

It's a delight to be here and occupy this spot for the purpose of teaching God's Word. The topic that we've been given is sanctified in the spirit and with the sub-point of how people change. Now, I'm going to say this at the opening and address it again perhaps later, that we do know that if anyone, if we are all born in sin, and if we all are therefore by birth, by very inception, we are corrupt, then anyone who has ever believed in the promises of God has done so because they have been enabled by the Spirit. What we also know, is that in the New Testament and in the coming of Christ, who is the substance of all of God's saving promises, that there is a greater, more immediate work of the Holy Spirit in terms of indwelling that corresponds to what has been received by Christ. And it is unique to those who have come to faith since the coming of Christ. Not that Old Testament saints weren't empowered by the Spirit, but New Testament saints, and this is seen especially with the day of Pentecost, the church was anointed by the Spirit and the Spirit therefore indwells us with a deeper, not a deeper, or he doesn't do anything different in terms of enabling us, but he indwells us to a different degree than we can see in the Old Testament. Now that being the case, in taking on this particular topic, I want to use as my home base, and we'll reference other portions of scripture, Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 26 and 27, and then also verse 31. That's the home verse, Ezekiel 36, verses 26 and 27, and then also in verse 31. And I use this passage because in this passage, God is promising a greater work of the spirit in light of the coming of the Messiah. And so here's the text. 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. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good. and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. May God richly bless the reading and the hearing of his holy word. The first thing that we want to note here is that the indwelling and inner working of the spirit, as spoken of here in this particular text, is supplied by God as a part of his covenant of grace. This is not something that they work towards or something that you gain, but the work of the Spirit, even the indwelling of the Spirit, as alluded to here, is something that is supplied by God, but it's also supplied by God in keeping with his covenant of grace. In other words, his covenant integrity. is associated with this promise and this gift of the Spirit. Now, this is alluded to in verse 22 of Ezekiel 36, where he says, it is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my name. Therefore, the giving of the Spirit This indwelling of the spirit and this empowering of the spirit is a gift of God in keeping with his covenant of grace to his people. And so therefore, it is in the spirit of his own covenant integrity that he is making this promise of the spirit. And not only that, but he goes on to say, I will vindicate the holiness of my name. Basically, what he promises here corresponds to what he says in Hebrews chapter 10, verses 16 and 17. In that place, he says, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds. Then he adds, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. The indwelling of the spirit that is spoken of here in Ezekiel corresponds to God putting his law in our hearts, in our minds. In a sense, that is the way Adam was created, with God's law on our hearts and our minds. In our fallen state, it's still there, but it's kind of jumbled. We have a sense of right, we have a sense of wrong, but we don't connect it to the lawgiver, and we don't understand those commands to the degree that we should. What God promises in

his covenant of grace is a new heart and a new mind, and that corresponds to the giving of the Spirit. And again, notice the words in Hebrews, which is actually taken from the Old Testament, Jeremiah, where the Lord promises, I will put my law in their hearts and in their minds, and I will remember their deeds, their lawless deeds, no more. Therefore, the indwelling, sanctifying work of the Spirit is the effect of God's covenant of grace. It is not the cause of, it is the effect of God's covenant of grace. And so just as He seals the covenant of grace with the blood of His Son, He seals that covenant of grace to us with the gift of His Holy Spirit. Here's the second thing. The imagery of the heart of stone that's used here to describe the fallen human condition corresponds to the Apostle Paul's description of the fallen human condition as being dead in trespasses and sins. So to be spiritually dead, means to be unable to do what we have been created to do. Unable to respond to the word and will of God to the degree that we should. And so when it speaks here of a heart of stone, the whole idea of the transplanting of this heart of stone or transplanting the heart of flesh for the heart of stone finds its parallel in many New Testament passages, but particularly what the New Testament says about the dynamics of the new birth. So what's described here in Ezekiel as Lord taking a heart of stone out of you putting a heart of flesh in you and putting his spirit in you corresponds to what we see throughout the New Testament and we have labeled it as new birth. In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul says we who were dead in trespasses and sins have been made alive. spiritual death, which is our natural state, spiritual life, which is the gift of God's grace. Of course, we're familiar with the most, or I should say the most familiar passage on the new birth is Jesus' words himself. In John chapter three, Jesus says that unless one is born again, notice this phrase, they cannot see the kingdom of God. I know we often talk about what Jesus says about the new birth and born of the spirit, and the spirit is like the wind. As one preacher says, Jesus uses an analogy on the anatomy of the wind to describe the dynamics of the new birth. And all of that is true. But here's what we often overlook. One cannot see the kingdom of God. I don't know if we've given enough attention to that, that very statement. Without being born of the spirit, one cannot see the kingdom of God, which means we are not able to recognize the things of God. Not only are we not able to respond rightly to the law of God written on our hearts, but we're not able to see or comprehend the things of God. We don't have the ability to recognize those things that Jesus is talking about and those things that are necessary for us. Yes, he has emphatically stated the necessity of being born again, but the reason we need to be born again is because in our natural state, we cannot understand the things or see, comprehend, grasp the things related to the kingdom of God, which is why we're often confusing God's kingdom with our own. Notice the way Paul puts this in Romans chapter 8, verses 7 through 11. He says, for the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. for it does not submit to God's laws, indeed it cannot. Those who are in the flesh, heart of stone, cannot please God, no matter what they think. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if in fact the spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the spirit who dwells in you. Therefore, the description and the language that we see here in Ezekiel illustrates the means by which God graciously brings spiritual life to those who were spiritually dead. He takes away

our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh, which means he takes away inability and gives us ability. He takes away the absence of sensibility to the things of God and makes us sensitive to the things of God. All of this is important as it relates to understanding how people change. We don't change by external things. We change first and foremost because the Spirit indwells us. And the Spirit who indwells us replaces our heart of stone. So that we are now sensitive to the things of God, we are sensitive to the people of God, we are sensitive to God's holy law. So what the Lord says through Ezekiel here corresponds to everything that we see in the New Testament concerning the new birth. Transplants, heart of stone, gone. Heart of flesh, given. Your spirit, which was corrupt, is co-opted by the spirit of God, which is holy. not only are you awakened, but you are indwelt. Everyone who believes in Christ, in fact this is one of the mistakes that was made by various branches of the evangelical or protestant church around the 19th century, what we call the holiness movement or excuse me the Pentecostal movement which actually goes back to 19th century and then early 20th century It is the idea that somehow you can be this and now you need to receive the Holy Spirit. No No, the Holy Spirit does not come later There is no life in Christ without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit so we don't linger for him we don't ask for him and He's given to us. Jesus uses the same logic and language as it relates to the Holy Spirit as he does to the natural birth. No one ever asked their parents, hey, by the way, can I be born? No. We don't linger for it to be conceived by our parents. We don't ask for it. We don't labor in prayer. And then all of a sudden we are physically conceived. No. It is like the wind, says Christ. It is something that is beyond your perception and your understanding. Now, we also know through the language of the New Testament that this regenerating work of the Spirit is not just spontaneous. It doesn't just happen. It happens through the instrumentality of the Word. Peter says that we are born of the Spirit and the Word. So therefore, through the proclamation of the Word, then we know that those who are dead in Christ, or who are dead in trespasses and sins, are made alive. All of those that God has appointed unto eternal life, he has also appointed the means by which they would be brought to eternal life, and that is through the proclamation of the Word. And it's an interesting dynamic. The same Word goes forth. with power, with clarity concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. One person hears it and they hear an inspiring message. Another person hears it and it's garbage. Another person hears it and what they hear is the power of God unto salvation. Three options. When we hear the word of God, reject it outright, recognize it as good moral teaching, right up there with Confucius. Or recognize it as the power of God unto salvation. So if we are dead in trespasses and sins, what is the first thing that a dead man needs in order to go to his birthday party? He needs life. That's what he needs. And so what God does is he begins with us in our natural state. And whatever else flows from that is the outworking of the spirit that God has committed by his covenant of grace to those. Everywhere where there is a believer, the Holy Spirit is dwelling. I've illustrated this in the past. by using the old example, and you can tell I'm from a previous century. But we use the example of when they used to make the soap, you remember detergent, and they would put it in the box? And back in the day growing up, it was just detergent in a box. But at some point, and we all had, because it was detergent, you pour it and you scoop it and you have your own measuring cup and you figure out how much you need. And someone came up with a brilliant idea to put a scoop in the detergent. And we say, oh, wow, that's cool. But then how many of us didn't trust it? Because when we got the scoop, what did we

do? Put it to the side on the washing machine so the next box of detergent you get, you're already prepared and you have your scoop already. Then you bought another box. And you open the box, lo and behold, there's a scoop. Most of us probably have four or five stacked up before we got the message that if you buy this detergent, the scoop comes with it. Brothers and sisters, every believer has the scoop that is the Holy Spirit. There is no such thing as a believer who is not indwelt, not empowered, not quickened by the Spirit. It's like the scoop in the detergent. It comes with the box. So as Paul says, that if you had not the Spirit of Christ, you don't belong to Him. So no, you don't need to go to a rally, you don't need to go to a special service and learn how to receive the spirit. There are things that we need to learn in light of the indwelling spirit, but everyone who belongs to Christ is sealed with the spirit of promise, who is the guarantee that we will be what God has declared us to be And we will be what he has called us to be. Well, that brings us then to the third thing, which is the heart of my assignment here, how people change. Now, change from what? We know that we've already changed. We've talked about change from death unto life. And in that sense, people change because God has changed them. He has changed us from being spiritually dead to now being spiritually alive. But I know what you mean when you say, how do people change? Because here's what we are looking at. We're looking at and we're looking for moral transformation. So the question then is, how do people change? Now, what's clear from both the Ezekiel text as well as the Romans passage that we cited What's clear is that the effect of being regenerated and the effect of being indwelt by the Spirit is a consciousness of the law of God. It is not only a consciousness of God's law, but it also includes a desire to conform to that law. And it also includes a disdain for having not kept it. All of that is included in being made alive. But let's begin at the bottom there. Let's begin with the disdain. Because that's what the Lord promises, that you will loathe yourselves. for your sins. That's not just beating yourself up. I think it has two components here. Number one, we are first made aware of the wretchedness of our natural condition. Jonathan Epwood says that before God makes men mindful of his mercy, he first makes them mindful of their misery. And so when we come to saving faith in Christ, we don't come to saving faith in Christ because we realize, you know what? I've got that medallion. I've got that medallion. I've got that trophy. But I need Jesus. No. It's with fear. It's with trembling. It's with the fear and the trembling that we see with Isaiah in Isaiah 6, when he saw the glory of the Lord filling the temple. and he sees the glory of God and he says, woe is me, I'm a man that's undone. It is us like Ezekiel feeling the power of death in his bones. We come to an awareness of the holiness of God, the loathsomeness that God speaks of. When we loathe ourselves, it's not that we just feel bad about what we've done, we realize what we are. Like Peter, when he sees Christ at one point, he says, don't look at me. I'm a sinner. We are like John in Revelation, who falls dead as a dead man at the feet in the very presence of the glory of Christ. So I think in the first place, this loathsomeness is the recognition of what we are. Brothers and sisters, no one comes to Jesus because they just think, well, that's just something else to try. People may say that, but those who genuinely come to saving faith, come to saving faith because they recognize that I am a wretched, unholy sinner in the presence of a holy God, and I can't do anything about it. And so the loathing of ourselves is the first real awakening or sense of ourselves. We think too highly of ourselves until the spirit shows us otherwise. I remember when my son was born and my wife was in the hospital and I went to go visit and I made sure I cleaned up

before I took a shower and everything. And I get to the hospital and the nurse, before I could hold my child, the nurse made me wash my hands, sanitize my hands again, and on top of it, put on a mask. And I said, wait a minute, I'm just, I'm clean. And as I'm washing, I'm seeing this hospital white towel that they gave me. There was still dirt. I used to work for a brief moment between high school and college. I worked at Universal Studios and worked on a couple film projects. And one of the things that always amazed me is the light that you see in the actors and actress in the trailers or in the makeup room. They have lights around the mirrors that you think you're looking pretty good when you leave home. And when you get under that light, you say, whoa, boy, I missed that. When God awakens us by his spirit, all of that which we thought was cute is not so cute. And we see ourselves not as good guys trying to get better. We see ourselves as the Old Testament says that we, I think it was Job who says that we are but worms, we are maggots. Understand that when Isaiah saw himself as undone, he was already serving in the priesthood. He wasn't a stranger off the street. He was serving in the house of the Lord. And so God allows us to see our loathsomeness so that we can understand what he gives us in Christ. But not only does he allow us to see our loathsomeness at the point of our embrace of Christ, he also allows us to see our remaining sin. That's what the Spirit does. And we see this especially as more and more of the culture allows us to do things that are contrary to the law of God. We are brought under conviction by his spirit that what may be permissible does not correspond to who we are as the people of God. And what the spirit, indwelling spirit does is he calls us, he causes us to have not just get rid of it, but to disdain what we are by nature and what we continue to be or to continue to do even as we embrace Christ by faith. Our sins that we lay aside, sometimes we lay aside sin because we got caught. Sometimes we lay aside sin because, well, in the moment I just felt bad, but eventually the spirit who is at work within us causes us to see it as it truly is. The way that we put it oftentimes in our pastoral prayer as we pray for people to be brought under conviction, that we pray, Lord, let us see our sins as you saw Jesus when you crucified him. That's the language that Paul uses. So sanctification is not just a laying aside, it's a putting to death. And anytime a living human being has to put anything to death, you ought to feel it. There's something wrong with us when we can just put it to death. It doesn't matter if it's an insect, they might be an exception. But anything else, any living thing that has to be put to death, and sometimes in this life, that which is living does need to be put to death, but it shouldn't be easy. And it certainly isn't easy when we put to death the deeds of the flesh that remain in us. So therefore, the disdain for our not keeping God's law is itself an effect of the indwelling spirit. The other effect of the indwelling spirit is that it is him that causes us to desire. And it does begin with desire. We may not always accomplish what we desire, but the desire for the things of God is itself a fruit or a consequence of the spirit indwelling us. And then the very consciousness of God's standard for our lives. Not our own, not our own little club, not our section, no, God's law. We are made conscious of the fact that wherever we be and wherever we, whatever we are, we are subject to the overarching law of God. Two things in relation to this. One, the reason we change is because God is at work in us, causing us to both will and do of His good pleasure. It is God who is at work in us. And God is at work in us through the person and work of the Holy Spirit. But God is at work in us, and I love that, causing us both to will and to do. The will or volition to desire to do. And you know, sometimes it's good to be able to confess when we don't want to do it.

Because what God calls us to do, we don't always want to do it. We might know that if he says that we are to do it, but we bump our heads and recognize we can't. And one of the, not only can we not do it, But at the height of our rebellion, the truth be told, brothers and sisters, we don't want to do it. Elise Fitzpatrick tells the story of her grandson acting up in church and doing some things that he shouldn't have done to his brother. And when he gets home, his mother scolds him. And she told him to apologize. And he cried. And she says, go ahead and apologize. And he says, but I don't want to. Brothers and sisters, I know what we like to think. We like to think that whatever God wants us to do, we want to do it. But here's what Jesus has done and why the standard for our obedience is never what we would do, but always what he has done. We are told to love. not as you have been loved by your mother, not as you have been loved by your spouse. We are told to love as we have been loved by Christ. You know what that love looks like? While we were yet enemies, God sent his son. to die for our sins. How many of us could have received Peter back after Peter has boasted in front of all of the other apostles, Lord, I die for you, I laid out my life for you. And a few hours later, he denies that he knows him three times. But after the resurrection, Jesus goes to Peter, not just once, but twice. comes to him when he's with the 12, and then he finds him when Peter, because Peter has reached the point, I really embarrassed myself. I really messed up. I don't deserve to preach. I don't deserve to be a disciple. So he went back to his old business. And he went back to his old business partner. And Jesus comes to him while he's fishing for fish. And then he just asks him, Peter, Do you love me? Three times he asked him, do you love me more than these? And Peter couldn't even look him in the eye. Lord, you know I love you. And then here's what he tells him. Then you feed my sheep. Brothers and sisters, do you really think that you love like you've been loved by Christ? And we know that we haven't, but that's the standard. And how comfortable have we become at loving as we've defined love and not loving as we've been loved by him? Same thing with forgiveness. We don't forgive. Well, I'll forgive, but I won't forget. Can you imagine confessing our sins to Christ and him telling us, well, I'll forgive it, but I'm not going to forget. But the omniscient God who knows all things tells us because of his great love towards us, I will remember their lawless deeds no more. What is it that empowers us or even compels us to love and forgive to that degree? Brothers and sisters, It is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. And so therefore, the reason that we can change, and we're always changing, and don't give up on yourself because you messed up, you were empowered to overcome that sin, and then here you are six months later, same situation, you are still forgiven. And brothers and sisters, our ability, the reason that we are able to change, is because it's God who is at work in us, causing us both to desire and to do his good pleasure. And you know, just as he caused us to do the impossible of loving as we've been loved by him, and forgiving as he has forgiven us, he empowers us supernaturally to love and forgive in ways that we are not naturally able to do it. But here's the other thing. The mechanics by which we change includes our connection to the body of Christ. We change because the Spirit indwells us. And we know that we, one-to-one, we can go to God in prayer. We know that we are indwelt by his spirit, but the spirit who saves us connects us to the larger body of Christ. So the mechanics that enable us to change corresponds to our connection to the living body of Christ. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians chapter four, verses 15 and 16. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which

it is equipped when each part is working properly. And it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. That's the reason we are told in Hebrews 10 to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the custom of some. But the contrary, in the verse prior to that, he says, but pay close attention to one another. In other words, so that we can be both instruments, vessels through which God's grace and love is communicated to others, and so that we can hear ourselves. The word of God coming through our brothers and sisters to whom we are connected. All of the language that we see in the New Testament corresponds to us speaking the truth to love, in love to one another, which means not only giving words of exhortation and encouragement, but loving words of rebuke. We often use the language of, especially in reform circles, we talk about church discipline. But here's the problem when we use the word church discipline. We use the word church discipline only in relation to the final step of it. Do you know when church discipline begins? It begins, first of all, when God's word is proclaimed, when the law is proclaimed in a public setting, and you are brought under conviction for God's law. That is God, through his church, the instrument of the church, bringing you under rebuke. That's the first step. That's church discipline. That's God chastening, disciplining his children. And then when sometimes, whatever sin it may be, it may continue, it may carry on. And a brother or sister, whether it's family member, whether it's church or whatever, confronts you. Because if you're saying, that's the language that Jesus sets forth in Matthew 18. that our sins may become public in such a way, not even public where everyone knows it, but another brother or sister, whether it's in your local assembly or whether it's another, maybe a coworker, and they confront your sin. That's God chastening his church. And then when that still doesn't happen, then Jesus says, then you bring two or three, every step of the way, is God chastening. Granted, here's what we get used to. We can numb ourselves to God's word, but his spirit is at work in us. And convicting, and trust me, we will all go home clutching some sin that we refuse to turn from, but while we are here, God changes us. through the instrumentality of his word, and his word used by the spirit brings us under conviction for not conforming to God's law, brings us under conviction for loving something more than we've loved the Savior, bring us under conviction that in spite of our failures, we're still loved. The spirit brings us under conviction and the mechanics of him bringing us under conviction, causing us to change. The spirit at work in us and the dynamics of our being connected or the mechanics of our being connected to the body of Christ. That's why it's not healthy for Christians to be isolated. But here's a third way. We change as the indwelling spirit enables us to see our sins, now that we have seen our sinful condition as loathsome, when the spirit enables us to see our sin individually continuing, even as believers, he allows us to see it as loathsome. And then he empowers us. to put to death the deeds of the flesh. Now, if you don't think putting to death something that is dead is difficult, then I admonish you to watch all of the series of zombie movies that are out there. We know that the spirit, that the old man has died. He's just not convinced. He has no power over us other than what we give, but he's not convinced. Now, they have zombie movies now. I grew up with Dark Shadows, and that was with Barnabas. Barnabas, the vampire, and at the end of every episode, Barnabas was right back in his coffin. But in the beginning of each episode, he got out. Brothers and sisters, we all have some vampire or zombie tendencies in the old Adam. And it is the spirit who has been given to us by God himself as a part of his covenant integrity and commitment to us, who has taken that heart of stone and has replaced

it with a heart of flesh. so that we loathe ourselves and the old Adam that is within. And he empowers us to put to death the Adam that remains. I had a friend years ago, I grew up with him in our church, and he reached a point where he had become a very bright guy, but he was addicted to crack cocaine. I remember him calling me over to his house at one point, and he asked me to take his crack pipe, and he broke it, and he gave it to me. And he, as we were talking, he pointed me to a closet, and I looked in the closet, and there were several other broken crack pipes. but I had to convince him in the moment. Don't let these other broken crack pipes, which obviously you've gone back, don't let that deter you. Let's live in this victory right now. Thank God he did get over it. Brothers and sisters, don't let Satan convince you because there are four broken crack pipes. You've made that promise four times before and you've messed up again. Don't let that convince you that you can't break a fifth one. Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world. How do we change in our sanctification? How do we change? We change by the power of the spirit who indwells us and who reminds us through the local body, the ordinary means of the preached word, and the ordinary means of the Lord's table, that this is the body that was broken for you. And this is the cup of my blood of the new covenant. which was given for you, the guarantee of God indwelling you, claiming you as your own, causing you to see the beauty of holiness and the loathsomeness of your sinful condition and your continuing sin. We change as we are empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit to see holiness for what it is and unrighteousness for what it is. Look at God speaking. This is what I will do in those days. I will take my people for my name's sake, not for their sake, and I will take the heart of stone that's in you and give you a heart of flesh. He doesn't say you might. He says, you will loathe yourselves because of your unrighteousness. And where there is love for God, there is a hatred for sin. And the sad part of our ongoing wrestling with sin is that that which we, as Paul says in Romans 7, that which I hate, is what I end up doing. And that which I love is what I don't do. But praise be to God that he is the one who is able to deliver me from this through his son. How do we change? We change because we've been changed. And the more we grow in the knowledge that we've been changed, from vessels of wrath to vessels of honor, then we grow in our grasp of that grace and integrate it into all of our thinking and all of our doing to the glory of God. One of the passages that blows my mind is the great benediction in Jude, where Jude says, unto him who is able to keep you from stumbling. That part I get. But here's the part that gets me. And to present you spotless. If he could just get me dingy, that would be a vast improvement. But he will present me spotless. And here is the incentive of our holiness, that just as God looked on Christ as if he were a sinner in his crucifixion, when we go to him in prayer and we recognize who we are, he receives us and looks at us as if we're spotless. That's how we change. Let's pray. Our God and our Father, we come to you, blessed name of our Savior, and we thank you for your word. We thank you for your word of grace to us. We thank you for reminding us that we, in and of ourselves, are not able, but you, by your grace, have not only pardoned us of our sins, you've sealed us with your spirit, and he empowers us and equips us to do, to will and to do of your good pleasure. Continue to strengthen us, continue to trouble our spirits with our own sin, even as we have the comfort of forgiveness, so that we would consciously turn from that which is contrary to your word and will, and consciously pursue that which is your word and will. We ask these things in Christ's name, amen.