

The Effects of the New Birth
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John 3:8
May 8, 2011

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 3. We are continuing our series of messages from the Gospel of John and from this third chapter this morning. Today we want to consider this question: How can you know if you've been born again? Is it possible to know if you've been born again, and how, if so, can you know? That is the subject of the verse that we're going to be looking at today, John 3:8. So we're going to be looking at an important doctrine, but one which has been woefully misunderstood in recent decades, and that is the Doctrine of the Assurance of Salvation. The evangelical church has largely, not entirely, but largely adopted a view of assurance which is completely unbiblical. They answer the question: "How can I know that I've been saved?" in an unbiblical way. I received counsel that way as a young Christian myself. "How can I know that I've been saved?" Usually there are two basic issues that people talk about. One is have you made a decision? Is there a time where you made a decision, where you prayed a prayer, where you asked God to save you? You asked Jesus to save you? You placed your faith in Him. Do you remember that? Did you write it down? Well, then you are saved. Just the very fact of knowing that you had that moment of decision, that's enough. In fact, there are many who counsel, I had a friend who shared this with me, he was trained to counsel at a Baptist church when people came forward after the service, in the invitation. In sharing the Gospel with them, and leading them to pray a prayer, this is what he was told to say: "Now that you've prayed that prayer, you've prayed that prayer in my presence, and I want you never to doubt your salvation or ever let anyone encourage you to doubt your salvation," as if the man, or any of the people that were counseled that way could look into the soul and see the reality of someone's salvation. That is decision-ism. Basically, the fact that you made the decision seals it.

Another approach is not so much have you had a decision, but have you had an experience? This relates more to the emotions of it. Were you moved at some time? Did you have an extraordinary spiritual experience where you felt conviction, you felt the need for Christ? If you had that experience, it doesn't matter how you are living today, go back and look at that experience. There are many people who have imbibed this unbiblical view of assurance because it really has predominated in the evangelical culture. The question is: What does the Bible say about assurance of salvation? What does God in His Word say? I mean, the good news is He says, "You can have assurance." There is an entire book of the

Bible written for that purpose, 1 John, which we are going to look at a little bit later.

The same author as the Gospel of John, the passage we're reading, writes another book, or a few other books. He writes Revelation, 1, 2, and 3 John. 1 John was written so that you may know, you who believe in the Son of God may know that you have life in His name. It's a biblical guide to assurance. But is it just the fact that I've made the decision, or the fact that I've had an experience, why is that not enough? Well, the Bible first of all, in 2 Corinthians 13:5, the apostle Paul encourages the church of Corinth. These are professing believers. These are people who have had an experience, made a decision. He says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves to see if you are in the household of faith." So for someone to tell someone never to examine yourself, never question, is completely unbiblical. The Bible says, "Examine yourself." Well how do you do that? Well, we're going to see.

This passage gives us the great window into that. Another passage, 2 Peter 1:9 says, "Make every effort to make your calling and election sure." Don't just rely on an experience or a decision, make sure that you're holding to Christ, and that's exactly what this entire passage is about. It is about the new birth, to be born again, or to be born, more correctly, from above. That is the focus of this passage.

So what is the new birth? We've looked in previous weeks, starting in Chapter 2, Verse 23. We saw the peril of shallow faith, and those verses it says that Jesus was doing many signs, and there were many, Verse 23 of Chapter 2, who believed in His name. They have seen, they've encountered, they've had an experience with Christ. They believed in His name, Verse 24, but Jesus on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them for He knew all men. He knew what was in man. We said before, they believed in Him, but He did not believe in them. The word entrust is the same Greek word. '*Pistuo*', it means He did not believe in their faith. He knew their hearts, He knew their faith was shallow. Though they had in some sense a decision or an experience, they did not really know Christ.

The Pilgrim's Progress is an outstanding book. If you haven't read it, I encourage you to get a copy of it sometime and read it, and work through it. It's a great devotional aid. If you're reading the Scripture, read the Scripture, and then read some of The Pilgrim's Progress too. When you read The Pilgrim's Progress if you look up all the footnotes, you are reading a lot of Bible. In fact, I like what Spurgeon said about John Bunyan, the author of The Pilgrim's Progress, He said, "When you prick Bunyan, he bleeds bibline." He bleeds the Bible. Did I say breeds

or bleeds? He bleeds bibline. The Bible is all throughout the book. One of the most influential books ever written, in fact next to the Bible it is the most printed book in the English language—The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. It recounts the story of one who sets out to follow Christ, leaves the City of Destruction, and it's a metaphor, an allegory, it's a picture of Christian's life as he leaves the City of Destruction and makes his way to the Celestial City, to Heaven. He encounters all kinds of obstacles that are great lessons in what the Bible calls 'The Christian Life', and to show us how to live the Christian life. One of the most haunting lines in the book, The Pilgrim's Progress, is the very last line of the book.

Pilgrim and his friend, Faithful, have made it over the river which is Death. Fearing that they were going to lose their way, they made it through all the obstacles, they're crossing over. Bunyan, of course, is acknowledging that salvation is all of grace, but grace, if Faith in Christ perseveres and keeps following Him. That's why Jesus said, "Follow Me." So they make it over the river, they are going to Celestial City, the doors behind him close and it says he looks back and he sees Ignorance, an acquaintance. Every one of the characters has a name like that—Faithful, Hopeful, Worldly, Wise, Ignorance. You can tell a lot, you know what the guy is going to be like from his name. "Watch out for him, Mr. Worldly Wise Man," you know? Ignorance is able to glide across the river on a ferry. He doesn't have to swim through it somehow, so his death is even easier. It looks like it's even more faithful, but then he gets across to the other side. He wants to come into the Celestial City and does not have the certificate. He doesn't have new birth. He doesn't have eternal life. It says that the angels, the shining ones, took him and opened the door in the side of the hill, right outside the Celestial City, and cast him into the hole. Christian says this, and this is the line:

Thus I saw that it was possible to go straight into hell right from the gates of Heaven.

To be so close but not to have and possess Christ and possess eternal life. That's what Jesus is talking about when He says in Matthew 7, "There will be many who say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name. Did we not cast out demons in Your name?' And I will say to them, 'Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness, I never knew you.'" You see? "I never knew you. I never gave myself to you. We never had a relationship. My Spirit has not caused you to be born again," as the text is going to say in a minute when we read it. Unless you are born again you cannot see the Kingdom of God. You cannot enter the Kingdom of God. We don't want to hear those words, the most awful words in the Scripture: "Depart from Me, I never knew you."

So God gives us a passage like this which encourages us to do some examination of our own souls. I want to read for the sake of context, let's begin reading at John 2:23, we'll read through Verse 8, and we're going to focus in on Verse 8 this morning. The question is: How can you know that you've been born again?

John 2:23-3:8 ~ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. 24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, 25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 Nicodemus *said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Let's pray together.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your Word that You have spoken to us. That You have not only inspired these words but You've also granted Your Spirit to illuminate, to enlighten our minds to understand. We ask and we trust in Your grace that You would help us to understand Your Word and to apply it to our hearts. We pray this for the glory of Your Son, and in His Name, amen.

What does the Bible say about assurance? How can you know that you've been born again, or as the text says, "Born from above," or "Born of the Spirit?" How can you know if you've been born of the Spirit? The passage unfolds in such a way that Jesus shows in Chapter 2, Verses 23-25, there is a kind of shallow faith. So

then Chapter 3:1-3, we looked at a few weeks ago, and we said that teaches the necessity of the new birth, that you must be born again to enter Heaven. Then Verses 4-7 we looked at last time, which showed the nature of the new birth. What exactly does it mean to be born again? We talked about the instantaneous and dramatic change that happens, that it's done entirely by God. It's instantaneous and dramatic, it's progressive in the way we see it sometimes in the fruits that grow, but it is entirely done by God, the Holy Spirit Himself is the One who affects it. It consists of a cleansing at the core of a man's being and it consists of the impartation of life. That's why it is called the new birth, to be born is life, is placed in the heart by God. It's an entirely supernatural work of God. That is what it means to be born again.

Now, that's what it means, but how do you know that you've got it? That's the question today. That's what He goes to next. Verse 8:

John 3:8 ~ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

He uses the analogy from nature, the wind. The wind is something that, strictly speaking, you cannot see. I mean, you can see a tornado apparently, right? But even that you are sort of seeing the dust or whatever. I don't know what's going on, the physics of that, but normally you don't see the wind.

Yesterday I was at a wedding, an outdoor wedding, and it was a great day to have an outdoor wedding. I was praising the Lord for the folks, the family members that had the wedding. I thought, "Man, it couldn't be more perfect." I mean, if we could control the thermostat, which we cannot, we couldn't have set it better than it was yesterday. A beautiful setting up in the mountains near Clarksville, great view off of a mountain, as we were going through the wedding. I remember as the minister is talking the wind was blowing through the trees. You know how you can hear it sometimes? It wasn't a strong wind, but it was a firm wind, a little bit of a rustle, and kind of a tiny, roar is not the right word, but that kind of thing, that rumble through the trees. The glory of God, and I thought of this passage. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. As quickly as it started it stopped. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. What He is saying is, "Just as the wind is mysterious to us, beyond our control, beyond our full comprehension, that is its work is, strictly speaking, invisible. You don't see wind. You only see its effects." So also, the

Spirit, and His work is mysterious to us, beyond our control, beyond our comprehension, invisible to us. You can't see it working, you only see its effects.

That is what He's saying, and I mentioned last week that the word for wind here in Verse 8 is actually the same word as it's translated over and over in this passage, Spirit, '*pneuma*'. It is the word for Spirit, and in Greek '*pneuma*' means '*spirit*', it can mean '*wind*', and it can mean '*breath*'. The same way as the Old Testament Hebrew word '*ruach*'. '*Spirit*', '*wind*', '*breath*'—one word. And so in the Greek, as they were looking at this, they would be reading. Think about this, they would be reading the same word. "The wind blows." It would say like if we did it in English, "The Spirit blows where it wishes," and you hear the sound of it. Now that would have been a bad translation because here obviously the focus is on '*pneuma*' as '*wind*'. But do you see the wordplay and how powerful and rich that would be if we had that in the same way? Well, that's what God is getting at. The Spirit is like the wind, and so in the same way that the wind is mysterious to us, yet very real, and you see its effects, so also the Spirit is just like that. It is mysterious to us but you see its effects.

So that we could say, maybe a couple of principles from the passage, that flow out of this passage. The first is: The evidence of the Spirit's work of regeneration is movement. Movement. I mean, the way I heard the sound, but I also, when I looked up yesterday, I saw the treetops moving, and what was making the sound was the movement, so that when the Spirit has regenerated someone, there is movement. That is what He's saying. There is change. The evidence of the Spirit's work of regeneration is first of all movement. You can't stay where you were. You don't remain unchanged. That is why this decision-ism of just, "I prayed a prayer, but I'm living like I did before," that's not the new birth. "Well, I had a very emotional experience and for a time I was different, but now I've gone back to exactly what I was like before." That is not the work of the Spirit. It moves.

In fact, the second principle, the evidence of the Spirit's work of regeneration first of all is movement. The second principle from this passage, Verse 8, would be the evidence of the Spirit's work is ongoing movement. This is seen when we understand the tenses of the verbs here in this passage. The verb '*blows*', '*The wind blows*' and actually it says in the Greek, '*pneuma pneo*', because the word for '*blow*' is the same word, it's the verb form. '*Pneuma pneo*', it's hard to say that. It's like pneumonia, I just say the '*n*'. Don't mess with the '*p*', right? I don't know why I do that. I'll just say, '*neuma*', is that okay with ya'll? Easier for someone born in the south to handle those things. But anyway, the wind blows, and the verb '*blows*' is a present tense verb. It is a Greek present tense verb which means

'continuous action'. Actually, five verbs which speak of the action of the Spirit in this verse are all Greek present tense. *'The wind blows where it wishes.'* *'Wishes'* is also Greek present. You don't know where it comes from or where it is going, Greek present. Those four verbs, and then the word for *'hear'*, *'You hear the sound of it.'* Greek present.

Now the present tense in Greek is not like the present tense in English. The present tense in English the emphasis is on the time of the action, present time. Past tense, something had happened. Present tense, what is happening now. Future tense, what will happen. There is some of that in the Greek present and stuff, but the emphasis in the Greek present is not on time, but kind of action, and the action is continuous, ongoing, perpetual. So what He's saying is: The wind blows but it doesn't just blow and quit, it keeps blowing, and it keeps blowing, and it keeps blowing. You keep hearing it, and you keep hearing it. It's coming from, and it's going to, and it keeps on doing that. So there is ongoing movement.

Now this doesn't mean necessarily continual, that once you get saved that there is just continual movement of the Spirit so that you see it the same way all the time. There are times where things tend to die down a little bit, but the idea I think here is of consistent movement. The Spirit of God, once He starts a work in you, as Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began a good work in you will complete it to the day of Christ Jesus." When He starts a work He continues working. He doesn't stop, and so when the Spirit causes someone to be born again, He continues to move in them.

So this really gets at that sense of the experience I was talking about earlier. You can have a very dramatic experience and not be genuinely saved if the Spirit doesn't continue to work in you. A great authority in this area is one from church history, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards is somebody who we often have to kind of cleanse our understanding of because when I was in high school, we read the sermon *'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'*, and the whole slant was pejorative and slamming Jonathan Edwards. I was a Christian and I still thought he must be kind of a mean-spirited guy, but when you read Edwards you find that the opposite is true. He was a man who loved God and loved people, who preached Christ and preached grace. Now that sermon, he was preaching the wrath of God to people who had already been preached to about grace. In fact, he preached that sermon in Enfield, Connecticut on July 8, 1741.

An interesting thing I read this week was that he wasn't supposed to preach that day. Tradition says that there was another man who was going to preach. Edwards had ridden the miles that he had to ride from Northampton, Massachusetts where he was pastor, to Enfield. He got there, their preacher was not able to preach for some reason. Edwards said, "I think I have my sermon I preached a few weeks back in my saddlebag." He walked out and got his saddlebag, got his notes out, came in and preached that message the second time, and had a dramatic difference in outcome because the wind really blew forcefully on that delivery of the message. When you read it, it is a wonderful message. It shows you about the horror of hell, but he's pleading with you to come to Christ, and how good of God to tell us. I mean, Jesus talked more about hell than He talked about Heaven. Why? Because He doesn't want us to go there. But Edwards, that sermon was preached in 1741, that was right at kind of the high point of the 'Great Awakening' which happened between 1734 and 1750 in America with the preaching of George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. Others as well, but those were the main figures in the 'Great Awakening', where thousands came to Christ. The Spirit of God was moving in such a powerful way.

George Whitefield would go preach, he was one of the other great preachers in the 'Great Awakening'. He would preach, I remember hearing an account, he preached in Philadelphia. I can't remember the exact numbers, but this is about right, approximately. There were like 12,000 people who lived in Philadelphia. He preached there at the University of Philadelphia to like 17,000 people. The whole city came out and people were coming from all over because Whitefield was going to be there. Such was the hunger for the things of the Spirit. Such was the work of the Holy Spirit on people. It was dramatic, and when Edwards preached the message I mentioned earlier, in Enfield, Connecticut, the one he got out of his saddlebags, he said that the Spirit of God moved so powerfully that people were groaning out. This was a congregation kind of like ours, a congregational church. We don't have a lot of activity in more reformed churches. We probably ought to have a little more '*amens*'. People don't get as upbeat. If you were at a charismatic church it would be a lot different, right? Edwards was preaching to a church more like us than a charismatic church, and the people started moaning and crying out to God to save them as he is preaching. He would have to stop sometimes and allow the murmuring, the shrieks, to die down. It said that some of the people felt the vision of hell was so real that they were picking up their feet off the floor lest they fall in. Many came afterwards, after the service was over, looking for comfort from the Gospel. "I want to be saved. I want to know Christ."

The dramatic impact of that sermon! Edwards saw that in his own town throughout New England, and throughout what was 'the colonies' at that time. But as the years passed, what happened was many of those who had been radically affected, emotionally overwhelmed, stopped following God, and Edwards the pastor had to deal with that. What happened? So he went back to the Word to see what the Word says. What is it that makes a person born again? And he differentiated between, I think this is exactly biblical, he differentiated between the operations of the Spirit that are experienced by all men, and the saving work of the Spirit which is experienced by those who are born again. That we can all experience the Spirit at work.

Remember I said earlier Jesus, what He's going to say, "Depart from Me you who work lawlessness." Remember what they said to Him? "Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name? Did we not cast out demons in Your name?" He's saying, "These people are saying, 'We had experience of the power of the Spirit. We felt His presence at times. We even preached for Him.'" And He will say, "Depart from Me you who work lawlessness, I never knew you. I didn't ever know you. You were not really loving Me. You didn't know Me."

So Edwards came to see that this difference between a common operation of the Spirit on someone's life that would lead to a temporary sort of fascination with the things of God, or the difference between that and an abiding change, was the difference between being born again and not born again. He wrote a book, a very helpful book, called A Treatise on the Religious Affections in 1746, about five years after he preached that sermon in Enfield, Connecticut, to help people evaluate their souls. What he said essentially was, when you look at all that the Bible says, remember I said it says, "Examine yourself," right? In here this passage says the Spirit makes an impact on you. What does it do? When you are born again there is impact, and what he did basically was he summarized the work of the Spirit.

When someone is born again a principle of new life is planted in them. He said that it radically alters the heart, which is what the Bible says doesn't it? He takes out the heart of stone and He gives you a heart of flesh. He puts His Spirit within you, and what happens is, at the very core of a man's being, there are new affections. He calls them '*holy affections*'. Now affections, Edward doesn't use like we use '*emotions*'. The affection is an inclination of the will. It is the movement of the heart towards something or away from something. What Edwards said was that the essential change is that the heart is redirected. Before it was going after sin, after the world, away from God, away from Christ. Now it does a 180 by the Spirit of

God. You move away from sin to God, away from the world to Christ. Though the flesh is still here, we still have a sin nature, be clear on that, we all have a sin nature, and you are going to continue to struggle with sin, but the question is: At the core, what is the direction of your life? For a person who is born again, there has been a new principle implanted that cannot be stopped.

The other metaphor of this passage uses John 3. We said it talked about the wind, but the dominant metaphor is the metaphor of being born, and as we saw a little bit ago, when someone's born, they move. They make noise. They jump. Life is movement. Life is growth, so that to be born again means to have a new life that will manifest itself over time, albeit differently. Some will see more growth and gray. Some will see more fruit. Jesus said, "Some 30, some 60, some 100 fold." Remember the parable of the sower? But the idea even in that parable is that all those who are truly saved will give some fruit, different measures but some fruit. This is really the teaching of the whole Bible.

What does the Bible say? How does it say you can know you're born again? One of the things Paul says in Galatians 5:16 is, "The deeds of the flesh are..." and then he lists them: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, etc... They're all these bad things, but the fruit of the Spirit is what? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When the Spirit is in your life, these things will begin to grow. So there's been this radical change. When you're born, there's new life in you, and that new life will grow. It will sometimes be like the waves coming in, the tide going in and out. And there can be times of genuine believers who are backsliding even walking away from God.

When we've had to do church discipline as hard as that is when we've had to do that, we always do it with a broken heart, praying for a brother. It hasn't happened that many times in our ministry, but we're trusting that that person may truly be God's, and the Lord is calling us to say, "Please turn from what you're doing. We love you. The Lord loves you. His Word is right. Trust Him," and we're confident that through the means like the Lord's using, like His staff, He's using His rod through other Christians. That's what happens when you and I love each other enough to say, "Hey Ty, I think you've got a problem. I don't know, but it seems like I've seen this. You seem to not be doing this the way you should." If I'm seeing that rightly, that's the Lord Jesus hitting me with His staff. David said, "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." It means You love me, Lord.

That's not how we normally see it, is it? When somebody hits you with a staff, that's not the first thing you think of. "Oh, I'm so glad I just got popped in the nose," but that's what we have to capture and realize it's the Lord loving me. Even if they're 80% wrong on what they're saying, they're probably saying it for the 20% that's right. But anyway, so we're confident the idea is the Lord uses those things to call back the believer, and the one who's truly born again will eventually come back because it's the nature of the one who's born again to exhibit the evidence of the work of the Spirit. The Spirit who is in him will not allow him to continue on forever, even though there can be periods of backsliding, and even though there can be periods of darkness.

Edwards points out in his book *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, that if you want to have assurance biblically, one of the things you need to realize is you can only have biblical assurance if you're walking with God. You may truly be saved and have no assurance because you're not walking with Him as you ought. He says just because you don't have these things doesn't mean that you're not saved. It just means that you don't have biblical grounds for being confident in your salvation. Do you hear the difference? We all have to examine ourselves and say, "Lord, where am I? Where's the movement of my soul?" But those who are born of God, that new life evidences itself. And I want us to focus in – I mentioned earlier 1 John. The author of the Gospel of John also writes 1 John, and that phrase born again, born from above, born of the Spirit, that verb γεννάω (gennaō) occurs 8 times in John 3. It's used 9 times in 1 John. So turn over to 1 John. It's a key word in this book. I want you first of all to look at 1 John 5:13. I mentioned this earlier but I want us to be clear on this.

1 John 5:13 ~ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Just like in his Gospel, he states his purpose. Remember in his Gospel in John 20:31 he says, "I've written these things so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and believing, have life in His Name." He wrote the Gospel to inspire saving faith. He writes 1 John to help those who have faith, to know that they have faith, and to help those who have faith, to know that they've been born again. That's the purpose of the book. I mentioned the word *born* occurs 9 times in the book. Over and over, he says, "Born of God, born of God," and by looking at that, what John is doing is he's giving tests. He's giving vital signs, as it were.

When you go through an emergency situation and you have some kind of great distress, a heart attack or a stroke, or you're in an accident, one of the things that the healthcare personnel, the medical personnel do is they check your vital signs. They check your respiratory rate, your blood pressure, your pulse, your temperature. These are things that as they take them, they are windows into the condition of your life. How are you doing? There are these vital signs. Well, what John does is he says, "Look, I want you to know that you have life. I want you to know that you have been born of the Spirit, and the way that I'm going to do that is to give you some vital signs," and that's essentially what he does in the book is he gives them checks. "Look at this." It's interesting how often these are labeled in the context of the phrase *born of God*. For those who are born of God, their respiratory rate, looks like this. For those who are born of God, their pulse looks like this.

I want to point out four points in the remaining time we have this morning, that this idea of being born of God that John deals with and wants us to understand is really about movement, picking up on that idea we talked about, movement away from and toward. There are four points, and they're all going to be about the fact that if you've been born of God, there's movement away from something towards something else.

1) Movement Away from the World to God:

The first one I want to look at is 1 John 5:4.

1 John 5:4 ~ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

Whoever is born of God overcomes the world. Now, what does that mean? It means that you overcome the love of the world. You no longer are captivated and in bondage to the world. Now, the world in John and the world in the New Testament means the system of values that predominate in our world, the things that the world loves, the things that the world treasures. A Christian who's been born of God moves away from treasuring the things that the world treasures, toward treasuring God and loving God, moves from loving the world toward loving God. In fact, he says that, if you turn back over the same theme, Chapter 2:15. The opposite of loving the world is loving God. It's a movement away from the world and movement toward God. Look at Verse 15:

1 John 2:15 ~ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

The idea is that if you've been born with this new spiritual life, there is this new set of desires, and there is this disharmony with the way of the world. Now, you've got to remember that we have a brain of flesh that's not redeemed yet, and you have patterns. You and I have patterns of living and patterns of thought that we have to work to overcome. We also have the world continuing to try to influence us. I mean, you live in the world every day, right? You drive down the street and you see billboards that encourage you to think the world's values. You hear things on the radio. You see things on TV. In conversations with people, the world is pressing in, but we're to be transformed and renewed. And if that Spirit of God is in us, there's the desire for that. There's this new desire, whereas before, the aversion of the unbeliever, the aversion of the person who's not been born again, they have an aversion for God, and a love of the world. That's how you and I were when we were born. When we were born of flesh, that is what was true of us.

The natural man (Romans 8:7) does not submit to the Law of God. He is at enmity with God, at war with God. He is not able to obey God. That's what it says. "No man seeks God, not even one." We did not want the Lord. We might have thought we wanted the comforts of God, but we didn't want the God of the Bible who wants to be Lord of our life. But we did want the world, and that was all we wanted before we were born again. So the movement was aversion to God, love of the world. When you're born again, that's changed. Now it's an aversion to the world, and a love of God, and yet it takes some time to see that change.

It's just like a seed that's planted in the ground. It germinates, but you don't see evidence of the germination for some time. It takes time for that new life to come above the surface, doesn't it? And then even when it does, you wonder, "Is that a weed?" Have you ever planted something like that the first time? I'm such a great gardener. We plant okra or whatever, and I'm pulling up the weeds. I think I'm pulling the weeds, but I'm pulling up the okra. "That's an okra plant," Patti's telling me. She's got a little more experience in gardening than I do. But we don't know. It takes time. How do you know for sure? Boy, you know when the okra starts growing on the okra plant. I didn't chop any down after that. "That's okra, right?"

Well, it takes time for that to happen, and so the movement away from the world to God is a progressive thing, but it means we have new affections, albeit small at first. It changes the way we see the world. It changes the way we see God. How do you see God? Do you love Him? Do you want to love Him more than you do now? I think in some sense, Satan is always working to stamp out new life, so he's fighting against us. Sin in our own nature, our old nature, is fighting against the love of God, and when we hear these things that I should love God and not love the world, when I should be more delighted to spend time with the Lord in prayer and in His Word than I am to watch a ballgame, that I should yearn to be in His presence more than I yearn to go fishing, or more than as a mother I yearn to spend time with my children. I should yearn to be with God, when we hear that and we know how far we fall short of that, is there in your heart a yearning for that to be true of you?

That's a good sign, but don't just settle with that. Keep stirring up that love. Keep seeking God, and that will grow if you're born of Him. And when you know that you're loving the things of the world too much and you feel their hold on you, are you willing to lay them down? Is your life such that you would lay anything down for God? That's what Jesus was asking the rich, young ruler, remember? Remember the rich, young ruler who was not saved? He came to Jesus with a good profession. "Good Teacher, what must I do to be saved?" He went to the right place to find salvation. He said, "You're good." Jesus said, "What do you mean? Why do you call Me good? No one's good but God." He's testing him. "Do you know who I am? Are you having faith?" And the young man didn't have a clue. Jesus says, "Well, have you kept the commandments?" He thinks he has, and that's a bad sign, and Jesus says, "Well, you lack one more thing. Go and sell all that you have." Actually, I can't remember if it's Mark or Luke that tells us Jesus looked at him and loved him, and said, "Go sell all that you have." Why was He doing that? He knew the man loved his treasure, he loved his money, he loved his wealth, and that was keeping him from loving God. And because of that, He said, "Go sell all that you have." It doesn't mean that every Christian is supposed to go do that, but it means that you should be willing to, though, if you love God. Movement away from the world, to God, that's the first sign of movement we have in 1 John.

2) Movement Away from Sin and to Righteousness:

1 John 3:9 ~ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Now, you remember I mentioned the Greek present, earlier, which means continuous action. If you have the King James, it says, “No one who is born of God sins, because His seed abides in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God.” The New American Standard and some of these newer translations update it by bringing the word ‘practices’ in, which gets at that Greek present. It doesn’t mean that you never sin if you’re born of God. No, it’s clear the Bible tells us we’re supposed to confess our sins, because God knows we’re going to sin, but He’s faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We’re going to sin and we’re going to struggle with sin. We’re going to have sins that even beset us, as Hebrews 12 says. But the idea is no one who is born of God continues on in sin, unbroken patterns of sin, that progress, that never get better.

See, there’s movement away from sin. That’s what he’s saying. If you’re born of God, you can’t stay in sin. Now, before you were born of God, all we did was sin, really. Even the times that we denied sin, even the times that people who don’t know the Lord don’t commit adultery, the reason they do is still a sinful reason. It’s not a Godward reason. It’s some other selfish reason. “I care about what people are going to think about me.” So it’s self love, but when we’re born of God, suddenly the movement happens that we used to love sin and hate God and hate righteousness, and now we turn from sin. We love righteousness and hate sin.

Now, that’s hard, because sometimes we feel like we love sin, don’t we? Isn’t it amazing how tough it is to put off sin? It is. It’s a war. If you look in the New Testament, it says it’s a fight. I mean, Paul says, “I buffet my body. I beat my body and make it my slave,” like he’s boxing himself. He’s fighting against his sin. We’re to put it to death. We’re to mortify the deeds of the body. We’re to nail our flesh to the cross, figuratively. Spiritually it’s a war, and yet what he’s saying here, though, is that the one who is born of God will keep fighting. He won’t be happy in his sin to stay in a state where God is not pleased, to continue in activities which do not please God. He cannot.

So the question we need to ask ourselves: Is there that movement away from sin in me, or is there just contentment? That’s the question. Is there a desire to be free? Is there a discord, a disharmony? There should be with the one who is saved, because Jesus came into the world (Verse 8 says) to destroy the works of the devil, and the works of the devil are sin. He has sinned from the beginning. He continually sins. Jesus came to destroy those works. So if you know Christ, if you love Christ, if you’ve received the Spirit of Christ, then you don’t want to do the works of the devil at the essence of your being, and you’ve got to work out your salvation with

fear and trembling. But is that the direction of your heart? And not only should there be movement away from sin, but to righteousness. In fact, you see this if you look back a few verses to 1 John 2:29. Look at this. Again the phrase born of Him or born of God:

1 John 2:29 ~ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

The believer not only wants to put off sin, but he wants to put on righteousness. He not only wants to put off anger and harsh words, but he wants to put on edifying words. That's what Paul's doing in Ephesians 4:22 and following. I encourage you to read that. He's talking about putting off the old man and putting on the new man. Put off anger. Put off stealing. Put off all of these other sins of the flesh, and put on the opposite, which is righteousness. The Christian not only wants to stop sinning, but he wants to put on righteousness. He wants to be like his Savior. In fact, he said that a little bit earlier in the book. In Chapter 2, Verse 6, he says:

1 John 2:6 ~ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

The Christian wants to be like Jesus, and that doesn't just mean saying no to sin, but it means saying yes to righteousness. And this is a powerful principle. If you're going to put off any sin, you need to put on the opposite. That's why Paul says, "Put off... Put on." You put off and you go back into neutral. Say, "I'm not going to get angry." I mean, think how effective that is. You're in a situation, "I'm not going get angry. I'm not going to yell. I'm not going to yell. I'm really not going to yell, because I'm tired of yelling. I don't want to yell. What?? What's going on?" You yell. You stay focused on the negative. It's like trying to miss something.

I was talking to somebody the other day who hit a tree (I think it was with a golf ball and he hit a tree). Oh yeah, we were playing golf. I was playing golf the other day, and the guy that I was playing golf with, where he's hitting a shot, there's one tree in the way, a thin tree without branches. It's just a straight-up tree, and he nails the tree, and he said, "All that area, and I hit the tree." Isn't it true that if he had tried to hit the tree, he never would have? He would still be out here today trying to hit the tree. Is it not true? But when you try to avoid something, you hit it. So staying negative, and saying, "I'm not going to do this and I'm not going to do that," is not the way. It starts there, and it's like taking off a coat. "Wait a minute. I'm putting on this old flesh again. This is a dirty, ugly garment."

That's the idea Paul's using in Ephesians 4. Take that off, but don't just leave it off, put on righteousness. Instead of, "I'm not going to get angry," rather than thinking about that, "Okay, Lord, I don't want to get angry. I know this is terrible. I shouldn't speak words that are negative and tearing down. You said, 'Let no unwholesome speech proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as it's good for edification, that it may give grace to those who hear according to the need of the moment.' Lord, what's the need of the moment that I can edify? Help me edify. I want to build up. Rather than tear down, I'm building up now." You see, I've turned to a positive focus, and what he's saying is the one who's born of God not only wants to put off the negative, but he wants to put on the positive. Is there that desire in you?

Now, we have to be trained in the Word. Some of the reasons that we're not manifesting the fruit that we ought is because we're not feeding the seed. I mean, if you plant a seed and you never water it, you're not going to have the same growth. It's alive but it's just over there looking at it, and man, that thing is barely alive, but if you water it, if you fertilize it, look at it grow, because the life is there. How do you water and fertilize the new life in you? It's the Word of God. That's how you were born again in the first place. If you're born again, you're born again not by perishable seed, but by imperishable, the living and abiding Word of God. You continue in the Word, and the Word feeds, and the Word feeds, and you're not conformed to the world but transformed by the renewing of your mind. That's how we grow. It's a movement away from the world to God. I'm moving away from sin and to righteousness.

3) It's a Movement Away from Serving Self Towards Sacrificial Love:

1 John 4:7 ~ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Love is the opposite of serving self. When you look at it biblically, we have such a misunderstanding of what love is. That's why God gave us 1 Corinthians 13, in all the New Testament, particularly 1 Corinthians 13 to redefine love. An outstanding book is *Maximum Impact* by Wayne Mack. He exposit 1 Corinthians 13. I highly recommend it. It totally turns right side up what love is, and we need that. But it's a movement. If you're born of God, then love is natural. It's something that has to be cultivated. Like I said, the plant has to be nourished, but it's there. I mean, you love your brothers because you're a brother. There's kinship. So that's what he's saying here.

“If you’re not going to love your brother whom you have seen, how can you say you love God whom you’ve not seen?” he goes on to say a little bit later in this passage. If you’ve been born of God, then you should love, and love is action and sacrifice. It doesn’t just mean I like to be with these people. It should mean that, but it should go beyond that. 1 John 3:16 says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us,” and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. You see, that’s love. It’s me laying my needs aside, and putting your needs above mine. That’s supernatural, isn’t it? We can’t do that in our own strength. It’s new life in us empowered by the Spirit, motivated by His Word, His truth. He goes on in Verse 17 to say:

1 John 3:17 ~ But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

It’s practical. We want to meet the needs of people around us. Is there movement? Are you moving out toward others? This is a very convicting thing. I find myself continually having to come back and ask myself that. That’s one of the reasons I’m enjoying reading the book by Dr. Mack. I need to understand what love is more. I want to, but it’s so easy to find ourselves thinking about self even when we think we’re doing kindness to others. We’ve got to have the power of the Spirit helping us. “Lord, love them through me. Help me lay down myself for them. Show me what love is,” and keep looking at Jesus. So movement away from the world to God, movement away from sin to righteousness, movement away from serving self toward sacrificial love, and finally:

4) Movement Away from Trusting in Self to Treasuring Christ:

This is the fourth and final vital sign.

1 John 5:1 ~ Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

If you love God, you’re going to love the child born of Him. You’re going to love Jesus. ***Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ...*** What he’s talking about is do you believe Jesus is the Christ? Christ means God’s Man, God’s anointed One, His Savior. Christ means Prophet, Priest, and King. Those three offices in the Old Testament all converge in the term Messiah, which we translate into Greek Χριστός, (Christós). Christ = Messiah directly. It means Anointed One. So to say that you believe Jesus is the Christ is to say you believe Jesus is the Messiah. He is God’s Prophet. He is God’s Priest. He is God’s King. He is my Prophet. He is my

Priest. He is my King. Is that true of you? Do you see Him as the One who speaks definitively for God? Is His Word truth to you? Do you love to hear His words? Do you treasure His Word above every other word, or do you bristle at His Word?

I mean, sometimes when He says things that are hard, we can struggle with it, but is it your heart's nature to submit? Do you even find yourself asking, "Lord, help me submit. I'm feeling rebellious"? Is that desire to submit there? Priest means He's the One who comes and brings man to God through His atonement, through His blood. Do you trust in His blood? Have you moved away from trusting in yourself to treasuring Christ as your Prophet, as your Priest? Do you know that because He died on the cross, He became sin, and the wrath of God was poured on Him in your place? Do you know that? Do you treasure that? And do you believe that He rose again from the dead to prove that He's a great Savior and that He's your King? He's your Lord? He's your Master? You want Him to be pre-eminent. You want Him to be exalted. Is that your heart?

There are times again where this isn't as fervent as it needs to be, but is it your desire for that to be the case? Are you moving away from trusting in self to treasuring Christ? John says these are four vital signs. If you want to know whether you've been born again, don't take the foolishness of man that says decisionism or emotional experience. Look, is the evidence of the Spirit in your life today? Is the wind blowing? Is there movement? Is there growth? Are you moving away from the world and sin and self love, and trusting in your own righteousness? Are you moving away from those things toward God, toward loving Him, seeing Him as Father and moving toward righteousness and love and treasuring His Son?

You may not see much movement today, and if you don't, don't rest until you see movement. You should not be comfortable if you just have had a decision and you think that you're saved. The Bible says make every effort to make your calling and election sure. How do you do that? Keep seeking Him in His Word. Seek Him more fervently. Pray and ask Him. If you don't know that you've been born again, go to Him knowing He's a God of mercy and grace. He's compassionate. I love what Jesus says in Luke 11:13.

Luke 11:13 ~ If you then, being wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

Ask Him and keep asking Him, and know that He's good. Stay in the Word. Stay in fellowship. Get more connected with other believers, and pray, and ask Him to search you like the Psalmist says.

Psalm 139:23-24

- 23** *Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;*
- 24** *And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way.*

Let's pray...

Our Father, we thank You for the truths of Your Word. We thank You that You have made salvation possible. You've made it available. It is free. It is by the grace of God. It's a gift that we receive. But Lord, we have to have your Spirit help us. Open our eyes. Give us ears to hear. For those that are not saved here today, Lord, give them eyes to see. Help them to cry out to You for Your Spirit and to not rest until You have answered their prayer. Help us all to be in the Word and in prayer, and let us see, Father, continual growth, more and more growth in grace, that we can then have biblical assurance and we can know that we have eternal life. Father, we thank You for making that eternal life available and granting assurance to us, and we also thank You for having the wisdom not to give it to us when we don't need it, when we're walking in sin. So, Lord, let that be something even that calls us back to You with a new fervency and intensity. We pray all these things in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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