



The Spirit Is Sent The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Here we go. Foundation set. We've got one more facet of this first part, but really...Okay, we've got the cross. Obviously, not the end of the story. Jesus dies on the cross, and He rises from the grave. He ascends into heaven, and when He does, the Spirit of God is sent. This leads us to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The end of Luke's Gospel, Luke 24 and Acts 1 both give us a picture of Jesus being lifted up into heaven.

The Son ascends to the Father in heaven. The Spirit descends to believers on earth.

The Son ascends to the Father in heaven, and then, in the next chapter, the Spirit descends to believers on earth. Acts 2:1-4,

"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting." Just imagine the scene. "And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

The Spirit convicts sinners.

The Spirit comes down, just as Jesus had promised, to do exactly what Jesus had said. The Spirit convicts sinners. "When he comes," Jesus had said, "he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment," (John 16:8-11).

The Spirit applies salvation.

The Spirit convicts sinners, and the Spirit applies salvation. This is a text we're going to get to a little more later from Titus 3. The Bible says God "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."

It's the Spirit who applies salvation...watch this, twofold...first through Spirit-empowered proclamation of the gospel. Here's the deal: in order to be saved, someone must hear the gospel. The gospel requires a human person to speak it, a human person who says, "Jesus has died on the cross. He's risen from the grave in order to reconcile you to God." This is a message that must be delivered by a human person, speaking it, and by divine power accompanying it. You see this all throughout the book of Acts as the gospel is proclaimed.

It's proclaimed. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit. The disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking. In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul talks about how the Thessalonians...still with us Thessalonica, I hope...but they received the word, not just in word...the gospel...not just "in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction," (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5). So, the Spirit anoints, empowers the proclamation of the gospel, and then...so,

through the Spirit, empowered proclamation of the gospel...and then through Spirit-enabled response to the gospel.

We're going to talk about this in a minute, but when someone is saved, they are born of water and the Spirit. "*Born of the Spirit*," John 3:8 says. So, here's the deal. All of this has to happen in order for someone to be saved: the Father satisfied, Son sacrificed, Spirit sent. In order for anyone to be saved...in order for anyone to be saved, they must hear the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit...everything else we're about to talk about with the doctrine of salvation is the work of God's Spirit in salvation.

SALVATION

God Reveals Our Need The Doctrine of Depravity

Our Need...

When you look at kind of the outline that we're following tonight, God reveals our need, God changes our heart, God enables our belief...the way God does all of these things in salvation is through His Spirit. So, the foundation is set at this point...the cross, what happens at the cross, the glory of God, sacrifice of the Son, and the sending of the Spirit. How does He save us? That leads us to the doctrine of salvation. The first part that I've got there...and it's going to be a little bit of a recap...but it's important: God reveals our need. The doctrine of depravity: in order to be saved from something, you need to realize what you need to be saved from.

Francis Schaeffer was once asked the question, "What would you do if you met a modern man on a train, and you had one hour to talk to him about the gospel?" Schaeffer replied,

"I would spend 45-50 minutes on the negative, to really show this man his dilemma—that he is morally dead. Then I would take 10-15 minutes to preach the gospel. I believe that much of our evangelistic and personal work today is not clear simply because we are too anxious to get to the answer without having a man realize the real cause of his sickness, which is true moral guilt, (not just psychological guilt feelings) in the presence of God."

Nobody who is swimming just fine in a lake cries out, "Save me." The person drowning in the middle of the lake is the one who's crying out, "Save me." So, until we realize what we need to be saved from, then we're never going to get to the whole beauty of salvation.

I hope we've hit on that enough to at least get the picture, that we wouldn't say, "Well, my life isn't that bad. Like, I'm not a horrible sinner. I'm not deserving of death, eternal death." The starting point of salvation is realizing that's a lie. We are that bad. We are horrible sinners, and God would send us to hell in our sin. That's the starting point.

So, until we come to this point, we'll never get to the rest of salvation. So, God reveals our need. Salvation begins with seeing our sin. I put Genesis 3 here, entrance of sin into the world, just to remind us of what really the core of sin is. We have rejected God's Word. I want you to notice how sin started here. The first verse in Genesis 3, "*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say...'*" Now, Eve should have been suspicious as soon as she

heard the words, *"Did God actually say,"* and she should have been suspicious because there was a snake talking to her. So, that's one thing that should arouse suspicion.

Even deeper than that, this question, *"Did God actually say..."* for the first time is smuggled in. This covert, subtle idea comes into the world, that the Word of God is subject to the judgment of men, and this has driven falsehood...that idea has driven falsehood ever since. It's popular books that say, *"Did God really say that?"* It's dangerous. We've rejected God's Word. We've spurned God's authority, asserted our independence from God. God said, *"Don't eat from the tree."* *"We're going to do it anyway. He's not Lord over us,"* and we have denied God's character.

This is Eve, in her sin, Adam his sin, saying, *"God's ways are not good for us. Our ways are better. God is not good for me, I'm better."* Oh, see the essence of sin here. Eve, Adam, they trusted Satan instead of God, and to think...oh, the horror of it...that anytime I sin, this is a picture of me saying to God, *"Your ways are not best. I have better ways. I don't trust you."* This is our sin.

Our Status...

We've denied God's character, and our status? God said in Genesis 2, *"For in the day that you eat (of that tree) you shall surely die."* *"Just as sin came into the world,"* I quoted this earlier, *"through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned,"* (Romans 5:12).

So, this is the doctrine of depravity. Ladies and gentlemen, we are dead in our sin and unable to save ourselves. The consequences of sin are all over our lives. Run through them here: Our minds are blinded. We're futile in our thinking. We claim to be wise, but we are fools. We're fools. *"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done,"* (Romans 1:21-23). *"The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers,"* (2 Corinthians 4:4). Our minds are blinded. Our emotions are disordered. Dishonorable passions, passions of the flesh. Our bodies are defiled. Romans 1 says, *"God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves."* Our wills are distorted. None of us is righteous. We've all turned away from God. Our will does not submit to God's law. It cannot submit to God's law.

Our relationships are broken, our relationship with God. We look in Genesis 3 after the fall of man, and a relationship that was once marked by love and joy and peace and unhindered communion is now marked by guilt, shame, and fear. Guilt, shame, and fear that we are all familiar with, and broken relationships with one another. The very beginning of the next chapter in the Bible, murder (Genesis 4:8). James 4, Titus 3 tells us all the quarrels and fights we have are ultimately due to sin in our lives. Minds blinded, emotions disordered, bodies defiled, wills distorted...this is all of us. Relationships with God and others broken.

We are slaves to sin. Jesus said, *"Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin,"* (John 8:34). We are dominated by Satan. In the *"snare of the devil,"* Paul says in 2 Timothy 2. *"The whole world lies in the power of the evil one,"* 1 John 5. We are lovers of darkness. The last thing we want before God or each other is our sin exposed, so we run into darkness. We run from light; we hate light, run to darkness. Darkened in our understanding. Hard hearts. We're children of wrath. We saw this in Ephesians 2, *"by nature children of wrath."* We are perishing. It's clear in all three of these texts.

We are condemned before God. John 3:18, two verses after John 3:16, the famous verse about God's love, Jesus said, *"Whoever does not believe is condemned."* Sin brought

"condemnation for all men," (Romans 5:18). We're condemned before God. We are lost without God. It's why Jesus came, "to seek and save the lost," (Luke 19:10). We're lost without Him. We're separated from God, alienated from Him. Colossians 1 said this is our problem. Our problem is not that our lives are not going right. Our problem is not that we've messed up and made a few bad decisions. Our problem is that we are cut off from God, every one of us, separated from God, morally evil from our...Genesis 8:21, "The intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." There's a reason why my precious, cute, three-year-old, lovable son can be so sinful: because he's born with it. Jesus says, Luke 11, "Obviously you're evil." We are sinfully sick. We are spiritually dead. "You were dead in the trespasses and sins," (Ephesians 2:1). "The wages of sin is death," (Romans 6:23). Dead in trespasses and sins. When the Bible says that in Ephesians 2:1, the original language means "dead." Dead. Not mostly dead.

Dead, and we are destined for hell. Now, I know that this is not a popular doctrine, but it is all over Scripture, and all over the words of Jesus Christ Himself. Scottish professor James Denney wrote, "If there is any truth in Scripture at all, this is true: that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to the gospel and to love and obey Jesus Christ incur, at the last advent, an infinite and irreparable loss. They pass into a night on which no morning dawns."

Hell, a place where, Mark 9:48, "the fire is not quenched." Scripture teaches that hell is a place of fiery agony. "The lake of fire," Revelation 20. "The lake that burns with fire and sulfur," Revelation 21. Some people say, "Now, do you really think that's literal? Literal fire and sulfur? Aren't these just symbols?" Okay, maybe, maybe, but if that were the case, if they're just symbols, then what are they symbols for? Snow? Vacation? Happy hunting grounds? No, if these symbols mean anything, they mean that hell is the most dreadful, appalling reality that we can imagine. A place of conscious torment. A place of total darkness. A place of divine destruction. A place of eternal duration. Revelation 14:11 says, "The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night." Thomas Watson, Puritan preacher, said, "Thus it is in Hell; they would die, but they cannot. The wicked shall be always dying, but never dead; the smoke of the furnace ascends forever and ever. Oh! Who can endure thus to be ever upon the rack? This word 'ever' breaks the heart."

Our Solution...

So, that's our sin and our status. We've rebelled against God. Blinded, broken, children of wrath, separated from God, spiritually dead, destined for hell. So, what is our solution? What can save us from this situation? Psychotherapy? Psychology? Just think better thoughts about yourself? Education? Culture? Just learn more; knowledge saves. Not depraved knowledge. You going to try harder? Live a better life? Do better next time? Raise your hand, say these words, sign this card, walk this aisle? None of these things can save you from your sin. What we don't need is superficial religion. Ladies and gentlemen, throughout history, people have tried to cover up their sin before a holy God with religion...offering sacrifices, singing songs, doing deeds, attending churches. None of these things work.

God says in the middle of Isaiah 1, "(Your sacrifices are a) trampling of my courts...an abomination to me...my soul hates" them. Same thing in Jeremiah 7. We don't need to try harder. The problem is much, much deeper than that. Jeremiah 17 says, "Sin is engraved on the tablet of their heart." We don't need superficial religion.

We need supernatural regeneration. We're dead in sin, and we need to be born again. We need a new heart. Now, here's the question, follow really close with me, because to stray

right here would be to miss everything else after this. You think about what we just talked about. How can people who are morally evil at the core of who they are choose good? How can people who are sick make themselves well? How can slaves set themselves free? How can the blind choose to receive sight? How can lovers of darkness run into the light when they hate the light? How can an object of wrath appease wrath? How can those who are dead, meaning dead in sin, choose to come to life? How many of you one day thought, "I think I'd like to come to life now," and you were born? No. No, in order for these things to happen, you have to be acted upon from the outside. Right? There's not a list of boxes to check off at this point to be saved. You're dead. You can't check anything. You can't save yourself; you need God to do this for you.

That's why I've talked before about the seminary professor, preaching professor, used to take his students into a cemetery, and he would tell the students one by one to preach over the graves and call people who were dead to rise up from their graves and walk out. One by one, each student would step up awkwardly and shout over the graves, and nothing would happen, and he looked at them, and he said, "It is the same thing when you preach this gospel. You are speaking to those who are dead, and apart from the Life-Giver, nothing happens." Nothing happens.

God Changes Our Heart The Doctrine of Regeneration

Salvation is not about going from being a bad person to being a good person. Salvation is about going from being dead to alive. That's key. Only God, by His Spirit, can do that. So, how does He do it? It leads to, second...He reveals our need, opens our eyes to see our sin, our status before Him, and then He changes our heart...the doctrine of regeneration. Listen to Titus 3, this is what we just talked about:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others, and hating one another.

That's what we just talked about.

But, when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 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...

That's what we're talking about, and the main text in the Gospels on regeneration is John 3, when Jesus tells Nicodemus, a religious man, a devoutly religious man, that he needs to be born again. "Truly, truly I say to you," Jesus said to him, "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." At the end of that passage, He says, "You must be born again." Regeneration is, basically, a word that means "born again."

The Theological Question: What is regeneration?

So, here's the theological question...What is regeneration? Here's the definition that we're going to unpack: Regeneration is an instantaneous, unrepeatable, mysterious act of God, in which He changes a lost sinner's heart. Let me break that down. "Instantaneous" means it happens at a point in time. It's what happened to Lydia in Acts 16:14. God opened her

heart. Just as someone is born at a certain time, so someone is born again at a certain time.

Now, this is key because sometimes, circumstantially, this plays out differently in different people's lives. Some people can remember the exact moment when they were born again. Oftentimes, adults maybe, who are saved, who come to faith in Christ...it's sometimes more of a dramatic moment. They can remember, "That was the moment." There are others of you who may have grown up in a Christian home, and there was a point where you were saved, but you can't really identify or remember the moment. The key is, we see both of these in Scripture. We see Paul...obviously a dramatic moment. We see Timothy...grew up hearing the faith, probably a little harder to define. We don't know for sure, but what we need to realize is, we were...whether we can remember the exact moment or not...we were born again at a certain moment. Nobody oozes into the kingdom. You're born again. One point dead, next point alive. Big difference, and it didn't just kind of gradually develop. It happened. You're born again. So, that's what we mean by instantaneous.

"Unrepeatable," meaning it doesn't happen at various times. Once you're born, you're born. So, it's unrepeatable. You're alive. You're alive. You don't have to be born again, because you're alive. Born again, again. You know what I mean? Instantaneous, unrepeatable, "mysterious." Mysterious because it's spiritual. Listen to how Jesus describes being 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,*" (John 3:8). It's a spiritual birth, which makes it, in a sense, mysterious.

It's an "act of God." Now, we've already talked about this some, how we can't choose to come to life. Someone has to act upon us in order for that to happen. Scripture never says, "Be born again." It never says that. Never says, "Be born again, and you'll be saved." This is something that happens to us. God does this. God gives spiritual birth. You "*were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God,*" (John 1:13). Regeneration comes from the Father. Jesus said, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,*" (John 6:44). "*God, being rich in mercy...made us alive together with Christ,*" (Ephesians 2:4-5). "*Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth,*" James 1.

So, from the Father, through the Son. "*He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*" (1 Peter 1:3). From the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. We've talked about this through Spirit-inspired proclamation of the gospel and response to the gospel. In the Word. "*You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God,*" (1 Peter 1:23-25).

Now, pause real quick, this is huge. This is huge. In our efforts to lead people to Christ, we have run right past this great and glorious reality: that only God can give spiritual birth. In much of contemporary evangelism, we try to augment the message, to adjust the gospel, to make it more palatable to sinful people, and when we do that, we are missing the whole point of salvation. The reality is, because of God's work in regeneration, because I believe in regeneration, because I know this to be true based on the Word, then I can stand in front of a group of people who have cold, sinful, dead hearts, the people that the world would least expect...the Church would least expect to respond favorably to the gospel...and I don't have to cajole them to try to get them to respond to the gospel. I just speak the gospel, and I've got confidence in the Spirit of God that something is going to happen there that's not natural...that's supernatural. Somebody is coming out, because the Spirit of God does this. I don't have to manufacture something in order for them to respond. I need to give them the

gospel and be wise in how I give them the gospel, and trust the Spirit of God to bring about regeneration. I don't have to come up with trickery and device and dumbing down. God saves, and He does it through His Spirit...spiritual birth. Okay, we've got to move on. God does this...because I get riled up. All right.

So, instantaneous, unrepeatable, mysterious act of God, in which He changes a lost sinner's heart. That's key language. It's where I want us to...I want us to see that the change that we're talking about is from inside out, not the outside in. We're talking about change from the heart. This is promised in the Old Testament. God said in Ezekiel 36, "*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.*" That is right in the middle of that passage right there, and it's interesting...you might make a little note. You go through Ezekiel 36:22-32, you circle every time you see "I." Seventeen different times in these 11 verses God says, "I do this." "I do this." "I do this." "I do this." "I give spiritual birth." "I do this." So, it's promised that God would do this. God will forgive His people of their sin. This is what Old Testament was looking forward to.

God will forgive His people of their sins. Jeremiah 31:34, "*I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*" God will fill His people with His Spirit. He'll bring dead bones...Ezekiel 37 says...He'll "*bring dead bones to life.*" He'll pour out His Spirit on all, Joel 2 says, and as He does, God will transform their wants. This is what the people in the Old Testament longed for and needed. They had hearts of stone, hearts that were hard toward God, unresponsive to God, unyielding to God, and God says in Jeremiah 31 that He will give them a new heart that knows God and wants God. He'll transform their wants, and God will enable their wills, give them a heart of flesh. God will give them a heart of flesh, "*that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them,*" (Ezekiel 11:19-20). They will have a new heart that empowers them to walk with God.

All of these promises in the Old Testament then fulfilled in the New Testament. When Jesus comes to this conversation with Nicodemus, and He says, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God,*" (John 3:5). Immediately, we recognize language from the Old Testament. When Ezekiel said...that's back in a passage we didn't read...Ezekiel 36, "*I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean from all your impurities.*" God cleanses us. This is what happens when we're born again. Born of water, cleansed, our hearts are cleansed. Hebrews...the author of Hebrews, at the end of this passage says we'll draw near to God "*with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*"

So, not only...now follow this...not only will God cleanse us, but God indwells us. Regeneration: God cleanses our heart and indwells our heart. "*The Spirit of God,*" Romans 8:9 says, "*dwells in you.*" See what's happening here. Don't miss this. In regeneration, God is not improving our old nature. That is the recipe every other religion in the world offers. "Do this, do this, do this, follow these rules, make these steps, make this trip, worship these gods, do this," and if we're not careful, we'll fall in line and do the same thing, "Say these things, come to church, do this, do this."

It misses the whole point. God, in regeneration, doesn't improve our old nature; He imparts a new nature. New creation. Listen to 2 Peter 1:3-4. At the end of this passage, it says, "*Through (His promises) you may become partakers of the divine nature.*" What a bold statement: you and I, participants in the divine nature. Salvation means we become a new creation. This means everything changes. We have a new mind. God changes your heart. You begin to have this transformation from the inside out, a new mind, a mind with a

capacity to know God. *"The mind of Christ,"* 1 Corinthians 2. A mind that's being *"renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator,"* Colossians 3. A new mind.

Second, new desires. Oh, this is wonderful. Jesus says in John 6:25-35, end of this passage that I've got there, *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."* Oh, when you are born again, the deepest desires of your soul are met in Christ. Regeneration. It's like you've been wandering in a desert, and you're looking for water in all these different places: relationships, this man or this woman, money, greed, success, approval. Whatever it is, whatever it is for all of our lives, it looks different. We're looking, and then, regeneration is when we realize that the water is found in Christ, and we drink, and we drink deeply. We come to Him. He's bread from heaven, living water. These are the pictures we see in John. Which is why when you hear somebody say, "Well, I guess I'll trust in Christ. I want to go to heaven. Even though it's going to be tough to let go of the things of the world," you know that regeneration is probably not happening here.

We have this idea of salvation, as getting out of the line going to hell, and getting in the line to go into heaven, and we'd really kind of rather be enjoying those things over there, but we're going to do this over here to save our skin. That's not salvation. Salvation is a revolutionary new taste capacity, where you realize that the world doesn't satisfy, and Christ does, and you drink from His water, and you eat from His bread, and you say, "Why would I go back to that? I've got Christ and a new heart."

It's why people indulging in the pleasures and pleasures and pleasures of the world, not feasting on Christ, you wonder, "Have you been born again?" Because when you come to Christ...this is the beauty...we're going to get there. All right. It's so much to say.

All right, don't miss this. You get a new heart, a heart that beats for Him. When I come home to my wife Heather and...I come home from work one day, maybe, and give her a big, fat kiss on the lips, and she says, "What's that for?" If I say, "Well, it says here in my marriage manual, this is something I really need to do. Recommended that I should do. I don't really want to, but I'll do it." All right? I'm getting that book pushed right back in my face. No, no, this is over love, the heart beats. It's regeneration. We have a new heart. So, don't miss this. It's huge from the beginning and everything else in our Christian life. We don't conquer sin by working hard to change our deeds. That's not salvation. That's gospel-less. That's what I saw at a Buddhist training grounds in India a few weeks ago. People working hard on the outside to change who they are on the inside. That's not salvation.

We don't conquer sin by working hard to change our deeds. We conquer sin by trusting Christ to change our desires, and He gives us a new heart. He satisfies the thirst of our soul, and when He does...don't miss it...He breaks the power of desire for sin. How do you break the desire for pornography in your life? How do you break the desire for lust and greed and this or that in your life? How do you break that? You break that by having your heart conquered by a superior desire, by realizing, "That doesn't taste anywhere near as good as He does." This is the Christian life. After this, we find ourselves every once in a while going back to this, and we taste what this world offers. "No, no, I've got a new heart. He's the one who satisfies my soul." That's why this is key, from the very beginning, to see this. I don't have time to read Jonathan Edwards' quote there, great quote on the affections.

Listen, my favorite quote from...one of my favorite quotes from C. S. Lewis,

If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this

notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

If you think pornography satisfies, it's because your desires are weak. Your desires are so weak. It takes so little to satisfy you. You're like an ignorant child making mud pies in a slum, and you've been offered superior satisfaction in Christ, and in regeneration, you realize, "This does not taste good. This is what I need, and what I want." New desires.

A new will. A new mind, new desires, new will. Instead of being driven by flesh, sinful nature, you're now driven by God's Spirit. That's what Galatians 5 is all about. We'll talk about it more later. And being born again, you're brought into a new relationship. Ephesians 2 talks about how we have a new relationship with others who have been born again, and a new relationship with God. You get the point? When you're born again, everything changes, right? You go from death to life. Everything changes. That's why, when people say, "Yeah, I'm a Christian," but there's no difference in their life...I mean, if I got here late tonight, all of you here, in different contexts, simulcast, sitting here waiting, and I show up late. I come and have a seat here, and I'm like, "I'm sorry I'm late, but on the way over here, I had a flat tire. So, I got out to fix it, and when I was fixing the flat tire on the side of the road, I walked out in the middle of the road, and right when I did, a semi came by and hit me, and I got up as quick as I could, and fixed the rest of the tire, then came here. So, I'm sorry that I'm late." You know, you would say, "That's absurd. You get hit by a semi...standing on the road, hit by a semi, you look different afterwards. I'm just saying." All the more so when you meet the God of the universe, and by His Spirit, He reaches down into your heart, your dead heart, and then brings it to life. It doesn't look the same. Everything looks different.

The personal question...Have you been born again?

That brings us to the personal question here, okay? We have the theological question... instantaneous, unrepeatable, mysterious act of God in which He changes a lost sinner's heart. Now, here's the personal question: have you been born again? I could wish to ask every single person in this room, "Have you been born again? Has this been a reality in your life?" Here, in different contexts where you're sitting, this is an infinitely important question.

I've got to share this. My mother-in-law is sitting over here, and my wife, and I've been married almost twelve years and dated for a while before that, and ever since I met my now mother-in-law...kind, wonderful, loving, caring toward family, toward me...whenever we'd talk about spiritual things, no real desire. Good, wonderfully good by all accounts, but then, when it came to spiritual things, when it came to talk about Jesus, just a lack of desire, interest. Heather and I prayed, "Lord, awaken her heart, awaken her heart," and a little less than a year ago, God brought new life, and my precious, now sister in Christ, her life just turned upside down. Desire for the Word, desire for God in prayer, desire to worship. She has been training in preparation for Secret Church. She has been training. She has been, like, conditioning. She wants to make it the whole night. So, she's practicing with previous Secret Churches to be ready for this evening. She's sharing the gospel with people in the grocery stores. It's new life.

So, I've got to ask the question, "Have you experienced new life?" Not, "Have you gone to church?" Not, "Are you a deacon or a pastor?" Not, "Are you doing this? Are you reading...?" No. Do you have a new heart? Has God, by His Spirit, reached down into your heart and given you new life? That's an important question, and I pray that even right now, in this room, and in contexts around the country and the world, that God is revealing need and changing hearts. Pray for them.

God Enables Our Belief The Doctrine of Conversion

So, what happens when He does? When He changes our hearts? Well, that leads to the third: God reveals our need, changes our heart, and He enables our belief. All right, salvation: doctrine of conversion. So, this is the point. Now, new birth, mysterious. It's spiritual, but it triggers something practical, and now we're getting to the heart of the question that we started with in Acts 16, "*What must I do to be saved?*" God opens your eyes, changes your heart, and you cry out, "How can I be saved?" The answer to that question is what we're going to look at.

You look at the message...the answer to that question in the New Testament...what you'll see at the very end of this passage in Acts 20, you see these words, "*Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Those are the two main words you'll see in the New Testament when it comes to, "What must I do to be saved?" Repent and believe. Repentance and faith, and what we're about to see is that this is definitively how Scripture teaches we are to be saved. Yet, we are prone to describe salvation in so many other ways. Tozer once lamented,

All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences are fundamental.... This new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis is not as before...

The cross in this new evangelism does not slay the sinner; it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, "Come and assert yourself for Christ." To the egotist it says, "Come and do your boasting in the Lord." To the thrill-seeker it says, "Come and enjoy the thrill of the abundant Christian life." The idea behind this kind of thing may be sincere, but its sincerity does not save it from being false.

It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross. The cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a person. God salvages the individual by liquidating him and then raising in the newness of life. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die. God then bestows life, but not an improved old life. Whoever would possess it must pass under the rod. He must repudiate himself and concur in God's just sentence against him.

How can this theology be translated into life? Simply, the non-Christian must repent and believe. He must forsake his sins and then go on to forsake himself. Let him cover nothing, defend nothing, excuse nothing. Let him not

seek to make terms with God, but let him bow his head before the stroke of God's stern displeasure and acknowledge himself worthy to die.

Wow, I wish I could have said that. That is potent.

Conversion defined...

All right, so I want us to see the essence of conversion. When someone, having their need revealed, heart awakened to God, how do they become a follower of Christ, a Christian? Conversion defined: conversion is the divinely enabled response of individuals to the gospel in which they turn from their sin and themselves (repent) and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord (believe).

So, let's break this down. Divinely enabled. I hope you're picking up on a theme here tonight. Everything here is by grace. God does this. Even what we do, repent and believe, those are gifts from God. Look at this, repentance is a gift. Old Testament prophets made this clear. We can't turn from sin by our own strength. "*Bring me back that I may be restored,*" Jeremiah 31. Lamentations, "*Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored!*" You get to Acts 5, God gives repentance to Israel. God grants repentance that leads to life, Acts 11. God's kindness leads to repentance, Romans 2. God grants repentance, 2 Timothy 2. See the picture. Repentance is a gift. We repent, but that's still a gift granted by God.

In the same way, faith is a gift. "*When they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door,*" God had opened the door, "*of faith to the Gentiles,*" (Acts 14:27). "*By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Paul talked about how the crucifixion of Christ was "*a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,*" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Jews and Gentiles alike saw the crucifixion of Christ as foolish. It was madness, and it's the same today.

Imagine hearing today someone announce, "A man was executed by political authorities in a small, Middle Eastern country. He was claiming to be the Savior of the world." Such a man would not get a second thought from us. Jews, Gentiles, Americans alike. Imagine taking a successful businessman in our culture, successful businessman...money, house, car, everything. Imagine taking a successful, independent woman...independent in our culture from everything, including God. Imagine taking them out behind a garbage heap and showing a man nailed to a bloody cross, crying out that He is claiming to be the Savior of the world, and you say to that businessman and this independent woman, "This is your King, and you need to die to yourself and trust in Him, because He will judge you for all of eternity." That would seem like madness. They would feel sorry for the man.

What is the difference between those who see this as folly and those who see this as wisdom? The difference is grace and mercy. Faith is a gift. "*It has been granted,*" Philippians 1, "*that you should...believe in him.*" Spurgeon said, "Faith, wherever it exists, is in every case, without exception, the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Never yet did a man believe in Jesus with the faith here intended, except the Holy Spirit led him to do so...Faith in the living God and his Son Jesus Christ is always the result of the new birth, and can never exist except in the regenerate."

Divinely-enabled, response of individuals to the gospel. Now, what you see in Acts are these two words mentioned...repent and believe...over and over again. So, let's think about them both. What does it mean to repent? Turn from sin and themselves. This is what God does all throughout Scripture. Ezekiel, "*Repent and turn from all your transgressions.*" Matthew,

Jesus' initial message, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" First Christian sermon, Acts 2, right after that Acts 3, "Repent...and turn."

So, what does it mean to repent? Follow with me. Repentance involves intellectual acknowledgement of sin. You realize your sin before God. You see sin as an abomination in the sight of God. After committing adultery with Bathsheba, David realized, "*Against you...have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,*" (Psalm 51:4-5.) However, when you see intellectual acknowledgement of sin, realize that this alone is insufficient. Biblical repentance is not just merely intellectual.

Repentance also involves emotional sorrow over sin. Paul talks about godly grief that produces repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). Not the kind of grief where you feel bad that you got caught doing something wrong. It's the pain that you feel when you know you've hurt someone, and it's the deepest pain because you know you have rebelled against the infinitely beautiful and Holy One. There's an emotional element there. It's why Isaiah cries out, "*Woe is me!*" (Isaiah 6:5). Why Job says, "*I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes,*" (Job 42:6). So, there's sorrow over sin here, but that alone is insufficient.

Not just intellectual. Biblical repentance not just intellectual, not just emotional. Biblical repentance involves a personal decision to flee sin. "Turn from wicked ways," God called His people to in the Old Testament, "return to me, return to the Lord your God." New Testament, Jesus said, "*Bear fruits in keeping with repentance,*" (Luke 3:7-8). In other words, show your repentance by your deeds. Paul talks about how the Thessalonians were saved. He said, "*You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,*" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Now, I want to be careful here, because when we're talking about conversion, we're talking about the moment, that initial moment when someone repents of sin. That's going to begin a process...we're going to talk about sanctification later...where we're continually running from sin, but there comes a point...born again, God awakens our heart, and what happens is this is our response, divinely-enabled response. We were going in a certain direction, and we turned to a different direction. We realized, "I'm going in the wrong direction. I'm rebelling against God, not trusting in God."

Intellectual, emotional...feel the weight of that...and then volitional. Turn. Turn in a different direction. Turn where? Well, that leads to trust. Trust in Jesus. You believe. You turn from sin and yourself, and you trust in Jesus. "*Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved,*" (Romans 10:9). So, what does it mean to believe, to have faith? A lot of confusion about this one.

Similar to repentance, faith involves knowledge about Christ. So, we'll start on the intellectual level. Obviously, in order to be saved, you have to have knowledge about who Christ is and what Christ has done. We've talked about that. You've got to know that He lived the life you couldn't live. He died the death you couldn't die. He's risen from the grave. You've got to know that. You've got to hear that, Romans 10 says. You've got to hear the gospel that's summed up there in 1 Corinthians 15, but that alone is insufficient. Simply to have knowledge of Christ, to believe that Christ died on a cross and rose from the grave, that's insufficient. People say, "Well, I believe in Jesus." The reality is every intoxicated guy I've ever met on the street believes in Jesus. Big deal. Simple, intellectual knowledge of who Christ is, what Christ has done, is not sufficient to save. Go a step deeper.

Faith involves assent to Christ. We skipped over James 2, "*Even the demons believe.*" Faith involves assent to Christ. So, this is intellectual to an emotional level. Not just realizing Jesus died on the cross, but realizing that this has personal relevance for your life. Now, we're getting closer, but you skip down. I put this alone is insufficient. You look at Nicodemus in John 3. He knew that Jesus was a teacher coming from God, but he was clearly not born again. Acts 26 gives us a picture of King Agrippa. He believed what the prophet said about Jesus, yet he was not willing to become a Christian.

So, take it deeper. Knowledge about Christ, assent to Christ. Biblical faith involves trust in Christ. Now, the reason I'm using trust here instead of belief is because, especially in this culture, we think about belief, and we almost think about it disconnected from personal commitment, but biblical belief involves a trust, personal trust in Christ. Listen to how Christ invites people to Himself: invites people to believe in Him, John 1; to come to Him, John 6; to drink from Him, John 7; to find rest in Him, Matthew 11.

Hear John Owen talk about this biblical picture of trust in Christ. He's imagining Christ speaking to us. He says,

"This is somewhat of the word which he now speaks unto you: Why will ye die? Why will ye perish? Why will ye not have compassion on your own souls? Can your hearts endure, or can your hands be strong, in the day of wrath that is approaching...Look unto me, and be saved; come unto me, and I will ease you of all sins, sorrows, fears, burdens, and give rest to your souls. Come, I entreat you; lay aside all procrastinations, all delays; put me off no more; eternity lies at the door...do not so hate me as that you will rather perish than accept of deliverance by me."

Luther said,

"There are two ways of believing. One way is to believe about God, as I do when I believe that what is said of God is true...This faith is knowledge or observation rather than faith. The other way is to believe in God, as I do when I not only believe that what is said about Him is true, but put my trust in Him, surrender myself to Him, and make bold to deal with Him, believing that without doubt He will be to me and do to me just what is said of Him."

So, belief in Christ. We turn from sin ourselves, trust in Jesus. Now, the reality is, our faith is only so good as the object of our faith. You can have all the faith in the world. What matters is the object of your faith. I remember one time I was preaching down in New Orleans on a Saturday during the day, and I had to be in North Mississippi that night. There was no way I could make it driving. So, the guy in North Mississippi said, "Well, I'll have somebody fly you up," and I thought, "Wow, that's cool, private jet." Well, got to the little airfield and not so jet like.

Okay, this thing...I think the Wright brothers were testing this thing out one day. So, I climb in this tiny little plane. I'm waiting for the guy to just kind of go out and start the propeller with his hands, and we're kind of wheeling around to get on this little dirt runway. As we're getting ready to take off, he's kind of taxiing some, and my door flies open, and he looks at me and says, "Is that your door?" I say, "Yeah," and he said, "Oh, sorry man." So, he gets out, and walks around and shuts my door, and he gets back in, and my prayer life is increasing at this moment. Just deep intimacy. I look at the guy, and I said, "Just out of curiosity, what if that had happened, say, 20,000 feet later. What would we have done then?" He's like, "Oh, no, don't worry about it. We're going to be fine." So, here's the deal.

We get up in the air. We get up in the air, and it doesn't matter how much faith I have in this plane, when the right wing falls off, we're going down regardless of how much faith I've got in it. Right?

What matters is the object of your faith. Have faith, all the zealous faith in the world. What's your faith in? In Jesus as...follow this...Savior and Lord. Salvation is coming from Jesus as the Savior who died for us and as the Lord who rules over us. Some people have said that you can accept Jesus as Savior without submitting to Him as Lord. Simply put, that is not true. You look in Acts: 92 times Jesus is called Lord...92 different times. Twice He's called Savior. 92 times called..."*Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ,*" (Acts 2:36-38). Believe in the Lord Jesus. Jesus is not a poor, puny Savior, just begging for you to accept Him. He is the sovereign, reigning Lord, who deserves all of your worship and all of your life. Savior and Lord.

Conversion debated...

Now, conversion debated. Are faith and repentance both necessary for salvation? This has been a debate among Christians. Wondering aloud if repentance and faith are both necessary for salvation. Hear the debate. Charles Ryrie...you're familiar with Ryrie Study Bible..."The message of faith only and the message of faith plus commitment of life cannot both be the gospel; therefore, one of them is a false gospel and comes under the curse of perverting the gospel or preaching another gospel."

Zane Hodges said, "Faith is the inward conviction that what God says to us in the Gospel is true. That - and that alone - is saving faith." Tozer begs to differ, "We take Him for what He is - the anointed Savior and Lord who is King of kings and Lord of lords! He would not be who He is if He saved us and called us and chose us without the understanding that He can also guide and control our lives."

James Boice said, "There is only one Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and...anyone who believes in a Savior who is not the Lord is not believing the true Christ and is not regenerate. We call for commitment to Christ, the true Christ." So, is faith, repentance, Savior...Jesus is Savior and Lord...all of that necessary? Look in Scripture. Sometimes Scripture only mentions faith. I put three instances there in Acts: "*believed,*" (Acts 11:17) "*believed,*" (Acts 14:23) "*believe*" (Acts 16:31). Sometimes Scripture only mentions repentance, and you see examples of that. Then, sometimes Scripture mentions both faith and repentance.

Conclusion: faith and repentance biblically are inseparable. You don't just see this in Acts. All over Scripture. Jesus says, "*Repent and believe in the gospel,*" (Mark 1:14-15). Repent "*from dead works and of faith toward God,*" Hebrews 6:1. John Murray said, "It is impossible to disentangle faith and repentance. Saving faith is permeated with repentance, and repentance is permeated with faith."

Whenever you turn from something, you turn to something. Whenever you turn to something, you turn from something. They go together. It's not even that one happens before the other. They happen together at a point of conversion. Look at it this way. I'll give you an illustration from the Old Testament that Jesus uses in John 3 in the New Testament. Look and live. In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, He said, "*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*"

What He's referencing there is a story in Numbers 21. Read this story.

From Mount Hor, (the Israelites) set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he may take away the serpents from us." So, Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So, Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

So, you've got the picture. People complaining about the food. When they do, snakes start appearing everywhere. People start dying from snakebites. Why? Why does Jesus use this story in His conversation with Nicodemus? It's a call, both in Numbers 21 to the Israelites, and in John 3 to Nicodemus, to repent of your rebellion. To realize that you and I have a disease we cannot cure. We've sinned against God. We cannot do anything to overcome the venom of sin in our blood. We have a disease we can't cure, and we have a destiny we can't change. Because of the sin in us, we are dying, all of us. Every single one of us is dying in our sin, headed to an eternal death with nothing we can do to change it.

Jesus says to Nicodemus, "You need to be born again." "How?" Nicodemus asked, "How can I be born again?" Jesus says, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up," and what does that mean? Well...follow this...recognize the extent of your rebellion and look to His love. When Jesus said, "The Son of man must be lifted up," He uses that phrase two more times in the book of John...John 8:28 and John 12:32, "*When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.*" That is a phrase, a verse that is so often taken out of context. People say in the context of a worship service, "If we just lift Jesus up, He'll draw people to Himself." Not what Jesus is saying in John 12. In John 12, Jesus was referring to the cross. He's referring to the point where He will be lifted up on a cross, and everyone who looks to Him on a cross, believes on Him on the cross will live. He was lifted up to suffer as Savior. That's what Jesus was pointing to.

Then, you see this word used later in the New Testament. Philippians 2 talks about how now He's lifted up to reign as Lord. The beauty is a surprising paradox. You think about it, Numbers 21, people are dying of snakebites. God says, "Take a bronze serpent and lift it up." Here's the deal. Now, I'm not a big fan of snakes anyway, but if everybody is dying of snakebites, then the last thing I really want to see is a what? A snake. So, what God does is He says, "Take that which is the symbol of death in this picture and raise it up." Surprising paradox leads us to the cross, where the ultimate symbol of death and sin on the cross becomes the ultimate source of life for sinners.

Look at the cross. Repent of your rebellion. Believe on Him as Savior and Lord, and you will live forever. What's interesting, and I have John 19 in there, you get to the end of the Gospel of John, and you see Jesus' body being taken down by Joseph of Arimathea, and who arrives back in the picture? In the middle of that passage, "*He came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.*" Nicodemus, who would see Jesus lifted up, and then care for His body when He was taken down.

I've mentioned Charles Spurgeon a couple of times. I couldn't help but to put his conversion story in your notes here. Here's the deal...before we read this...this is the text, John 3, a picture looking to Christ. This is the text that God used to draw...to awaken Spurgeon's heart and bring him to conversion. Spurgeon had been a religious man, trying hard to earn his way to God, but on one snowy Sunday morning, he wandered into a church where a guy was preaching, who had hardly ever preached before. This was his story,

I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm, one Sunday morning, while I was going to a certain place for worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. I had heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter to me. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they could tell me that, I did not care how much they made my head ache. The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up in the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed; but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was - "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus - "My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look.' Now, lookin' don't take a deal of pains. It ain't liftin' your foot or your finger; it is just, 'Look.' Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, 'Look unto me.' Ay' said he in broad Essex...

Like, I can do the accent. Sorry.

"...Many of you are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, 'Look unto Me.' Some of you say, 'We must wait for the Spirit's workin'.' You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, 'Look unto Me.'" Then the good man followed up his text in this way: -

"'Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!'"

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, "and you will always be miserable - miserable in life, and miserable in death, - if you don't obey my

text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live."

I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said, – I did not take much notice of it, – I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, "Trust Christ, and you shall be saved." Yet it was, no doubt, all wisely ordered, and now I can say, "Ever since by faith I saw the stream Thy flowing wounds supply, redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die."

To every person within the sound of my voice, His boundless love and eternal life are available to everyone who believes, and, don't move, just wait a second. We're only halfway through. I pray that there are people in this room, and I pray there are people in homes, different church buildings, who cannot say that you've been born again, and yet God, in the last couple of hours, has shown you your need and awakened your heart and is calling you to repent and believe. So, with this gospel, I want to call you to repent and believe.

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