

S T U D Y G U I D E

# The New Birth

Steven J. Lawson



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# A Necessary Birth

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The phrase “born again” can call to mind a variety of ideas, memories, and questions. Although some Christians passionately refer to being born again as a specific turning point in their lives, others might perceive it as being a more subtle step in a gradual process of coming to faith. Many Christians describe being “born again” as an experience in the past, while others regard it more as a present reality. Some believers even avoid using the term at all.

In the midst of these different perspectives, it is crucial to anchor our understanding of the new birth in the teachings of Jesus. In this lecture, Dr. Steve Lawson will begin to expound what the Bible says about spiritual birth. As we begin this study, Scripture confronts us with the reality that being born again is the necessary gateway to the kingdom of God.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

John 3:1-17; 1 Peter 1:3-5

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the idea of spiritual birth, or regeneration, as the Holy Spirit’s miraculous work of breathing life into a spiritually dead human soul.
2. To explain why regeneration is a crucial and inescapable part of the teachings of Jesus.
3. To demonstrate that regeneration is necessary in order for a person to participate in the kingdom of God.

## QUOTATIONS

*Regeneration, therefore, is a spiritual resurrection; the beginning of a new life.*

–Charles Hodge

*To put it as simply as I can, if you are not spiritually reborn, you are not a Christian.*

–R.C. Sproul

*Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. It is a total transformation of the person on the inside.*

–Louis Berkhof

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Miracle of New Birth

- A. Jesus' act of transforming sinners into saints is even more miraculous than His acts of healing the sick and raising the dead.
- B. There is no greater evidence of the power of God than in the new birth and salvation of a soul.

### II. From Death to Life

- A. Spiritual rebirth, or regeneration, is the life of God in the soul of man.
  - i. Before the new birth, each person is in a state of spiritual death.
  - ii. In regeneration, God immediately implants eternal and supernatural life within the soul of a man or woman.
- B. New birth represents a spiritual resurrection.
  - i. Believers are raised from a condition of being dead in trespasses and sins.
  - ii. Believers are raised unto a condition of being made alive in Jesus Christ.
- C. New birth produces a total transformation of the person on the inside.
  - i. The governing disposition of the soul is made holy.
  - ii. The hearts of sinners become inclined to God.

### III. The Need for New Birth

- A. By human standards, Nicodemus appeared to have everything going for him.
  - i. If anyone could have bypassed regeneration, it would have been Nicodemus.
  - ii. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus obeyed the Old Testament law with zeal and purity.
  - iii. As a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, Nicodemus held a position of religious power and prestige.
  - iv. As the teacher of Israel, Nicodemus possessed extensive knowledge of the Scriptures.
- B. Yet, even Nicodemus needed to be born again.
  - i. Nicodemus regarded Jesus as a teacher sent by God and did not realize that Jesus was God who had come to teach.
  - ii. Because of his spiritual blindness, Nicodemus could not see who Jesus truly was.
- C. Jesus understood Nicodemus' need to be born again.

- i. Jesus saw past Nicodemus' pious exterior and addressed the question burning within his heart: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"
- ii. Jesus responded by confronting Nicodemus with his need for regeneration.

#### IV. New Birth and the Kingdom of God

- A. Apart from new birth, a person cannot see the kingdom.
  - i. Regardless of a person's background or accomplishments, he or she is unable even to see the kingdom without being reborn.
  - ii. To see the kingdom is to have spiritual discernment.
    1. One is enabled to understand his or her need for new birth.
    2. One is enabled to comprehend who Christ is.
    3. One is enabled to grasp what Christ has come to provide.
    4. One is enabled to recognize that salvation is given by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
- B. Apart from new birth, a person cannot enter the kingdom.
  - i. A person must be born of water and the Spirit in order to be able to receive the salvation that Jesus Christ offers.
  - ii. The Holy Spirit must act upon a person's soul in order to birth that person into the kingdom.
  - iii. By His grace, God creates new life in the hearts of the regenerate.
  - iv. God supernaturally invades the natural realm of human hearts and souls in order to bring people into the supernatural realm of His kingdom.
- C. All people are born outside the kingdom and must enter the kingdom through new birth.
  - i. No one is born a Christian.
  - ii. Although God eternally elects Christians to inherit the kingdom, they are dead in their sins until God gives them new spiritual life.
  - iii. Even those who are born into the covenant community of the Church must be born again before they are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord.
  - iv. The words of Jesus in John 3 clearly state that all people need to be born again.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Spiritual rebirth refers to the life of God in the soul of man.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. Nicodemus was a powerful and influential religious figure due to his position as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. One of the twelve disciples
  - b. The Roman governor of Judea
  - c. A respected Sadducee
  - d. A member of the Jewish Sanhedrin

3. Apart from new birth, a person cannot \_\_\_\_\_ the kingdom of God.
  - a. Talk about
  - b. Oppose
  - c. See or enter
  - d. Accept or reject
  
4. The spiritual discernment that accompanies new birth enables the regenerate person to understand everything in the Bible.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. Human beings begin in a state of spiritual \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Indecision
  - b. Death
  - c. Life
  - d. Sickness

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus employed powerful imagery when he described the spiritual regeneration of a person as a second birth. In what ways is this an accurate description? How does the idea of a new birth help us to understand the spiritual condition of a person before and after regeneration?
  
2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the new birth of a person? Why is this significant?
  
3. Many people are religious and know the Bible but have not yet been born again. Dr. Lawson observes that often these people can be the most difficult to reach with the Gospel. Have you encountered this in your own experiences? How might being near the truth make a person more resistant to the Gospel?
  
4. Dr. Lawson ended his lecture by describing George Whitefield's response when a person asked him why he was preaching about the new birth. If someone were to ask you why it is necessary to be born again, how would you respond? How might you help a person to understand the importance of spiritual rebirth?

## 2

# A Supernatural Birth

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

In current times, we may associate the term “supernatural” with many different things. In pop culture, the word “supernatural” might evoke thoughts of fairy tales, mythology, science fiction movies, or other stories where the realities that govern our daily existence do not seem to apply. In Christian circles, “supernatural” brings to mind deep spiritual truths about the Christian life. However, we may rarely think about the fact that our own experience of coming to faith has profoundly supernatural origins. In this lecture, Dr. Lawson will explain how Scripture presents the Christian’s new birth as a supernatural event.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

John 1:12-13; 3:1-17; 1 Peter 1:3-5

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To explain what it means to be born of God.
2. To discuss the differences between natural birth and supernatural birth.
3. To examine instances of the supernatural new birth in the lives of significant figures in church history.

### QUOTATIONS

*In order for us to desire the things of God, we have to be made alive, and to be made alive requires a sovereign act of God.*

–R.C. Sproul

*Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners.*

*At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith...Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.*

–Martin Luther

*In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*

–John Wesley

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Joy of the New Birth

- A. Physical birth is an occasion for excitement and celebration.
- B. Spiritual birth into the family of God is an even greater cause for excitement and celebration.
  - i. Knowing Christ is the greatest experience in life.
  - ii. Being used by God to help others know Christ is the second greatest experience in life.
- C. To be a Christian is to be born again.
  - i. The phrase "born again Christian" is redundant.
  - ii. A person can only accept Christ and enter the kingdom by being born again.

### II. The Supernatural Character of the New Birth

- A. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).
- B. Jesus used the formula "Truly, truly, I say to you" to underscore the importance of what He was about to say.
- C. The word that Jesus used for "again" has a two-fold meaning.
  - i. The Greek word *anōthen* means "again."
    1. Example: Galatians 4:9
    2. Jesus was speaking about a second birth.
  - ii. The Greek word *anōthen* also means "from above."
    1. Examples: John 3:31; John 19:11; James 1:17; James 3:15, 17
    2. Jesus was speaking about a birth given by God.

- iii. The fullest meaning of Jesus' statement is that people must experience a second birth that comes from God above.

### III. The Heavenly Origin of the New Birth

- A. Christians are born anew from heaven, God's dwelling place.
- B. Human tradition, religion, morality, and effort cannot bring about the new birth.
- C. New birth comes vertically by God acting upon a dead human soul.
- D. Supernatural birth accomplishes what a physical birth cannot.
  - i. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).
  - ii. The regenerate are enabled to exit the kingdom of darkness and enter God's kingdom.
  - iii. The regenerate are given a new spiritual beginning with a new heart, will, and destiny.
  - iv. Through regeneration, a person becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

### IV. The Saving Effects of the New Birth

- A. A person who is born once will die twice.
  - i. This person experiences physical birth, but not spiritual birth.
  - ii. This person will experience both physical death and spiritual death.
- B. A person who is born twice will die once.
  - i. This person experiences both physical birth and spiritual birth.
  - ii. This person will experience physical death, but not spiritual death.
- C. "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12).
  - i. A person who has not been born again is in a state of death.
  - ii. This person has existence, but does not have life.

### V. The Internal Transformation of the New Birth

- A. The new birth occurs at the core of a person's being.
  - i. New birth brings a newness of life that is more than just turning over a new leaf.
  - ii. New birth sparks regeneration that is greater than reform.
  - iii. New birth is life from above, not just a push from below.
- B. God's life is now present in the inner recesses of the soul.

### VI. Accounts of the New Birth

- A. George Whitefield
  - i. As a student at Oxford and a member of the Holy Club, George Whitefield had not yet experienced the new birth.
  - ii. He worked hard in order to earn God's acceptance, but he found that he could not live up to God's standard of perfection.

- iii. In the aftermath of his personal failure, Whitefield's eyes were opened to the supernatural character of the new birth while reading Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.
  - iv. Whitefield experienced new birth and became fueled with a passion for preaching the Gospel.
- B. John Wesley
- i. John Wesley spent several years as a preacher and missionary in the American colonies before he was born again.
  - ii. Discouraged by his failures in ministry, Wesley returned to England in an exhausted and defeated state.
  - iii. While at a Moravian gathering in London, Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed" upon hearing the introduction to Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians.
  - iv. After being born again, Wesley embarked upon a ministry through which God brought Christian revival to both England and North America.
- C. Martin Luther
- i. As a priest, Martin Luther had a profound awareness of his guilt before the almighty and holy God.
  - ii. Luther's sense of the gulf between his sin and God's righteousness filled him with dread and hatred toward God.
  - iii. Romans 1:17 awakened Luther to the reality that sinners receive the righteousness of Christ by faith alone.
  - iv. Luther's new birth infused him with a love for God and His Word that enabled him to take a passionate stand for the Gospel in the years ahead.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born "again," what is significant about Jesus' choice of words?
  - a. He used a word that does not occur anywhere else in Scripture.
  - b. He used a word with a two-fold meaning.
  - c. He was quoting an obscure Old Testament prophecy.
  - d. He described a familiar concept so that Nicodemus knew exactly what he meant.
  
2. A Christian's new birth always comes \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Unexpectedly
  - b. After a long struggle with doubt
  - c. From above
  - d. As the result of theological study

3. Under certain circumstances, human desire and effort can cause the soul's new birth.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. Becoming a new creature is the result of regeneration, and not the cause of regeneration.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. A book by \_\_\_\_\_ helped to open George Whitefield's eyes to the supernatural character of the new birth.
  - a. Henry Scougal
  - b. John Owen
  - c. Martin Luther
  - d. Saint Augustine

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics and effects of the sinful nature that we inherit when we are born physically? How do these change when we are born again? In what ways do they not change even after the new birth?
2. Dr. Lawson states that God is the one who brings about our spiritual birth and that there is nothing that we can do to cause ourselves to be born again. Do you agree with this statement or not? What are biblical reasons that support your position? Are there passages in the Bible that present difficulties to this position?
3. What was the spiritual state of the members of the Holy Club at Oxford? How did God work in their lives to change them?
4. In this lecture, Dr. Lawson noted that Christians often take part in a person's spiritual birth through prayer and evangelism. How does the believer's task of sharing the Gospel relate to the fact that only God can give spiritual life to a person? What does this say about God's sovereignty? What does it say about human responsibility?

## 3

# A Scriptural Birth

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Words carry power. When an idea is articulately expressed in words, it possesses the ability both to persuade and to call people to action. In fact, the well-known expression “the pen is mightier than the sword” is a tribute to the difference that words can make. History recounts how certain people, through passionate speeches or bold writings, have influenced the world around them in noteworthy ways. The Word of God, however, wields a power that is unrivalled by any form of human communication. As an account of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the Bible calls its hearers and readers to faith. In this lecture, Dr. Lawson will discuss the significance of Scripture as the means the Holy Spirit uses to bring about the new birth.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 8:5-15; John 3:1-3; Romans 10:17; 2 Corinthians 4:13; James 1:17-18;  
1 Peter 1:22-25

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the role of the Bible in new birth.
2. To explain why the Bible is a necessary means of bringing about the new birth.
3. To identify teaching as an important part of the ministry of Jesus and of the apostles.
4. To examine passages in the Bible that speak about the Bible’s role in the new birth.

### QUOTATIONS

*God makes the Word his instrument in the new birth, and the way the Word works in the new birth is by awakening faith.*

–John Piper

*They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”*

–Luke 24:32

*Q. It is through faith alone that we share in Christ and all his benefits: where then does that faith come from?*

*A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.*

–Heidelberg Catechism, Question & Answer 65

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. Introduction: The Personal Nature of the New Birth

- A. In the physical realm, one person cannot be born on another’s behalf.
- B. In the spiritual realm, birth also takes place on an individual basis.

### II. The Word as Seed in Human Hearts

- A. No one is born again independently of the Word of God.
  - i. The Word must be planted within the human soul.
  - ii. God must sovereignly tend that seed to bring forth life.
  - iii. “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).
- B. Teaching the Word of God was an important part of Jesus’ ministry.
  - i. Nicodemus regarded Jesus primarily as a teacher, addressing him with the term “Rabbi” (John 3:2).
  - ii. As a teacher, Jesus sowed the seed of Scripture in the hearts of His listeners.
  - iii. In His words to Nicodemus, Jesus drew upon Old Testament imagery of ceremonial cleansing.
  - iv. Jesus’ statements to Nicodemus and others imparted truth about the kingdom of God, planting seeds that would be cultivated at a later time.

### III. The Word as a Means of Regeneration

- A. James 1:18
  - i. The will of God is the cause of regeneration.
  - ii. The Word of God is the means of regeneration.
  - iii. A harvest of human souls is the result of regeneration.
- B. 1 Peter 1:23-25
  - i. Christians are not born from a perishable seed.
    - 1. The new birth is not brought about by natural means.
    - 2. No human, natural, or worldly seed that is sown into a person’s heart can produce the new birth.

- ii. Christians are born from an imperishable seed.
  - 1. People are born again through the living and enduring Word of God.
  - 2. Only a supernatural book can be used by God to bring about the supernatural birth that is needed to breathe supernatural life into human souls.
  - 3. Although the grass withers and the flower falls, the Word of the Lord endures forever.
- C. Luke 8:5-15
  - i. Jesus sows the seed of His Word in human hearts.
  - ii. The seed that falls along the path is trampled underfoot and eaten by birds.
    - 1. These listeners are hard-hearted or uninterested in spiritual matters.
    - 2. The Gospel does not penetrate their hearts.
  - iii. The seed that falls upon rocky ground withers away.
    - 1. These listeners respond enthusiastically but without becoming spiritually rooted.
    - 2. They might at first appear to be converted, but there is not true conviction or commitment.
  - iv. The seed that falls among thorns is quickly choked out.
    - 1. These listeners are entangled in a dense thicket of other concerns, activities, and priorities.
    - 2. They do not make room in their lives for the Gospel to take root and produce fruit.
  - v. The seed that falls upon good soil grows and produces abundant fruit.
    - 1. These listeners have been prepared by God to hear the Gospel.
    - 2. They respond with faith, showing that they have been born again from above.
- D. 1 Corinthians 4:15
  - i. The Gospel is the means by which God brings about new birth.
  - ii. The Gospel is, therefore, the means by which God's elect are united with Christ and with one another.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. No one is born again independently of the Word of God.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. According to Romans 10:17, faith comes \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Through prayer
  - b. After repentance
  - c. By works
  - d. By hearing

3. Nicodemus addressed Jesus as “Rabbi” because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Jesus told everyone to call him by that title
  - b. He regarded Jesus as a teacher who had come from God
  - c. Nicodemus believed Jesus to be the Messiah
  - d. It was a sign of respect for Jewish men to address one another in that way
  
4. Which of the following statements about regeneration is true?
  - a. Regeneration always results in a spiritual harvest.
  - b. A person’s positive response to the Gospel brings about regeneration.
  - c. The Word of God is the means by which regeneration takes place.
  - d. All of the above
  - e. A and C only
  - f. B and C only
  
5. In Luke 8:5-8, the seed that fell on rocky ground perished because it was trampled underfoot and devoured by birds.
  - a. True
  - b. False

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to say that the new birth is a Scriptural birth? Why is this important to our understanding of regeneration?
  
2. Read Romans 10:14-17. Since God’s Word is the Holy Spirit’s means of bringing about new birth, what is the means of bringing the lost into contact with God’s Word? How should God’s people be involved in the process of new birth in the lives of others?
  
3. How should we understand Jesus’ teaching about the rocky ground in Luke 8:6 and Luke 8:13? Is Jesus implying that Christians can be born again but lose their salvation later? Why or why not?
  
4. What are ways that God works in advance to prepare the soil of a person’s heart for the seed of the Gospel? Can you identify examples of this preparatory work in your own life or in the lives of others?

## 4

# An Instantaneous Birth

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

One of the most mysterious aspects of the new birth is the instantaneous way in which the Holy Spirit brings it about. For some people, new birth has been an instant transformation; individuals who have long been hostile or indifferent to God suddenly find themselves responding to the Gospel as new creatures. For others, the moment of being born again might be the culmination of a long and gradual journey toward the Savior. In either case, there comes a decisive moment when the sinner passes from death to life and from judgment to salvation. Dr. Lawson will explore the instantaneous nature of this moment and will examine conversion accounts from Scripture and church history.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 23:39-43; John 3:3-5; Acts 2:37-41; 8:35-39; 9:3-5

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the instantaneous transformation that regeneration brings about.
2. To explain that the act of regeneration is a moment rather than a journey and to differentiate the moment of regeneration from the gradual processes that God may use to bring that decisive moment about.
3. To examine accounts of instantaneous regeneration in the Bible and in church history.
4. To foster a greater love for God, who miraculously brings sinners from death to life in an instant of time.

### QUOTATIONS

*The new birth is an instantaneous change of man's nature, affecting at once the whole man. It is not a gradual process like sanctification. There is no intermediate stage between life and death. One either lives or is dead.*

–Louis Berkhof

*Every regeneration is really instantaneous. Its evidences, its outward manifestations may be gradual, but there must be a time when the man begins to live. There must be a period when the first ray of light darts on the open eye. There must be a time when the man is condemned, and a period when he is not condemned. There must be an instant when the change takes place.*

—Charles Spurgeon

*I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence.” No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.*

—Saint Augustine

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. Augustine: A Case Study in Regeneration

- A. Augustine was born in northern Africa in A.D. 354.
  - i. His pagan father, Patricius, died when Augustine was sixteen years old.
  - ii. His Christian mother, Monica, tirelessly prayed for Augustine’s conversion to Christianity throughout his early life.
- B. As a young man, he became ensnared in sexual sin.
- C. He abandoned both the paganism of his father and the Christianity of his mother in favor of Manichaeism.
  - i. During the third and fourth centuries, Manichaeism emerged as one of Christianity’s major competitors in the Roman world.
  - ii. This religion, originating in Persia, represented a blend of Eastern and Western elements and incorporated teachings from paganism, Gnosticism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and other sources.
  - iii. Manichaeism was highly philosophical and adopted a dualistic view of good and evil that was contrary to Scripture.
- D. A skilled orator and teacher of rhetoric, Augustine lived and taught in Carthage before relocating to Rome and then to Milan.
- E. Monica accompanied him in order to pray for him and influence his life for the better.
- F. In Italy, Augustine began to grow disillusioned with Manichaeism and drifted toward Neoplatonism instead.
  - i. Though unbiblical in many ways, the worldview of Neoplatonism had been influenced by Christianity to a greater degree.
  - ii. Augustine’s exploration of Neoplatonic thought indirectly led him to regard Christianity more favorably.
- G. While in Milan, Augustine came under the influence of the bishop Ambrose.
  - i. Ambrose was regarded as one of the most learned and skilled preachers of his day.

- ii. His oratory skills and Christian commitment made a lasting impression upon Augustine, who was not regenerate at the time.
- H. At the age of thirty-two, Augustine had a sudden and dramatic conversion experience.
  - i. He was sitting in a garden in a state of despair when he heard a child's voice saying, "*Tolle lege*" (take up and read).
  - ii. He picked up a nearby Bible and read Romans 13:13-14, which addressed the state of his heart at that moment.
  - iii. As he read these words, he felt himself being made into a new creature.
  - iv. He later described this experience by saying that "instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away."
- I. Augustine eventually became one of the greatest theologians in the history of the church.

## II. The Instantaneous New Birth

- A. A person may not be aware of the exact moment when regeneration occurs.
- B. There is, however, a moment when the sovereign grace of God suddenly acts upon the dead soul.
- C. God acts upon human souls through His Word.
- D. Jesus' analogy of birth implies that there is a specific moment when regeneration occurs.
- E. Although regeneration might come within or at the end of a gradual process, there is a definite moment when a person passes from death to life.
- F. Jesus' analogy of entering the kingdom implies that each person begins outside the kingdom and that there is a moment of being brought into the kingdom.

## III. Regeneration and Conversion

- A. Regeneration is one side of the coin, and conversion is the other side.
- B. Regeneration is God's work of imparting life.
- C. Conversion is the human heart being turned to God.
- D. Regeneration and conversion take place instantly.

## IV. Regeneration and Sanctification

- A. Sanctification is a lifelong journey in the same direction.
- B. Regeneration is not a journey because it takes place in a moment.
- C. Sanctification cannot take place until after a person is regenerate.

## V. Biblical Accounts of Instantaneous Regeneration

- A. The thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43)
- B. The crowd on Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41)
- C. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-39)
- D. Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:3-5)

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## VI. Summary

- A. In every salvation there is a moment of recognizing by faith the atoning work of Jesus and His sovereign authority to be totally in control of one's life.
- B. In this moment of recognition a person is immediately and instantly born again.
- C. Nothing can be more decisive than the moment when Jesus brings life to a spiritually dead soul.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Before he was a Christian, Augustine followed the religious movement known as Montanism.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. Augustine began to be drawn toward Christianity when he sat regularly under the skilled preaching of \_\_\_\_\_ in Milan.
  - a. Athanasius
  - b. Ambrose
  - c. Pelagius
  - d. Patricius
3. Which of the following statements is *not* implied by Jesus' statement in John 3:5 about entering the kingdom of God?
  - a. Each person begins life outside the kingdom.
  - b. There is a definite moment when a person is brought into God's kingdom.
  - c. The Holy Spirit must work in a person's heart if that person is to enter the kingdom.
  - d. There is a phase in the conversion process when a person is neither clearly inside the kingdom nor clearly outside of it.
4. Regeneration and sanctification are two sides of the same coin.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. Which of the following people did Dr. Lawson *not* mention as a biblical example of instantaneous regeneration?
  - a. Saul of Tarsus
  - b. The thief on the cross
  - c. Simon the sorcerer
  - d. The Ethiopian eunuch

## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Augustine's mother support him during his struggles with sin and his search for truth? What does this say about the way that God works to bring sinners to faith? How does the story of Augustine's conversion inform your own life and ministry to unbelievers?
2. What is the relationship between regeneration and conversion? How does regeneration relate to justification? How does it relate to a person's sanctification?
3. Many Christians vividly recall the moment of their conversion. Others have been born again but do not know when their new birth took place. R.C. Sproul writes, "It is not important to know when or how you became a Christian. The only thing that matters is whether you *are* born again." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
4. There is a specific and definite moment when the new birth takes place within a person's soul. Sometimes this moment occurs as a dramatic turning point, and sometimes it is embedded within a gradual process of awakening and change. As you reflect upon your own spiritual birth, what are specific ways in which your entrance from death into life reveals God's sovereign power and grace?

# A Comprehensive Birth

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The human need for regeneration arises from more than the need for forgiveness of sins. As a result of the fall, humans are totally depraved. This does not mean that every person is as evil as he or she could possibly be, but rather that all of human nature and personhood has been corrupted by sin. Because the effects of sin are comprehensive, God's regeneration of a sinner must also be comprehensive. God's purpose in redemption is not just to forgive the sins of His people, but also to give them new hearts and make them into new creatures. For this reason, God's act of comprehensive regeneration both enables a person to enter into the kingdom of God and renews that person's capacity to bear God's image as a citizen of that kingdom.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:17

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To articulate the radical and far-reaching effects of new birth.
2. To convey an understanding of sin's corrupting of the whole person and regeneration's renewing of the whole person.
3. To express each person's need to be transformed by receiving a new heart and a new spirit.

## QUOTATIONS

*When our Lord teaches that the tree must be made good in order that the fruit should be good, it was not any one part of the tree which must be changed, but the whole tree. In like manner it is the soul, in the centre and unity of its life, that is the subject of that life-giving power of the Holy Ghost, by which it becomes a new creature. The doctrine that regeneration is a change affecting only one of the faculties of the soul has its foundation entirely outside of the Scriptures.*

–Charles Hodge

*[Regeneration] is an instantaneous change of man's nature, affecting at once the whole man, intellectually, emotionally, and morally.*

–Louis Berkhof

*[Regeneration] is a radical and complete transformation wrought in the soul by God the Holy Spirit, by virtue of which we become 'new men,' no longer conformed to this world, but in knowledge and holiness of the truth created after the image of God.*

–B.B. Warfield

*[Regeneration] is a universal change of the whole man. It is a new creature, not only a new power or new faculty. This, as well as creation, extends to every part; understanding, will, conscience, affections, all were corrupted by sin, all are renewed by grace. Grace sets up its ensigns in all parts of the soul, surveys every corner, and triumphs over every lurking enemy; it is as large in renewing as sin was in defacing. The whole soul shall be glorified in heaven; therefore the whole soul shall be beautified by grace.*

–Stephen Charnock

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. The Relevance of the New Birth

- A. According to John Murray, the 3rd chapter of John is “the most relevant and explicit episode in the teachings of Jesus.”
- B. Without this portion of the Bible, there would be a gaping hole in Christian theology.
  - i. There would not be an adequate explanation of how the redemption accomplished by Christ is applied to sinners.
  - ii. The teachings in the Sermon on the Mount would be lost upon unregenerate human nature.
  - iii. A new heart is essential to the Christian life.

### II. The Radical Nature of the New Birth

- A. The new birth involves the entire person.
  - i. Being born again is not a merely cosmetic or superficial experience.
  - ii. Being born again is not a merely peripheral or marginal experience.
- B. The new birth is a complete and dramatic change on the inside.

### III. The All-Encompassing Nature of the New Birth

- A. Physical birth is comprehensive.
  - i. A person begins life with all of his or her essential organs.
  - ii. A person does not acquire arms, legs, ears, or eyes in stages.
  - iii. The person, physically complete at birth, still needs to grow, develop, and mature.

- B. Spiritual birth is comprehensive.
  - i. A person is born spiritually as a complete person.
  - ii. A person is not born again in stages and does not acquire new spiritual organs.
  - iii. The regenerate person, spiritually complete at birth, still needs to grow, develop, and mature.

#### IV. Reformed Theologians on the Comprehensive New Birth

- A. Stephen Charnock (1628–1680)
  - i. No part of the old person remains.
  - ii. Regeneration changes the whole person into something new.
  - iii. Regeneration renews all parts of a person that were corrupted by sin.
- B. Louis Berkhof (1873–1957)
  - i. Regeneration brings about an instantaneous change in human nature.
  - ii. Regeneration affects the whole person.
    - 1. It brings intellectual renewal.
    - 2. It brings emotional renewal.
    - 3. It brings spiritual renewal.
- C. Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921)
  - i. God’s Spirit wrought “a radical and complete transformation.”
  - ii. The regenerate no longer conform to the pattern of this world, but are renewed in the image of God.
- D. John Murray (1898–1975)
  - i. Regeneration is “a radical, pervasive, and effectuous transformation.”
  - ii. New birth is God’s act of recreation.

#### V. The Comprehensive New Birth in Scripture

- A. Ezekiel 11:19-20; Ezekiel 36:24-28
- B. God promises to give His people a new heart.
  - i. God’s people receive a new heart that is one.
  - ii. The new heart possesses new affections, desires, passions, loves, hungers, and thirsts.
  - iii. The old heart of stone was hard, cold, and unresponsive to the things of God.
  - iv. The new heart of flesh is alive, loving, and responsive to the things of God.
- C. God promises to place a new spirit within His people.
  - i. A new power governs the minds of the regenerate.
  - ii. The new spirit brings new attitudes, priorities, inclinations, and patterns of thought.
  - iii. This new governing spirit is the Holy Spirit, who empowers believers to walk in God’s ways and observe His ordinances.
  - iv. By His Spirit, God comes to live within His people, and they become His temple.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. John Murray commented that the third chapter of John is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. The most relevant and explicit episode of Jesus' teachings
  - b. The most frequently preached passage in the Bible
  - c. His favorite passage to quote when sharing the Gospel with others
  - d. One of the most difficult chapters to understand in the New Testament
  
2. Regeneration brings about a profound personal transformation, either on the outside or on the inside.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
3. Although physical birth is comprehensive, spiritual birth occurs in stages.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. According to Stephen Charnock, \_\_\_\_\_ is/are renewed by God's grace.
  - a. The human soul exclusively
  - b. The most important spiritual faculties
  - c. Every part of a person that was corrupted by the fall
  - d. The least sinful parts of a person
  
5. Which of the following is *not* associated with God's promise to give His people a new spirit in Ezekiel 11 and 36?
  - a. The people will become the temple of the Holy Spirit.
  - b. The people will no longer be tempted by the flesh.
  - c. A new power will govern the minds of the people.
  - d. The Spirit will empower the people to live obediently.

## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the doctrine of the new birth affect our understanding of and response to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount? In what ways would our interaction with the Sermon on the Mount be different if there were no such thing as new birth?
  
2. Dr. Lawson describes total regeneration as the renewing of all parts of human nature that were corrupted by sin. However, this renewing of the whole person is not a perfecting of the whole person. How is this comprehensive regeneration different from sanctification, or growth in grace? How does it aid in a Christian's sanctification?
  
3. What does it mean to have a heart of stone? How is a heart of flesh different? Why must God give a person a new heart?

4. Regeneration brings change to all areas of a person's life. What changes have you observed in your life or in the lives of others as a result of God's comprehensive regenerating work?

## 6

# A Cleansing Birth

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

God's redemptive purpose is to transform the entire person into the image of Jesus Christ. Because humanity's fall into sin has had a pervasive polluting effect upon human nature, God's grace also extends to every part of the inner self, making the regenerate person into a new creation. A crucial aspect of the new birth, therefore, is the Holy Spirit's act of cleansing a sinner. All ungodliness is washed away and replaced with a genuine hunger for God. In this lecture, Dr. Lawson will examine the Bible's teachings about the profound spiritual cleansing that people experience at the new birth.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 1:18; Ezekiel 36:25-27; John 3:5; 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10; 5:25-27

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To explain why spiritual cleansing is a necessary part of the new birth.
2. To describe the role of the Holy Spirit in the cleansing of a person's soul.
3. To show the beauty and artistry of God's cleansing power.
4. To facilitate an awareness of God's cleansing work within one's own life.

### QUOTATIONS

*To be a Christian is to be a new person. We have undergone a transformation that is rooted in the heart.*

–R.C. Sproul

*Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. It is a total transformation of the person on the inside.*

–Louis Berkhof

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## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. Total Depravity and the Need for Cleansing

- A. The doctrine of total depravity teaches that the entire inner person has been polluted by sin.
  - i. Depravity signifies that each person is marred by wickedness.
  - ii. The doctrine does not claim that every person is as depraved as he or she could possibly be.
  - iii. Rather, depravity is rightly understood as extending to the total person.
  - iv. Each part of a person's inner being demonstrates the effects of sin (Romans 3:10-18).
- B. Because of sin's pollution, the inner person needs to be cleansed.
  - i. When God places a new heart within a person, He cleanses the soul as well.
  - ii. The governing disposition of the soul is made holy.

### II. Born of Water and the Spirit

- A. "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).
- B. Because being born of water and the Spirit is an absolute necessity, it is important to have clarity about what this means.
- C. There are four options for interpreting "water" in this statement.
  - i. The water of physical birth
    - 1. It is a medical fact that fluid is released from the mother at birth.
    - 2. However, water is not described this way in the Bible.
  - ii. Baptismal water
    - 1. Baptism is important as the covenant sign of God's people.
    - 2. However, this episode in John's gospel predates Christian baptism.
    - 3. Moreover, the act of baptism itself does not wash away sin.
  - iii. A metaphor for God's Word
    - 1. Scripture is important to the new birth and is an agent of God's cleansing in a person's life.
    - 2. However, there is no clear indication that Jesus has the Bible in mind when He speaks of water.
  - iv. The cleansing power of the Holy Spirit
    - 1. The phrase "born of water and the Spirit" refers not to two separate things, but to the powerful cleansing influence of the Holy Spirit.
    - 2. Verse 5 uses the imagery of water to refer to the Holy Spirit, and verse 8 adds the imagery of wind.
    - 3. The power of wind and the cleansing of water are both present in the new birth.

### III. The Cleansing of the Holy Spirit

- A. Ezekiel 36:25-27 is an Old Testament passage that speaks about the new birth.

- i. God will cleanse His people by sprinkling clean water on them.
  - 1. When God cleanses, the recipients are truly clean.
  - 2. The cleaning is a work that God does, not one that humans do with God.
- ii. The cleansing that God offers is a spiritual cleansing.
  - 1. God will purify His people from filthiness and idols.
  - 2. God will free them from their depraved state.
- B. John 3:5 could be better translated “Unless one is born of water, even the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”
  - i. “Water” and “Spirit” are used interchangeably.
  - ii. “Spirit” refers to the reality, and “water” refers to the symbol.
- C. Titus 3:5 expresses a similar truth when it says, “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.”
  - i. Cleansing is not the result of human righteousness.
  - ii. The Holy Spirit brings renewal apart from human works.

#### IV. The Beauty of Cleansing

- A. Isaiah 1:18 reveals the dramatic cleansing power of regeneration.
  - i. Sins that are “like scarlet” and “red like crimson” shall be made “white as snow” and “like wool.”
  - ii. God places a new heart in a sanitized, cleansed, and clean soul.
  - iii. In cleaning and regenerating, God makes something beautiful out of a human life that used to be filthy and stained.
- B. Ephesians 2:10 speaks of cleansing as making a new creation.
  - i. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
  - ii. By His grace, God remakes a broken sinner into a new masterpiece, or *poema*.
    - 1. In Greek, a *poema* can refer to a painting, statue, literary work, or anything else that is beautiful.
    - 2. A *poema* holds intrinsic beauty.
    - 3. The restored image of Christ in a person gives that person a profound beauty that does not come from the flesh.
  - iii. Just as any person can recognize beauty in a work of art, God’s artistic masterpiece in a human life cannot be hidden.
- C. 2 Corinthians 5:17 proclaims that when God makes someone into a new creation, the transformation is permanent.
  - i. The old has passed away, and the new has come.
  - ii. The life of Christ emerges within the regenerate person at the new birth.
  - iii. Through God’s sanctifying grace, believers are made more and more like Jesus Christ.
  - iv. As God continues to cleanse and remake His people, their lives reveal the stunning beauty of His workmanship.

## V. Conclusion

- A. To create a beautiful statue, a sculptor chisels away all the pieces of stone that do not look like what he is trying to create.
- B. God chisels away all the pieces of the human life that do not look like Jesus Christ.
- C. At the new birth, God cleanses humans of their sins, washes them, and places a new heart inside.
- D. After regeneration, God continues to chisel away remaining sinful attitudes and actions, enhancing the Christ-like beauty within the new person.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What does Dr. Lawson believe the word “water” to be referring to in John 3:5?
  - a. God’s Word
  - b. Baptismal water
  - c. The Spirit’s cleansing
  - d. Physical birth
2. When describing the work of the Holy Spirit in John 3, Jesus employs the metaphors of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Bread and wine
  - b. Wind and water
  - c. Water and blood
  - d. Light and wind
3. According to Dr. Lawson, the best translation of John 3:5 is “Unless one is born \_\_\_\_\_, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”
  - a. Of water, even the Spirit
  - b. Of water or the Spirit
  - c. From water and wind
  - d. From above by the Spirit
4. Paul’s use of the Greek word *poema* in Ephesians 2:10 describes Christians as marvelous works of art.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. When God makes someone into a new person, only the passing of time will reveal whether the change is permanent or not.
  - a. True
  - b. False

## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to be born by water and the Spirit? How is water related to the Spirit's work?
2. Many Christians struggle with the idea of God cleaning a person, believing that God will give a new heart if they clean themselves. Yet, according to the Bible, it is God who both cleanses us and gives us new hearts. How does this scriptural truth revolutionize the way we perceive God, ourselves, and the new birth?
3. What does it mean that we are God's workmanship? How have you seen God's power at work cleansing and changing someone you know into a new creation?
4. Like a talented sculptor, God chips away the parts of His art that do not resemble the original likeness that He is copying. As He transforms you into the image of Christ, what pieces of the old you has He chipped away? How might He continue to change you in the future?

# 7

## A Sovereign Birth

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Contemporary culture prizes independence and autonomy. The spirit of the day is one of self-determination and personal fulfillment, in which all people—at least in theory—are free to go where they please, do what they want, be who they want to be, and make their own decisions. Against this backdrop, the words of Jesus in John 3 are shocking. One of the most striking features of the imagery of new birth is the utter helplessness of the person being born. By describing the event of coming to faith as new birth, Jesus makes it clear that the initiative comes entirely from God and that fallen human beings are unable to gain spiritual life on their own.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Ecclesiastes 11:5; John 1:12-13; 3:8; Romans 11:33

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To describe God's sovereign role in election and regeneration.
2. To describe the passive role of humans in regeneration.
3. To discuss the ways in which the Holy Spirit works to regenerate a spiritually dead soul.
4. To explain what it means to be born of God.

### QUOTATIONS

*In or towards whomsoever the Holy Spirit puts forth His power, or acts his grace for their regeneration, he removes all obstacles, overcomes all oppositions, and infallibly produces the intended effect.*

–John Owen

*The wind is an element which man can neither harness nor hinder. The wind neither consults man's pleasure nor can it be regulated by his devices. So it is with the Spirit. The wind blows when it pleases, where it pleases, as it pleases. So it is with the Spirit.*

–A.W. Pink

*It is obvious, therefore, that when God uses this image he does so to show that he alone is responsible for your salvation and that you believe only because he first created the life within you to do it.*

–James Montgomery Boice

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. One-Sided Birth

- A. The imagery of being born again suggests that God is the one acting and humans are the ones being acted upon.
  - i. People cannot do anything to bring about their own birth.
  - ii. The one being born is utterly helpless and dependent.
  - iii. The one who is giving birth is the one who takes the initiative and who brings about a successful birth.
- B. This imagery communicates that God alone is responsible for salvation.
  - i. God creates new life within spiritually dead humans.
  - ii. Humans come to faith as a result of the life that God created within them.
  - iii. In short, the new birth precedes and produces saving faith.

### II. The Holy Spirit and Election

- A. God the Father sends the Spirit to work within the hearts of those whom God elected, or chose, before the foundation of the world.
- B. The work of the Spirit causes the elect to be born again.
- C. Each time a person is born again, God's eternal plans are being accomplished.

### III. The Holy Spirit and the Wind

- A. "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).
- B. The Greek word *pneuma* means both "spirit" and "wind."
- C. The wind in nature acts in the same ways as the Spirit in the new birth.
  - i. Both are independent.
    - 1. The wind has a mind of its own.
    - 2. Humanity cannot control the wind.
    - 3. The Holy Spirit moves independently of human influence.
    - 4. The Spirit moves upon one heart and passes over another.
    - 5. The Spirit blows according to the sovereign will of God.

- ii. Both are irresistible.
  - 1. When the wind blows in the fullness of its power, it sweeps away everything in its path.
  - 2. The wind cannot be stopped or contained.
  - 3. The Spirit breaks down human prejudices and overcomes resistance to the Gospel.
  - 4. The Spirit always achieves His intended results.
- iii. Both are invisible.
  - 1. The wind cannot be seen, but its effects are seen and felt.
  - 2. When the Holy Spirit is at work, His mighty effects can be seen.
  - 3. The results of the Spirit's work are evidence of His presence and power.
- iv. Both are inscrutable.
  - 1. The movement of the wind is inscrutable—mysterious and beyond human understanding.
  - 2. The Spirit's workings cannot be explained.
  - 3. No one can predict what the Holy Spirit is going to do next.
  - 4. Those who seem likely to come to faith often never do, while those who seem most distant from God often embrace Him.
  - 5. The manner in which the Spirit operates upon the human soul and creates new life “belongs to the deep things of God” (A.W. Pink).

#### IV. Born of God

- A. John 1:12-13 describes the Spirit's independent, irresistible, invisible, and inscrutable work.
- B. Verse 12 records the effect: human faith.
  - i. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”
  - ii. The result of the Spirit's work is that the elect receive Christ, believe in Him, and become children of God.
- C. Verse 13 records the cause: the Spirit's regenerating work.
  - i. “Who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”
  - ii. New life does not come through lineage, moral effort, or by independent human choice.
  - iii. New spiritual life comes only through the sovereign, electing, predestinating, gracious, loving, and merciful will of God.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. Both physical and spiritual birth are initiated as a shared effort between the one giving birth and the one being born.
  - a. True
  - b. False

2. The Greek word *pneuma* means both “spirit” and “wind.”
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
3. To say that the Holy Spirit is irresistible is to imply all of the following statements *except*:
  - a. The Spirit breaks down barriers and overcomes human resistance to the Gospel.
  - b. The Spirit sometimes forces people to act in ways that are contrary to their feelings and convictions.
  - c. The Spirit cannot be influenced, stopped, or contained by human efforts.
  - d. The Spirit always accomplishes His desired result.
  
4. To say that the movement of the Holy Spirit is inscrutable is to say that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. The Spirit will stop at nothing to achieve His purposes
  - b. The Spirit works in every person’s heart the same way
  - c. Nothing is known about the Spirit
  - d. The Spirit acts in ways that are beyond human understanding
  
5. In John 1:12-13, human faith is \_\_\_\_\_ God’s regenerating work.
  - a. The result of
  - b. The cause of
  - c. Independent of
  - d. In anticipation of

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. For some, the Bible’s teachings about human passivity in new birth can seem to contradict their experience of making a decision to receive Christ. Others find it very natural to look back and see their conversion as being entirely God’s work. Is it easy or difficult for you to see your role in new birth as a passive one? Why or why not?
  
2. In what ways does Dr. Lawson say that the Holy Spirit is like the wind? Can you think of other similarities between the two?
  
3. When the Holy Spirit intends to regenerate a person, He removes all obstacles and all resistance to the Gospel. What are some of these obstacles to faith? How does the Spirit overcome them?
  
4. Although we cannot see the wind, we can see its effects when it comes into contact with other things. The same is true of the Spirit. How have you observed the effects of the Holy Spirit’s activity in your life? In the lives of others?

## 8

# A Monergistic Birth

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The previous lesson discussed God's sovereignty in bringing about the new birth. As we examine what Scripture says about the way that God sovereignly works in bringing a person to faith, we encounter the truth that the new birth is not a collaborative effort between God and us. In this lecture, Dr. Lawson will survey several passages that describe the new birth, and he will demonstrate that the new birth is solely the result of God's initiative and work. In other words, the new birth is a monergistic birth.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:25-26; John 3:3-8, 12-18; 11:25-26; 1 John 5:1

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the term "monergism" and its importance in the new birth.
2. To examine the monergistic pattern of God's dealings with His people throughout the Bible.
3. To discuss the relationship between regeneration and saving faith.
4. To promote a spirit of gratitude and worship in response to God's merciful work in regeneration.

### QUOTATIONS

*Your active believing and God's active begetting are simultaneous. God does the begetting, and you do the believing at the same time, and His doing is the decisive cause of your doing.*

–John Piper

*To say that we are able by our own efforts to think good thoughts or give God spiritual obedience before we are spiritually regenerate is to overthrow the gospel and the faith of the universal church in all ages.*

–John Owen

*No more soul-destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that sinners can regenerate themselves, and repent and believe just when they please.*

–Charles Hodge

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. Definition of Monergism

- A. The prefix *mono* means “one” or “single.”
  - i. Monogamy: the state or practice of having one spouse
  - ii. Monopoly: the possession of exclusive control of a commodity or service by a single person or organization
- B. The Greek word *ergon* refers to “work.”
  - i. Ergonomics: The study of human efficiency and well-being in the workplace
  - ii. Ergograph: A device for measuring a muscle’s work capacity
- C. Monergism describes a state in which only one agent is at work.
- D. The opposite of monergism is synergism.
  - i. The prefix *syn* means “with” or “together.”
  - ii. Synergism refers to two or more agents working together.
- E. The Bible describes regeneration as the work of a single agent.
  - i. The Holy Spirit brings about new birth independently of human involvement.
  - ii. New birth is not, therefore, a joint effort between God and man.

### II. Monergism in Scripture

- A. John 3:3-8
  - i. A person must be born again from above (verse 3).
  - ii. A person must be born of water, even the Spirit (verse 5).
  - iii. Flesh is born of flesh, and spirit is born of Spirit (verse 6).
  - iv. This passage identifies God as an agent in regeneration, but does not attribute an active role to man.
  - v. Man is completely dependent upon the mercy and grace of God in regeneration.
- B. Jeremiah 31:33-34
  - i. “I will put my law within them.”
  - ii. “I will write it on their hearts.”
  - iii. “I will forgive their iniquity.”

- iv. “I will remember their sins no more.”
  - v. In short, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”
  - vi. Within this covenantal relationship, God is the initiator who gives His people a new heart and a new status.
- C. Ezekiel 11:19
- i. “I will give them one heart.”
  - ii. “A new spirit I will put within them.”
  - iii. “I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.”
  - iv. God is the primary worker in the regeneration of His people.
- D. Ezekiel 36:25-26
- i. “I will sprinkle clean water on you.”
  - ii. “From all your idols I will cleanse you.”
  - iii. “I will give you a new heart.”
  - iv. “A new spirit I will put within you.”
  - v. “I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”
  - vi. God is claiming to be the sole and exclusive author and agent of the new life that His people will receive.
- E. John 11:25-26
- i. “I am the resurrection and the life.”
  - ii. “Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”
  - iii. Every person who is made alive in regeneration comes to faith in Jesus Christ.
- F. 1 John 5:1
- i. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”
  - ii. The difference in the verb tenses indicates the cause and effect relationship between new birth and belief in Christ.
  - iii. Logically and theologically, birth comes before belief.
  - iv. Chronologically, new birth and faith come at the same time.
  - v. This is similar to the way that fire causes heat and light, but all three occur at the same time.

### III. Regeneration and Faith

- A. Regeneration causes saving faith but never occurs apart from saving faith.
- B. As soon as a person receives the gift of regeneration, he or she is enabled to repent and believe the Gospel.
- C. John Owen observes a birth-response pattern in both physical birth and spiritual birth.
  - i. When a baby is born, he or she immediately cries out and gasps for breath.
  - ii. When a person is born spiritually, he or she immediately calls out to God for salvation and clings to Jesus Christ.

- D. Charles Hodge states that there is “no more soul-destroying doctrine” than the view that sinners can regenerate themselves.
- i. If people could be born again of their own power, they would not look to God for spiritual life and growth in grace.
  - ii. Because God is the sole agent in the new birth, sinners are totally dependent upon Him.

#### IV. New Birth and the *Ordo Salutis*

- A. John 3 indicates that there is a logical sequence in the events of a person’s salvation.
  - i. Jesus discusses new birth in verses 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8.
  - ii. Saving faith is not mentioned until verses 12, 15, and 16.
  - iii. Jesus teaches Nicodemus about regeneration before He teaches him about faith.
- B. This pattern is consistent with the *ordo salutis*, the order of salvation, that appears in Romans 8:28-30.

#### V. Conclusion

- A. The Bible teaches that regeneration is exclusively a work of the Holy Spirit in human lives.
- B. Human beings are passive in the new birth, and God is active.
- C. When God acts upon human hearts, it produces the human act of calling upon the name of the Lord in faith.
- D. The proper response to the new birth is renewed faith, gratitude, and prayer that God would touch the lives of other sinners with His regenerating power.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The term “monergism” describes a state in which \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. One agent completes a task that another agent began
  - b. Only one agent is at work
  - c. Two agents participate equally in a joint effort, working as one
  - d. One person manipulates another in order to achieve a desired result
2. The opposite of monergism is panergism.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. Dr. Lawson cites all of the following passages *except* \_\_\_\_\_ as examples of monergism in the Old Testament:
  - a. Jeremiah 29:11-14
  - b. Jeremiah 31:33-34
  - c. Ezekiel 11:19
  - d. Ezekiel 36:25-26

4. In what way(s) does new birth always come before faith?
  - a. Logically
  - b. Theologically
  - c. Chronologically
  - d. All of the above
  - e. A and B only
  - f. B and C only
  
5. The Latin phrase *ordo salutis* refers to the logical and theological order in which the events of salvation occur in a person's life.
  - a. True
  - b. False

#### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As Dr. Lawson points out, the new birth is not a joint effort between God and people. Instead, God works independently, and humans are completely passive. Are there other parts of the Christian life in which we play a more active role? If so, give examples. If not, state why this is so.
  
2. Think about passages in the Bible where God's activity is described monergistically. What do these passages say about God? What do they say about human beings? How do these truths inform your understanding of the covenantal relationship between God and His people?
  
3. How is it possible for regeneration to be the cause of saving faith when both of these emerge in a sinner's life at the same time? What are other examples of causes and effects that occur simultaneously?
  
4. Can a person be regenerate without having saving faith? Why or why not?

# A Promised Birth

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

As John's gospel shows, Nicodemus was taken utterly off guard by Jesus' teachings about the new birth. A natural response might have been to ask Jesus where He had come up with these peculiar ideas about grown men being born a second time. However, Jesus' response implied that any person who had read the Old Testament should have readily understood the need for new birth. In this lecture, Dr. Lawson will show that the concept of a new birth was nothing new in Jesus' day. Long before, God had promised His people that a day was coming when He would give them new hearts and make them into new creatures.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 9:25-26; 31:33; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:25-28; John 3:9-10; Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:11-14

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To present the Person and work of Jesus Christ as the primary focus of the Old Testament.
2. To identify and explain the Old Testament's teachings about the new birth that Jesus proclaimed.
3. To identify and explain the New Testament's teachings about the circumcision of the heart that is a recurring theme in the Old Testament.

## QUOTATION

*This doctrine, therefore,—namely, that everyone who will enter into the kingdom of God must be born again of the Holy Spirit,—was contained in the writings of the Old Testament. It was so in the promises, that God would circumcise the hearts of his people, —that he would take away their heart of stone, and give them a heart of flesh, with his law written in it.*

—John Owen

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## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. Christ in the Old Testament

- A. As Jesus explained the new birth, Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was trying to communicate.
- B. Jesus responded in John 3:10 by asking, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?”
  - i. As someone who taught the Jewish Scriptures to others, Nicodemus would have been familiar with the Old Testament.
  - ii. Jesus’ surprise that Nicodemus did not know about the new birth indicates that it had been foretold in the Old Testament.
- C. In spite of his external piety and his knowledge of the Bible, Nicodemus did not yet realize that Jesus was the fulfillment and culmination of Old Testament revelation.
- D. The Old Testament, understood in light of the Person and work of Jesus Christ, proclaims a message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in the coming of Christ alone.
- E. In spite of his zeal for God and his impressive religious credentials, Nicodemus still needed to be born again.
  - i. God requires spiritual perfection (Matthew 5:48), which even Nicodemus could not attain.
  - ii. The only way to see or enter the Kingdom is through the new birth that comes from above.
  - iii. The new birth is a recurring theme in the Old Testament.

### II. The Old Testament Promise of New Birth

- A. Deuteronomy 30:6
  - i. True circumcision takes place not on a physical level, but on the level of the heart.
    - 1. Physical circumcision was the sign and symbol of belonging to the covenant community of the people of God.
    - 2. Even more important than bearing the physical sign of the covenant was bearing the sign of the covenant in one’s heart.
    - 3. Inward devotion to God is of greater worth than a merely external affiliation with Him.
  - ii. God promises to circumcise the hearts of His people and their descendants.
    - 1. Though people circumcise the body, only God can circumcise the heart.
    - 2. Because God works through families and communities, the descendants will be blessed through their physical birth into the community of the covenant.
    - 3. To be full members of God’s family, the descendants must also experience spiritual birth as their forbears had done.

4. All people must undergo new birth, or circumcision of the heart, in order to enter the kingdom of God.
- iii. As a result of receiving heart circumcision, the people “will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”
  1. In the Old Testament as well as the new, God places life into spiritually dead hearts and souls.
  2. A new heart enables a sinner to love God and love the things of God.
- B. Jeremiah 9:25-26
  - i. The Lord declares that one day He will punish those who are circumcised merely in the flesh.
    1. The physical circumcision is merely external, and the spiritual circumcision is internal.
    2. The external circumcision is merely a sign, and the internal circumcision is the reality of what the sign is indicating.
  - ii. The physical sign will not save a person who has not shared in the spiritual reality of redemption that the sign represents.
  - iii. Similarly, today there are many who are affiliated with the covenant community of the church but who have not experienced the forgiveness and newness of life that only the covenant Lord can give.
  - iv. While the surrounding nations are uncircumcised physically, God pronounces that Jeremiah’s audience was circumcised physically but not spiritually.
    1. Because they bore the covenant sign, the Israelites regarded themselves as privileged before God.
    2. Without the spiritual reality of circumcised hearts, the Israelites were in truth no better off than their uncircumcised neighbors.
    3. God had not regenerated them and given them spiritual life.

### III. Circumcision of the Heart in the New Testament

- A. Romans 2:28-29.
  - i. No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly.
  - ii. True circumcision is not merely outward and physical.
  - iii. A true Jew is a Jew inwardly.
  - iv. True circumcision is a matter of the heart, accomplished by the Holy Spirit.
- B. Colossians 2:11-14
  - i. The regenerate are made recipients of every spiritual blessing in Christ.
  - ii. In Christ, sinners receive a circumcision that does not come from human hands.
  - iii. Like circumcision, baptism is an external, covenantal symbol of the spiritual reality that the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the human heart.
  - iv. Through new birth, those who were previously uncircumcised in heart are made alive in Christ.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. The new birth proclaimed by Jesus had been promised long beforehand in the Old Testament.
- B. In both the Old and New Testaments, a person must receive a new heart from God.
- C. God has written His word upon the hearts of the regenerate of both ages, giving new spiritual life and a sincere love for Him.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why was it ironic that Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus taught about the new birth?
  - a. Nicodemus had already been born again.
  - b. The New birth appeared in Scripture, which Nicodemus knew well.
  - c. The Pharisees taught extensively about the new birth.
  - d. Most Jews already knew what it meant to be born again.
2. The Old Testament, understood in light of the New Testament, proclaims a message of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Salvation by works giving way to salvation by faith
  - b. Law vs. gospel
  - c. God's wrath, which is later superseded by God's mercy
  - d. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in the coming of Christ alone
3. True circumcision takes place on the level of the heart.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. Outwardly bearing the physical sign of the covenant is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. More important than bearing the inner sign of the covenant upon one's heart
  - b. Of equal value to bearing the sign of the covenant upon one's heart
  - c. Ultimately futile if that person does not also bear the sign of the covenant upon his or her heart
  - d. No longer necessary after the coming of Jesus Christ
5. In Old Testament times, a priest would circumcise both a person's body and a person's heart.
  - a. True
  - b. False

## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways can reliance upon the external trappings of religion—such as heritage, church membership, moral respectability, and knowledge of the Bible—cause a person to misunderstand Jesus' identity and mission? How do Jesus' words to Nicodemus correct this tendency?
2. Read Genesis 17:1-27. What is the significance of circumcision? How does circumcision relate to God's dealings with His people?
3. Read Deuteronomy 10:6. Why is it important for a person's heart to be circumcised? What are the results of having a circumcised heart?
4. In what ways is the Old Testament circumcision of the heart similar to the new birth that Jesus speaks of? Are there notable differences between circumcision of the heart and the new birth?

# A Saving Birth

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Although the doctrine of salvation is an important topic of discussion among Christians, there is an alarming amount of disagreement regarding what the Bible actually teaches about salvation. One area of confusion concerns why salvation is necessary at all. Although evangelicals proclaim that we must be saved, very few people specify what it is that we must be saved from. Another area of confusion concerns the way that sinners receive salvation. Throughout church history, the biblical doctrine of salvation by faith alone has often been trivialized and marginalized by efforts to promote salvation through human effort. Confusion also exists about whether people receive salvation through an independent act of their own will or as a result of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. In this lecture, Dr. Lawson will address these issues and others, showing that salvation is a gift from God and that fallen human beings can inherit it only after experiencing the new birth.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

John 3:5, 16-18, 36; 8:34-47; 1 Corinthians 1:18

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To clarify what salvation is and why human beings need to be saved.
2. To describe the kingdom of God and its relationship to the new birth.
3. To explain the vital importance of new birth for salvation.
4. To celebrate the freedom and new life that Jesus Christ imparts through the new birth.

## QUOTATION

*What do we need to be saved from? We need to be saved from God—not from kidney stones, not from hurricanes, not from military defeats. What every human being needs to be saved from is God. The last thing in the world the impenitent sinner ever wants*

*to meet on the other side of the grave is God. But the glory of the gospel is that the One from whom we need to be saved is the very One who saves us. God in saving us saves us from Himself.*

–R.C. Sproul

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. Saved from What?

- A. Many presentations of the gospel focus on the need for sinners to be saved, but they do not specify from what sinners need to be saved.
- B. Preachers often emphasize being saved from loneliness, poverty, or not having a purposeful life.
- C. According to the Bible, sinners are saved from God Himself.
  - i. Through faith, sinners are saved from God's curse upon humanity and the entire creation.
  - ii. Through faith, sinners are saved from God's wrath.
  - iii. Through faith, sinners are saved from the final judgment and everlasting punishment.
- D. The only one who can save sinners from God is God Himself.
  - i. God's justice is satisfied because Jesus Christ suffered the punishment that humanity deserves.
  - ii. God's mercy triumphs because sinners are justified and forgiven by faith in Christ.
  - iii. It is through the new birth that sinners are able to place their faith in Christ and experience the blessings of redemption.

### II. Salvation and the Kingdom of God

- A. To save someone is to deliver that person from imminent danger.
- B. Salvation is a rescue mission.
- C. "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).
- D. What is the kingdom of God?
  - i. A kingdom is the sphere over which a king reigns.
  - ii. The kingdom of God is the reign of grace in the hearts of those who are born again.
  - iii. The kingdom of God is the sphere of salvation in the hearts of those who have been born anew from above.
  - iv. The kingdom of God is the realm of redemption and reconciliation that now exists between God and man.
- E. Salvation involves entering the kingdom of God.
  - i. Before the new birth, each person is outside the kingdom and is an enemy of the king.
  - ii. There is no state of neutrality; one is either inside the kingdom or outside the kingdom.

- iii. To be saved is to be brought into the kingdom of God's grace.
- F. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
  - i. To be outside the kingdom is to be in a state of perishing.
  - ii. All people are either in a state of wrath or in a state of grace.
  - iii. One passes from the state of wrath to the state of grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
  - iv. One can only possess saving faith in Christ as a result of the supernatural birth that is a gift from God.

### III. Saved from Perishing

- A. What does it mean to perish?
  - i. When Jesus uses this word, He is not referring to annihilation or non-existence.
  - ii. Instead, "perish" refers to the destiny of unending ruin in hell.
  - iii. To perish is to suffer eternal destruction under the just judgment of God.
  - iv. Jesus juxtaposes perishing with possessing eternal life, showing that the two are opposites.
- B. Those who are outside the kingdom of God are presently perishing.
  - i. "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).
  - ii. Paul expresses these truths in the present tense.
  - iii. In this life the regenerate are already being saved and the unregenerate are already perishing.
- C. The mission of Jesus is "that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17).
  - i. The reason for Christ's incarnation was to seek and save what was lost.
  - ii. Christ has come to rescue sinners from their state of perishing.
- D. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36).
  - i. The gospel issues a command to all people to lay down their arms, repent of their sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - ii. God's kingdom is a place of safety and a refuge from wrath.
  - iii. This message is an urgent message; all who are outside the kingdom can only be delivered through faith in Christ.

### IV. Free Indeed

- A. Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin (John 8:34), but if the Son sets a person free, that person "will be free indeed" (John 8:36).
- B. Through Jesus Christ, sinners are set free from bondage to sin, physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death.
- C. The earth is divided between the children of light and the children of darkness (John 8:37-38, 44).
  - i. Those who are inside the kingdom are, by God's grace, the children of God.

- ii. Those who are outside of the kingdom are the children of Satan, enslaved in their sins.
- D. Abraham's true descendants are not those who are descended from him physically, but are his spiritual descendants through faith (John 8:39; Genesis 15:6-7).
- E. The unregenerate are bound by human depravity and are therefore unable to see, hear, or enter the kingdom (John 8:43)
- F. Only through the new birth can a person be delivered from the family of Satan to the family of God and be transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When sinners receive salvation, what are they ultimately being saved from?
  - a. Sickness and physical death
  - b. Satan and his demons
  - c. The physical world
  - d. God's wrath and curse
2. Dr. Lawson describes the kingdom of God in all of the following ways except \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. The reign of grace in the hearts of those who are born again
  - b. The sphere of salvation in the hearts of those who have been born anew from above
  - c. The state of happiness and personal fulfillment that arises from living a worthwhile and moral life
  - d. The realm of redemption and reconciliation that now exists between God and man
3. There is no neutral ground; a person is either outside or inside God's kingdom.
  - a. True
  - b. False
4. When the New Testament talks about perishing, it is referring to a purely future condition.
  - a. True
  - b. False
5. John 8:36 states, "So if \_\_\_\_\_, you will be free indeed."
  - a. The Son sets you free
  - b. You obey the Law of the Lord
  - c. You love one another
  - d. You set your neighbor free

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## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When we speak about salvation R.C. Sproul reminds us that it is important to remember what we are saved from. How do you think most people might answer the question, “Saved from what?” What is the biblical answer to this question?
2. What is the kingdom of God? How does a person enter God’s kingdom? What does it mean to live as a citizen of God’s kingdom?
3. What does it mean to be spiritually perishing? What is not meant by this phrase? Which verses in the Bible address spiritual perishing?
4. In what way is the gospel a command? When Dr. Lawson describes the gospel as a command, is he suggesting that we earn our salvation by obeying this command? Why or why not?

# A Transforming Birth

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

When God saves a sinner from His wrath and curse, He creates a new person. Yet, we will never be completely sinless in this life; in fact, sometimes it can feel like we are getting worse. As we grow in our love for God and our understanding of His holy nature, we become more profoundly aware of the depths of our sinfulness. However, this growing awareness of and grief for our sin indicates that a breathtaking transformation has already taken place within our hearts, minds, and wills. The forgiven sinner is liberated from patterns of sinful behavior and is conformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. Although we may still wrestle with sin and doubt, Scripture proclaims that the old has gone and the new has come.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

John 1:41-42; 2:6-11; 3:3; 1 John 2:29; 3:8-9; 4:7-8; 5:1

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss why transformation is necessary and inevitable in the life of a person who has been born again.
2. To survey biblical examples of lives that were radically changed as a result of being born from above.
3. To examine several biblical characteristics of the regenerate human soul.
4. To foster a greater awareness of and gratitude for the Holy Spirit's transforming power in a human life.

## QUOTATIONS

*These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created*

*in Christ Jesus thereunto, that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life.*

–Westminster Confession of Faith, XVI, 2

*We believe that this true faith, produced in us by the hearing of God’s Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates us and makes us new creatures, causing us to live a new life and freeing us from the slavery of sin...So then, it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls “faith working through love.”*

–Belgic Confession, Article 24

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. A New Creation

- A. New birth radically and dramatically changes a person’s life from the inside out.
- B. A person cannot be born again without his or her life being significantly altered.
  - i. It is not simply the case that this person’s life has changed.
  - ii. The regenerate person possesses a new life altogether.
- C. One cannot know Jesus Christ as Savior without knowing Him as Lord.
  - i. The Christian has been bought at a price, and his or her life now belongs to Jesus.
  - ii. Christ changes a person’s heart, mind, and will, giving that person new affections, values, and desires.
  - iii. A newfound love for God directs that person’s life in a new direction.

### II. Changed Lives in John’s Gospel

- A. Simon Peter’s life changed when he met Jesus (John 1:41-42).
  - i. Simon was regenerated in Jesus’ presence.
  - ii. Jesus gave Simon the new name Cephas (meaning “Peter”), which indicates the importance of the turning point that had just taken place in Peter’s life.
- B. Jesus’ miracles were signs to draw people to Him (John 2:11).
  - i. The Bible uses two words that refer to miracles as wonders or displays of power.
  - ii. John refers to Jesus’ miracles as signs.
    - 1. These signs are miracles intended to relay a message.
    - 2. These miracles are visual snapshots of the spiritual truths of the kingdom of God.
    - 3. The transformation of water to wine in John 2:6-11 prefigures the spiritual transformation of those who are born again.

### III. The Miracle of Transformation

- A. The new birth is a miraculous change from the inside out.

- i. As Christ transformed ordinary water into the finest wine, He also transforms the most corrupted sinners into His pure saints.
  - ii. In the new birth, broken sinners give up the worst they have to offer—their sin—in order to receive the best thing God has to offer—forgiveness, adoption, and new life as His sons and daughters.
- B. The new birth is the life of Christ inside a human soul.

#### IV. The Transformation of Nicodemus

- A. In John 3:1-21, Nicodemus comes to Jesus in darkness and unbelief.
- i. Nicodemus did not want to be associated with Jesus.
  - ii. Nicodemus did not understand the true identity and mission of Jesus.
  - iii. Nicodemus is spiritually lost.
- B. In John 7:50-52, light has begun to penetrate Nicodemus' darkness and unbelief.
- i. Nicodemus defended Jesus before the chief priests and Pharisees.
  - ii. Nicodemus was beginning to understand who Jesus truly was.
  - iii. Nicodemus had not been born again, but the Holy Spirit was preparing his heart and mind for the new birth.
- C. In John 19:39, Nicodemus has been brought out of darkness into light and out of unbelief into faith.
- i. Nicodemus openly associated himself with Jesus when it was most costly and most dangerous to do so.
  - ii. Nicodemus had been brought to an understanding of who Jesus truly was.
  - iii. Nicodemus' actions show that the Holy Spirit had birthed him into the kingdom of God.

#### V. Marks of Transformation

- A. 1 John 2:29
- i. Everyone who practices righteousness has been born from God.
  - ii. The regenerate are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.
- B. 1 John 3:8-9
- i. No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning.
  - ii. Although there will still be moments of sin in the life of a Christian, the sinful patterns will decrease as the believer grows in grace.
  - iii. Those who remain in patterns of sin reveal that they have not truly been born again.
- C. 1 John 4:7-8
- i. Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.
  - ii. Because the regenerate are born into God's family, there is a genuine love for other believers as brothers and sisters.
  - iii. Those who do not love God or others reveal that they have not truly been born again.
- D. 1 John 5:1
- i. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

- ii. Everyone who has truly been born again cannot totally or finally walk away from Jesus Christ.
- iii. Those who love God and obey His commandments show that they have received the new birth.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Some Christians know Jesus Christ as Savior, and others know Him as Lord; knowing Him as both is not necessary.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
2. Which miracle of Jesus prefigured His act of transforming sinners into saints?
  - a. Calming the storm
  - b. Feeding the crowd of five thousand
  - c. Cursing the fig tree that did not bear fruit
  - d. Turning water into wine
  
3. Those who profess faith in Christ but remain in patterns of sin reveal that \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. God is unable to save them
  - b. They have not actually been born again
  - c. They are members of a false church
  - d. They have lost their salvation
  
4. John 3 reports that Nicodemus openly associated himself with Jesus when it was most costly and most dangerous to do so.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
5. Which of the following is not a sign that new birth has taken place?
  - a. Extensive knowledge of Scripture
  - b. Belief that Jesus is the Christ
  - c. Love for God and others
  - d. An increase of righteousness and a decrease of sin

### BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In this lecture, Dr. Lawson mentioned the transformation that new birth brought about in the lives of Peter and Nicodemus. Think of two or three other people in the Bible whose lives were transformed by the new birth. How did their new birth come about? How were their lives different afterwards?

2. What does John 2:11 mean when it refers to Jesus' miracles as signs? How do they operate as signs? What is their purpose?
3. Although we will never be completely sinless in this life, we are enabled by the new birth and by the Holy Spirit's aid to increase in holiness and decrease in sin. As you reflect upon the Spirit's transforming work in your life, how are you different from the way you would be if you had never been born again?
4. What are the marks of the new birth? Which of these is the most evident in your life? In which area(s) do you sense the most room for continued growth?

## A Permanent Birth

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Ironically, we can become so afraid of losing something that we no longer fully enjoy having it. This is true in both everyday affairs and in spiritual matters. People will sometimes keep a prized possession out of harm's way to such an extent that they no longer use it or enjoy it. Fortunately, Christians can rejoice in the knowledge that the forgiveness of sins, their relationship with God, and their eternal hope can never be taken away. Few truths are as beautiful as God's promise that those who are born again receive a permanent birth and can never lose their status as His sons and daughters.

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

John 3:3-5, 15-16, 36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:35, 58; 10:10; 11:25; 14:16; Ephesians 1:13-14.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce the biblical teaching that the saints persevere in their faith because God, through His Holy Spirit, preserves them.
2. To describe the abundant and permanent nature of the eternal life that Christ has obtained for His Church.
3. To reiterate the necessity of the new birth and the lasting joy that it brings.
4. To encourage increased gratitude and devotion to God as the author and perfecter of faith.

### QUOTATIONS

*Regeneration is a single act, complete in itself and never repeated.*

–A.A. Hodge

*When God brings about our spiritual rebirth, He does not let anything extinguish that life. Rather, those whom He makes alive, He preserves and keeps alive that they might one day reach the goal for which He regenerated them.*

–R.C. Sproul

*They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.*

–Westminster Confession of Faith, XVII, 1

*Because of these remnants of sin dwelling in them and also because of the temptations of the world and Satan, those who have been converted could not remain standing in this grace if left to their own resources. But God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them in it to the end.*

–Canons of Dort, V, 3

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. Once Born, Always Born

- A. One of the greatest blessings of the new birth is the assurance that it is a permanent birth.
- B. Living in perpetual fear of losing one's salvation is a terrible experience.
- C. The Bible proclaims that a person who has been born into the family of God cannot be unborn or removed from it.
- D. The analogy of birth is a permanent one, implying that once a person has entered the kingdom of God, he or she can never exit or be removed from the kingdom.
- E. This truth is most frequently referred to as the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

### II. Eternal Life

- A. John 3:15-16 describes the life that the elect receive at the new birth as eternal life.
- B. This new life is eternal in quality.
  - i. It is the life of the age to come.
  - ii. It is the type of life that God's people will experience at the consummation of God's kingdom in the new heaven and the new earth.
  - iii. It is the very life of Christ that we receive when we are united to Him.
- C. This new life is eternal in duration.
  - i. Eternal life would not be eternal life if a person only possessed it for a limited amount of time.
  - ii. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life already (John 3:36) and for all time.
  - iii. A person is only regenerated one time and does not need to be regenerated again.

- iv. A person cannot vacillate between being born and being unborn.
- v. The regenerate have left the land of the dead forever and are preserved in the land of the living by God's grace.
- vi. A person cannot be born again again.

### III. Saving Faith

- A. Each person must make a decisive commitment to Jesus Christ.
  - i. "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life" (John 5:24).
  - ii. Hearing the word is essential, but it is not enough.
  - iii. In addition to hearing the word, a person must also believe in Jesus Christ.
- B. Saving faith involves the mind because a person cannot be saved without knowledge of the truth.
- C. Saving faith involves the heart because there must be an inner receiving of God's truth and of God Himself.
- D. Saving faith involves the will because there must be a response to the gospel, a full-orbed commitment to God.

### IV. God's Preserving Grace

- A. When God brings about the new birth, He does not allow anything to extinguish that new life.
  - i. If perseverance in grace were in human control, all would be lost.
  - ii. The Holy Spirit preserves the regenerate and brings them to the fullness of their redemption.
- B. God gives His people the Holy Spirit to be with them forever (John 14:16).
  - i. A person who is the dwelling place of the Spirit can never lose his or her salvation.
  - ii. As a Helper, the Spirit preserves and purifies God's people.
- C. The Spirit is a promise of salvation.
  - i. The regenerate are sealed with the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).
  - ii. The Spirit is a guarantee that God's children will receive their final inheritance (Ephesians 1:14).
  - iii. Christ has taken permanent residence within the regenerate by His Holy Spirit.
- D. The person who is united to Christ will be eternally satisfied.
  - i. Whoever drinks the water Jesus gives will never be thirsty again (John 4:14).
  - ii. Whoever comes to Jesus shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Him shall never thirst (John 6:35).
  - iii. Whoever feeds on the bread of heaven will live forever (John 6:58).
  - iv. Whoever believes in Jesus will live in spite of physical death (John 11:25).

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Those who are born again receive life that is eternal in its \_\_\_\_\_ and duration.
  - a. Quality
  - b. Quantity
  - c. Dimensions
  - d. Relevance
  
2. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints teaches that a person who wanders away from Christ can be restored to faith by being born again a second time.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
3. Because God is the author of salvation, saving faith involves the human mind and heart, but not the will.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. According to Ephesians 1:14, \_\_\_\_\_ is a guarantee to God's people that they will one day receive their final inheritance.
  - a. Baptism
  - b. Church membership
  - c. The Lord's Supper
  - d. The Holy Spirit
  
5. Jesus said that whoever drinks the living water that He offers would never \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Commit sin again
  - b. Be thirsty again
  - c. Find such delicious water anywhere else
  - d. Have doubts about his or her salvation

## BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a young man, Dr. Lawson struggled with the fear of losing his salvation one day. As he mentioned, this can be a terrifying way to live. What would you say to help a new Christian in his situation?
  
2. The permanence of the new birth is referred to in several ways, such as "once saved, always saved;" "eternal security;" "perseverance of the saints;" and "preservation of believers." What is helpful about these phrases? Are any of them potentially misleading? How would you explain this doctrine in your own words?

3. Some Christians consider the doctrine of the permanent new birth to be harmful to Christians because it permits them to live sinful lives since they cannot lose their salvation. How would you respond to this objection?
  
4. The new birth is a permanent birth, and a person that has become spiritually alive can never go back to being spiritually dead. What does this truth say about those who profess faith in Christ but whose lives do not bear Christ-like fruit? What does it say about those who love the Lord but are struggling with doubts and sins? How does this doctrine encourage you in your life of faith?

## Appendix

# Resources for Further Study

Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VIII, Chapter 12

Berkhof, Louis. *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Part V, Chapter 14

Canons of Dort, Points 3 & 4

Charnock, Stephen. *A Discourse of the Nature of Regeneration*

Charnock, Stephen. *A Discourse of the Efficient of Regeneration*

Charnock, Stephen. *A Discourse of the Word, the Instrument of Regeneration*

Charnock, Stephen. *The Necessity of Regeneration*

Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, Part III, Chapter 15

Kuyper, Abraham. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, Volume II, Chapter 4

Murray, John. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Part II, Chapter 3

Owen, John. *Pneumatologia*, Book III, Chapters 1-6

Piper, John. *Finally Alive*

Sproul, R.C. *What Does it Mean to be Born Again?*

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters X, XIII, XIV