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R.C. SPROUL

# EXPOSITOR

A PUBLICATION OF  
ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

SUMMER 2022

*No. 39*

## Effectual Calling

PREACHING • TEACHING • TRAINING



NEW

## A JOY THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN

### REJOICE IN THE LORD

*with* Steven Lawson

It was from prison that Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Addressing a church troubled by division and false teaching, the Apostle called anxious Christians to share in his vibrant joy. What was Paul’s secret? The book of Philippians presents the key to having joy that even our darkest trials cannot steal away: knowing Christ. In this new teaching series, Dr. Steven Lawson takes a thorough look at Paul’s letter of joy. Set out on this verse-by-verse journey to discover how the joy of the Lord enables Christians to live faithfully for the gospel in every circumstance. **Available now.**

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# THE TRIUMPHANT PULPIT

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

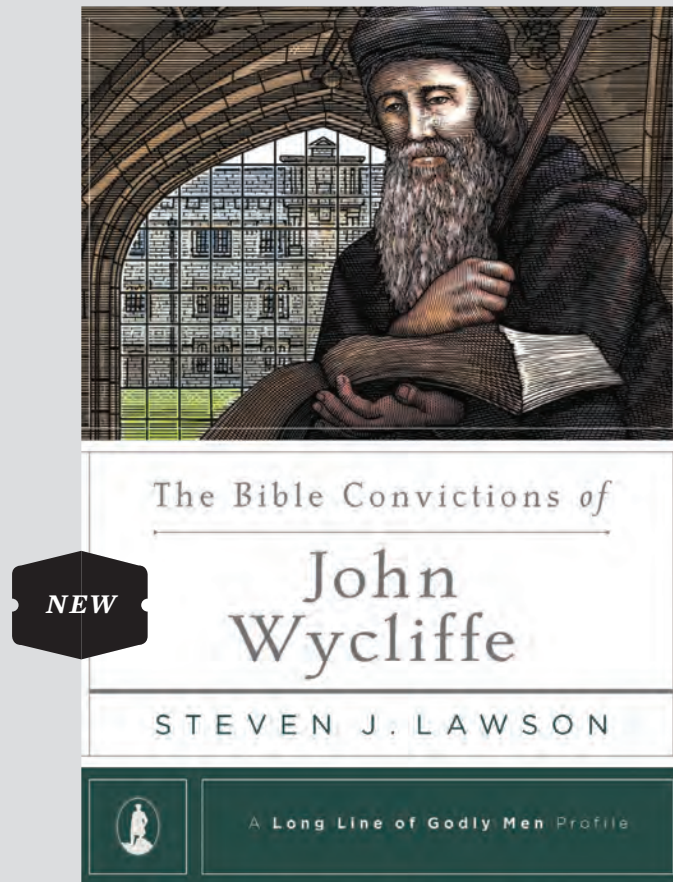


**W**hen I first came to understand the doctrines of grace, I was immediately struck by certain key questions that needed answers: how would these lofty truths affect my preaching? If God is sovereign, why should I even preach? If God has already chosen those who will be saved, why should I step into a pulpit with the Scripture?

What I had not yet realized was this: not only has God appointed the end of all things, but he has appointed the means to accomplish that end. I came to discover that the primary means of God fulfilling His eternal purpose is through the preaching of His Word. This balanced, biblical understanding was a game-changer for me.

As a result, I saw that the sovereignty of God in my pulpit ministry guaranteed the success of my preaching. The doctrines of grace were not a hindrance to my exposition, but my greatest help. I learned that God would extend his effectual call to the elect as I proclaimed His Word. I became liberated as never before in my preaching. It was with a new confidence that I addressed my hearers, fully persuaded that God's sovereign will could not be thwarted.

If you have ever wrestled with this matter of the sovereignty of God in preaching, my prayer is that this issue of *Expositor* magazine will be of enormous help to you. May you read each article with the utmost attention. Here will be a great support for your pulpit ministry. ♦



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**STEVEN J. LAWSON** is founder and president of OnePassion Ministries. He is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow, director of the doctor of ministry program at The Master’s Seminary, and host of the Institute for Expository Preaching. He is the author of numerous books.

## 19 MAKING SENSE OF GRACE AND ELECTION

**JOHN MACARTHUR** is pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, and president of The Master’s College and Seminary. He has authored many books and is a regular contributor to *Expositor* magazine.

## 23 THE NEW GENESIS

**R.C. SPROUL** was founder of Ligonier Ministries, an international Christian discipleship organization located near Orlando, FL. He was also founding pastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel in Sanford, FL, first president of Reformation Bible College, and executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine.

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**SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON** is Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary and the former senior minister of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC. He is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow and the author of many books.



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# EFFECTUAL CALLING

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STEVEN J. LAWSON

**T**he doctrine of effectual calling should be every preacher's cherished companion. Without this truth, gospel preaching would utterly fail. Apart from it, no listener would ever be converted to Christ. But when the irresistible call accompanies the preaching of the gospel, God guarantees the success of our pulpit ministry. We plant the seed and water it, but according to God's sovereign will, He causes its growth. By effectual calling, Jesus builds the church—and nothing can thwart its advance.

Understanding this truth gives the preacher an unwavering confidence that God's Word will not return to Him void. It infuses him with a firm conviction that God can overcome all resistance of unbelief within human hearts. As he stands in the pulpit, this doctrine enlarges his faith that God will save elect sinners through the preaching of

His Word. It emboldens him to be fearless in the face of any opposition to the truth. It restrains him from being manipulative in calling for a response to the message of salvation. This doctrine is vitally important to the effectiveness and success of any preacher's ministry.

Throughout the Bible, this truth of the irresistible call of God is clearly taught. It is a cornerstone teaching closely connected with many other core doctrines taught in the Scripture. This is especially true with the other four doctrines of grace. These foundational truths—total depravity, sovereign election, definite atonement, persevering grace—are seamlessly interwoven together to form one body of truth. Remove any one of these truths, and the whole system of soteriology crumbles and collapses. These five doctrines of grace stand as one statement of truth. Like interconnected links, if one breaks, the whole chain falls

apart. So it is with these golden links in salvation's chain—they stand or fall together.

In past issues, we have focused upon how to preach the first three doctrines of grace. To this point, we have considered total depravity, sovereign election, and definite atonement. Now, we want to discuss how to preach the next truth—effectual calling. This teaching is the critical link between the sovereign will of God in eternity past and the moment of regeneration within time. Here is the connection between Christ's particular atonement made upon the cross two thousand years ago and the application of His death to the lives of God's elect. Effectual calling is where the saving grace of God becomes real in spiritually dead souls.

Given the immense importance of effectual calling, let us carefully consider how to preach this glorious truth. We will consider this matter from several angles.

### **EXEGETE THE KEY PASSAGES**

Whatever we preach about effectual calling, it must come from the clear teaching of specific texts of Scripture. Certainly, all our doctrinal preaching must arise exclusively from the Bible. We must not resort to human reasoning when expounding any doctrine in the pulpit. We must not appeal to religious traditions or secular wisdom. We must not rely upon man's logic or self-perceived rationale. What we preach about effectual calling must always originate from biblical texts. "Thus says the Lord" must be our constant appeal. It does not matter what even the most eminent theologians say. All that matters is, ultimately, what God says in His Word.


### ***Highlighted in Both Testaments***

This doctrine of effectual calling runs throughout the pages of Scripture. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, this truth is clearly taught. The prophets repeatedly made this truth known to their audiences. Jesus Christ did the same, whether it was to His disciples in private or to the unconverted multitudes in public. The Lord had more to say about effectual calling than anyone else in the Bible. Furthermore, the apostles repeatedly taught this truth in their Spirit-empowered preaching. The same can be said for their infallible, God-breathed writings in Scripture, whether in Acts, the Epistles, or Revelation. To expound this truth is to set forth what they so openly proclaimed.

As this doctrine of effectual calling is taught in the Bible, it is often placed in the most prominent places. This is especially true in the New Testament. This truth is not hidden in the back corners of books in the Bible. It is not concealed where few would find it. Neither is it taught with obscure words or presented in veiled metaphors. Rather, effectual calling is brought out into the open for all who read Scripture's pages. This truth is often presented in the initial verses or opening prologues of biblical books. Open virtually any book in the New Testament, and you will have no trouble finding this doctrine.

### ***Discovered in Opening Verses***

The Apostle John begins his Gospel by stating that those who receive Jesus Christ are those who are "born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). This is a clear reference to monergistic regeneration, clearly taught in the opening Prologue. Paul



**This doctrine of effectual calling runs throughout the pages of Scripture. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, this truth is clearly taught.**



does much the same. He starts his epistle to the Romans by identifying its recipients as “the called of Jesus Christ” and “called as saints” (Rom 1:6–7). In his first epistle to the Corinthian church, Paul immediately addresses the church in Corinth as those who are “saints by calling” (1 Cor 1:2). They “were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). Likewise, Paul refers to the believers in Galatia as those “called...by the grace of Christ” (Gal 1:6).

The same truth of effectual calling finds prominence in the initial passages of the General Epistles. To begin Peter’s first epistle, he writes that “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...has caused us to be born again” (1 Pet 1:3). Likewise, Peter starts his second epistle, “To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours” (2 Pet 1:1). Peter adds that God “called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Pet 1:3). Jude commences his epistle the same, addressing his readers as “the called” (Jude 1). In each of these instances, the biblical authors front-load their mention of effectual calling at the beginning of their books. This stresses its importance as a core teaching of the Christian faith and also indicates how well they were taught in this doctrine.

### EXPLAIN THE ESSENTIAL TERMS

A faithful expositor must explain what effectual calling means when he addresses this truth. Because this theological term often has a variety of meanings to different people, clarity is greatly needed. A misunderstanding here will mean significant confusion as to what the Scripture teaches about this truth. This, in turn, affects how other truths are perceived. However, a right assessment of this truth will lead to a proper embracing of it. Achieving a correct understanding of this doctrine requires that we grasp three key words—“call,” “effectual,” and “church.”

#### *Call: The Divine Summons*

The word “call” (*kaleō*) is frequently used in the New Testament, where it most often refers to the summoning of someone to respond to an invitation. It was used to depict what happened when Jesus “called” James and John to leave their fishing nets to follow Him (Matt 4:21). Jesus said that He did not come to “call” the righteous, but sinners (Matt 9:13). In the parable of the marriage feast, the word *kaleō* is used for those who have been “invited” (Matt 22:3, 4, 8, 9). In the parable of the talents, the word describes the action of a man going on a journey who “called” his slaves to himself in order to entrust his possessions to them (Matt 25:14).

This is the work of the Holy Spirit: to call the elect to

faith in Jesus Christ. This means they are being summoned to believe the gospel. Peter writes, “[God] has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet 2:9–10). Previous to being called, people live in spiritual darkness, unable to see the truth, and they practice sin. But the divine call draws them out of the darkness to enter the light of truth and holiness. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ does so because they have been called by God. No one can believe the gospel until he or she has first been called.

#### *Effectual: Producing a Sure Result*

The word “effectual” is a theological term not found in the Bible, but its truth certainly is. In like manner, the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, but the truth contained within the term is certainly present throughout Scripture. “Effectual” simply means there will be a necessary result produced by a specific cause. It indicates there is a cause–effect relationship that exists. In this case, effectual calling means that the sovereign call of God will be successful in producing its intended effect with saving faith in Jesus Christ. The effectual call will always succeed. It can never fail to achieve its divinely determined result, which is the conversion of elect sinners.

In the first epistle of Peter, virtually every mention of the call of God refers to this effectual call. Examples of this are too numerous to list exhaustively. In the two epistles of Peter, he writes that God is “the Holy One who called you” (1 Pet 1:15). This verse acknowledges that the ones to whom he writes are in Christ because God “called” them. Peter goes on to address all believers, stating “you have been called for this purpose” (1 Pet 2:21). The reference is to suffering unjustly for the gospel. Again Peter writes, “You were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing” (1 Pet 3:9). This statement confirms that they were irresistibly summoned by God to receive His blessing. Finally, Peter writes, “[God] called you to His eternal glory in Christ” (1 Pet 5:10). These saints were powerfully “called” by God to eternal life in Christ.

#### *Church: The Called-Out Ones*

The other word requiring attention is “church” (*ekklēsia*), which is a prominent term in the New Testament. *Ekklēsia* is a compound word, combining *ek*, meaning “out,” with *kaleo*, meaning “to call.” When these two words are joined together, it means “the called-out ones.” The truth conveyed by the use of this term is that the church is composed of the called-out ones. They have been summoned by God

out of the evil world system and brought into fellowship with God's Son, Jesus Christ. They have been summoned out of disobedient lifestyles of sin and are ushered into a new life in Christ. The result of this call is they are in the pursuit of following Christ daily.

In any local church, there will always be both believers and unbelievers. There will be those who are born again and those who may be outwardly religious and respectable but inwardly unregenerate and lost. Jesus said that in the church, there will always be tares among the wheat. There will be bad fish caught in the same net with good fish (Matt 13:47–50) and foolish virgins alongside the wise virgins (Matt 25:1–13). There will always be Judases among the disciples. Not everyone in a local church knows Jesus Christ.

But the universal church consists of all who are truly converted and know the Lord. This is the true church, the bride of Christ. This body of the redeemed is made up of elect believers around the world. Regardless of which local church they attend, these are those who have received the effectual call of God. They have responded to this irresistible summons and are born anew in Christ.

## **DISTINGUISH THE DISTINCT CALL**

In preaching on effectual calling, you must draw a careful distinction between the two different calls concerning salvation. The fundamental distinction is between the external and internal call. The former is the call of the gospel, and the latter is the call of the Spirit. Both are found in Scripture, and both are necessary for salvation to become real in a person's life. There is the external call, which is a first step but does not save. Then there is the internal call, which saves the lost soul from eternal destruction. Both calls are necessary for salvation, but it is possible to hear the first call but not answer the second one. It is the internal call alone that actually saves.

### ***The External Call***

The external call of God is the summons to lost sinners that is found in the Word of God. The passage supporting this summons has already been mentioned. It is the parable of the wedding feast, in which the king commissioned many slaves to go and invited many to the grand affair. But many who were invited refused to come. Jesus explained, "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt 22:14). This verse shows that the external call can be rejected by those who are invited to come to faith in Christ. In fact, this general call will be rejected by many.

The outward call goes only to the ear of the listener, but no further. It is the sermon of the preacher, summoning

his listeners to believe in Jesus Christ. It is in the witness of parents, pleading with their children to be converted. It is the lesson of teachers, urging their students to commit their lives to Christ. It is the testimony of believers, encouraging the unsaved to trust in the Lord. It is the black letters of the Bible, inviting every reader to call upon the name of the Lord. But this outward call cannot penetrate to the depths of the soul. There must be another call—a heavenly call, a more penetrating call—that advances the external call deeper into the heart.

### ***The Internal Call***

The internal call of God involves the summons of the Spirit to apprehend and bring sinners to faith in Christ. As a criminal would be arrested and brought to appear before a ruling magistrate, so the sinner must be apprehended by the Spirit and brought to Christ. This begins with the Spirit's conviction of sin, which brings divine prosecution to the heart and indicts the guilty sinner before God. It then escalates to the Spirit's drawing of the wayward sinner to the Savior, Jesus Christ. This call includes the Spirit's regenerating work in the spiritually dead heart. This inward call is so powerful that it penetrates to the depth of the human soul and imparts new life. It concludes with the Spirit's ministry of granting repentance and faith.

An internal call will never be issued until the external call is extended to the unconverted sinner. Only then will the internal call of the Spirit be given to penetrate the depths of the heart. Once the Word of God has been made known, whether by human voice or in print, then God will issue the internal call. This occurs according to His sovereign will, because the Spirit works whenever and wherever He pleases (John 3:8).

## **PROCLAIM THE PURE GOSPEL**

The effectual call of God makes necessary the preaching of the Word of God. There must be two preachers standing in every pulpit. There must be one preacher who is seen and another who is unseen. There must be one preacher who is heard and another who is felt—that is, the Holy Spirit.

### ***The Visible Preacher***

The human preacher is the one who is visibly seen and audibly heard. He stands in the pulpit with an open Bible and proclaims the message of the gospel. Paul reasons, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:14). Paul's reasoning is sound, and his logic is airtight. He establishes the absolute necessity of a human preacher

to proclaim the gospel message. This is God's chosen method in carrying out the work of evangelism.

Throughout the Bible, it is clearly seen that the primary means of grace to reach unconverted souls is the preaching of God's Word. This is seen in the Old Testament in the preaching of the many prophets sent by God. This is further seen in the preaching ministry of Jesus Christ and His apostles. Preaching was their chief outlet for reaching the multitudes who stood in need of salvation. This is likewise seen in the great eras of church history, when preaching rose to its greatest heights. From the dawn of time to this present hour, the principal instruments that God has chosen to use are passionate preachers who proclaim His Word.

### *The Invisible Preacher*

Accompanying the human preacher, though, must be another Preacher, who both stands with him—and in him. The human preacher is only the secondary preacher, an instrument in the hands of God. There must be one primary Agent who takes the words of the human preacher and brings them home to the human heart. This chief Herald is God the Holy Spirit, who silently, though powerfully, preaches in the voice of the human preacher. This principal Expositor takes the audible sermon and brings it home into the depths of the human heart. This invisible Preacher—and only this Evangelist—causes the visible preacher to be effective in converting sinners.

What confidence should fill the heart of every preacher as he understands that as he stands in the pulpit, God stands with him! Moreover, God is empowering and


upholding the visible preacher. He is taking his words and causing them to penetrate to the depths of the human soul. But in no way does this absolve the responsibility of every preacher to herald God's Word. In fact, it demands that they preach the Word—and leave the results to God.

### **TEACH ALONGSIDE TOTAL DEPRAVITY**

The first doctrine of grace—total depravity—makes the truth of effectual calling absolutely necessary. There is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between these two truths. Total depravity means that no one in his or her own ability can believe in Jesus Christ. If it was not for effectual calling, no one would ever believe in Him. Every sinner is radically corrupt and cannot see the truth, because he is spiritually blind. He cannot desire the truth, because his heart is filled with unholy affections. Likewise, he cannot believe the gospel, because his spiritual will is bound. The unconverted are spiritually dead, unable to respond to the truth.

### *Overcoming Radical Corruption*

However, the effectual calling of God overcomes the sin-hardened resistance of human hearts. By this soul-arresting summons, God gives spiritual eyes to the blind so that they may see the truth. He gives spiritual ears to the deaf so that they may hear the truth. He gives spiritual life to the dead soul so that it may believe the truth. By the effectual call, God spiritually pierces the uncircumcised heart. This divine call is absolutely necessary to reverse the effects of total depravity. It causes the plan of salvation to be intellectually believed.



**Throughout the Bible, it is clearly seen that the primary means of grace to reach unconverted souls is the preaching of God's Word.**

Until total depravity is rightly understood in its fullness, effectual calling will be viewed as an unnecessary teaching. Man's nature is so corrupt that he has neither the will nor the power to come to Christ. Unless one grasps the blindness of the sinner's mind and the imprisoned bondage of his will, this doctrine will never be rightly seen, nor embraced. But once the comprehensive nature of radical corruption is learned, effectual calling is seen as entirely necessary. Moreover, its truth will be preached with precision and power.

### *The Spiritually Dead Made Alive*

In your preaching, you must show how effectual calling overcomes the natural resistance of total depravity. Addressing believers, Paul said, "You were [once] dead in your trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). Each Christian was once a spiritual corpse with no ability whatsoever to respond to the gospel. A dead person can see nothing, hear nothing, and feel nothing. That was the debilitating condition of their once-lost soul. Further, they walked according to the world and were held captive by the devil (v. 2). Moreover, they were ensnared by their own fleshly desires. No one can respond with saving faith unaided by the Holy Spirit.

But you must then teach the sovereign power of God in raising the spiritually dead to new life in Christ. Paul continues, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:4–5). This is the supernatural resurrection of the spiritually dead soul. The effectual call of God penetrates into the grave of sin and raises the dead to believe in Jesus Christ.

## **UNITE WITH SOVEREIGN ELECTION**

As a preacher, it is also your responsibility to show the inseparable connection that exists between the second doctrine of grace—sovereign election—and the teaching of effectual calling. Those who are called by God are the same ones who have been chosen by Him from before the foundation of the world. Those who are predestined unto eternal life are the very ones summoned to faith in Jesus Christ. If God had not chosen untold numbers to be saved, no one would be called to believe in Christ—and, therefore, none would believe. It is sheer grace in His divine sovereignty that sinners experience salvation.

### *Those He Foreknew, He Called*

In the pulpit, you should preach on the many passages that teach this close connection between unconditional election and irresistible calling. The signature text is found in

Paul's letter to the Romans: "Those whom He foreknew, He also predestined...and these whom He predestined, He also called" (Rom 8:29–30). Divine foreknowledge points to God's sovereign choice to love and save individual sinners. Predestination means that God has made the salvation of His elect to be irrevocable. Both of these sovereign acts—foreknowledge and predestination—occurred before the foundation of the world. This inevitably leads to effectual calling within the realm of time.

Your sermons should show that the ones who are foreknown and predestined are the same ones who are called. You should point out that no more individuals will be called by God than those who were chosen. You should make it equally clear that no fewer individuals will be called to faith in Christ than the number of the elect. Further, all who are "called" will be "justified" and "glorified" (Rom 8:30). The vast multitude that God began with in His saving purposes before time began is the exact same group that He calls within the temporal timeline of this world.

### *Those He Chose, He Called*

As the Apostle Paul addresses the church in Corinth, he makes this same airtight connection between sovereign election and effectual calling. He stresses, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that he may nullify the things that are" (1 Cor 1:26–28). Here, God's "choosing" and "calling" refer to the same individuals, the former preceding and producing the latter.

### *Called from All Eternity*

Bringing further clarification, Paul writes, "[God] saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (2 Tim 1:9). Here, the apostle specifies that those who are "called" are the same ones who were appointed by God's "purpose" to receive "grace." This divine determination for salvation occurred "from all eternity." God's pre-temporal will in salvation determines the direction of His calling individual sinners within time.

### *God's Calling and Choosing*

Every preacher must clearly teach what the Apostle Peter states, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make



certain about His calling and choosing you” (2 Pet 1:10). This “calling” and “choosing” are overlapping terms, in that they refer to the same specific group of people. Those who are the recipients of God’s “calling” are the ones who are elected by His “choosing.” The Apostle John writes, “Those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful” (Rev 17:14). These three designations—“called,” “chosen,” “faithful”—refer to the very same people. As an expositor, you must make clear this solid connection between being chosen and being called.

### **CONNECT WITH DEFINITE ATONEMENT**

In the pulpit, it is your duty to show the inseparable relationship between the third doctrine of grace—definite atonement—and effectual atonement. You need to demonstrate that the extent of the atonement and the extent of effectual calling are one and the same. The saving work of Jesus upon the cross and the saving work of the Spirit in hearts is directed toward the same ones chosen by the Father. What God has joined together, let no one separate.

#### ***Jesus Calls His Sheep***

In Jesus’ own words, He explained that His effectual call is extended exclusively to His sheep. He stated,

He who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep.

To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers. (John 10:2–5)

In this allegory, the voice of the shepherd is the effectual call to salvation.

There can be no mistaking that this sovereign call is extended by Jesus—the Good Shepherd—to the individual sheep given into His care. The summons of this shepherd is given to these sheep alone—to no others. These sheep have been given by the Father to this shepherd, Jesus Christ. There is an intentional allusion to the doctrine of election in this imagery. These chosen sheep were given to Jesus long before they are called by Him. They were given to Him before they came to Him. Here, the doctrine of sovereign election is inseparably connected with the truth of effectual calling.

#### ***Jesus Died for His Sheep***

While preaching to His enemies, Jesus explained for whom He died. He said, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Here,

Jesus described the extent of His death as specifically designed for His sheep—not for other sheep, nor for the goats. Jesus died explicitly for those chosen by the Father and given to Him. These are the same sheep to whom He issues His effectual call. Jesus equated those who were chosen by the Father and given to Him with those called by the Spirit. This is the same flock of sheep.

### **God Delivered Over Jesus**

The Apostle Paul makes the same identification. Those for whom Christ died are the same ones as those who are called. Those whom God “called” (Rom 8:30) are those for whom the Father “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all” (v. 32). “Us all” refers to all the elect, all those foreknown and predestined by the Father (v. 29). Here, Paul establishes the inseparable connection between definite atonement and effectual calling. Jesus went to the cross to die for those who will be called to faith in Himself.

### **TEACH THE THEOLOGICAL ORDER**

As you preach on effectual calling, there are several aspects you will need to differentiate. Each element of the internal call is a necessary part of the larger whole. The term *ordo salutis* is Latin for the “order of salvation,” which addresses the order with which each component fits into the larger scheme.

### **Conviction by the Spirit**

Effectual calling begins with the internal work of the Holy Spirit in bringing conviction of sin. For anyone to be converted, he or she must first be convicted of sin. The Spirit has come into the world to convince sinners of their desperate need for salvation. Jesus says, “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged” (John 16:8–11). Here, Jesus promises the Spirit’s work of heart-piercing conviction that will accompany the preaching of the disciples.

The Spirit acts like a prosecuting attorney who indicts the human heart of guilt before God. Further, the Spirit convinces the sinner of the truthfulness of the charges brought against him for breaking God’s law. No one will ever be saved until they know they are lost. No one will ever call upon the name of the Lord until they know they are perishing and realize their need for a Savior. This is the work of the Spirit—to create this sense of sobering alarm within the unconverted heart (Acts 2:37). The Word we

preach is sharper than a two-edged sword and plunges to the depth of a person’s innermost being (Heb 4:12).

### **Drawing by the Spirit**

Second, the effectual call also includes the drawing of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit must overcome all human resistance to the gospel and powerfully apprehend the sinner, drawing him to Christ. The word “draw” (*helkuō*) is a vivid word that is used elsewhere for dragging a person through the streets of the city or for leading or impelling someone to move toward a destination. This is how powerfully the Spirit must arrest the unconverted sinner and draw him or her to Christ.

Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). This stresses the moral inability of the sinner to come to faith in Christ in his own nature or will. The Father, working by the Spirit, must “draw” us. The word is even used in the Bible to describe dragging something such as a sword out of its sleeve or to “haul” a catch of fish onto shore (John 21:6, 11). The word was also used when the authorities “dragged” Paul through the streets of Philippi (Acts 19:19) and when he was “dragged” out of the temple (Acts 21:30). So it is that the Spirit overcomes the resistance of sinners and pulls them to Christ.

### **Regenerated by the Spirit**

Further, effectual calling includes the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This aspect of the internal call raises the spiritually dead sinner to life in Jesus Christ. It involves the work of God to impart divine life to the human soul. This life-giving ministry must take place before anyone can believe in Jesus Christ. The new birth gives the unconverted new eyes to see the truth, new ears to hear it, and a new heart to receive it. This is necessary if an unregenerate individual is to answer the call of the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle John teaches that regeneration both precedes and produces faith. “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1). “Believes” (*pisteuō*) is in the present tense and refers to an ongoing life of exercising personal faith in Christ. However, “born” (*gennaō*) is in the perfect tense and describes a past event with continuing results into the future. The idea is that one is “born of God” first and then “believes” in Jesus Christ. This confirms what Jesus taught: “Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die” (John 11:26). Here, the order is the same. A spiritually dead sinner “lives” by means of the new birth and then “believes” in Jesus, that He is the Christ.

### *How Shall We Then Preach?*

Effectual calling is one of the most important truths that you will preach in your pulpit ministry. This requires that you have a clear theological understanding of this doctrine and that you perceive its inseparable connection with the other doctrines of grace.

Preaching this truth will elevate your listeners' worship of God, because they will see, all the more, how God-centered their salvation is. At the same time, teaching this doctrine promotes deeper humility in the one who embraces this truth, because that person sees that it is all of God that he or she believes the gospel. Moreover, expounding this

truth breeds a true assurance of salvation. It helps people see that they would never have believed in Jesus Christ apart from this work of grace. In addition, it builds confidence in our witnessing, because it shows that God prepares hearts to believe the truth. Our responsibility is to be faithful to spread the good news and leave the results with God.

May you be found faithful to preach this truth of effectual calling in the power He provides. As you do, may God call many to His Son, Jesus Christ, in true saving faith. ✦



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# MAKING SENSE OF GRACE AND ELECTION

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JOHN MACARTHUR

**W**hat is the first thing that comes to mind when someone brings up the topic of God’s saving grace? For most believers—frankly, for most *people*—it’s the cross of Christ. That makes sense—the cross represents the climax of God’s redemptive work and is the fullest depiction of His love for lost sinners.

But while the grace of God is most clearly and fully manifest in the sacrifice of His Son and His redemption of sinners, its expression is not isolated to the person and work of Christ. God’s grace is older than history, reaching back before the creation of time itself. It is not merely poured out in the moment of salvation; it is evident throughout His eternal plan of redemption. After all, He chose those whom He would save before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

## GRACE AND ELECTION

Theologians refer to this precious truth as the doctrine of *election*, and it has been a major point of debate and division in the church. The truth about election is essential to understanding who God is, His plan of redemption, and His design for the church. But some who profess love for God and belief in the Bible nevertheless resent and even despise this doctrine.

But rejecting this doctrine has major negative implications, especially with regard to the practical aspects of evangelism and Christian ministry. Christians who don’t believe God sovereignly draws His elect to Christ are forced by their theological perspective to take a very pragmatic approach to evangelism. They become more concerned with what “works” than they are with what’s true—because their doctrine leads them to believe everything hinges on

# A right view of God's grace informs how we relate to other believers. It informs how we evangelize the lost. It defines a pastor's role. It touches every aspect of life in the body of Christ.

their own skill, cleverness, or persuasive abilities. What an enormous burden and responsibility they have taken on themselves!

However, the doctrine of election should not extinguish the church's evangelistic efforts—if anything, it ought to spur us on. While the Lord knows whom He chose in eternity past, we do not have insight into His electing work (cf. Deut 29:29). Instead, we must fervently pursue *every* sinner while there is still time to repent. We need to proclaim the blessed truth of Isaiah 59:1–2 faithfully to every ear that will hear:

Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

We who know and love the Lord bear the responsibility of faith: As long as we draw breath, we are duty bound to preach the good news of Jesus Christ as winsomely and

persuasively as possible, so that others may be led to a saving knowledge of Him. “Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade [others]” (2 Cor 5:11).

Moreover, we need to hold the doctrine of election with great humility. Our salvation is not a credit to us, but an unearned gift from a gracious God. And He has left us in this world for the time being to extend that gift to others through the proclamation of His Word.

Understanding God's sovereign grace is at the heart of what the church is and how it functions. A right view of God's grace informs how we relate to other believers. It informs how we evangelize the lost. It defines a pastor's role. It touches every aspect of life in the body of Christ.

## GRACE AND JUSTICE

The typical complaint of those who are skeptical about the doctrine of election (or even opposed to it) is that it makes God seem unfair. And that may indeed *seem* to be the case—if you measure what's “fair” by fallen human judgment. “Why doesn't God treat everyone the same?” we think. “That's what I would do.”


But God doesn't think the way we think or do the things we would do. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD" (Isa 55:8). He is wiser and more just than we are. He is not to be measured by any human standard. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul, who said, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" He goes on to say, "How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Rom 11:33).

Furthermore, the question we should ask when we ponder the doctrine of election is not "Why doesn't God save everyone?" but "Why does God save anyone at all?" He's certainly not *obligated* to show mercy. That's what makes grace gracious.

When considering what's fair in the matter of election, all human presumptions and standards must be set aside. Instead, the nature of God must be the focus—specifically: What is divine justice? Simply stated, it is an essential attribute of God whereby He, infinitely and in perfect justice, does what He wants. As William Perkins said, "We must not think that God doth a thing because it is

good and right, but rather is the thing good and right because *God* willeth and worketh it." God defines justice. He himself is by nature just and righteous, and whatever He does reflects His nature. So, whatever He does is right. His own free will (and nothing else) is what determines justice, for whatever He wills is just; and it is just because He wills it, not vice versa. There is no higher standard of righteousness than God Himself.

In Revelation 19:6, we're told, "The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns." Both in heaven and on earth, He is the controller and disposer of all creatures. He is the Most High, and "all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan 4:35). He is the Almighty who works all things out according to the counsel of His will. He is the heavenly Potter who takes good-for-nothing sinners and shapes them into useful vessels. Scripture pictures the fallen human race as a lump of clay—a dirty, formless material which left to itself would certainly harden into something utterly worthless



**God defines justice. He himself is by nature just and righteous, and whatever He does reflects His nature. So, whatever He does is right.**

and altogether unattractive. From that one common lump of muck, the divine Potter forms unique objects for various purposes. Like an earthly potter who makes both ashtrays and fancy serving dishes, the heavenly Potter fashions vessels for honor as well as dishonor (Rom 9:21)—some to show His grace and glory; others to serve as vessels of His wrath. Every expression of His righteous character—including His utter hatred of sin—is thus put on display in accord with His sovereign will. And Scripture furthermore says He always accomplishes His perfect design with patience and kindness, never with malice or ill will:

What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory? (Rom 9:22–23 ESV).

Ultimately, then, God is the one who decides and determines every man's destiny. As our Creator and rightful Ruler, He carefully governs each detail in His universe—which is another way of saying He is God, the sovereign

and almighty Lord.

Frankly, the only reason to believe in election is because it is found explicitly in God's Word. No man, and no committee of men, originated this doctrine. It's like the doctrine of eternal punishment: it conflicts with all the natural inclinations and preferences of the carnal human mind. It's repugnant to the sentiments of the unregenerate heart. And—like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the miraculous birth of our Savior—the truth of election, because it has been revealed by God, must be embraced with simple, solemn, settled faith. If you have a Bible and you believe what it says, you have no choice.

As we think about the justice of God being representative of His character and not subject to fallen assumptions, we begin to understand that God—in the nature of His own sovereignty—defines everything that He does not only as just, but also as perfect. The Creator owes nothing to the creature, not even that which He is graciously pleased to give. So God does exactly what God chooses to do. Nothing can thwart His will or overpower Him. That's actually the very essence of what we are confessing when we acknowledge Him as Almighty God. ♦



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# THE NEW GENESIS

R.C. SPROUL

**B**irth and rebirth. Both are the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit. Just as nothing can live biologically apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, so no one can come alive to God apart from the Spirit's work.

In His discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus said this about the Holy Spirit: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3 NKJV).

To be "born again" is to experience a second genesis. It is a new beginning, a fresh start in life. When something is started, we say that it is generated. If it is started again, it is regenerated. The Greek verb *geniauoō* that is translated as "generate" means "to be," "to become," or "to happen." Regeneration by the Holy Spirit is a change. It is a radical change into a new kind of being.

To be regenerated does not mean that we are changed

from a human being into a divine being. It does mean that we are changed from spiritually dead human beings into spiritually alive human beings.

Spiritually dead persons are incapable of seeing the kingdom of God. It is invisible to them, not because the kingdom itself is invisible, but because the spiritually dead are also spiritually blind.

## **REGENERATION AS NECESSARY**

When Jesus uses the word "unless" in speaking to Nicodemus, He is stating what we call a necessary condition. A necessary condition is an absolute prerequisite for a desired result to take place. We cannot have fire without the presence of oxygen, because oxygen is a necessary condition for fire.

In the jargon of Christianity, people speak of "born again" Christians. Technically speaking, this phrase is

redundant. If a person is not born again, if he is not regenerate, then he is not a Christian. He may be a member of a Christian church. He may profess to be a Christian. But unless a person is regenerate, he is not in Christ, and Christ is not in him.

The word “unless” makes regeneration a *sine qua non* of salvation. No regeneration, no eternal life. Without regeneration, a person can neither see the kingdom nor enter the kingdom.

When Nicodemus was puzzled by Jesus’ teaching, he replied:

“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4)

Nicodemus’ response almost seems like an attempt to ridicule Jesus’ teaching. In crass terms, he suggests that Jesus must mean that a fully grown person must attempt the impossible task of returning to his mother’s womb.

Nicodemus failed to distinguish biological birth from spiritual birth. He didn’t differentiate between flesh and spirit. Jesus answered his response by saying,

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” (John 3:5–7)

Again Jesus prefaces His words by saying, “Most assuredly, I say to you . . .” The “most assuredly”—the Hebrew “amen,” carried over into the New Testament—indicates strong emphasis. That is, when Jesus spoke of regeneration as a necessary condition for seeing and entering the kingdom of God, he stated this necessary condition emphatically. To argue against the need of rebirth to be a Christian, as many of our contemporaries frequently do, is to stand in clear opposition to the emphatic teaching of Christ.

The word “cannot” is also crucial to Jesus’ teaching. It is a negative word that deals with ability or possibility. Without regeneration, no one (universal negative) is able to enter the kingdom of God. There are no exceptions. It is impossible to enter God’s kingdom without a rebirth.

No one is born a Christian. No one is born biologically into the kingdom of God. The first birth is one that is of the flesh. Flesh begets flesh. It cannot produce spirit.

Later in John’s Gospel, Jesus adds this comment: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” (6:63).

When Martin Luther was debating whether fallen

mankind is utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit for regeneration, he cited this text and added: “The flesh profits nothing. And that ‘nothing’ is not a ‘little something.’”

The flesh is not merely weak with respect to the power of rebirth. It is utterly impotent. It has no power whatever to effect rebirth. It cannot aid or enhance the Spirit’s work. All that the flesh yields is more flesh. It cannot yield an ounce of Spirit. The “nothing” is not a “little something.”

Finally, Jesus says, “You must be born again.” If there is the slightest ambiguity with the use of the conditional word “unless,” the ambiguity completely evaporates with the word “must.”

## REGENERATION IN EPHESIANS

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul speaks of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 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. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). (Eph 2:1–5)

Paul provides a graphic description of our spiritual impotence prior to regeneration. He is addressing the Ephesian believers and describing a prior condition in which they all once shared. He adds the phrase “just as the others” (2:3), presumably referring to the whole of mankind.

He declares that this prior condition was a state of death: “[You] were dead in trespasses and sins.” Again, this death is obviously not a biological death, as he enumerates activities that these dead persons were involved in.

The characteristic behavioral mode of people dead in trespasses and sins is described in terms of walking a particular course. He calls it the “course of this world” (2:2). Here, the “course of this world” obviously refers to a course or pattern that is opposed to the course of heaven. The words “this world” refer not so much to a location as to a style or a point of reference. It involves a this-worldly orientation.

Christians and non-Christians alike share the same sphere of operations. We all live out our lives in this world. The regenerate person’s course, however, is guided from above. He has his eye on heaven and his ear attuned to the

King of heaven. The unregenerate person is earthbound. His ear is deaf to any word from heaven; his eye is blinded to the glory from on high. He lives as a walking cadaver in a spiritual graveyard.

The course of this world is “out of the way” of God (Rom 3:12 KJV). Rather, it follows a path that is “according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2).

The spiritually dead have a master. Their master sets a course for them that they willingly—even eagerly—follow. This master is called the “prince of the power of the air.” This sobriquet of royalty can only refer to Satan, the chief architect of all things diabolical. Paul calls him “the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” Satan is an evil spirit, a corrupt and fallen angel who exercises influence and authority over his captive hordes.

Paul sets forth a principle of life: we either walk according to the Holy Spirit, or we walk according to the evil spirit. Augustine once compared man to a horse who is either ridden by Satan or by the Spirit of God.

Paul continues his vivid description of the regenerate person’s prior unregenerate lifestyle: “Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (2:3).

The attention now shifts away from the external course and the external influence of Satan to the internal state of the unregenerate person. Again we see this as a universal condition: “Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves...” The key descriptive word of this previous internal condition is the word “flesh.” Here Paul echoes the language Jesus used with Nicodemus.

The word “flesh” here must not be understood as a synonym for “physical body.” Our bodies per se are not evil,

since God made us as physical beings and became a human being Himself. “The flesh” refers to the sin nature, the entire fallen character of man.

Prior to regeneration, we live exclusively in the flesh and by the flesh. Our conduct follows after the lusts of the flesh. That refers not exclusively to physical or sexual appetites but to a pattern of all sinful desires.

Paul caps this universal indictment of our fallen state by adding: “And were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (2:3). When Paul speaks of “by nature,” he refers to our state in which we enter this world. Biological birth is natural birth. Regeneration is a supernatural birth. Men were not originally created as children of wrath. Original nature was not fallen. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, however, the word “natural” refers to our state of innate sinfulness.

Every child who enters this world enters it in a corrupt state. David declared, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps 51:5). We are all spiritually stillborn. We are born dead in trespasses and sin. In theology we call this inherent sinful condition “original sin.” Original sin does not refer to the first sin of Adam and Eve; it refers to the consequences of that first sin, with the transmission of a corrupt nature to the entire human race.

We are by nature “children of wrath.” How different this sounds from the socially acceptable notion that we are all naturally the children of God! This misguided idea is both longstanding and widespread. It is a falsehood that gains credibility by its frequent repetition. If you repeat a lie often enough, people will begin to believe it.

The lie of saying that we are by nature children of God was a lie that distressed Jesus. He was forced to combat it and refute it in His debates with the Pharisees. The



**Prior to regeneration, we live exclusively in the flesh and by the flesh. Our conduct follows after the lusts of the flesh.**

Pharisees raged under Jesus' criticism and said, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God."

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.... He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God. (John 8:41–44, 47)

Although the Bible acknowledges that God is the Father of all men in the sense of His being the Creator of all men, there is a special sense in which the Fatherhood of God is defined not in terms of biology but in terms of ethics. Obedience is the operative word. In the biblical view, our father is the one we obey. The relationship is established not by biological ties, but by willing obedience.

Since the Pharisees obeyed Satan rather than God, Jesus said of them, "You are of your father the devil" (John 8:44).

In Ephesians 2, Paul speaks both of "children of wrath" (v. 3) and "sons of disobedience" (v. 2). These phrases describe all of us in our natural, unregenerate state.

When Paul completes his description of our unregenerate state, he moves abruptly and gloriously into a doxology that praises God for His mercy. The transitional word is the single word upon which our eternal destinies depend. It is perhaps the most glorious word in Scripture, the one word that crystallizes the essence of the gospel. It is the word "but." This tiny conjunction shifts the mood of the entire passage. It is the link between the natural and the supernatural, between degeneration and regeneration:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in

trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:4–10)

### THE DIVINE INITIATIVE

Regeneration is the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit. The initiative is with Him, not with us. We notice that the accent with Paul falls on the work of God, not on the effort of man: "But God, who is rich in mercy..."

We observe that the apostle does not write: "But man, out of his goodness, inclines himself to God and raises himself to a new spiritual level."

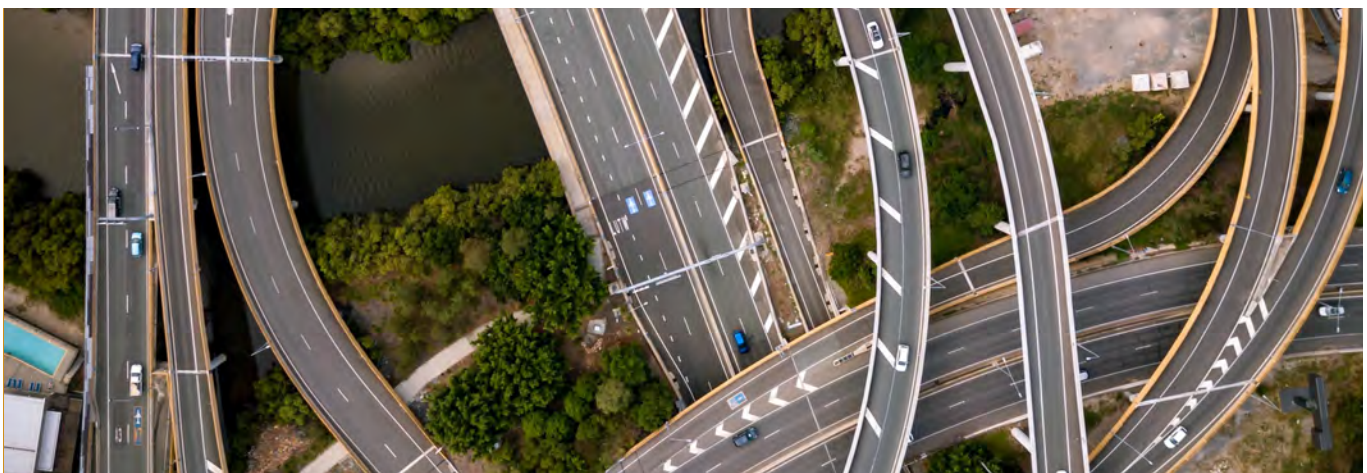
One of the most dramatic moments in my life for the shaping of my theology took place in a seminary classroom. One of my professors went to the blackboard and wrote these words in bold letters:

**REGENERATION PRECEDES FAITH.**

These words were a shock to my system. I had entered seminary believing that the key work of man to effect rebirth was faith. I thought that we first had to believe in Christ in order to be born again. I use the words "in order" here for a reason. I was thinking in terms of steps that must be taken in a certain sequence to arrive at a destination. I had put faith at the beginning of the sequence. The order looked something like this:

Faith—Rebirth—Justification.

In this scheme of things, the initiative falls with us. To be sure, God had sent Jesus to die on the cross before I



ever heard the gospel. But once God had done these things external to me, I thought the initiative for appropriating salvation was my job.

I hadn't thought the matter through very carefully. Nor had I listened carefully to Jesus' words to Nicodemus. I assumed that even though I was a sinner, a person born of the flesh and living in the flesh, I still had a little island of righteousness, a tiny deposit of spiritual power left within my soul to enable me to respond to the gospel on my own.

Perhaps I had been confused by the traditional teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Rome, and many other branches of Christendom, had taught that regeneration is gracious; it cannot happen apart from the help of God. No man has the power to raise himself from spiritual death. Divine assistance is needed and needed absolutely. This grace, according to Rome, comes in the form of what is called *prevenient* grace. "Prevenient" means that which comes before something else.

Rome adds to this *prevenient* grace the requirement that we must "cooperate with it and assent to it" before it can take hold in our hearts.

This concept of cooperation is at best a half-truth. It is true insofar that the faith that we exercise is our faith. God does not do the believing in Christ for us. When I respond to Christ, it is my response, my faith, my trust that is being exercised.

The issue, however, goes much deeper. The question still remains: Do I cooperate with God's grace before I am born again, or does the cooperation occur after I am born again?

Another way of asking this question is to ask if regeneration is *monergistic* or *synergistic*. Is it operative or cooperative? Is it effectual or dependent? Some of these words are theological terms that require further explanation.

### MONERGISM AND SYNERGISM

A *monergistic* work is a work produced singly, by one person. The prefix *mono-* means "one." The syllable *erg* refers to a unit of work. English words like "energy" are built upon this root. A "synergistic" work is one that involves cooperation between two or more persons or things. The prefix *syn-* means "together with."

I labor this distinction for a reason. It is fair to say that the whole debate between Rome and Martin Luther hung on this single point. At issue was this: Is regeneration a *monergistic* work of God, or is it a *synergistic* work that requires cooperation between man and God?

When my professor wrote, "Regeneration precedes faith" on the blackboard, he was clearly siding with the *monergistic* answer. To be sure, after a person is regenerated, that person cooperates by exercising faith and trust. But

the first step, the step of regeneration by which a person is quickened to spiritual life, is the work of God and of God alone. The initiative is with God, not with us.

The reason we do not cooperate with regenerating grace before it acts upon us and in us is because we cannot. We cannot because we are spiritually dead. We can no more assist the Holy Spirit in the quickening of our souls to spiritual life than Lazarus could help Jesus raise him from the dead.

It is probably true that the majority of professing Christians in the world today believe that the order of our salvation is this: faith precedes regeneration. We are exhorted to choose to be born again. But telling a man to choose rebirth is like exhorting a corpse to choose resurrection. The exhortation falls upon deaf ears.

When I began to wrestle with the professor's argument, I was surprised to learn that his strange-sounding teaching was not a novel innovation to theology. I found the same teaching in Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield. I was astonished to find it even in the teaching of the great medieval Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas.

That these giants of Christian history reached the same conclusion on this point made a tremendous impact on me. I was aware that they were neither individually nor collectively infallible. Each and all of them could be mistaken. But I was impressed. I was especially impressed by Thomas Aquinas.

Thomas Aquinas is regarded as the Doctor Angelicus of the Roman Catholic Church. For centuries, his theological teaching was accepted as official dogma by most Catholics. So he was the last person I expected to hold such a view of regeneration. Yet Aquinas insisted that regenerating grace is operative grace, not cooperative grace. Aquinas spoke of *prevenient* grace, but he spoke of a grace that comes before faith, which is the grace of regeneration.

The key phrase in Paul's letter to the Ephesians on this matter is this: "Even when we were dead in trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph 2:5).

Here Paul locates the time when regeneration occurs. It takes place when we were dead. With one thunderbolt of apostolic revelation, all attempts to give the initiative in regeneration to man is smashed utterly and completely. Again, dead men do not cooperate with grace. The spiritually dead take no initiative. Unless regeneration takes place first, there is no possibility of faith.

This says nothing different from what Jesus said to Nicodemus. Unless a man is born again first, he cannot possibly see or enter the kingdom of God. If we believe that faith

precedes regeneration, then we set our thinking and therefore ourselves in direct opposition not only to Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and others, but we stand opposed to the teaching of Paul and of our Lord Himself.

### REGENERATION IS GRACIOUS

In Paul's exposition of regeneration, there is a strong accent on grace. It is necessary that Christians of all theological persuasions acknowledge willingly and joyfully that our salvation rests upon the foundation of grace.

During the Reformation, the Protestants used two Latin phrases as battle cries: *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone). They insisted that the supreme authority in the church under Christ is the Bible alone. They insisted that justification was by faith alone. Now, Rome did not deny that the Bible has authority; it was the *sola* they choked on. Rome did not deny that justification involves faith; it was the *sola* that provoked them to condemn Luther.

There was a third battle cry during the Reformation. It was originally penned by Augustine more than a thousand years before Luther. It was the phrase *sola gratia*. This phrase asserts that our salvation rests on the grace of God alone. There is no mixture of human merit with it. Salvation is not a human achievement; it is a gracious gift of God. This formula is compromised by a synergistic view of regeneration.

It is not by accident that Paul adds to his teaching on regeneration that it is a gracious work of God. Let us look at it again:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) . . . that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:4–10)

Have you ever second-guessed the Bible? I certainly have, to my great shame. I have often wondered, in the midst of theological disagreements, why the Bible does not speak more clearly on certain issues. Why, for example, doesn't the New Testament come right out and say we should or we shouldn't baptize infants?

On many such questions we are left to decide on the

basis of inferences drawn from the Bible. When I am bewildered by such disagreements, I usually come back to this point: the trouble does not lie with the Bible's lack of clarity; it lies with my lack of clear thinking about what the Bible teaches.

When it comes to regeneration and faith, I wonder how Paul could have made it any more clear. I suppose he could have added the words to Ephesians 2, "Regeneration precedes faith." However, I honestly think that even that phrase wouldn't end the debate. There's nothing in that phrase that isn't already clearly spelled out by Paul in this text or by Jesus in John 3.

Why, then, all the fuss? My guess is that it is because if we conclude that regeneration is by divine initiative, that regeneration is monergistic, that salvation is by grace alone, we cannot escape the glaring implication that leads us quickly and irresistibly to sovereign election.

As soon as the doctrine of election comes to the fore, there is a mad scramble to find a way to get faith in there before regeneration. In spite of all these attending difficulties, we meet the apostle's teaching head-on:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Eph 2:8–9)

Here the apostle teaches that the faith through which we are saved is a faith that comes to us by grace. Our faith is something we exercise by ourselves and in ourselves, but it is not of ourselves. It is a gift. It is not an achievement.

With the graciousness of the gift of faith as a fruit of regeneration, all boasting is excluded forever, save in the boasting of the exceeding riches of God's mercy. All man-centered views of salvation are excluded if we retain the *sola* in *sola gratia*. Therefore, we ought never to grieve the Holy Spirit by taking credit to ourselves that belongs exclusively to Him.

### REGENERATION IS EFFECTUAL

Within traditional forms of Arminian theology, there are those who agree that regeneration precedes faith but insist that it doesn't always or necessarily produce faith. This view agrees that the initiative is with God; it is by grace, and regeneration is monergistic. The view is usually tied to some type of view of universal regeneration.

This idea is linked to the cross. It is argued by some that one of the universal benefits of the atonement of Christ is that all people are regenerated to the point that faith is now possible. The cross rescues all men from spiritual death in that now we have the power to cooperate or not cooperate

# Those whom the Holy Spirit makes alive most assuredly come to life.

with the offer of saving grace. Those who cooperate by exercising faith are justified. Those who do not exercise faith are born again but not converted. They are spiritually quickened and spiritually alive but remain in unbelief. Now they are able to see the kingdom and have the moral power to enter the kingdom, but they choose not to.

I call this view one of ineffectual or dependent grace. It is close to what Thomas Aquinas rejected as cooperative grace.

When I maintain that regeneration is effectual, I mean that it accomplishes its desired goal. It is effective. It gets the job done. We are made alive into faith. The gift is of faith that is truly given and takes root in our hearts.

Sometimes the phrase “effectual calling” is used as a synonym for regeneration. The word “calling” refers to something that happens inside of us, as distinguished from something that occurs outside of us.

When the gospel is preached audibly, sounds are emitted from the preacher’s mouth. There is an outward call to faith and repentance. Anyone who is not deaf is capable of hearing the words with his ears. These words strike the auditory nerves of the regenerate and the unregenerate alike.

The unregenerate experience the outward call of the gospel. This outward call will not effect salvation unless the call is heard and embraced in faith. Effectual calling refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Here the call is within. The regenerate are called inwardly. Everyone who receives the inward call of regeneration responds in faith. Paul says this: “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified” (Rom 8:30).

This passage in Romans is elliptical. That is, it requires that we supply a word to it that is assumed by the text but not explicitly stated. The big question is, Which word do

we supply—some or all? Let us try “some”:

Moreover, [some] whom He predestined, these He also called; [some] whom He called, these He also justified; and [some] whom He justified, these He also glorified.

To add the word “some” here is to torture the text. It would mean that some of the predestined never hear the call of the gospel. Some who are called never come to faith and justification. Some of the justified fail to be glorified. In this schema not only would calling not be effectual, but neither would predestination nor justification be effectual.

The implication of this text is that all who are predestined are likewise called. All who are called are justified, and all who are justified are glorified.

If that is the case, then we must distinguish between the outward call of the gospel, which may or may not be heeded, and the inward call of the Spirit, which is necessarily effectual. Why? If all the called are also justified, then all the called must exercise faith. Obviously, not everyone who hears the external call of the gospel comes to faith and justification. But all who are effectually called do come to faith and justification. Here the call refers to the inward work of the Holy Spirit that is tied to regeneration.

Those whom the Holy Spirit makes alive most assuredly come to life. They see the kingdom; they embrace the kingdom; they enter the kingdom.

It is to the Holy Spirit of God that we are debtors for the grace of regeneration and faith. He is the Gift-giver, who while we were dead made us alive with Christ, to Christ, and in Christ. It is because of the Holy Spirit’s merciful act of quickening that we sing *sola gratia* and *soli deo gloria*—to the glory of God alone. ♦

Source: *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* by R. C. Sproul (Christian Focus, 2014).







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# SPIRITUS RECREATOR

SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

**T**he union with Christ into which the Spirit brings us is multi-dimensional in character. To be “in Christ,” says Paul, is to enter “a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17); the old order of sin and death, the age dominated by the flesh and the devil, has given way to a new order of reality in the resurrection of Christ. Thus the mutual bonding between Christ and His people in the Spirit is the fulfillment of all that was adumbrated in the old covenant bond between Yahweh and His people in the Exodus and entrance into the land of rest; grounded in the work of the Messiah, it is forged through the ongoing work of the Spirit creating a new humanity.

Because it is multi-dimensional, life in union with Christ is necessarily viewed from various perspectives in the New Testament. It involves identification with Him in His death, resurrection, and ascension; but it also involves a correlation of the action of God with the action of man. As

we have seen, Scripture stresses its monergistic roots (that is, God is its author); it is bilateral in nature, with faith as its other polarity. The threads of regeneration and faith are inextricably intertwined. In both dimensions of activity, the Spirit is active. These strands are capable of separate analysis (indeed, they ought not to be regarded as identical), but they cannot be existentially separated from each other. They belong together in such a way that we cannot mark a joint where the monergistic action of God ends and the activity of the believer begins. It is significant in this context that both regeneration and the elements of conversion are regarded in the New Testament as gifts of God.

## **REGENERATION**

Union to Christ is inaugurated by the renewing work of the Spirit in which He begins the transformation into the image of Christ which will be completed at the eschaton.

# Regeneration is causally rooted in the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet 1:3). Like produces like; our regeneration is the fruit of Christ's resurrection.

The ancient promise is thus fulfilled that God would give His people new hearts and spirits through the indwelling of His Spirit, resulting in a new lifestyle (Ezek 36:24–27).

This transition was marked in the New Testament by the rite of baptism. By the time of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus in the late second century AD, regeneration already seems to have become so closely associated with its symbol of baptism that the two were thought of as coincident. This link became so refined that the sign and the thing signified were related in a *sine qua non* fashion, and a sacramentalist view of regeneration came to dominate the theology of the church. Even for Augustine, to whom the Reformers looked as the great theologian of grace, the idea of regeneration apart from water baptism was unthinkable. The doctrine of the *limbus infantum* for those who died in infancy unbaptized thus became virtually a dogmatic necessity for the medieval church.

While the mainstream Reformation thinkers continued to emphasize the role and necessity of baptism as the sign of regeneration, they argued that any identification of the two must be seen as sacramental and not mechanical; the sign and the thing signified must not be confused, as though the grace indicated by the sign were contained within it.

Particularly in the teaching of Calvin, the term “regeneration” was used to denote the renewal that the Spirit affects throughout the whole course of the Christian life. For him

it describes the same reality denoted by “conversion” and “repentance” but viewed from a different perspective. Later, in many seventeenth-century writers, effectual calling and regeneration tended to be treated as synonyms. Only in the continuing development of evangelical theology did the term come to be used in the more limited and particular sense of the inauguration of new life by the sovereign and secret activity of God. While this served to focus attention on the power of God in giving new life, when detached from its proper theological context it was capable of being subjectivized and psychologized to such an extent that the term “born again” became dislocated from its biblical roots.

But what does the New Testament itself mean when it speaks about “regeneration”? In the structure of evangelical soteriology, regeneration has occupied such a central role that “second birth” has been regarded as the definitive element of genuine Christian experience. Yet the New Testament term for regeneration, *palingenesia* (from *palin*, “again,” and *genesis*, “beginning”) occurs only twice in the New Testament. In Matthew 19:28, it refers to the renewal of all things, the final rebirth of the universe, a meaning that stands in marked contrast with its use in Stoic thought as the periodic restoration of the world.

*Palingenesia* here is the final resurrection, the realized adoption of God's sons, the redemption of their bodies

and of the entire groaning creation (Rom 8:19ff.), and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Pet 3:13). It is cosmic in its effects.

The only other New Testament occurrence of *palingenesia* is in Titus 3:5, where Paul speaks of the “washing of rebirth [*palingenesia*] and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” It is difficult to be dogmatic about the meaning of this phrase. Does the washing consist in rebirth, effect rebirth, or symbolize new birth (through baptism)? Does the statement refer to two actions (washing and renewal), or is it a hendiadys (in which a single idea is denoted by two expressions)?

This latter interpretation seems likely and, if valid, suggests a striking connection between the regeneration of the individual and the dawning of the new age, since Paul’s only other use of “renewal” (*anakainōsis*, Rom 12:2) serves the function of emphasizing the contrast between the present world order and that of the age to come. Furthermore, as H. N. Ridderbos has pointed out, the outpouring of the Spirit to which Paul refers in this context is “typical eschatological terminology.” It underlines the fact that Paul sees regeneration within a broader context as a share in the renewal-resurrection which has been inaugurated by the Spirit in Christ. The renewal which is effected in regeneration (and symbolized in baptism) is, therefore, not merely an inner change; it is the incursion of a new order into the present order of reality. Thus regeneration (*palingenesia*) and the cognates (*anagennaō*; *gennēthēnai anōthen*) denoted not merely the phenomenon of spiritual change from within—from below, as it were—but transformation from without and from above, caused by participation in the power of the new age and more specifically by fellowship through the Spirit with the resurrected Christ as the second man, its firstfruits, the eschatological Adam (*ho eschatos* Adam, 1 Cor 15:45). This is the note which became muted in the teaching of the postapostolic church but which must be recovered.

### NEW CREATION—NEW LIFE

While the term “regeneration” is not strictly associated with the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, the idea of inauguration into the kingdom of God as a Spirit-wrought new birth is widespread and is, in fact, foundational in Johannine theology: “To all who received [Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12–13 NIV 1984). That this birth is the work of the Spirit is later underlined by Jesus’ words

to Nicodemus: “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit ... the Spirit gives birth to spirit ... So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:5–8 NIV 1984). Being “born of God” (i.e., through the Spirit) becomes as characteristic a description of being a Christian in Johannine theology as is the expression “in Christ” in the Pauline corpus (cf. 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

Elsewhere in the New Testament similar language is used of the renewing work of God. While reference to the Spirit is less direct, His sovereign action is nevertheless implied (e.g. in James 1:18; 1 Pet 1:3, 23). Paul views Christians as being like Isaac, children of the promise “born by the power of the Spirit” (Gal 4:29 NIV 1984).

Regeneration is causally rooted in the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet 1:3). Like produces like; our regeneration is the fruit of Christ’s resurrection. In union with Him, it is effected here and now and will be consummated at His return. He is the firstfruits of the resurrection-regeneration of the end time; we will participate in the final harvest, but already, through the bond of union in the Holy Spirit, we share in the firstfruits (Rom 8:23).

Here then, in the deep structures of New Testament thought, the eschatological nature of regeneration is underscored. The Spirit who has come at Pentecost is the Spirit of the future age; the world into which He brings believers is marked by the powers of the aeon to come (Heb 6:4–5), as was the ministry of Jesus in the sense that His miracles were themselves confirmatory signs that the anticipated future age of the Messiah and His Spirit had already arrived.

### DIVINE MONERGISM

The New Testament’s statements on regeneration emphasize the sovereign, monergistic activity of the Spirit. The metaphor of birth itself implies not only a radical new beginning, but one which is never autonomous. The divine monergism behind it is spelled out elsewhere in antitheses: we are born, not of our own will, but of God’s decision (John 1:12); from above, not from below; of the Spirit, not of the flesh (John 3:3, 5–6); of God, not of man (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18); by God’s choice, not our own; through His word, not out of the energies of an autonomous will (James 1:18). The priority here is accorded to God, not to man. The reason for this is that man is “flesh.”

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus says that he ought not to be surprised that he “must be born again/from above” (John 3:7). This necessity is universal: without the new birth, no one can either see or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). Here the accent is placed heavily on

man's inability. The denial of human ability (in the negative of the verb *dynasthai*, "to be able, to have the power") occurs five times in John 3:3–10. As flesh, man gives birth only to more flesh. He cannot give birth to spirit, or to what is spiritual. Only the Spirit of God can do that (John 3:6). Since the kingdom of God is the kingdom of the Spirit, no flesh has access to it.

It is widely accepted that "flesh" (*sarx*) probably has a different nuance in John from Paul's characteristic use (where *sarx* = human nature debilitated by sin). Since, for John, the eternal Logos became *sarx* (John 1:14), *sarx* must have in view the weakness and frailty, rather than the sinfulness as such, of human nature. E. Schweitzer's comment is representative: "The nuance of that which is sinful or which entices to sin is quite absent." Man is thus being viewed apart from and in contrast with God in His inexhaustible spiritual energy.

Such a use of *sarx* does not negate human sinfulness as the root cause of the Spirit-less condition, but it is the effect rather than the cause that is in focus. *Sarx* stands for man viewed apart from God. As flesh, we require new birth because we are bereft of the life and energy of the world of the Spirit. If we are to belong to the kingdom, or family, of the Spirit, we must be "born from above" by the Spirit. Only thus will we be able to "worship in Spirit" (John 4:23–24).

As flesh, men and women cannot see (i.e., experience, John 3:36; 8:51) or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). To be flesh is to be blind and insensitive to the realities of the Spirit-governed kingdom of God, and to fail to understand or accept the nature of spiritual reality (cf. 1 Cor 2:14).

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus provides a striking illustration of this. Nicodemus asks how new birth is possible. He cannot understand Jesus' words. The "secret of the kingdom of God" is a complete mystery to the man who comes "at night" (John 3:2); he still needs to come out of the noetic darkness common to all those who do not have the Spirit-given birth (cf. John 3:2, 19–21).

This is taken one stage further. Man is not only spiritually blind, but spiritually powerless to enter the kingdom: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5 RSV). Leaving aside for the moment the enigmatic phrase "of water and the Spirit," this statement clearly stresses man's inability. Although in Christ the kingdom has come, man is powerless to enter it by the will of the flesh (cf. 3:3: not able to see, *ou dynatai idein*; and 3:5: not able to enter, *ou dynatai eiselthein*). No one can come to Christ (i.e., believe in Him) unless drawn (sovereignly) by the Father (John 6:44–45).

As a consequence, regeneration is regarded in John as the sine qua non of eternal life. Regeneration can be accomplished only from above. Apparently, we can no more bring ourselves into the kingdom unaided than we can be conceived and born unaided.

What, then, is involved in the Spirit's work of regeneration?

## ASPECTS OF REGENERATION

What is regeneration? The Spirit's work of radical renewal involves several elements.

Firstly, it implies intellectual illumination: the kingdom of God, which before stood unrecognized, now becomes clearly visible.

John explains this in terms of the "anointing" Christians have received that results in their knowing the truth (1 John 2:20). They do not need anyone to teach them (1 John 2:27). Now, in Christ, all believers share in His anointing with the Spirit and have knowledge of the Lord without human mediation, in distinction from old covenant knowledge of God, which was mediated through prophets, priests, and kings. This is what was in view in the promise of the new covenant (Jer 31:33).

This no more means that the regenerated individual understands everything at the moment of regeneration than that a blind man receiving his sight sees everything immediately and simultaneously. He sees what his eyes are fixed on when sight is given to them, and this is then placed in the wider context. So it is with those who are born from above and have their spiritual understanding illuminated. This is one reason why the consciousness of individuals at regeneration is bound to differ from one person to another.

Secondly, regeneration involves liberation of the will from its bondage in a nature dominated by sin. Man is incapable of entering the kingdom of God without regeneration. It follows that a central element in regeneration must be the Spirit's empowering of man's will in a kingdom-orientated way. Before regeneration he will not come to the light (John 3:5, 20). Now he comes to the light; indeed, he will not refuse it.

Thirdly, there is a cleansing aspect to regeneration. This is the most probable meaning of the difficult phrase "born of water" (3:5). Various interpretations of this have had currency in the church, ranging from equating it with baptism (implying baptismal regeneration) to the view that the reference here is to natural begetting (as in John 1:12), since water, rain, and dew are used variously in ancient thought to refer to male semen, in which case Jesus is simply emphasizing the necessity of being "twice-born" men

and women.

The reference to water is, however, best interpreted in the light of the probable background to this section of Jesus' teaching in the new covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:25–27: "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your [impurities] and from all your idols." In the rest of the passage, Jesus speaks of only one birth, the birth from above (3:3, 6–7). "Water and ... Spirit" (v. 5) probably refers to the two-fold work of the Spirit in regeneration: he simultaneously gives new life and cleanses the heart.

In any event, the cleansing which takes place in regeneration is underlined in Titus 3:5, and perhaps also in 1 Corinthians 6:11: "You were washed, ... sanctified, ... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Here "washed" and "sanctified" are tantamount to regeneration. In regeneration, desires are renewed and cleansed by what Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) called "the expulsive power of a new affection." The Spirit gives birth to spirit (John 3:6), in the sense of creating an appetite for the new age and its realities. As Ezekiel beautifully expressed it, the Spirit's renewing work makes its recipients "careful" to do the Lord's will (Ezek 36:27).

The Spirit's work in regeneration is thus total in the extent of its transforming power. It is the individual as an individual who is regenerated, the whole man. For regeneration is the fulfillment of God's promise to give us a new heart (Ezek 36:26; cf. Jer 31:33), indicating that the Spirit's renewing work is both intensive and extensive: it reaches to the foundation impulses of an individual's life and leaves no part of his or her being untouched.

Regeneration is, consequently, as all-pervasive as

depravity. On the basis of such statements as "the heart is ... beyond [all] cure" (Jer 17:9 NIV 1984), theologians have spoken of total depravity, meaning not that man is as bad as he could be, but that no part of his being remains untainted by the influence of sin. Regeneration reverses that depravity, and is universal in the sense that, while the regenerate individual is not yet as holy as he or she might be, there is no part of life which remains uninfluenced by this renewing and cleansing work. Indeed, just as total depravity leads to moral and ultimately even to physical disintegration, so total regeneration leads to moral but also ultimately to physical renewal, in the regeneration of the whole being in the resurrection (Phil 3:21; 1 Cor 15:42–44). The new man is put on; he is constantly being renewed by the Spirit (Col 3:10) and finally will be resurrected and glorified through His power.

Older theologians spoke of this radical change as "physical." Although the expression now seems infelicitous, their concern was to emphasize that regeneration is not merely intellectual persuasion; it is a transformation of fallen nature (*physis*). It penetrates deeply. It is the gift of a new heart.

#### THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE SPIRIT

How does the Spirit effect new birth? His work is both mysterious and sovereign. Jesus compares His activity to the wind, perhaps reflecting the words of Ecclesiastes 11:5: "As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things" (NIV 1984). We hear the sound the wind makes as it catches objects in their tracks, but we do not know from where it comes



**Man is incapable of entering the kingdom of God without regeneration.**

or to where it goes. The Spirit's presence is recognized exclusively by its effects. In one sense, therefore, we do not have access to the divine activity in regeneration, only to its immediate accompaniments. We hear "the sound" the Spirit effects in expressions of faith and repentance. Those formerly unwilling to trust Christ now do so freely and willingly.

At this juncture, the classical Protestant formulations of regeneration rightly refuse to compromise either the integrity of the human person (we are not "forced" by external pressure) or the necessity of divine monergism (we are "dead" spiritually and cannot bring ourselves to life by an act of our own will).

The tension point we encounter here—those who are unwilling being made willing—is, in fact, a subset of the larger question of the divine-human engagement, and in many ways parallels the similar mystery of the interplay of the divine and the human in both providence and the inspiration of Scripture. The most common mistake made in attempts to resolve this tension is to seek to divide up the field of activity between the Spirit and man (is this a work mostly from the Spirit, but partly from man? or equally from the Spirit and from man?). It is a common assumption that if it is the monergistic work of the Spirit, then the will of the human person must be forced. We thus fail to recognize the underlying biblical principle that the Spirit and the individual are both active on the same field—a human life—simultaneously. But the free coming to Christ in faith is dependent on the sovereign drawing of the Spirit. Because the Spirit works in us, we are able freely to respond. Sovereign divine activity does not negate the necessity for human activity; rather, it grounds it and renders it possible.

Scripture does not view the Spirit's operations on the mental, volitional, and affectional powers as independent of the integrity of the individual, as though the regeneration of the individual is an abstract event. Rather, the individual is a thinking-willing-affective creature, a whole person. The Spirit works within the broad context of mind, will, and emotions. Consequently, although regeneration is seen by John as a sovereign and monergistic activity, it does not take place in a vacuum but is effected through the ordinances of God directed to the whole person. There is appeal through the word of the gospel to the mind; the senses are affected by Christian testimony and care, so that faith is constrained. At one level of analysis, the individual changes his or her mind (repentance) and turns to Christ (faith). But that which he does—although he was impotent to do it—he does through the renewing work of the Spirit.

It is already clear, then, that the sovereignty of the Spirit

in regeneration is not antithetical to a thoroughgoing emphasis on the role of faith in salvation, for faith is born within the context of the Word (Rom 10:14).

This is underlined in the New Testament by statements which suggest that regeneration itself takes place by means of the Word of God (e.g., 1 Pet 1:23; James 1:18; John 15:3, in each of which the Word is viewed as instrumental in regeneration). The Word of God engages us at the level of our consciousness, evoking a response. It operates at the level of our responsive action.

But how can regeneration take place through the Word without this diluting the notion of the Spirit's monergistic, sovereign activity?

Since an emphasis on divine monergism has been a leading characteristic of Augustinian theology, it is not surprising that within this tradition some theologians have been particularly sensitive to this difficulty. The nineteenth-century North American theologian W. G. T. Shedd, for example, argues that what is in view here is the "gospel dispensation." Others equate the Word with Christ himself, who sovereignly calls into action the seed of new life implanted by the Spirit.

A common resolution is to view regeneration as having a narrower and a broader dimension, a subconscious and a conscious aspect. Thus B. B. Warfield notes:

At the root of all lies an act seen by God alone, and mediated by nothing, a direct creative act of the Spirit, the new birth. This new birth pushes itself into man's own consciousness through the call of the Word, responded to under the persuasive movements of the Spirit; [man's] conscious possession of it is thus mediated by the Word.

For the New Testament writers, however, there is no hint of a threat to divine sovereignty in the fact that the Word is the instrumental cause of regeneration, while the Spirit is the efficient cause. This is signaled in the New Testament by the use of the preposition *ek* to indicate the divine originating cause (e.g., John 3:5; 1 John 3:9; 5:1) and *dia* to express the instrumental cause (e.g., John 15:3; 1 Cor 4:15; 1 Pet 1:23).

Since the Spirit's work in regeneration involves the transformation of the whole man, including his cognitive and effective powers, the accompanying of the internal illumination of the Spirit by the external revelation of the Word (and vice versa) is altogether appropriate. Since faith involves knowledge, it ordinarily emerges in relationship to the teaching of the gospel found in Scripture. Regeneration and the faith to which it gives birth are seen as taking place



not by revelation-less divine sovereignty, but within the matrix of the preaching of the Word and the witness of the people of God (cf. Rom 10:1–15). Their instrumentality in regeneration does not impinge upon the sovereign activity of the Spirit. Word and Spirit belong together.

Individual regeneration is therefore analogous at this point to the final regeneration of all things. Eschatological regeneration and resurrection will take place through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11), as an act of undiluted sovereignty. Yet at the same time it will be effected by the Word of God: “The Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command ... and the dead in Christ will rise” (1 Thess 4:16 NIV 1984). He will say, as he said at the tomb of Lazarus: “Come out” (John 11:43 NIV 1984). But then, as now in regeneration, the instrumental use of the Word does not compromise the sovereignty of the Spirit’s regenerating actions.

### FAITH A GIFT

This is further emphasized in the New Testament by the fact that faith is the fruit of the Spirit’s ministry and is seen in the New Testament as a gift of God. Here again there is an apparent tension between the Spirit’s activity and human response. Paul provides an important perspective for us in this respect by drawing a further analogy between believing and suffering: “It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for

him” (Phil 1:29 NIV 1984). Suffering, like faith, is a grace-gift in Christian experience. But the gift of suffering is not a commodity given to us as a fait accompli. We, not God, suffer. Yet this suffering is a gift from him. In a parallel way, faith is not a package placed in our hands. It is the activity of the whole man, directed by the Spirit towards Christ. God does not believe for us, or in us; we believe. Yet, it is only by God’s grace that we believe. His gift is simultaneously our act.

The classic text in this connection is Ephesians 2:8: “It is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (NIV 1984). There is a well-known exegetical crux here; what is the antecedent of “this,” and therefore, what exactly constitutes the gift?

To the casual reader, “faith” reads as the natural antecedent (it is the immediate antecedent). But “this” (*touto*) is neuter while both of the obvious antecedents are feminine (*charis*, “grace,” and *pistis*, “faith”); so also is “salvation” (*sōtēria*), which might be understood as the unwritten antecedent: “and this [i.e., salvation] is not ...”).

It is a long-recognized principle that in languages in which the grammatical gender of a noun may differ from the gender of the thing itself, the gender of a pronoun may agree with the gender of the antecedent itself rather than with the gender of the word which denotes it. In this specific context, since both *pistis* and *charis* are gender-neutral, either might serve as the antecedent.



Three considerations suggest that the antecedent (i.e., the thing that is the gift of God) is faith (*pistis*):


- (1) It is the immediate antecedent and therefore the most natural one.
- (2) It would be an unusual tautology (but admittedly not impossible, as Romans 3:24 and 5:15 indicate) to speak of grace as a gift of God, since by definition grace is a gift from God.
- (3) It gives a coherent reading of Paul's thought-pattern, which may be paraphrased as follows:

God made us alive—by grace you have been saved (2:5). God raised us up—to show his grace (2:6–7). It is indeed by grace you have been saved (2:8)! But this grace engages rather than ignores our action (salvation is by faith, i.e. it engages our active response). Yet this active faith on our part does not prejudice grace. For even the ability to believe is not ours independently. Faith (too) is the gift of God. Thus: the salvation which is by grace is also by faith. But, as should now be clear, this salvation, while received by our action

(faith), is not thereby “by works.” It engages our activity, but it leaves no room for our boasting (2:9). Hence: salvation is not our work; instead, we are God's workmanship (2:10).

Even if we adopt the view that it is “being saved through faith” that forms the antecedent (the view favoured by Calvin and others), there would still be a hint that faith is a gift of grace. That faith, in any case, is viewed by Paul as a gift is confirmed in Ephesians 6:23, when he prays for “faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” There would be little point in praying for what comes from the Father and the Son unless that faith were, in some sense, given by them. Similarly, Peter refers to believers who have “received a faith as precious as ours” (2 Pet 1:1 NIV 1984), which seems to refer to the content of faith (*fides quae creditur*) not the act (*fides qua creditur*). Furthermore, in the New Testament, repentance (from which faith is inseparable) is viewed as a gift (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25); it is no surprise, therefore, if faith is also seen as a gift of grace. Here, then, divine sovereignty is given priority (it is the *sine qua non* of faith) without minimizing the reality and significance of the believer's activity.

Furthermore, the active exercise of faith (it is we, not



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God, who believe) does not compromise the grace of the Spirit's work in the application of salvation. It is of the nature of faith that by it we actively receive Christ and justification in Him without contributing to it. After all, faith is trust in another. It is the antithesis of all self-contribution and self-reliance.

Paul hints at this when he says that the promise of salvation is by faith so that it might be by grace, and be guaranteed to believers (Rom 4:16). Faith engages grace without transforming salvation into human merit.

Warfield expresses this in a pointed way when he says:

The saving power of faith resides thus not in itself, but in the Almighty Savior on whom it rests. It is never on account of its formal nature as a psychic act that faith is conceived in Scripture to be saving—as if this frame of mind or attitude of heart were itself a virtue with claims on God for reward ... It is not faith that saves, but faith in Jesus Christ ... It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith.

We are saved by Christ through faith. The saving power of faith does not lie in itself but in the object of its trust. As G. C. Berkouwer writes in another connection: "Faith does not possess one single constructive and creative moment; it rests only and exclusively in the reality of the promise." There is a total engagement of the believer, yet at the same time grace is not compromised. The genius of salvation by grace is that it engages man without diluting the graciousness of the salvation received. Otto Weber puts it well: "Faith, according to the biblical understanding, does not consist of man's being set aside, but of his being involved to the uttermost."

## IMPLICATIONS

It should not now surprise us if the evidences of the Spirit's work in regeneration on the one hand, and the actions of faith and repentance on the other, are one and the same and mirror the union with Christ of which He is the bond. By the work of the Spirit, we are joined to Christ; we share in the death of the old man and the resurrection of the new. We have died to sin and been raised into new life in Christ (Rom 6:1ff.); yet, simultaneously, we ourselves crucify the flesh with its lusts, and put off the old man and put on the new (Eph 4:22–24; Col 3:9–10; Gal 5:24). We work out our salvation because, and as, God the Spirit works in us to will and to act according to His good pleasure (Phil 2:12–13). Thus, those who have the Spirit live according to the Spirit

and set their minds on the things of the Spirit; they set their affections on the things above (Rom 8:5; Col 3:1–2). A distaste for the old order, and a desire for the new eschatological order, become evident (cf. Ezek 36:25–26).

A similar point is made in 1 John 3:9 and 5:18, in the startling statements that anyone born of the Spirit does not sin (*hamartian ou poiei*). Many commentators and versions understand John to be speaking here of sin as a prevailing habit. But the pointed language he uses (the Christian "does not do sin") probably refers to the critical and radical deliverance from specific manifestations of the reign of sin which takes place at the point of union with Christ. Instead of remaining captive in concrete ways to the dominance of sin, the Christian becomes righteous precisely in those areas (cf. 1 John 2:29; 3:10). Thus, the regenerate Saul seeks the fellowship, not the slaughter, of believers; the new man Zacchaeus gives money away rather than steals it; the transformed Philippian jailer cares for his prisoners rather than mistreats them; the runaway Onesimus, "useless" in his old life, becomes a faithful servant and is "useful" to Paul.

Spirit-birth also transforms the Christian's relationship to the present world order. This is expressed variously by the New Testament writers (e.g., for Paul we have already been "crucified" to it, Gal 6:14). For John, everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world through faith (1 John 5:4). Here "the world" signifies the world in rebellion against God, under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19; cf. John 12:31; 14:30), in darkness and sin (John 1:5; 12:46). The cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes, the boasting of what man has and does—all this is the spirit of the world (1 John 2:16). This is overcome by the one who is born of God. In Pauline terms, in the consecration of faith, the believer's mind is renewed, and he does not conform to the world or let it mould him (Rom 12:1–2), or follow its course (Eph 2:2).

Central to all of these manifestations of new life is faith that has the new birth as its inaugural context. Everyone who believes in Jesus as the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1). These are two aspects of one and the same reality, viewed from the perspective of the divine action and the individual's response.

## PREPARATION

It is clear from the preceding that faith and repentance constitute the phenomenological side of the Spirit's work in regeneration. But how is this brought about? After all, it is difficult to conceive of someone coming to faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord without understanding why a

Saviour is necessary in the first place, i.e., without a prior sense of personal need for salvation. Without this, the very idea of justification through faith seems incomprehensible. Is there, then, a preparation for justification in which the Holy Spirit is active?

This question brings us back to our earlier discussion of the *ordo salutis* and to the contrast between Roman Catholic and Protestant views of it.

In the context of Augustine's legacy to the church's theology, in which baptism was seen as the *sine qua non* of regeneration and justification was understood as *justum facere*, "to make just or righteous," medieval theology often emphasized the process of justification.

In this process, "first justification" was given in baptism, in which guilt and punishment for eternal and actual sin were removed. But the so-called *fames peccati* (the "tinder" of sin, which might conflagrate later) remained. For "final justification," the love of self had to give way to love of God for God's sake. This required the individual to cooperate with God's prevenient grace to do what lay in his powers (*facere quod in se est*, as Gabriel Biel expressed it). Led from the fear of divine justice to the hope of divine mercy, the individual developed a hatred for sin, or contrition.

The problem was, of course, that men were not perfectly contrite. Hence the provision of the sacrament of penance, which bridged the gap between real but inadequate sorrow (*attritio*) and the true contrition (*contritio*), which led to the faith suffused with love (*fides formata caritate*), which brought (second) justification.

Within this system, assurance of salvation was virtually impossible, and to claim to experience it was potentially heretical. Here we see why: certainty of final justification depended on a sufficient contrition, of which no one could be certain. The whole *ordo* was, in fact, a preparation for a future justification. What had not yet been accomplished could not become the ground for a settled confidence.

The Reformation turned this *ordo salutis* on its head. It distinguished in a biblical way between justification and sanctification and, following Paul carefully, placed a forensic justification in the foundation of the Christian life, not at its end. It rejected the Roman view of preparation, in which penance prepared the individual for justification.

In doing this, however, the Reformation theologians and their successors did not mean to deny the work of the Spirit prior to actual conversion and justification. They held, in the light of John 16:8–11, that the bringing of the individual to conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment, which found its initial fulfillment at Pentecost, was a continuing activity of the Spirit in the contemporary world.

But conviction is not repentance and faith; it does not further dispose an individual to justification.

Yet does not penitence, or repentance, precede and in some sense prepare us for faith and justification? Louis Berkhof's widely used resource book for students appears to take this position: "There is no doubt that, logically, repentance and the knowledge of sin precede the faith that yields to Christ in trusting love."


In Scripture, by contrast, faith and repentance are inseparable gifts of the Spirit. The summons accompanying the preaching of the gospel may be phrased as "Repent and believe" (Mark 1:15). But on other occasions, it is simply: "Repent!" (Matt 3:2; Acts 2:38; 17:30). At other times, it may be: "Believe!" (John 3:16; cf. Acts 16:30–31). Interestingly, in Acts 17:34 (cf. 17:30 above), where the response of repentance was required, the actual reaction of the few converts is described as believing!

It is clear from this that, while denoting different elements in the Spirit's work in bringing about conversion to Christ, both faith and repentance are so essential to it that the one cannot exist apart from the other. As a consequence, the one may be used where both are intended—as though either faith or repentance can function in synecdochal fashion for faith and repentance. Faith will always be penitent; repentance will always be believing, if it is genuine. There is no regeneration which is not expressed in both faith and repentance.

At the conscious level, however, one may predominate over the other, depending on which object has been a central focus in the events surrounding rebirth. If this is a deep sense of sin, repentance, with its attendant sorrow for sin, may be the dominant influence on the emotions of the individual. Alternatively, the individual may have an overwhelming sense of the grace and graciousness of Christ, in which case faith, with a joyful consciousness of forgiveness and acceptance, may predominate. But neither can properly exist in the absence of the other. Depending on the context of active conversion, the level of consciousness of the one converted may be suffused with a sense of one over the other.

A theological clue to understanding this is found in a fine statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith: faith "acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof [i.e. of Scripture] containeth." The point is that in the varied work of the Spirit, the psychological and emotional accompaniments of conversion are correspondingly diverse. But in no case does real conversion take place apart from the presence of both faith and repentance.

The "conversion" from which sorrow for sin and turning



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from it are absent—that receives the Word only with joy, but knows no other impact from the gospel—is likely to be temporary faith, according to Jesus (cf. Mark 4:16–17). By contrast, the “conversion” that is only sorrow for sin will eventually feed on itself, and die.

### **REPENTANCE**

What, then, is involved in repentance in this context? Two primary elements:

First, recognition of offence against God and the covenant He has made with His people (cf. Ps 51:4, where David’s recognition that his sin is against God reflects this covenantal orientation). Isaiah, for example, pictures the people as covenant sons who have rebelled against their Father. The inevitable consequence is that they end up in the “far country” of exile, individualized in Jesus’ parable

of the prodigal son (Luke 15:13), but threatened long ago in the Mosaic covenant (cf. Deut 28:36).

Men are under the covenant judgment of God for their rejection of the obligations of faith and obedience (cf. Amos 4:6–11 with Deuteronomy 28:15). Repentance involves a recognition of this; a realization of the significance of being in the “far country,” separated from the Father.

Second, repentance also involves a turning away from sin in the light of the gracious provisions of God’s covenant. Repentance is returning to a spirit of creatureliness before the Creator, in recognition of His mercy to penitent believers (cf. Deut 30:11ff.). Ungodliness is thus rejected, and righteousness is embraced.

Such repentance is evoked by the Spirit through a sense of who God is, and therefore by an awareness of the true character of sin. It is a God-centred response; indeed, it is

the beginning of true God-centredness. It is a turning away from sin in the turning round to God.

Repentance is as necessary as faith for salvation. Salvation is salvation from sin. It involves more than forgiveness. It includes our sanctification. It must therefore engage those who are saved in the turning away from sin which is involved in repentance. There can be no salvation which allows for an unchanged pattern of continuing in sin (cf. Rom 6:1ff.). But while repentance is as necessary as faith for salvation, it is related to justification in a different way. By faith alone Christ is received and rested on as Saviour. Justification is by faith (alone!), not by repentance. But repentance is as necessary to salvation by faith as the ankle is essential to planting the foot on the ground, or as the beating heart is to the use of the eye for vision. Both are essential, but they are not related to the same act in the same way. Faith is the individual trusting in Christ; repentance is the same individual quitting sin. Neither can exist apart from the other.

We have defined repentance in terms of turning from sin to God in the concrete terms of His covenant relationship with us in Christ. But since that is the activity of self-conscious individuals, it follows that the experience of repentance will vary from individual to individual, just as surely as do their expression and consciousness of sin. God's mercy is not merely a universally applicable medicine for sin; it is prescribed for particular sinfulness and particular guilt. Individual consciousness of repentance, or what we might call the psychology of repentance, is bound to be influenced by this. Here, too, we find the principle which characterizes the ministry of the Spirit: His ways of working are diverse. Herman Bavinck has some wise words in this respect:

Repentance is, despite its oneness in essence, different in form according to the persons in whom it takes place and the circumstances in which it takes place. The way upon which the children of God walk is one way but they are varying led upon that way, and have varying experiences. What a difference there is in the leading which God gives the several patriarchs; what a difference there is in the conversion of Manasseh, Paul and Timothy! How unlike are the experiences of a David and a Solomon, a John and a James! And that same difference we encounter also outside of Scripture in the life of the church fathers, of the reformers, and of all the saints. The moment we have eyes to see the richness of the spiritual life, we do away with the practice of judging others according to our puny measure.

There are people who know of only one method, and who regard no one as having repented unless he can speak of the same spiritual experiences which they have had or claim to have had. But Scripture is much richer and broader than the narrowness of such confines ... The true repentance does not consist of what men make of it, but of what God says of it. In the diversity of providences and experiences it consists and must consist of the dying of the old and the rising of the new man.

But within this general framework, there are several elements we can trace that will be common to all incidences of the repentance which is effected in us through the Spirit.


### MARKS OF REPENTANCE

In repentance, the Spirit produces a new attitude to sin, which will inevitably be accompanied by a sense of shame and sorrow for it (Rom 6:21; cf. Luke 15:19). Such an attitude to sin will be as concrete as the sin to which the new attitude is directed. Repentance means returning in a spirit of obedience along the path one has trod in a spirit of disobedience, and it is worked out in the specific terms of concrete obedience to the commandments of God (cf. Deut 30:2). Thus, in the Gospels, the repentance to which the rich young ruler was summoned was to take the concrete form of developing self-denial in the very area he had developed self-indulgence; in the case of Zacchaeus, it meant the returning of what had been taken unjustly (cf. Mark 10:17–31; Luke 19:8).

In this sense, Paul describes the repentance which issues from the regenerate heart when he says that the righteous requirements of the law are met in those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Rom 8:3–4).

It follows from this that repentance is not limited to the act of the moment, but develops into a permanent lifestyle.

In repentance, the Spirit also evokes a changed attitude to oneself. Repentance is dying to the old ways and crucifying one's flesh. Initial repentance is simply the beginning of mortification. It is a deeply radical change. It involves concurring with God's judgment of all reality, including oneself—justifying God in His righteousness and condemning oneself in one's sinfulness. It is taking up the cross and denying oneself—not by ontological self-abnegation, but by the putting off of the old man (Col 3:9; Eph 4:22) and by the crucifying of the flesh with its lusts (Gal 5:24). This too is a permanent change with perpetual implications. It means making no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts



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(Rom 13:14).

It is worth noting in passing that this has a profound bearing on the issue of the Christian's view of himself or herself. It must always be both simple (we become new men and women in Christ) and yet complex (we are imperfectly renewed). The Christian therefore sees himself or herself as one who has died to sin and been raised to new life. But this mortification and vivification characterize the whole course of his or her life, as we shall later see.

Repentance also has at its root a changed attitude to God brought about through the work of the Spirit. Neither of the first two elements could exist without this. Repentance is rooted in a true view of God. If He should mark iniquities, none could stand; but there is forgiveness with Him that He may be feared (Ps 130:4). Evangelical repentance, the inauguration and continuance of the life of godly fear, is always suffused with the promise and hope of forgiveness. In the theology of Scripture, a sense of sinfulness on its own is never equated with repentance. Thus, the encouragement towards repentance is that "there is still hope for Israel" (Ezra 10:2 NIV 1984). Peter's genuine repentance after his denial of Christ (which seems to be set in deliberate contrast with Judas' worldly sorrow-repentance and ultimate despair) is produced by his remembering the word of the Lord, which in this case included the promise: "I will pray for you that your faith fail not, and when you are converted, strengthen the brethren" (Luke 22:32, lit.; see also 22:61–62).

The classical pattern of the work of the Spirit in evoking repentance is found in Psalm 51, which, writes Artur Weiser, does not express

the fleeting mood of a depressed conscience, but the clear knowledge of a man who, shocked by that knowledge [i.e., of his sinfulness] has become conscious of his responsibility; it is a knowledge which excludes every kind of self-deception, however welcome it might be, and sees things as they really are.

Hence the psalm begins (51:1–6) with a comprehensive analysis of the nature of sin as rebellion (*peša'*, "transgression"); as distortion (*āwôn*, "iniquity"); as failure (*ḥaṭṭā'ā*, "sin"); as contrareity ("against you, you only, have I sinned"); as filth that needs to be cleansed ("cleanse me ... wash me"); as falsehood and lack of authenticity and integrity ("you desire truth [*emet*] in the inner parts"). Repentance also unfolds in a recognition of the danger of sin, as that which places us under the judgment of God (51:4), and in danger of being cast out from Him (51:11). It involves the

uncovering of the deep-seated intransigence of sin (51:5), since it is rooted in our nature, from the womb.

In the light of this, true repentance inevitably involves a broken spirit (51:17). That is not a highly emotional spirit. It is a spirit in which self-sufficiency and self-defence have been penetrated and broken down.

The same psalm also makes clear that repentance arises not only within the matrix of the Spirit's illumination of our condition, but in the hope of pardon to which He draws us. Appeal is made to the steadfast love of the Lord (51:1); the cry of the penitent is directed to the One who is able to save and who does save (51:14).

Furthermore, the reality of such repentance is evidenced in a new concern for holiness: a new desire for heart-reality and a clean life (51:6–7), for purity and renewal (51:10). Coupled with this is the desire to serve and save others (51:13) that flows from broken pride. Finally, true repentance, because drawn out in the context of grace, leads to, and energizes, worship: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise" (51:15 NIV 1984).

David's entire burden is, in one sense, summed up in the plea: "Do not ... take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation" (Ps 51:11–12). More than official royal anointing is at stake here. David realizes that without the Spirit's ministry there can be neither repentance nor its fruit in the joy of restoration (the verb, significantly, is *šūb*).

The fact that repentance is a gift of the ascended Christ to His people (Acts 5:31) indicates that it comes to us specifically through the ministry of the Spirit. Its nature indicates how manifold and comprehensive His ministry is.

Christ is a "Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel" (Acts 5:31 NIV 1984). When we ask "By what means does God bring us to repentance?" the answer must be that it is by the revelation of Himself in His Word, illumined by the Spirit. A right view of God as holy and merciful is the only foundation for genuine evangelical repentance. His holiness grounds its necessity; His grace and mercy ground its possibility.

Faith and repentance, as expressions of regeneration, are thus not merely inaugural aspects of the Christian life but characteristics and fruits of the Spirit's ongoing ministry. Indeed, the entire progress of sanctification is but regeneration coming into its own, and faith and repentance becoming more and more the dominant notes of life in the Spirit. ♦





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11 TIMOTHY 1  
is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.  
21 Which some professing have

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

## TIMOTHY

### CHAPTER 1

PAUL, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.  
2 To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.  
3 I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;  
4 Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy;  
5 When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.  
6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.  
7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.  
8 He not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou as the sufferer of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.  
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Advised to Timothy  
erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen.  
\* The first in Timothy was written from Laodicea, which is the chiefest city of Phrygia. PA-4-03-04.

9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,  
10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.  
11 Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.  
12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.  
13 Had I had the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in me, I should have been able to come unto thee, as I desire, and to be with thee: but I am hindered, lest I shall be troublesome unto thee, and thy charges be multiplied.  
14 That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us, and by the word which is with thee, that they which are in Asia be turned away from error, and that they be not entangled in words, which are to no profit, but which are to the superfluity of learning.  
15 The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus, for he hath refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.  
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Conduct to prison and then  
17 But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.  
18 The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day; and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

### CHAPTER 2

THOU therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.  
2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.  
3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.  
4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.  
5 And if a man also strive for master, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.  
6 The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruit.  
7 Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.  
8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel.  
9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an outlaw, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.  
10 Therefore I endure all things, for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.  
11 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.  
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12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.  
13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself.  
14 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them from the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.  
15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.  
16 But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness.  
17 And their word will eat as doth a canker of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus;  
18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.  
19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.  
20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.  
21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.  
22 They also which have not followed righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart,  
23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.  
24 And the servant of the Lord