

The Doctrine of the Trinity

Three Reasons to Hold to Monergistic Regeneration



ALLEN S. NELSON IV



There are two words to define at the outset of today's post. The first is monergism, and the other is synergism. Both of these words contain the Greek word "*ergon*" which means "work." The prefix *syn* means "with", and the prefix *mono* means "alone."

In Christian theology, the word "Synergism" means that the new birth (regeneration) results from the work of both God and man together. It essentially teaches that being born again is God's work *with* man. God does His part; man does his part, and voila! – regeneration.

Monergism, on the other hand, says that the new birth is entirely God's work alone. Regeneration, rather than being God laboring "with" man, is God's work *in* man. Every person is in such a dead and depraved condition that he or she is unable and unwilling to bring about the new birth. God does this of *His* own will by the Word of truth according to His great mercy (cf. [James 1:18](#), [1 Peter 1:3](#)).

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As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached, “[Y]ou do not become a Christian as the result of human activity, not even human endeavor at its best and highest...Becoming a Christian is all of God.”¹

In today’s post, I’d like to give you 3 practical arguments for why you should hold to monergism as opposed to being a synergist. You should believe that regeneration is God’s work alone apart from any assistance from the sinner. Here’s why:

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1. THE BIBLE IS TRUSTWORTHY

I had to begin here. You should hold to monergism because it’s what the Bible teaches. At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter so much what Calvin or Spurgeon or anyone else believed in comparison to what the Bible teaches.

Titus 3:5 teaches us that we did not save ourselves. We did not make ourselves savable. Rather, God saved us without our assistance.

We must not let our particular soteriological tradition or personal experience, or heroes of the faith cloud our understanding of what the Scriptures teach. The Bible is sufficient to teach us how salvation works. It is also authoritative; therefore we are obligated to trust its precious truth! “It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh is no help at all” (**John 6:63**).

As J.C. Ryle preached, “if the Bible be indeed true and our only guide to heaven, and this I trust you are call ready to allow, it surely must be the duty of every wise and thinking man to lay to heart each doctrine which it contains, and while he adds nothing to it, to be careful that he takes nothing from it.”²

The Bible is our source for all sound doctrine. Everything we believe must be held up to the scrutiny of God’s Word. Everything we believe must flow from this Book for it is truth. It is in the truth we must stand, and it is by the truth that we are sanctified (**John 17:17**). The Bible is worthy of our time and study.

If the Bible never presses you, never makes you uncomfortable, never leads you to question yourself, never challenges you, never changes your mind, actions, and heart,

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Born of God: Sermons from John, Chapter One* (Carlisle, PA Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), 233.

² J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Race and Other Sermons* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), 15–16.

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never humbles you, never convicts you...I'm not sure which translation you're using but switch now. Of course, the problem is not the "translation," is it? It's operator error.

To follow Jesus is to follow His Word. It is to desire to understand and know and grow in sound doctrine. And so rightly grasping the doctrine of monergism is practical because to not understand it is to misunderstand a core truth of the Bible.

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Yes, you can be a Christian and be confused on this doctrine. But why would you want to be confused or mistaken? Doesn't being a Christian make you want to know His word rightly?

Psalm 111:2 says, "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them." Oh, how great a work of God is the new birth! So, may we continue to study to remove any unbiblical notions of this precious work from our minds.

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS TRULY GOD

Now, I do not mean to imply that those who do not hold to monergism are not trinitarians! But I do want to press us to understand that all sound doctrine is interconnected. Monergism is a consistent way of magnifying and glorying in the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

Herman Bavinck writes,

The Christian church...has consistently – and all the more vigorously as it gained more insight into the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit – assumed a special divine activity in regeneration. Just as, to the extent it became more firmly persuaded of the necessity of internal grace, it confessed all the more decisively and joyfully the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit.³

Now, certainly synergists can identify "a special divine activity in regeneration." But only monergism understands this divine activity as wholly sovereign and *all* of grace, thus attributing to the Holy Spirit His due glory for bringing about the new birth.

To suppose the Holy Spirit needs our help in the new birth separates how He works from that of the Father and the Son. For example, the Father did not need our help in electing

³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI Baker Academic, 2006), 78.

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us for salvation. The Son did not need our help in dying on the cross for our sins. Why then would the 3rd Person of the Trinity need our help in regeneration? Is He lesser than the Father or Son? Of course not!

John Flavel rightly wrote,

[T]he Father hath elected, and the Son hath redeemed; but until the Spirit (who is the last cause) hath wrought his part also, we cannot be saved. For he comes in the Father's and in the Son's name and authority, to put the last hand to the work of our salvation, by bringing all the fruits of election and redemption home to our souls in this work of effectual vocation.⁴

Now, understand my point here. I am not saying that someone who thinks regeneration is a work of God and man together is out and out denying the Trinity. Synergism is not a heresy.⁵ But I am saying that if you think regeneration is a work of God and a work of man together, you are being inconsistent in your understanding of the Trinity.

In the whole scope of salvation, in the entire trinitarian work of salvation, the Father doesn't need your help. The Son doesn't need your help. But the Holy Spirit does need your help? To say He does besmirches His glory.

May it never be so, beloved. The wind blows where it wishes. The Spirit moves as He will. He is sovereign. He is holy. He is in control. He is deserving of our worship.

Jonathan Edwards helpfully writes that "Those who are in a state of salvation are to attribute it to sovereign grace alone, and to give all the praise to him, who maketh them differ from others."⁶ He goes on to write how we ought to exalt God the Father and God the Son. But he does not forget the Holy Spirit! Edwards reminds Christians that they ought to also,

[E]xalt God the Holy Ghost, who of sovereign grace has called them out of darkness into marvellous [sic] light; who has by his own immediate and free operation, led them into an understanding of the evil and danger of sin, and brought them off from their own righteousness, and opened their eyes to discover

⁴ John Flavel, *The Whole Works of the Reverend John Flavel*, vol. 2, (London, England: W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 20.

⁵ It should be noted, however, that synergism is a dangerous trajectory and an inconsistent position within Christian orthodoxy.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 854

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the glory of God, and the wonderful riches of God in Jesus Christ, and has sanctified them, and made them new creatures.⁷

3. IT MAKES YOU A BETTER EVANGELIST

There is a certain faulty line of reasoning that says if God is completely sovereign in salvation, choosing whom He will and regenerating whom He will, then evangelism is unnecessary. This is an example of fallen men using fallen logic to reject the plain teaching of the Scriptures. The sovereignty of God in salvation in no way negates the responsibility of believers to proclaim the gospel nor does it lessen the responsibility of sinners to repent of their sins and believe the gospel. As Will Metzger notes, “[W]e should not consider these two doctrines of sovereignty and responsibility as enemies but rather see them the way the Bible does—as friends!”⁸

Adhering to monergism actually makes us better evangelists. How so? Because it reminds us not that God “might” save, but that He *will* save His people from their sins (cf. [Matthew 1:21](#)). It confirms that evangelism will ultimately prove fruitful in the long run.

It also helps us to not rely on gimmicks or emotionalism in order to see people savingly converted to Christ. Rather, we rely on the power of the truth of the gospel proclaimed. God causes us to be born again by the word of truth according to the power of the gospel (cf. [James 1:18](#)).

But how do we “close the deal” with sinners then? If we believe in this biblical doctrine of regeneration and trust the monergistic power of God, what do we do to see sinners savingly converted to Christ? Am I saying we just do nothing? Of course not!

W.B. Sprague rightly lectured, “[If] the doctrine of divine influence be preached in such a way as to authorize the inference that man has nothing to do in respect to his salvation, but wait to be operated upon like a mere machine...there is little probability that [people] will be converted.”⁹

What did we see Paul tell the Philippian Jailer? Believe! ([Acts 16:31](#)). He did not say, “Wait to see if you will be regenerated!” Instead, he gave him the imperative, *Believe*. It was the Jailer’s duty to believe on Christ.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Tell the Truth*, 109.

⁹ William B. Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, (London, England Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 84.

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Revelation 22:17 declares, “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.” All men, women, boys, and girls are invited (and commanded) to come to Christ in saving faith.

The sovereignty of God in salvation in no way negates the responsibility of believers to proclaim the gospel nor does it lessen the responsibility of sinners to repent of their sins and believe the gospel.



And this proclamation we are to publish to the uttermost parts of the earth. Trust, dear soul. Come to Christ! Repent of your sins and believe the gospel. We must preach the gospel and issue this summons to respond to all sinners regardless of our assessment of their situation. All we need to know is they are sinners. We have been commanded to share the gospel with them, and monergism reminds us that God is willing to use the proclamation of His gospel to actually and really and truly save many.

Both in Scripture and history we see the circumstances surrounding conversion happen in a variety of ways. Charles Spurgeon heard a sermon from a layperson in the midst of a wintry storm. George Whitefield read a book by Henry Scougal. John Newton recalled Scripture he had memorized as a child. The Philippian Jailer was on the brink of committing suicide.

But all of these stories, in fact every conversion story, are tied to the gospel’s proclamation and a willful response of faith. That volitional response of faith is an inevitable reaction to the Spirit’s effectual calling and sovereign gifting. But we don’t have control over that. It is not our business to power the wind but to preach the Word. It is our duty to “implore [sinners] on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (**2 Corinthians 5:20**).

We know a sinner will not make one step toward God in his own power, for the flesh is no help at all (cf. **John 6:63**). But God...(**Eph. 2:4**). Salvation truly is of the Lord! (cf. **Jonah 2:9**). Monergism, then, gives us all the confidence in God and His Work, and thus motivates us to be better evangelists.

There are more reasons to hold to monergism. Regenerate church membership and understand the proper mode and subjects of baptism come to mind. But the three above reasons are enough to consider for today. I hope you’ll think through them and affirm the wonderful biblical truth of monergistic regeneration.

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Allen S. Nelson IV is the pastor of Perryville Second Baptist Church in Perryville, AR, where he resides with his wife Stephanie, and their 5 children. Allen is the author of *From Death to Life: How Salvation Works* and *Before the Throne: Reflections on God's Holiness*. His other titles include blogger, rookie podcaster, and occasional conference speaker. Most importantly, he is a recipient of the undeserved grace of God.

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