

Reading: 1 John 5:1-12

Theme: Born of God and Believing.

When I grew potatoes in Barton I had various degrees of success. One year we had an excellent crop and I'd dig up enough for a week or two, then when they were finished I would go and dig up some more. It was good that I kept finding potatoes where had dug before and even when I dug all the potatoes up ready for winter I still found more where I had previously dug! I thought I was a thorough digger, but they were still there and the following year I had potatoes growing up from those I had still missed!

That is how I have felt about many of the verses we have looked at in 1 John and I want to dig again in 5:1 to remind ourselves about some important truths, ones I don't mind re-sprouting and re-growing in our lives. This 1st verse of chapter 5 is connected to the 2 verses we have opened up on last time concerning loving our brothers and sisters. Yet there are further important things to consider in it - things which are so obvious we can overlook them and miss out on important truths along with the comfort and joy they can give us. I want to use 2 main headings to look again at this verse:

1. The Essential Truth.

It is often said that "*the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!*" I know of one man in a church in the Black Forest who speaks of GBO - Glimpses of the Blindingly Obvious. I realise that what I will say should be that, but it is not always so. We are to remember John is writing to Christians, those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their own Saviour.

When he wrote, John did not have to pause and say “*I need to explain this and that*” but he used terms and truths they were familiar with and understood. These believers had been well taught and grounded in Christian truths, just like you have been over the years, and yet John’s first readers needed their memories jogged and then shown how it was to be applied to their lives. This is a practice we all need!

John had the God-given ability to summarise and compact into a few words and sentences so much Christian truth and here in v1 he returns to the essential truth and teaching of the new birth, of being born again, born of God, regeneration (*the theological and technical phrase*). This is a term that is wonderfully characteristic of John as he uses often it in his gospel and letters – for it was a term he learned from the Lord Jesus!

This term “born of God” or born again, or the “new birth” = regeneration and it is an important, essential truth for all. If we are believers it is right we understand it; if we are not yet a Christian, or are considering Christianity, then it is right we also understand it. Why is that? It is as essential because it deals with the very question as to what being a Christian is and it involves.

If we consider a Christian to be a nice, a moral, a religious person then the essential truth of regeneration is excluded, disregarded. If we see becoming a Christian as an emotional response in a meeting, or to a message or film, or a decision to accept and follow certain ethics, teachings, philosophy and way of life, then regeneration, being born again is side-lined. For we look on becoming a Christian is something we do, as something we have to achieve.

The NT shows us that we can do nothing whatsoever to be right with God, to have life with God, to have any response to God. We are dead in trespasses and sins - dead means dead - no life, no hope, no strength and no abilities. That is why any ideas, notions that leave it up to us to decide, to follow, to sort ourselves out, begin by ignoring the fundamental biblical truth of mankind's state in sin. The Bible speaks clearly of being born of God, of being born again, of being a new creation. Here the emphasis is on what God will do and accomplish in us - born of God. We will see this clearly if we look at John 1:13 "*children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*" or 3:3 *'In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*' The Bible is clear on this - it is not a person and their activity, or what is done in a religious ritual, but God in His activity that causes new life in a person.

God begets, produces, generates, gives spiritual life and being. We cannot be a Christian unless God has done this in us. This regenerating, giving of life comes from God. In Greek it is usual to have an ending on the noun that indicates "of" (Genitive case) but here a word is added that stresses "*out of*" (εκ) and so gives the force of born out of, from out of God. It is not referring to any external, outward change in us but speaks of the principle of new life being implanted in a person and the overriding, the governing disposition of the soul i.e. our eternal part, is made alive and holy. We are made partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). It is something glorious and brought about by God in our souls and our dead spiritual nature, outlook and disposition are made alive, transformed and made like God's nature and disposition.

This does affect us - it changes us essentially in our standing with God and makes a difference in us as we are now a new living creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are transformed by the working of the power of God in our lives - it is that radical! This being born of God is not some superficial thing but changes, transforms, converts our dead souls and gives them life. That change makes a great difference in people's lives and they will, suddenly or gradually, be aware of this great difference in their lives. They become aware that now there is something different and new about their lives and this has been brought about by a work of God in their lives.

This is not to make us proud and arrogant "*I'm better than...*" For it should cause in us a sense of wonder, love and praise, coupled with humility that God should ever do this for us and that we did not deserve it at all.

This is new birth, this is being born again, born of God, is regeneration and is common to all believers. It is beyond the superficial and external. We are to see that being a Christian is more than churchgoing, or religious rituals and words, more than class or manners but a real work of God in the soul and we are to seek to recognise such in others. As we do so, our hearts should be knit together. Yes, there will still be differences, we will still be individuals and not as some sect that must all act, think, dress and behave alike or identically. We are to recognise that the great work God has done in us, He has also done in others and we are to love them as brothers and sisters.

I have not touched upon morals, church attendance, education, wealth, class, or social standing - for these are not the essential things concerning being a Christian. The Essential Truth is that

we need to be born of God. That is why we should question our own heart and life as to whether we are born of God, born-again, a new creation. It is a work of God, we will be aware of it and can even question if we have had this work of God in our life. If not, we can call on Him to do this work in us. Along with this Essential Truth John also gives:

2. The Evidences Present.

What evidences can be noted to test, to examine, to assure us that we are born of God? The term “born-again” is now often used as a general term for becoming a Christian and the whole miraculous process involved in that, but the Bible, especially John in his writings, makes a distinction between God’s work of regeneration - giving us new life, making us new creatures and therefore born-again and between believing, coming to faith, trust in the Lord Jesus i.e. conversion. In John 3 the Lord Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of the need to be born again to even see and enter the kingdom of God and **then** He spoke of believing. Like Nicodemus we can be confused at this (John 3:9).

We play no part in our being born of God, regenerated, for it is a sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit in our souls. Then and only then are we able to respond to the gospel that we can hear, see and understand seemingly for the 1st time. Until then we are dead, deaf, blind of eyes and understanding and with a heart that was against God; We could not receive the things of God nor understand them; but when God makes us alive, regenerates us, then it makes sense, then we can respond and the 1st evidence, often seemingly simultaneously without being born of God is:

A. Belief that Jesus is the Christ: this is the 1st and foremost expression of new life, of being regenerated, born of God. Regeneration is an instantaneous work and we are either dead or alive, it is a one-off, once for all work of God in our souls. It is never directly perceived, recognised by a person as happening as it occurs at a subconscious level in the soul, but its effects are known in a person as they are brought to faith and trust in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

This belief, this trust in the Lord Jesus as Saviour is what is called “conversion”. Sometimes regeneration and conversion coincide - moments, milliseconds separating the two. Other times a person’s regeneration leads to a conversion process as they gradually grasp, understands and comes to believe that Jesus is the Christ.

There is no such thing as just “faith” - “*Oh, I have faith*” - faith in what, in whom? True saving faith always has an object - belief in Jesus as the Saviour, for it centres on Him, who is as both God and man, as the Saviour who died as a sacrifice, to atone and to pay for our sin and its guilt, who was dead and buried, rose again and ascended to heaven and will one day return in glory. It centres on Him, sees Him and all He is and has done as essential for salvation and that there is no salvation apart from Him.

This is where the NT takes us to - believe in the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one and the only Saviour. This is the 1st evidence of regeneration - belief in Jesus as the Christ. Have we come to trust the Lord Jesus as our only hope of heaven and eternal life? Or are we hoping to plea bargain for our good deeds, morals, church attendance, church rituals, family

connections etc.? If so, it is probable we are not believing on Jesus as the Christ for the 1st evidence is absent and we can have no hope and confidence for eternal life. What would we answer God if we were to face Him now - as to why He should let us into heaven? If it is our good works, our religious feelings, we were baptised, have had religious rites done to us? If so, then we have not understood the need to be born of God, converted. The only way into heaven is by having trusted the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour and nothing else.

Even our believing is a work of God the conscious level after He has worked at the subconscious, at the soul level in regeneration and even that saving work is a gift of God as we read in Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”*. Sometimes this conversion work is sudden and dramatic e.g. as in Saul of Tarsus; other times it is a quiet, gentle and even gradual process e.g. as in Lydia. Yes, God uses means - usually the preaching of the gospel, the reading or hearing of the word of God, but He can use other means e.g. stubborn donkeys...

The next 2 pieces of evidence have been covered in detail previously, but to round off the digging and to level the ground, I'll touch on them again:

B. Love to God: if we are born of God and believe on the Lord Jesus, we will love the Father i.e. God the Father. Those who are Christians see God has loved them (4:9) and realise that they do not deserve such love. Yes, even as Christians they are still conscious of not deserving such love but they love Him because He 1st loved them - love to God and so they do not approach God in fear and trembling, but with awe, wonder and love for

Him who has lavished such love on ones like us (3:1). Yet it is not only love to God that is now a present evidence in their lives, but also:

C. Love to other believers: we love those who, as KJV says “*is begotten of Him*” or as NIV says “*his child too*”. They were as we were - lost, dead in trespasses and sins, but we and they are born of God and all by His grace, we have come to believe that Jesus is the Christ and therefore are His children, part of the same family and we are to view them as brothers and sisters in Christ and love them - for His sake 1st of all and because we are of the same family. As this is the case, we desire and live for their good.

Are the evidences there in our lives? We are not to delude ourselves and be content with one evidence but desire and long to have the three evidences. Do not forget the bigger context of love for brothers and sisters in Christ - the real and practical outworking of the evidence of belief and love to God.

I pray God would help us all to understand and work out these things in our lives, work this out here in this church, as well as among the fellowship of those who truly believe as we meet them.