

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 4: EFFECTUAL CALLING AND REGENERATION

The Spirit's Sovereign Work of New Birth

Lesson 12

The New Heart

What Regeneration Produces

The Radical Transformation of the Inner Person

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”

Key Texts: Ezekiel 36:25–27; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 5:5; 1 Corinthians 2:9–16; Galatians 5:22–23;

Romans 7:14–25

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

2 Corinthians 5:17, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Lesson 11 traced the new birth as an event, the instantaneous, monergistic, sovereign act of the Spirit by which He imparts new spiritual life to the dead sinner. This lesson traces what that event produces, the four great transformations that occur in the inner person of the one who has been born again: new desires, new understanding, new affections, and a new will. Where Lesson 11 asked “What is regeneration?” and “How does it happen?”, this lesson asks “What does regeneration actually do to the person who receives it?” The answer is, in a word: everything. Regeneration is not the repair of the old nature but the implantation of an entirely new one. It is not the polishing of a tarnished soul but the creation of a new creature. It is not the correction of a few spiritual deficiencies but the radical, center-outward transformation of the entire inner person, mind, heart, will, and affections, from a state of bondage to a state of freedom, from death to life, from darkness to light.

The governing text of this lesson is 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (NASB 1995). The verse is among the most comprehensive statements in the Pauline corpus about what the new birth produces, and its structure is worth noting carefully from the outset. The condition (“if anyone is in Christ”) establishes the sphere of the new creation: union with Christ, the reality that Unit 3 established as the organizing center of the entire doctrine of salvation. The declaration (“he is a new creature”) uses the Greek word *kainos*, which means not merely a second instance of the same kind of thing but something qualitatively new, of a different order entirely. The old things have “passed away”, the same verb used in Revelation 21:4 when the first creation passes away to make room for the new, and “new things have come”, the perfect tense indicating a completed arrival with present ongoing reality. The new creature is not a work in progress toward something that does not yet exist; the new creation has arrived, in the person of every believer who is in Christ.

It is equally important to hold this declaration in the tension that the New Testament itself maintains. The new creation has arrived, but it has not yet arrived in its fullness. The new heart is real, but it is not yet perfect. The new desires are genuinely new, but they coexist with the residual pulls of the old nature. The new understanding is genuinely enlightened, but it still sees in part and knows in part. The new will is genuinely freed, but it still encounters the resistance of the flesh. This is the “already and not yet” tension that characterizes the entire New Testament’s account of the Christian life: the new age has broken in definitively with the death and resurrection of Christ and with the Spirit’s regenerating work in the believer, but the old age has not yet fully passed away. The Christian life is therefore lived in the overlap of the two ages, in the tension between what is genuinely new and what has not yet been fully renewed, between the heart of flesh that God has given and the residual pull of the heart of stone that is being progressively overcome.

This lesson will proceed through seven sections: the foundational image of the new heart from Ezekiel 36 as the organizing metaphor for the entire discussion; the four specific transformations that regeneration produces (new desires, new understanding, new affections, new will); the new creation declaration of 2 Corinthians 5:17 and its theological significance; the already/not yet tension and its expression in the war between flesh and Spirit (Romans 7:14–25; Galatians 5:17); the Galatians 5 fruit of the Spirit as the positive description of what the new nature produces; the pastoral diagnostic, the evidence of regeneration is not sinless perfection but a changed direction; and the doxological conclusion that all of this is to produce the praise of the One who has done it.

A pastoral note before we begin. The doctrine of what regeneration produces is among the most practically useful in the entire study of soteriology, because it provides the language and the framework for Christians to understand their own experience, both the genuine spiritual goods they find in themselves that they know they did not produce, and the ongoing struggle with sin that makes those spiritual goods feel fragile and uncertain. The answer to the person who says, “I have believed in Christ, but I am not sure I have truly been born again because I still struggle so much with sin,” is precisely the doctrine of this lesson: the new heart is real, but it is not yet perfect; the new creation has arrived, but the old things have not yet finally passed away; and the war between flesh and Spirit, the very war that is the evidence of the new nature’s presence, not the proof of its absence, will continue until glorification. The struggling believer who runs toward God even while stumbling has received the new heart; the person who never runs and never stumbles because she never runs has not.

I. The Heart of Stone and the Heart of Flesh

The Organizing Image of the New Nature

A. *Ezekiel's Promise Revisited: Not Repair but Replacement*

Lesson 11 introduced Ezekiel 36:25–27 as the Old Testament's most direct anticipation of the New Covenant reality of regeneration. This lesson returns to Ezekiel's promise not as historical background but as the organizing image for the whole of what regeneration produces, because the specific metaphor Ezekiel employs, the removal of the heart of stone and the giving of the heart of flesh, is the most theologically precise and pastorally illuminating description of the nature of the change that regeneration effects in the inner person.

The image is surgical, not merely metaphorical. Ezekiel does not say that God will soften the heart of stone, reform the heart of stone, educate the heart of stone, or provide external motivations that will encourage the heart of stone to act more like a heart of flesh. He says that God will remove the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh in its place. The language is replacement, not renovation. This is the most important single truth about what regeneration produces: the new nature is not an improvement on the old nature but an entirely different nature that has been implanted in place of the old. The old nature, the Adamic nature with its systematic orientation away from God, its blindness to spiritual truth, its bondage to sin, its hardness against the claims of God's righteousness, is not gradually reformed into something better. It is replaced by a fundamentally different orientation, a fundamentally different set of desires, a fundamentally different capacity for spiritual perception, a fundamentally different relationship to God.

This distinction, replacement rather than renovation, has profound implications for how the Christian life is understood. The person who thinks regeneration is the renovation of the old nature will tend to evaluate her Christian life in terms of how much progress she has made in improving the qualities she already had: how much more patient she is than she used to be, how much less prone to certain sins than she was before conversion, how much further she has come in the moral and spiritual development she was always trying to achieve. These improvements may be real, but they are not the substance of what the new birth produces. The substance of what the new birth produces is a genuinely new nature, new desires, new understanding, new affections, new will, that were not present in any degree before regeneration and that cannot be produced in any degree by the improvement of the old nature. The new creation is qualitatively different from the old, not quantitatively superior.

The image of the heart of stone is equally instructive for understanding the condition from which regeneration delivers. A stone does not resist God's commands because it is obstinate; it fails to respond because it lacks the capacity for response. The heart of stone is not primarily a moral category (a rebellious will that could comply but chooses not to) but an ontological category (a nature that is constitutionally incapable of the love, trust, and obedience that God requires). This is why Ezekiel's promise is so astonishing: God does not merely command Israel to stop having hearts of stone and to start having hearts of flesh; He promises to do the transformation Himself, because Israel is constitutionally incapable of producing the change from within the resources of the stony nature. The command "repent" and "believe" and "love God" are genuine commands that Israel is genuinely responsible to obey; but they cannot obey them from within the resources of the heart of stone. The new heart is the divine

gift that makes the obedience possible, and its giving is the sovereign act of the God who does not merely command what He desires but creates what He commands.

B. The Four Dimensions of the New Heart

The new heart that God gives in regeneration can be described in terms of four major transformations that affect the whole of the inner person: a transformation of desires (the person now desires what was previously alien and repellent), a transformation of understanding (the person now perceives what was previously invisible and incomprehensible), a transformation of affections (the person now loves what was previously unknown and unattractive), and a transformation of the will (the person now freely chooses what was previously impossible and unwanted). Each of these four dimensions will be developed in the sections that follow. Together they constitute the comprehensive picture of what the Spirit's regenerating work does to the inner person, the full description of the new creature that Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

It is important to note that these four transformations, while analytically distinguishable, are not experienced as four separate events or as four separable dimensions of the spiritual life. They are facets of the single transformation of the whole person that the new birth effects. The new desires express the new affections; the new understanding enables the new will; the new will acts from within the new desires. They are not a checklist of spiritual attainments to be achieved sequentially; they are the integrated, organic description of a new inner life that has been planted whole and that grows whole. Just as the physical life of a human being includes capacities for perception, desire, emotion, and will that develop together as the person matures, so the spiritual life of the new creation includes all four dimensions from the beginning, developing and deepening together as the Spirit's sanctifying work proceeds.

II. New Desires

The Heart That Now Hungers for God

A. The Transformation of the Deepest Appetite

The most foundational transformation that regeneration produces in the inner person is the transformation of desire, the deepest, most basic level of the soul's motivational structure, the level at which the person's fundamental orientation toward life, self, God, and the world is established. Before regeneration, the unregenerate person does not desire God in the biblical sense of genuine spiritual appetite: "There is none who seeks for God" (Romans 3:11, NASB 1995). This is not a statement that unregenerate people have no religious instincts or no interest in spiritual things; it is a statement that the unregenerate person's spiritual interest is never the genuine hunger and thirst for the true and living God that characterizes the regenerate soul. What the unregenerate person wants from religion is typically safety, comfort, meaning, or social belonging, the benefits that a god can provide, rather than the God who provides them. The heart of stone does not desire God Himself.

After regeneration, the desire structure of the inner person is fundamentally changed. Psalm 42:1–2, which the regenerate believer receives as the voice of her own new nature, declares: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (NASB 1995). The desire is for God Himself, not for what God can provide, not for the feeling of

being religious, not for the social and psychological benefits of Christian community, but for the living God as He is in Himself, as He has revealed Himself in His Word, as He is encountered in prayer and worship and the reading of Scripture. This desire was not present in the unregenerate soul; it cannot be produced by any effort of the unregenerate will; it is the sign and the fruit of the new heart that the Spirit has implanted.

The new desire for God is inseparably connected to a new desire for holiness, for righteousness, for conformity to the character of the God who has become the object of the regenerate soul's deepest love. The Beatitudes of Matthew 5:6 declare: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (NASB 1995). The hunger and thirst for righteousness is not merely the desire to avoid the consequences of sin; it is the positive, active appetite for the righteousness that reflects the character of God, the righteousness that the new creature both possesses in Christ (justification) and desires to embody in her own character and conduct (sanctification). This desire is the distinguishing mark of the regenerate: not the achievement of righteousness but the genuine, Spirit-given appetite for it.

New desires also manifest as a new desire for the Word of God. Peter writes to the newly born-again believers: "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2, NASB 1995). The longing for the Word that Peter describes is the natural appetite of the new nature for the nourishment that sustains it, as natural and as urgent as the newborn's hunger for milk. The unregenerate person may find the Bible interesting, informative, or culturally significant; only the regenerate person finds it the bread that the soul cannot live without. The new desire for the Word is itself one of the evidences of regeneration, the sign of a new life that has been born and is already reaching for the food it needs to grow.

New desires also include a new desire for prayer, for communion with the God who has become the heart's deepest object of love. Before regeneration, prayer is either absent or a religious duty performed without genuine appetite; after regeneration, prayer becomes the expression of the soul's new relationship with the Father, the natural reaching of the child toward the One who gave it life. Romans 8:15–16 describes the Spirit of adoption producing in the believer the cry of "Abba, Father", the most intimate address of the redeemed child to the Heavenly Father. This cry is not produced by religious discipline; it is the spontaneous expression of the new nature that the Spirit has planted, which naturally and inevitably reaches toward the God it now knows as Father.

B. New Desires for Obedience

The regenerate person also receives, in the new heart, a new desire for obedience to the commands of God, not the reluctant, external compliance of a person who obeys because she fears punishment, but the genuine, Spirit-given delight in the law of the Lord that Psalm 1:2 describes: "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night" (NASB 1995). This is the same transformation described in Jeremiah 31:33, where the New Covenant promise is precisely the internalization of the law: "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it." The law written on the heart is the law desired and delighted in, not merely externally imposed and reluctantly obeyed. The regenerate person obeys God's commands not primarily because she fears punishment (though she fears God in the appropriate sense of reverent awe) but because the commands express the character of the God she loves and the life she genuinely desires to live.

First John 5:3 states this with characteristic precision: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome" (NASB 1995). The commands are not burdensome, not because they are easy (they are not), but because the regenerate person's new desires are

oriented toward the obedience the commands require. A command to do what you genuinely desire to do is not a burden; it is a description of the life you already want to live. This does not mean the regenerate believer experiences no struggle in obeying God's commands, the ongoing war between flesh and Spirit means the struggle is real and persistent. But the fundamental orientation of the new heart is toward obedience, and the person who says "I want to obey but I find it hard" is in a fundamentally different spiritual condition from the person who says "I have no desire to obey."

III. New Understanding

The Mind Illuminated by the Spirit

A. The Spiritual Blindness of the Unregenerate

The second dimension of the new heart is a new understanding, a transformed capacity for spiritual perception that allows the regenerate person to see and receive and delight in spiritual truth that was previously invisible, incomprehensible, or irrelevant. This transformation is the direct reversal of the spiritual blindness that characterizes the unregenerate state. Paul describes that blindness in 1 Corinthians 2:14: "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (NASB 1995). The natural man's inability to understand the things of the Spirit is not primarily an intellectual limitation; it is a spiritual one. He does not lack the cognitive capacity to understand the words of Scripture; he lacks the spiritual capacity to receive them as the living Word of God rather than as the interesting but ultimately uninspiring product of ancient religious imagination.

The blindness of the unregenerate is described in the most comprehensive terms in 2 Corinthians 4:3–6: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (vv. 3–4, NASB 1995). The blindness is active, the god of this world has blinded the minds, and it is specifically directed at the gospel's revelation of the glory of Christ. The unregenerate person cannot see the glory, not because the glory is not there, not because the gospel does not describe it accurately, but because the spiritual eyes that perceive it have been darkened by the enemy of souls.

B. The Spirit's Illuminating Work, 1 Corinthians 2:9–16

First Corinthians 2:9–16 provides the most extended Pauline account of the Spirit's illuminating work in the regenerate mind, and it deserves careful attention. "But just as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.' For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God" (vv. 9–12, NASB 1995).

The argument is a fortiori from the analogy of human self-knowledge: just as a person's thoughts are inaccessible to anyone who does not share the person's own inner life, so the thoughts of God are inaccessible to any mind that does not participate in the Spirit of God. The natural mind, the mind that does not have the Spirit of God,

cannot access the depths of God any more than a stranger can read your thoughts. The regenerate mind, the mind that has received the Spirit of God, has been given, through the Spirit's illuminating work, access to "the things freely given to us by God." The language of free giving is important: the illumination the Spirit provides is not the result of the regenerate person's intellectual effort or spiritual discipline; it is a gift, freely given, to those who have received the Spirit.

Verses 14–16 make the contrast between the natural and the spiritual mind explicit: "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that He will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ" (NASB 1995). The spiritual person, the one who has the Spirit of God, "appraises all things" in a way that the natural person cannot. The crowning declaration of verse 16, "we have the mind of Christ", is the most astonishing single statement of what the Spirit's illuminating work produces: a capacity for understanding that participates in the mind of Christ Himself, not by absorption into the divine (as some mystical traditions have claimed) but by the Spirit's mediation of Christ's wisdom to the regenerate mind.

The practical expression of the regenerate mind's new understanding is the experience that every genuinely born-again person recognizes: the Scripture that was previously opaque has become luminous; the gospel that was previously irrelevant has become the most urgent and most personally significant message the person has ever received; the hymns and psalms and prayers that previously seemed like the empty religious exercises of other people have become the expression of the person's own deepest spiritual experience. This is not primarily the product of better education, more careful reading, or more intellectually sophisticated engagement with the Christian tradition, though those things are valuable. It is the product of the Spirit's illuminating work in the regenerate mind, giving it eyes to see the glory that was always there but previously invisible.

Second Corinthians 4:6 provides the most luminous description of this transformation: "God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (NASB 1995). The illumination of the regenerate mind is nothing less than the creative act of God, the same God who created light in the darkness of the formless void has now created light in the darkness of the unregenerate mind. The new understanding is not an improvement of the old intellectual capacity; it is a new creation, as radical as the original creation of light out of darkness, and its specific content is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ, the vision of divine glory mediated through the person of Jesus that is the highest object of the redeemed mind's sight.

IV. New Affections

The Heart That Now Loves What God Loves

A. The Love of God Poured Out, Romans 5:5

The third dimension of the new heart is a transformation of affections, the emotional, relational, and evaluative dispositions of the inner person. Where the unregenerate person is described as "a lover of self, a lover of money... a lover of pleasure rather than a lover of God" (2 Timothy 3:2, 4, NASB 1995), the regenerate person has received, through the Spirit's work in regeneration, a fundamentally different set of loves. The most foundational

description of this transformation is Romans 5:5: “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (NASB 1995). The love of God poured out in the heart is the regenerate person’s primary new affection, the foundational love that reshapes and reorders every other love in the new creature’s inner life.

The phrase “poured out” (Greek: *ekkekhtai*, perfect passive) is language of abundance and completeness: not a trickle or a gradual seeping but a generous, overflowing outpouring of the divine love into the heart. The love of God in Romans 5:5 is most naturally understood as the love that God has for us, the objective divine love that is the ground of our salvation, being communicated and made real in the believer’s conscious experience through the Spirit’s work. The Spirit takes the love that is objectively ours by virtue of election and adoption and makes it subjectively real in the heart of the regenerate person, so that the person knows herself to be loved by God with the specific, personal, undeserved love that is the gospel’s most fundamental announcement.

This poured-out love of God is the source of the regenerate person’s love for God in return. First John 4:19 provides the clear statement of the derivation: “We love, because He first loved us” (NASB 1995). The new affection of love for God is not something the regenerate person generates from within her own emotional resources; it is the natural response of a heart that has been filled with the knowledge of God’s prior love for it. The love flows in one direction (from God to the believer) and produces a response in the opposite direction (from the believer back to God), but the originating love, the cause of the whole dynamic, is always God’s. This is why the new affection of love for God is as much a fruit of the new birth as any other evidence of regeneration: the person who genuinely loves God does so because the Spirit has first filled her with the love of God, not because she has independently cultivated that love from within the resources of the old nature.

B. New Love for the Brethren, the Word, and the World

The new affection of love for God expands outward in three directions that together constitute the full relational transformation of the regenerate inner life: love for the brethren, love for the Word, and a new relationship to the world. The love for the brethren was established in Lesson 9 as one of the four Johannine tests of regeneration, and it bears repetition here as one of the four transformations of the new heart. First John 3:14’s declaration, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren”, establishes the love for fellow believers as the clearest interpersonal evidence of the new birth. This love is genuinely supernatural: it crosses the natural boundaries of affinity and preference, embracing as family those with whom the regenerate person may have little else in common. It is not warmth toward agreeable people; it is the Spirit-given recognition of and love for the same Spirit in others.

The new love for the Word of God is the natural affective expression of the new understanding that the Spirit has given. The person who has received the Spirit’s illumination does not merely understand the Word differently; she loves it differently. Psalm 119:97, “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (NASB 1995), is the voice of the regenerate heart in its most characteristic expression. The law that is loved here is not a set of external rules being grudgingly acknowledged as legitimate; it is the expression of the character of the God who is loved, and the delight in it is inseparable from the delight in Him. The unregenerate person may find the Bible culturally interesting or morally instructive; only the regenerate person finds it the living Word of the living God whose reading and study and memorization and meditation are the most natural and most satisfying exercises of the new life.

The regenerate person's relationship to the world is also transformed by the new affections. The world, the system of values, priorities, and relationships organized around the rejection of God, loses its ultimate attractiveness for the person who has received the new heart. This does not mean that the regenerate person experiences no temptation from the world; the ongoing war between flesh and Spirit ensures that worldly attractions retain their pull. But the ultimate, governing love of the regenerate person has been redirected from the world to God, and the person who previously found her deepest satisfaction in the pleasures and achievements of this age now finds a deeper satisfaction, however intermittently and imperfectly it is experienced, in the God who is the new heart's deepest love. First John 2:15 articulates the incompatibility: "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." The love of the Father and the love of the world are not two co-existing loves; they are competing ultimate loves, and the new heart, whose ultimate love is the Father, finds itself in a new and growing conflict with the world's pull on the old nature's residual loves.

V. New Will

The Enslaved Will Freed to Choose God

A. *The Bondage of the Unregenerate Will*

The fourth and in some ways most contested dimension of the new heart is the transformation of the will. The doctrine of the bondage of the will, the teaching that the unregenerate will is enslaved to sin and constitutionally incapable of freely choosing God and the good, is one of the most foundational and most consistently resisted claims of the Reformed tradition. The resistance comes from multiple directions: from the Arminian tradition's insistence on libertarian free will as a necessary condition of genuine moral responsibility, from common intuition about the normal experience of human choice, and from a culture that treats freedom of the will as one of its most sacred assumptions about human dignity.

The Reformed account of the will's bondage before regeneration is not the same as determinism or fatalism. The unregenerate person genuinely wills, she makes real choices, is genuinely responsible for those choices, and cannot excuse her moral failures by reference to her bondage. The bondage is not the bondage of external coercion (someone forcing her against her genuine desires) but the bondage of internal corruption: the unregenerate will always chooses according to the deepest desires of the unregenerate nature, and those desires are systematically oriented away from God and toward the self. The will is free in the compatibilist sense (acting according to one's own genuine desires without external compulsion) but enslaved in the moral sense (those genuine desires are oriented toward sin and away from God, so the will's "free" choices are always, apart from grace, choices that deepen the bondage rather than escaping it).

Paul's account of the will's bondage in Romans 6:17–20 captures the double paradox of willing enslavement: "But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (NASB 1995). The pre-conversion slaves of sin were genuinely slaves, their choices were genuinely their own, but their genuine choices were genuinely enslaved to sin. The post-conversion slaves of righteousness are equally genuinely their own persons, but their genuine choices are now freely (and genuinely willingly) oriented toward righteousness, because the regenerating work of the Spirit has transformed the desires from which the choices flow.

B. The Liberation of the Will in Regeneration

What regeneration does to the will is precisely what the Ezekiel promise implies and what the Westminster Confession describes: it renews the will and by God's almighty power determines it to that which is good, "yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace" (WCF X.1). The regenerated will is not a will that has been taken over by an external divine power and operated like a machine; it is a will whose deepest desires have been transformed by the Spirit, so that the person now freely, genuinely, and gladly chooses what her new nature desires, and what her new nature desires is oriented toward God, toward righteousness, toward holiness, toward obedience.

Philippians 2:12–13 provides the most precise Pauline statement of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human willing in the regenerate life: "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (NASB 1995). God is at work in the believer both to will (at the level of desire and orientation) and to work (at the level of action and performance). The human responsibility ("work out your salvation") is real and genuine; the divine enabling ("it is God who is at work in you") is equally real and equally genuine. The two do not compete; the divine working at the level of willing is what makes the genuine human working possible. This is the regenerate will in its full theological description: a will that is genuinely the person's own, genuinely free in the compatibilist sense, and genuinely oriented toward God, because God is at work within it at the very level of desire, making it willing what He desires it to will.

The transformation of the will in regeneration is also the ground of the genuine freedom that the New Testament consistently attributes to the children of God. John 8:32, 36: "and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"; "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." The freedom the Son gives is not freedom from external constraint; the regenerate believer still lives in a world that constrains, in a body that is prone to weakness, and in a spiritual war that is genuinely demanding. The freedom is the freedom of the will itself, the liberation from the tyranny of the old nature's desires, the release of the will from its enslaved orientation toward self and sin, the gift of the new desires that make genuine, free, glad, and willing obedience to God possible for the first time. This is the liberty of the children of God (Romans 8:21), not freedom from God's claim on their lives, but freedom to respond to that claim from the deepest, most authentic level of their new nature's desire.

VI. The New Creation and the Already / Not Yet

The War Between Flesh and Spirit

A. 2 Corinthians 5:17, The Declaration and Its Tension

Second Corinthians 5:17's declaration, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (NASB 1995), is one of the most sweeping and comprehensive declarations in the New Testament, and it must be received in its full weight without being either softened into a future hope or misread as a claim to present completion. The new creation has arrived. The old things have passed away, not "some old things," not "many old things," but "old things" in a sweeping characterization of the entire old order that characterized the person before Christ. New things have come, again, comprehensively, the whole new order

of the person's life in Christ. The declaration is not aspirational; it is indicative. It describes what is already true of every person who is genuinely in Christ.

And yet the same Paul who makes this sweeping declaration also writes Romans 7:14–25 and Galatians 5:17, both of which describe the regenerate believer's ongoing struggle with the flesh with an intensity and a realism that would be inexplicable if 2 Corinthians 5:17 were describing a completed and unambiguous present reality. "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to each other, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17, NASB 1995). The war between flesh and Spirit is a present, ongoing, genuinely difficult reality in the Christian life, and Paul describes it not as an anomaly or a failure of genuine regeneration but as the normal experience of the genuinely regenerate.

The resolution of this apparent tension is the already/not yet framework that characterizes the New Testament's entire eschatological account. The new creation has arrived in the Spirit's regenerating work, the new nature is real, the new desires are genuine, the new understanding is actual, the new affections are present. But the old creation has not yet finally passed away, the flesh, the residual pull of the Adamic nature with its sinful desires and its systematic orientation away from God, persists in the body and continues to wage war against the new nature until the body's redemption at the resurrection. The Christian life is therefore lived in the tension between two genuinely present realities: the new creation that the Spirit has established and the old creation that the flesh perpetuates. Neither is illusory; both are real; and the war between them is the evidence of a genuine spiritual battlefield, not the sign of a defective regeneration.

The crucial pastoral diagnostic emerges from this tension: the evidence of regeneration is not the absence of the war but the presence of the war. The person who never struggles with sin because she has no new nature resisting it is not regenerate; the person who struggles with sin because the new nature is genuinely fighting back against the flesh is. The regenerate person does not declare a truce with sin and find an accommodation that allows both natures to coexist comfortably; she is at war, because the new nature that the Spirit has planted cannot coexist with the flesh without conflict. And the grief over sin, the renewed pursuit of holiness, the persistent return to God after every failure, these are not evidence of a struggling regeneration; they are the marks of a genuine one.

B. Romans 7:14–25 and the Regenerate Struggle

Romans 7:14–25 has been the subject of extensive debate about whether it describes the experience of a regenerate or an unregenerate person, and the debate carries significant implications for the doctrine of regeneration and its fruits. The Reformed tradition has, with broad consensus, identified the subject of Romans 7:14–25 as the regenerate believer in her ongoing struggle with indwelling sin, a reading confirmed by the specific character of the struggle described: "For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate" (v. 15, NASB 1995). The person who does the very thing she hates has a genuine hatred for sin, a hatred that is only possible if the new nature is present. The unregenerate person does not hate her sin; she may regret its consequences, but she does not hate it at the level of deep, spiritual abhorrence that Romans 7:15 describes.

Verse 22–23 intensifies the description: "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members." The "joyfully concurring" of the inner man with the law of God is a thoroughly regenerate expression: only the person who has the new heart can joyfully concur with God's law at

the level of the inner person. The war is between the regenerate inner person (which joyfully concurs with God's law) and the law of sin in the members of the body (the residual pull of the flesh). Paul's distress in verse 24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?", is the distress of a regenerate person who knows exactly what she desires (freedom from the body of sin) and experiences with honest intensity how far short of that freedom she falls in the present age. And the answer of verse 25, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!", is the doxological resolution that only the regenerate person can offer, because only the regenerate person has a Lord through whom thanks can be offered for the victory that is coming.

VII. The Fruit of the Spirit and the Pastoral Diagnostic

The New Nature's Positive Profile and the Changed Direction

A. Galatians 5:22–23, The Positive Portrait of the New Nature

The most positive and comprehensive description of the new nature's fruit in Paul's letters is the well-known catalogue of Galatians 5:22–23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (NASB 1995). The nine qualities named are not nine separate spiritual achievements to be cultivated individually; they are the organic fruit of a single new life, produced by the Spirit's indwelling work in the regenerate heart in the same way that a single tree produces a full array of its characteristic fruit. The singular "fruit" (not the plural "fruits") is theologically significant: the nine qualities are the unified expression of the single new life, not a checklist of discrete spiritual exercises.

Each quality in the catalogue corresponds to a dimension of the new nature's transformation. Love (agapē) is the foundational new affection that the Spirit has poured out in the heart (Romans 5:5) and that is oriented first toward God and then, by necessary extension, toward all who bear His image. Joy (chara) is the deep, settled, Spirit-given gladness that transcends circumstances and is grounded in the knowledge of God's goodness and the certainty of the gospel's promises, the same joy that is described in 1 Peter 1:8 as "joy inexpressible and full of glory." Peace (eirēnē) is the wholeness and rightness of relationship, with God through justification, with others through the Spirit's binding work in the body of Christ, and with the self through the conscience's rest in the gospel. Patience (makrothymia), kindness (chrēstotēs), and goodness (agathōsyno) are the social expressions of the new nature's orientation toward others, the long-suffering endurance of difficult people and circumstances, the practical kindness that looks for ways to serve, and the moral goodness that reflects the character of the God who is good.

Faithfulness (pistis), gentleness (prautes), and self-control (egkrateia) complete the portrait of the new nature in its internal and behavioral dimensions. Faithfulness describes the reliability and trustworthiness of the regenerate person's commitments, the consistency that flows from a new will genuinely oriented toward the God who is faithful. Gentleness, the quality of the meek who will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5), is the fruit of a new nature that has been delivered from the defensive self-assertion of the old nature and is free to be strong without being aggressive, confident without being contemptuous. And self-control, perhaps the most obviously countercultural item in the list given the cultural context of first-century Corinth and the perennial temptations of every age, is the fruit of the new will's genuine freedom from the tyranny of the old nature's demands.

Paul's closing comment, "against such things there is no law", is the most compressed statement of the relationship between regeneration, the fruit of the Spirit, and the law. The law was given because of transgressions (Galatians 3:19); where the Spirit's fruit is present in its fullness, the law's corrective function has been superseded by the internal reality of the transformed life that the law was designed to command from outside. The person whose life is genuinely characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control is not breaking any law by living that way; she is exceeding what any external law could require or produce. This is the end to which regeneration is directed: not the production of persons who comply with external commands from fear of punishment, but the creation of persons whose new nature produces, from within, the life that the law could only command from without.

B. The Pastoral Diagnostic: Changed Direction, Not Sinless Perfection

The practical pastoral use of all that this lesson has established is crystallized in the principle that the lesson's outline names explicitly: the evidence of regeneration is not sinless perfection but a changed direction. The test of the new birth is not whether the person has stopped sinning, the New Testament nowhere makes that claim, and 1 John 1:8 explicitly denies it: "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." The test is whether the overall direction of the person's life has changed, whether the heart that formerly ran from God now runs toward Him, even if it stumbles; whether the will that formerly found God's commands burdensome now finds them the expression of the life it genuinely desires to live; whether the mind that formerly found the gospel foolishness now finds it the wisdom of God; whether the affections that formerly were organized around the self and the world are now increasingly organized around God and His kingdom.

This pastoral diagnostic has two directions of application. For the anxious believer who doubts her regeneration because of the persistence and severity of her ongoing struggle with sin, the diagnostic is a word of carefully nuanced comfort: the war itself is the evidence. The person who is genuinely grieved by her sin, who returns to God in repentance, who desires holiness even when she fails to attain it, who fights the flesh even when the flesh wins the immediate engagement, that person shows the signs of the new nature, not its absence. The new heart hates sin; the old heart does not. The presence of the hatred, the grief, the longing for holiness, and the pattern of repentant return is the evidence of the new heart's reality, even when the sin is simultaneously real and persistent.

For the complacent professor who claims the new birth but shows no evidences of the new nature's fruits, no new desires, no new understanding, no new affections, no new will, no war between flesh and Spirit because there is no Spirit resisting the flesh, the diagnostic is a word of searching warning. Not sinless perfection, but genuinely changed direction. Not the absence of struggle, but the presence of struggle. Not the perfect fruit of Galatians 5:22–23 in its final, glorified fullness, but the genuine, Spirit-produced, directional orientation toward that fruit that is the mark of every genuinely regenerate soul. The person who finds in her heart no love for God, no desire for the Word, no love for the brethren, no grief over sin, and no genuine desire for holiness has been given by this lesson not reassurance but a call to examine whether the new birth has genuinely occurred, and, if not, to seek the Spirit's sovereign, life-giving work with the urgency that the necessity of the new birth demands.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Galatians 5:22–24, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

New Creation	Paul's comprehensive term for the regenerate believer's transformed existence in Christ: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NASB 1995). The Greek <i>kainos</i> (new) denotes qualitative newness, a different order of existence, not merely a second instance of the same kind. The new creation is not the repair of the old nature but the implantation of an entirely new one, involving new desires, new understanding, new affections, and a new will. The old things have passed away comprehensively; the new things have arrived permanently. The new creation is already real (present indicative) but not yet complete (awaiting glorification).
Bondage of the Will	The teaching that the unregenerate will, while genuinely the person's own and genuinely free in the compatibilist sense (acting according to one's own desires without external coercion), is enslaved in the moral sense: its deepest desires are systematically oriented away from God and toward the self and sin, so that it never freely chooses God or genuine righteousness apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit. The bondage is internal (the corruption of the desires from which choices flow), not external (compulsion against the person's genuine will). Luther's <i>De Servo Arbitrio</i> (On the Bondage of the Will, 1525) is the foundational Reformed treatment. The bondage is not a denial of moral responsibility but the condition from which regeneration liberates the will.
Spiritual Illumination	The Spirit's work in the regenerate mind by which it is enabled to receive, perceive, and delight in spiritual truth that was previously invisible, incomprehensible, or irrelevant to the unregenerate mind. Grounded in 1 Corinthians 2:9–16 ("we have the mind of Christ"), 2 Corinthians 4:6 (the light of the knowledge of God's glory shone in the heart), and 1 John 2:27 (the anointing that teaches). Spiritual illumination is not identical with the inspiration of Scripture (which is the Spirit's work through the original authors) but its complement: the Spirit's ongoing work in the regenerate reader to make the inspired text spiritually apprehended rather than merely intellectually engaged.
Fruit of the Spirit	The nine qualities of Galatians 5:22–23 that are produced organically in the life of the regenerate believer by the Spirit's indwelling work: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The singular "fruit" (not "fruits") indicates these are the unified expression of a single new life, not nine separate achievements. They are produced by the Spirit's work, not manufactured by the believer's effort, though the believer's genuine, Spirit-empowered effort is the necessary human dimension of their cultivation. Contrasted with the "deeds of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19–21), the characteristic expressions of the old nature.
Flesh (Sarx)	In Paul's theological vocabulary, the residual disposition of the Adamic nature that persists in the regenerate believer even after the new birth and wages war against the new nature of the Spirit. Not identical with the physical body (though the body is the primary location of the flesh's resistance), nor with the whole of the unregenerate person (from which the flesh is distinguished as a component). The flesh is the dimension of the believer's existence that remains oriented toward sin, self, and the world, and that continues to pull against the Spirit's new direction in the believer's life until the body's redemption at the resurrection. The war between flesh and Spirit (Galatians 5:17; Romans 7:14–25) is the normal, expected, genuinely difficult experience of the regenerate believer.
Mortification	The ongoing, Spirit-empowered work of putting to death the deeds of the flesh, the active, deliberate, Spirit-dependent effort of the regenerate believer to weaken and overcome the residual power of sin in the body and soul. Grounded in Romans 8:13 ("if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live"), Colossians 3:5 ("consider the members of your earthly body as dead"), and Galatians 5:24 ("those who belong to Christ Jesus have

	crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”). Mortification is the human side of the Spirit’s sanctifying work: the believer genuinely wills and acts to put sin to death; the Spirit empowers and accomplishes that mortification through the believer’s genuine effort.
Vivification	The ongoing, Spirit-empowered work of growing in the positive graces of the new nature, the active, Spirit-dependent cultivation of the new desires, new understanding, new affections, and new will that the new birth has implanted. The complement of mortification: while mortification puts the old to death, vivification enlivens the new. Both together constitute the full dynamic of sanctification in the Reformed account. Vivification is grounded in the new creation’s positive reality: the new nature is not merely the absence of the old but the presence of a genuinely new life that seeks expression and growth in love, holiness, obedience, and conformity to Christ.
Common Graces of the Unregenerate	The undeserved, non-saving gifts of God to all human beings, including the unregenerate, that do not constitute or flow from the new birth: natural moral conscience, the restraint of sin through law and culture, natural affections and virtues, intellectual gifts, aesthetic sensibilities, and the sincere recognition of moral obligation. These are distinguished from the spiritual gifts of the new heart (new desires for God, new understanding of spiritual truth, etc.) which are available only to the regenerate. The existence of common graces in the unregenerate explains why they can exhibit genuine moral qualities, genuine aesthetic sensibility, and genuine intellectual virtue without being regenerate, while the absence of the specifically spiritual gifts of the new birth remains the diagnostic distinction.
Ordo Salutis	Latin: “order of salvation.” The theological term for the logical sequence in which the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Christ’s accomplished redemption to the individual believer: effectual calling, regeneration, conversion (repentance and faith), justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, glorification. The new heart (this lesson) is the direct product of regeneration, the content of what regeneration creates in the inner person. The new heart is the inner reality from which conversion (repentance and faith, Unit 5) flows as the first fruits of the regenerated life. Understanding the ordo establishes that the new desires, new understanding, new affections, and new will are logically prior to (and the source of) the conscious repentance and faith that follow.
Sensus Divinitatis	Latin: “sense of the divine.” Calvin’s term (Institutes I.3.1) for the natural, universal awareness of the divine that is implanted in every human being as the image-bearer of God, the ineradicable sense that there is a God and that we are accountable to Him. Distinguished from the saving knowledge of God that is the gift of regeneration: the sensus divinitatis is suppressed and distorted by sin (Romans 1:18–21) and does not constitute saving knowledge, but it establishes universal moral accountability. The new understanding produced by regeneration is not the creation of a religious awareness from scratch but the transformation and healing of this distorted natural awareness through the Spirit’s illuminating work.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that regeneration is not a small event whose primary significance is a change in one's religious affiliation or doctrinal commitments. It is the radical, center-outward transformation of the entire inner person, the implantation of a genuinely new nature in place of the old, the creation of new desires, new understanding, new affections, and a new will from the deep center of the soul outward. This belief has diagnostic implications that cut in every direction. For the person who has no new desires, no new understanding, no new affections, no new will, who is no different in the deep center of her being from what she was before her religious conversion, the belief establishes that regeneration has not genuinely occurred, however impressive the external religious profession may be. For the person who finds in herself these new realities, however imperfectly and inconsistently expressed, the belief establishes that the Spirit has genuinely done His sovereign work.

We must believe, with equal conviction, that the war between flesh and Spirit is not an anomaly in the Christian life that should progressively diminish as the believer matures in faith. It is the normal, expected, genuinely difficult experience of every genuinely regenerate soul in the present age. The absence of the war is not the mark of a mature Christian; it is the mark of either a glorified saint (in whom the flesh has been finally overcome) or an unregenerate professor (in whom the Spirit is not at war because the Spirit is not present). The presence of the war, the grief over sin, the renewed pursuit of holiness, the persistent combat between the new nature's desires and the flesh's counterattacks, is precisely what Paul describes in Romans 7:14–25 as the experience of the person who has the new inner man joyfully concurring with the law of God. We must believe this, both for our own pastoral stability and for our care of the anxious members of our congregations.

We must also believe that the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 is not a description of the spiritual ideal that we are to achieve through dedicated religious effort, but a description of what the Spirit produces organically in the life of the regenerate through the vital union with Christ that is the new nature's ultimate source. This does not make the cultivation of the fruit passive or effortless, the New Testament consistently calls the believer to active, Spirit-empowered pursuit of holiness. But it locates the source of the fruit where the Spirit locates it: in the vine, not in the branch; in the new life that the Spirit has implanted, not in the religious discipline that the old nature can manufacture.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The emotional register that the doctrine of the new heart should produce is a specifically personal and intimate gratitude, not the abstract appreciation of a theological discovery, but the particular, individual, self-referential gratitude of someone who has identified in herself the four transformations that this lesson describes and has recognized that she did not produce any of them. The new desire for God that you feel when you open the Word or enter into prayer, where did it come from? Not from the old nature; you know the old nature, and it did not want this. The new understanding that makes the gospel luminous and urgent and personally compelling, where did it come from? The old mind saw this as foolishness. The love for God and for the brethren that goes beyond what natural affinity or shared interests can explain, where did it come from? The old heart was a lover of self. Every genuinely new thing in you is the Spirit's gift, the evidence of a new creation whose Author is the God who said let there be light and shone in your heart to give you the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Desire the progressive realization of the new nature's full potential, not with the anxious striving of someone trying to prove that regeneration has occurred, but with the joyful, Spirit-fueled pursuit of someone who knows what she has been given and wants to inhabit it more completely. The new desires are genuine but not yet fully satisfied; desire to satisfy them more fully through the means of grace. The new understanding is real but still partial; desire to deepen it through more faithful engagement with the Word. The new affections are present but still mixed with the residual pulls of the old loves; desire to have those old loves progressively overcome by the love of God that the Spirit is continuing to pour out. The new will is freed but still fights the flesh; desire to exercise that freedom more consistently through the Spirit's mortifying and vivifying work.

Desire, above all, the eschatological completion of the new nature's present reality. The new heart is real, but it is not yet glorified; the new creation has arrived, but the old things have not yet finally passed away. First John 3:2–3, established in Lesson 9 as the eschatological anchor, is also the eschatological orientation of the new heart's deepest desire: "We will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." This is the desire that the new heart produces in its most eschatological expression: the longing for the consummation of the very transformation that the new birth has begun, the fullness of the new creation in which the flesh has been finally and forever overcome, the old things have passed away completely, and the new things have come in their eternal and perfect fullness.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Romans 7:14–25 carefully as a self-diagnostic. Identify the specific features of the experience Paul describes: the doing of what is not desired (v. 15), the hating of what is done (v. 15), the joyful inner concurrence with God's law (v. 22), the war between the inner person and the law of sin in the members (v. 23), the cry of distress (v. 24), and the doxological resolution (v. 25). Ask: does this passage describe your own experience of the Christian life? If so, what specifically does the lesson teach you about the significance of that experience as evidence of the new nature rather than its absence? If not, if the war Paul describes seems foreign to your experience, ask honestly whether the absence of the war reflects the completion of the struggle (unlikely in the present age) or the absence of the new nature that engages in the struggle.
- Work through the four transformations of the new heart, new desires, new understanding, new affections, new will, and identify the specific, concrete evidence of each in your own present life. For new desires: what do you desire now that you did not desire before regeneration? For new understanding: what do you see in the Scripture or the gospel that you could not previously see? For new affections: what do you love now that you did not love before, or love in a different way? For new will: what do you freely choose now that you previously could not bring yourself to choose? Then, for each transformation, identify the area where the new nature's reality is least clearly expressed, and bring that specific area to God in prayer, asking the Spirit to deepen the transformation He has begun.
- Read Galatians 5:16–25 as a practical guide to the war between flesh and Spirit in your own life. Note the specific deeds of the flesh listed in verses 19–21 and ask honestly which of them most characterizes your own ongoing struggle with the old nature. Then read the fruit of the Spirit in verses 22–23 and identify which of the nine qualities is most clearly present in your life (giving thanks for what the Spirit has produced) and which is least present (bringing that specific deficit to the Spirit in prayer and asking for His vivifying work to deepen it). Then note the prescription of verse 16 ("walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh") and ask: what specific practices in your daily life constitute walking by the Spirit, and are you pursuing them with the consistency that the prescription requires?
- Pray the prayer of Ephesians 3:16–17 specifically for the four transformations of the new heart that this lesson describes: ask the Father to grant you to be strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man (for the new

will), so that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith (for the new affections), being rooted and grounded in love (for the new desires), so that you may comprehend with all the saints... and know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (for the new understanding). Use this prayer for yourself every day for a week, and use it intercessorily for at least three other people in your spiritual community whose new heart needs the specific deepening that this prayer asks for.

- Write a brief spiritual autobiography, no more than one page, tracing the specific evidences of the new heart in your own life since regeneration. Not a record of achievements or spiritual milestones, but an honest account of the ways in which your desires, understanding, affections, and will have been genuinely transformed from what they were before the new birth. Then identify the areas of greatest continuity, the places where the old nature's patterns persist most stubbornly, and bring those specific areas to God with the specific prayers of Romans 8:13 (putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit) and Galatians 5:25 (living by the Spirit and walking in step with the Spirit).

Key Texts: *Ezekiel 36:25–27; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 4:6; Romans 5:5; 7:14–25; 1 Corinthians 2:9–16; Galatians 5:16–25; 1 John 3:14; 4:19; 5:3; Psalm 42:1–2; 119:97; Philippians 2:12–13*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- This lesson opens with the claim that regeneration is “not the repair of the old nature but the implantation of an entirely new one”, replacement, not renovation. Before engaging the lesson’s exegetical argument for this claim, what is your initial reaction to it? Does it match your experience of the Christian life, do you experience yourself as a fundamentally new person in Christ, or more as the same person with improved spiritual dispositions? What would it mean practically for you if the claim were true: that the spiritual goods you find in yourself (the new desires, the new understanding, the new loves, the new will) are genuinely not improvements on the old nature but the fruit of an entirely new nature that the Spirit has implanted?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–19. What is the primary argument of verses 14–15 (the love of Christ and its logic)? What claim does verse 17 make, and what are the grammatical details: what is the Greek word for “new” (kainos vs. neos, and what is the difference), what tense is “passed away,” and what tense is “have come”? In verse 18, what does Paul attribute “all these things” to (who is the active agent), and what has that agent done? How do verses 14–16 establish the context within which verse 17’s claim about new creation should be understood?
- Read 1 Corinthians 2:9–16 carefully. What is the source of the spiritual knowledge Paul describes (v. 10: “For to us God revealed them through the...”)? What analogy does Paul use in verses 11–12 to explain the relationship between the Spirit and spiritual knowledge? What specific contrast does Paul draw in verses 14–15 between the natural person and the spiritual person? And what is the culminating claim of verse 16 (“we have the mind of...”), and what does it mean for the regenerate believer’s understanding of spiritual truth?
- Read Galatians 5:16–25. What is the prescription of verse 16, and what is the promise attached to it? In verse 17, what is the character of the war between flesh and Spirit, and what is its practical consequence (“so that you may not do the things that you...”)? In verses 19–21, what does the catalogue of the deeds of the flesh reveal about the character of the old nature? In verses 22–23, what is the singular noun used for the nine qualities (not plural, but singular “fruit”), and what does that grammatical choice indicate about the relationship among the nine? In verse 24, what have those who belong to Christ Jesus done to the flesh, and how does this grammatical statement (aorist active) relate to the ongoing present struggle described in verse 17?
- Read Romans 5:5 in context (vv. 1–5). What is the sequence of Paul’s argument from verse 1 to verse 5? What is the relationship between tribulation (v. 3), perseverance (v. 3), proven character (v. 4), hope (v. 4), and the love of God poured out in the heart (v. 5)? What is the agent of the love’s being poured out (“through the... who was given to us”), and what does the passive construction of “has been poured out” establish about the source and the character of this love? Is the love in verse 5 the believer’s love for God, God’s love for the believer, or both, and what is the difference it makes to the argument?
- Read Philippians 2:12–13 carefully. What is the imperative Paul gives (v. 12, “work out...”), and what qualifiers accompany it (“with... and...”)? What is the ground Paul provides for this imperative (v. 13, beginning with “for...”)? What two levels of God’s internal work does Paul name (v. 13: to... and to...)? And

how does the relationship between the imperative (v. 12) and the indicative ground (v. 13) capture the relationship between human effort and divine enabling in the regenerate life?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the Ezekiel 36 metaphor of removing the heart of stone and giving a heart of flesh establishes regeneration as replacement, not renovation. Evaluate this argument. Is the replacement/renovation distinction exegetically defensible from Ezekiel 36? Does the New Testament's description of the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) and the new birth (John 3:3–8) confirm the replacement interpretation? And how does the replacement interpretation guard against both the Roman Catholic view (justification as infused righteousness gradually transforming the old nature) and the Arminian view (regeneration as the Spirit's assistance in improving the old nature's responsiveness to God)?
- The lesson presents the four transformations of the new heart (new desires, new understanding, new affections, new will) as facets of a single transformation rather than four separate events. Trace the organic relationships among the four: how does new desire relate to new affection? How does new understanding enable new will? How do the four together constitute the comprehensive description of the new inner life? And how does the organic unity of the four transformations guard against the spiritually fragmenting experience of trying to cultivate each separately as an individual achievement?
- The lesson argues that Romans 7:14–25 describes the experience of the regenerate believer, and that the war Paul describes is evidence of regeneration rather than its absence. Evaluate this interpretation against the alternative (that Romans 7:14–25 describes the unregenerate person). What specific features of the passage support the regenerate interpretation (the joyful inner concurrence with God's law in v. 22, the distress of v. 24, the doxological resolution of v. 25)? What features might support the unregenerate interpretation? And how does the already/not yet framework help to account for both the genuine new nature Paul describes and the genuine ongoing struggle with sin?
- The lesson uses the pastoral diagnostic "changed direction, not sinless perfection" as the test for the genuineness of regeneration. Evaluate this diagnostic pastorally. Is it sufficiently precise to distinguish the genuinely regenerate from the unregenerate in most pastoral situations? What specific features of "changed direction" are identifiable enough to function as genuine diagnostic indicators? And how does the lesson's account of the already/not yet guard this diagnostic against two opposite misuses: (a) using it to offer false assurance to those with no genuine change of direction, and (b) using it to withhold assurance from those with genuine but imperfect change of direction?
- The lesson describes the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 as the organic product of the Spirit's indwelling work rather than the achievement of the believer's religious effort. But the New Testament also consistently calls the believer to active pursuit of holiness (Philippians 2:12; Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:25; Colossians 3:5). How are these two dimensions, the Spirit's producing work and the believer's genuine effort, compatible? What specific practices constitute the believer's active "walking by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16, 25) through which the Spirit's fruit is cultivated? And what is the difference between working toward the fruit by the Spirit's power (the New Testament's prescription) and manufacturing the fruit through independent spiritual effort (the moralist error)?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson describes the new desire for God as the "most foundational transformation that regeneration produces," citing Psalm 42:1–2 ("As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God"). Evaluate the presence of this new desire in your own life honestly. Not: do I perform the disciplines of the

Christian life? But: do I have genuine appetite for God Himself, for communion with Him in prayer, for the knowledge of Him in His Word, for the experience of His presence in worship? If the appetite is weak or intermittent, what specific practices in your daily life nurture it, and which practices in your daily life suppress or compete with it? And what does the lesson's account of the new desire suggest about how the appetite can be cultivated, not as the creation of something absent, but as the deepening of something genuinely present?

- The lesson closes the main body of content with the pastoral diagnostic: “a heart that once ran from God now runs toward Him, even if it stumbles along the way.” Apply this diagnostic to your own spiritual history. Is there a clear difference between the direction your heart ran before the new birth and the direction it runs now? Can you identify specific ways in which the direction has changed, specific things you run toward now that you ran from before, and specific things you run from now that you ran toward before? And for the areas in which the direction change is least clear, where the heart seems to be running in circles rather than toward God, what does the lesson's account of the war between flesh and Spirit suggest about the appropriate response?
- The lesson argues that the new understanding produced by regeneration is not primarily an intellectual achievement but a spiritual illumination, the Spirit's creative act in the mind, as radical as the original creation of light out of darkness (2 Corinthians 4:6). Has your reading, studying, or preaching of Scripture reflected this understanding? Specifically: do you approach the reading of Scripture primarily as an intellectual exercise (gathering information, understanding doctrines, solving interpretive problems) or primarily as the experience of the Spirit's illuminating work in a spiritually receptive mind? What specific practices in your approach to the Word would change if you more consistently understood Scripture reading as the Spirit shining the light of God's glory in the face of Christ into your heart?
- The lesson describes the bondage of the unregenerate will as the condition from which regeneration liberates the believer, and the new will as the freedom to freely choose what the new nature genuinely desires. Does this account of the new will match your experience of making moral choices in the Christian life? Specifically: do you experience holiness as the demand of an external law that constrains a will that would prefer otherwise, or do you experience it as the expression of the new nature's genuine desires that the will now freely pursues? And in the areas where the former experience predominates (obedience as external constraint rather than internal desire), what does the lesson suggest about the remedy, is it primarily a matter of trying harder, or of letting the new desires deepen and the old desires diminish through the Spirit's ongoing transforming work?

Prayer Focus

Begin this lesson's prayer time with a slow reading of Psalm 42, the great psalm of spiritual thirst, as the voice of the new heart in its most characteristic expression. The deer panting for water, the soul thirsting for the living God, the question "when shall I come and appear before God?" (v. 2), this is the desire of the new nature that the Spirit has implanted, reaching toward the God who is the new heart's deepest object of love. Note the tension in the psalm: the thirst is real (vv. 1–2), but the present experience is one of absence and grief (vv. 3–4); the memory of past communion with God is both a comfort and an intensification of the present longing (vv. 4, 6). This is the already/not yet tension of the new heart in its most honest expression, genuinely desiring God, not always experiencing His presence with the fullness that the desire hungers for.

Pray through the four transformations of the new heart as an act of gratitude and aspiration. Begin with the new desires: thank the Spirit for the desires He has implanted in your soul for God, for His Word, for holiness, for prayer, for obedience, desires that were absent in the old nature and that you could not have produced from within its resources. Then ask Him to deepen those desires, to make them more constant and more intense, to diminish the competing desires of the old nature so that the new heart's appetite for God becomes more consistently the governing orientation of your daily life.

Continue with the new understanding: thank the Spirit for the illuminating work that has made the gospel luminous, the Scripture living, and the glory of God in the face of Christ visible to you. This is the light that the God of creation shone in your heart, and it is as miraculous as the original creation of light out of darkness. Pray for a deepening of that understanding, for the specific things you have not yet seen, the passages that remain opaque, the dimensions of the gospel's glory that you have not yet fully received. And pray for the illumination of specific people in your life whose minds are currently darkened by the god of this age, that the same creative act of 2 Corinthians 4:6 that opened your eyes would open theirs.

Move to the new affections: thank the Spirit for the love of God poured out in your heart, for the love of the brethren that the new nature generates, for the love of the Word and the love of prayer and the decreasing pull of the world's ultimate claims on your heart. Acknowledge honestly the areas where the old loves persist most stubbornly, the lingering love of self, of comfort, of approval, of the world's pleasures, and ask the Spirit to do the mortifying and vivifying work that will progressively loosen those old loves and deepen the new ones. Ask for the love of God to be poured out more abundantly (Romans 5:5), not as the creation of something absent but as the deepening of something genuinely present.

Close with the new will: pray Philippians 2:12–13 as both a commission and a confidence. Thank God for working in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure, for the internal transformation of desire that makes the external transformation of conduct both possible and genuine. Commit the specific areas of ongoing struggle, the places where the flesh's resistance to the new nature's direction is most intense, to the Spirit who empowers the mortification of the flesh and the vivification of the new life. And receive, as a closing assurance, the declaration of 2 Corinthians 5:17 as the true and permanent account of who you are in Christ: a new creature, in whom the old things have passed away and new things have come, in whom the new heart that God promised in Ezekiel 36 has been given by the Spirit who moved as He willed and chose to give it to you, for His glory and your eternal good.

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.”

2 Corinthians 5:17–18a, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Ezekiel 36:25–27; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 4:6; Romans 5:5; 7:14–25; 1 Corinthians 2:9–16; Galatians 5:16–25; Psalm 42:1–2; 119:97; Philippians 2:12–13; 1 John 3:2–3; 4:19; 5:3

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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