

# The Exclusive Work of the Holy Spirit

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[ 0 : 00 ] The last time we met, we talked about the great subject of God's sovereignty as it relates to the new birth.

! I'm amazed at the number of professing Christians, and churches, and even entire denominations, that reject the idea that God is sovereign in His universe.

I thank God that we see it and we proclaim it even if others do not. Our lesson tonight is in some respects a continuation of last week's lesson on our sovereignly produced rebirth.

To do so, we get to use a really interesting word that theologians have used for generations.

And it's a big word, which I don't get to use a lot of big words, but I'm going to use this one. And it is the fact that the new birth is a monergistic birth.

[ 1 : 27 ] I was taken aback when I discovered that my computer spell check program did not include that word. And I had to add it.

Well, I looked it up in Webster's dictionary and was very pleased with their definition. Now, remember, Brother Webster was a brother in Christ, although the dictionary has totally changed. Monergism is defined there as the theological doctrine that regeneration is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit.

Well, that's a great definition. And that's precisely what it is. Now, let's break it down. We know the word mono is one or single.

We hear the word monogamy or monogamous to describe the practice of having only one wife. And I thought about that. Why would you want two? And I don't have enough love for two wives.

[ 2 : 37 ] I only want to love my wife, just in case you listen to this. We've all heard of the board game Monopoly. Finally, the goal is for one person to have exclusive ownership over everything.

So in a monogistic belief system, there is one active agent. There is an opposite word, and that is the word synergistic or synergism.

And that means two or more agents working together to accomplish a goal or a purpose. And there are some churches and denominations that believe salvation is synergistic.

We meet God halfway. We meet Him three-fourths of the way or whatever. In our review of the various passages we have examined relative to the new birth, it is crystal clear.

There is one active person, the capital P, doing the work. And that one agent is God, and He accomplishes His work through His Spirit.

[ 3 : 53 ] Now, we've been camped out in John chapter 3, and that's not going to change tonight. Although we are going to broaden out a little bit, both directions in the Bible.

But I want to read this passage with the words monogistic and synergistic in mind. And then let's try and come to a conclusion as to which of these are used to describe the new birth and the act of regeneration.

Is it God acting alone, or do we somehow cooperate in the process? Put another way, as I'm often asked when I visit our brothers at VOM, what is God's part and what is our part?

John 3.3 Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. John 3.5 Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

By the way, that verse can properly be translated, born of water, even the Spirit. John 3.6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

[ 5 : 15 ] John 3.7 Do not marvel that I said to you, you must be born from above. John 3.8 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. Now remember, we said at the outset that the words born again in Greek can be translated born from above.

Obviously, the idea that we are born from above is God's work, not ours. We didn't do anything to get born from above. It comes down from heaven.

These passages and others like them make it very clear that God is solely at work here. God is the only agent in the new birth.

Men and women who are being saved are passive in the regeneration process. God alone is active. Put another way, we do not cause ourselves to be born again.

[6:18] We do not cause ourselves to be born from above. And I used the example a few weeks ago of our first birth. We didn't cause ourselves to be born. God alone does this work.

And I've said this on many occasions, salvation is far too important to be left in the hands of fallen creatures. We rely totally and completely upon the mercy and grace of God to enter into His kingdom.

God accomplishes this through the act of regeneration. That is why Jesus said, You must be born again.

Told Nicodemus that. And through Him, told all of us. So, regeneration in the Bible is always presented as Godward. God does this.

It is monergistic. It is God acting alone upon the soul of a man or woman. The Holy Spirit is the active and sovereign agent in the new birth.

[7:29] The Puritan John Owen, who I have come to really appreciate, and I camped out with him most of today after I got all the birds fed and all that. He said this, The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to regenerate God's elect children.

Great men of God. Let's consider some passages from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah for just a moment. God is speaking in these passages.

And He's going to use two words. I want you to listen for these words. He's going to use the words, I will. I think once He says, I shall, but He uses these words, I will, contained in these verses.

In the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, verses 33 and 34, For 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, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

[8:46] Six times. In verse 33, and in the last sentence of verse 34, God employs the words, I will. God has both the ability, and the desire to change the human heart.

He can even put within us His Word. Listen to another passage, this time in Ezekiel, chapter 11, verses 19 to 20.

Here's some I wills. 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. And again we hear God saying four times, He is going to do this work within us. This is God at work in the new birth.

Know the way to put it. This is God at work. Again we see this in Ezekiel 36, 25, very similar to Ezekiel 11. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols.

[10:11] I will cleanse you, and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit, and 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.

We hear again God using the words, I will. It is His work. This is the monergistic work of our Heavenly Father. This is written by the finger of God in granite.

He alone is the sole author and agent in our new birth. This is not us cooperating with God to bring about our new birth. That would be synergistic.

This is monergistic. God acting alone upon the human heart and spirit. Here's Romans 1.16. It says this, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

I did a little study today when I was reading some of John Owen's stuff, and J.I. Packer's commentary on John Owen. And that's just an amazing verse. Talking about the power of God.

[ 11 : 29 ] If part of that salvation was due to me, or something I did, then God's power is diluted to an extent.

I don't want to mix His power and my lack thereof. But His awesome power is on display in the salvation of His elect children.

And it is awesome. It has been well said by good ministers of the gospel that regeneration is the root and saving faith is the fruit.

We have looked at the fact that regeneration precedes faith and regeneration produces faith. We'll be looking at that a lot more, by the way. This is at variance with a lot of teaching in the churches today that argue to be regenerated, you must be born again first, and you've got to be born again. You've got to conjure up a certain amount of faith. And then after you have that faith, you will be regenerated. That is not only not true, that's an impossibility.

[ 12 : 40 ] That's an impossibility. To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must be born again. And this is exactly what the Lord told Nicodemus. You must be born again. That is our first step into Christian faith.

And this is a teaching not only of the Old Testament, which we've heard tonight and other nights, but in the New Testament will. Listen to what Jesus told Martha. Remember Martha?

Martha and Mary. You've got to love them. One of the sisters of Lazarus. Of course, Lazarus is dead. Been in the tomb for four days.

Not pleasant smell. I've been around that. Some of you probably have too. This is the same Lazarus that the Lord was about to raise from the dead. And the Lord Jesus looks at Martha and He says this, I am the resurrection and the life.

Everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? Now note the order here. Jesus tells this grieving woman that everyone who lives in Him, that's regeneration.

[ 13 : 53 ] That's being born from above, born again. Once they live in Him, they will believe. That's the faith that comes after rebirth. And it's interesting, the word faith and believe are the same Greek word.

Or the root, anyway. Pastuo. Another verse found in John's epistle of 1 John 5.1. Everyone who believes, there's that word believe, that Jesus is the Christ, now listen to this, has been born of God. God. This is phenomenal. And everyone who loves, the Father loves whoever has been born of Him. Take note of the verb tenses used there. Everyone who believes, and that's present tense. I mean, I would know that and wouldn't have to copy off the girl next to me. I was horrible in English. You all knew that. Everyone who believes, present tense.

Other translations say, whoever or whosoever believes. And again, the Greek language uses the same words for believe and have faith. Everyone in the room who believes, is in, again, in the present tense, but take note, what has happened in the past.

[ 15 : 09 ] And this is past tense. Everyone who believes, present tense, has been, past tense, born of God. Belief comes from new birth, from regeneration, from being born again.

The new birth precedes saving faith. It is the new birth that produces saving faith. Whoever believes, has been born of God.

I am told by men who understand the Greek language, the language of the New Testament, the passage says, whoever believes, has already been born of God. Amazing. Now we go on to a very important point in all of this.

Logically and theologically, regeneration must precede saving faith. That's an essential. When we were lost, we were incapable of conjuring up saving faith.

We're lost. We, and we've studied this like November, October, we cannot overcome our wicked heart.

[ 16 : 17 ] We can't overcome our sin nature on our own. We can't overcome our enmity with God unless God is the overcomer. And the Bible uses that term many times to describe God.

But chronologically, it practically happens at the same time. So don't panic. This is a cause and effect scenario.

Regeneration produces faith. There's not this appreciable break in time. You're not regenerated and 40 years later you wake up one day and have faith.

It doesn't work like that. There is not a measurable gap between the event of the new birth and the inflow of God produced faith.

When God regenerates the soul, that soul is immediately alive in Christ. We've got new things we want to look at. We have this burning desire to know Jesus and get into His Word.

[ 17 : 23 ] God gives His children the gifts of repentance and faith. Those are grace gifts of God. and they follow regeneration. This is one of the words of Dr. John Piper.

I had Dr. Piper I got to think you guys might think it's Everett Piper so it's John Piper. Your act of believing and God's act of begetting are simultaneous.

God does the begetting and you do the believing at the same time. God's doing is the decisive cause of your doing.

The operation of God's will is the cause of the operation of your will. His begetting is the decisive cause of your believing.

If you have a hard time thinking that one thing causes another thing simultaneously think of fire and heat or fire and light. The instance there is a fire there is heat. The instance there is fire there is light.

[ 18 : 26 ] The light and the heat did not cause the fire the fire cause the light and the heat. Well I was impressed with Dr. Piper's illustration because he is actually treading on my territory.

Some of you might remember that at one time I was a fire and arson investigator all over the country investigating fires. When I would be in court on a case I would often have another investigator that was going to lie about the fire and testify against my findings.

And it's so funny because often the plaintiff attorney got a person that had no background whatsoever as a fire investigator.

In fact I had one done in Little Dixie part of Oklahoma in trial. I was in federal court down there and their expert turned out was the arsonist.

We found out later he's the one that burned the place and he was their expert. But often they had no background as a fire investigator. He might have been a reserve deputy three months before he was fired but he never worked a fire in his life.

[ 19 : 38 ] But in the federal court they say if you say you're an expert you're an expert. So knowing that person was going to take the stand my lawyer that was on our team he would say do you have any questions I can ask this guy?

Oh he said oh yeah absolutely. And I said when you get him up there ask him the definition of fire. I mean if he's an expert surely he knows what fire is.

And you stop and think about it would you like to be on the spot to try to define it's kind of one of those can we really define that? Well we can so I would say just ask him in front of the jury and the judge what is fire?

Describe it to us define it. Well I decided if I'm going to really do that I better know what the answer is because they're going to come back at me you know and I've used that successfully. It's embarrassing.

You're a fire expert and you know what fire is? I mean oh man I mean I've had juries snicker at people fire. You know and then when I get up there the plantarist says can you define fire?

[ 20 : 49 ] Fire is a process of rapid oxidation that gives off both light and heat. That's it. That's the answer. Well that goes back to Dr. Piper light and heat. I still remember that answer.

I'm scared not to memorize it. This is the analogy that Dr. Piper is using in the new birth and faith. One produces the other but you're never going to find one without the other.

Wherever there's fire there's heat. Wherever there's fire there's light. Wherever there's the new birth there's faith. Wherever there's a new birth there's repentance. God moves us right along.

Our begetting is caused by God but our faith is never independent of God and the new birth. There is no such thing as a person who's been regenerated but does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. that would mutually exclude each other. It can't happen. How many times have you guys ever had a guy say well I believe in God I just don't believe in Jesus.

[ 21 : 53 ] No you don't believe in God. You believe in a God of your own imagination but you don't believe in the biblical God the true God the real God. The moment God puts divine life within a soul there's an immediate believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we're babies in our beliefs aren't we? We have to have milk. Don't start out with a T-bone or a prime rib. We start out with milk. Regeneration the new birth being born again being born from above is monogistic.

It is God who causes it. You can tell from our previous studies that I've got this renewed interest in Dr. John Owen. And even if you couldn't tell that I already told you that tonight.

He was a towering figure in the 17th century and I love to read his books as long as they've been abridged by somebody smarter than I am.

Dr. Owen is a difficult read. But he towered over the 17th century. He was referred to in his lifetime as the John Calvin of England.

[ 23 : 07 ] And that was meant as a compliment. Listen to what he says. To say that we are able by our own efforts to think good thoughts or give God spiritual obedience before we are regenerated is to overthrow the gospel and the faith of the universal church in all ages.

Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit unaided by human effort or cooperation. regeneration. Yet as soon as God acts in regeneration there is the human response in believing upon the Lord Jesus Christ because in that instant and in that moment God the Holy Spirit grants us saving faith and repentance.

Just as the baby comes out of the womb and cries out gasping for breath that there would be air to fill the lungs even so the moment one is birthed into the kingdom and there is spiritual delivery of new life the very first act of the newly born spiritual soul is to call out to God for salvation and to commit one's life to Jesus Christ.

Another great man of God was the late Dr. Charles Hodge. He was a professor of systematic theology at Princeton Seminary when it was a real Christian institution that was back in the 19th century.

He spoke as to how important it is to keep the proper order in regeneration and faith. He wrote this, No more soul destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that sinners can regenerate themselves.

[ 24 : 46 ] You cannot just repent and believe as you please. As it is a truth both of scripture and experience that the unrenewed man can do nothing of himself to secure his salvation, it is essential that he should be brought to a practical conviction of that truth.

Go back to our study when we talked about our nature, our sin nature, that we're dead in trespasses and sins. All that was the foundation for what we're studying now.

Now we are belaboring this because there's nothing more important than our total dependence upon God for our salvation.

Nothing more important than that. There is an order in this taught in the word of God. In John's gospel the new birth is spoken of in verse 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

There is no mention of saving faith in those passages of scripture. But in the great chapter 3, we do find saving faith, but it comes in in verse 12, verse 15, and verse 16.

[ 26 : 01 ] Listen to these. This is verse 12, 15, and 16. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how are you to believe if I tell you heavenly things?

Whoever believes in him may have eternal life, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Then we get to verse 18 of John chapter 3, we read these words. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

Believe is faith. this is a theological and a logical order. In chapter 3 of John, we first have regeneration.

That's what we've been studying all these weeks. We're going to keep going. A few more lessons. We have regeneration. That will be followed by faith and repentance.

[ 27 : 14 ] repentance. So the Bible teaches that our new birth is monergistic. It is accomplished by God the Holy Spirit.

He is active and we are passive. But when God acts, it causes us to act as we receive the free gift of salvation by believing.

By believing. Again, a grace gift of God. It's all of grace, isn't it? Spurgeon wrote a book, all of grace. The new creation is as much and entirely the work of God as the old creation.

The God who said, let there be light, and instantly there was light, is the same God who speaks into our darkened hearts and said, let there be life.

And there was life. Now, I'd like to take credit for that, and I didn't give credit to anybody, but I'm pretty sure that's Charles Spurgeon. That wasn't me. God said, let there be light, there was light.

[ 28 : 26 ] In regeneration, He says, let there be life, and there is spiritual life. Born again, born from above. So, what do we do with all this knowledge?

You guys are just crammed full of it. what do we do with it? I suggest, I have a suggestion.

With all this knowledge we've got tonight, but the weeks leading up to this, when you get home, let's fall on our knees and cry out to God as a gracious and loving Father.

He didn't have to do any of this. He did it because He wanted to. Let's acknowledge to Him that He has birthed us into the kingdom and not we ourselves.

As a result, we should spend the rest of this life and eternity glorifying the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

[ 29 : 40 ] His grace is beyond our ability to comprehend that He would regenerate rebels, and that's what we were, who were at that very moment sinning against Him is staggering.

This is not a God of human creation. Humans could not create such a God. No way could humans create that God. There are gods of the human imagination and Islam and Hinduism and Buddhism and Confucianism and just rattle off the isms.

But this is the true God. We would never create a God like this. We would never write the Bible because it condemns us. These are divine items.

So let's spend the rest of our life thanking Him in triunity because truly His grace is beyond our ability to comprehend.

He's regenerated rebels. He's regenerated sinners. And may I suggest that we cry out with one voice in our closet to God be the glory to God alone be the glory.

[ 31 : 06 ] moment moment