

1 Peter 1:23-25 – Part VV

1Pe 1:23 (NKJV) **having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,** ²⁴ *because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away,* ²⁵ *But the word of the LORD endures forever."* Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

As we close out [1 Peter 1](#), Peter provides a powerful testimony as to why a believer should be able to love other believers fervently. The motif of a believer's love for other believers has been the target of Peter's conclusion to his teaching that God is holy and that every believer has been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. The genuine work of God in a believer's life has great purpose and intention. It is always headed toward an authentic love for God and an authentic love for other Christians. So, as Peter concludes this chapter, he does so by reiterating that the believer has been born again through the Word of God. The believer's salvation is a deeply spiritual event in which the Word of God exerts its supernatural influence and produces and fashions the very life of Christ in the individual's life. Because this was such a deeply supernatural work of God originated by the Father, salvation always has a deep and eternal influence on the person who has been truly "**born again**".

In the Greek text, the phrase "**having been born again**" is just one word "*anagennao*" and is only used twice in the entire New Testament – and both by Peter. The prefix "*ana*" means "again", and the verb "*gennao*" simply means to be born – thus, "**to be born again**". [1 Peter 1:3](#) is the first use and says,

1Pe 1:3 (NKJV) **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**

In fact, this is a completely New Testament word and is not found anywhere in any classical Greek literature. This word speaks of a very dynamic spiritual transformation that is made possible through the gospel of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹ It only makes sense that the New Testament would create this word simply because no other religious entity has such a unique experience as being "**born again**". The passage in [John 3:3](#) where Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again uses similar, but different words. In that verse it is the Greek word "*anothen*" for "**from above**" or "**again**" and our Greek word "*gennao*" for "**to be born**", or "**to be born from above**". In essence, both of the words are referring to the same experience and mean exactly the same thing, but it appears that Peter created a new Greek word to emphasize the uniqueness of the experience.

In the [1 Peter 1:23](#) passage, the verb for "**having been born again**" is in the perfect tense, the passive voice – both of which are critically important and somewhat different from [John 3:3](#). In that passage the verb is in the subjunctive mood, the aorist tense, and the passive voice. Since Jesus is talking with someone who is lost, He uses the subjunctive mood which is the mood of possibility, and He identifies that the idea of being "**born from above**" is an event which must have taken place in a person's life at a very specific point in time. There is an actual moment in time when a person is "saved", or in the New Testament language, is "**born again**", "**born from above**". This was the appropriate mood and tense to use if talking to someone to whom this had never happened. However, Peter is addressing individuals who have been saved, so he uses the perfect tense. What the perfect tense emphasizes is that not only did the event actually happen in the past, but it is having a continuing impact on the person's life. There

is no such thing as a legitimate salvific experience that has no meaningful impact on a person's life. If I can emphasize it another way, that is a spiritual impossibility simply because sanctification is a process guaranteed by God to take place in a believer's life. A believer cannot be saved, but never sanctified. Real salvation always makes a real difference. When someone is truly born from above, that spiritual reality supernaturally produces a complete and radical transformation in the person's life. It is not just a minor renovation, but rather an absolute conversion and transformation. Salvation is never to be seen or thought of as just a kind of minor alteration where an individual makes a "decision", but not a decision that radically impacts their life.

I know at this point that someone is going to say, "*Well, what about this person that I know who accepted Christ, but who has never really lived for Christ.*" The perfect tense of the Greek word "**having been born again**" makes that a spiritual impossibility. Think of it as the difference between a snapshot and a motion picture. If the motion picture of their life is that they are not living for Christ, have no interest in God's Word, and have no commitment to Christ's church, no matter what that individual may "profess", they simply are not saved. Whatever "experience" they may have claimed to have had has made no difference in their life. When someone is truly "**born again**", that unique spiritual experience always impacts his or her life – always. The perfect tense demands that position.

Then to make it even more emphatic, the verb is in the passive voice which means that someone else or that something outside of the individual is actually performing this work in the believer's life. Theologians describe this as what they call a "monergistic" work, or a work that is solely initiated and produced by the Holy Spirit. In [John 3:8](#), John defines it as being "**born of the Spirit**". The Holy Spirit is the One who not only gives this life, but He also creates this new kind of life in the individual. The sinner is no more responsible for their new birth any more than a young infant is responsible for their natural birth.² It is one thing to be "**dead in trespasses**" and then to be made "**alive together with Christ**". [Ephesians 2:4-5](#) says,

Eph 2:4 (NKJV) **But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**

So, how does Peter actually say that this happens? Well, he says that it happens "**through the Word of God**". Then, just to emphasize the actual power invested in the Word of God, he says that the Word is "**incorruptible**" or "**imperishable**". The Greek word for "**incorruptible**" is "*aphthartos*" and simply means that it is incapable of decaying, incapable of being corrupted.³ It describes that which cannot be ruined or impaired in some way, that which is not subject to death and decay, and it is that which endures forever. This is important for a very critical reason. It is the fact that that which produces God's divine life in a believer cannot fail. It has and always will have a very abiding, eternal, enduring, and indestructible character to it that cannot and will not be thwarted in any way. This is a word that speaks greatly of eternal security. Once the Word of God produces something in the sinner's life, at that moment that work of God in them becomes eternal and imperishable. Think of it this way. It is utterly impossible for God to start something in a person's life, but then fail to bring it to completion. It is a spiritual impossibility for God to fail.

Now, what is important about this word is that it is actually modifying the word “**seed**” (“*spora*”), and [1 Peter 1:23](#) is the only place that this word “**seed**” is used in the New Testament. It was a very curious thing to me personally why Peter would actually use a particular Greek word for “**seed**” if no one else has used it in the New Testament. There are 46 other places in the New Testament where another Greek word is translated as “**seed(s)**” (“*sperma*”), so why use this particular word when the primary Greek word for “**seed**” is used 45 other times. After much consternation over why, it appears that the definition of the word “*spora*” does not provide a great deal of distinguishable difference between that of the primary Greek word for “**seed**”.

The overriding point is that the “**seed**” that Peter is referring to is the actual divine Word of God itself and its work in a believer’s life cannot be destroyed, cannot be overcome, and in simple terms cannot be hindered because it is “**imperishable**” and “**incorruptible**”. It is always confusing to hear people talk about being saved, but then they have no meaningful biblical evidence of that in their life. What Peter is clearly stating in v23 is that somebody has actually been born again (“**having been born again**” – perfect tense, actually happened, ongoing results), and that it was “**through**” or by the means of something that is living and abiding and “**imperishable**”. The word “**through**” is the very common Greek preposition “*dia*” and it always represents the channel through which something happens. Every time you encounter the word “**through**” or “**by**”, you have to ask what is it that is being accomplished and how is it being accomplished? In this case, salvation is being accomplished through the “**incorruptible**” Word of God.

Here is the simple way that all of this works, and it involves two distinct elements. The first is that the Holy Spirit is the One who is completely responsible for bringing about someone being “**born again**”, “**born from above**”, or regenerated. It is His sole work of calling and drawing someone to Christ, then actually giving to them the gift of faith and the grace to believe. The second element is that the Word of God, the incorruptible seed, is the means that the Holy Spirit uses to awaken spiritual life in a spiritually dead sinner. [Romans 10:17](#) says,

Ro 10:17 (NKJV) **So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

No one is ever saved in a spiritual vacuum. It is always the Holy Spirit drawing a lost person to Christ through the Word of God – always. If a person is ever going to be saved, they must hear the Word of God. When they hear it and perceive it in their mind, at that point the Holy Spirit will transfer it to their heart and conscience in such a way that they actually believe what they have heard. The Word of God is so powerful that it is able to awaken new life in a spiritually dead individual.⁴ At a personal level as a pastor, I am convinced that as long as I make the message of Scripture clear, understandable, and correct, that the Holy Spirit will take it from my lips and place it into a person’s heart.

There are a number of good theologians who interpret v23 as the foundation as why believers can love other believers in v22. Even though that is perfectly correct, that is not the primary emphasis of v23. What Peter is stressing is the life transforming nature that is produced in a believer’s life by the Word of God. They have been born again by something that Peter declares lives and abides forever and is imperishable, and it is that life transforming power that enables them to love other believers fervently and sincerely. God’s work of salvation is not the Holy Spirit giving the believer the potential for change, but it is that they actually become a changed person.⁵ [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) says,

2Co 5:17 (NKJV) **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**

Salvation is not a renovation, but a transformation. That transformation has to be evident in a person's life if their professed salvation is to be considered a reality. The believer is given a completely new affection for God and the things of God. This is the undeniable reality of the new birth and a new heart, the inescapable work of the Holy Spirit in the individual's life.

V23 says that the Word of God both "**lives and abides forever**". Everything in life changes. We change, we grow, we get stronger, and we get weaker. The culture changes constantly and is always in a revolving state of flux. Ideas change, fads come and go, and men are constantly trying to revise, update, deny, and change the truth. Fashions change and what was outdated and old last year is in style and new this year. We are constantly exposed to these kinds of changes, and in that process people tend to migrate in and out with those changes. It is as if their life is never anchored in anything but change. However, for the believer, his life is anchored in the only thing that never does change – the Word of God. It "**lives and abides forever**". No matter what the lost man may think, the word of God is never outdated, never obsolete, never invalid, never antiquated, never worn out. Ideas constantly change and fads come and go every day, but the Word of God never changes. The truth of God's Word is the one constant upon which someone can build their life and be anchored in the midst of all of the change that is occurring around them. In a world that is constantly changing, we all need that which is unchanging, and that is the Word of God. Its truth is immutable, unchangeable, binding, and absolute. The Word of God is the only anchor that our life can have in a world that hates truth and absolutes, in a world that hates God and His righteousness. Peter describes all of this in v24 and 25 when he says,

1Pe 1:24 (NKJV) **because "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, ²⁵ But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.**

Everything that man glories in is transitory and fleeting in nature. [James 4:13-14](#) declares,

Jas 4:13 (NKJV) **Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.**

[Psalm 144:4](#) says,

Ps 144:4 (NKJV) **Man is like a breath; His days are like a passing shadow.**

No matter who we are and no matter what we have and no matter what we think that we know, in just a very short time the fleeting reality of life will prove itself out in our own personal lives. Family members will be fighting for our possessions, worms will be scrambling for our flesh, and if we have never been saved and embraced Christ as our Savior, the demons themselves will be fighting for our soul. At that moment in time the lost man will find himself completely unable to help himself, and he shall have passed away from all that he once thought real with a groan because it was so false and so deceptive.⁶ At the very best, the life of a man or woman who is lost is a mere vanity, an illusion, and a sad ending to what Christ wanted to provide for them. No matter what the lost man thinks, no matter what ideas

and philosophies he has bought into, all of it will be found to be worthless, empty, useless, and futile. His entire life will have been a total waste and will be found to be no more than eternal rubbish.

Thank God for His Son. Thank God for His Word. Thank God for His Spirit. Thank God for His salvation.

ENDNOTES

¹ Harris, *anagennao*, ep.

² MacArthur, 92

³ Zodhiates, 298.

⁴ Grudem, 91.

⁵ Sproul, 53.

⁶ Precept, *1 Peter 1:24-25*, ep.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Grudem, Wayne. *1 Peter: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988.

Harris, Ralph. W., ed. *The Complete Biblical Library: Greek English Dictionary*. Springfield, Missouri: World Library Press Inc., n.d.

MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Peter*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2004.

Sproul, R.C. *1-2 Peter, St. Andrews Expository Commentary*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011.

Unknown. *1 Peter 1:23-25*. n.d. http://www.preceptaustin.org/1_peter_122-25.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Revised. Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1992.