**Foundations (32 of 60) The Holy Spirit in the New Testament - RC Sproul**

During the next half hour, you'll hear another installment in our overview of Systematic Theology on this weekend edition of Renewing Your Mind. When a man is born into this world, he's actually dead on arrival. Physically speaking, we're squirming, full of life newborns.

But spiritually speaking, we're lifeless. Today on Renewing Your Mind, we'll discover that the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us life physically and spiritually. Dr. R.C. Sproul continues his step-by-step teaching through Systematic Theology.

Last weekend, we looked at the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Today, however, we'll examine the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Stay to the end of today's teaching to learn how to own the entire series on DVD.

Right now, here's R.C. Sproul. One of the most beautiful pictures that we find of God in the Old Testament is not only in His work of the creation of the universe, but in the narrative of the creation of the human species, where we are told that God scoops up clay from the ground and He shapes it and He molds it much as a sculptor would. But when God creates human beings, He doesn't simply create an inert statue or an idol or an icon or an empty piece of sculpture as an artist may be able to do by rearranging stone or clay in our days.

But when God finishes shaping and forming this figure that He makes out of the dust, He condescends to stoop over and to breathe into this inert, lifeless form that He's made out of the ground, and we are told that man became a living ruach, a living spirit. And in that narrative of the creation of the human species, we see in that God breathing into this mud His own life. Now, obviously, one of the greatest mysteries that we face in science and philosophy and have faced for millennia is the mystery of life itself.

And yet, from the biblical perspective, we trace it back ultimately to the power supply, the source or the genesis of life is God the Holy Spirit. Remember what Paul teaches, that in God we live and move and have our being. So there's one sense, ladies and gentlemen, that every person in the world has the Holy Spirit, not in the redemptive sense, in the salvific sense, but simply in the biological sense because He is the author and the empowerer of life itself, so that a pagan can't even breathe without the power of the Holy Ghost.

So the Holy Spirit is the one who generates and sustains life in all of its forms. He is the life giver or the power generator or the power for genesis, if you will. And even though the Bible speaks uniquely and miraculously of Christ being conceived in the womb of Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit, in a broader sense, in a more general sense, no one is conceived in the womb except by the Holy Spirit, because He again is the power supply for life itself.

And it's interesting to me that both in Hebrew and in Greek we find a play on words with the concept for spirit, because the same word in Hebrew for spirit is also the word for wind and for breath. And in the New Testament, when we look at the Greek, the Greek word pneuma, we use it in English, pneumatic tools, air-driven tools, and so on, that the word pneuma in the New Testament also can be translated wind or breath or spirit. And again, there is such a close link between the Spirit of God and the breath of life that we don't want to miss that.

But the chief concern, I think, in the New Testament with respect to the relationship of God the Holy Spirit to life is not so much the reference back to the original creation of life or to the general sustenance of life by the empowerment of God, but through the creative energy necessary for spiritual life, for the new life, for the life that Christ came. Remember Christ said, I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly. Well, there Christ is not talking about what we call bios in the Greek, which was the word for life or living things in the world of biology, but He uses the word zoe, which is used, again it comes over in English for zoology, but here Jesus uses it to refer to a particular quality or kind of life, the living spiritual life that only God can bring to people who are spiritually dead.

Jesus said, remember, I came that you might have life. Now where did He preach that sermon? At the cemetery? He didn't go into the cemetery and say, hey everybody, listen up, I came that you might have life. You would think that that address would be given to people who were dead.

Well, He wasn't talking about biological life, therefore He was not addressing people who were biologically dead. He was addressing people who were biologically alive and spiritually dead. And so He says to that person who is alive in terms of having his vital signs functioning and so on, but who is dead to the things of God, I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly.

Now, of course, Christ as the Redeemer comes to give us life. The person of the Trinity who is the one who applies the redemptive work of Christ to our lives is the Holy Spirit. When we look at the work of the Trinity, God creates, God initiates the plan of redemption, Christ performs all that is necessary to affect our redemption, and then that objective ministry of Christ is made ours subjectively through the application of God the Holy Spirit.

And one of the chief works by which that occurs in the New Testament is the new Genesis, the impartation of new life to dead souls, and that we call in theology regeneration. Regeneration is the function of God the Holy Spirit, and there's great emphasis placed upon that in the New Testament. Again, we've seen the Spirit in the Old Testament, and the first place we met Him was where? In what book? In Genesis.

And Genesis was the record of the original generation of the universe and the generation of the human race. Okay? When we talk about regeneration, we put this little prefix, R-E, in front of a word. What does that mean? It means again.

It calls to some new, second or later repetition of an original. I can paint the house, and then I repaint the house. Before I can repaint the house, it has to at least be painted once in the first place, right? So, when you speak of regeneration, you can only have that term mean something if there's been some kind of prior form of generation, and the prior form of generation that the Scripture has in mind in the New Testament is your earthly birth, your biological birth.

But remember that when you are born into this world, you arrive D-O-A. You are dead on arrival spiritually. You may be in great health biologically, but you are born in a state of corruption and fallenness that we've already explored.

Now, when we come to the New Testament, we look at Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And Paul begins the second chapter of Ephesians with these words, "...and you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world." Now, notice the metaphorical use of the word dead here, because Paul also speaks of walking in the world. He talks about zombies walking around, the walking dead.

"...you who were quickened, who previously were dead in sin and trespasses, in which you once walked." Now, do you see, of course, what he's saying here is that even though you were dead, you were still walking, because the death to which he's referring is spiritual death. "...in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." Now, we have to stop for a second and hear what the apostle is saying here, because what Paul is teaching in this text manifestly is on a collision course with the popular view of the relationship between God and people that saturates the media and permeates our society and even our churches. And that is the idea that we all are by nature children of God, and we all start off in this world as part of God's family, and we grow up Christians.

Ladies and gentlemen, nobody, nobody in this world is born a Christian. You can be born into the most godly family in the world, and you will not be born a Christian. You will be born not as a child of God, but as a child of wrath.

You will be by nature alienated from God, at enmity with God, dead in your sin and in your trespasses. That's your natural state. That's your natural condition as a result of your biological birth.

Because when you are born, you are still in the flesh. And here, when the New Testament contrasts flesh from spirit, it means you are dead to the things of God. And the only way you can become a Christian is through the work of the Holy Spirit, who, as Paul speaks of here, quickens you or makes you alive.

The older translation was, you have been quickened. Now, we hardly ever use the word quickened in this regard. We do it in the ancient use of the Apostles' Creed when we say, I believe in Christ's return to judge the quick and the dead.

And, you know, when I was a kid, I used to think that He's going to judge the ones that are running away from Him as fast as they can. They're the quick. But the quick and the dead refer to what? The living and the dead.

The other way in which we use the term quicken or quickening in our popular language is in the term of the gestation period of a woman's pregnancy. That there is that moment during that nine-month period where, for the first time, the woman feels the actual presence and movement of the baby in her stomach. And she calls that what? Quickening.

She's sensed or felt the life of the baby. And, of course, about ready to get rid of that word with respect to pregnancy because we don't want people thinking that unborn babies are alive in this culture. But in any case, Paul says, You hath He quickened, or you hath Me made alive.

He's talking about regeneration, where the Holy Spirit raises dead people to life. It is the resurrection of the human spirit from spiritual death. Now, I'm laboring this point right now because, again, what I'm saying, I realize, flies in the face of what the culture says.

And the thing that surprises or astonishes me is that this might come as much of a surprise to people in the church as it does out of the church. But I take comfort in that I'm not the first person to articulate this idea who is somewhat exasperated from people's failure to grasp it because we see that in the confrontation in the New Testament when Jesus has a discussion with Nicodemus. Remember in John 3? We're told that there was this Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, who came to Jesus by night with all kinds of flattery saying, Good teacher, you know, we know that thou art a teacher sent from God or you wouldn't be able to do the things that you do.

Sound judgment there. He gives all these compliments to Jesus, and Jesus turns on this man and says to him point blank, Unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. And he goes on to say, Unless a man is born of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

This is what Jesus abruptly announces to this member of the Sanhedrin, this Pharisee, this ruler of the Jews. Now, what is the response of this Pharisee to Jesus' announcement? He's a theologian. He thinks this is the most ridiculous thing he's ever heard.

And he gives a crass reply to Jesus. What do you mean? That a man who's fully grown has to climb a second time into his mother's womb and be born? It's a wonder Jesus didn't strike him dead when he spoke that cynically to our Lord. And Jesus said, Nicodemus, Are you a ruler of the Jews and you don't understand these things? Have you never read the Old Testament? See, this is critical.

That Jesus wasn't introducing here a new idea. Jesus wasn't saying that people in the Old Testament could be saved without being regenerate, whereas in the New Testament all of a sudden you had to be born again in order to get saved. No.

David had to be born of the Holy Spirit. Abraham had to be born of the Holy Spirit. Everybody that's ever been redeemed has to be born of the Spirit of God in order to escape spiritual death and the flesh.

So that regeneration is an absolute requirement and necessity for salvation. You can't be saved without it. It always amazes me when I hear people talk about born-again Christians.

Have you heard that phrase? I want to say to people, do you stutter? Why are we talking about born-again Christians? What other kind of Christians are there? Can you be a non-born-again Christian? Or a spiritually reborn non-Christian? No. To be born again, if being born again according to Jesus, is an absolute prerequisite for even seeing the kingdom of God, let alone entering the kingdom of God. How could you have somebody entering the kingdom who hasn't had it? Well, according to Jesus, there are no non-born-again Christians.

It's a meaningless term for Jesus. And yet it's a striking term because the reason why people use it today is because we have a brand of religion that claims to be Christian that says you don't have to have regeneration to be redeemed. That's not Christianity.

So, in any case, this is one of the central roles of the Spirit of God in the New Testament and in the Old Testament. He is the regenerator. He is the one who creates the new Genesis, who gives us spiritual birth in the first place.

But the beautiful thing is that not only does the Holy Spirit regenerate us in the plan of salvation, but He is the principal nurturer of Christians because the other place where we see so much attention given to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is with respect to our sanctification, that respect to which we are being molded and shaped and brought into conformity with the image of Christ and growing into maturity in Christ. This process is called the process of sanctification. We'll look at that separately later, but just in terms of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, let us remember that it is in the application of redemption not only does the Spirit quicken us to faith and to spiritual life so that we become justified, but He nurtures those whom He has raised from spiritual death throughout their lives, leading them, influencing them, working within them to bring about the actual transformation of their character from sinner to saint.

I've always wondered, for example, why the Holy Spirit is called the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, the Father is holy, the Son is the Holy One, and yet it's the Spirit who is given this title right before His name. We don't say, Dear Holy Father, Dear Holy Son, Dear Holy Spirit, or in the name of the Holy Father, in the name of the Holy Son, in the name of the Holy Spirit.

We say in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And yet we know clearly that this attribute of holiness belongs equally to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. So why do we single out the Spirit to call Him holy? Well, obviously not because He's the only member of the Godhead who's holy.

But why? Because of His ministry, because of the concentrated function that He has in the plan of redemption. He is the one whom God sends to make us holy. It is the business of the Holy Spirit to generate holiness.

And so we see that in stages, beginning with our regeneration, then through our whole lives in the process of scientification, until scientification reaches its final climax, its culmination in heaven, where then we experience glorification. And that is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit initiates our changing character.

He nurtures it during our lives. He finishes it at the end, at the completion of our redemption in heaven. So one of the things that's fantastic to observe about the ministry of the Holy Ghost is how multifaceted it is.

He's there in the original creation. He's the power of the recreation. He's there in the original giving of life.

He's there in the quickening to spiritual life. He's there in scientification. He's there in glorification.

What else does He do? We've seen Him empower people in the Old Testament. He is the one who inspires the sacred Scripture. It's the Holy Spirit who has the task of inspiring the writing of the Bible.

But not only does He inspire the original record of Scripture, but He is also the one who illumines it. No one knows the mind of God save the Spirit of God. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians.

And so the Holy Spirit helps us understand the Scripture by shedding light into our dark heads to help us to see what's there in the text. He is our supreme teacher of the truth of God as the one who is the illuminator. He's the one who convicts us of sin and of righteousness.

He is our paraclete, the helper that Christ promised to give to His church. And in our next session, we'll explore the significance of that. The multifaceted ministry of the Holy Spirit throughout the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, is something every Christian needs to understand.

You're listening to the weekend edition of Renewing Your Mind with R.C. Sproul. This study of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is part of a larger series titled Foundations, an overview of systematic theology. And we have the complete Foundation series available to you on DVD right now.

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Just go online to facebook.com slash Ligonier and like our page. There's no better way to spread the word than engaging friends who tell other friends about Ligonier Ministries. Dr. Sproul ended our time together today by referring to the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete.

Well, next weekend we'll explore that title for the third person of the Trinity and continue our exploration into systematic theology. Plan to meet Dr. Sproul here again next weekend on Renewing Your Mind, the radio outreach of Ligonier Ministries.