conversion or salvation or the new birth shows us that God does not lead us into sin." Verse 18 says, "Of His own will," in other words, it was His will, "to beget us to become like Him, a kind of firstfruits of

His own creation." So the purpose of regeneration was to give birth into life, to create us to do good not evil, to give us power over sin as a part of a new creation. So God is in no way involved in our sinfulness. He cannot be mixed with evil. The problem is in man. In man the problem is bound up with his lust. The nature of God is such that He only gives good gifts. And when God touches your life, it is to produce life not death, to produce righteousness not sin, to make a new creation not exercise the old one.

So all of those things we looked at last time point to the fact that God cannot directly or indirectly be the source of sin. God is not and cannot be tempting men to sin. And so we looked at verse 18 in that light. But the verse is so rich because it discusses this matter of the new birth of begetting a person, of regenerating a person and it demands a closer and longer look. And we want to do that tonight. He introduces us to the subject of regeneration in verse 18 in connecting with a point in his context. And the point is what I've just said to you, he is using regeneration as a way to show you that God doesn't lead people into sin, He leads them to be creations of a new kind like Him. He leads them out of sin into new life. And that would be inconsistent with any thought that He would lead us into sin. He is recreating us away from sin, not into sin.

But apart from the context itself, as we look at the verse, I want you just to examine it in and of itself because it says so much about regeneration. And the whole teaching of regeneration or new birth is worthy of our careful attention.. Now keep in mind what I said earlier and what we noted in the text that man is filled with lust and lust produces sin and sin begets death. It is true that without holiness, no one will ever have a relationship with God, no one will ever fully know God, no one will ever enter into God's eternal presence without holiness. And yet man is unholy and he is sinful and everything in his nature produces lust and evil.

To give you a clearer understanding of that, look at Romans with me, chapter 3...a very familiar portion of Scripture to Bible students, but one that needs examination in the light of this particular point. At the end of verse 9, he says, "Jews and Greeks, they are all under sin." They are all literally under the mastery of sin, they are all subject to the control of sin. And then he goes on to show this in extent by quoting from some Old Testament passages and he says, "As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one." There is not one human being created in this world since the fall of Adam that is righteous. And that means that is right with God, that does righteously, that obeys the will of God in and of himself. There's none righteous, no not one.

There is none that understands...that is there's none that fully comprehends that which God requires and is fully able to understand it and to carry it out. There is none that even seeks after God. The bent of man is to seek sin. Men love...what?...darkness, John 3 says, because their deeds are evil. They're all gone out of the way. They've all diverted themselves from the path that God ordained for righteousness. They are all together become unprofitable. The Greek word has to do with sour milk, it's good for nothing. They're absolutely useless. And there is none that does good, not even one.

And then he describes the nature of their evil. Their throat is an open sepulcher. It stinks like a dead corpse whose scent comes oozing out of a tomb. With their tongues they have used deceit. The poison of asps or snakes is under their lips. A man is basically revealed in his conversation and in his mouth. And the ugly evil defiled deadness of his sinful nature comes out through his mouth. The mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are in a hurry to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways. The way of peace have they not known. And there is absolutely no reverence for God before their eyes.

Now here is a definition of sinful man. Man without God. And the whole world comes under this in verse 18, every mouth is stopped and all the world stands guilty before God. And there is no way, he says in verse 20, that through their flesh they can be justified by God by keeping some rules, by obeying law even though it be the law of God. The law simply produces the knowledge of sin, it doesn't produce righteousness. So, there is the definition of man from Romans 3...man in his sinful state.

Look at Ephesians 2. And in Ephesians 2 it says, verse 1, "And you who were dead in trespasses and sins," and here we find that man is characterized again as being dead, the stench of a corpse. And the characteristic of his deadness is that it is a deadness in trespasses and sins. Just using two words to show kind of the breadth and the extent of his sinfulness. "He walks," it says, "according to the course of this world." In other words, his daily conduct is dictated by the evil system. "The one who is in charge of his life is the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience," those are titles for Satan. "He functions," verse 3, "in the lust of the flesh, he fulfills the desire of the flesh and the mind and he is by nature a child of wrath." That means he is a target of judgment, he is the object of God's judgment.

Now all this is very basic. Man in order to have a right relationship to God needs to be holy. Man is not holy. Man doesn't recognize that he's not holy. And sometimes if he does recognize that he is not holy and sinful, he tends to blame God for his circumstances, pass of the responsibility which keeps him confined under the subjection of sin and therefore cut off from God.

Now the question comes up: what are you going to do to help this man? What are you going to do to change the situation? What does this man need? External changes are not enough. He cannot by some resolution in his own mind determine that he's going to obey the law of God and work his way out of this deadness. He cannot give himself new life. What he needs is to be recreated. He needs a new heart, a new inner person, a new life principle, he needs to be born again. He needs to start all over and come out different as if in the words of Nicodemus, he could crawl back into his mother's womb and start all over again with a different nature. Since holiness is the absolute condition for acceptance in to fellowship with God, sinful man in his fallen dead condition can't ever have that fellowship and God won't accept his corrupt self so he needs a new life. He needs a brand new life.

So, when we talk about the gospel or the new birth, we're not talking about adding something, we're not talking about tacking something on. We're not talking about putting a ribbon on a sow. We're not talking about putting a new suit of clothes on an old man. We're talking about a total transformation. To enter into a right relationship with God demands a total new person. You have to go back and start all over again and be born all over again into a new life.

Now Scripture affirms this. It isn't even...it isn't even new in the New Testament. This was part of the promise and anticipation of the Old Testament. Jeremiah, for example, says the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. And Jeremiah says "Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can he by willingly and by willing...being willing rather and wishing, can he change the color of his dark skin?" And then Jeremiah says, "Can the leopard change his spots?" And the obvious answer is of course not. "Then may you also do good that are accustomed to do evil." You can't change your life either. So you need a transformation. That's Jeremiah 13:23. And over in chapter 31 comes the wonderful promise of that transformation. Jeremiah 31:31, "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, I'll make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt," and so forth. He says, "I'll make a new covenant," verse 33, "I will put my law in their inward parts, I will write it in their hearts, I will be their God and they will be My people." I'm going to get inside and change their inside. They can't do it on their own so it has to be done for them.

Man has to have a change at the very core of his being. The natural man, that is the unregenerate man, the man that doesn't know God, the sinful man, the unredeemed man, the unsaved man, does not--1 Corinthians 2:14 says, "receive the things of the Spirit of God." He can't receive them, he's dead. And a corpse doesn't respond to anything.

And so, what does he need? He needs new birth. He needs new life. I just read you Ephesians 2:1 to 3 how that men are dead in trespasses and sin, following the lust of the flesh, the lust of the mind, the desires of the flesh, being subject to the leadership of Satan, the prince of the power of the air. They are children of wrath. But it says, even when we were dead in sins, in that same chapter verse 5, Christ has made us alive and raised us up. And here's the idea of a resurrection from the dead, of new life, of a new birth. In Romans 6, it says when you put your faith in Christ, you die and you rise to walk in...and it uses this wonderful phrase..."newness of...what?...of life." Now that's what every person has to have, newness of life. The old life has to be totally done away and a new life has to come. In Ephesians 4:24, "You have put on the new man...listen to this...which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." When you come to salvation, you put on a new man, a new person not new clothes, a new person. It's a recreation.

The best and most graphic illustration of this is found in the wonderful encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. So turn to John 3 and let's look at it briefly and remind ourselves of this wonderful wonderful story. "There was a man of the Pharisees," that is he was a religious leader of great esteem. He may have well been as prominent as any teacher because in verse 10 Jesus says, "Are you...and uses the definite article "the teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" So here is one man who recognizes...is recognized perhaps publicly as "the teacher" in Israel of some great stature of Pharisee well versed in the law. He approaches Jesus and says, "We know You're a teacher from God." Here is a man of great esteem. Here is a man who recognizes his own calling but recognizes one who is even significantly above himself in understanding.

So, he comes to Jesus. And he says in verse 2, "We know You're a teacher come from God for no one can do the miracles that You do except God be with Him." And he never says what's in his heart. He doesn't ask a question but Jesus reads his heart. "And Jesus answered," that's an interesting statement because he didn't ask anything, he just said, "You're a teacher," and went on to say You come from God, we know that. "But Jesus answered the question in his heart and said, Truly, truly, I say to you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." And He knew that what was in the heart of Nicodemus was, how do I get into the Kingdom? Here was a man who was the teacher in Israel, a Pharisee, had it all going religiously, but knew he had not entered in truly to the Kingdom of God. How did he know he hadn't? Because there was nothing inside of him confirming that.

So he comes to Jesus and the question of his heart is, what do I do to get in the Kingdom? And the implication would be, "I'm very religious, I study the law. I try to live by the code of the Old Testament. I'm a very ethical man. I'm a trusted man. I'm a respected man. What do I need to add to my life to get in the Kingdom?" And Jesus said you don't do anything, you start all over again. You just kill the whole thing and start with birth. You have to be born again. And Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he's old?" Now he's not asking the physical thing. Give him a break, he's not saying physically how can I go back and be born, he knows what Jesus is talking about. He is simply picking up on the same use of veiled language, of parabolic talk of the Mishal, the kind of speech that they used and he's picking up on the same metaphor, the same descriptive terms that Jesus is using and he's saying, how does someone so many years in one religion, so many years following one code, so many years to be now a Pharisee and a rabbi and a teacher of the law ever go back and undo all of that and start all over again. That's what he's saying.

And if you have ever witnessed to an orthodox Jew of any years, you will understand this mind set. How can I ever unravel all this lifelong pursuit of religion and start all over again? That was what was in the mind of Nicodemus. Can he enter the second time in his mother's womb and be born? And he's tongue and cheek at that point. He's saying that again, consistent with the analogy that Jesus is using. How can I be born again spiritually? He knows Jesus speaks spiritually. How can I do it? How can it happen? And Jesus says to him, basically, you can't do it. You can't do it, Nicodemus.

"Truly, truly I say to you, except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot...what?...enter the Kingdom of God." He says you can't do it. It has to be done by water and the Spirit. It has to be done by a power and a resource outside yourself...outside of you. And that power is the water and the Spirit.

Now what does that refer to? That's the water of salvation, I believe if you go back for a brief moment to Ezekiel 36, you will see. Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus in very familiar terms. He knew the Old Testament. He knew the promise of Ezekiel 36. Verse 25, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you." Who's "I"? God. This is a sovereign act and "You will be clean from your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you."

What He is saying to Nicodemus is this: number one, you must have a sovereign cleansing by God. Secondly, it comes through the Holy Spirit. You need a sovereign salvation that comes from outside yourself. Just like Ezekiel prophesied, clean water, cleansing your filthiness. Paul writing to Titus talks about the washing of water through the Word, the water of regeneration. And verse 26, "A new heart will I give you and a new Spirit will I put within you. Take away the stony heart out of your flesh, I'll give you a heart of flesh...then this...I'll put My Spirit within you and cause you from the inside to walk in My statutes. You shall keep My ordinances and you shall do them." So when Jesus says to Nicodemus, you must be born of the water and the Spirit to enter the Kingdom, He's taking Nicodemus right back to Ezekiel 36 and saying you know what the prophet said, you need a sovereign cleansing that comes from God outside yourself and the planting of His Holy Spirit in your heart to give you a new life and a new heart and a new motivation.

Why? Verse 6, if you tried to do it on your own, "That which is born of the flesh is...what?...all you're going to do is reproduce what?...yourself, more of you, but that which is born of the Spirit is...what?...Spirit. So don't be surprised that I said you must be born again." Don't be surprised. Then He says, "The wind blows where it wants and you hear the sound and you can't tell from where it comes and where it goes and so is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

You know what He's saying there? He's saying I can't tell you how or when the Holy Spirit does this but this is a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit. It can't be charted. You can't even see it coming or going. But the Spirit of God moves in where He wills and gives new birth to whom He wills as sovereign God by the agency of the Spirit through the washing of the water of the Word in regeneration, cleanses the heart and plants that Spirit within a man. What you need, Nicodemus, is a new life and that is a sovereign act of God.

Just what Jeremiah 24 said in verse 7, where God said, "I will give them a heart to know Me," a new nature, a new heart, a new life. "If any man be in Christ," 2 Corinthians 5:17, "he is a new creature. Old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new."

So, what I'm saying here is that a new birth is essential. That's what salvation is. It is God sovereignly coming down to a sinner and by His grace cleansing that sinner and planting His Spirit in that sinner so that the cleansing of that sinner takes care of his relationship to God and the planting of the Spirit takes care of His power to live in the will of God. And that's the purpose of regeneration.

Now I'm going to ask four questions in our verse, James 1:18, let's go back. That was introduction. James 1:18, I want to ask you four questions about regeneration, very simple questions and it won't take us but a brief time to answer the four.

First question: what is it? You've just said that man is...man cannot know God without holiness, man is not holy. Man doesn't recognize his unholiness and when he does, he tends to blame God. How's he ever going to get out of that dilemma? Here he is blaming God for it or not recognizing it. How's he ever going to change? You say, "Well, somebody brings him some higher standards, some better ethics, a law that he is supposed to keep and he does it on his own." No. "That which the flesh produces is more...what?...more flesh." So what has to happen is, he needs the divine intervention of a sovereign God who by His Spirit comes in, washes away his sin, plants a new life in him, gives him His Spirit to energize that new life unto obedience. That is a sovereign act. That's really regeneration.

But let's get into this verse and look at the four questions. Question number one, what is it? What is the nature of regeneration? And I've already alluded to it. In fact, already covered a great portion but just this phrase, "Of His own will, He begot us." That's the nature of regeneration. It is God bringing us forth, giving birth to us as new beings. You're not the same. You're a whole new creation. It's the same verb, by the way, exactly the same one used back in verse 15, God when He conceives brings forth regeneration, brings forth new life, it's the very same verb. It is in an aorist tense so it looks back to the event of salvation when we were born by the divine parent and given new life as children of God.

Now if you want a technical definition for "He begot us," here's one that I think is excellent. It's given by the theologian Berkhof many years ago but really says it, "Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man and the governing disposition of his soul is made holy." That is a great definition. "Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man and the governing disposition of his soul is made holy." That is a total transformation. That doesn't sound anything like Romans 3, does it? Or anything like Ephesians 2:1 to 3. In fact, Peter says we become partakers of the divine nature. God gives us His own life, His own self, His own righteous character, His own holiness is implanted in us. Just a tremendous thought.

As a Christian, you and I possess the very nature of God, 2 Peter 1:4. We are partakers of the divine nature. Now in its fullness we are yet to receive all that that implies, but already that new-life principle is planted in us. This is completed in a moment of time, it is not a process. It is an event. It is an act by which God creates you new. It is a secret work. It cannot be perceived. That's why we can't, in the words of Jesus, tell the wheat from the...the tares, because this particular act is imperceptible. It is known only through its effect. We can't see God recreate someone, that is a divine miracle unseen by any human eye. But it plants in the person a new-life principle and a new disposition that is enabled and driven to keep the law of God. Marvelous. It overcomes the deadness of sin and the deadliness of sin. No longer are we subject to sin, Paul says in Romans chapter 6, and no longer has dominion over us, we now follow a new master willingly and eagerly. Jesus said in John 10, "I am come that they might have...what?...life." What do dead men need most? Life. And so He comes to give us new life.

So what is regeneration? What is it? He begot us. What does that mean? He gave us new life, total transformation of the inner person. Second question: who does it? Well, I've already told you that from John chapter 3. Who does it? Look back at verse 18 again, "Of His own will, He begot us." He, being God the Father, mentioned in verse 17, is the source of every good and every perfect gift. "Of His own will" is first in the Greek in the verse which puts it in the emphatic position, showing that the sovereign will of God is the root of this new life. It couldn't be any other way because how is a dead person going to give himself life? Impossible. The source of new life is God...God. It is the grace of the giver, not the desire of the receiver. That desire of the receiver is prompted by the grace of the giver.

So, it is wholly the choice and the work of almighty God. If I am saved and you are saved, who gets all the credit? God does. We praise Him.

Go back to John 1:12 and I want to just draw a little more on this thought. You say, "But wait a minute. Didn't I receive Christ? Didn't I believe?" Of course you did. You reached out and received Him and believed. Look at verse 12 of John 1, "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right or the authority to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name." You say, "That's right. I believed and I received. Didn't I do that? Didn't I initiate that?" Look at verse 13, "Who were born not of blood...not talking about a human birth...nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of...what?...God." You believed and you received, because it was the will of whom? Of God. It is a sovereign thing. Yes, you believe. Yes, you received. Behind it all was the sovereign determinative gracious will of God.

No child has ever been born into the world humanly speaking because he or she wanted to be born. Fair enough? The birth of a child is strictly the decision of parents, not of unborn children. Spiritual birth is analogous to that. It is the decision of the sovereign divine parent. "No man comes unto Me," Jesus said, "except the Father...what?...draws him...except the Father draws him." And even the

very faith we exercise is granted graciously by God.

So, our conscious experience of conversion, our conscious experience of committing our life to Jesus Christ, of believing in His death and resurrection, of opening our hearts to receive Him, of believing the gospel, all is a consequence of His sovereign will. Beloved, when you stop to think that you're saved because He predetermined in eternity past to save you, that is a marvelous thing. God in His grace and love predetermined to have an eternally intimate love relationship with you, just because that's what He wanted. Marvelous. John put it this way, "We love Him because He...what?...first loved us." A child gives love to a human parent as a response to parental love and care and the life they gave that child. And because God has willed to save us, because God has willed to give us new life, and a holy nature, it is absolutely impossible, James says, that He could ever lead us into sin. You see how absolutely incongruous that is? What a thrilling thought.

He predestinated us to set His love on us, to give us new life that we might have eternal fellowship with Him and He longs for us to be in His presence. And when we go into His presence, He'll make us like His own Son and He'll pour out eternal blessing on us forever and ever and ever. No wonder John says in 1 John 3, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God." He can't even think of an adjective. It's absolutely indescribable. He just says, "What manner of love..." He couldn't even come up with an adjective to describe that kind of predetermined sovereign free choice to love.

Now looking back at James 1:18, just one other thought about that particular point...when it says "of His own will," it uses the word *bouletheis*, aorist participle. It is not just a wish, but it is an active will of accomplishment. It isn't God just wishing it, He wishes us to be saved, it is He wills it to the extent that it actually happens. May I say something to you that's very profound theologically? This is what we would say is God's productive will. That is, when He wills this, it happens. It is not a wish. You could wish something..."I wish...O how I wish this would happen..." and it may be remotely unrelated to what will happen. Or you could say, "I will that to happen," because it's within your power to make it happen. That's the intent of the word here. God's desire produces the end of that desire.

So, what is regeneration? It is God recreating us. Who does it? God does it by His sovereign power and we respond to that sovereign grace. Third question, okay? We've asked, what and who, here's the third one: how does it happen? How does it happen? Well, you say, "Well, does God just reach down and...bang, you're saved? Does God just zap you? How does it happen?" Well, let's look back at the verse. Verse 18, "Of His own will He begot us...here it comes...with the word of truth...with the word of truth." Or literally, by "truth's word...by truth's word." That means the Word of God, the Scripture. You see, God regenerates us and washes us and cleanses us and gives us a new inner person and plants the Spirit in us through the power of His...what?...of His Word...of His Word. Men are born again by the power of the Word. If you don't hear the Word, you don't hear the message that saves.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul is commending the Thessalonians for how they responded to the preaching of God's Word. He says, "For this cause, we thank God without ceasing because when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you received it not as the word of men but as it is in truth the Word of God...listen to this...which effectually is working also in you that believe." It is the Word that works with a believing heart. God sovereignly moves to redeem, a person responds to the exposure to the Word with faith and salvation takes place. God's will then of salvation is brought to the heart of a person through an understanding of the Word mixed with faith and regeneration takes place. How does it happen? It happens through the Word of God. And again I remind you of Titus 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done," we don't get salvation and new life by doing things, by trying to obey God in the flesh, "but according to His mercy He saved us...watch this...by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." There are the same two things, the washing of the water of the Word and the planting of the Holy Spirit. That's the sovereign work of God. So, the word of truth is the issue.

Now let me just take that...that phrase a little bit further, "the word of truth," or "truth's word." That particular designation is used several times in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 6:7, you don't need to look these up, I'll just mention them to you, it says, "By the Word of truth by the power of God," and it goes on. In Colossians 1:5 it says, "Of which you heard before...listen to this...in the word of the truth of the gospel." The word of the truth of the gospel, and there the "word of the truth" is specifically linked to the gospel. By the way, 2 Timothy 2:15 also mentions the word of truth, rightly dividing the word of truth.

So, the word of truth in general is the Word of God. It is that which God brings to us to unfold an understanding to us of His revelation of Himself. In specific, on basis of Colossians 1:5, we could call it the word of the truth of the gospel. Now with that in mind, we go back to James and we can just simply say that we wouldn't be out of line to say that we are born again with the word of truth, not only God's general revelation but as in Colossians 1:5, His specific revelation of the gospel. And you say, "What's the gospel?" The good news that Jesus came, died and rose again. So people are saved then when God sovereignly sets out to give them new birth, to give them a new nature, to wash away their sin, plant His Spirit in them, He brings them an understanding of that through the knowledge that comes in the gospel that is preached or that is given to them, that mixed with faith results in the new birth.

In Romans 10:17, and I'm just picking up some scriptures that come to mind that I think are related to this as we kind of wind down, but in Romans 10:17, do you remember this? "How then shall they call on Him whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher?" And then it says, "And how shall they preach unless they be sent," and so forth and so on. It's talking about we have to have preachers, how are people going to hear if they don't have a preacher? How can we send anybody if there's no one to send? People

have to have a preacher. How beautiful, according from Isaiah, are the feet of them that preach the gospel, how important it is to preach it. Why? Because of verse 17, "Faith comes by hearing a speech about Christ." That's the proper Greek rendering of 10:17. Faith comes by hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ, Romans 10:17.

So, God sovereignly saves by moving into a life and recreating that life, but that takes place when a person comes to hear and understand the gospel and it is mixed with faith. And that brings about the new birth. What is it? It is total transformation. Who does it? God does it by His own sovereign will. How does it happen? By hearing and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ that He died on the cross and rose again. That comes through the revealed Word of God.

One other scripture on this regard is 1 Peter 1, "Being born again," it says, and here's a definition of the means, "being born again not of corruptible seed," he's not talking about human birth, "but of incorruptible...here it comes...by the Word of God which lives and abides forever." By the Word of God which lives and abides forever. For flesh, you can't have a new birth in the flesh, it's just like grass and the glory of man is like the flower of grass, the grass withers and the flower falls away. The flesh can't produce anything lasting, "But the Word of the Lord endures forever...now listen..." And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." And again he says you're born again by the Word and the Word that you're born again by is the gospel and the gospel is the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. So God sovereignly chooses to redeem, comes down, cleanses the heart, plants His Spirit, but in order to do that, the heart must comprehend the gospel as clearly preached. And that comprehension mixed with faith brings about new life...new life. Now if anything is to change in us, God must do it. But we must respond as well to the gospel.

Now that leaves us with one question, one question...why is it done? Why? Why does God bother? We know what, we know who, we know how, but why? What is the purpose of making us new? The end of verse 18, this is marvelous, "In order that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creation." Boy, what a statement. We could really go to town on this one. The ramifications of this are just tremendous..."that we should be," that's an eis with the verb to be, that's a purpose clause, with the purpose of producing a new kind of creation. That's what God wants. He wants a new kind of creation. And we're the firstfruits of that. That's great.

Well, what are firstfruits? Well, if we had time and we won't take the time, we could study the Old Testament, mark down Exodus 23:19, Leviticus chapter 23, Deuteronomy chapter 18, Deuteronomy chapter 26, that tells about firstfruits. When you planted a crop, God said, "I want your firstfruits." Firstfruits meant two things, I want the first in order and I want the best. When you harvest that crop, bring an offering to Me and I want the first that you harvest and that will show that you live by faith because if you take your first...the tendency for a farmer is to take the first thing he harvests and hoard it in case nothing else comes through. So you bring Me the first and you bring Me the best. That's the firstfruits. The first of a full crop that's coming later. And that's exactly what it means here.

He says I want you...this is thrilling...to be the first and the best, indicative of a whole crop that's coming later. That's marvelous.

Now listen to me carefully. Do you realize, people, that the world will not continue the way it is right now? Do you know that? Do you know that we are headed to a total transformation of the world as we know it? Do you know that this entire operation on the earth will burn up? And the Bible tells us that the Lord will recreate this earth to His own liking? He will make a new creation, everything will be born again, everything, men and women and dirt and hills and valleys and water and grass and plants and animals and everything. In fact, He will make a new heaven and a new earth. There is coming a whole new creation and we're just the first evidence of it. And as Paul says in Romans 8, "the world doesn't even know what we're going to be yet because we're still veiled in our flesh and waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God when it becomes clear to everybody what we really are." That's kind of exciting to know what I am in that regard. I'm a sample as a Christian, and so are you, of what's coming. We're just the first look at the new creation. Incredible.

We're...we're His and He recreates us as symbols, as examples, as illustrations of His coming new creation. You want to know what the future's going to be like? I'll tell you what it's going to be like. It's going to be like us. All new on the inside. It's going to be like us after we get all new on the outside, too. But we're just the firstfruits. What is that? The firstfruits was the promise of the full crop...the promise of the full crop. And we are the firstfruits. What a thought. God says I want to take you to be My special possession, I want to take you to belong to Me, to be symbols of the full new creation yet to come. Do you realize that here we are in little Grace Community Church in this little pocket of bricks here tonight, and the world has no idea what we are but we are just firstfruits of an incredible new creation when God recreates the whole heaven and the whole earth? We're just the firstfruits.

Creation, it says in verse 8, is groaning, waiting for its recreation. And we also are crying out for the recreation, not of our soul--we've had that--but of our...what?...of our bodies where the flesh hangs on. This new life we have in Christ is a taste of future glory when the whole universe will be recreated. So, what a marvelous privilege is ours.

What is regeneration? It's recreation, making us all new from the inside. Who does it? God does it sovereignly. When does it happen? Or how does it happen? It happens when we hear with believing hearts the Word of the gospel and then God mixes our faith with His sovereign power, transforms us. And why does He do it? Because we are to stand out in the world as living examples of where this world is headed when He recreates it.

Now to put this thing back in James' context, try to tell me now that God wants us to sin and I'll tell you you've got a screw loose. There's no way God wants you to sin. No way He's pleased with your sin. He created you to be a model of a sinless society. That's what He wants. So when you sin,

don't blame Him. Put the blame where it ought to be, on your flesh and long for the day when your flesh is redeemed. That's what it means to be born again. And we have much to praise God for. Let's bow in prayer.

Our Father, we titled our message tonight "Born to Holiness," and we indeed are committed to that, that we have been made new in order that we who were unholy might be holy. What a tremendous truth that is. Father, we thank You so much for making us the symbols of Your new creation. And, Father, we pray that we might shine as lights in the world, that we might who have been redeemed be so grateful that we might live in such a way as to properly represent that whole new creation of which we are but the firstfruits. Forgive us for those times when we have blamed You for our sin and help us to realize that it is Your desire to recreate us unto holiness. And help us to pursue that with all might in the power of the Spirit.

And, Father, if there are some in our fellowship tonight who have never come to Christ, who have never been born again, who have not yet received the life principle, who have not been changed on the inside, who have not been washed from all their sin, who have not received a new spirit and a new inner person, a new life principle, who have not received the Holy Spirit to live in them, who are not Your special beloved and intimate possession, your firstfruits and the promise of a whole new universe, O Lord, may this be the night when they embrace Jesus Christ. May they believe in the One who died on the cross for them, shed His blood to pay the penalty for their sin, rose again the third day for their salvation. May they put their faith in the living Jesus Christ and may they experience that glorious sovereign mercy and grace and the joy of being firstfruits, living examples of the coming recreation. O God, help us who know You to live up to who we are and rightly represent to this world what is coming in the future. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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