

## CHAPTER 9 - GRACE

*Grace is a word that has several meanings in Scripture, depending on its context. It is the translation of the Greek "charis" from which we get such English words as "charisma, charismatic, charity, charitable," and even babies names like "Karisa."*

*The meanings that primarily concern us are:*

- 1. Grace is unmerited favor. It is God's free action for the benefit of His people. It is different than Justice and Mercy. Justice is getting what we do deserve. Mercy is not getting what we deserve. Grace is getting what we don't deserve.*
- 2. Grace is good will, loving-kindness, favour or merciful kindness by which God turns people to Christ, keeps them, strengthens them, increases them in Christian faith and knowledge, and motivates them to do good works.*
- 3. Grace is **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. Grace rules out all human merit. It is the product of God, that is given by God, because of who He is, not because of who we are.*
- 4. Grace is the application of Christ's righteousness to the sinner.*

*Grace sets Christianity apart from every other religion. Grace, by definition, cannot be owed to anyone, or earned. One Christian author claims that God is obligated to extend His grace to everyone in the same way. The first problem with this view though, is that the moment there is any obligation, it ceases to become grace. The second, and more important problem, is that it is totally unbiblical. Exodus 33: 19 ... And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy (compare Rom 9: 14-18). God is not obligated to extend grace to anyone, much less everyone. All deserve punishment, but God chooses to extend grace to some.*

*The great theologian BB Warfield talked about a man who is "on the one hand, filled with a sense of his own unworthiness to stand in God's sight as a creature, and much more as a sinner, and on the other hand, with adoring wonder that nevertheless this God is a God who receives sinners." That is what makes grace so amazing.*

- 1. Why will God not accept a salvation based on our own efforts? Do you think there would be more or less people in heaven if salvation was gained by human effort?*

*As we have seen from the chapter on Sin, no one is able to please God by their efforts. Even our best attempts to keep His Law fail miserably. If we were to gain salvation based on our own efforts, where is the line between what is acceptable to God and what is not? We have no way of knowing whether we have been good enough, or worked hard enough to please God. And what about if we slip back into sin, or just get lazy? Have we then lost everything we worked for? Instead, Scripture tells us that anything short of perfect obedience results in our fair and just condemnation.*

*Given the requirement for perfect obedience then, there would be no one in heaven if it was left up to human effort. In fact, it requires more than just obedience. Jesus spent quite a bit of time during the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt 5) explaining that mere external obedience to the Law was insufficient to meet God's standards. Our attitude and our desires are involved as well. For example, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt 5:27-28).*

*Jesus seems to stress just how difficult it is to meet God's standards. In Matt 5:20, He says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." At the end of that section in Matt 5:48, He says, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

*No matter how hard we try, we can never be perfect by our own efforts. (Gal 3:21)...For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.*

*Our only hope is the grace of God, imputing our sins to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God), and imputing Christ's righteousness to us.*

*We should stress that there was no requirement for God to do this. He was under no obligation to extend grace to anyone. He could have just as easily condemned and destroyed everyone of us at our conception, and no one could raise an objection that He was being unfair or unjust.*

2. What relationship exists (if any) between grace and works?

*Grace and works are antithetical (sharply contrasted, opposing). Grace, by definition, gives what we don't deserve. Works earns the wage we deserve.*

*(Rom 4: 2-5) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness*

*(Rom 6: 23) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*(Rom 11: 5-6) So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

*(Gal 3: 2-3) Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*

*(Gal 3: 10-13) For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"*

3. If salvation is by grace, not works (see Eph 2: 8-9), how do we explain James 2: 17, 24 & 26?

*Put simply, grace is the basis of our salvation, and works plays no part of that, but works is the evidence that we have been saved.*

*The great Reformer, Martin Luther didn't think the book of James should be in the Bible, because he thought it contradicted Paul's message of salvation by grace. But James and Paul were not talking from the same perspective.*

*James is talking about works as a result of salvation, not works to gain salvation. Any claim to be in the faith which is not accompanied by a love for others which leads to good works being performed is not a claim that can be taken seriously.*

These two passages are a good example of the need to read Scripture in context, not just pluck verses out at random to suit our purposes.

For example, the very next verse in Ephesians, says: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph 2: 10). We have been saved for more than just heaven. We have been saved to do good works (which, you will note, have already been prepared by God for us). The most natural thing in the world for a genuinely saved person is to want to serve the Lord and do good works. It is one of the things we are saved for.

We also need to look carefully at what James is saying.

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe-and shudder! <sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"-and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (Jas 2: 14-26)

There is a very important word at the end of verse 24: "alone." James is not saying that we are saved by works, not by faith. He is saying, as the whole passage reveals, that merely claiming to have faith is not the same thing as really having saving faith. Notice that he even makes the point in verse 19 that demons believe. This word "believe" is the verb form of the noun "faith" (Greek - pistis). It is the same word in the original Greek (pisteuo) that is used

when James says "You believe that God is one" (v19) and also that "Abraham believed God" (v23). The demons can claim to have faith. But there is something missing from their faith, which reveals whether or not their faith is the type of faith that has saved: works. In fact, James makes the point with a rhetorical question in verse 14 that if there are no works to confirm a person's claim of faith, then that person doesn't possess saving faith. And he also says in verse 17 that faith without accompanying works is not a living faith, but is dead.

James' intention through this passage is not to disagree with Paul on how we are saved and justified. Rather, his intention is to point out how other people may know we are saved and justified. And the most important thing that reveals that our faith is a genuine and saving faith is our works.

To summarise: Paul tells us how we are saved, justified and fit to enter into God's presence. That is by faith alone, not by works. James tells us how we show the world that we are saved, justified and fit to enter God's presence. That is by a faith that produces good works. In much the same way that we can't see the wind, but we see the effect it has, we can't see grace directly, but we see the effect it has on someone's life.

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We probably should point out that God's grace does not begin and end with salvation. It goes back to time immemorial, before creation, when He chose those whom He would extend His love and saving grace to, and extends on into eternity when His people will dwell with Him forever.

Grace exists in a general sense for everyone in the world. God does not instantly destroy the wicked, but "(Matthew 5: 45)... he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." In Theology, this is often called "Common Grace." It is a grace that God gives to everyone regardless of their relationship (or lack of relationship) to Him.

Grace exists in saving grace, when God calls a person to Himself, and changes their heart from a dead and rebellious heart, to a living and obedient heart.

Grace also exists in sanctifying grace, enabling us to become more and more like His Son. (2Cor 3: 18) And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. And (Rom 8: 29) For those whom he

*foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

*The process of Christian life is one in which God, by His grace, shapes us and conforms us into the image of Jesus Christ. We should be able to see some evidence over the course of our lives that we are becoming more and more like Christ.*

*Finally, grace exists in glorifying grace. (Rom 8:18-19) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Rom 8:23) For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom 8:30) And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (1Pet 1:13) Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

*At some point in the future, either at our death or at the second coming of our Lord, believers will be transformed out of the weakened and sin-damaged bodies that they now inhabit, to have perfect and everlasting bodies, forever in the presence of the Lord.*

## CHAPTER 10 - REGENERATION

*Regeneration is another of the technical terms of Theology. It is a word that rarely gets used nowadays, and so is not commonly understood. In fact, it may have been a totally new word to some. Therefore, we should begin by defining Regeneration.*

*A dictionary gives us meanings such as:*

- i) Reproduction; the act of producing anew.*
- ii) In theology, new birth by the grace of God; that change by which the will and natural enmity of man to God and his law are subdued, and a principle of supreme love to God and his law, or holy affections, are implanted in the heart.<sup>1</sup>*

*A thesaurus gives us synonyms such as: renewal, rebirth, revival. Other Biblical synonyms are:*

- i) new creation*
- ii) made alive*
- iii) new heart*
- iv) raised from the dead*
- v) washing of regeneration*
- vi) born of God*
- vii) spirit is alive*

*It is commonly called "being born-again." The most obvious Scriptural use of the concept is in John 3: 1-9.*

1. Peter Jeffery states, "Regeneration is not the same as conversion..." What is the difference and how are the two related?

*Regeneration is the initial step that God takes to change our hearts from dead to alive. It is specifically the "born-again" event. The result of this is that we can now repent of our sins and believe the gospel. It is the starting point, without which we cannot become Christians. We are not born-again because we believe, but we believe because we are born-again. The new life given in regeneration then manifests itself in repentance and faith.*

*Regeneration is a secret act of God in which He imparts new spiritual life to us. This is sometimes called "being born-again" (using language from John 3: 3-8).<sup>2</sup> It is more than "turning over a new leaf"; it marks the beginning of a new life in a radically renewed person.<sup>3</sup>*

*Conversion is the human response of turning to Christ once God's work of regeneration has occurred. It is the act of changing course,*

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<sup>1</sup> Webster's Dictionary, as found in e-Sword Bible software

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

<sup>3</sup> RC Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*

from following after idols (1 Thess 1:9), or spiritual indifference (Luke 18:22), or sensuality (Like 15:13), or even zealous but misguided religion (Acts 26:9), toward God. In conversion, we turn towards God and become like little children (Matt 18:3), exercising repentance and faith towards God. We will be dealing with *Repentance and Faith* in the next session.

Regeneration is necessary. We are “dead in our trespasses and sins” (see Eph 2:1-4). We are so opposed to God in our nature that we will not choose for Him unless He changes and renews our dead hearts first (see Rom 3:9-18, Rom 8:7). Nor can we grow more Christ-like unless God brings about this new birth. There are no spiritual activities without regeneration.

John Piper writes: Most people do not know what is really wrong with them. One way to help them make a true and terrible and hopeful diagnosis is to show them the kind of remedy God has provided, namely the new birth. If you have a sore on your ankle and after the doctor does his test, he comes in and says, “I have hard news: We have to take your leg off just below the knee,” then that remedy tells you more about the sore than many erudite medical words. So it is with the remedy “You must be born again.”<sup>4</sup>

Regeneration is decisive. The regenerate person has forever ceased to be the person he or she was; the old life is over and a new life has begun; he or she is a new creature in Christ, buried with Him out of reach of condemnation and raised with Him into a new life of righteousness (see Rom 6:3-11, 2 Cor 5:17, Col 3:9-11).<sup>5</sup> The apostle John uses this word (Gk *gennao*) more than anyone. Each time the verb tense used indicates that it is a decisive and completed act. Like natural birth, if it has happened at all, it has happened completely.

Regeneration is God’s work, unaided by man. Infants do not induce, or cooperate in, their own procreation and birth; no more can those who are “dead in transgressions and sins” prompt the quickening operation of God’s Spirit within them (see Eph 2:1-10). Spiritual vivification (that is, making alive) is a free, and to humans mysterious, exercise of divine power (John 3:8), not explicable in terms of the combination or cultivation of existing human resources (John 3:6), not caused or induced by any human efforts (John 1:12-13) or merits (Titus 3:3-7).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *Finally Alive*

<sup>5</sup> From Walter A Elwell, *Dictionary of Evangelical Theology*, Regeneration

<sup>6</sup> Walter Elwell again.

Regeneration is an instantaneous event. It happens only once. At one moment we are spiritually dead, and then at the next moment we have new spiritual life from God. Nevertheless, we do not always know exactly when this instantaneous change occurs. Especially for children growing up in a Christian home, or for people who attend an evangelical church or Bible study over a period of time and grow gradually in their understanding of the gospel, there may not be a dramatic crisis with a radical change of behaviour from "hardened sinner" to "holy saint," but there will be an instantaneous change nonetheless, when God through the Holy Spirit, in an unseen, invisible way, awakens spiritual life within. The change will become evident over time in patterns of behaviour and desires that are pleasing to God.<sup>7</sup>

Regeneration is the fulfilment of the promises of God found in the Old Testament in Deu 30:6, Jer 24:7; 31:31-34; 32:38-40, Eze 11:19-20; 36:25-27. This may be why Jesus gave Nicodemus a hard time in John 3. Nicodemus was a respected and knowledgeable teacher, and really should have understood what Jesus was talking about.

Regeneration is made possible by the Atonement.

Some Old Testament passages which speak of Regeneration are:

(Deut 30:6) And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

(Isa 44:3-4) For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams.

(Jer 24:7) I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

(Jer 31:31-34) "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying,

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<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem again.

'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

(Jer 32:39-40) I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

(Ezek 11:19-20) And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

(Ezek 36:25-27) I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

*Some New Testament passages which speak of Regeneration are:*

(John 1:12-13) But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

(John 3:3-8) Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

(Rom 6:2-4) By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

(Rom 8:10) But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

(2Cor 5: 17-18) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

(Gal 6: 15) For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

(Eph 2: 4-5) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved

(Col 2: 12-14) having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross (note: this is Atonement in action).

(Titus 3: 5) he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

(1Pet 1: 3-5) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(1Pet 1: 23) since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

(Jas 1: 18) Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

(1John 2: 29) If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

(1John 3: 9) No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

(1John 5: 4) For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith.

(1John 5: 18) We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

2. Read John 3:3-8 and Col 2:13-14. Explain (as best you can) the "born-again" process.

*God takes a heart that is hard and is dead to Him, and changes it into a heart that is soft and is alive. He doesn't just change His attitude towards us. He makes an actual, real change within us. He does this on the basis of the Cross, forgiving our sins and wiping out the record of them.*

*This work is done by the Holy Spirit and is mysterious, but real nonetheless.*

*It is necessary to be saved (to see the kingdom of God). If God does not do this work in a person, that person will not be saved.*

3. If regeneration precedes everything in salvation, does this mean that the sinner is not responsible for refusing to believe the gospel?

*This is a difficult question to answer, and probably one that can't be answered simply or quickly.*

*Scripture constantly commands people to turn to God. It always and everywhere holds people responsible for the choices they make. Scripture clearly teaches that all people are responsible before God for their rejection of Him, and that in no way and to no degree can God be held responsible for our sin and for our choice to reject Him.*

*Yet, it equally clearly tells us that God is in control, and will ensure that His will is done, and His purposes accomplished, and that no man can thwart or hinder His plans.*

*We make our choices freely, according to our desires. We are under no compulsion from God to choose evil. However, unless we have been born-again, our desire is only for evil (that is, not evil in the sense that our only desire is to kill people, but rather evil in the sense that we are always opposed to God). And we freely choose to do evil, thus we are responsible for our own choices.*

*As we continue this study, and as you continue to study the Bible, the answer to this may become a little clearer. But we must acknowledge that it is a question that has exercised some of the greatest minds in Christian history.*

*The answer requires us to hold a number of Biblical truths in apparent tension (such as the sovereignty of god and the free*

agency of man, and how God can be creator of everything yet not be held responsible for evil). The answer will also require us to allow a little bit of mystery to remain in our knowledge and understanding of God. I suspect we will never fully resolve this matter, and that there may be just as many opinions as there are people discussing the problem.

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The Bible talks about both the Father and the Holy Spirit bringing about the new birth. Compare John 3:8 with Eph 2:5 and Col 2:13.

It is the first event in the human experience of the salvation process. There are other parts of that process that have occurred in eternity past (as we will discover in later chapters of Bitesize Theology), but the first part we are conscious of is being born-again. Many believers (not all) can testify to an instant and life-changing experience that changes their whole outlook on life and on God. They often report emotions of great grief or great joy, sometimes both simultaneously. They know, and others can frequently see, that something dramatic has happened to them, often unexpectedly. They suddenly know that they know that they are saved, that they now believe in Christ, that they are Christians.

The born-again event occurs in different ways in different people. Two famous examples from history show some of the similarities in the experience as well as some of the differences:

In August, 386AD, Aurelius Augustine was overwhelmed by a sense of his slavery to lust. He was 32 years old, and had made an idol of sex for 16 years. While talking with his friend Alypius about the remarkable sacrifice and holiness of a particular Egyptian monk, he was stung by his own bondage in comparison with others who were free and holy in Christ.

He relates, "I now found myself driven by the tumult in my breast to take refuge in this garden, where no one could interrupt that fierce struggle in which I was my own contestant... I was beside myself with madness... I was dying a death... I was frantic, overcome by violent anger with myself... I tore my hair and hammered my forehead with my fists; I locked my fingers and hugged my knees... I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes... All at once I heard the singsong voice of a child in a nearby house... ...again and again it repeated the refrain "Take it and read, take it and read." So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was

*sitting... seized [the book of Paul's epistles] and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: "Not in revelling in drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites: (Rom 13; 13-14). I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled."*<sup>8</sup>

*This was one of the most important days in church history. The most important leader, writer and theologian since apostolic times had been born-again.*

*The story of CS Lewis (author of "The Chronicles of Narnia") is very different to Augustine's story. Lewis had been discussing Christianity with Hugo Dyson and JRR Tolkien (author of "Lord of the Rings") one evening in September, 1931. The next morning he caught a bus to the zoo. All of the struggle had gone before.*

*He tells his story, "I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven into Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. And yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. "Emotional" is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man, after a long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake. And it was, like that moment on top of the bus, ambiguous."*<sup>9</sup>

*In these two stories, we see similarities in the mystery of how the Holy Spirit works to bring about regeneration. Neither of them were actively seeking to have their hearts renewed. "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes" (John 3:8).*

*But we also see differences. Augustine was tortured by his sins and his bondage. Lewis was not even thinking about his sin, or about God. Augustine could pinpoint the exact moment that he experienced the change. Lewis just came to a gradually dawning realisation that a change had happened. In either case, the work done by God is astonishing.*

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<sup>8</sup> Aurelius Augustine, *Confessions*

<sup>9</sup> CS Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*

*Whilst technically regeneration precedes faith, the two may seem to occur so closely together that they appear to occur at the same instant in time. We do not actually see the event of regeneration occur. Rather, like the wind in John 3, we see the results of regeneration. The evidence of regeneration is repentance, faith, and an increasingly Christ-like character (see Gal 5:22-23 and Matt 7:15-20). Church involvement, or even a powerful miraculous ministry, does not necessarily indicate that a person is born-again (see Matt 7:22-23). Regeneration is known by its fruits.*

*Incidentally, there is no such thing as a Christian who is not a born-again Christian. I once heard a person say, "I'm a Christian, but not the born-again type." If he is not born-again, he is not a Christian at all, according to Jesus Christ. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." All born-again people are Christians, and all Christians are born-again. Equally, any person who is not born-again is not a Christian, and every non-Christian is also not born-again.*

*The fact that Scripture talks about "being" born-again indicates that it is an event that happens to a person, not something they can do themselves. It is the spiritual equivalent to physical birth in which the baby does nothing to bring about its own conception or birth, but is the recipient of the gift. We are passive recipients of the gift of new birth, who are then enabled, because of the gift, to respond with repentance and faith towards God.*

*JI Packer tells us that, "Just as a baby gives evidence that it is alive, so too there will be evidence of genuine regeneration. First, the baby cries instinctively; and the born-again person instinctively prays, crying to God in dependence, hope and trust as a child to his father.*

*Second, the baby sucks, instinctively; and the born-again person also feels a hunger for spiritual food – first the milk and then the meat of God's revealed Word.*

*Third, a baby moves, turning its head, flexing its limbs, later on rolling, crawling, tottering, toddling, exploring; and similarly the born-again person moves in the spiritual realm into which he has now come, sorting out priorities, reshaping his life in the light of his new allegiance, exploring Christian relationships and ways of worship, using enterprise for the Lord in many kinds of work and witness.*

*Fourth, the baby rests, relaxing completely and sleeping soundly in adult arms and wherever else feels firm; and in the same way the*

*born-again person rests in the knowledge that God's everlasting arms are underneath him, and is able to spend his days, whatever pressures they bring, without panic and in peace."<sup>10</sup>*

*Understanding the nature and purpose of Regeneration can help us to make sense of how it can be that people who profess to be Christians frequently behave no differently from the way non-Christians behave. Unfortunately, some people have concluded that because many who claim to be born-again are just as worldly as non-Christians, therefore the new birth does not radically change people, and Christians must be hypocrites.*

*Rather, the New Testament draws the opposite conclusion. Because the new birth really and actually does radically change people, then if people claim to be born-again and are not radically changed, we must conclude that they are not born-again, and therefore not Christians. The first letter of John in the New Testament gives us Scriptural support for this. Consider 1Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4; 5:18. The Bible tells us that it is not born-again people who are permeated with worldliness; instead, it tells us that the church is permeated by people who are not born-again.*

*The sad news about this, though, is that there are untold millions of church attenders who are not actually born-again, not actually Christians, even though they may think they are. Still, we must not be too hasty making judgments about people. Sin remains in all of us, and the process of transformation from sinner to being "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29) takes longer in some people than in others. The process is not always as fast as we would like. Those who have been born-again are being changed, even if slowly, from one degree of humility and love to the next.*

*The born-again experience is far more glorious than many think it is. It is not just a life-improvement step (although it does achieve that), but a radical and dramatic break with the sin, guilt, shame and bondage of the past, and the doorway into a free, confident and holy future. It matters for eternity, and it matters for the glory of Christ in this life. If people are to enter the kingdom of God, and if the church is to let her light shine so that people may glorify God, then the new birth must be experienced.*

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<sup>10</sup> From JI Packer, *18 Words – The most important words you will ever know*