

GOD'S WORKING AND OUR RESPONSE

I. THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We saw in the previous lesson that man is sold as a slave to sin. We are sinners by nature and sinners by choice. As a result, we are cut off from God and are dead in our trespasses and sins. We are not merely spiritually sick – we are spiritually dead. This leaves us incapable of doing anything to save ourselves.

Ephesians 2:1 “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”

Colossians 2:13a “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.”

In this state, it is impossible for people to even see the kingdom of God, and no one would ever seek to enter the kingdom if God did not work to draw them first.

John 3:3 “In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’”

Romans 3:11 “There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.”

John 6:44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Thus, if we are going to be saved, it will have to be the work of God. To accomplish this, the Holy Spirit works to convict us of our sin, our need for righteousness, and of the coming judgement for sin. This is uniquely the work of the Holy Spirit in unregenerate people; no human being is able to do this.

John 16:8-11 “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”

This work of the Holy Spirit in convicting unbelievers may be seen in the table on the following page:

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The Conviction of the Holy Spirit

	Sin	Righteousness	Judgement
The world's idea of sin, righteousness, and judgement (The False Idea)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world thinks it has no sin • The world accused Jesus of sin (John 9:24) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world thinks it is righteous • The world thinks it will be good enough for God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world thinks it will not be judged by God • The world judges God and Jesus and finds them lacking (1 Peter 2:4,7)
The world's own sin, righteousness and judgement (The Reality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world is full of sin • The world hated Jesus because He revealed it's sin (John 15:22-24) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world has no true righteousness • The world's righteousness is like filthy rags to God (Isaiah 64:6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world will be judged by God • Christ, Whom they rejected, will now judge them
Reason for the Spirit's conviction	Because they do not believe in Jesus	Because Jesus has returned to the Father	Because Satan has been judged
How to deal with their sin, righteousness, and judgement (The Cure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repent and turn to Christ! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forsake their own righteousness and ask Christ for His 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plead to God for mercy

II. REGENERATION

Regeneration is defined as the work of the Holy Spirit in which He brings persons into living union with Jesus Christ, changing their hearts so that they who were spiritually dead become spiritually alive, now able to repent of sin, believe the gospel, and serve the Lord.

Ezekiel 36:26 “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

Colossians 2:13 “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.”

John 3:3 “In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’”

Titus 3:4-5 “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

III. WE ACT BECAUSE GOD HAS ACTED--CONVERSION

Although only the Holy Spirit can convict us of sin and bring about the new birth, this does not mean that we are entirely passive. If we are truly God’s children, we must turn to Him in conversion.

Conversion is comprised of two elements: repentance and faith. Although repentance and faith are spoken of separately, they always work together in conversion. There is no repentance without faith and no faith without repentance.

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A. Repentance

Teaching Tapes Available for Further Study on the Work of the Holy Spirit in Conversion:

The Work of the Spirit in the Process of Evangelism – January 23, 2000
The Work of Christians in the Process of Evangelism – January 30, 2000

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1. Repentance has three aspects.
 - a. An intellectual aspect--a knowledge of God's holiness, our sin, and God's mercy and readiness to forgive.
 - b. An emotional aspect--a heartfelt sorrow for sin.
 - c. A volitional aspect--a willingness and steadfast purpose to turn away from all sin and to turn to God.

2. Repentance is an action on our part in response to God's grace. It is God's grace that enables us to repent.

Acts 5:31 "God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel."

2 Timothy 2:25 "Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth."

3. Repentance is a blessing. Our sin, while momentarily pleasurable, ultimately causes us nothing but grief and pain. To turn from it is to turn from the terrible consequences it brings and to find increasing joy and fulfillment in following God.

Acts 3:19 "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Acts 3:26 "When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

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4. Repentance is commanded. We are commanded to repent and turn away from our sinful rebellion toward God and his rule. And we are directly and personally accountable to God for our failure to do so.

Acts 17:30 "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent."

B. Faith

The blessings of God (righteousness, regeneration, etc.) come to us by faith. Faith is the instrument through which the saving benefits of the cross come to us. It is both a gift of God and an act of our will. God gives us faith but we are responsible for exercising it.

Romans 3:21-24 "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Romans 1:16-17 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast."

The New Testament word for faith, when used in the context of salvation means a true commitment to God with constant fidelity and obedience.

Teaching Tapes Available for Further Study on Regeneration:

Regeneration – March 10, 1996

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Romans 10:14,17 "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?... ¹⁷Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?...¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

b. Assent--We must believe that what is revealed is true.

Hebrews 4:2 “For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.”

c. Trust--We must stake our life on it as proven by our obedience, trust, and commitment.

James 2:17,22 “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. . . .²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”

2. We are saved by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone.

True saving faith will always lead to obedience. We do not only commit ourselves to Jesus as Savior. We commit ourselves to Him as Lord. Since the essence of sin is rebellion against God's rule in our life, the essence of saving faith and repentance is the total acceptance of and committal to His rule and authority. No one can rightfully say 'Jesus is my Savior' who does not also say 'Jesus is my Lord'. No one will receive the benefits of salvation without also accepting the responsibilities of discipleship.

1 Peter 1:2a “Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.”

Romans 1:5 “Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”

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James 2:17 “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

Luke 9:23-24 “Then he said to them all: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.’”

Having said this we must also be careful to say that while obedience will inevitably follow faith it is never the basis for our justification. Our obedience never has and never will add anything to the work of the Cross.

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3. Faith is a gift from God not a meritorious work.

Romans 4:1-5 “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. ³ What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ ⁴ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Hebrews 12:2a “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”

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C. Water Baptism: The Initial Act of Obedient Faith

Baptism doesn't save us; Jesus saves us through faith alone. However, as a sign and symbol of our union with the Lord in His death, burial, and resurrection, all believers are commanded to be baptized in water following their conversion. Just as a wedding ring symbolizes the union of a man and his wife, so water baptism is a testimony to the world and a symbol of the believer's union with Jesus Christ.

Baptism is an outward depiction of an inner reality. It demonstrates the gospel by symbolizing the believer's death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. It symbolizes the fact that the believer's sins have been forgiven and washed away. They are figuratively buried in the waters of baptism.

Acts 22:16 “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”

I Peter 3:21 “...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of

I Peter 3:21 “...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

However, water baptism is more than just a symbol, it is a means of grace. In water baptism God actually does something to us and in us. As we are baptized, we receive God’s grace to enable us to live for Him. Our old nature, which was crucified with Christ, is circumcised and buried in the waters of baptism, and we are clothed with Christ so that we can live in righteousness.

Colossians 2:11-12 “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,¹² having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

Galatians 3:27 “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

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Romans 6:3-7 “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

Since water baptism is not only a sign, but an actual means of grace to enable the believer to live in righteousness, only those who have believed the gospel and repented of their sins should be water-baptized. We do this because Christ and His apostles commanded us to be water baptized.

Matthew 28:19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 2:38 “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Because of the importance of obeying Christ, and due to the important work that God does in the life of a Christian through water baptism, we should not delay being baptized. In Acts 16:25-34, the jailer and his family were baptized in the middle of the night. In Acts 8:34-39, the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized in the middle of the desert immediately after believing. In fact, throughout the book of Acts, baptism usually took place on the day someone was converted. The issue is not having a big ceremony. Rather, the issue is obeying the Lord Jesus and letting Him do His work in us.

having a big ceremony. Rather, the issue is obeying the Lord Jesus and letting Him do His work in us.

Acts 16:31-33 “They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.”

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Teaching Tapes Available for Further Study on Conversion:

Justification By Faith Alone – August 13, 2000

Our Response to the Crucifixion of Christ – April 5, 1998

The Nature of True Faith – January 28, 1996

water and the eunuch said,

‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?’³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.”

It should also be noted that we believe and practice water baptism for believers by immersion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. While we do not deny other methods, modes and formulas, we believe that this is the method which best fulfills the purpose, description, and examples of baptism given in the Scriptures.

Acts 2:38 “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Acts 8:16b “They had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Acts 10:48a “So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”

It should be noted that this does not deny the Trinity, a doctrine to which we, along with the entire Christian Church throughout history, strongly subscribe. Jesus is not the Father or the Spirit, but He is a member of the Trinity, equal in authority and Divinity with the Father and the Spirit. It is by His Name specifically, though, that we are saved and healed, and our baptism symbolizes and seals our union with Jesus. Therefore, following the example of Scripture, we are baptized in His Name. Truly, whatever we do, whether in word or deed must be done in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

Colossians 3:17 “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

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