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EDITORIAL

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When Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3:7), he was not giving the Pharisee a task to perform.

Nor did Nicodemus take it that way. As a well-educated rabbi ("a ruler of the Jews"—v. 1) he was thoroughly conversant with figurative language. He didn't think that Jesus was telling him he literally needed to "enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born" (v. 4). The first and last of Nicodemus's questions ("How can a man be born when he is old?" and "How can these things be?"—vv. 4, 9) signified that he correctly understood Jesus' point—namely, that by definition it is impossible for anyone to give birth to himself.

Jesus' reply to Nicodemus's amazement emphatically confirmed the point: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (v. 6). The New Birth *(regeneration)* is the Holy Spirit's work, and we cannot observe, govern, or direct the Spirit of God any more than we can see and control the wind. Jesus was prompting this works-oriented religious leader to understand that he needed a divine Savior, because the salvation of a sinner, from start to finish, is a work *only* God can do.

The point is even more obvious in the original language. The Greek word translated "again" in most English versions of John 3:7 is *anothēn*—literally, "from above." That's precisely how the word is translated in John 3:31 ("He who comes *from above* is above all") and 19:11 ("You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you *from above*"). Jesus was telling Nicodemus in the plainest possible way that he must be born *from above,* by the Holy Spirit's agency—born anew. Again, this was obviously not a work he could do; he needed the Spirit to give him new life and a new start. Rather than imagining he could gain divine approval by his own efforts, he had to confess his need, seek God's grace, and ask for the Spirit to work on his behalf. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63).

Nicodemus had greeted Jesus with what amounted to a profession of faith: "We know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (v. 2). He probably hoped to receive congratulations and a blessing from Jesus. Instead, he got this brusque-sounding, authoritative

message, basically informing him that he had zero hope of earning a place in the kingdom for himself. "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Here is the key lesson that runs like a powerful current through everything the Bible says about the New Birth: Eternal life is not a prize for being good. It is not a reward for those who try harder. It is not heaven's reimbursement for those who live sacrificially in this life. It is not a wage that can be earned by being pious and legalistic. You don't obtain it by forsaking vices or praying prayers. You can't acquire it by paying tithes or performing religious ceremonies. It isn't the birthright of anyone's ethnicity or an entitlement for some privileged class. You don't get it by joining a religious sect, no matter how meticulously you keep its traditions.

The doctrine of regeneration, properly understood, will stop any legalist dead in his tracks, and that is precisely the effect Jesus' words had on Nicodemus. His life and religion had been totally devoted to the notion that he could achieve heaven by his own righteousness—and with one sentence, Jesus (whose divine authority Nicodemus had already correctly confessed) demolished the Pharisees' whole belief system.

By the rules governing evangelical discourse today, to be that abrupt with an inquiring non-Christian (especially a respected religious leader) would draw a penalty flag. Even in Jesus' time, a casual observer might think the Lord was being curt and tactless. After all, Nicodemus was a member of the ruling council (the Sanhedrin). As such, he was deemed worthy of great respect. He was not approaching Jesus antagonistically. On the contrary, he had begun the conversation in the friendliest way possible, with a salutation and testimonial formally recognizing the authority of Christ's words and the authenticity of his works.

But Jesus did not even acknowledge the honor, much less offer any reciprocal compliment. With no cordial preamble whatsoever, the Lord brought up a truth that runs directly counter to all forms of self-righteousness, moralism, and works-based religion. There was no way to interpret Jesus' opening statement to Nicodemus other than as an emphatic dismissal of his religiosity, and Nicodemus clearly got the point.

This is a pivotal moment in the Word of God. A measure of its importance is the fact that this narrative sets the context and establishes the foundation for John 3:16 (the best-known of all gospel summaries). That is fitting, because the doctrine of regeneration encapsulates the principle that makes the gospel of Jesus Christ stand apart from every other brand of religion. It is not about what we do to earn God's favor; it is about what he has done to secure our redemption. In the hierarchy of gospel truths, the doctrine of regeneration ranks so high that we sometimes use the expression "born-again Christians" to distinguish true believers whose lives have been transformed by the gospel from people who self-identify as "Christians" merely as a matter of social convenience.

Nevertheless, of all the principles of biblical soteriology, none has suffered more at the hands of preachers and theologians than the doctrine of regeneration. Some deal with it only superficially (or utterly disregard it)—and they typically embrace some variety of antinomianism. Others suggest that the New Birth is God's response to a free-will choice the sinner must make. That turns Jesus' whole point on its head, making it seem as if sinners, not the Holy Spirit, control when and where regeneration occurs.

Much of the misunderstanding and debate about regeneration has to do with where it fits in the *ordo salutis* (the logical sequence of stages in the outworking of salvation). Does faith precede regeneration, or vice versa? No other question about the order of salvation is more fiercely contended. This is an issue that divides Calvinism from Arminianism, monergism from synergism, and Spirit-wrought revival from crass revivalism.

One serious obstacle to resolving the debate is that much of the material written on the topic deals with the relationship of faith and regeneration as if it were a question of chronology. It is tempting to think of the *ordo salutis* as a vast timeline, because, after all, it runs from the decree of God and the predestination of the elect in eternity past to the glorification of the saints and the consummation of history in eternity future.

Some paedobaptist and Covenantal theologians even teach that infants and young children might be regenerated "long before they are able to hear the call of the gospel ... [and] the possibility exists that they receive the seed of regeneration ... long before the effectual calling penetrates to their consciousness."[1] That idea, of course, is simply wrong. Scripture never separates regeneration from faith in that way. To cite one example, when the apostle John says, "No one who is born of God practices sin" (1 John 3:9), he doesn't mean, of course, that regenerate souls never commit any sin. (He had already denied that possibility at the start of his epistle—1:8, 10.) But 1 John 3:9 *does* rule out the possibility that anyone—even an infant—might be regenerate ("born of God") but still live in an unrepentant state of unbelief.

The relationship of faith to regeneration is not a conundrum about whether faith comes before regeneration on a timeline. The question is not whether a person comes to faith sometime before being born again—or vice versa. Regeneration and faith are simultaneous features of God's saving work, and the proper question is: *Which one is the cause, and which one is the effect?*

Scripture is very clear; faith is the result of God's regenerating work in the sinner. "You were dead in your trespasses and sins[, and yet] when we were [still] dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive" (Eph 2:1–5).

In other words, when we order these two aspects of redemption in the *ordo salutis,* we need to think in *logical, not chronological,* categories. Those whom God calls effectually, he also justifies (Rom 8:30). The effectual call is the culmination of the Holy Spirit's regenerating work, and the fact that it is *effectual* signifies that the one being drawn and awakened *believes.* To be regenerate is to have one's heart opened unto faith. The Spirit of God also opens the sinner's spiritual eyes, removes the veil of unbelief, and draws the heart to Christ. Faith is born in the same instant. So there is no such thing as a sinner who is regenerate but still unbelieving, and there is no such thing as a believer who is not regenerate. In short, regeneration is the cause; faith is the effect.

This issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal* takes a careful, biblical look at this vital doctrine of regeneration and several of its implications, seeking to sort through some of the errors and misconceptions that have skewed evangelicals' understanding of what it means to be born again. We've never had a more vital gospel theme in the journal. I trust you'll be encouraged and edified as you read these articles.

[1.] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 471–72.

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YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

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It would be difficult to find an issue more central to the Bible than regeneration. This article provides a simple example of how one could explain regeneration in a non-academic setting by examining Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus. Nicodemus had spent his life attempting to earn his way into heaven through fastidious, self-righteous legalism. What Nicodemus wanted was the hope of eternal life—he wanted to be accepted into God's kingdom. He knew that all his religion and rituals had not made him right with God. With a simple illustration, Christ explains that to be born again is a work in which the sinner plays no role. Jesus is saying that it is a work of God and God alone. In the end, Nicodemus lost everything in this world and gained everything in the world to come—not on the basis of his own works, but through the completed work of Christ.

* * * * *

How would you respond if someone asked you, "What must I do to be born again?" Of course, we're familiar with the terminology, drawn from Christ's clandestine conversation with Nicodemus. The phrase "born again" has featured prominently in evangelical lingo for decades. We even sometimes use it to delineate between nominal Christians and true believers.

However, most Christians don't seem to understand the point of the Lord's analogy. Some even blithely misinterpret it in ways that directly contradict His meaning. Nearly forty-five years ago, the prominent evangelist Billy Graham wrote a bestselling book called *How to Be Born Again*. Graham's approach was well-intentioned—he does call for repentance and faith in God. But a how-to book about what it means to be born again betrays the whole point of Christ's words.

That same man-centered perspective dominates the church today, skewing much of gospel preaching and muddying the truth of God's regenerating work. When faced with the question of how to become born again, too many Christians are quick to recommend a rote prayer to pray or a progression of steps to follow. They don't

realize that such instructions reflect the very doctrinal error that Christ was confronting in the first place.

The church needs to recover—and faithfully uphold—what it actually means to be born again.

The Savior's Gospel

The apostle John records the dramatic encounter between the Lord and Nicodemus.

> Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:1–3)

In truth, being born again is a simple, straightforward concept. In verse 12, Jesus called it an "earthly thing," which is to say, an earthly illustration—one that was simple enough that Nicodemus could not have confused its meaning. It's possible that the better translation of Christ's words in verse 3 would be, "Unless one is born *from above*." Two other times in John's Gospel, the Greek word *anōthen* is translated "from above." But whether it's born again or born from above, the point of the analogy is the same.

Just like His parables, the Lord chose a familiar concept to illustrate this vital theological truth. He even confronts Nicodemus over the simplicity of His point: "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (v. 12). In other words, if you can't understand what it means to be born again, you'll never understand the heavenly reality of the new birth, which is the foundational truth of salvation. It's a simple but crucial truth that you must be born again.

Nicodemus responds with the natural question, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (v. 4). How can a man be born *again*? Christ's whole point is that of man's own volition and effort, *he can't*.

Don't miss this. What role did you play in your physical birth? Of course, that's an absurd question—you played no role and made no contribution whatsoever. And that is exactly the idea the Lord drove home to Nicodemus. To assume that you have anything to do with your physical birth is an insane idea. To assume you have anything to do with your spiritual birth is equally insane. It's utterly absurd. And that's why the Lord chose this illustration—because it's so inescapably clear. If you give it any thought, it's not really possible to miss the point.

To be born again, or born from above, is a work in which you play no role. Your birth happened to you; you had no part in it. And the same is true of your new birth. Christ is saying that it is entirely a work of God and God *alone*. This simple statement immediately obliterates all works righteousness. It crushes the notion that religion, ceremony, ritual, and sacraments make any contribution to the sinner's new birth. Theologians call this monergistic regeneration. It's not a work that you and God do together. It's God's work alone.

No one is going to enter God's kingdom because he tried hard to be a better person, or more religious, virtuous, or philanthropic. No one is going to enter based on his own works. That's exactly the point Christ was making. And He was making it to "a ruler of the Jews" (v. 1), a man who Jesus would later refer to as "the teacher of Israel" (v. 10). This simple illustration hit Nicodemus right between the eyes.

Nicodemus had spent his life attempting to earn his way into heaven through fastidious, self-righteous legalism. And with a simple illustration, Christ stops this legalist dead in his tracks. The Lord is saying, "Your morality, your good works, your adherence to the law and rabbinic tradition—it's all useless. It was all for nothing, utterly meaningless."

Christ was confronting the empty, superficial nature of Judaism's faith and practice, just as He did throughout His ministry.

The Danger of Superficial Faith

The full context of Christ's discussion with Nicodemus reaches back into the previous chapter of John's Gospel. The apostle writes,

> Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man. (John 2:23–25)

Jesus is God, and therefore, He is omniscient. Nobody had to tell Him what people were thinking, because He knew it. He knew that the crowds following Him were there because of the miracles He performed. They had seen the signs and believed in Him to a point, but it wasn't a repentant, saving faith. Christ knew the truth of their hearts; He knew their faith was superficial.

We see the same kind of superficial faith after Christ fed the five thousand. John 6:14 says, "When the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is come into the world.'" The Jews had some notion that Christ could be the Prophet or Messiah they had been waiting for, but as the next verse illustrates, they had no clear concept of what that meant. "So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone" (v. 15). They were eager to initiate the reign of their messianic King—even though they had no idea what it entailed. The crowd followed Jesus across the sea to Capernaum, and near the end of the chapter, He confronted their false faith.

> "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. (vv. 63–64)

Christ knew that He had some non-believing followers—people who were just waiting for the next miracle, or perhaps hoping Jesus would throw off Rome's

shackles and initiate His earthly reign. Perhaps they believed He was the Prophet or the Messiah—whatever the reason behind their curiosity, their interest in Him fell far short of actual saving faith.

Rather than play on that curiosity, He confronted their false faith head on: "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father" (v. 65). Their own sense, their impressions about Jesus were not enough to save them. Their superficial faith in Him afforded them no spiritual merit. This jarring rebuke was an echo of an earlier stunning statement to the crowd: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (v. 44).

John tells us how the crowd responded. "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore" (v. 66). They were committed to their system of works-righteousness, and Christ was clearly not preaching a gospel of works. Confronted with their inability to earn or even initiate their own salvation, they quit and went home.

That kind of superficial faith surrounded Christ throughout much of His earthly ministry. In a sense, there is no better illustration of it than Nicodemus. For all we know, he was one of the group at the end of John 2 who believed *something* about Jesus, but stopped short of true saving faith.

In fact, John 3:2 tells us exactly what Nicodemus believed about Jesus. "This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.'" He didn't necessarily believe that Jesus was the Messiah. He certainly didn't affirm Him as God the Son. In that sense, he gives us a good idea of what it meant to superficially believe in Jesus at the end of John 2—that He was a prophet and teacher from God.

Perhaps Nicodemus hoped he could impress Jesus with his words. Clearly, he did not expect the response he received, which upended his faith, his career, and his entire life.

The Futility of Pharisaical Piety

John tells us that Nicodemus "was a man of the Pharisees" (John 3:1). We know much about this influential religious sect, mostly from Jesus' repeated confrontations with them. The Pharisees were arch legalists, known for their rigid observance of the law and all the religious traditions enfolded into it. Their name means separated, and that's how they carried themselves—as sanctimonious, holier-than-thou religious elites. As the popular theologians of the day, they were at the heart of apostate Judaism.

We get a sense of the depth of their corruption when Christ first cleansed the temple in Jerusalem.

> The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My

> Father's house a place of business." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume me." (John 2:13–17)

While another sect, the Sadducees, had oversight of the temple operations, the Pharisees would have been equally involved in its lucrative, blasphemous practices. Luke 16:14 tells us unequivocally that the Pharisees "were lovers of money."

They were also overt hypocrites. Jesus delivers a blistering rebuke of their duplicity in Matthew's Gospel.

> The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. (Matt 23:2–7)

Having exposed the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious elite, Christ then delivers a series of woes upon these deceptive false teachers. It's some of the most searing language Christ invoked during His earthly ministry, aimed at those most responsible for Israel's apostasy. And while space won't permit us to dig into the Lord's full rebuke of these spiritual abusers, we can get a sense of their wickedness in a brief excerpt.

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.
>
> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (vv. 25–28)

The Pharisees epitomized everything that was corrupt, perverted, and blasphemous about first-century Judaism. And Nicodemus was one of them.

He was also, as John notes, "a ruler of the Jews" (John 3:1). That means he was part of the Sanhedrin, a body of seventy members plus the high priest that functioned like Israel's Supreme Court. The men who made up the Sanhedrin were the financial and academic elite from the most prominent families of Israel, sitting in judgment over the rest of the nation.

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus sat atop the theological pyramid, and as a member of the Sanhedrin, he was in the highest echelon of Jewish authority. There was not much hope that a man so situated in life, so privileged and favored by the social structures that propped him up, would show any interest in Jesus. That's why this story is so unique.

It's also likely why Nicodemus "came to Jesus by night" (v. 2). There was potentially a lot at stake if he should be seen with Jesus in the light of day. Remember

that his fellow Pharisees would eventually accuse Christ of coming from hell, and doing what He did through the power of Satan. Even under the cover of darkness, Nicodemus showed remarkable fortitude in confessing that he believed Jesus had come from God. He was curious enough to seek out more information. And by referring to the Lord as "Rabbi" (v. 2), we also see that he was respectful.

He has seen the miracles, and he knew they had to be done by God—there was no other explanation. And he was not alone: "*We* know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (v. 2, emphasis added). To some degree, he was speaking on behalf of that group from the end of chapter 2, who were attracted and intrigued by the power of God on display in the ministry Christ. What we have here is an objective, plural, first-person eyewitness testimony to the authenticity of the miracles of Jesus as proof of His divine mission.

I imagine there was some excitement in his heart as he began this discrete conversation. After all, he was a professional religionist, about to speak with someone who, by his own admission, had "come from God." And in spite of the Pharisees' blasphemous expansion of God's law, they did still uphold some accurate theology. They believed in divine decree, moral accountability, immortality, bodily resurrection, and punishment and rewards in the future.

Where they diverged from the truth is in believing they could attain to the kingdom of God by strictly keeping the ritual observances of the law. Nicodemus had worked hard to adhere to the burdensome expanded law of the Jews, following the most minute details and regulations. It was a horribly restricted life. For example, if you had a sore throat on the Sabbath, you could swallow vinegar, but you couldn't gargle it. On the other hand, you could eat an egg that was laid on the Sabbath, so long as the chicken that violated the Sabbath by laying the egg was slaughtered the next day. That was the fastidious, exhausting system of works-righteousness that Nicodemus propagated and lived under. And since those rigid observances and rituals had no transforming effect on his heart, Nicodemus had to pretend that his piety made him holy and keep up his self-righteous façade.

Ultimately, we know that his heart was full of fear. From the outside, his life couldn't have looked much better. But he knew—even if only fleetingly—that his pious exterior was just a show. Sin and self still reigned in his heart, and no amount of going through the motions and religious rituals could quiet his conscience.

The fear that consumed Nicodemus was well-founded. He was trusting in an unbiblical, impotent system of works-righteousness for his salvation—a system he knew had no power to cleanse or transform. He was right to lack confidence and assurance, because he was trusting in a lie. And before he could even give voice to these fears, Christ was ready with an answer.

The Hypocrite's Heavy Heart

Nicodemus didn't have to say what was bothering him; the Lord knew what was on his heart. What he wanted was the hope of eternal life—he wanted to be accepted into God's kingdom. He knew that all his religion and rituals had not made him right with God. He wanted to be in the realm of the redeemed—those who are saved from

judgment, whose sins are covered and forgiven. He wanted the confidence that he was bound for heaven, and that he would enjoy a right relationship with God for eternity.

The question that plagued his heart was similar to the one put to Jesus by the rich young ruler: "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" (Matt 19:16). In the case of Nicodemus, he had likely already done every good thing he could have in hopes of earning salvation. There's no reason in the text for us to think he was less than fastidious when it came to the demands and practices of Judaism. We can assume he had been circumcised according to the law, that he followed Jewish dietary restrictions, and that he made all the necessary sacrifices. As a Pharisee, he would have paid special attention to the religious laws and traditions regarding the Sabbath and other aspects of daily life. But none of that gave him any hope of heaven. Nicodemus had achieved a high and influential place in Judaism, but he had no place in the kingdom of God.

Jesus' answer begins with a familiar phrase: "Truly, truly" (John 3:3). John's Gospel records twenty-five uses of that idiom, which was meant to call attention and emphasis to something new—often, something that broke with the teaching of the Pharisees and Jewish tradition. In this case, he was going to cut to the core of this Pharisee's self-righteousness.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3). Those words shatter any hope in the efficacy of good works. Christ is saying that religion is totally ineffective—that all the good works Nicodemus thought he was accumulating were worthless in terms of gaining entry into God's kingdom. To be welcomed into the kingdom, He had to be born from above.

The necessity of God's work in the new birth echoes throughout the New Testament. Christ's message here is consistent with John the Baptist, the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists—none of the New Testament writers told anyone to do *something* to be born again. They consistently called on sinners to repent and believe. But they never prescribed a prayer or a process, because there are no steps to recreating yourself.

The apostle James is unequivocal regarding the Lord's work in regeneration. "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth" (James 1:17–18). The new birth is not a synergistic process. It's not a team effort. You did nothing to initiate or empower God's transforming work. He chose you of His own will. He gave you spiritual life as an exercise of that will. It's His work alone.

Peter emphasizes the same idea in his first epistle.

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. ... For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Pet 1:3, 23)

God alone causes us to be born again. Sinners are "dead in [their] trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1), utterly unable to save themselves. They can't do anything to trigger the new birth; it is an independent act of divine mercy. "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 (by grace you have been saved)" (vv. 4–5). Knowing man's propensity for claiming credit he does not deserve, Paul included this reminder to his believing readers: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (vv. 8–9). You didn't do anything to save yourself. You couldn't; you were dead.

In his epistle to Titus, Paul further stressed the wretchedness of the unregenerate heart and the sinner's impotence to save himself.

> For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:3–5)

The new birth is a unique and unilateral work of Creator God. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor 5:17). And if there was any ambiguity, Paul adds, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ" (v. 18). There's nothing you can do to save yourself. It's an act of God's mercy alone—He doesn't need your input or assistance.

Consider how that must have landed with Nicodemus. He had risen to the highest ranks of Judaism, and was still searching for answers. He came to Christ looking for the next step—perhaps the *last step*—in quieting his conscience and securing an eternity with God. He wanted to know what else he had to accomplish, and instead he was told his accomplishments were worthless. This was a crushing blow. Nicodemus might as well have worshiped a rock—that's how much his piety and rituals could achieve for him. All his works were dead. He had no spiritual life to speak of—no relationship to God at all.

Nicodemus got the point. He understood the meaning of Christ's analogy, and where it left him in terms of achieving his own salvation. "Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?'" (John 3:4). His reply is ridiculous, highlighting the absurdity of the idea. He understands that it's impossible. He can make no contribution. There's nothing he can do to hoist himself into heaven.

This had to be heartbreaking for Nicodemus. In a moment, his piety and good works were reduced to nothing. His fastidious legalism was worthless—it brought him no blessing or spiritual benefit. A life of works-righteousness had been a waste, and what he needed most was impossible for him to achieve.

Christ didn't soften the blow. In fact, He explained that Nicodemus, ostensibly an expert in the Old Testament, should have known this all along.

The New Birth in the Old Testament

"Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God'" (John 3:5). What does He mean, "born of water and the Spirit"?

I've heard some people argue that Christ simply means you must be born both physically and spiritually. The idea is that this refers to a mother's "water breaking" as the amniotic fluid is released before the birth of a child. But that interpretation leans too heavily on an American colloquialism that wouldn't have made any sense in first-century Israel. Moreover, Christ doesn't need to tell Nicodemus that he has to exist before he can be saved.

Others argue that this is an affirmation that baptism is essential for salvation. But if Christ were simply recommending another good work to Nicodemus—even one like believer's baptism, which had not yet been implemented—the Pharisee's despairing response makes no sense. Frankly, he would have been overjoyed if Christ were prescribing such simple instructions. But his response—along with everything else Christ says in this passage—reinforces the idea that he could not attain salvation for himself.

The fact is, Nicodemus should have understood what Christ was saying. In verse 10, the Lord rebukes this high-ranking Pharisee's ignorance: "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?" You're an expert in the Old Testament and you don't know that salvation isn't something you can accomplish for yourself? You don't know that only God can grant you spiritual life?

Nicodemus should have known better. He should have remembered God's promise of a new covenant through the prophet Ezekiel.

> For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezek. 36:24–27)

God had promised, centuries earlier, to revive and restore His people. He promised to wash them of their sin and corruption, and to put His Spirit in them. Over and over, God stresses His work in the regeneration of His people. He had no intention of them saving themselves. There is no sense here that they need to pull themselves up by their spiritual bootstraps. Their only hope is His regenerating work.

He says He will "sprinkle clean water on you" and "cleanse you from all your filthiness"—that's what it means to be born of water. And He further promises to "remove the heart of stone ... and give you a heart of flesh," and to "put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes"—that's being born of the Spirit. This is God's description of His regenerating work—He washes us of the corruption of our sin and indwells us through His Spirit. That was the salvation that the Pharisees should have been looking for and proclaiming to Israel—not the phony piety of external religion.

The promise of the new covenant and the new birth is not an obscure idea. It's repeated throughout the Old Testament. Earlier in Ezekiel, God promised,

> I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God. (Ezek. 11:19–20)

God made similar promises through the prophet Jeremiah.

> "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Jer 31:31–33)

Nicodemus knew those passages well, and they should have been ringing in his ears. Christ was confronting his ignorance and biblical illiteracy. He was the teacher of Israel, and he didn't even know the promises of the new covenant.

The doctrine of the Pharisees deviated from the clear promises of God's Word. They proclaimed a faulty gospel of works that could not save. Their legalism had no solution for the sinful heart, and Christ drove that point home with His next statement: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:6).

In Romans 8:8 Paul writes, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Nicodemus didn't have access to the book of Romans, but he should have known plenty about the weakness and inability of the flesh from the Old Testament.

Just a few chapters into Genesis, God said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh" (Gen 6:3). Verse 5 continues, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." It wasn't long before the Lord revealed His plan to purge the earth of man's sinful influence. "God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them'" (vv. 12–13). And we know the flood did not mitigate the sinfulness of man's flesh, as the Lord declared, "The intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen 8:21).

The theme of man's wretchedness continues throughout the Old Testament. "What is man, that he should be pure, or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" (Job 15:14). In Psalm 51, David confesses that he was sinful from the beginning: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (v. 5).

Isaiah likewise acknowledged mankind's comprehensive corruption, and the futility of the sinner's attempts to save himself. "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on Your name" (Isa 64:6–7).

Nicodemus should have known that. He should have known that salvation could not be as simple as external behavior modification—that the problem was entirely internal. He should have known the impotence of man's flesh to produce righteousness. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (Jer 13:23). He should have known that "the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick" (17:9)—that its corruption is beyond understanding.

Unmistakably spelled out across the Old Testament, Nicodemus should have had a thorough doctrine of human depravity. He should have known that man's flesh renders him incapable of honoring God, much less earning His favor and forgiveness.

Nicodemus's ignorance of the new covenant and its promises was inexcusable. Christ told him directly, "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:7). It was all there. He was supposed to be the teacher of Israel—he should have known there was nothing he could do to save himself. He should have known that the new birth was God's work alone.

The Will of God in the Work of Regeneration

Contrasting the futility of the flesh and man's inability in verse 6, Jesus emphasizes again the necessity of God's intervening, regenerating work: "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Man has no capacity to wield or influence God's transforming power—it's entirely out of his control. The Lord expanded on that idea in verse 8, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The wind is invisible and unpredictable. We can't control it. We can't even resist it. It's a force that functions according to God's will alone. Jesus says the new birth functions the same way. We can't control or resist it. It operates entirely through the power of God according to His sovereign will. Regeneration is exclusively His work. And the idea of sinners initiating or partnering in that work is as ridiculous as trying to steer or stop the wind.

Likely dumfounded and no doubt dejected, "Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can these things be?'" (v. 9). Scripture doesn't tell us how long this conversation took. The dialogue we see here might represent only a portion of an hours-long discussion. But over the course of this conversation, however long it lasted, Nicodemus had received a refresher on the new covenant, a thorough doctrine of human depravity, and a complete takedown of the illegitimate system of works-righteousness he had spent his life propagating.

Christ confronted the very lies and false doctrines that Nicodemus had built his life upon, exposing him as a sinful wretch, totally depraved, spiritually unable and unwilling, and completely at the mercy of God. And He wasn't finished yet.

> Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (vv. 10–12)

The primary problem for Nicodemus was not a lack of information. He should have known the truth about his own depravity and the promises of the new covenant. He should have understood that salvation was not some external religious activity, but that it's an internal transformation wrought by God alone, in which He washes away your sin, gives you a new heart, and plants His Spirit within you.

Nicodemus *could* and *should* have known all of that. Instead, the primary problem for him—as it is with all unrepentant sinners—was unbelief. And Christ

confronted it head-on, "You do not accept our testimony. ... You do not believe." All the effort and intensity Nicodemus brought to his external religion was a waste. He wasn't obeying out of faith, because he had none.

Christ continued, "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life" (vv. 13–15). Jesus is pointing ahead to His own cross, and the only means of hope for sinners. It's not about what they needed to do to be saved. It's what He was going to do—what He *did*—to save His people from the due penalty of their sins.

The sinner is like Lazarus, dead and rotting in the tomb (cf., John 11:39), incapable of helping himself or responding to stimuli of any kind. He's lifeless, until God, who spoke creation into existence, speaks life into his dead corpse. Only when God bids us to come forth (v. 43) can we respond.

The church is the body of those who have been called by God from death to life. In the words of Paul, we have been "called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). The apostle follows that with a thorough description of what it means to be called by God.

> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (vv. 29–30)

Later in his epistle, Paul explains "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). God alone is the irresistible initiator of our regeneration.

The theme of God calling sinners to spiritual life is repeated throughout Paul's writing. In 1 Corinthians, he identifies himself as "Paul, called as an apostle" (1:1), writing "to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (v. 2). He continues, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 9). Only those who are called can understand and appreciate the truth of the gospel: "We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (vv. 23–24). And he reminds his readers to "consider your calling, brethren" (v. 26)—that "God has chosen" (v. 27) them according to His purpose.

He wrote to the Galatians, confronting them for betraying their calling, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel" (Gal 1:6). He exhorted the Ephesians to live up to their calling in Christ, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Eph 4:1). He reminded the Colossians, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Col 3:15). And he likewise reminds his Thessalonian readers to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12).

Throughout the New Testament, God's people are identified as those He has chosen and called.

> But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 2:13–14)

The author of Hebrews refers to his readers as "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling" (Heb 3:1). How did believers get rid of their depravity and wretchedness? How did they escape the slavery of sin? It was nothing we did for ourselves. God graciously called us out of death, out of darkness, out of ignorance and blindness, into life and the light of His truth.

All the New Testament writers celebrate God's sovereign work in salvation. But perhaps the richest description is found in Peter's first epistle.

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who 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)

Peter is writing to believers facing severe persecution, reminding them of the glorious reality of their new life in Christ. He's encouraging them with reminders of God's sovereign care for them as those He had called from death to life. He even indicates that their suffering is part of their calling (v. 21). And he assures them, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen" (5:10–11). The believer's calling is unshakable and inviolable, forever secure in the hands of the One who first called him to life.

Such ideas were well beyond Nicodemus's comprehension. His concept of salvation was much smaller. That's always the case with those who believe God needs them to do part of the work. He was merely looking for one more box to check, one more task to complete. In spite of his vast education, he holds no notion that God could have chosen and called him in eternity past, and there's seemingly no interest in the transforming work God had promised to do.

Having worked his whole life for God's favor and blessing, he merely wanted to know how close he was to the kingdom, and what else he still had to accomplish to get there. Christ crushes all sense of spiritual achievement with these words: "Whoever believes [in the Son of Man] will in Him have eternal life" (John 3:15).

Nicodemus couldn't look to his legalistic piety for salvation. He couldn't look to the law or the rituals of Judaism. Like the tax collector in Jesus' parable, he simply needed to cry out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). He needed to look to Christ. Jesus made that point unmistakably clear.

> For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been

> judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16–18)

You can't earn or initiate your salvation. It is the work of God alone. You must believe in the Savior. Look to Christ.

Epilogue

We don't hear anything further from Nicodemus. Scripture doesn't tell us how or when he parted ways with Christ that night, but there's no indication that he went away having believed.

But Nicodemus does reappear in John's Gospel account. Roughly two years later, in chapter 7, he intervened and defended Jesus against some other rulers who wanted Him arrested and executed. While he didn't defend Christ's teaching or His deity, Nicodemus reminded them, "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" (v. 51). John records that Nicodemus was mocked by his peers for defending Jesus, but again there is no indication that he had believed in Christ.

He appears once again in John 19, in the aftermath of the crucifixion. Regarding Jesus' burial, John writes,

> After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. So he came and took away His body. Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. (vv. 38–40)

Both Joseph and Nicodemus were members of the Sanhedrin, and likely faced the scorn and wrath of their fellow members for this courageous act of devotion to Christ. As men of means, they gave Jesus a burial fit for a king or a nobleman. And they did it boldly, unafraid of what it could cost them to be known as followers of Christ. No longer was Nicodemus hiding under the cover of darkness.

And what of the rest of the story? Tradition tells us that Nicodemus was baptized by Peter and John, and that his confession of faith in Christ led to his excommunication from the Pharisees and banishment from Jerusalem. Tradition says that his family was reduced to utter poverty, and that he died a martyr, beaten to death by a mob.

He lost everything in this world and gained everything in the world to come—not on the basis of his own works, but through the completed work of Christ. Somewhere between chapter 7 and chapter 19, heaven came down on Nicodemus. God called him from death to life, and he was born again.

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A REFORMED SCHOLASTIC LOOK AT REGENERATION

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The doctrine of regeneration among Early Modern Reformed theologians exhibits a number of key characteristics that help us to understand the nature of Reformed scholastic theology as it presented itself not only as a doctrine to be established but also a doctrine to be defended against the attacks coming from inside and outside the Christian theological tradition. Reformed theologians offered a trinitarian account of regeneration, in part to affirm what must be true of all key doctrines, namely, that the triune God saves. This trinitarian emphasis was also used to counter the rising Socinian opposition that denied the doctrine of the Trinity. In addition, Reformed theologians combined biblical-theological and historical-systematic concerns to highlight how these emphases are friends of exegetical theology. In the period of High Orthodoxy, Reformed divines understood regeneration as a "big doctrine" insofar as it incorporates not only the beginning of the Christian life, but also its progress and conclusion. Finally, the scholastic toolbox, including key distinctions, was required to clarify the important ways in which both God and man were active agents in salvation.

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Defining Terms

The doctrine of regeneration among Early Modern Reformed theologians proved to be a significant doctrine for their system of theology, in large part because their understanding of regeneration was not limited to the initial conversion of a sinner, but had implications for the whole Christian life. The idea of regeneration as a sovereign work of God upon a sinner who is spiritually dead is not something a Reformed theologian would wish to deny. Nonetheless, if matters were that simple, there would be no need for the many extended treatises on regeneration among Reformed orthodox theologians in the Post-Reformation era.

There were many different views on regeneration among Christian and heretical theologians—whether Lutheran, Papist, Remonstrant (i.e., "Arminian"), or the heretical Socinians that emerged during and after the Reformation period. So besides setting forth positive treatments of regeneration, by the seventeenth century Reformed divines were also engaged in battles against several foes from traditions that put forth views of regeneration that aimed to counter Reformed confessional orthodoxy.

One of the most penetrating treatments from the period of High Orthodoxy (ca. 1640–1685–1725) came from the Puritan theologian, Stephen Charnock (1628–1680).[1] Amounting to over 300 pages in his *Works*, Charnock wrote several *Discourses* on regeneration, in which he examined its necessity and nature, the efficient cause of regeneration, and the Word as the instrument of regeneration. The work is a classic of Protestant scholastic theology, combining careful theological distinctions as well as practical application with constant Christological and pneumatological insights within the framework of an orthodox view of God.

The term itself had a certain established meaning in the period of High Orthodoxy, and even in the era of Early Orthodoxy (ca. 1565–1618–1640), but during the Reformation the Genevan Reformer, John Calvin (1509–1564), says, "Therefore, in a word, I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam's transgression."[2] Yet he will also speak of the "regeneration" in Matthew 19:28 as "referring to the first coming of Christ; for then the world began to be renewed and arose out of the darkness of death into the light of life."[3] Calvin was not atypical among Reformed theologians of his era in his understanding of the term. Reformed theologians in the periods of Early and High Orthodoxy clarified the term in important ways, especially in light of the various traditions emerging. For example, the Remonstrant cause that led to Dort was countered in many extended works on regeneration by Reformed divines for many decades after Dort, not only on the Continent but in Britain.

In fact, even before Dort, many post-Reformation Reformed theologians distinguished between effectual calling (*vocatio efficax*) and regeneration. For example, the Scottish theologian Robert Rollock (1555–1599), who wrote *A Treatise of Our Effectual Calling*, describes regeneration as "the beginning of our glorification, and the beginning of a new creature."[4] He distinguishes regeneration from effectual calling and speaks of regeneration as sanctification: "regeneration followeth justification; for, being justified, we receive the Spirit of sanctification, whereby we are renewed, and, as it were, find a new creature begun even in this life. Repentance is the cause, regeneration is the effect; for therefore God doth renew us

[1] See Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (1845; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 3:7–335. Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) has an entire volume (over 500 pages) in the nineteenth century edition of his collected works devoted to the doctrine of regeneration. See Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin D.D.*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863).

[2] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 3.3.9. Cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 466; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:581.

[3] John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke,* trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 406.

[4] Robert Rollock, *Select Works of Robert Rollock* (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1849), 1:244–45.

in Christ, and make us new men …."[5] As he clarifies that these are not temporal distinctions, but logical ("in nature"), Rollock claims that "all divines distinguish calling and faith from regeneration."[6] However, this shows how an ostensibly impeccable Reformed theologian, writing in the period of Early Orthodoxy, could differ from another Reformed theologian, such as Charnock, writing in the period of High Orthodoxy. They very clearly distinguished regeneration from effectual calling (or, conversion), but not in the same manner.

Herman Witsius (1636–1708) first discusses effectual calling before regeneration. Effectual calling is the "first immediate fruit of eternal election."[7] Effectual calling is both external and internal. Externally, through the persuasion of the gospel (i.e., moral suasion), the elect sinner also receives an internal call that has supernatural efficacy because of the Spirit's work. Following in order of nature is regeneration, which is, according to Witsius, "that supernatural act of God, whereby a new and divine life is infused into the elect person spiritually dead, and that from the incorruptible seed of the word of God, made fruitful by the infinite power of the Spirit."[8] In this definition, the emphasis is upon the power granted to the sinner, and seems to be more consistent with Charnock's understanding.

Charnock speaks of the distinction between regeneration and other spiritual benefits—such as justification, adoption, and sanctification. So, whereas regeneration is "a spiritual change, conversion is a spiritual motion."[9] God implants a power in his elect in regeneration, but conversion involves the "exercise of this power"—that is to say, in regeneration Christians possess a principle to turn, but conversion is the actual manifestation of that turning; "conversion the actual fixing on God, as the *terminus ad quem*. One gives *posse agere*, the other *actu agere*."[10] Regeneration is the cause that effects conversion. Charnock is adopting the typical power-act distinction here to distinguish conversion from regeneration. This means that while the sinner is wholly passive in regeneration, in conversion he is active. Hence, in short, this means for Charnock that "Regeneration is the motion of God in the creature; conversion is the motion of the creature to God, by virtue of that first principle; from this principle all the acts of believing, repenting, mortifying, quickening, do spring. In all these a man is active; in the other merely passive; all these are the acts of the will, by the assisting grace of God, after the infusion of the first grace."[11]

When matters are put this way, one can see why Charnock would also distinguish regeneration from sanctification. The distinction is not in the possession of the Spirit. Habitual sanctification is the possession of spiritual life which takes place in regeneration. Rather, the distinction relates to "actual sanctification" (and its gradual progress). Hence, according to Acts 15:9, faith purifies the heart in sanctification. But, as Charnock argues, faith is part of the new creature in Christ, "and that which

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[5] Rollock, *Select Works*, 1:245.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank (repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 1:344.

[8] Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 1:357.

[9] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:88. That said, one can speak of conversion.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:88–89.

is a part cannot be the cause of the whole, for then it would be the cause of itself."[12] Regeneration does not happen by faith, but sanctification does. Making use of the habit (power)–act distinction, Charnock notes how faith produces acts of grace, but it does not produce the habit (power) of grace, since "it is of itself a part of this habit; for all graces are but one in the habit or new creature; charity, and likewise every other grace is but the bubbling up of a pure heart and good conscience. … Regeneration seems to be the life of this gradual sanctification, the health and liveliness of the soul."[13]

With that in mind, Reformed scholastics did sometimes distinguish between passive conversion (*conversio passive sive habitualis*) and active conversion (*conversio activa sive actualis*). So, Charnock distinguishes between regeneration and conversion, but conversion may be distinguished between passive and active, which answers to the regeneration-conversion distinction. Francis Turretin (1623–1687) provides an example of this view in his section on calling and faith: "Habitual or passive conversion takes place by the infusion of supernatural habits by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, actual or active conversion takes place by the exercise of these good habits by which the acts of faith and repentance are both given by God and elicited from man."[14] Turretin admits that the former (passive conversion) is more properly termed "regeneration," whereas the latter is better termed "conversion." The habit produces the act.

Regeneration, then, emphasizes God's motion in the creature; effectual calling stresses that God's motion toward those he converts is never in vain; and conversion highlights the necessity of a human response to God's omnipotent acting in those he regenerates.

Confessional View

Confessionally, the matter is somewhat straightforward, whether on the Continent or in Britain, though there are a few tricky points of dispute even within the Reformed tradition.[15] In the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561), regeneration comes up in Article 24, "Man's Sanctification and Good Works." The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) affirms the necessity of regeneration (Q. 8), connecting it to Christ's resurrection (Q. 45) and to being washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ, as signified in baptism (Q. 69–70), but like the Belgic Confession, locates the full discussion of it after justification by faith in the third part of the Catechism ("Of Thankfulness"), as the source of the good works Christians must do (Q. 86–91). The Canons of Dort (1618–1619) use the terms "calling," "conversion," and "regeneration" interchangeably, stressing regeneration in its narrowest sense as the initial work of saving grace in the soul (head 3–4, articles 3, 4, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17).

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[12] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:89.

[13] Charnock, 3:91.

[14] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 15:4:13.

[15] The question concerning regeneration in relation to baptism is one such point of contention between Reformed theologians in the Early Modern period. On this, see John Davenant, *Baptismal Regeneration and the Final Perseverance of the Saints. A letter…to Dr Samuel Ward*, trans. Rev. J. Allport (London, 1864).

In the mid-seventeenth century, the Westminster Confession of Faith offers a "mature" understanding of the doctrine of regeneration, first, as the effectual calling of the elect (8.8; 10.1) and the regeneration of elect infants who die in infancy (10.3); second, as the Spirit's work of sanctification in those who are effectually called and regenerated (13.1), increasing their faith (14.1, 3), moving them to repentance unto life (15.1, 2), and enabling them to do good works (16.3) and to persevere to the end in the state of grace and be saved (17.1, 2); and in this life, leading believers to assurance of grace and salvation (18).[16] Regeneration further extends to death, when "the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens" (32.1), and to the last day, when Christ shall raise "the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honor," and make them conformable to His own (32.3). According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, regeneration is an all-encompassing doctrine, which, we may say, extends to not only the elect, but to the renovation of the cosmos when all things shall be made new (Rev 21:1–8). According to Westminster, calling, quickening, renewing, enabling, bearing the fruits of a lively faith, assurance, enlargement in peace and joy, restoration, being made perfect in holiness, and the resurrection of the body, are the result of regeneration, attributed to God, wrought upon the elect by the Spirit, for Christ's sake.

No doctrine among the fundamental Reformed loci was ever without a key trinitarian focus, based upon rigorous interaction with the biblical texts and ecclesiastical history. Yet that did not mean Reformed theologians did not make use of the scholastic toolbox available to them to explicate, for example, the doctrine of regeneration that clearly highlighted not only what they wished to affirm but also what they wished to deny. To this end, Charnock and others offer students of Reformed orthodoxy a picture of what it meant to keep all the aforementioned emphases in mind when looking at a key theological doctrine.

Causation

Reformed theologians distinguished themselves from other traditions not so much in their use of the scholastic method, since papists and Lutherans were no strangers to the scholastic method, but in their use of scholastic tools to clarify and establish their distinctives based upon exegetical and historical-theological reflection.

An investigation into the efficient cause of regeneration will highlight the basic differences between the Reformed and their opponents. To speak of the "efficient cause" is quite obviously to borrow from "the philosopher," Aristotle (384–322 BC). Even before the seventeenth century, the Reformers, and before them the medieval theologians, made use of a fourfold schema of causality to explain various doctrines. The basic fourfold schema of "causes" include:

1. Efficient cause (*causa efficiens*);
2. Material cause (*causa materialis*);
3. Formal cause (*causa formalis*);
4. Final cause (*causa finalis*).

[16] Note that the Westminster divines distinguish between effectual calling, regeneration, and sanctification in WCF 13:1.

Calvin, who is not typically identified as a "scholastic theologian," makes use of Aristotelian terminology to clarify his exegetical point on Ephesians 1:4: "The efficient cause is the good pleasure of the will of God; the material cause is Christ; and the final cause is the praise of his grace" (*Causa efficiens est beneplacitum voluntatis Dei. Causa materialis est Christus. Causa finalis, laus gratiae*).[17] He does mention the "formal cause" later in Ephesians 1:8, which is the preaching of the gospel.

The efficient cause of regeneration is always God, but even here we need further clarification. The Leiden Synopsis speaks of the "primary efficient cause" of the effective gospel-call as the Father, "in the Son and through the Holy Spirit," thus emphasizing the trinitarian nature of salvation.[18] Relating causes more specifically to Christ's mediatorial work, Goodwin says that Christ's death is "the *meritorious* cause, his intercession the *applicatory* cause … his resurrection is the *virtual* cause, as by virtue of which it is wrought," of regeneration.[19] Goodwin admits that locating in Scripture the relation between the resurrection as the virtual cause of regeneration is "the most difficult to discern."[20] These are transient works, wrought specifically by the Son. By distinguishing these causes—all subspecies of the efficient cause—Goodwin highlights why each aspect of Christ's work is crucial to the doctrine of salvation. Following from this, the "cause" of the Spirit's work in the elect is based upon the intercession, which is the applicatory cause.

Against the Arminians (i.e., Remonstrants), Roman Catholics, and Socinians, the Reformed aimed to explain, by using the terms above, how God's foreknowledge, providence, and predestination related to each other. These are immanent works. But in terms of applicatory works, Reformed theologians also spoke of the "instrumental cause" (*causa instrumentalis*). The *causa instrumentalis* is a subordinate efficient cause. God is the efficient cause of all that happens. But to guard from a fatalistic understanding of salvation and providence, the Reformed suggested that humans were not mere "blocks" (i.e., they did not remain merely passive), but that God involves them in his purposes as *causa instrumentalis*. This means the act is ours in believing the gospel, according to the instrumental cause, but the power is God's, according to the efficient cause. God's powerful acting in his people produces graces in them and excites them to action, but by involving the will instead of bypassing it.

Arminian and Roman Catholics not infrequently castigated the Reformed for allegedly compromising human freedom. Yet, the Aristotelian categories, whereby the *causa instrumentalis* is a subspecies of the *causa efficiens*, enabled the Reformed to insist that salvation truly is of the Lord and yet we are willing agents in this salvation. These categories, going back to Aristotle, were helpful in the explication

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[17] *Ioannis Caluini Commentarii in omnes Pauli Apostoli epistolas, atque etiam in Epistolam ad Hebraeo* (Geneva, 1580), 338.

[18] Henk van den Belt, Riemer Faber, Andreas Beck, William den Boer W, ed., *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae/Synopsis of a Purer Theology: Latin Text and English Translation,* vol. 2, trans. Riemer Faber (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 211.

[19] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 6:457. In justification, too, we can distinguish between the means of procurement (*medium impetrationis*) and the means of application (*medium applicationis*). Charnock writes: "Upon the whole we must consider, that though our propitiation made on the cross by the blood of Christ be the meritorious cause of our justification, yet the intercession upon the throne made by the same blood of Christ, as a speaking blood, is the immediate moving cause, or the *causa applicans*, of our justification." Charnock, *Complete Works*, 5:131.

[20] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 6:455–58.

of many theological points that required a sophisticated way to avoid errors by way of distinguishing between causes.

Commenting on John 1:13 ("Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."), it might make sense for Charnock to prove that regeneration is the "sole efficiency of God."[21] But instead, Charnock first removes the "false causes." This is a typical approach of Reformed orthodox theologians who "clear away" the false before setting forth the truth. Therefore, man cannot be the cause of his own regeneration for a multitude of reasons, not least because our wills are wholly uninterested in the new life that characterizes true children of God. Charnock thus remarks, "We have no more interest of our wills in regeneration, than we had in corruption."[22] Those in the flesh cannot please God (Rom 8:8). What is the highest pleasure of God for his creatures? That they share in his moral likeness—specifically that of the Son. But whereas God is all-powerful, we are all-impotent in the matter of creating the life that God requires. What does this mean? We still possess understanding, but our understanding does not naturally choose that which is spiritually good and pleasing to God. Charnock adds, "Though since the fall we have such a free will left, which pertains to the essential nature of man, yet we have lost that liberty which belongs to the perfection of human nature, which was to exercise acts spiritually good and acceptable to God."[23]

Charnock then distinguishes between a physical and a moral cause.[24] We still possess the physical nature of faculties such as understanding, but we no longer possess the moral ability to please God. The weakness we have is a moral weakness, lying chiefly in the will (John 5:40), not a physical weakness. As we have our being and life in this world, we have a will that wills. The question is what we are able to will.

Our problem, then, is innate; that is, in our state of nature ("in the flesh"), we have a habit (*habitus*) of corruption. This habit manifests itself in a progressive distancing from God. According to Charnock, "An unrenewed man daily contracts a greater impotency, by adding strength to this habit, and putting power into the hands of sin to exercise its tyranny, and increasing our headstrong natures in their unruliness."[25] In his classic work on mortification, John Owen (1616–1683) argues the same: "the more men exert and put forth the fruits of their lust, the more is that enraged and increased in them;—it feeds upon itself, swallows up its own poison, and grows thereby. The more men sin, the more are they inclined unto sin."[26] We do

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[21] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:169.

[22] Charnock, 3:170.

[23] Charnock, 3:171.

[24] John Owen, using a distinction that the Spanish Jesuit theologian, Francisco Suarez (1548–1617), also used in his *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, discusses the difference between a moral and physical cause but with a different application: "Effects are to be considered with respect to their causes. Causes are real or moral. Real or physical causes produce their effects immediately, either *immediatione suppositi* or *virtutis*. Unto them the subject must be existent. I speak not of creating power, where the act produceth its object. Moral causes do never immediately actuate their own effects, nor have any immediate influence into them. There is between such causes and their effects the intervention of some third thing previous to them both,—namely, proportion, constitution, law, covenant,—which takes in the cause and lets out the effect; and this for all circumstances of where, how, when, suitable to the limitations in them expressed or implied, with the nature of the things themselves." John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), 10:459.

[25] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:174.

[26] Owen, *Works*, 6:170.

not drift towards God but away from God because sin gains a stronghold. "Man is a mere darkness before his effectual calling," says Charnock; a mere darkness where the power of Satan dwells (Eph 2:2). The spirit that "works" (ἐνεργεῖν) refers to the acting of Satan in Ephesians 2:2, but the same word is used for the working of sin in Romans 7:5 and the working of the God in Philippians 2:13. Thus, "as the Spirit fills the soul with gracious habits to move freely in God's ways, so Satan fills the soul (as much as in him lies) with sinful habits."[27]

Man can cause his own regeneration to the same degree that he can cause the creation of the world. The work of regeneration is likened to a work of creation. Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) says: "regeneration requires no less power than creation; but creation is the work of God alone. Ergo."[28] Likewise, Charnock says, "God is as much in the new creation as he was in the old … neither the matter, nor any part of it, prepared itself. If nothing prepared itself to be a creature, how can anything prepare itself to be a gracious creature, since to be a new creature is more than to be a creature; and every preparation to be a new creature is more than any preparation to be a creature? The new creation differs, I must confess, from the old creation; but it is such a difference which makes it rather harder than easier."[29]

The consideration of God's being should be enough to prove that man is in no way responsible for causing his regeneration. For, according to Charnock, if we could bring about our new birth, "God would not be the supreme independent cause in the noblest of his works. This work is nobler than creation in respect of the price paid for it. The world was made without the death of anything to purchase the creation of it. But the divine image is not restored without the death of the Son of God, every line in this new image being drawn with his blood."[30] God is the supreme cause in all things. But, in the matter of restoring man, shall he be relegated to an inferior or secondary cause? As the first cause, we depend upon God in all our actions, especially those actions that are supernatural. If we caused our regeneration then our wills would be the cause of God's working, and his actions would be consequent to our actions rather than our actions being contingent upon his. As Charnock notes, "Man would then be the *dispositiva causa* in relation to God. It would make God the *second cause.* … It would make God to will that which man wills, and make God to will that which man may reject. It would follow that God concurs not to regeneration by way of sovereignty, but by way of concomitancy. It would not be a victorious but a precarious grace, which is against the whole tenor of the Scripture, which represents God as holding in his hands the first links of all second causes" (Rom 11:36).[31]

As noted above, there are also instrumental causes. The efficient cause (i.e., God) guarantees the certainty of spiritual life in the elect. God, as the efficient cause, makes use of instrumental causes to produce spiritual life. The word of God, preaching, and prayer, for example, may be instrumental causes used by God to grant life to a sinner, but those instrumental causes do not negate God as the prime efficient cause.

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[27] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:177.

[28] *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules*, trans. Willem van Asselt, Michael D. Bell, Gert van den Brink, and Rein Ferwerda (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), 245.

[29] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:182.

[30] Charnock, 3:188

[31] Charnock, 3:189.

More specifically, the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of regeneration; the efficient principal of it, as the Reformed held. According to Augustine's well-known dictum, *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*, we can speak of God as the efficient cause of regeneration. But God's work of regeneration terminates upon the Holy Spirit (*terminus operationis*). Charnock understands regeneration as a "mighty and powerful change, wrought in the soul by the efficacious workings of the Holy Spirit, wherein a vital principle, a new habit, the law of God, and a divine nature, are put into, and framed in the heart, enabling it to act holily and pleasingly to God, and to grow up therein to eternal glory."[32] Similarly, Turretin speaks of regeneration as the "infusion of supernatural habits by the Holy Spirit."[33] But, as the above has shown, it was important to illustrate how and why the Spirit should be the cause of new life in a sinner.

Regeneration as "Physical"

The work of the Spirit upon the sinner is a physical operation. When the term "physical" is used by the Reformed, they have in view the Spirit's immediate work upon the sinner. Owen says: "There is not only a moral but a physical immediate operation of the Spirit … in their regeneration."[34] The physical operation (*operatio physica*) of the Spirit was affirmed in opposition to a mere moral suasion. It was not that moral suasion was not an instrumental cause in effecting regeneration, but that only moral suasion was required.

Charnock argued that if regeneration were nothing more than moral suasion, then "the most eloquent preaching were like[ly] to do most good" and the "most eloquent preaching would then most fill the gospel nets."[35] Only a physical cause, which leads to a spiritual motion towards God, will bring about regeneration. With Charnock, Owen argues for a "*real physical work* of the Spirit on souls of men in their regeneration."[36] The work of the Spirit upon the soul is immediate; there is direct contact between God and the person he regenerates. Goodwin likewise explains that the first working of the Spirit upon us is immediate: "He doth not work grace first, and then come into a man; but he comes first and seizeth on a man, then works grace in him."[37] The Spirit's work on us and in us is the foundation of all the graces that flow forth in our Christian life, and, says Goodwin, "therefore … his coming upon us and entering into us is immediately, without any preparation, when men are unregenerate."[38]

There was also emphasis, however, on the instrumental means God used to regenerate sinners. To insist on "means" is to say that God does not ordinarily regenerate sinners as they are simply walking down the street or waiting for a bus to arrive, even though (according to his absolute power) he could. The Spirit works immediately upon a sinner, but ordinarily through the Word of God, especially the preaching of God's Word.

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[32] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:87–88.
[33] Turretin, *Institutes*, 15:4:13.
[34] Owen, *Works*, 3:316.
[35] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:238.
[36] Owen, *Works*, 3:307 (emphasis in the original).
[37] Owen, 6:60.
[38] Owen, 6:61.

Charnock produced a whole discourse on the Word in relation to regeneration, titled "A Discourse of the Word, the Instrument of Regeneration."[39]

William Whately (1583–1639) makes use of a few Aristotelian causes to highlight the various "means" of regeneration. He says that the Spirit is the efficient cause, the Word the instrumental, and holiness the material cause of regeneration.[40] He explains this more fully. "The holy Ghost himself … doth convey and insinuate himself into the man, whom he will beget again to a new life. … And yet the Spirit of God, that could work of himself, and without means, pleaseth not so to do in this great work: but of his own free-will makes choice for himself, of a fit and blessed instrument for that purpose; even the law of God, the whole doctrine of the Scriptures."[41] Like most Reformers and Puritans, he believed that the Lord more often uses ("more often, more usually, more ordinarily") the Word preached than the Word read.[42]

The Westminster Larger Catechism illustrates that the preaching of the Word is the ordinary means God uses to effect salvation. Question 155 asks, "How is the Word made effectual to salvation?" The answer: "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation." So not only does God use the Word as a means to "enlighten" those dead in sin, but the Word is used to sanctify God's people. Regeneration, largely understood as incorporating the renewal of those in Christ, is effected especially by the Word.

Yet, this strong emphasis on the Word as the instrumental cause was never detached from the work of the Spirit as the efficient cause. Thus, Owen affirms that the bare preaching of the Word apart from the Spirit is useless: "The word itself, under a bare proposal to the minds of men, will not so effect them."[43] Turretin likewise says: "But whatever may be its efficacy, still it is not sufficient without the immediate operation of the Spirit."[44] "The Spirit," adds Turretin, "works immediately upon us, not so much before or after the word as together with it."[45] Though the Word is instrumental, the Spirit is still ultimately the efficient and immediate cause of regeneration. In Arthur Dent's popular work *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*, he affirms this basic point. Philagathus asks, "Cannot a man attain unto regeneration and the new birth without the word and the Spirit?" Theologus responds, "No verily: for they are the instruments and means whereby God doth work it."[46]

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[39] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:307–35.

[40] William Whately, *The New Birth* (London, 1622), 4–5.

[41] Whately, *The New Birth*, 16–17.

[42] Whately, 17–18. John Cotton lists the Word of God as the second "cause" of new life and argues that God "ordinarily" uses "a word of Promise" preached while insisting that He does not give life through "the words of the Law." John Cotton, *Christ the Fountain of Life* (London, 1651), 95–96.

[43] Owen, *Works*, 3:235–36

[44] Turretin, *Institutes*, 15:4:23.

[45] Turretin, 15:4:51.

[46] Arthur Dent, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven; Wherein Every Man May Clearly See Whether He Shall Be Saved or Damned* (1599; repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 19.

The Gospel as a Moral Instrument

Commenting on James 1:18 ("Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures"), Charnock makes use of several of the distinctions that have been highlighted above to explicate his doctrine of regeneration.

The efficient cause is God the Father; the "impulsive" ("moving") cause is God's will; the instrumental cause is the "word of truth;" and the final cause is that those regenerated should be "a kind of firstfruits." By the "word of truth," Charnock means specifically that the gospel is the instrument that God uses to effect the new birth.[47] The efficient and instrumental causes are distinguished by the prepositions ἐκ, or ἐξ, and διὰ. Charnock explains: "When we are said to be 'born of the Spirit,' it is, John 3:5, ἐκ πνεύματος; 1 John 3:9, 5:1, ἐκ Θεοῦ; never διὰ πνεύματος, or διὰ Θεοῦ; but we are nowhere said to be born *of* the word, or begotten *of* the word, but διὰ λογου, *by* or *with* the word, 1 Peter 1:23; and διὰ ἐυαγγελίου, 1 Cor. 4:15, I have begotten you 'through the gospel.' The preposition ἐκ or ἐξ, usually notes the efficient or material cause; διὰ, the instrumental or means by which a thing is wrought."[48] So the "ordinary instrumental cause" is the ministry of the Word.[49]

In typical Puritan fashion, after highlighting Aristotelian causality and connecting prepositions to certain causes, Charnock will then quip: "Sin entered into the heart of Eve by the word of the devil, grace enters into the heart by the word of God; that entered by a word of error, this by a word of truth."[50]

The word of truth, the gospel, is the "chariot" (*vehiculum*) upon which the Spirit rides. As an instrument used by God, the gospel unlocks "prison doors, and take[s] them off the hinges; strike[s] off the fetters, and draw[s] out the soul to a glorious liberty."[51] The gospel does not, however, have a natural efficacy. The sun giving heat, good food nourishing, or water hydrating are natural efficacies. If the gospel possessed a natural efficacy, then it would convert each person who hears it preached. Instead, the gospel is a moral—not a natural—instrument. As a moral instrument, there is a certain "ordinariness" concerning the relation between the gospel and regeneration insofar as belief arises ordinarily from the hearing of the Word (Rom 10:14, 17). Just as God uses natural instruments (i.e., secondary causes)—the sun to keep us warm—he has ordained that the preaching of the gospel should be the instrument to bring about salvation. As Charnock says, "God seems here to have fixed his power … Rom. 1:16, the gospel is 'the power of God to salvation'; not that his power shall always[s] attend it, but that he will exert his power, at least ordinarily, only by it; no other organ through which the wind of the Spirit shall blow, no other sword which the Spirit shall manage but this, Eph. 6:13."[52]

As a moral instrument by which God ordinarily uses to convert sinners, the gospel is therefore also a necessary instrument. God ordinarily works through means in all his acts, including regeneration. Means are necessary only insofar as God, in

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[47] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:309.
[48] Ibid.
[49] *Synopsis Purioris*, 213.
[50] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:309.
[51] Charnock, 3:310.
[52] Charnock, 3:312.

his freedom, has decided to make use of means, not because he is under an outward compulsion or necessity. Man possesses a will and an understanding. Various objects, ideas, propositions, truths, falsehoods, etc., are proposed to us, which we conceive to be true of false. Thus Charnock says, "to make an alteration in us according to our nature of understanding, will, and affection, it is necessary there should be some declaration of things under those considerations of true, good, delightful, &c., in the highest manner, to make a choice change in every faculty of the soul, and without this a man cannot be changed as a rational creature; he will otherwise have a change he knows not why, nor to what end, nor upon what consideration, which is an unconceivable change in a rational creature."[53] The revelation of the gospel is used by God to change our affections of what is true and praiseworthy. Without the revelation of the gospel, we could, theoretically, be regenerated, but we would not know why or how we have been changed. While Charnock is prepared to admit that "God may communicate himself without the written word to some that have it not, yet according to his appointment, not without a revelation of what is in that word."[54] Thus the revelation of the gospel is ordained by God as a necessary instrument, suitable to both the way God has made man and to the end that God will be glorified by this means of conversion.

So while the person and work of Christ is the meritorious cause, the work of the Spirit is the efficient cause, and the gospel is the instrumental cause of regeneration.[55] As an instrument, the gospel depends on God's two gifts to his people: his Son and the Spirit. The gospel is an instrument that is only efficacious by the Holy Spirit: "the word declares Christ, and the Spirit excites the heart to accept him; the word shews his excellency, and the Spirit stirs up strong cries after him."[56] The question is not whether God regenerates us by the Spirit or by the Word, but rather how God regenerates us by the Spirit and the Word, and their necessary relation to one another. Just as there is no gospel without the work of Christ, so there is (ordinarily) no work of the Spirit in regenerating sinners without the revelation of the gospel.

Understanding and Will

As a moral instrument, the preaching of the gospel, when it is efficaciously applied to the sinner through the work of the Spirit, renews the mind and will to understand, believe, and embrace what God has said concerning his Son.

Francis Burmann (1632–1679) says, "*Primus regenerationis actus, primusque novi hominis motus est fides*," arguing that the first act of regeneration and the first movement of the new man is faith.[57] The power-act distinction was crucial here for Reformed divines: the power to believe comes from the Spirit, but the act of faith is required. Man must believe, but he can only believe if there is a supernatural power

[53] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:313.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Charnock, 3:315.
[56] Charnock, 3:317.
[57] Francis Burmann, *Synopsis theologiæ & speciatim oeconomiæ foederum Dei*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Joannem Wolters, 1699), 168.

to believe supernatural truth. When this happens, man receives, according to Mastricht, "a new propensity towards spiritual good."[58]

Considering these axiomatic truths, Charnock defines regeneration as a "universal change of the whole man. It is a new creature, not only a new power or new faculty. This ... extends to every part. … [It] is as large in renewing as sin was in defacing."[59] Likewise, George Swinnock (1627–1673) says that the subject of God's renewal is "the whole man;"[60] but, says Charnock, the "proper seat of grace" is the soul, which in turn influences every faculty of the soul.[61] Owen's definition of regeneration is similar, which "consists in a new, spiritual, supernatural, vital principle or habit of grace, infused into the soul, the mind, will, and affections, by the power of the Holy Spirit, disposing and enabling them in whom it is unto spiritual, supernatural, vital acts of faith and obedience."[62] Almost always in Owen's writings he lists the understanding before the will, highlighting a basic tendency of the Reformed orthodox to consider the understanding before the will in the work of regeneration upon the person.

For Owen, the "leading" or "conducting" faculty of the soul is the understanding, which, in regeneration, is not replaced, but renewed so that we may truly know God. The Spirit works on our will as well so that our inclinations are determined. As Owen argues, the will is not left "remaining undetermined," but the Spirit determines it "in and unto the acts of faith and obedience." The Spirit does not leave men to "the undetermined liberty of their wills." At the same time, the Spirit does this, says Owen, "without the least impeachment of its liberty or freedom."[63]

Charnock makes the same point as Owen: "God therefore works by way of a spiritual illumination of the understanding, in propounding the creature's happiness by arguments and reasons, and in a way of a spiritual impression upon the will, moving it sweetly to the embracing that happiness, and the means to it which he doth propose; and indeed without this work preceding, the motion of the will could never be regular."[64]

God first works upon the understanding in regeneration before the will: "Our eye first sees an object before our hearts desire it … so there is an apprehension of the goodness of the thing proposed, before there be any motion of our wills to it; so God begins his work in our minds, and terminates it in our wills."[65] The mind understands the heinousness of sin and thus the will hates it. The mind likewise understands the beauty of grace, and as a result, the will loves God. Thus, "the higher the degrees of this saving illumination are in the mind, the stronger and firmer are the habits and acts of grace in the will."[66] This truth brings us back to the importance of the Word

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[58] Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 40.

[59] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:95.

[60] George Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened by the Key of Regeneration* (London: John Best for Tho. Parkhurst, 1660), 22.

[61] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:96. Cf. Swinnock, *The Door of Salvation Opened*, 24. Whately also says it pertains to the whole man and focuses on the "principal faculties" of understanding, conscience, and will. Whately, *The New Birth*, 69.

[62] Owen, *Works*, 3:329.

[63] Owen, 3:333–34.

[64] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:279.

[65] Charnock, 3:279–80.

[66] Charnock, 3:280.

in relation to regeneration. In terms of the sanctifying principles at work in us, ordinarily the more gospel truth we possess the stronger our love should be toward God. Truth in the understanding cannot lead to indifference toward God, but should effect the opposite. As Charnock says, "The same hand that darts light into the mind, puts heat into the will."[67]

Interestingly, Charnock's view affirms, in terms of the existential experience of the believer, that when the understanding is enlightened, and a "thorough conviction" takes place, the will, "by virtue of the same Spirit, follows in a delightful motion to the object proposed to it."[68] The Spirit works immediately upon both the understanding and the will; the Spirit does not affect the understanding, and then our will, apart from the Spirit, does its own work. The Spirit is at work as much in the understanding as it is in the will of those whom he regenerates.

When God regenerates the will, he eradicates "corrupt habits" and implants gracious habits; he gives a new heart (Deut 30:6). Charnock makes the point that faith is principally, but not exclusively, in the will since it consents, leans, rests, comes, etc. Similarly, love is an act of the will. These gracious habits replace unbelief and hatred.[69] In short, the effects of regeneration are crucial. As Turretin and other Reformed divines were painstakingly clear, "Man is not like a log and a trunk in his regeneration, as our opponents falsely charge upon us."[70] As regeneration happens, the conversion of the person is not unwilling, but willing; the Spirit, says Turretin, "glides most sweetly into the soul … and operates by an infusion of supernatural habits by which it is freed … so as to become willing from unwilling."[71] It may be said that if any tradition does justice to the integrity of the will in conversion, it is the Reformed tradition. The will remains the will, but it is also a will that, because of God's ineffable power and grace, truly wills in a manner that God accepts as cleaving to him without hypocrisy.

Irresistible Grace

Regeneration is, in the application of salvation, irresistible. Semi-Pelagians, Socinians, and most Arminians held that regeneration can be resisted, but the Reformed understood that the efficacy of Christ's intercession was such that his reward (i.e., his people) was not a matter of possibility. Though Reformed theologians understood the possible shortcomings of the word "irresistible" in the application of salvation, they still used the word. For example, Turretin notes that the "expressions 'resistibility' and 'irresistibility' of grace are both barbarous and little adapted to unfold what is sought ... we are compelled to use them *ad hominem* that we may draw off the mask from our adversaries."[72] The terms capture some, not all, of the truth of regeneration, and we need to be careful that the terms are carefully located within a larger framework of biblical, systematic, and historical theology.

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[67] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:283.
[68] Charnock, 3:284.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Turretin, *Institutes*, 15:4:16.
[71] Turretin, 15:4:16.
[72] Turretin, 15:6:3.

The Dutch Reformed theologian, Petrus Van Mastricht (1630–1706), affirmed that moral suasion may be resisted, but not regeneration.[73] Owen explicitly argues that the Spirit's work in regeneration is "infallible, victorious, irresistible, or always efficacious."[74] Anthony Burgess declared that regeneration is "irresistibly wrought in us by an insuperable efficacy of God's spirit."[75] Charnock says it is "insuperably victorious. … The power of the Spirit is sweet and irresistible."[76] The concept of "victory" was not therefore limited to Christ's death on the cross, but following from Christ's own victories over sin and evil, it was fitting that his should share in that victory in terms of how their salvation was understood. What could be better than to say that God will be victorious in those whom he dwells by his Spirit?

Van Mastricht explains why regeneration must be irresistible: "If anyone could at his pleasure resist the divine agency in regeneration, then all could, and so it might be the case that not one would be regenerated, and thus the whole glorious design of redemption might be frustrated."[77] Speaking of the will in regeneration, Owen says, "The will, in the first act of conversion … acts not but as it is acted, moves not but as it is moved; and therefore is passive therein."[78] What this means is that a mighty gracious "secret act" "is antecedent unto its own acting."[79] The Spirit acts on the will before the will acts, but the will is meant to act according to its new inclination. The will has been determined or given a new propensity—a new principle. We receive not merely a power for the first act of faith, but there is a power in us to (perpetually) believe. All works of obedience by faith are done in the power that has been granted from above—a power that Owen calls "habitual grace" or "indwelling grace."

This grace is not *in potentia*, as if there were a power in us by nature to believe before we do believe. Rather, God works faith in a sinner by a "creating act" (Eph 2:10; 2 Cor 5:17). As Owen says, "the effects of creating acts are not *in potentia* anywhere but in the active power of God; so was the world itself before its actual existence."[80] Faith is a supernatural gift given from God (Phil 1:29; Eph 2:8), wrought by his power (Eph 2:13). God works faith and repentance in his elect as effects of his grace; "And," says Owen, "his working in us infallibly produceth the effect intended, because it is actual faith that he works, and not only a power to believe, which we may either put forth and make use of or suffer to be fruitless, according to the pleasure of our own wills."[81] So the working of God's power in faith is infallibly efficacious because God works actual faith by granting to us the habit of faith that cannot be lost.

Charnock refers to this work of God as "insuperably victorious." God's work in regeneration "is not a faint and languishing impression, but a reviving, sprightly, and victorious touch. As the demonstration of the Spirit is clear and undeniable, so the power of the Spirit is sweet and irresistible … 1 Cor. 2:4. An inexpressible sweetness allures the soul, and an unconquerable power draws the soul; there are clear

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[73] Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 2002). 43–46.
[74] Owen, *Works*, 3:317.
[75] Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 226
[76] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:288.
[77] Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 43–44.
[78] Owen, *Works*, 3:319–20.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Owen, 3:321.
[81] Owen, 3:324.

demonstrations, charming persuasions, and invincible efficacy combined together in the work. He leaves not the will in indifference."[82] The will is not "made alive" with a desire for Christ, only to be, in the final analysis, indifferent to the gospel. The inward work of the Spirit, working upon the mind and the will, cannot but lead to a necessary, ongoing embrace of the person and work of Christ.

Such an "irresistibleness" does not remove the will's freedom. For example, Christ's obedience to the Father was "free and voluntary, yet necessary and irresistible."[83] Charnock affirms the impeccability of Christ on account of the hypostatic union, but this only highlights how God can be freely and necessarily good: "He cannot be otherwise than good, he will not be otherwise than good. So the will is irresistibly drawn, and yet doth freely come to its own happiness. The soul is brought over to God, and adheres to him, not by a necessity of compulsion, but of immutability."[84] As a new creature in Christ, there is a certain necessity in each child of God whereby he serves God that is not inconsistent with a willing desire to serve God. The "necessity of nature" is not only true of God and the angels, but also of those in Christ.

The irresistibleness of grace is not only a doctrine that man will certainly believe in God and Christ, but that his new regenerate state cannot be undone by his own willing since his will has been forever changed with inclinations toward God rather than away from God. Semi-pelagians, Arminians (i.e., Remonstrants), and even most Lutheran theologians held that the regenerate could ultimately divest themselves of the grace received.[85] The person who has experienced a mere "moral suasion" toward God can also experience a change away from God. This may be true of those in the visible church who have believed with a spurious faith, but it cannot be true of those who have been given a supernatural gift of faith. The Leiden Synopsis speaks of those who have had a taste given to them by the Spirit, "so that their hearts are touched by a momentary feeling of happiness" (Matt 13:20).[86]

John Flavel (c. 1627–1691) argued that new life in Christ is "no transient, vanishing thing, but a fixed, permanent principle, which abides in the soul for ever." Furthermore, he adds, "grace cannot be separated from the soul: when all forsake us, this will not leave us."[87] Regeneration means that grace infallibly resists apostasy since the power of Christ's intercession is greater than the power of our desire to fall away from God. Grace is a fixed principle—victorious always—because it makes us unwilling to want to be apart from God. Once the habit of faith, hope, and love is poured into the soul, there cannot be stronger habits of contrary principles that would prove victorious over these graces from above.

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[82] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:288.

[83] Charnock, 3:288.

[84] Ibid.

[85] In terms of the Reformed tradition, the matter is a little more complex than previously thought. See Jay T. Collier, *Debating Perseverance: The Augustinian Heritage in Post-Reformation England* (Oxford: OUP, 2018).

[86] *Synopsis Purioris*, 223.

[87] *The Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 2:91.

A Picture of the Regenerate

The vital principle of the regenerate is the law written in the heart by the Spirit, which produces likeness to God. A new creature in Christ is conformed to God; or the begotten is in the likeness of the begetter, which is the pattern we see between the Father and the Son. Sin makes us in Satan's image, but regeneration makes us in God's image (Col 2:10). Through God's divine power, we possess a habit that inclines us toward godliness, such that we are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4).

A person in Christ is denominated as divine because of grace, which is a divine principle. If there is a perfection in any person, it is essentially from somewhere else (i.e., God). Thus, according to Charnock, "Grace being the highest perfection of the creature, must be somewhere essentially. Where can that be but in God?"[88] This likeness to God is not "in essence," as if we participate in his essence. We cannot participate in an infinite essence that is alone communicated to the Son and by procession to the Holy Spirit. The natural and necessary operations of the three persons are peculiar to them. At bottom, "the divine essence is incommunicable to any creature. Infiniteness cannot be represented, much less communicated."[89] Notwithstanding this basic principle of the Creator-creature distinction, the participation that Peter speaks of (2 Pet 1:4) is a real participation. This real participation consists in the communication of grace, "whereby a divine nature is communicated."[90]

Regeneration as the new birth is the production of a living thing by another. In our case, God "caused us to be born again to a living hope" (1 Pet 1:3). We are born with a likeness to his nature, which is why we are exhorted to be holy because God is holy (1 Pet 1:16). Thus, for Charnock, "Something of God's perfections are in the new creature by way of quality, which are in God by way of essence. In a word, it is as real a likeness to God as the creature is capable of, laid in the first draughts of it in regeneration, and completed in the highest measures in glory."[91] This point illustrates how regeneration is not merely a one-time act of God upon a sinner, but a divine work that includes the whole process of renewal in the image of God (Col 3:10).

Being re-made in the image of God is, for the Christian, more specifically being made in the image of Christ. In regeneration we are enabled to partake of a "real likeness to Christ in righteousness, though not an equal perfection."[92] Our new nature is the implanting of Christ into the soul, "Not by any communication of his substance, either of the divine or human nature," says Charnock, "but by conveying such affections into us, which bear a likeness to the affections of Christ."[93] The doctrine of regeneration is therefore not simply a focus upon the sovereign work of the Spirit in imparting life to spiritually dead creatures, but more specifically upon the Spirit imparting the life and mind of Christ to those whom God has predestined to be conformed to his Son (Rom 8:29). In a wonderful turn of phrase, Charnock quips,

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[88] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:124.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Charnock, 3:125.
[92] Charnock, 3:126.
[93] Ibid.

"Jesus Christ conformed himself to us, by assuming the human nature; and God conforms us to Christ, by bestowing upon us a divine."[94]

The goal of regeneration is full conformity to Christ, not simply to bring sinners into a state of grace. This explains in part why regeneration is such a special doctrine. Christ is formed in sinners who therefore glorify their Savior in the most special way by an imitation that leads to a complete likeness at glory when we shall see, as Charnock notes, "Christ as he is in glory" (1 John 3:2).[95]

Conclusion

This look at the doctrine of regeneration among Charnock and other Early Modern Reformed theologians exhibits a number of key characteristics. First, any doctrine of regeneration that does not highlight the trinitarian nature of salvation is inadequate, especially against the sub-trinitarian doctrines offered by other theological traditions. Just as the doctrine of adoption cannot focus exclusively on the Father, so the doctrine of regeneration cannot focus exclusively on the Spirit. Charnock shows us the importance of each person in the godhead for safeguarding both the glory of God and the gracious nature of salvation from above. Second, while the emphasis in this essay has not been on exegesis, all substantial treatments of the doctrine of regeneration considered not just multiple key texts, but the overarching scope of Scripture. In this respect, biblical-theological and historical-systematic sensitivities were friends of exegetical theology. Third, based upon the biblical evidence, the doctrine of regeneration is a "big" doctrine; it incorporates not only the beginning of the Christian life, but also its progress and conclusion when Christ not only makes us complete (sinless) in his image, but makes all things new. We are awaiting both our glorified bodies and the glorified new heavens and earth. This all falls under the doctrine of regeneration. But, with that said, Reformed divines still distinguished between the applied benefits of calling, conversion, regeneration, justification, sanctification, etc. Fourth, the scholastic toolbox was required to clarify the important ways in which both God and man were active agents in salvation. We are surely providing an anemic theology of regeneration when we say it is exclusively the work of God. In a certain sense, that is true, but as we have seen above, based upon distinct causes, there are important ways in which we speak of the acting and willing of the human that God has saved as a result of regeneration. So, in conversion, the human will is involved, even if in regeneration the person is at first wholly passive. But the turning to or movement towards God, involving a new free act of the will, happens because of regeneration wherein God produces new spiritual qualities in the person and excites them to action.

Finally, when we take time to investigate how careful our Reformed forefathers were in offering us a doctrine of regeneration that considers so many different theological and philosophical concerns, we are better equipped to speak today in ways that avoid soundbite theological statements that have the air of grandstanding when in fact we should be—if I may coin a term—displaying our corporate "grandlearning" on such an important locus of theology. Love to God and our

[94] Charnock, *Complete Works*, 3:126.
[95] Charnock, 3:124.

neighbour demands not simply defending the truth, but also setting forth the truth with precision and clarity. To that end, our Reformed forefathers have much to teach us today about the art of careful theology for the sake of the Church.

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JOHN OWEN ON REGENERATION

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Late seventeenth-century England was rife with civil war. War raged not simply over borders or political control, but theology. In the midst of this war, John Owen presented a defense of what he considered the orthodox teaching on regeneration. Regeneration is a work of the Spirit, bringing dead men and women to life, making them into new creatures, implanting in them a new principle of righteousness. According to Owen, whoever denies the truth that regeneration is entirely a work of the Trinity and not man's will or reason "overthrows the gospel, and all the whole work of the Spirit of God, and of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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When John Owen wrote on regeneration in the 1670s, England was recovering from the fallout of a bitter series of civil wars. The conflict between King Charles I and his Royalist army and Parliament's army led by Oliver Cromwell were the last wars of religion fought on English soil. The King and his Royalists favored an Arminian understanding of salvation, while Parliament, responding to countless petitions calling for biblical reform, desired to bring the nation more in line with the Reformed churches of the continent and Scotland.[1] Theologians from all over England tirelessly petitioned Parliament to revise the Church of England's Thirty-nine Articles—the foundational documents of the Church, so that there could be "no shadow of an Arminian" in them.[2] Crafted during England's nascent departure from Catholicism in the mid-1500s, the Articles were not Catholic, but were sufficiently vague on matters of election, predestination, grace, law, justification, and sanctification to allow varied understandings to be present and to be considered "orthodox" in the Church.

[1] See Whitney G. Gamble, *Christ and the Law* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Press, 2018) and Whitney G. Gamble, "The Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith in its Context," in *History of Scottish Theology*, eds. David Fergusson and Mark Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 265–278 for more information about the historical and theological context of the early decades of the 1600s.

[2] R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 184.

In response to these petitions, Parliament called an esteemed group of pastors and theologians to Westminster, London to re-write the Articles. Parliament's move was bold—the King was pleased with his Church's doctrine and had decreed that it was illegal to change it. The theologians, now known as the Westminster assembly, gathered anyway and worked throughout the war to produce a doctrinal statement marked by precision and clarity, not ambiguity and inclusion. The assembly's labors resulted in an optimistic and new confession of faith for what was to be a united church of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.

The civil wars officially ended in 1651. But the next decade would prove that while Parliament won the war against the King, she lost the experiment in governing without a king. In 1660, King Charles I's son, Charles II, was invited to take the throne. He restored the Church of England to its pre-civil war religious habits and practices. This meant the Westminster assembly's work of reformation was rejected, its completed *Confession of Faith* publicly burned in London. Charles II reinstated the Thirty-nine Articles as the Church's official teaching under the new Clarendon Code, and the Book of Common Prayer was required to be used in worship.

Over 2,500 ministers, John Owen among them, refused to conform to the King's religious policies. In response, the King took away the "Nonconformists'" livings. He effectively silenced them from public life—the Clarendon Code mandated that all municipal officials take communion in the Church of England and reject the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643.[3] The Code also forbade Nonconformists to step within five miles of incorporated towns and to return to where they had practiced ministry. They were forbidden to enter university, teach, and to meet in groups of more than five people who were not members of the same household.

A Battle for Legitimacy

The restoration of the Thirty-nine Articles sparked a new civil war in the 1660s and 1670s. Theologians took up words instead of arms, and a vitriolic battle of argumentation ensued between the "conformists" and Noncomformists.[4] The touchstone issue was soteriology—specifically, justification by faith alone and regeneration.[5] Is justification a gift of God, given to those who, by faith, apprehended Christ's imputed righteousness? Are men and women able to receive justification or

[3] In the early 1640s, Parliament's army lost several important battles, which led Parliament to approach the Scottish Parliament and the General Assembly of the Scottish church seeking help. Scotland agreed to send an army to help the Parliamentary cause, but on the condition that the Solemn League and Covenant be signed. The Covenant's terms included the drafting of a new confession of faith and Covenant signers swore to preserve the already-established form of "Doctrine, Worship, Discipline, and Government" in Scotland and work to reform England's and Wales' doctrine, worship, discipline, and government "according to the Word of God, and the example of the best Reformed Churches." *A Solemne League and Covenant for Reformation and Defence of Religion* (1643), 4.

[4] See John Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), and Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), for summaries of the theological debates during this time.

[5] Christopher Haigh, "'Theological Wars': 'Socinians' v. 'Antinomians' in Restoration England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 67, no. 2 (April 2016): 325–50, provides an excellent summary and analysis of the debate, especially as it relates to the doctrine of justification.

become regenerated apart from the work of the Spirit? Polemically, the two sides became "solifidians" versus "Pelagians;" "antinomians" versus "Socinians;" and the "reformed" versus "Arminians."[6]

Conformists largely rejected the imputation of Christ's righteousness and held that regeneration was possible through one's mind's apprehension of the reasonable truths of Scripture. The conformists were pleased to return to the politically safe and "orthodox" Thirty-nine Articles, and they branded the Nonconformists—those who had fought for biblical reformation in the 1640s and 1650s—as dissenters, schismatics, and rebellious incendiaries. Afterall, in the eyes of the conformists, the Nonconformist discontent with theological status quo had been the match that set fire to the most horrific series of civil wars England had ever known. The Nonconformists' arguments over total depravity, God's electing grace, the nature of Christ's work, and most importantly, the nature of justification, were not only unnecessary, but seditious.

The Nonconformists upheld the necessity of the imputation of Christ's righteousness by faith and fought for the idea that regeneration was the Spirit's taking a dead heart and making it new. They followed the Westminster assembly's *Confession of Faith*, which had expounded in no uncertain terms a Reformed understanding of regeneration. Chapter 10 of the *Confession* explained that God worked regeneration by effectually calling his people. He enlightened their minds "spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God," taking away their heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by his almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ. The *Confession* stated that there was no other way men and women can be saved—even if they were diligent to "frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the laws of that religion they do profess." For the authors of the *Confession*, to assert anything different is "very pernicious, and to be detested."[7]

From the Nonconformist perspective, with the re-instatement of the Thirty-nine Articles, a new tide of "Pelagian Arminianism," as they termed it, washed over the Church. The Articles once again obscured and trivialized the doctrine of justification, and with it, the glory and reputation of Christ and his work.

John Owen, who by the 1670s was nearing the end of a long career, entered the debate reluctantly. He had battled Arminianism since the 1640s. He had, out of conviction, left his studies at Oxford University when it became controlled by Arminian supporters. By leaving Oxford, Owen relinquished all hope for pastoral or academic success. His first book, *A Display of Arminianisme*, published in 1642, was

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[6] For an excellent analysis of the rise of Arminianism in England, see Anthony Milton, ed., *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort (1618–1619)* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), and Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). For antinomianism, see David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil War England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), and Gamble, *Christ and the Law*. For Socinianism, see Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[7] *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, Concerning part of a Confession of Faith, Presented by them lately to both Houses of Parliament* (London, 1646), 19–20.

a resounding indictment of Arminianism and placed him at odds with the prevailing powers. He continued the fight for the next several tumultuous decades.

Owen completed his magnum opus on the work of the Holy Spirit, *Pneumatologia, or, A discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in 1674 at the height of the theological war.[8] His work, like several of his others published in the 1660s and 1670s, was offered as a defense that his, and his fellow Nonconformists' theological positions, were the Church of England's historic teachings, rooted in the ancient Church Fathers and in Scripture. Owen argues that he is not a radical, schismatic, or a dissenter—instead, the teaching currently prevalent in the Church was the distortion, summoning Pelagius from his tomb, resurrecting old Arminian heresies. He wrote against what he understood to be a new wave of moralism in the Church. Owen argued that those who held to regeneration as consisting in a reformation of morals were on the path to atheism—their idea was "bold Pelagian figment" rising from a denial of original sin.[9]

Owen's *Discourse* defends the honor of the Spirit as the author of regeneration. Owen stated: "This truth, of the Holy Spirit being the author of our regeneration is granted by all who pretend to sobriety in Christianity. That by some other it hath been derided and exploded is the occasion of this vindication of it. It must not be expected that I should here handle the whole doctrine of regeneration … it hath been done already by others. My present aim is only to confirm the fundamental principles of truth concerning those operations of the Holy Spirit, which at this day are opposed with violence and virulence."[10]

Theologically, Owen was accused of antinomianism: If one held to justification by faith alone and the imputation of Christ's righteousness, surely this left no room to goad men and women on to moral living.[11] Because Owen denied that regeneration consists in a moral reformation or that men and women could be saved by the "light of reason," he was branded an antinomian. In response, Owen wrote to address the "pretended difficulty" in reconciling the necessity and nature of the believer's duty with the efficacy of the grace of the Spirit.[12] He endeavoured to make clear that not only is the necessity of the believer's duty consistent with the efficacy of God's grace, but also that without the aid and assistance of God's grace, believers cannot perform any duty or attempt any course of obedience.[13]

Owen's Defense

Owen begins his defense of what he understands to be the reformed and biblical position on regeneration with the claim that there are only two types of people: those who are regenerate and those who are unregenerate. This, he argues, is the "general

[8] Christopher Haigh, "'Theological Wars,'" 325–50, provides an excellent summary and analysis of the debate, especially as it relates to the doctrine of justification.

[9] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850–1855; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965–1968), 3:220–23.

[10] Owen, *Works*, 3:209–10. See also, Owen, 3:9.

[11] Owen, 3:218.

[12] Owen, 3:10.

[13] Ibid.

consent of Christians," as well as apparent in the Scripture.[14] He calls his opponents to look at the work of the British delegates to the Synod of Dort, who affirmed his position clearly in their *Suffrage*.[15] King James I sent the bishops to represent the Church of England at the Synod and they argued for this same truth—that the natural man is completely corrupt and must be given new life in order to be saved.

Owen argues that unless one knows the greatness of his apostasy from God, the depravation of his nature, the power and guilt of sin, and the holiness and severity of the law, he cannot know the nature of repentance, faith, justification, or Christ himself.[16] This knowledge is above reason, and it is "vain to dispute concerning justification with men who have not been convinced of a state of sin."[17]

Regeneration is the deliverance of men and women from the state and condition under which they are born—namely, with a corrupt nature and dead in their trespasses and sins. Owen provides a lengthy description of what it means to have a corrupt nature: Scripture defines it as a corrupted and depraved *mind*— a darkened and blind mind which brings forth vanity, ignorance, and folly. A corrupt mind also has a depraved will and affection, which is expressed by weakness and impotency, stubbornness and obstinacy.[18] Those with a corrupt nature are spiritually dead, their nature is dominated by death.[19] Those with a corrupt nature are "alienated from the life of God (Eph 4:18)."[20]

A "life of God," as Owen describes this phrase, is a life lived to God—a life which God requires of his people that they may please him on earth and come to the enjoyment of him hereafter. It is a life of faith and spiritual obedience. God works this life in his people, not naturally by his power, but spiritually, by his grace. It is that life where God lives in his people—in and by his Spirit through Jesus Christ. It is a life where God's people live to him, where God is the supreme and absolute end. It is a life where believers do all things for God's glory, and they "design in and by it to come unto the eternal enjoyment of him as our blessedness and reward." It is a life whose fruits are holiness and spiritual, evangelical obedience. Lastly, it is a life that does not die.[21]

To be spiritually dead means that one has no liking for the life of God, no inclination to it—the entirety of the carnal soul has an aversion to it. Those who are spiritually dead cannot perform a spiritually vital act—they can perform no act of life where they live to God or such an act as is acceptable to him—unless they are endowed with a "quickening principle of grace."[22]

Owen states unequivocally that there is "no power in men by nature whereby they are of themselves … able to perceive, know, will, or do any thing in such a way or manner

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[14] Owen, *Works*, 3:243–44.

[15] Owen, 3:243.

[16] Owen, 5:20–21; 2:100. For a detailed analysis of how Owen develops this point in his 1677 *Doctrine of Justification*, see Whitney G. Gamble, "John Owen on the Doctrine of Justification," in *Handbook of John Owen*, ed. John W. Tweeddale and Crawford Gribben (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, Forthcoming, 2022).

[17] Owen, *Works*, 5:46–48, 53–54, 69–70.

[18] Owen, 3:282.

[19] Owen, 3:244, 246.

[20] Owen, 3:255.

[21] Owen, 3:255–256.

[22] Owen, 3:288.

as that it should be accepted with God, with respect unto our spiritual life unto him, according to his will, and future enjoyment of him, without the efficacious infusion into them, or creation in them, of a new gracious principle or habit enabling them thereunto; and that this is accordingly wrought in all that believe by the Holy Ghost."[23]

Scripture teaches that the work of conversion itself, and especially, the act of believing or faith itself, is expressly said to be of God, wrought in believers by him, given to them from him. Faith, repentance, and conversion themselves are the work and effect of God.[24] It is preposterous for believers to pray that God would persuade them to exercise faith or belief or repentance—these are things that believers pray that *God* would supply: "God in our conversion, by the exceeding greatness of his power, as he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, actually worketh faith and repentance in us, gives them unto us, bestows them on us; so that they are mere effects of his grace in us."[25] The church of God "has always prayed that God would work these things in us … they pray that he would convert them; that he would create a clean heart and renew a right spirit in them; that he would give them faith for Christ's sake, and increase it in them."[26]

God's working in his people "infallibly produceth the effect intended, because it is actual faith that he works, and not only a power to believe, which we may either put forth and make use of or suffer to be fruitless, according to the pleasure of our own wills."[27] God works repentance in his people by a power that is infallibly efficacious, and which the will of man never resists. No man ever circumcised his own heart. No man can say he began to do it by the power of his own will, and then God only helped him by his grace.

Owen summarizes his opponents: they claim that men have by "nature certain notions and principles concerning God and the obedience due unto him, which are demonstrable by the light of reason; and certain abilities of mind to make use of them unto their proper end."[28] Those on the opposing side affirm the power of the *intellectual faculties* of the soul, as though the soul were "neither debased, corrupted, impaired, nor depraved."[29] They describe the fallen nature as only affected by the "disorder of the affections and the inferior sensitive parts of the soul, which are apt to tulmultuate and rebel against that pure untainted light which is in the mind!"[30]

In order for a "light of reason" argument to work, one must completely ignore the state of the lapsed nature of man, according to Owen. Those who hold to this, Owen declares, must never once have consulted the Scriptures, or, they have simply "gone over into the tents of the Pelagians."[31] Owen states that "men may cavil whilst they please about this carnal mind, and contend that it is only the sensitive part of the soul, or the affections, as corrupted by prejudices and by depraved habits of vice …

[23] Owen, *Works*, 3:288.
[24] Owen, 3:320.
[25] Owen, 3:324.
[26] Owen, 3:312.
[27] Owen, 3:324.
[28] Owen, 3:314.
[29] Owen, 3:245.
[30] Owen, 3:245; 257–258.
[31] Owen, 3:245.

[and yet] this carnal mind is in all mankind, whoever they be, who are not partakers of the Spirit of God and his quickening power."[32]

Owen pleads for the "ancient catholic church, declared in the writings of the most learned fathers and determinations of councils against the Pelagians, whose errors and heresies are again revived among us by a crew of Socianized Arminians."[33]

After this lengthy treatment of the corrupt mind and nature, Owen summarizes: "And from what hath been spoken, we do conclude that the mind in the state of nature is so depraved, vitiated, and corrupted, that it is not able, upon the proposal of spiritual things unto it in the dispensation and preaching of the gospel, to understand, receive, and embrace them in a spiritual and saving manner, so as to have the sanctifying power of them thereby brought into and fixed in the soul, without an internal, especial, immediate, supernatural, effectual, enlightening act of the Holy Ghost."[34] Owen writes to prove "the indispensable necessity of a saving work of illumination on the mind, to enable it to receive spiritual things spiritually."[35]

Definition of Regeneration

Owen then outlines the doctrine of regeneration. First, the Holy Spirit is the immediate author of regeneration: all of Scripture assigns regeneration to be the proper and peculiar work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the principle efficient cause of regeneration—he in whom regeneration occurs is said to be "born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). The "natural and carnal means of blood, flesh, and the will of man, are rejected wholly in this matter, and the whole efficiency of the new birth is ascribed unto God alone." The product of the Spirit's work is "spirit"—a "new spiritual being, creature, nature, life." That which is born of flesh is flesh, but that which is born of Spirit is spirit (John 1:13). It is the Spirit who enlivens, the flesh profits nothing (John 6:62; Rom 8:9,10; Titus 3:4–6).

In regeneration, the Spirit takes from the sinner's heart its enmity, carnal prejudices, and depraved inclinations, though not absolutely and perfectly, and fills the heart with holy spiritual love, joy, fear, and delight, "not changing the being of our affections, but sanctifying and guiding them by the principle of saving light and knowledge before described, and uniting them unto their proper object in a due manner."[36]

The Spirit worked mightily to prepare and form the natural body of Christ. In this work, the Spirit began the new creation, the foundation of the gospel state and church. As he prepared the natural body of Christ, so he now prepares the mystical body of Christ—Christ's Bride, the church.[37] Where there was previously darkness and death, the Spirit, through regeneration, communicates a new principle of spiritual life to the souls of God's elect.

Despite great variety in the perception and understanding of the work in whom it is wrought, the Spirit's work of regeneration is the same work—the same kind and

[32] Owen, *Works*, 3:288.
[33] Owen, 3:245.
[34] Owen, 3:281.
[35] Owen, 3:275.
[36] Owen, 3:335.
[37] Owen, 3:207.

wrought by the same power—in all that were, are, or will be regenerate."[38] The condition of all men is the same throughout all ages: one is not by nature more unregenerate than another. All men "since the fall, and the corruption of our nature by sin, are in the same state and condition toward God. They are all alike alienated from him, and all alike under his curse."[39]

Likewise, all people who are regenerated are brought into the same state: "Though one may be more beautiful than another, as having the image of his heavenly Father more evidently impressed on him, though no more truly. Men may be more or less holy, more or less sanctified, but they cannot be more or less regenerate."[40]

Owen states emphatically: there was never but "one kind of regeneration in this world, the essential form of it being specifically the same in all."[41] The doctrine that everyone who will enter the kingdom of God must be born again of the Holy Spirit was contained in the writings of the Old Testament, just as in the New. Yet, the revelation of regeneration in the Old Testament was "but obscure in comparison of that light and evidence which it is brought forth into by the gospel."[42] All of God's elect are regenerated by God's Spirit, even those in the Old Testament. However, when Christ came, he brought life and immortality to light—the nature of regeneration itself is far more "clearly, evidently, and distinctly revealed and declared."[43]

Owen argues that Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus proves that regeneration was so "obscurely declared" that the principal masters and teachers of the people knew little or nothing about it.[44] When Jesus presented the doctrine clearly to Nicodemus, Nicodemus was surprised and amazed. Owen comments: "Our Saviour knowing how all our faith and obedience to God, and all our acceptance with him, depend on our regeneration, or being born again, acquaints him with the necessity of it; wherewith he is at first surprised."[45] And yet, Jesus shows by his reproof that Nicodemus *should* have understood the doctrine, as it was contained in the Old Testament promises "that God would circumcise the hearts of his people—that he would take away their heart of stone, and give them a heart of flesh, with his law written in it, and other ways."[46]

Owen describes the grace of regeneration that delivers a sinner from his natural state: it is a *vivification* or quickening. Though dead, sinners "hear" the voice of the Son of God and live. This cannot be done except through an effectual communication of a principle of spiritual life. Regeneration is a new, "spiritual, supernatural, vital principle or habit of grace, infused into the soul, the mind, will, and affections, by the power of the Holy Spirit, disposing and enabling them in whom it is unto spiritual, supernatural, vital acts of faith and obedience."[47]

Regeneration is an "implantation of a new principle of spiritual life, of a life unto God in repentance, faith, and obedience, or universal holiness, according to the

[38] Owen, *Works*, 3:213–14.
[39] Owen, 3:215.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Owen, 3:210.
[43] Owen, 3:212.
[44] Owen, 3:210.
[45] Owen, 3:208.
[46] Owen, 3:210.
[47] Owen, 3:329.

gospel truth, or the truth which came by Jesus Christ."[48] There is an "effectual, powerful, creating act of the Holy Spirit put forth in the minds of men their conversion unto God, enabling them spiritually to discern spiritual things; wherein the seed and substance of divine faith is contained."[49] The renovation of the sinner's mind has a transforming power to change the whole soul to be in an obedient frame to God. Regeneration becomes the head, fountain, or beginning of sanctification.[50]

It is true that God commands believers to circumcise *their own* hearts and make them new, but Owen explains that that is the believer's *duty*, not his or her *power*. God himself promises to work in his people what he requires of them. The power believers have to exercise the progress of this work proceeds from the infused principle which they receive in regeneration.[51]

In characteristic fashion as the theologian of the Trinity, Owen then outlines the Trinitarian nature of salvation: "The whole blessed Trinity, and each person therein, acting distinctly in the work of our salvation. The spring or fountain of the whole lieth in the kindness and love of God, even the Father. … Whatever is done in the accomplishment of this work, it is so in the pursuit of his will, purpose, and counsel, and is an effect of his love and grace. The procuring cause of the application of the love and kindness of God unto us is Jesus Christ our Saviour, in the whole work of his mediation. And the immediate efficient cause in the communication of the love and kindness of the Father through the mediation of the Son unto us, is the Holy Spirit."[52] The Holy Spirit does this by the renovation of sinners' natures by the washing of regeneration—where sinners are purged from their sins and sanctified to God. [53]

That Which Is Preparatory for Regeneration

Moving from his definition of regeneration, Owen explains that there are preparatory works to regeneration.[54] All preparatory works are wrought instrumentally by the Spirit of God and are the effects of his power. That which is preparatory for regeneration is the Spirit's work to convict a sinner of his or her sin. Conviction of sin involves a discovery of the true nature of sin by the ministry of the law, an application of that discovery made in the mind or understanding to the conscience of the sinner, and finally, the engagement of affections suitable to that discovery and application.

Owen explains the degrees of illumination and the ingredients that make up conviction of sin. God uses both outward and inward means to bring men and women to salvation. One is the outward attendance to the word of God, because "faith comes by hearing."[55] The Spirit works how and when he pleases, so there is great variety in the outward means which he uses to effectually call the elect. However, the primary way he regenerates is through the preaching of the Word.[56]

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[48] Owen, *Works*, 3:330.
[49] Owen, 3:332.
[50] Owen, 3:299.
[51] Owen, 3:336, 367, 382, 388, 393, 404. See also Owen, 6:62 and 2:182.
[52] Owen, 3:209.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Owen, 3:301.
[55] Owen, 3:230.
[56] Owen, 3:213.

Men and women must also "attend" the means of grace—to understand and receive the things revealed and declared as the mind and will of God. Owen is clear that even with the most diligent use of these outward means, men and women are not capable to regenerate themselves. There must still be an "especial, effectual, internal work of the Holy Spirit of grace on their whole souls."[57] Inwardly, the preached word is the *instrumental cause* of three things that precede regeneration: illumination, conviction of sin, and a reformation of life.[58]

Owen then explains the degrees of illumination and the ingredients that make up conviction of sin. All of these preparatory works are things wrought instrumentally by the Spirit of God—they are the effects of his power. God's Word itself, under a "bare proposal to the minds of men, will not so affect them." There must be a work of God's Spirit.[59]

What Regeneration Is Not

Owen moves on to discuss what regeneration is not. In doing so, he summarizes the popular and "misguided" understanding of regeneration prevalent in his day: that men and women are naturally able to become regenerated as they hear the logical, "suited to reason" presentation of the gospel. He summarized his opponents' understanding of this gospel: God revealed himself to all in the declaration of the law and the gospel. The reception of this doctrine in belief and practice is enforced by promises and threatenings. The things revealed, taught, and commanded are not only good in themselves, but are also "so suited to reason and interest of mankind as that the mind cannot but be disposed and inclined to receive and obey them, unless overpowered by prejudices and a course of sin."[60] The consideration of the promises and threatenings of the gospel is sufficient to remove man's prejudices and reform his way of life. Upon a compliance with the doctrine of the gospel and obedience to it, men and women are made partakers of the Spirit, with other privileges of the New Testament, and have a right to all of God's promises of the present and future life.

This "Pelagian" view exalts man's reason, logic, and obedience. According to Owen, his opposition holds to the idea that upon the mind's illumination and understanding of the reasonable truth, the will determines to choose that which is good, and believes and repents. Grace is then supplied and "helps and aids it in the perfection of its act; so that the whole work is of grace."

Owen disagrees: if the Spirit illuminates the mind and aids the will by persuading it of what is reasonable only, there is no real strength communicated or infused but what the will is at perfect liberty to make use of or to refuse at pleasure. "Now this, in effect, is no less than to overthrow the whole grace of Jesus Christ, and to render it useless; for it ascribes unto man the honour of his conversion, his will being the principal cause of it."[61] This understanding of regeneration "makes a man to beget himself anew, or to be born again of himself." It takes away the analogy that there is

[57] Owen, *Works*, 3:231.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Owen, 3:235.
[60] Owen, 3:302.
[61] Owen, 3:311.

between "the forming of the natural body of Christ in the womb, and the forming of his mystical body in regeneration."[62]

Owen does not discount the mind in regeneration—in fact, certainly in the case of mature conversions, reasonable arguments are important and affect one's mind. However, the whole of the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion does not consist in reasonable arguments that affect the mind.

Locating regeneration merely in the mind and not the conversion of the will leads to "the whole glory of our regeneration and conversion unto ourselves, and not to the grace of God."[63] Owen states that not only does this leave regeneration as something entirely uncertain, as it is dependent upon one's will to choose it or not, it is also contrary to the testimony of Scripture, which affirms that it is God who works to will and do. Owen explains that the act of willing in one's conversion is God's operation—although men and women will themselves, it is God who causes people to will, by working in them to will and to do.

While regeneration does not consist merely in the mind's apprehension of truth, it also does not consist merely in a moral reformation of life.[64] Someone may change from "sensuality unto temperance, from rapine to righteousness, from pride and the dominion of irregular passions unto humility and moderation" through the preaching of the gospel. He may even be baptized accompanied with a profession of repentance and faith. And yet, this is not regeneration, nor do those things comprise regeneration within them.[65] Whatever there may be of actual righteousness in these things, they do not express an inherent, habitual righteousness.

Owen explains that regeneration is an infusion of a "new, real, spiritual principle into the soul and its faculties … disposed unto and suited for the destruction or expulsion of a contrary, inbred, habitual principle of sin and enmity against God."[66] There is also a "real physical work, whereby he [God] infuseth a gracious principle of spiritual life into all that are effectually converted and really regenerated."[67]

The new creation does not consist of a *new course of actions*, but in *renewed faculties*, with new dispositions, power, and ability to and for them.[68] This new person is called "new" because he or she is the product and effect of God's creating power. There is a "work of God in us preceding all our good works towards him; for before we can work any of them, in order of nature, we must be the workmanship of God, created unto them, or enabled spiritually for the performance of them."[69] Owen states that this is the constant "course and tenor of Scripture, to distinguish between the grace of regeneration, which it declares to be an immediate supernatural work of God in us and upon us, and all that obedience, holiness, righteousness, virtue, or whatever is good in us, which is the consequent, product, and effect of it."[70]

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[62] Owen, *Works*, 3:311.
[63] Owen, 3:308.
[64] Owen, 3:216–17.
[65] Owen, 3:218.
[66] Owen, 3:219.
[67] Owen, 3:307.
[68] Owen, 3:221.
[69] Owen, 3:222.
[70] Owen, 3:223.

The method of God's covenantal dealing with his people has been that he first washes and cleanses their nature, takes away their heart of stone, gives a heart of flesh, writes his law on their hearts, and puts his Spirit in them. Then, they walk in his statutes, keep his judgments, and do them.[71]

Regeneration *produces* a reformation of life, it does not *consist* in a reformation of life. The believer's obedience is a necessary duty that flows from regeneration. Regeneration is passive; it is wrought in a sinner. But it always and infallibly produces a reformation of life.[72] A reformed life is more fully produced in some than in others—it is communicated in various degrees, and it is improved upon to more or less faithfulness by those who are regenerated.

Continuing his description of what regeneration is not, Owen states that the work of regeneration does not consist in "enthusiastical raptures, ecstasies, voices, or any thing of the like kind."[73] The Spirit ordinarily works through means and he works upon people "suitably unto their natures" as the "faculties of their souls, their minds, wills, and affections are meet to be affected."[74] He does not come upon people with "involuntary raptures, using their faculties and powers as the evil spirit wrests the bodies of them whom he posesseth. Instead, the Spirit only works through what is determined and declared in his word."[75]

The work of the Spirit of God in regenerating sinners is to be diligently inquired after by the preachers of the word. Owen takes a moment to refute the idea, prevalent in his day, that it was a waste of time for preachers to spend long hours or conduct intense studies into the nature of regeneration. He argues that to be spiritually skilled in the nature of regeneration is "one of the principal furnishments of any of the work of the ministry, without which they will never be able to divide the word aright, nor show themselves workmen that need not be ashamed."[76] One cannot "discharge any one part of their duty and office in a right manner" without a proper and deep knowledge of the doctrine of regeneration. Ministers must be able to "comply with the will of God and the grace of the Spirit in the effecting and accomplishment of it upon the souls of them unto whom they dispense the word."[77]

If all who hear the gospel are born dead in trespasses and sins, and if preachers are appointed by God to be the instruments of their regeneration, "it is a madness, which must one day be accounted for, to neglect a sedulous inquiry into the nature of this work, and the means whereby it is wrought."[78] Owen anticipates objections to this idea: "But it will be objected, and hath against this doctrine been ever so since the days of Pelagius, 'That a supposition hereof renders all exhortations, commands, promises, and threatenings, which comprise the whole way of the external communication of the will of God unto us, vain and useless; for to what purpose is it

[71] Owen cites Ezek 36: 25–27; Jer 31:33; 32:39–40; Rom 6:3–6; Col 3:1–5; Eph 2:10, 4:23–25.
[72] Owen, *Works*, 3:219.
[73] Owen, 3:224.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Owen, 3:225.
[76] Owen, 3:227.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

to exhort blind men to see or dead men to live, or to promise rewards unto them upon their so doing?'"[79]

He answers the objection by stating that exhortations, promises, and threatenings do not primarily deal with one's present *ability*, but one's present *duty*. Their end is to declare to believers not what believers *can* do, but what they *ought* to do; and this is done fully in them.[80] God is pleased to use exhortations and promises as the means of communicating spiritual life and strength unto his people.

Without an infused habit of internal, inherent grace, received from Christ by an efficacious work of the Spirit, no one can believe or obey God, or perform any duty in a saving manner, so as it should be accepted with him. And if believers do not abide in this principle, "the whole poisonous flood of Pelagianism" is let into the church. To say that believers have a sufficiency to themselves so much as to "think a good thought, or to do any thing as we ought, any power, any ability that is our own, or in us by nature, however externally excited and guided by motives, directions, reasons, encouragements, of what sort soever, to believe or obey the gospel savingly in any one instance, is to overthrow the gospel and the faith of the catholic church in all ages."[81]

Conclusion

In the midst of the theological battles of the 1670s, Owen presents a defense of what he considers to be the biblical, orthodox, and historic teaching of the Church of England. Regeneration is a work of the Spirit, bringing dead men and women to life, making them into new creatures, implanting in them a new principle of righteousness.

Owen summarizes his view: "In our regeneration the native ignorance, darkness, and blindness of our minds are dispelled, saving and spiritual light being introduced by the power of God's grace unto them; that the pravity and stubbornness of our will are removed and taken away, a new principle of spiritual life and righteousness being bestowed on them; and that the disorder and rebellion of our affections are cured by the infusion of the love of God into our souls."[82]

For Owen, no one can be saved by the "light of nature" and no right conduct or moral reformation can produce or is even an indication of regeneration. The "corrupt imagination" of the opposing side who holds to this view is directly opposite the teaching of Scripture, the faith of the ancient church, and the experience of all sincere believers. The battle for who was the true inheritor of the Church of England was a battle to claim the hearts of the English people. And the stakes could not be higher. According to Owen, whoever denies the truth that regeneration is entirely a work of the Trinity and not man's will or reason "overthrows the gospel, and all the whole work of the Spirit of God, and of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."[83]

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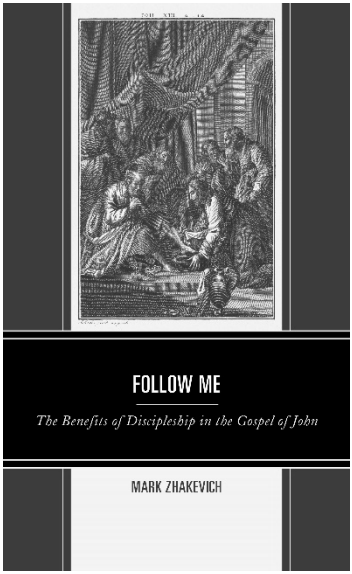
[79] Owen, *Works*, 3:288.
[80] Owen, 3:289.
[81] Owen, 3:292. See also Owen, 2:96ff; and 11:112, 209.
[82] Owen, 3:224.
[83] Owen, 3:218.



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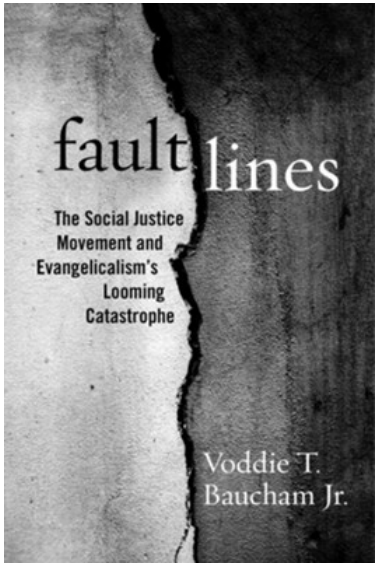

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MONERGISM

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"Monergism" indicates the view that God alone brings sinners from a state of spiritual death to spiritual life. When any sinner passes from death to life, it can only be because an energy other than his own has flowed upon him, the life-giving energy of God in Christ, giving him a new heart, a new understanding, a new direction of will. It took the Pelagian controversy of the early fifth century to galvanize the church to a clear understanding of the issues involved. After surveying the debate through church history, the article presents the biblical basis for monergism. The doctrine of monergistic grace has its spiritual counterpart in the practice of a God-centered gratitude—Am I grateful to the preacher for my salvation? Or myself? The "doctrine of gratitude" means that I give thanks to the triune God for the whole of my salvation.

* * * * *

Monergism derives from a Greek term meaning "single work" (*monos*, single; *ergon*, work). In patristic theology, "work"—and its associated term "energy"—was an important idea, having ramifications for both Trinitarian and Christological doctrine. To be brief, "work" or "energy" referred to the operation, activity, or functioning, that manifested a thing's nature. In Trinitarian theology, this idea was integral in setting forth the deity of the Son and the Spirit: from them, according to Scripture, flowed the work of creation. But that work is single. There are not three creations, still less three Creators. Therefore, Son and Spirit must be the single source of creation along with God the Father. The activity of creation flows from the single nature of God, which is possessed equally by Father, Son, and Spirit.

In modern times, the specific term "monergism" came to be used in the area of soteriology to describe the view, classically deriving from Augustine, that God alone brings sinners from a state of spiritual death to spiritual life.[1] The divine monergism displayed in creation applies also to the re-creation of fallen, lost, sinful man. In that

[1] Monergism seems to be of late English coinage—the 19th century, although it may well derive from an earlier German theological term.

salvific transition from the deadness of human guilt and depravity to new life in Christ, there is only a "single energy" at work—the energy of God. The sinner's bondage to sin is so deep, so total, that he cannot do anything toward his own liberation. As the Westminster Confession states:

> Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.[2]

When, therefore, any sinner passes from death to life, it can only be because an energy other than his own has flowed upon him, the life-giving energy of God in Christ, giving him a new heart, a new understanding, a new direction of will. If we wish to state this in a more radically Christological way, we could say that human nature has been "recreated" in Jesus Christ, by virtue of the union of divine and human natures in Him, a union given effect in Christ's obedience, death, and resurrection; this new life, present in and radiating from the risen Christ, now communicates itself to sinners as Christ is set before them in the gospel-proclamation of the Church.

Augustine (354–430) was the first of the early church fathers to articulate this "doctrine of grace" (as he called it) with systematic clarity and precision. Prior to Augustine, there had been no need for such clarity or precision in the Church's theology. If the Church had an enemy in its sights, it was (perhaps surprisingly to the modern ear) the widespread cult of astrology, with its "determinism of the stars." Patristic theologians were keen to deny this astral determinism; man is accountable for his own choices and actions, and cannot irresponsibly attribute them to astral influence. This meant that theology had every reason to emphasize human responsibility and freedom.[3]

However, alongside this emphasis, we do find utterances pointing toward what Augustine would later clarify and systematize, notably in the writings of Augustine's great mentor, Ambrose of Milan (339–97). Ambrose had a robust conception of the fall of all humanity in Adam, producing collective guilt and death, from which deliverance is found only in Christ and His redeeming, regenerating grace:

> We must accept the misery so that we might obtain the gift! For, as Scripture says, Christ "has come to save that which was lost" (Matt.18:11), and "to be Lord both of the dead and the living" (Rom.14:9). In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of Paradise, in Adam I died. How then shall the Lord call me back, unless He finds me in Adam, so that as I was liable to guilt and owing death in him, so now in Christ I am justified?[4]

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[2] Westminster Confession, 9:3.

[3] Another form of determinism was present in Gnosticism, which divided the human race into radically different kinds or categories, only one of which was destined (so to speak by its spiritual genes) for the Gnostic heaven.

[4] Ambrose, *On Belief in the Resurrection*, in *On the Death of His Brother Satyrus*, ch. 5–6. My rendering of the Latin.

It fell to Augustine to be the great clarifier and systematizer of the pre-Augustinian Church's undeveloped beliefs about human lostness in Adam, and regeneration by divine life-creating grace in Jesus Christ. Augustine stated the matter as follows, taking the conversion of Saul of Tarsus as his template:

> Tell me, please, what good Paul willed while he was still Saul, when he was in fact willing great evils, breathing out slaughter as he went, in a horrible darkness of mind and madness, to destroy Christians? What virtues of Saul's good will prompted God to convert him by a marvellous and sudden call from those evils to good things? What shall I say, when Paul himself cries, "Not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Tit.3:5)? And what about that saying of the Lord which I have already mentioned, "No one can come to Me"—that is, "believe in Me"—"unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (Jn.6:65)? Is faith given to the person who is already willing to believe, in recognition of the virtues of his good will? Or rather, is not the will itself stirred up from above, as in the case of Saul, *in order* that he may believe, even though he is so hostile to the faith that he persecutes believers?
>
> Indeed, how has the Lord commanded us to pray for those who persecute us? Do we pray that the grace of God may reward them for their good will? Do we not rather pray that the evil will may itself be changed into a good one? Surely the saints, whom Saul was persecuting, prayed for Saul, that his will might be converted to the faith which he was destroying; and they did not pray in vain. Indeed, the obviously miraculous nature of Saul's conversion made it clear that it originated in heaven. And how many enemies of Christ at the present day are suddenly drawn to Him by God's secret grace! Let me set down this word from the Gospel: "No-one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn.6:44).[5]

Those raised in a historic Protestant tradition, whether Reformed or Lutheran, may think that monergism is the obvious lesson both of Scripture and Christian experience. However, it took a specific controversy—the Pelagian controversy of the early fifth century—to galvanize the Church to a clear understanding of the issues involved. Before Pelagianism arose, the Church was content to remain in a less theologically articulate state, biased perhaps by its conflict with astral determinism to give emphasis to the responsibility/freedom side of the human equation (man's dignity as God's image-bearing creature), rather than to the bondage side (man's lostness in fallen Adam). Pelagianism proved to be a theological catalyst that made the Church think again.

Named after a British ascetic Pelagius (active 383–417), Pelagianism denied the fall of the human race in Adam (crudely, Pelagians thought every man was his own Adam), and asserted the fundamental autonomy of each human will to choose between good and evil. Augustine rightly regarded this libertarian individualism as destructive of any real agency of divine grace in human salvation, and wrote eloquently against Pelagianism in a rich stream of treatises, from 411 up until his death in 430. Augustine's close friend Jerome (347–420), the scholar who translated the Bible into Latin (the "Vulgate"), also fought Pelagianism in the literary sphere.

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[5] *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 1:37. My rendering.

Jerome's case shows how high party passion could run: a Pelagian mob assaulted and burnt down Jerome's monastery in Bethlehem in 416. (Perhaps such behaviour might have shown the Pelagians that human nature was not quite the innocent thing they made it out to be.)

At length, Pelagianism was condemned as heresy at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 430, more famous for condemning Nestorianism.[6] There was, however, a connection between the two movements. Nestorianism made (or was perceived to make) the human in Christ independent of the divine in the incarnation; Pelagianism made the human will independent of the divine in salvation. It is unsurprising, then, that these theological bedfellows met the same fate at the Council of Ephesus.

We may note, in passing, that controversy has always been the way doctrine has developed in the unfolding history of the Church. By the "development of doctrine," we mean of course the development in the Church's understanding of the doctrine laid down in Scripture. Doctrine is not some self-sufficient entity that has developed by its own laws. It certainly is, however, the development in the Christian apprehension of what the Spirit has given in the inspired Word. The most famous example of such development is how it took the Arian controversy, which occupied almost the whole of the fourth century, to compel the Church to hammer out a coherent doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ.[7] In the fifth century, the Pelagian controversy rendered the same service to the Church, when it came to her understanding of the nature of humanity's fall, its bondage to sin, and its salvation by the free and omnipotent grace of God in Jesus Christ.

The Eastern Greek Church, it must be noted, was never quite so enamoured of Augustine's monergism as the Western Latin Church was. The East preferred to tread a middle path between Augustine and Pelagius, the path of "synergism" ("working together"), in which the divine and human wills cooperated at every point. This was an advance on Pelagianism, since Eastern synergism admitted the corporate fall of the race in Adam, its inheritance from him of physical death, and the corruption of man's moral nature. However, the synergism of the Greek East held that fallen man's transition to new life was not sheerly an act of divine grace, but involved an element of free cooperation by the human will in its own salvation. This synergism has often been called "Semi-Pelagianism;" but given the Greek East's forceful rejection of Pelagianism at the Council of Ephesus in 431, it might be more generous to call it "Semi-Augustinianism." When no context existed in which emphasis on human agency seemed necessary, a Greek synergist could sound much like an Augustinian monergist. John Chrysostom (344–407), for example, the Greek East's mightiest preacher, could speak about the depth of sin in fallen man, and the almighty power of God in conversion, in this vein:

> Two things he requires them to understand, as it is their duty to understand them; to what blessings they are called, and how they have been released from their

[6] Ephesus was the third of the Ecumenical Councils of the Church, in between Constantinople in 381 and Chalcedon in 451. Nestorianism took its name from Nestorius (381–451), patriarch of Constantinople from 428 until his deposition in 431.

[7] Arianism—after Arius, an Alexandrian preacher—denied these truths. For Arius, the Son of God was the first and most exalted of God the Father's creations; but the Son was not true God or co-eternal with the Father.

> former state. … From understanding who we were, and how we believed, we shall know His power and sovereignty, in turning again to Himself those who had been so long time estranged from Him, "for the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25.) Inasmuch as it is by the self-same power by which He raised Christ from the dead, that He hath also drawn us to Himself.[8]

Augustine's unparalleled influence in the Latin West meant that his theological legacy lived and flourished in the Western Church throughout the Middle Ages, and on into the Reformation. The Council or Synod of Orange in France, in the year 529, gave classic expression to Western Augustinianism during the last gasp of the ancient world just before the dawning of the Middle Ages. It is worth quoting at length from the Council's eloquent exposition:

> If anyone says that through the offence of Adam's sin the whole of our humanity, body and soul, was not changed for the worse, but rather believes that only the body was subjected to corruption, while the freedom of the soul remained undamaged, he is led astray and goes against Scripture "do you not know that if you surrender yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are the slaves of the one you obey?" (Rom.6:16), and again, "whatever overcomes a man, he is enslaved by it" (2 Pet.2:19).
>
> If anyone maintains that the fall damaged Adam alone, and not his descendants, or declares that only physical death (the punishment of sin) but not sin itself (the death of the soul) is passed on to the entire human race by the one man, he ascribes injustice to God[9] and contradicts the apostle's words: "Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned in him" (Rom.5:12).
>
> If anyone says that God's grace can be conferred on account of human prayer, and not that grace is the very thing that moves us to pray, he contradicts the prophet Isaiah, or the apostle who says the same thing: "I have been found by those who did not seek Me; I have shown Myself to those who did not ask for Me" (Isa.65:1, Rom.10:20).
>
> If anyone argues that God waits for our will before cleansing us from sin, but does not confess that even the desire to be cleansed is aroused in us by the infusion and action of the Holy Spirit, he opposes the Holy Spirit Himself speaking through Solomon: "The will is prepared by the Lord" (Prov.8:35, Septuagint), and the apostle's health-giving message, "God is at work within you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil.2:13).

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[8] John Chrysostom, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (First Series)*, vol.13, commentary on Ephesians, Homily 3.

[9] He ascribes injustice to God by saying that *death* is passed on to everyone from Adam, but not *sin*. If that were so, God would be punishing the human race unjustly in consigning it to death. The universal inheritance of Adam's sin is the basis for the universal inheritance of Adam's death.

> If anyone says that mercy is bestowed on us by God when, without God's grace, we believe, will, desire, strive, labour, pray, keep watch, endeavour, request, seek, and knock, but does not confess that it is through the in-pouring and inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we believe, will, or are able to do all these things that are required; or if anyone subordinates the help of grace to humility or human obedience, and does not acknowledge that it is precisely the gift of grace that makes us obedient and humble, then he contradicts the apostle who says, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor.4:7) and also, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor.15:10).
>
> If anyone asserts that by his natural strength he is able to think as God requires him to think, or choose anything good regarding his eternal salvation, or assent to the saving message of the Gospel without the Holy Spirit's illumination and inspiration, who alone gives freeness and joy in assenting to the truth and believing it, such a person is deceived by a heretical spirit and does not understand what God said in the Gospel, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (Jn.15:5), nor the apostle's word, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as coming from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor.3:5).[10]

Few important Western medieval theologians would seriously disagree with the Council of Orange. Indeed, one of the largely unknown treasures of Western medieval Christianity is its long line of Augustinian theologians who embraced Augustine's basic understanding of monergism, however much they may, in other ways, have modified his conception of the human will, the effects of the Fall, and the eternal backdrop of divine grace in predestination and election. Among the Augustinian monergists of the medieval era, we may name the Venerable Bede (673–735), Gottschalk of Orbais (805–69), Florus of Lyons (d.860), Prudentius of Troyes (d.861), Ratramnus of Corbie (d.868), Remigius of Lyons (d.875), Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), Peter Lombard (1100–1160), Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), Thomas Bradwardine (1290–1349), John Wycliffe (1325–84), and Jan Hus (1372–1415).

Modern students can be confused by the way that these medieval Augustinians accepted and used the term "free will." They were, however, taking their cue from Augustine here. By "free" they meant "uncoerced." Nothing *forces* the human will to sin. In that sense, it remains free in the very depth of its bondage. The sin of the fallen will is always its own spontaneous doing.[11] The problem, as Augustine said, is that the fallen will never does anything other than sin—uncoerced, spontaneously—when left to itself. Only the supernatural grace of God in Jesus Christ can release it from this willing bondage, so that it becomes free to trust and obey God. The human will, therefore, is always "free" in the sense of uncoerced; but in Christ alone does it become free for God, to rely on and follow His Word. Bearing these necessary

[10] Canons 1–4 and 6–7 of the Council of Orange. My rendering.

[11] This is what the Westminster Confession means when it affirms: "God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined, to good or evil" (Westminster Confession 9:1).

distinctions in mind, here is a characteristic quotation from the medieval Augustinian most admired by Luther and Calvin, namely Bernard of Clairvaux:

> We must therefore be careful, whenever we feel these things [salvation] happening invisibly within us and with us, not to attribute them to our own will, which is weak; nor to any necessity on the part of God, for there is none; but solely to that grace of which He is full. It is grace which arouses our free choice, by sowing the seed of the good thought; it is grace which heals our free choice, by changing its affection; it is grace which empowers it, so as to persuade it to action; it is grace which saves it from experiencing a fall. Grace so works with free choice, however, that only in the first case [regeneration] does grace *run ahead* of it; thereafter, in the other cases, grace *accompanies* free choice. Indeed, grace first of all runs ahead of free choice so that, in the future, it may work together with it.[12]

The Protestant Reformation was, in many ways, a movement to reassert Augustinian theology, and its monergism, against the "neo-Pelagianism" that had come to characterize much of medieval Catholic theology in the last few centuries of its development.[13] Martin Luther (1483–1546), Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), and John Calvin (1509–64), were all humble disciples of Augustine, and all were monergists. Luther's treatise of 1525, *The Bondage of the Will*—often regarded as his theological masterwork, although his *Small Catechism* should probably rank alongside it—was a lengthy defence of monergism against the more Pelagian-leaning ideas of the great Renaissance humanist Erasmus (1466–1536). Luther affirms in a typical utterance:

> Man, before he is renewed into the new creation of the Spirit's kingdom, does nothing and endeavours nothing to prepare himself towards his new creation into that kingdom, and after he is re-created does nothing and endeavours nothing towards his perseverance in that kingdom; but the Spirit alone effects both in us, regenerating us, and preserving us when regenerated, without ourselves; as James saith, "Of His own will begat He us by the word of His power, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures." (Jas. i. 18).[14]

Calvin likewise says in his commentary on John's Gospel:

> *No man can come to me, unless the Father, who hath sent me, draw him* (Jn.6:44). The statement amounts to this, that we ought not to wonder if many refuse to embrace the Gospel; because no man will ever of himself be able to come to Christ, but God must first approach him by His Spirit; and hence it follows that all are not drawn, but that God bestows this grace on those whom

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[12] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Grace and Free Will*, ch. 14. My rendering.

[13] This neo-Pelagianism is known as the "Via Moderna," the Modern Way, against the more Augustinian "Via Antiqua," the Ancient Way. The most distinguished theologian associated with the Via Moderna was William of Ockham (1285–1349). Martin Luther and John Calvin were both reared in the neo-Pelagianism of the Via Moderna, which helps to explain their often sweeping condemnations of medieval and "papist" theology.

[14] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Henry Coles (London: 1823), 131:305.

> He has elected. True, indeed, as to the kind of drawing, it is not violent, so as to compel men by external force; but still it is a powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit, which makes men willing who formerly were unwilling and reluctant. It is a false and profane assertion, therefore, that none are drawn but those who are willing to be drawn, as if man made himself obedient to God by his own efforts; for the willingness with which men follow God is what they already have from Himself, who has formed their hearts to obey Him.[15]

Both branches of the Reformation—Lutheranism and Calvinism (or the Reformed tradition)—were committed to monergism from their origins. When a group of would-be reformers of the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands, led by Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), tried to introduce synergism into the Dutch Reformed Church, their effort was roundly rejected at the Synod of Dort in 1618–19. Dort was not merely a Dutch synod, but an international gathering of Reformed theologians from the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, England, and Scotland. They made it plain that synergism had no place in the Reformed Churches. The "Canons of Dort" (the Synod's theological deliverances) were highly esteemed throughout the Reformed world. In Britain, they were one influence contributing to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, which enshrined Augustinian monergism among English-speaking Presbyterians for generations to come, to the present day. The Congregationalist Savoy Declaration of 1658, and the Reformed Baptist 1689 Confession, were both adaptations of the Westminster Confession.

Monergism was not *per se* a dividing line between Protestant and Roman Catholic in the era of the Reformation. There were Augustinian monergists who remained loyal to Rome. Many of these populated the ranks of the so-called "Catholic Evangelicals"—men and women sympathetic to the Reformation who, nonetheless, continued to believe in the Roman Catholic Church as the true Body of Christ. In the seventeenth century, these Catholic monergists coalesced into the great Jansenist movement, named after Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), a Dutch Catholic theologian. His masterwork, the *Augustinus*, was a distillation of everything Augustine had taught about grace. Published in 1640 after Jansen's death, the book was popularized in Catholic France by Jansen's friend Jean-Amboise Duvergier de Hauranne (1581–1643), generally known by his title of abbė Saint-Cyran, aided by his talented circle of followers.

For the rest of the seventeenth century, and on even into the eighteenth, Jansenists waged an energetic crusade to capture the French Catholic Church for Augustine's doctrine of grace. It became a nation-dividing conflict between Jansenists and Jesuits, the latter championing a more Semi-Pelagian, or synergist, theology. The most famous and influential Jansenist was the lay theologian, philosopher, and scientist Blaise Pascal (1623–62); his apologetic work, *Pensées* (thoughts), is to this day widely regarded as a masterpiece, and is colored all through by his Augustinian/Jansenist faith.

After an epic struggle for supremacy, the Jesuits at length defeated Jansenism in France by the middle of the eighteenth century. Yet it lived on in Holland, where in 1723 Jansenists broke away from the Roman Catholic Church to form their own independent Dutch Jansenist Church. They won admiration from many Protestants,

[15] John Calvin, *Commentary on John's Gospel*, trans William Pringle (Edinburgh: 1847), on John 6:44.

owing to their plain style of worship, and their use of a Dutch Bible and Dutch liturgy (i.e., not in Latin, but in the native language of their country—remarkable in Roman Catholicism prior to the Second Vatican Council of 1962–65). The Dutch Reformed theologians always had a high regard for Jansenism, especially its foundation treatise, Jansen's *Augustinus*, which they saw as vindicating everything they had fought for against Arminianism at the Synod of Dort.[16]

Although monergism had been the acknowledged creed of the Reformation, among both its branches of Lutheran and Reformed, the eighteenth century witnessed serious change. The introduction of synergism as a vibrant form of Protestantism into a large portion of Reformed geographical territory (Britain and America) came in that century, via the Evangelical Revival and that wing of the movement led by the Wesley brothers, John (1703–91) and Charles (1707–88). They had been reared in a sacramental type of Arminianism, the High Church "Laudian" tradition of Anglicanism,[17] and carried this over into their new-found Evangelicalism from 1738 onwards. John Wesley's widespread impact as a revival preacher and organizer of converts into tightly structured "societies,"[18] and Charles Wesley's impact as a writer of hymns, meant that their Arminian synergism became a potent religious force in Britain and America.

The Wesley brothers' hostility to Reformed monergism should not be underrated. John Wesley famously expressed his opposition to Reformed theology in his oft-printed sermon *Free Grace*, a manifesto for Arminianism. His problem with monergism was its deep background in the mystery of divine election; John Wesley could not conceive how, if the Augustinian view of election were true, a God of love would not elect everyone. Consequently, he condemned Calvinists as making God into a capricious tyrant, "worse than the devil":

> You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by Scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never can prove this; whatever its true meaning be, this cannot be its true meaning.[19]

Charles Wesley was as hostile as John to Reformed monergism, referring in his diary to "the poison of Calvin," and writing polemical hymns whose express purpose was to vilify the Augustinian/Reformed understanding of grace, and assert its Arminian/synergist alternative:

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[16] For a detailed account of Jansenism from a Reformed perspective, see N. R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, vol. 4 (London: Christian Focus and Grace Publications, 2016), ch. 6:4.

[17] Laudian refers to William Laud (1573–1645), Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633, who championed the High Church movement within the Church of England (a precursor to the Anglo-Catholic movement of the 19th century).

[18] Societies were voluntary groups of believers who met regularly for mutual edification, confession, and discipline. The practice was adopted from German Moravianism. John Wesley's body of societies were known as the United Methodist Societies, and they formed the nucleus of what—after Wesley's death—would become the Methodist Church.

[19] John Wesley, "Free Grace" (1739), section 25.

Sinners, abhor the fiend:
His *other* gospel hear—
"The God of truth did not intend
The thing His words declare!
He offers grace to all
Which most cannot embrace,
Mocked with an ineffectual call
And insufficient grace.[20]

The world of English-speaking Protestantism would from this point be seriously divided between Reformed monergists and Arminian synergists. Reformed monergism had a particularly gifted body of theological exponents in America; one has only to think of Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), the father-and-son team of Charles Hodge (1797–1878) and A.A. Hodge (1823–86), James Henley Thornwell (1812–62), William G.T. Shedd (1820–94), Robert L. Dabney (1820–98), B.B. Warfield (1851–1921), and R.C. Sproul (1939–2017), to name a few.

While whole swathes of British and American Evangelicalism were being conquered by Wesleyan Arminianism, Protestantism in its homeland of Continental Europe underwent devastation first by Enlightenment rationalism, and then by the more subtle "Romantic" liberalism linked with the influential life and labors of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834).[21] Schleiermacher is often ranked as the next "great" theologian in church history after John Calvin (great in terms of creativity and impact). Strangely, Schleiermacher was a monergist of sorts; but his monergism was grounded in a philosophical system of determinism, not the witness of Scripture as the inspired Word of God. His conception of Christ as the perfectly God-conscious Man fell far short of the Church's historic faith.

However, Schleiermacher's Romantic and philosophical Christianity was dealt a shattering blow in the early twentieth century by Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968). This is not the place to assess Barth's complex and controversial theology as a whole, but it should be noted that when it came to fallen man's regeneration, he taught a vigorous grace-centred monergism closely akin to that of Augustine and the Reformers. A liberal theologian by youth and training, Barth's optimistic liberalism had been wrecked by the First World War, and by the uncritical, even adulatory support his old German theology tutors gave to Germany's war effort (as if Germany itself were somehow sacred). In his despair, Barth turned to other teachers—such as the Lutheran existentialist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813–55), the Russian Orthodox novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–81), and the Reformers themselves, especially Luther and Calvin.

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[20] Charles Wesley, "The Horrible Decree," in *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (1741).

[21] The Romantic Movement reacted against the rationalism of the Enlightenment, in favor of a fresh appreciation of experience, intuition, feeling, and art/poetry, in the understanding of man. Most often, and unsurprisingly, we connect Romanticism with the great poets of the late 18th and early 19th centuries—in the English-speaking world, this would include William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, John Keats, and Percy Bysshe Shelly. Of these, Coleridge also developed into a notable theological thinker, whose collected writings were edited by the great American Reformed theologian, W. G. T. Shedd (1820–1894).

From these, Barth derived a very different evaluation of man and his condition, in which man is far from good, but radically ambiguous and fallen, needing a rebirth and re-creation that could be mediated only by the gracious Word of the transcendent God who had broken into man's world in Jesus Christ. To that extent at least, if not in other ways, the old Augustinian theology of the Western tradition spoke anew in the Swiss divine. Sin was again taken seriously, God as sole Source of salvation was again brought into the theological picture, and the rationalistic liberalism of the Enlightenment, and the Romantic liberalism of Schleiermacher, were both driven from the field.[22] Barth's dominance of European theology, however, was much weakened after the close of the Second World War, with the rise of a new style of "modernist" theology linked to the name of Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), with his radical scepticism about the historicity of the New Testament documents, and reinterpretation of the New Testament message in terms of a type of existentialist philosophy.[23] Still, Barth remains something of an influence, more perhaps in the English-speaking world now, although it is unclear to what degree today's Barthians appreciate or endorse his monergism.[24]

The biblical basis for monergism is found in two elements: the Bible's teaching about human sinfulness, and its allied teaching about the transformative power of God in the salvation of sinners.

The background of monergism lies in the inability of fallen man to change himself. His bondage to sin is total in nature. A significant passage is Ephesians 2:1–3, where Paul says to the Ephesian Christians, describing what they had once been like outside of Christ:

> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.[25]

Paul says that the Ephesian Christians—prior to their being made alive in Christ—were dead in trespasses and sins. It is not that they were *unwell* in trespasses and sins, but with enough health left to give hopes for a recovery; they were *dead* in trespasses and sins. There was no human hope of recovery—no human possibility of salvation from their own sinful natures.

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[22] Barth's greatest weakness was probably his inadequate doctrine of Scripture as an objective communication from God. For a balanced assessment of the earlier Barth, his notable strengths and potential weaknesses, see the perceptive talk by J. Gresham Machen, "The Theology of Crisis" (April, 1928). "Crisis theology" was one of the nicknames given to the theology of Barth and those associated with him.

[23] Existentialism is not necessarily incompatible with orthodox Christian belief (the "father" of existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard, was an orthodox Lutheran in his religious beliefs). However, in the 20th century, much existentialism stripped out the Christian content of what Kierkegaard meant by faith. Bultmann's existentialism owed its character to the philosophy of non-Christian thinker Martin Heidegger (1889–1976).

[24] Some do, notably one of today's most famous Barthians, Bruce McCormack of Princeton Seminary.

[25] ESV translation.

In the next verse Paul states that they used to "walk" in these trespasses and sins. In other words, sin was their way of life. They were under the practical dominion of sin. It governed the whole way they lived. John Calvin comments on this:

> Spiritual death is precisely the soul's alienation from God. Consequently we are all born as dead people, and we live as dead people, until we are made to share in the life of Christ. … As long as we continue "in Adam", we are utterly destitute of life. Regeneration is the soul's experience of a new life, whereby it rises from the dead. Some form of life, I confess, does remain in us, when we are still at a distance from Christ; unbelief does not totally destroy the physical senses, the will, or the other capacities of the soul. However, none of this relates to the kingdom of God or a blessed life. How can it, when the mind's every sentiment, and the will's every act, is death? Let us hold this, then, as a secure axiom, that our soul's union with God is the true and only life; and that outside of Christ we are wholly dead, because sin—the cause of death—has dominion over us.[26]

We also observe Paul's assertion that in this condition of spiritual death, human beings are the slaves of Satan: "Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." Satan is here set forth under the title "the prince of the power of the air." We recollect that in Scripture there are three heavens: the celestial heaven, where God's angels dwell; the starry heaven visible at night; and the cloudy heaven—the atmosphere that separates the earth from the starry heaven. When Satan is described as "the prince of the power of the air," Paul seems to mean that the air—the cloudy, atmospheric heaven—is the dwelling place of the demons. Perhaps the idea is that the earth is cocooned in a Satanic atmosphere that defiles the entire spiritual environment of our planet. Satan is also depicted as a prince—a mighty figure. And this mighty prince is said to be "at work in the sons of disobedience." By nature, apart from Christ, men are disobedient to God; but our disobedience, Paul says, is more than a merely human thing. It is the product of Satan's influence, as he works spiritually within our minds and hearts, turning our thoughts away from God or against Him.

The outcome is that we are "by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." In the Bible, the phrase "children of" indicates the dominant characteristic. So "children of wrath" means that outside of Christ, this is the mark branded (so to speak) on our foreheads: *under God's judgment*. We do not become children of wrath by practice; it is our condition by nature. We are born sinful. We are all too obviously Adam's people. The whole race of humanity is under judgment; therefore, each one of us shares in that condition.

Other biblical passages teach the same truth (for example Gen 6:5; Jer 13:23; John 6:44; 8:44; Rom 3:10–12; 8:7–8; 2 Cor 4:4–6; Col 2:13; 2 Tim 2:25–6). The doctrine is often expressed in the phrase "total depravity." This articulates two realities about fallen humanity. First, sin has affected and corrupted every part of us—the *totality* of our nature. Mind, emotions, will, imagination, memory, conscience: all darkened and corrupted by sin. We cannot point to any aspect of ourselves and say, "Here at least, sin has not touched me; here at least, I am free from sin's dominion." No: sin has taken hold upon us in the totality of our being. Every part, every power, every faculty of man has been poisoned by sin. How desperate is our fallen condition.

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[26] Calvin's commentary on Ephesians 2:1–3, my rendering.

Were this not so, we could not say that Jesus Christ had saved the whole of us. We could only say He had saved some parts of us, but that other parts did not need saving. Where do we ever find such reservations, such limitations, in what Scripture says of Christ as a Savior? Which of the people of God have ever said to Christ, "I thank You for saving my will, my emotions, and my imagination, but I do not thank You for saving my mind or my conscience, because these did not need any saving"? This would make Christ into a limited Savior who receives limited praise. We do not find such language in the Bible. The Christ of the Bible saves the whole of us, because the whole of us needs to be saved.

The second thing that "total depravity" means is this: fallen man is, in and of himself, totally unable and totally unwilling to turn back to God. Apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ, fallen man has neither the desire nor the strength to give up sin and return to his Creator, in whom alone is true life and blessedness.

This is why the Bible compares the salvation of man to a new creation, a new birth, and a resurrection from death. Man's depravity requires God's gracious and omnipotent energy to transform him. Let us think about the very language:

- A new creation. When God brought about the creation of the universe, there was nothing there at first. "Creation out of nothing." What can nothingness contribute to creation? Nothing.
- Or again, a new birth or begetting. What does a child contribute to its own conception and birth? The active contribution comes from the parents.
- Again, a resurrection from death. What positive thing does a dead body contribute to its resurrection? The power of resurrection flows from God alone.

Now let us look at where the Bible uses this vivid and telling language. First, salvation is a new creation. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul writes, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."[27] Redeemed Man is a new creation. If our salvation means that we have been re-created, created all over again, then how totally lost in sin we must have been. Totally unable to save ourselves, totally unwilling of ourselves to be saved, salvation came to us as an act of new creation by the almighty power of the Creator God. Indeed, His creative power is shown more gloriously in our salvation than in the very creation of the universe.

Second, new birth. Peter writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).[28] Our human parents begot us at first; but when we were saved, the abundant mercy of God begot us all over again. It was a whole new birth. So again, our old self outside of Christ must have been hopelessly lost and alienated from God. Tinkering about with the old self cannot do any good. We must be entirely reborn as new men.

Lastly, resurrection from death. Ephesians 2:4–6 states, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

[27] ESV translation.
[28] ESV translation.

and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."[29] We were dead—dead in sins. Sin had taken away our true life and imprisoned us in the tomb. But our salvation came as a quickening from death, an enlivening, a resurrection into newness of life. Could the human predicament be stated more graphically than "dead in sins"? We were devoid of spiritual life; the whole of our nature was spiritually dead and buried in sin; but God in Christ made us live—He raised us from the death of sin into life in Christ.

New creation, new birth, resurrection: all of these biblical ways of speaking of sinful man testify to his total depravity. We are totally unable and unwilling, in ourselves, to return from sin to God. But God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He saves, He regenerates, He converts, He creates us afresh, gives us new birth, raises us from the dead.

And therefore all praise and thanksgiving belong to God for our salvation. Yes, we believed, we repented; these were our conscious choices; but we now understand that it was by the sovereign, gracious empowering of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—that we ever believed and ever repented. Our choice to believe and repent flowed from the fountain of His plentiful mercy in Christ. As Augustine said:

> What good can you do out of a heart that is not good? But in order that you may have a good heart, He says, "I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you" (Ezek.36:26). Can you say, "We will first walk in His righteousness, and will observe His judgments, and will act in a worthy way, so that He will give His grace to us"? But what good would you evil people do? And how would you do those good things, unless you were yourselves good? But who causes people to be good? Only He who said, "And I will visit them to make them good," and, "I will put my Spirit within you, and will cause you to walk in my righteousness, and to observe my judgments, and do them" (Ezek.36:27). Are you asleep? Can't you hear Him saying, "I will cause you to walk, I will make you to observe," lastly, "I will make you to do"? Really, are you still puffing yourselves up? We walk, true enough, and we observe, and we do; but it is God who makes us to walk, to observe, to do. This is the grace of God making us good; this is His mercy going before us.[30]

We must embrace the biblical doctrine of fallen Man's total depravity, in order to be able rightly to thank, praise, and glorify God for our salvation. If we are not from the heart gladly celebrating God's mercy in our salvation, perhaps it is because we do not realize from what an unspeakable darkness He delivered us, from what a deadly slavery He liberated our wills.

Some of the purest outpourings of the doctrine of monergistic grace, and the gratitude it inspires, are found in the Church's poetry and hymnology. Let me offer just a few examples. Here is Heinrich Suso (1295–1360), one of the best and most orthodox of the Catholic mystics of the Middle Ages, singing the mystery of the grace of God's eternal election:

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[29] ESV translation.

[30] Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 4:15. My rendering.

O Lord, the most fair, the most tender,
My heart is adrift and alone;
My heart is so weary, so thirsty,
It thirsts for a joy unknown.
From a child I've followed it, chased it,
Through wilderness, wood and hill;
I never have seen it or found it —
Yet I must follow it still.

In the bygone years, I sought it
In the sweet fair things around;
But the more I sought and I thirsted,
The less, O my Lord, I found.
When closest it seemed to my grasping,
It fled like a vanishing thought.
I never have known what it is, Lord;
Too well I know what it is not.

"It is I! It is I, the Eternal,
Who chose you My own to be —
Who chose you before the ages —
Who chose you eternally!
I stood in the way before you,
In the ways that you would have gone;
For this is the mark of My chosen —
They shall be Mine alone."

Fast forward to the eighteenth century. Here is Charles Wesley, the Arminian:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

As the Scottish Reformed theologian Rabbi Duncan (1796–1870) said, "Where's your Arminianism now, friend?" Finally, from the nineteenth century, here is Josiah Conder (1789–1855):

'Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee,
Hadst Thou not chosen me;
Thou from the sin that stained me
Hast cleansed and set me free,
Of old Thou hast ordained me,
That I should live to Thee.

'Twas sovereign mercy called me,
And taught my opening mind;
The world had else enthralled me,
To heavenly glories blind;
My heart owns none before Thee,
For Thy rich grace I thirst;
This knowing, if I love Thee,
Thou must have loved me first.

The doctrine of monergistic grace has its spiritual counterpart in the practice of a God-centred gratitude. I can bring out my meaning here by pointing to the close connection between grace and gratitude. In English and in New Testament Greek, the two words have the same basic root; they are simply variations on the same word. In Hebrews 12:25, is it "let us have grace" or "let us have gratitude"? It could be either. Grace in the giver corresponds to gratitude in the receiver. As Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788–1870) said, "In the Bible, religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude." Thankfulness to God for every blessing received lies at the heart of our response to Him.

We could, with justification, call the doctrine of grace the doctrine of gratitude. To whom am I grateful for every blessing, especially the blessing of my salvation? Am I grateful to the preacher? Did he save me? Do I, in my Sunday worship, sing hymns of praise to him and his mighty sermons? That, of course, would be man-centred idolatry of the most blasphemous type. I am sure we have all heard the anecdote of the drunkard staggering through the streets, screaming and cursing, until he happens to see the local pastor. "Don't you recognize me, pastor?" the drunkard shouts. "I'm one of your converts!"—"You must be," answers the pastor, "since you certainly don't look like one of God's."

Or am I grateful to *myself* for my salvation? Praise be to me? As Archbishop William Temple (1881–1944) once put it, must I say, "Thanks be to You, Father in heaven, for sending Jesus Christ to die for me. But as for my believing and trusting in Him, I do not thank You; for this, I congratulate myself: praise be to me." As Temple remarked, hardly a prayer for a true child of God.

The "doctrine of gratitude" means that I give thanks to the triune God for the whole of my salvation. And since I am not saved without the personal response of faith and repentance, I give thanks to Him for these also. Thanks be to God that I have believed and repented. Thanks be to God that I am a Christian.

It is this deep heart-sense of gratitude to God for salvation, that the saved owe all their salvation to God, which the Bible, Augustine, and Augustinian theologians are setting forth in their doctrine of grace. The doctrine of God's sovereign, triumphant, efficacious grace in salvation is theology's way of teaching with emphasis that it is to God, the triune Redeemer, that believers owe their salvation. The Father in love eternally chose us to be His children; the Son in love took flesh, lived, died, and rose from the dead, to bestow the gift of gifts upon us; and the Holy Spirit in love begot faith and repentance within us by uniting us with Christ, that in Him we might become sons of the Father. Thanks be to God. Monergistic grace: God-centered gratitude.

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CHOSEN, BORN AGAIN, AND BELIEVING: HOW ELECTION, REGENERATION, AND FAITH RELATE TO EACH OTHER IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

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This article inductively examines what key passages in the Gospel According to John say about election, regeneration, and faith (John 1:9–13; 3:3–8; 6:36–40, 44, 63–65; 8:45–47; 10:14–16, 26–29; 12:37–40; 13:18; 15:16, 19; 17:2, 6–9, 20, 24; 20:30–31). Then it deductively synthesizes how the Gospel According to John contributes to a systematic theology of how election, regeneration, and faith relate to each other: (1) Unconditional election logically and chronologically precedes faith. Faith is not the basis of election. (2) Monergistic regeneration logically precedes and enables faith. Faith is not the basis of regeneration. (3) God's absolute sovereignty regarding election and regeneration is compatible with human responsibility regarding faith. The article concludes with an observation, a warning, and an exhortation.

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Some humans are (1) chosen by God, (2) born again, and (3) believe in Jesus:

- God the Father chooses to save some humans (John 17:6–9). That choice is *election*.
- God gives spiritual life to spiritually dead people (3:3–8). That new birth is *regeneration*, or being born again.
- Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe in him (10:28; 17:2; 20:31). That trust or dependence is *faith*.

We who affirm these glorious realities do not all agree on how election, regeneration, and faith relate to each other. We treasure the triune God and unswervingly trust the Bible as God-breathed, entirely true, and our final authority. We love God's words, and we are eager to submit to and obey them. But we do not all agree on precisely how to define election, regeneration, and faith—and

particularly how they relate to one another. (1) Is election based on our faith that God foresees? (2) Does faith precede regeneration? (3) Is God's sovereignty regarding election and regeneration contingent on our faith?

It would take a series of books to thoroughly examine what the whole Bible says about election, regeneration, and faith. The goal of this concise article is more modest. It attempts (1) to inductively examine what key passages in the Gospel According to John say about election, regeneration, and faith; and then (2) to deductively synthesize how the Gospel According to John contributes to a systematic theology of how election, regeneration, and faith relate to each other.

What Is the Meaning of Key Passages on Election, Regeneration, and Faith in the Gospel According to John?

This section considers key passages in John's Gospel that address election, regeneration, and faith.[1]

John 1:9–13

> [9] The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. [11] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. [12] But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:9–13)[2]

Jesus is "the true light" (1:9; cf. 8:12). The incarnate Word discloses God to humans, who are rebelling against the Creator. By shining on everyone (1:9), Jesus divides humans into one of two groups: humans respond to Jesus either by *rejecting* him or by *receiving* him (1:10–13; cf. 3:19–21).[3] To receive Jesus is to believe in his name—that is, to welcome, trust, and submit to him.

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[1] For my concise perspective on John's Gospel as a whole, see D. A. Carson and Andrew David Naselli, "John," in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 1886–1937. I repackage some of those notes in this article. Much of those study Bible notes condense what is arguably one of the finest commentaries available: D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). Carson's commentary builds on his Ph.D. dissertation, which he later updated for publication: see D. A. Carson, "Predestination and Responsibility: Elements of Tension-Theology in the Fourth Gospel against Jewish Background" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1975); D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).

[2] Scripture quotations are from the ESV, unless otherwise noted.

[3] The Wesleyan view of prevenient grace is that God gives saving grace that is universal, enabling, and resistible. See David T. Fry, "Grace Enough: An Exposition and Theological Defense of the Wesleyan Concept of Prevenient Grace" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2014), see 294–319 on John 1:9. I agree with Jim Hamilton: "In the context of John's Gospel, 1:9 does not support the notion of prevenient grace, as though by his coming Jesus has given light to everyone in the sense of somehow lifting them out of deadness in sin to have the opportunity to believe. John explains what does that in verse 13—not the coming of Jesus to give prevenient-grace-light to all, but the new birth. What separates those who receive Jesus from those who reject him is the new birth (cf. vv. 10–13)." James M. Hamilton Jr., "John," in *John–Acts*, vol. 9 of *ESV Expository*

God gives those who receive Jesus the right to become God's adopted children (1:12).[4] John then describes God's adopted children as those "who were born … of God" (1:13). This suggests that they were born of God logically prior to receiving Jesus. The final sentence (1:12–13) undermines the view that faith causes the new birth. The three contrasts in 1:13 emphasize that God—not a human—causes the new birth:

1. Born of God—not "of blood" (i.e., natural descent, especially being Jewish under the old covenant).
2. Born of God—not "of the will of the flesh" (i.e., what a person wants; possibly sexual desire).
3. Born of God—not "of the will of man" (i.e., what an adult human male wants; possibly a husband's initiative in sexual intercourse).

The basis of the new birth is not who your parents are or what you desired. John Calvin soundly infers, "Faith is not produced by us but is the fruit of spiritual new birth."[5] Even if we cannot pinpoint with certainty what the three contrasts in 1:13 refer to, the main idea is clear: *the new birth is an act of God*, not an act of a human (cf. 3:3–8). Humans are unable to cause the new birth. The birth-metaphor itself excludes that our will in any sense causes the new birth. Did your will have anything at all to do with your physical birth?[6] "The act of regeneration," Lloyd-Jones explains, "being God's act, is something that is outside consciousness."[7]

John 3:3–8

> [3] Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." [4] Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" [5] Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. [6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] Do not marvel that I

Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 39. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 229–46; William W. Combs, "Does the Bible Teach Prevenient Grace?" *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 10 (2005): 3–18.

[4] Both John and Paul distinguish between the sonship of believers and the unique sonship of Jesus. In John's Gospel, the believer becomes God's *child*, and only Jesus is God's *Son*. Paul describes both Jesus and believers as God's *sons*, but believers are characteristically sons by adoption (cf. Rom 8:15). This builds on how the OT frequently calls Israel God's children (e.g., Deut 14:1). Cf. D. A. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God: A Christological Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

[5] John Calvin, *John*, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 24. Cf. Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 105.

[6] Cf. John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 99.

[7] David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Experiencing the New Birth: Studies in John 3* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 43. Contra David Allen on John 1:12–13: "The act of being 'born of God' was initiated by God and the one being 'born' is the recipient of God's act. However, one should not conclude that this excludes any participation by man." David L. Allen, "Does Regeneration Precede Faith?" *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 11, no. 2 (2014): 39.

> said to you, 'You must be born again.' [8] The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:3–8)

To be "born again" (3:3, 7) is to be born from above—that is, to be born of God (cf. 1:13) and thus to become a child of God (1:12). John repeatedly describes believers as those who are born of God (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).[8]

Two additional phrases parallel "born again": "born of water and the Spirit" (3:5) and "born of the Spirit" (3:8). Jesus emphasizes a single Spirit-produced birth. To be "born of water and the Spirit" means to experience a new birth that cleanses and transforms.[9] Since Jesus expects Nicodemus to understand what he means (3:7, 10), the background to the concept is previous Scripture. In the OT, water often refers to cleansing or purifying, and the most significant OT connection that brings together water and spirit is Ezekiel 36:25–27. In that passage, water cleanses from impurity, and the Spirit transforms hearts. And immediately after Ezekiel 36:22–38, God's Spirit sovereignly gives life to dry bones (Ezek 37:1–14). Likewise, in the new birth, explains John Piper,

> The Spirit unites us to Christ where there is cleansing for our sins (pictured by water), and he replaces our hard, unresponsive heart with a soft heart that treasures Jesus above all things and is being transformed by the presence of the Spirit into the kind of heart that loves to do the will of God. (Ezek. 36:27)[10]

The principle is that *like* generates *like* (John 3:6). In other words, humans physically produce more spiritually dead humans, but only God's Spirit can produce spiritual life.[11]

The effects of the wind are evident, but humans can neither control nor fully understand the wind's invisible origin and movement (3:8a). "So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (3:8b). Humans can neither control nor fully understand the Spirit's invisible origin and movement.

John 6:36–40, 44, 63–65

> [36] "But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. [37] All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. [38] For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. [39] And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing

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[8] This new birth is what Paul calls "the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). Peter refers to this when he praises God: "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope" (1 Pet 1:3; see also 1 Pet 1:23).

[9] For other interpretations and a defense of this one, see Carson, *John*, 191–96; Robert V. McCabe, "The Meaning of 'Born of Water and the Spirit' in John 3:5," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (1999): 85–107.

[10] John Piper, *Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again*, in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 7:365.

[11] Cf. Jonathan Edwards, "Treatise on Grace," in *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee, vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Yale Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 154–55.

> of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. [40] For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. … [44] No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. … [63] It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. [64] But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) [65] And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." (John 6:37–40, 44, 63–65)

Jesus is not surprised that some do not believe in him (6:36). Their unbelief does not mean that Jesus is failing to accomplish his mission. Rather, Jesus is confident that the Father will fully accomplish his saving purposes by enabling specific individuals to come to Jesus (6:37, 39, 44, 65). People come to Jesus because the Father previously gave them to Jesus (cf. 6:39, 65; 10:29; 17:6, 9, 24; 18:9), and Jesus will keep or preserve them (6:37–40; cf. 10:28–29).

"For" (6:38) indicates that what follows is the reason Jesus will perfectly preserve all those whom the Father has given him: Jesus came to earth to do the Father's will—namely, not to lose a single person the Father had given him (6:39).

Those the Father has given to Jesus look to and believe in the Son (6:40). God's sovereignty (6:37) does not mitigate human responsibility.

In 6:44, Jesus expresses the negative counterpart of 6:37a. A human cannot come to Jesus on his or her own initiative. The decisive cause of one's coming to Jesus is the Father. The Father must enable a human to come to Jesus by *drawing* him or her. "Draws" (6:44) translates ἑλκύω, which occurs six times in the NT (italics added):

1. John 6:44a: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me *draws* him."
2. John 12:32: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, *will draw* all people to myself."[12]
3. John 18:10: "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, *drew* it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear."
4. John 21:6: "He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able *to haul* it in, because of the quantity of fish."
5. John 21:11: "So Simon Peter went aboard and *hauled* the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn."
6. Acts 16:19: "But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and *dragged* them into the marketplace before the rulers."

[12] "Lifted up" combines two notions in John's Gospel: Jesus is physically raised up on the cross, and Jesus is gloriously exalted (cf. 3:14; 8:28, 12:34). Jesus will draw "all people" to himself in that he will draw all kinds of people. That is, Jesus will draw all people without distinction (i.e., not just Jews but also Gentiles) rather than all people without exception (see the judgment theme in 12:31; cf. 3:17; 5:22–30). It is significant that Gentiles were present on this occasion (12:20). Cf. 4:22–23, 41–42; 10:16; 11:52.

According to BDAG, the primary sense of ἑλκύω is "to move an object from one area to another in a pulling motion, *draw*, with implication that the object being moved is incapable of propelling itself or in the case of person(s) is unwilling to do so voluntarily, in either case with implication of exertion on the part of the mover."[13] I would qualify "unwilling to do so voluntarily" in the context of John 6 as *unwilling to do so voluntarily until God changes what you want* (cf. Jer 38:3 LXX). That is, God does not draw people to Jesus against their will, kicking and screaming; no, he draws people by changing their nature so that they *want* to come to him. Piper explains,

> Irresistible grace never implies that God forces us to repent or believe or follow Jesus against our will. That would even be a contradiction in terms because believing and repenting and following are always willing, or they are hypocrisy. Irresistible grace does not drag the unwilling into the kingdom; it makes the unwilling willing. It does not work with constraint from the outside, like hooks and chains; it works with power from the inside, like new thirst and hunger and compelling desire.[14]

The Father draws select individuals by giving them the desire and ability to come to Jesus. Calvin explains John 6:44, "Faith is not dependent on man's will, since it is a gift from God."[15] "When he [i.e., God] compels belief," explains Carson, "it is not by the savage constraint of a rapist, but by the wonderful wooing of a lover."[16] And every person without exception whom the Father draws comes to Jesus because Jesus will resurrect them (6:39–40, 44). That means that the Father's drawing is flawlessly effectual; one-hundred percent of the people he draws come to Jesus. His drawing is always successful.

In 6:63–65, Jesus reiterates 6:44. Apart from God's Spirit, humans cannot experience eternal life (6:63; cf. 3:5–8). Unbelief does not surprise Jesus (6:64; cf. 2:23–25; 6:36). Because Jesus knew in advance that many would reject him, he explains that the Father must draw those whom he has given to the Son and enable them to believe (6:37, 44, 65).

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[13] BDAG, 318.

[14] John Piper, *Five Points: Toward a Deeper Experience of God's Grace*, in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 8:568.

[15] Calvin, *John*, 164. Calvin continues, "We should not be surprised if many people refuse to embrace the Gospel, since no one is ever able of himself to come to Christ unless God first comes to him by his Spirit. So it follows from this that not everyone is drawn, but that God gives this grace to those whom he has elected. This is not the kind of drawing that is violent, as if it were compelling men through external force. However, it is a powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit which enables men to be willing to follow Christ, men who had been unwilling and reluctant previously. Therefore, it is a false and ungodly assertion that nobody is drawn unless they are prepared to be drawn, as if a person could make himself obey God through his own efforts. Men's willingness to follow God has already been given to them by God, who made their hearts to obey him."

[16] Carson, *John*, 293. Similarly, Luther explains, "When God draws us, He is not like a hangman, who drags a thief up the ladder to the gallows; but He allures and coaxes us in a friendly fashion, as a kind man attracts people by his amiability and cordiality, and everyone willingly goes to him. Thus God, too, gently draws people to Himself, so that they abide with Him willingly and happily." Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6–8*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther's Works 23 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 86.

John 8:45–47

> 45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. 46 Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? 47 Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." (John 8:45–47)

Jesus does not say, "*Although* I tell the truth, you do not believe me." He says, "*Because*" (8:45). The fundamental reason a human does not believe in Jesus is that he or she is "not of God" (8:47).[17] Every human is either "of God" or "not of God" (8:47)—that is, one either belongs to God as his sheep or not (10:27); one is either chosen by God or not (15:19). Being "of God" explains why a person believes in Jesus. Consequently, a human who believes in Jesus does not have any grounds to boast.

John 10:14–16, 26–29

> 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. … 26 But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:14–16, 26–29)

Jesus uses a Palestinian sheep-farming metaphor (10:1–5) and expands three features: the gate (10:7–10), the shepherd (10:11–18), and the shepherd's own sheep (10:26–30). In contrast to a hired hand who cares more about protecting himself than protecting the sheep (10:12–13), Jesus is "the good shepherd" (10:11, 14). Jesus and his sheep experientially know each other (10:3–4, 14, 16, 27). The "other sheep" Jesus has (10:16) are those outside the sheep pen of Judaism—that is, Samaritans and Gentiles (cf. 11:51–52; Isa 56:8; Rev 5:9). The one people of God are part of "one flock" (cf. Eph 2:11–22).

This remarkable sentence is jarring: "But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep" (10:26). Spurgeon remarks, "Some divines [i.e., theologians] would like to read that—'Ye are not my sheep, because ye do not believe.' As if believing made us the sheep of Christ; but the text puts it—'Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep.'"[18]

In the sheep-farming metaphor, a human does not become a sheep in Jesus's flock by believing in Jesus. Rather, a human believes in Jesus *because* he or she is from God's perspective already a sheep; that is why Jesus earlier says, "I have other

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[17] Murray J. Harris, *John*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 179. Contra Hans Förster, "Die Syntaktische Funktion von Ὅτι in Joh 8.47," *NTS* 62 (2016): 157–66.

[18] C. H. Spurgeon, *Faith: What It Is, and What It Leads To* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1903), 21.

sheep" (10:16)—sheep who have not yet believed in him.[19] From God's perspective, every human is either among Jesus's sheep or not, and no human ever changes the status from not being a sheep to being a sheep. God considers a human to be a sheep even before he or she believes in Jesus. Being among Jesus's sheep explains why a person believes in Jesus, and not being among Jesus's sheep explains why a person does not believe in Jesus (10:26). Not being among Jesus's sheep does not reduce one's moral responsibility to believe.

Jesus gives each of his sheep "eternal life" (10:28)—that is, resurrection life of the age to come that believers experience in some measure now (cf. 17:3). Consequently, Jesus's sheep "will never perish" in eternal judgment (10:28). Jesus powerfully keeps his sheep from harm (10:28; cf. 10:11). Their security rests with the good shepherd, who faithfully fulfills his mission to preserve everyone the Father has given to him (6:37–40). Therefore, no force or person can sever the relation between the true believer and Jesus (10:29). There is no greater security (cf. Col 3:3).

John 12:37–40

> 37 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in
> him, 38 so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:
> "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,
> and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"
> 39 Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,
> 40 "He has blinded their eyes
> and hardened their heart,
> lest they see with their eyes,
> and understand with their heart, and turn,
> and I would heal them." (John 12:37–40)

Jesus reveals the nature and inevitability of unbelief. Whether a person believes in Jesus ultimately depends on whether God enables a person to believe. Even though Jesus's audience saw him do many signs, "they still did not believe in him" (12:37). This is similar to what Moses told Israel after they saw signs and great wonders: "To this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear" (Deut 29:4).

"So that" (John 12:38) indicates that the God-designed purpose that some Jews did not believe in Jesus is to fulfill Scripture—specifically, Isa 53:1 (John 12:38b) and Isa 6:10 (John 12:40). "For this reason [διὰ τοῦτο] they could not believe" (12:39 NIV).[20]

The Isaiah 6:10 quotation in John 12:40 is startling. God has blinded the eyes and hardened the hearts of specific individuals for the explicit purpose that they not see and not understand so that they will not repent and experience God's saving work. In his infinite wisdom, the just and merciful God judicially hardens some individuals and graciously saves others (cf. Rom 9:14–24). In Isa 6, God commissions Isaiah, who knows that his preaching will evoke and, in some sense, *cause* a negative

[19] Cf. J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 598.
[20] Cf. Todd Scacewater, "The Predictive Nature of Typology in John 12:37–43," *WTJ* 75 (2013): 129–43.

response; in that sense God hardens their hearts (see John 8:45). John's Gospel affirms both God's sovereignty (12:38–40) and human responsibility (12:37).

John 13:18

> I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, "He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." (John 13:18)

John has repeatedly warned about the treachery of someone within the ranks of the Twelve (6:70–71; 12:4; 13:2, 10–11). In 13:18–30, Jesus predicts that Judas will betray him.

There is a sense in which Jesus chose Judas, and a sense in which Jesus did not choose Judas. On the one hand, Jesus chose his twelve disciples in the sense that he selected all twelve to follow him (6:70). On the other hand, Jesus savingly chose (cf. 15:16, 19) eleven of the disciples and did not savingly choose Judas. The first sentence of 13:18 indicates that Jesus did not savingly choose all twelve of his disciples: "I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen." That is why the Father drew eleven of the disciples, but did not draw Judas (6:64–65, 70–71).[21]

This fulfills Scripture—a concept Jesus repeats in 17:12: "Not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, *that the Scripture might be fulfilled*." The Scripture passage Jesus quotes in John 13:18 is David speaking in Ps 41:9. Jesus fulfills that passage by repeating David's experience at a deeper, climactic level in the history of salvation.[22]

John 15:16, 19

> [16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. … [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:16, 19)

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[21] Jesus's metaphor of the vine and branches in John 15 illustrates that Judas was only superficially connected to Jesus. Every unfruitful branch connected to the vine ("in me," 15:2) is removed, thrown away, dried up, gathered, cast into the fire, and burned (15:6). Unfruitful branches show that they are only superficially connected to the vine. As Jesus spoke those words to his eleven disciples, Judas was showing that he was only superficially connected to Jesus (13:1–2, 10–11). Judas betrayed Jesus. In contrast to Judas (13:10–11), the eleven disciples were fruitful and clean (15:3). Judas represents spurious believers who are only superficially connected to Jesus, and the eleven disciples represent genuine believers who are vitally connected to Jesus. See Andrew David Naselli, *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It's Harmful* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 69–76.

[22] Because of passages like 2 Sam 7:12–16 and Ps 2, David became a type or model of his greater Son, the promised Messiah. This does not mean that everything that happened to David must find its echo in Jesus, but the NT understands many of the broad themes of his life that way (cf. Ps 16:8–11 in Acts 2:24–28; Ps 45:6–7 in Heb 1:8–9), especially those that focus on his suffering, weakness, betrayal by friends, and discouragement (e.g., Ps 22 in the passion narratives). On typology, see Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 81–88.

The opening line of Jesus speaking to his disciples puts it starkly: "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (15:16a). Believers enjoy privileges—such as being the friend of Jesus! (15:14–15)—not because they are wiser or better than others, but ultimately because Jesus selected them and set them apart.[23] Jesus chose specific individuals out of the world (15:19).

John 17:2, 6–9, 20, 24

> [2] since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. … [6] I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. [7] Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. [8] For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. [9] I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. … [20] I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word …. [24] Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:2, 6–9, 20, 24)

In Jesus's prayer, he repeatedly refers to a group of specific individuals whom the Father has given to him (17:2, 6, 9, 12, 24; cf. 6:37–39, 44). He prays only for present and future believers—not for the world.

John 20:30–31

> [30] Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; [31] but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31)

This passage encapsulates the theological message of John's Gospel: *Jesus the Messiah and Son of God gives eternal life to everyone who believes in him*. This Gospel emphasizes *believing* in Jesus.[24] The verb *believe* occurs an astounding 98 times! No wonder that some people refer to this book as "the Gospel of belief."[25] Most of the passages that mention *believing* emphasize human responsibility. Here are eight examples:

- 3:15–16, 18: "that whoever *believes* in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever *believes* in him should not perish but have eternal life. … Whoever *believes* in him is not

[23] Cf. Charles Simeon, *John XIII to Acts*, Horæ Homileticæ, 14 (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), 75–78.

[24] Faith is part of conversion. To state it as an equation, *conversion = repentance + faith*. On repentance in John, see John MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 81–82; David A. Croteau, "Repentance Found? The Concept of Repentance in the Fourth Gospel," *TMSJ* 24 (2013): 97–123.

[25] E.g., Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

condemned, but whoever *does not believe* is condemned already, because *he has not believed* in the name of the only Son of God."

- 3:36: "Whoever *believes* in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."
- 5:24: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and *believes* him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."
- 5:38–40: "and you do not have his word abiding in you, for *you do not believe* the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet *you refuse to come to me* that you may have life."
- 6:35: "I am the bread of life; whoever *comes* to me shall not hunger, and whoever *believes* in me shall never thirst."
- 8:24: "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you *believe* that I am he you will die in your sins."
- 12:46: "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever *believes* in me may not remain in darkness."
- 20:29: "Have you *believed* because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have *believed*."

How Does the Gospel According to John Contribute to a Systematic Theology of How Election, Regeneration, and Faith Relate to Each Other?

The above passages help us answer three questions:

1. Is election based on our faith that God foresees?
2. Does faith logically precede regeneration?
3. Is God's sovereignty regarding election and regeneration contingent on our faith?

Unconditional Election Logically and Chronologically Precedes Faith: Faith Is Not the Basis of Election

Grant Osborne, an Arminian exegete, explains, "Arminian theology accepts the doctrine of predestination but asserts that it occurs on the basis of foreknowledge (Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:2)—that is, God knew beforehand who would respond to the Spirit's convicting power via faith-decision, and he chose them."[26] But the Gospel According to John never says that our faith is the basis of election. Such a view is based on a presupposition that the text does not state. To the contrary, the text repeatedly emphasizes that election is God's sovereign choice.

[26] Grant R. Osborne, "The Gospel of John," in *The Gospel of John and 1–3 John*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2007), 97. See also H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1940), 2:334–78.

- People come to Jesus because the Father previously gave them to the Son (6:39, 65; 10:29; 17:6, 9, 24; 18:9). Robert Peterson rightly infers from the logic of John 6, "Election precedes faith and results in faith. For this reason, it is incorrect to maintain that election is based on God's foreseeing people's faith."[27] Bruce Ware rightly infers from the logic of John 17, "The unconditional election of the Father, then, accounts for the subsequent faith and salvation of those to whom the Son grants eternal life."[28]
- A human does not have the ability to come to Jesus on his or her own initiative (6:44, 63–65). The decisive cause of one's coming to Jesus is the Father's drawing him or her (6:44). Carson argues, "The combination of [John 6] v. 37a and v. 44 prove that this 'drawing' activity of the Father cannot be reduced to what theologians sometimes call 'prevenient grace' dispensed to every individual, for this 'drawing' is selective, or else the negative note in v. 44 is meaningless."[29]
- The fundamental reason a human does not believe in Jesus is that he or she is "not of God" (8:47).
- The Father has given specific individuals to Jesus as his sheep. The rest are not his sheep. Every human is either among Jesus's sheep or not. The fundamental reason a human does not believe is that he or she is not one of Jesus's sheep: "You do not believe because you are not among my sheep" (10:26). When a human first believes in Jesus, he or she does not experience a transformational status change from *not a sheep* to *a sheep*. To the contrary, a human believes in Jesus *because* he or she is already a sheep—that is, someone whom the Father previously gave to the Son.
- The fundamental reason a human does not believe in Jesus is that God has blinded and hardened his or her eyes and heart. Whether a person believes in Jesus ultimately depends on whether God enables a person to believe (12:37–40).
- One cannot say, "I knew a good deal when I saw one because I am smarter than the average guy. That's why God chose me." To the contrary, Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (15:16a).[30] That humbling logic is similar to 1 John 4:19: "We love because he first loved us." As Leon Morris observes while explaining John 6:37, "People do not come to Christ because it seems a good idea to them. It never does seem a good idea to sinful people."[31]

The nature of election is unconditional—that is, what we do is not a precondition of election. The basis of election is what God chooses to do—not our faith that he foresees.[32]

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[27] Robert A. Peterson, *Election and Free Will: God's Gracious Choice and Our Responsibility*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 61.

[28] Bruce A. Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian," in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006), 7.

[29] Carson, *John*, 293.

[30] Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14–17* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 107.

[31] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 325.

[32] Cf. Robert W. Yarbrough, "Divine Election in the Gospel of John," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 47–62.

Monergistic Regeneration Logically Precedes and Enables Faith: Faith Is Not the Basis of Regeneration

Regeneration is an act of God. Those who believe in Jesus "were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Only God's Spirit can produce spiritual life (3:3–8; 6:63). When God causes a human to be born again (cf. 1 Pet 1:3), he changes that person's nature so that he or she willingly comes to Christ; the Father effectually persuades or "draws" each person he has given to the Son (John 6:39–40, 44, 65). "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all" (6:63).

What the Gospel According to John teaches about regeneration affirms *monergism* (i.e., God alone causes a human to be born again), not *synergism* (i.e., being born again is a joint effort between God and a human).[33] The physical corpse of Lazarus illustrates the spiritual state of a human prior to God's causing him or her to be born again. Lazarus's corpse was lying lifeless in a tomb until the moment Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out" (11:43). Jesus alone raised Lazarus (which illustrates monergism), and then Lazarus responded after Jesus enabled him to do so. The raising of Lazarus was not a joint effort between Jesus and Lazarus (which would illustrate synergism). The raising of Lazarus was entirely one-sided. Similarly, the effectual call and regeneration are monergistic. (The effectual call is the means of regeneration.[34])

If regeneration is monergistic, then it follows that from God's perspective (logically or *theo*logically) regeneration precedes and enables faith.[35] Mark Snoeberger captures the logic of John 1:13 in a syllogism (Figure 1).

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[33] An Arminian theologian calls this "a main issue between Calvinism and Arminianism": "It is the historic issue of monergism and synergism. The latter, with its full meaning of conditionality in forgiveness and salvation, is ever the unyielding and unwavering position of Arminianism." John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1893), 2:122–23.

[34] Cf. Jonathan Hoglund, *Called by Triune Grace: Divine Rhetoric and the Effectual Call*, Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 6, 124–25.

[35] A minority Calvinist view sees the logical order as illumination, then faith, then regeneration. In other words, this view affirms that a life-giving work of the Spirit logically precedes faith but labels that work illumination instead of regeneration. The best case for this view that I am aware of is this three-part series: R. Bruce Compton, "The *Ordo Salutis* and Monergism: The Case for Faith Preceding Regeneration, Part 1," *BSac* 175 (2018): 34–49; R. Bruce Compton, "The *Ordo Salutis* and Monergism: The Case for Faith Preceding Regeneration, Part 2," *BSac* 175 (2018): 159–73; R. Bruce Compton, "The *Ordo Salutis* and Monergism: The Case for Faith Preceding Regeneration, Part 3," *BSac* 175 (2018): 284–303. I do not find this view exegetically or theologically persuasive. For example, in Compton's discussion on John 1:12–13, he argues, "Nothing inherent in the expressions [in 1:13] themselves highlights the inability of the human will in regeneration. They are simply compounded to emphasize the contrast between human procreation and being born of God." Compton, "The *Ordo Salutis* and Monergism: Part 2," 163. That manner of arguing seems to misread the point of the text and is as persuasive to me as Arminians who argue that John 10:28–29 still allows for a believer to reject his or her salvation and apostatize since Jesus does not specify that it is impossible for a believer to remove himself or herself from Jesus's hand or the Father's hand.

Figure 1. The Logic of John 1:13[36]

A: No act of the human will can inaugurate regeneration.
B: Faith is an act of human will.
C: Faith cannot inaugurate regeneration.

From our perspective, however, regeneration and faith seem to be chronologically simultaneous. In other words, we do not discern a time gap between the moment that (1) God instantaneously imparts spiritual life to a spiritually dead human and (2) a human first believes in Jesus. Though we perceive that we experience regeneration and faith simultaneously, that does not mean that regeneration and faith must be simultaneous from God's perspective. There is a logical order in which one enables and causes the other—see Figure 2.

Figure 2. Analogies for How Regeneration Enables and Causes Faith

Regeneration: **God regenerates a human.**	**Faith:** **A human believes in Jesus.**
Turn on a water faucet.	Water runs out of the faucet.[37]
Flip a toggle switch in a dark room.	Light fills the room (cf. 2 Cor 4:6; 1 Pet 2:9).
Jesus commands, "Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43b).	"The man who had died came out" (John 11:44a).
A mother gives birth to an infant.	The infant breathes.[38]

All of the analogies in Figure 2 illustrate that regeneration is both passive and instantaneous. The actions are *passive* in that the first action happens to another item; the item does not perform the first action—that is, water does not turn on the faucet; light does not flip the toggle switch; Lazarus does command his corpse to come out of the tomb; and an infant does not decide to be conceived and born.[39] Regeneration is what God does to us; it is not something we do. The actions are *instantaneous* in that they appear to occur simultaneously. There is not a noticeable time-delay between flipping a toggle switch and light filling a room.[40]

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[36] This figure is from Mark A. Snoeberger, "The Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith in a Theological *Ordo Salutis*," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 7 (2002): 80.

[37] Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 107.

[38] Cf. Piper, *Finally Alive*, 7:354n1: "We will not make any significant distinction between the imagery of conception and the imagery of birth. Even pre-scientific, first-century people knew that children were alive and kicking before birth. But the biblical writers did not press the details of gestation in discussing the new birth. In general, when they (and we) speak of the new birth, we are speaking more broadly of new life coming into being whether one thinks of the point of conception or the point of birth."

[39] Cf. John Piper: "Faith is our act, but it is possible because of God's act. Repentance and faith are our work. But we will not repent and believe unless God does his work to overcome our hard and rebellious hearts. This divine work is called *regeneration*. Our work is called *conversion*. Conversion does indeed include an act of will by which we renounce sin and submit ourselves to the authority of Christ and put our hope and trust in him. We are responsible to do this and will be condemned if we don't. But just as clearly, the Bible teaches that, owing to our hard heart and willful blindness and spiritual insensitivity, we cannot do this." John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 2:67.

[40] Contra some Reformed theologians who assert that there may be a time gap between when God regenerates an infant and when conversion (i.e., initial repentance and faith) occurs. Peter van Mastricht

But some of the analogies in Figure 2 are imperfect because they do not exactly parallel how regeneration and faith relate. For example, a water faucet and toggle switch are impersonal items, not personal agents. The most helpful aspect of the analogies is how they illustrate that one action enables and causes another. The first action is logically prior to the second action. Thus, I agree with how Matthew Barrett defines regeneration:

> Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit to unite the elect sinner to Christ by breathing new life into that dead and depraved sinner so as to raise him from spiritual death to spiritual life, removing his heart of stone and giving him a heart of flesh, so that he is washed, born from above and now able to repent and trust in Christ as a new creation. Moreover, regeneration is the act of God alone and therefore it is monergistic in nature, accomplished by the sovereign act of the Spirit apart from and unconditioned upon man's will to believe. In short, man's faith does not cause regeneration but regeneration causes man's faith.[41]

When God regenerates a human, he creates a believer.[42] We may still have questions about exactly why and how regeneration works the way it does. Ultimately, analyzing regeneration is like analyzing the wind. The wind evidences itself only by what it affects (John 3:8).

God's Absolute Sovereignty Regarding Election and Regeneration Is Compatible with Human Responsibility Regarding Faith

Jesus explains, "You do not believe because you are not among my sheep" (10:26). On the one hand, being a sheep depends solely on God's sovereign choice. On the other hand, you are responsible to believe, so you are culpable if you do not believe.

Jesus demands, "You must be born again" (3:7). On the one hand, being born again is solely a work of God. On the other hand, you are responsible to be born again, so you are culpable if you are not born again.

On the one hand, God's sovereignty regarding election and regeneration is absolute; it is not contingent on our faith. On the other hand, humans are morally responsible to believe in Jesus; we are culpable if we do not believe in Jesus.[43]

Both of those sentences are true at the same time without contradicting each other. God is absolutely sovereign to choose to save individuals and regenerate them, and humans are morally responsible and thus culpable without being puppets or robots. What John's Gospel teaches about election, regeneration, and faith fits with

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refers to "seminal faith, which belongs through regeneration even to infants"—that is, "God works faith, first, in regeneration, whereby he confers the seed of faith, that by it we may be able to believe at the proper time, once all things needed are supplied." Peter van Mastricht, *Faith in the Triune God*, vol. 2 in *Theoretical and Practical Theology*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 7, 14.

[41] Matthew Barrett, *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 127.

[42] Cf. Sproul: "God intervenes in the hearts of the elect and changes the disposition of their soul. He creates faith in faithless hearts." R. C. Sproul, *Everyone's a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2014), 228.

[43] See Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 163–98.

the position that modern philosophy calls *compatibilism*. That is, God's sovereignty and human responsibility are compatible; they can exist together without conflicting. They do not break the law of noncontradiction.[44]

The many passages in John's Gospel that emphasize human responsibility[45] do not cancel out or contradict the passages that emphasize God's sovereignty. Both are true. If we sense a problem, then the problem is not with the God-breathed text but with our finite and fallen minds. Some concepts are too difficult for us to fully understand. There is a tension for us—a mystery.[46] Carson observes how this is the case, for example, regarding Judas (and Caiaphas in 11:49–52):

> Divine ultimacy even behind evil actions is presupposed. But divine ultimacy operates in some mysterious way so that human responsibility is in no way mitigated, while the divine being is in no way tarnished. In particular, Judas is responsible even when Satan is using him; but over both stands the sovereignty of God.[47]

The Gospel According to John presents this tension without a hint that it is philosophically perplexing. MacArthur rightly asserts,

> A full understanding of exactly how those two realities, human responsibility and divine sovereignty, work together lies beyond human comprehension; but there is no difficulty with them in the infinite mind of God. Significantly, the Bible does not attempt to harmonize them, nor does it apologize for the logical tension between them.[48]

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[44] Here is how Carson put it: "Divine sovereignty in salvation is a major theme in the Fourth Gospel. Moreover, the form of it in these verses [i.e., 6:38–40], that there exists a group of people who have been given by the Father to the Son, and that this group will inevitably come to the Son and be preserved by him, not only recurs in this chapter (v. 65) and perhaps in 10:29, but is strikingly central to the Lord's prayer in ch. 17 (vv. 1, 6, 9, 24; *cf.* Carson, pp. 186ff.). John is not embarrassed by this theme, because unlike many contemporary philosophers and theologians, he does not think that human responsibility is thereby mitigated. Thus, he can speak with equal ease of those who look to the Son and believe in him: this they must do, if they are to enjoy eternal life. But this responsibility to exercise faith does not, for the Evangelist, make God contingent. In short, John is quite happy with the position that modern philosophy calls 'compatibilism.'" Carson, *John*, 291. Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 458–64.

[45] See the sampling of passages under the "John 20:30–31" heading above.

[46] Sproul helpfully distinguishes three terms: (1) "The logical law of contradiction says that a thing cannot be what it is and not be what it is at the same time and in the same relationship." (2) "A paradox is an apparent contradiction that upon closer scrutiny can be resolved." (3) A mystery is "that which is true but which we do not understand." Sproul continues, "No one understands a contradiction because contradictions are intrinsically unintelligible. … Mysteries are capable of being understood. The New Testament reveals to us things that were concealed and not understood in Old Testament times. There are things that once were mysterious to us that are now understood. This does not mean that everything that is presently a mystery to us will one day be made clear, but that many current mysteries will be unraveled for us. … Christianity has plenty of room for mysteries. It has no room for contradictions." R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 43–47.

[47] Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 132.

[48] John MacArthur, *John 1–11*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 442.

Conclusion

After inductively examining what key passages in the Gospel According to John say about election, regeneration, and faith, I deductively synthesized how the Gospel According to John contributes to a systematic theology of how election, regeneration, and faith relate to each other:

1. Unconditional election logically and chronologically precedes faith. Faith is not the basis of election.
2. Monergistic regeneration logically precedes and enables faith. Faith is not the basis of regeneration.
3. God's absolute sovereignty regarding election and regeneration is compatible with human responsibility regarding faith.

I conclude with (1) an observation, (2) a warning, and (3) an exhortation.

Concluding Observation. While some Christians profess to disagree that God sovereignly saves specific individuals in this way, it is noteworthy that Christians seem to universally affirm God's sovereignty in salvation in (1) how they thank God for their own conversion and (2) how they ask God to save specific unbelievers. J. I. Packer highlights this at the beginning of his masterful little book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*:

> [I am not] going to spend time proving to you the particular truth that *God is sovereign in salvation*. For that, too, you believe already. Two facts show this. In the first place, you give God thanks for your conversion. Now why do you do that? Because you know in your heart that God was entirely responsible for it. You did not save yourself; He saved you. Your thanksgiving is itself an acknowledgment that your conversion was not your own work, but His work. …
>
> As you look back, you take to yourself the blame for your past blindness and indifference and obstinacy and evasiveness in face of the gospel message; but you do not pat yourself on the back for having been at length mastered by the insistent Christ. You would never dream of dividing the credit for your salvation between God and yourself. You have never for one moment supposed that the decisive contribution to your salvation was yours and not God's. …
>
> There is a second way in which you acknowledge that God is sovereign in salvation. You pray for the conversion of others. In what terms, now, do you intercede for them? Do you limit yourself to asking that God will bring them to a point where they can save themselves, independently of Him? I do not think you do. I think that what you do is pray in categorical terms that God will, quite simply and decisively, save them: that He will open the eyes of their understanding, soften their hard hearts, renew their natures, and move their wills to receive the Saviour. You ask God to work in them everything necessary for their salvation. You would not dream of making it a point in your prayer that you are not asking God actually to bring them to faith, because you recognize that that is something He cannot do. Nothing of the sort! When you pray for unconverted people, you do so on the assumption that it is in God's power to bring them to faith. You entreat Him to do that very thing, and your confidence

> in asking rests upon the certainty that He is able to do what you ask. And so indeed He is: this conviction, which animates your intercessions, is God's own truth, written on your heart by the Holy Spirit.[49]

Concluding Warning. Some Christians (including me) love the above truths about God's sovereignty in election, regeneration, and faith. We should love any truth that God reveals, so in no way do I want to be a wet blanket over embers of praise. But since in some circles "Calvinists" have a poor reputation, here is a friendly warning. Greg Dutcher wisely cautions us about eight ways we might wrongly respond to such glorious truths about God's sovereignty:

1. By loving Calvinism as an end in itself
2. By becoming a theologian instead of a disciple
3. By loving God's sovereignty more than God himself
4. By losing an urgency in evangelism
5. By learning only from other Calvinists
6. By tidying up the Bible's "loose ends"
7. By being an arrogant know-it-all
8. By scoffing at the hang-ups others have with Calvinism[50]

Concluding Exhortation. In his sermons D. A. Carson often recounts a story about someone asking George Whitefield, "Why do you go around preaching, 'You must be born again' all the time? You go someplace, and all you say is, 'You must be born again.' Why do you keep emphasizing that?" Whitefield answered, "Because you *must* be born again!"

We might feel a tension between God's sovereignty (i.e., God causes a human to be born again) and human responsibility (i.e., a human is morally responsible to be born again). Jesus does not attempt to resolve the tension: "You must be born again" (John 3:7b).

When Jesus says to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (3:7), the word "You" is plural. What Jesus demands here applies to all humans, not just Nicodemus. It applies to *you* (singular): *You* must be born again.

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[49] J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 12–15.

[50] Greg Dutcher, *Killing Calvinism: How to Destroy a Perfectly Good Theology from the Inside* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform, 2012).

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THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF PURITAN DOCTRINAL PREACHING: THE WESTMINSTER DIRECTORY AND ITS APPLICATION FOR TODAY

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After six years of work, the Westminster Assembly produced a series of documents collectively known as the Westminster Standards. One of the least known standards they produced was on public worship. In this standard, the Assembly produced a number of guidelines for transformative preaching, many of which the church today would do well to remember. This article explores these guidelines and considers the implications for modern preaching.

* * * * *

Some years ago, I had the privilege of going into the very room in Westminster Abbey, London, where the Westminster Assembly met. It is not a very large place, and you can imagine the heated debates taking place with several dozen men packed into it. When the divines first gathered on July 1, 1643, they did not think that the Assembly would last very long. Parliament had summoned them only to revise the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. They aimed to establish greater theological unity according to the treaty between the English Parliament and Scotland known as the Solemn League and Covenant. But, in fact, the Assembly met for nearly six years, holding over a thousand sessions and producing an entirely new Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Form of Church Government, and the Directory for Public Worship.[1]

[1] All these documents may be found in *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994). This book also contains other documents related to the Westminster Assembly but not composed by it, such as the Scottish Directory for Family Worship. The latter was preceded by the anonymous *Familie Exercise, or The Service of God in Families* (Edinburgh: Robert Bryson, 1641),

These documents, collectively known as the Westminster Standards, have enjoyed an unusual divine blessing. The Westminster Assembly's work has directed an international movement of English-speaking Reformed Christianity for some 375 years. Benjamin Warfield said that the Westminster standards are the "crystallization of the very essence of evangelical religion;" in terms of theology, they are, "the richest and most precise and best guarded statement possessed by man, of all that enters into evangelical religion and of all that must be safeguarded if evangelical religion is to persist in the world;" and in terms of godliness, "the very expressed essence of vital religion."[2]

In this address we give our attention to one standard in particular: the Westminster Directory for Public Worship.[3] The Directory was drafted by a sub-committee of four Scottish commissioners and five English divines, one of whom was a Scot by birth. The Directory was completed by the Assembly on December 27, 1644, making it the first document produced by Westminster, though the least known today. In early 1645 it was adopted successively by the English Parliament, the Scottish church's General Assembly, and the Scottish Parliament. On April 17, 1645 the English Parliament made the Directory the official guide of public worship instead of the Book of Common Prayer. This change was swept away by the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and the Act of Uniformity in 1662. But in the 1690s, the Directory again rose in influence among English Nonconformists as a guide to simple, biblical worship.[4]

In this paper, I want to probe the Directory's guidelines for transformative preaching with an emphasis on its central doctrinal component and then consider the Spirit's transforming power through such preaching for today.

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perhaps composed by Alexander Henderson. It was adopted by the Scottish church in 1647. Both the Directory for Public Worship and the Directory for Family Worship laid the foundation for the American Presbyterian Directory for Worship (1788). See Stanley R. Hall, "The American Presbyterian 'Directory for Worship': History of a Liturgical Strategy" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1990), 80–83.

[2] Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Significance of the Westminster Standards as a Creed* (New York: Scribner, 1898), 36.

[3] On the Directory of Public Worship, see Ian Breward, ed., *The Westminster Directory Being a Directory for the Publique Worship of God in the Three Kingdomes* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1980); J. A. Caiger, "Preaching—Puritan and Reformed," in *Puritan Papers: Volume Two, 1960–1962*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001); Alan Clifford, "The Westminster Directory of Public Worship (1645)," in *The Reformation of Worship* (S.l.: Westminster Conference, 1989), 53–75; Mark Dever and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Westminster Directory of Public Worship* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Heritage, 2008); Hall, "The American Presbyterian 'Directory for Worship'," 31–80; "The Westminster Directory and Reform of Worship," in *Calvin Studies VIII: The Westminster Confession in Current Thought* (S.l.: Colloquium on Calvin Studies, 1996), 91–105; Thomas Leishman, *The Westminster Directory. Edited, with an Introduction and Notes by T. Leishman* (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1901); Frederick W. McNally, "The Westminster Directory: Its Origin and Significance" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1958); Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Public Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007); Iain H. Murray, "The Directory for Public Worship," in *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. John L. Carson and David W. Hall (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 169–91.

[4] Muller and Ward, *Scripture and Worship*, 90–92.

It is striking that in the midst of civil war and great theological upheaval, the Assembly's Puritan divines gave priority to the matter of worship before writing the confession and catechisms. They invested more than seventy sessions, plus many subcommittee meetings, in writing this short Directory.[5]

The foundational concern of the Puritans was that worship be directed by Scripture alone—God's will and not the inventions of men (Matt. 15:9). The Directory says in its preface, "Wherein our care hath been to hold forth such things as are of divine institution in every ordinance; and other things we have endeavoured to set forth according to the rules of Christian prudence, agreeable to the general rules of the word of God."[6]

The centrality of the Word in worship also appears in the ample instructions the Directory for Public Worship gives for preaching. Stanley Hall says that in this scheme preaching is "the unifying center of worship."[7] Though the Directory covers fifteen topics, over a tenth of it is devoted to "the Preaching of the Word." In the order of worship, the Directory places preaching after a call to worship, opening with prayer, consecutive Scripture readings from Old and New Testaments,[8] singing a psalm, and a long prayer by the pastor. After the sermon comes another prayer, the singing of a psalm, and the sacraments. All of these instructions are rich in wisdom, but we will focus upon preaching.

The divines begin their guidelines for preaching with an impressive statement drawn from the Scriptures: "Preaching of the word being the power of God unto salvation, one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the ministry of the gospel, should be so performed that the workman needs not be ashamed but may save himself and those that hear him."[9]

In short scope, the Directory lays down a remarkable set of principles for the public proclamation of God's Word. We may classify what follows in the Directory as (1) preparation for preaching, (2) introduction in preaching, (3) instruction in preaching, (4) application in preaching, (5) adaptation in preaching, (6) dedication of the preacher, and (7) cooperation among preachers and teachers.[10] Let's consider each of these aspects of preaching.

Preparation for Preaching

Before the sermon is prepared, the man must be prepared. The Directory lists gifts which qualify a man for the weighty task of preaching, beginning with

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[5] Hall, "The Westminster Directory and Reform of Worship," 91.

[6] "The Directory for Public Worship," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 374; See Murray, "The Directory for Public Worship," 176–78; Muller and Ward, *Scripture and Worship*, 96–98.

[7] Hall, "The Westminster Directory and Reform of Worship," 98.

[8] Hall notes that the Scripture readings are disconnected from the text of the sermon, perhaps because the reading of Scripture was considered a distinct ordinance from its preaching. Hall, "The Westminster Directory and Reform of Worship," 98.

[9] "The Directory for Public Worship," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 379. See Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Tim. 4:16.

[10] "The Directory for Public Worship," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 379–81. All further quotes from the preaching section in the Directory are from these three pages.

knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, the arts and sciences "as are handmaids unto divinity," and "the whole body of theology," what today we would call systematic theology. J. A. Craiger comments on the last, "Notice this characteristically Puritan view of the counsel of God as a body of divinity, with all its parts properly fashioned, proportioned, and related. The minister of the Gospel must be able to see it whole."[11]

The Directory for Public Worship then refers to "the rules for ordination." They were quite demanding of ministerial candidates—particularly in the area of sound doctrine grounded in the original languages of Scripture and Latin. In the Form of Church Government, published the same year as the Directory, we read that a candidate for ordination must be required by the presbytery to read from the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures, translate a portion into Latin, and perhaps show his proficiency in logic and philosophy. He must demonstrate a familiarity with the major writers in theology, be able to explain orthodox doctrine and to refute contemporary errors, exegete a text of Scripture, answer cases of conscience (questions about assurance and ethics), know the chronology of biblical history, and also know the history of Christianity.[12] One should remember that in the seventeenth century Latin was the official language of the ministry, the school, the sciences, and the government.[13]

Later the candidate for ordination must answer before the congregation about his faith in Christ, his Reformed beliefs according to the Scriptures, his sincerity and diligence for "praying, reading, meditation, preaching, ministering the sacraments, discipline, and doing all ministerial duties," his zeal and faithfulness for both truth and unity, his care that he and his family be examples to the flock, his humble submission to correction, and his resolve to fulfill his calling regardless of "trouble and persecution."[14] Academically and spiritually, these were rigorous demands for a disciplined, gifted man, well-grounded in biblical and Reformed doctrine in a way that is suitable for a high calling.

The Directory says that the man of God must not rest on his training, however, but continue in "reading and studying of the word" and "still to seek by prayer, and an humble heart" further knowledge and illumination in his private preparations. A preacher must always be a student of doctrinal truth with the Bible as his textbook and the Spirit as his teacher. We see here that the public prayers of the minister for the Spirit's assistance must be undergirded by his private prayers.

Each sermon must be the preaching of biblical doctrine from a text of Scripture. The preacher may select his Scripture text either topically to speak to some doctrine or special occasion, or by preaching through a chapter or book of the Bible. The Directory does not mandate either method, but gives the preacher freedom to do "as he shall see fit." We note here that the minister has liberty about the subject and series on which he will preach. Yet, as Caiger observes, "It is noteworthy that preaching for some special occasion still calls for an exposition of Scripture."[15]

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[11] Caiger, "Preaching—Puritan and Reformed," 167.
[12] "The Form of Church-Government," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 413.
[13] Latin was the official language of government documents in England from 1066–1733.
[14] "The Form of Church-Government," 414.
[15] Caiger, "Preaching—Puritan and Reformed," 168.

This brings us now to consider the content of the sermon itself. The Directory speaks to it in terms of introduction, instruction, and application.

Introduction in Preaching

The Assembly did not approve of a long, complicated introduction, but a short and clear introduction focused on the Scripture text. The minister could develop his introduction out of the text itself, or its context, or a parallel text, or the general doctrinal teaching of Scripture. In other words, it must be a biblical introduction grounded in sound doctrine.

The preachers should present the contents of the text to the hearer's view, either by a summary if it is long (like a history or parable) or a paraphrase if it is short. He should highlight the "scope" of the text, that is, its purpose in the context. Then he should tell the congregation *the main points of doctrine* found in it. This introduction sets the stage for the minister to proclaim the doctrinal teachings of that portion of Scripture.

Instruction in Preaching

The backbone of preaching is the drawing out of substantive doctrines of the Bible—doctrines that can have transforming power in the lives of the listeners by the salvific power of the Holy Spirit. Each doctrine on which he preaches must pass three tests: First, it must be "the truth of God," that is, the teaching of Holy Scripture. Second, it must be "grounded on that text, that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence." Even topical preaching must be expository in that every doctrine must stand upon a text which clearly teaches it. Third, he must focus upon "those doctrines which are principally intended, and make most for the edification of the hearers." In other words, let the text of Scripture and the needs of the people set the agenda for the doctrine(s) being propounded in the sermon. This stops the preacher from preaching a doctrine that is only tangentially related to the Scripture text; he must preach the main thrust of the text. It also guards him against preaching on speculative topics that might be discussed in schools but are irrelevant to the spiritual needs of the congregation.

The Directory says, "The doctrine is to be expressed in plain terms." The preacher must explain things that might not be clear. If the doctrine is a deduction from the words of the text and not obviously stated in the text, then the preacher must convincingly show how it comes from the text. The goal is that the listeners can see that this is the point of the Scripture and their conscience may embrace it as God's authoritative doctrine to transform them to become more like Christ.

After stating the doctrine as rooted in the text, the preacher should then develop it so that, with the Spirit's blessing, it may movingly fill the mind and powerfully grasp the heart. The divines suggested a number of tools for doing this. It may involve opening up "parallel places of scripture" which are "plain and pertinent" in order to confirm the doctrine in view. The divines wisely say that it is better to have a few confirming texts that speak directly and clearly to the doctrine than to have many texts that only circumvent it. Opening up the doctrine may require making "arguments or reasons" which are "solid" and "convincing." The preacher can use "illustrations, of what kind soever" as are "full of light" and "convey the truth into

the hearer's heart with spiritual delight." Illustrations should not merely entertain, but act as humble servants carrying delicious spiritual food to the table where the guests are seated. He may also find it helpful to answer "any doubt" arising from an apparent contradiction in Scripture or that seems to conflict with human reason. Answering objections can be very helpful, but it can also turn into an endless list of arguments which does not edify. One must use moderation in addressing them.

The Puritans excelled in preaching doctrine, making each sermon an exploration in biblical truth. However, in developing a doctrine one may lose sight of the Scripture text. It is safer to stick close to the text and develop the main points of the sermon out of the text itself. Again, this will allow the Scripture to set the agenda for your preaching. At times the Puritans did this well, as with William Perkins's *Commentary on Galatians* or Thomas Manton's sermons on James. But sometimes their preaching lost its tight connection to a text of Scripture, such as when Thomas Hooker preached a very long series on Acts 2:37, printed as several hundreds of pages in the tenth book of his *Application of Redemption*. For a theological treatise on a particular doctrine that is acceptable, but such is not always the preaching of Scriptures in a balanced way.

Application in Preaching

The Directory advises, "He is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers." This is a difficult work, "requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation." The preacher's flesh will shrink back from spiritual applications, and fallen sinners often find such preaching offensive. But the Holy Spirit has often used preaching conjoined with application to save sinners, transforming them powerfully by the doctrines being applied. Therefore, the Directory says, the minister "is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that is auditors [listeners] may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."[16]

Application occupies forty percent of the Directory's treatment of preaching, clearly a prominent concern in the Westminster method. The Assembly offered six forms of application or "uses":

1. *Instruction or information*. The preacher may deduce some logical "consequence from his doctrine" and "confirm it by a few firm arguments." This helps the congregation to see each doctrine as a branch of the whole counsel of God. We note that it reinforces one truth with another and helps people to develop a unified and comprehensive perspective on all of life.

2. *Confutation of false doctrines*. The divines warned against raising "an old heresy from the grave" or unnecessarily expose people to evil. "But," they said, "if the people be in danger of an error, he is to confute it soundly, and endeavor to satisfy their judgments and conscience against all objections." Mark Dever writes, "Preachers are not only encouraged to take on controversial issues; they are required to do so in the Puritan conception of the pastorate."[17]

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[16] See Heb. 4:12.

[17] Dever and Ferguson, *Westminster Directory of Public Worship*, 45.

3. *Exhortation to duties*. In addition to pressing God's commands upon his hearers, the preacher should also explain "the means that help in the performance of them." In other words, he should command them what to do and teach them how to do it through Christ and the instruments by which Christ gives us grace. Sinclair Ferguson says, "'Duty' is a much misunderstood term in our modern culture and carries with it the aroma of legalism. In contrast the Puritan minister realized that grace always leads to and commands duties; he was a Paulinist in this sense—all his imperatives were rooted in the indicatives of grace; but every indicative of grace gave rise in his preaching to an imperative of grace-filled obedience."[18]

4. *Admonition against sin*. The minister is to preach against specific sins, which requires "special wisdom." The minister should expose "the nature and greatness of the sin, with the misery attending it." He should help people to see how this temptation captures people, and the danger it presents to them. And he should show them "the remedies and best way to avoid it."

5. *Application of comfort*. He may give comfort in general, "or particularly against some special troubles or terrors." Here the pastor must be a skillful physician of the soul, learning from Scripture and experience the afflictions of the heart. This requires not only matching comfort to affliction, but also answering "such objections as a troubled heart and afflicted spirit may suggest to the contrary." Guilty sinners resist God's comforts and need help to embrace them.

6. *Examination of the hearer.* This form of application leads people to ask themselves: Have I attained to this grace? Have I performed this duty? Am I guilty of that sin? Am I in danger of this judgment? Can I rightfully claim these consolations? This use of examination, in the hands of a wise preacher well-studied in the Scriptures, makes application profitable. It moves each listener from abstractly considering the truth to bringing it home to his own condition. As a result, by the Spirit's grace, the hearer is stirred to obedience, humbled for sin, distressed by danger, or strengthened with comfort.

These applications are linked by inference and logic to the doctrine. They are structured like this. Since this doctrine is true, therefore: (1) be sure of additional truths that this doctrine implies; (2) abjure the following errors that this doctrine contradicts; (3) do whatever good things that this doctrine requires; (4) stop doing or avoid doing whatever bad things that this doctrine forbids; (5) apply to yourself the encouragement that this doctrine offers; and (6) ask yourself where you stand spiritually in the light of this doctrine and how far you are resolved to live by it.

Clearly the Westminster Assembly had in mind a sermon where a large chunk of time was given to doctrinal application. Even in an hour-long sermon, such as the Puritans were accustomed to preach, developing two or three kinds of doctrinal application as outlined above would occupy a significant portion of the message.

Adaptation in Preaching

The Directory offers a detailed and demanding set of guidelines for teaching biblical doctrine and making spiritual application. But at this point the Assembly

[18] Dever and Ferguson, *Westminster Directory of Public Worship*, 29.

wisely inserts a note of flexibility. The preacher should not follow this method rigidly but adapt it so as to feed his flock.

For example, the Directory tells us that the preacher should not always develop "every doctrine which lies in his text." He should also be selective in his applications based on personal knowledge of the congregation gained "by his residence and conversing with his flock." Here we see the essential connection between a preaching ministry and a relational ministry. How can the preacher know what is "most needful and seasonable" for the flock if he does not know them? Above all, he must major on those applications "such as may most draw their souls to Christ, the fountain of light, holiness, and comfort." Believing that Christ is the center of the Bible and the answer to our needs, the preacher must labor in his applications to offer men the Bread of Life and to transform them by powerful doctrinal applications blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Even more important than the method of preaching is the man who preaches. He is "the servant of Christ," and this led them next to outline the qualities of a godly ministry.

Dedication of the Preacher

The Westminster divines stated seven characteristics that should mark the "whole ministry" of a godly doctrinal preacher. He must serve Christ:

1. *Painfully.* In the divines' parlance, *painful* means with labor, toil, and hard work. Today we might say *painstakingly*. They had no tolerance for a negligent or lazy minister.

2. *Plainly*. He must speak the truth with simplicity, clarity, and directness so that even the uneducated will understand the doctrines being explained. The Puritans saw this not merely as an educational goal, but as a spiritual law exemplified by the apostle Paul, whom they quoted when they said, "delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."[19] This required the preacher to avoid "unprofitable use" of foreign languages in the pulpit, though he must use Hebrew, Greek, and Latin in the study. He must not follow in the style of preaching popular in aristocratic circles, by displaying his cleverness in playing artistic games with words, meanings, and sounds. Quotations of other writers should be "sparingly" cited, whoever they may be.

3. *Faithfully*. The divines call on the minister to preach from pure motives. He should seek Christ's glory and the salvation and sanctification of men, not "his own gain or glory." He must preach the whole counsel of God, "keeping nothing back which may promote these holy ends." He should not show partiality in the pulpit, but give each person "his own portion," neither ignoring the poor and weak, nor sparing the great from his rebukes. In other words, he must preach as servant of Christ and not as a man-pleaser (Gal 1:10).

4. *Wisely*. Preaching requires skill in crafting both doctrine and application so that it is "most likely to prevail." This skill is especially crucial when reproving sin. Whether preparing to teach, to reprove, to correct, or to train in righteousness, the minister should not only study the Bible, but also his audience. He constantly asks, "What will woo them? What will win them?"

[19] See 1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:1–5.

5. *Gravely*. In its older sense, the term gravity refers to seriousness or solemnity appropriate to the weightiness of a matter, as opposed to levity which treats matters as light or trifling. There is a divine authority to the message and doctrine being proclaimed, and so there should be a dignity to the messenger. He must not be a court jester nor comedian nor entertainer, but should shun "all such gesture, voice, and expressions" as may provoke people to despise his authority.

6. *Affectionately*. The people should be able to see that everything their minister does comes from "his godly zeal, and hearty desire to do them good." It is a beautiful thing if the people of a church, though they may disagree with their minister over certain matters, still can say, "I know that my minister loves me. He really wants to do me good, especially eternal good." Such is the character of the good Shepherd, and it is no accident that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10).

7. *Earnestly*. Both in public and in private, the preacher must serve with an eager desire and sincere spirit: "as taught of God, and persuaded in his own heart, that all that he teacheth is the truth of Christ; and walking before his flock, as an example to them."

Cooperation among Preachers and Teachers

The Directory concludes by encouraging ministers serving in the same congregation to work out arrangements so that each can use his strengths to the utmost profit. It recognizes that some men are more gifted in "doctrine" and others in "exhortation." Where more than one preacher resides with a church, let them come to an agreement of how to best use their gifts.[20]

In their wisdom, the Westminster divines set up a partnership between "pastors and teachers" so that they might labor together "for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11–12). While we should never separate doctrinal teaching from exhortation (2 Tim 4:2), it is wise to recognize the Spirit's will in gifting different men in different ways (1 Cor 12:11). Each must have his place to serve.

The Spirit's Transforming Power Through Such Preaching

The Westminster Assembly members are remembered for passing on to subsequent generations brilliant statements of biblical, Reformed, doctrinal preaching. In a few words, they capture much wisdom about how to preach doctrinally to the church of God in a way that the Holy Spirit was most likely to bless with transforming power. They had a high view of preaching because they had a high view of the Word of God. Through the Word of truth, the Spirit applies Christ to the soul, thus building a living church of elect sinners. And they recognized that in the mystery of God's will, preaching held a preeminent place among the various ways God's Word comes to sinners and saints alike. Hence they wrote in the Shorter Catechism (Q. 90), "How is the word made effectual to salvation? The Spirit of God maketh the reading, *but especially the preaching of the word,* an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation."[21]

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[20] Cf. "The Form of Church Government," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 401–402.

[21] "The Shorter Catechism," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 312, emphasis added.

For this reason they also called upon men to cherish preaching and to respond to it conscientiously. The Larger Catechism (Q. 160) says, "It is required of those that hear the word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hid it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives."[22]

The application of all of this for us today is that such doctrinal preaching is God's ordinary means to exercise transformative power in people's souls by His Spirit. The Word of truth plainly preached is a powerful tool in the hands of God. Paul says he preaches Christ in this plain manner "that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:5). He heartily believed that the gospel was "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom 1:16). Yes, "the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing," and they scoff at it; but to those "who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18).

Are we satisfied merely by the dissemination of information if the power of God is not present to change lives? May it never be so. We must not mistake Paul's emphasis upon teaching doctrine for merely educating the mind. Paul says, "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (1 Cor 4:20), and we find him rejoicing that "our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power" (1 Thess 1:5). The faithful preacher does not shrug and say, "Whether or not anyone is saved or sanctified through my preaching, it does not matter to me." No, his heart cries for the power of God to come flaming from heaven and strike the altar as he preaches and applies the doctrinal truths of Scripture so that the people turn back to God and declare, "The LORD, he is God!" (cf. 1 Kings 18:37–39).

Nor is the power of God divorced from the preacher and his manner of preaching. Hear me carefully on this point. I am not saying that the preacher provides the power, nor that he merits God's blessing. All is of sovereign grace. However, when God sends power *through* the preacher as he proclaims God's doctrine, the Puritans would say that he generally sends power *to* the preacher also. When Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium, Luke reports that they "so spake, that a great multitude … believed" (Acts 14:1). The manner of their preaching impacted their hearers. How did they preach? Luke goes on to say that they were "speaking boldly" (*parrēsiazomai*). Paul likewise says, "We were bold in our God to speak unto the gospel of God with much contention" (2 Thess 2:2). When Paul says of his ministry, "We use great plainness of speech" (2 Cor 3:12), the Greek text may be literally translated, "We use boldness [*parrēsia*]" (cf. KJV mg., ESV). This is characteristic of Spirit-filled preaching—a supernatural boldness, freedom, and authority (Acts 4:8, 13, 31), often called "divine unction" by the Puritans.

Powerful Christian preaching is not human boldness or proud self-confidence. It is boldness rooted in God and in His Word of truth, and is entirely consistent with preaching "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling," as Paul says (1 Cor 2:3). Spirit-empowered boldness humbles man and exalts God alone. Paul's "fear" and "trembling" have sometimes been explained as the consequence of his personal problems or the challenges of the ministry, but it may well be that he preached with fear and trembling precisely because he spoke as one who knows that he speaks in

[22] "The Larger Catechism," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 253.

the presence of the living God.[23] In other words, a sense of your own weakness and unworthiness mingled with the fear of God may be a sign not of poor preaching, but preaching in the fullness of the Spirit.

The power of biblical, doctrinal preaching is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, using gospel preaching to create and nurture faith in Jesus Christ. There is no substitute for the Spirit's work. There is no safety net or fallback position for the preacher if the Holy Spirit does not do His work by applying doctrinal preaching to the mind, soul, and affections of the hearer. All depends upon His gracious influence. Such preaching is a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy that God's temple will be built "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech 4:6).

The word translated "demonstration" (*apodeixis*) that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 2:4 means an exhibition or proof.[24] Among the ancient Greeks, the word could be used of logical proofs or arguments, such as in the philosophy of Aristotle.[25] But Paul uses the word in direct contrast to the persuasive words of human wisdom. The "demonstration of the Spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit's powerful work to convince the hearts of men that God's preached Word is true so that they trust in Him.

How does the Holy Spirit work this "demonstration"? It cannot refer to miracles, signs, and wonders worked by the Holy Spirit, for Paul has just said that "the Jews require a sign" and consequently reject the message of "Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:22–23).[26] His point here is that God's saving message is not one of outward power, but apparent weakness (v. 25). The "demonstration of the Spirit" is the inward, secret work of effectual calling by which God makes people into believers (v. 24). Paul tells us that the Spirit gave the words of God to the apostles (1 Cor 2:9–13). Now the Spirit enables us to receive the apostolic words as true wisdom. The person who does not have the Holy Spirit "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (v. 16). So there are two powers at work: the power of God's Spirit-inspired Word, and the power of the Spirit working with and using that Word as it is proclaimed to sinners of mankind.

The greatest demonstration or proof of God's Word, and the only proof sufficient for saving faith, is the inner demonstration when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see the truth of God and the doctrines of His Word. When the Holy Spirit exercises his power through the preached Word, then the message comes with "much assurance," a strong inward conviction of the reality of unseen spiritual things (1 Thess 1:5).

This, then, is the power of the Holy Spirit: not visible or outward display of power, but an inward demonstration or proof by which the Spirit convinces the heart of the gospel's doctrinal truths so that the person intelligently and willingly cannot but trust in Christ alone for salvation. Faith may not seem like an impressive result in the eyes of this world. However, saving faith in Christ is the effect of "the

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[23] Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 115–16. See the use of "fear" (*phobos*) and "trembling" (*tromos*) in Ex. 15:16; Ps. 2:11; Isa. 19:16 LXX; Phil. 2:12.

[24] *Apodeixis* is *hapax legomenon* in the NT. The cognate verb *apodeiknumi* means to display, exhibit, or prove to be genuine (Acts 2:22; 25:7; 1 Cor. 4:9; 2 Thess. 2:4).

[25] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comp., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 196.

[26] Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 118. They comment, "*Power* here is about moral conviction, not miraculous display."

exceeding greatness" of God's power, power no less than that which raised Christ from the dead and exalted him to the right hand of God (Eph 1:19–20). Faith unites a poor sinner to a rich Christ, so that all the benefits purchased by Christ's death on the cross are now his (John 1:12). Such faith conquers this evil world (1 John 5:4). By faith, God saves us and will bring us to eternal glory through biblical doctrine applied by the Spirit. Truly, the gift of faith is a work of sovereign power, and its preservation and growth a cause for glorifying God forever.

Though God could exercise His power to create faith through whatever means He chooses, it is very fitting that faith in Christ is worked primarily through plain doctrinal preaching. Such preaching requires the preacher *to renounce man's wisdom and carnal ambitions;* it requires that the preacher *resolve faithfully to declare God's Word,* so that saving faith rests entirely upon the transforming testimony of God as true and trustworthy. Doctrinal preaching aims to *inform the mind concerning Jesus Christ and Him crucified,* which is the great object of saving faith and the only confidence of the believer. Doctrinal preaching aims to *convince the conscience before God,* and faith arises from a wounded conscience seeking healing by the blood of Christ, so that the sinner finds peace in the presence of a righteous God whose justice is satisfied once and for all by the finished work of Christ. How wise it was for our God to choose plain doctrinal preaching as His primary means to exercise spiritual power unto faith!

Conclusion: Pray for Plain, Doctrinal, Powerful Preaching Today

Ministers of God, will you, like Paul and the Puritans, be a plain doctrinal preacher? Members of churches, will you pray that your ministers would be plain doctrinal preachers? If you or your pastor will persevere in such preaching, it will require more than an understanding of what it is. Such preaching is only sustainable by faith in Christ and the fear of the Lord.

It takes faith to preach with plainness and boldness, especially when crowds of people are not flocking to hear you but are swarming about popular, worldly preachers. It requires faith to believe that plain preaching is God's method to bring many sons and daughters to glory.

The pressure to employ worldly methods to bolster your ministry will be intense at times. Who among us is not tempted to please people? However, the fear of the Lord can deliver us from this snare. Let us remember that we are messengers of the King. Both we and our hearers will stand before His judgment seat one day. Let the preacher preach as a dying man to dying men with the world behind his back and the glory of God before his eyes.

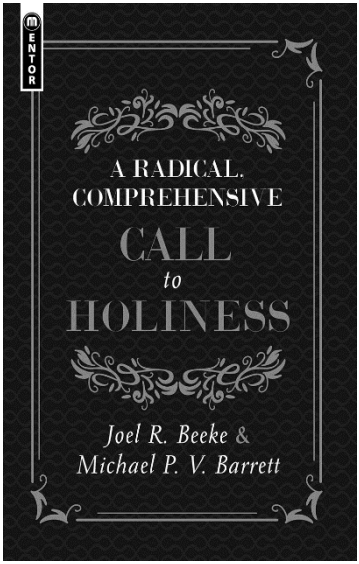
Plain doctrinal preaching is contrary to the nature of fallen mankind. It is ignored, derided, and scorned. Yet the plain preaching of God's Word is exceedingly precious. This is the box in which God brings the wedding ring of faith to His bride. Far from being boring, plain preaching in the Spirit's power is a beam of heavenly glory touching this sin-darkened earth.

Therefore, let us devote ourselves to prayer for the ministry of the Word, that it may be doctrinal and powerful. Let the preacher turn his study into his prayer closet, and read and write with continual petition and praise. The Puritan Robert Traill

(1642–1716) said, "Many good sermons are lost for lack of much prayer in study."[27] May it never be said of our preaching, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4:2). And as we pray, let us labor to conform our preaching as much as possible to the gospel-pattern exemplified by the apostle Paul and the Puritans, who preached "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2:4).

May God grant us more preachers and more listeners like those described by the Westminster Assembly's Puritan divines, and the church will be transformed and flourish through it.

[27] Robert Traill, "By What Means May Ministers Best Win Souls?" in *The Works of the Late Reverend Robert Traill*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: J. Ogle et al., 1810), 1:246.



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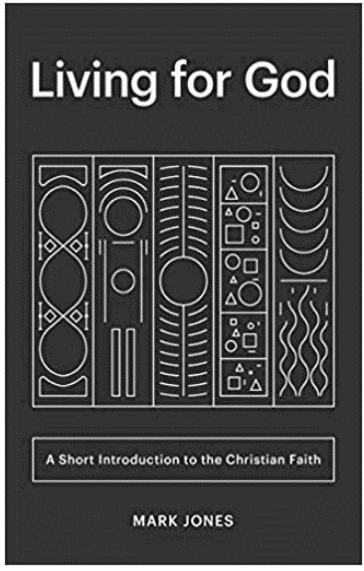

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REVIEWS

Mark D. Futato, Sr. *Basics of Hebrew Accents*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 128 pp., $13.59 Paperback.

Reviewed by Paul Twiss, Instructor of Bible Exposition, The Master's Seminary.

Basics of Hebrew Accents is the most recent addition to Zondervan's Language Basics series. At 113 pages, it is a brief volume, intended to provide an introduction to the Hebrew accent system. The book's author, Mark Futato, serves as the Robert L. Maclellan Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary. He has written or contributed to a number of exegetical works, and the various endorsements of the book rightly acknowledge not only Futato's competence, but the clarity with which he writes. Futato ably renders a complex and intimidating system accessible for the student of Hebrew grammar.

The book is divided into five short chapters which explain (1) the threefold role of Hebrew accents (17–30), (2) the disjunctive accents (31–58), (3) the conjunctive accents (59–66), (4) the role of accents in exegesis (67–90), and (5) accents in the Three (91–100). Two brief appendices direct the student toward correct identification of various accents (101–104), and further study (105–108). Futato's presentation of the disjunctive accents broadly follows the hierarchical model favored by many in recent times. After briefly representing those who disagree, he gives a top-down approach, with a worked example for each accent. His treatment of the conjunctive accents takes on a more summative fashion, discussing in detail only the *merekha*, *munakh*, *mehuppakh*, and *azla*. Chapter 4 attempts to show the value of the accent system as it pertains to exegesis: Futato provides a series of worked examples wherein an understanding of the cantillation marks elucidates a point of syntactical significance. Helpfully, he concludes the chapter with three examples of apparent errors by the Masoretes. Futato's balanced approach in this respect serves as a reminder to the student of the delineation between the accent system and inspired text. Throughout the book, Futato's explanations are supplemented with visual aids: tabulated Hebrew text with the accompanying English, and the relevant section highlighted to draw attention to the teaching point.

The strengths of *Basics of Hebrew Accents* certainly outweigh its weaknesses. Perhaps foremost among its strengths is the clarity with which Futato presents his subject matter. As he skillfully distills the salient learning points of each marker, the cumulative effect is to adumbrate an otherwise overwhelming system. As such, *Basics of Hebrew Accents* provides a ready entry-point by which the student can

begin to master the Masoretic Text. The value of coming to terms with such details should not be underestimated. In my experience of teaching Biblical Hebrew, even after a student has an understanding of grammar and vocabulary, he continues to lack confidence when reading and making basic exegetical observations. There is much to be gained by giving attention to aspects of the text beyond the Hebrew characters. With some basic knowledge of the *masora magna*, *masora parva*, text critical apparatus, and cantillation marks, the student's confidence to engage meaningfully with the text significantly increases. For this reason, I would recommend professors consider using *Basics of Hebrew Accents* as an extra textbook in grammar classes. Its brevity would allow for the book to be added to the required reading, perhaps for extra credit, thereby avoiding the need to curtail teaching in other areas.

Regarding weaknesses, they are relatively few, and certainly insignificant. (Moreover, if the length of the book were increased, the following would probably be addressed.) First, Futato broaches a few points of debate at various junctures. He gives examples of where the accent markers seemingly contradict the syntax of the text, and as mentioned above, he alludes to various views concerning the hierarchy of disjunctive accents. In each case, Futato's presentation of the issue is extremely brief. After raising awareness of the discussion, he moves on. Presumably, the reader of Futato's book has more than a cursory interest in Biblical Hebrew. Most likely, his audience will be intermediate students of the language. As such, a fuller representation of the issues would have been appropriate. It would surely strengthen the book to demonstrate more completely the debates that relate to the system he so skillfully presents.

Second, Futato's choice of presentation is perhaps the most straightforward, yet it leaves certain questions unanswered. He separates the disjunctive and conjunctive accents, following something of a hierarchy with each. This approach is sufficient to set the cogs in motion. However, Futato neglects to explain various nuances that will eventually present themselves to the discerning student. For example, how can one differentiate between the *pashta* and the *azla*? Will the *mehuppakh* only occur before a *pashta*, or are there exceptions? Is the *geresh* always preceded by an *azla*? Such subtleties are by no means determinative to sound exegesis. However, they are valid questions that Futato's simplistic presentation of the data does not address. One possible resolution to this problem would be to provide a secondary series of tables that groups the accents according to permissible, prohibited, and common pairings. This would provide opportunity for consolidation and help the student to grasp better the relationship between the various accent markers. To be sure, Futato's examples begin to probe such dynamics. But a more exhaustive appendix would satisfy the enquiries of inquisitive students.

Again, these points of critique are minor and do not detract from the strengths of Futato's work. His short introduction to Hebrew accents is a clearly explained guide that will undoubtedly help many students. It is an improvement on the relevant chapter in Scott's, *A Simplified Guide to BHS*, and forms an obvious complement to Practico and Van Pelt's *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*.

J. Paul Tanner. *Daniel: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. 864 pp., $38.06 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Iosif J. Zhakevich, Associate Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

One of the first features that immediately captures the eye of the observer of J. Paul Tanner's commentary on *Daniel* is the length of the volume—it commands 803 pages, not including 22 pages of preliminary material. However, there is an explicitly stated, and arguably a justifiable, reason for this length—the comprehensive nature of the volume. In his introduction, Tanner explains:

> I hope this commentary will fill a much-needed gap, providing evangelical pastors and teachers with a full-orbed commentary that provides the technical details regarding manuscripts and translation issues, commentary resting on careful exegesis and consistent application of hermeneutics, and yet with pastoral concerns and applicational insights befitting those who wish to live in submission to God's revealed Word. (p. 2)

Accordingly, within the introduction, the reader will note discussions on "Texts and Versions," "The Question of an Aramaic Original," "Presence of Foreign Loanwards," "Fragments from Qumran," "Greek Translations," "Unity and Structure, "Date and Authorship," and many more relevant but specific matters related to the book of Daniel (pp. 1–122). The volume will later, at times, return to these questions throughout its commentary on specific texts in order to address the relevant matter particularly in its relation to a specific passage.

The large division of the commentary into sections is descriptive and straightforward. After the *Introduction* (pp. 1–122), the commentary proceeds to *Part I: The Historical Setting* (covering ch. 1:1–21; pp. 123–158), then to *Part II: The Aramaic Section* (covering chs. 2:1–7:28; pp. 159–474), and then to *Part III: The Hebrew Section* (covering chs. 8:1–12:13; pp. 475–779). While this division is straightforward, the reader could immediately raise two objections: (1) one heading is based on the content of the text (i.e., the historical setting), while the latter two are based on the language of the text (i.e., Aramaic and Hebrew, respectively), and therefore, there is a sense of inconsistency; and (2) there are typographical errors in this division within the outline of the volume, leaving the reader with a sense that the text needs further refinement (i.e., the main table of contents within the front matter of the book has *Part I: The Historical Setting* and *Part II: The Hebrew Section*, and so pp. 123 and 475, while a more detailed outline of the commentary on pp. 114–119 has *I. the Historical Setting, II. The Aramaic Section*, and *III. The Hebrew Section*). While this is a minor mishap, it nonetheless serves as a distraction within the commentary.

A typical portion of commentary includes a title for the pericope in question (e.g., "Nebuchadnezzar's angry interrogation of Daniels' three friends [3:13–18]; p. 239), a section with textual notes, a translation of the passage, the actual commentary on the portion of text, a discussion with application and devotional implications, and finally a selection of additional exegetical comments (and in various cases, he includes a biblical theological discussion). In this treatment of various matters pertaining to the

text, the commentary succeeds nicely in providing a substantial explanation of the text in light of the challenges that a text might face.

For example, one passage of significant contention to which Tanner gives attention is Daniel 3:17, specifically raising the question as to whether Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego doubted God's existence or ability to save them. To show the fact that this text has indeed posed a challenge for the translators, Tanner includes a selection of different translations from the modern era (i.e., NASB, NIV, NET, NJPS, Goldingay, and Collins; p. 244) and from the ancient era (i.e., LXX$^{\theta}$ and LXX^{O}; p. 244). He also includes a relatively robust grammatical discussion in his analysis of this passage to argue the validity of his interpretation. In explaining his position, Tanner generally states, "Though this is undoubtedly a conditional statement about what God is able to do, we should not think that they [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego] were questioning God's *power* (as though he might lack the power to deliver them)" (italics original; pp. 241–42). Tanner's justification for this claim is that the men are in fact borrowing some of the earlier language of the king to make their statement an effective response to the king's earlier comment. In v. 15, the king had said, "Now if you are *indeed* ready…" and so now the men are reusing the same structure, saying, "If our God whom we serve [*worship*] is able…" (italics and brackets original; p. 240). Thus Tanner explains, "Their statement—couched in a conditional clause, just as the king had done in v. 15 with them—was a clear rebuttal to the king's own claim" (p. 242). Tanner later adds a further explanation to this, saying, "The conditional element, however, is only for the purpose of making a fitting response to the king and clarifying that they will not bend the knee to his statue or serve his gods" (p. 246). And as is common in other commentaries, Tanner does not fail in linking this narrative to the New Testament—and I would suggest legitimately, as regards application—in this case, specifically to Matthew 10:28–31.

In the end, the student, scholar, and pastor will find this volume a helpful addition to other commentaries on Daniel, particularly with regard to its thoroughness and discussion of translation-related and text-critical matters. The lay reader might, admittedly, find these very points hard to process, due to their dense nature; however, they can be easily bypassed with the attention being focused on the interpretation of the text, or they might actually serve as a cause for further study.

Thomas Breimaier. *Tethered to the Cross: The Life and Preaching of C. H. Spurgeon*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 288 pp., $24.64 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Kevin D. Zuber, Professor of Theology, The Master's Seminary.

It is remarkable that over a century and a quarter after his death (January 31, 1892) Charles Haddon Spurgeon continues to be a subject of inspiration for evangelical readers, instruction for evangelical preachers, and importance for evangelical historians. While his name and legacy may be little known outside evangelical circles today (much in contrast to his fame and popularity in his lifetime), Spurgeon's name and legacy among evangelicals of all traditions and denominations is not simply known but revered. This reverence and popularity can be gauged by the fact that a search on amazon.com using the single, simple term "spurgeon" will bring

up dozens of works by C. H. Spurgeon himself (from leather bound devotionals to multivolume sets of his sermons), books about him, documentary films on his life and ministry, as well as t-shirts with his image or quotations from his many works. The words of the author of Ecclesiastes ("... the making of many books is endless ..." Eccl 12:12) may well describe the ongoing project of publishing the works of and studies about C. H. Spurgeon.

Of course, that much interest in, and investigation of, a single subject, a single life and ministry, inevitably results in a certain amount of repetitiveness and, unfortunately, a certain degree of (hagiographic) superficiality. In other words, not a few of the works about Spurgeon's life and ministry over the last half century have been short on fresh analysis and lacking critical (or even interesting) insights. Perhaps that is a predictable development (and maybe not a bad one if the result is that each new generation of evangelicals is re-introduced to Spurgeon.)

Here, however, is where a new book on the life and preaching by Thomas Breimaier is different.[287] Breimaier has provided readers with a genuinely fresh perspective on the life, and more specifically, the preaching of Spurgeon. It may not exactly be, as one enthusiastic endorser has asserted, that Breimaier has "broken new ground," but it is none-the-less true that Breimaier has established the main theme of Spurgeon's preaching and ministry in a genuinely distinct way. Breimaier asserts that the main theme of Spurgeon's preaching was the cross of Christ, which is not a new insight. However, by a thorough survey of Spurgeons' preaching and ministry, Breimaier reveals how this amounted to Spurgeon's main hermeneutical principle: Spurgeon "viewed the entire Bible through the lens of the cross of Christ, with the aim to bring about the conversion of sinners."[288]

In the introductory chapter, following David W. Bebbington's (widely accepted) analysis of the defining characteristics of evangelicalism,[289] Breimaier asserts that Spurgeon's cross-centered preaching exemplified the crucicentrism and conversionism of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. By surveying a number of recent works on nineteenth-century preaching in general and works on Spurgeon in particular, Breimaier establishes that his work is "the first sustained investigation of Spurgeon's hermeneutics" and that it demonstrates "that the cross and conversion were central to [Spurgeon's] approach to biblical texts."

Before getting to an analysis of those biblical texts, Breimaier offers two chapters of biography—but it is a focused biography that highlights Spurgeon's engagement with the texts of Scripture, before his conversion, at his conversion, and in the first years of his ministry. The key points Breimaier makes in these chapters is that Spurgeon's own conversion and his early evangelistic efforts set the pattern for his approach to preaching for the main years of his ministry. In addition, Breimaier demonstrates that Spurgeon's use of the biblical text in his publications (e.g., *The Sword of the Trowel*) and in speeches outside his pulpit were also indicative of the central theme of the cross and the aim of seeing converts to Christ.

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[287] This book is the product of Breimaier's doctoral work at New College, University of Edinburgh.
[288] Breimaier. *Tethered to the Cross*, 3.
[289] See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005), 2–3. Bebbington's four characteristics of evangelicalism are: activism, biblicism, crucicentrism, and conversionsim.

In the central chapters of the book, Breimaier surveys Spurgeon's engagement with the Old Testament (Chapter Three) and with the New Testament (Chapter Four). In both Chapters, Breimaier juxtaposes the developments in critical biblical scholarship in the nineteenth century and Spurgeon's approach, which was to maintain the plenary inspiration of the Bible. Spurgeon did not directly assert a doctrine of inerrancy, but did use language that reflected similar beliefs.[290]

With several examples, Breimaier demonstrates that Spurgeon's actual use of the Old Testament, whether historical narrative or wisdom literature, was christological. Spurgeon could leap from a historical text about the army of Israel to an application to the contemporary church, and even when he did maintain a connection to the Old Testament context "he often concluded with an turn toward a crucified Christ and an evangelistic invitation."[291] In his best known work using Old Testament texts, his commentary of the Psalms in *The Treasury of David*, Spurgeon freely inserted Christ into the text and took full advantage of those texts which were applied to Christ in the New Testament (e.g., Psalm 22). The Old Testament prophetic literature was likewise mined for prophecies and allusions to Christ. In sum, "In many of Spurgeon's sermons crucicentric and conversionistic language would be explicitly woven into virtually any Old Testament text."[292] This same practice can be seen in Spurgeon's use of the New Testament. Breimaier summarizes: "He unashamably and boldy interpreted texts in light of crucicentrism and conversionism irrespective of their immediate context."[293]

The strength of these chapters is that Breimaier actually engages with a selection of typical sermons to demonstrate his thesis that Spurgeons' hermeneutic was driven by his crucicentric and conversionistic concerns.

In the later chapters (Five and Six), Breimaier shows how this crucicentric and conversionistic emphasis shaped Spurgeon's response to controversy (e.g., "The Downgrade Controversy") and Spurgeon's ministries in education.

Overall, Breimaier is relentless in pursuing his thesis that Spurgeon's preaching and use of the biblical text was guided by his crucicentrism and conversionism, and that Spurgeon was indeed "Tethered to the Cross."

For anyone interested in Spurgeon studies, history of preaching, or history of evangelicalism, Breimaier's work will be a welcome and informative addition to the library of works on "the prince of preachers." I recommend the book enthusiastically.

Voddie Baucham. *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe*. Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2021. 270 pp., $21.49.

Reviewed by Virgil Walker, Executive Director of Operations, G3 Ministries.

In the book *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe*, Voddie Baucham examines the imminent threats facing the

[290] Breimaier. *Tethered to the Cross*, 86.
[291] Breimaier, 104.
[292] Breimaier, 122.
[293] Breimaier, 123.

church from what he calls *critical social justice*. Baucham opens by explaining the purpose for writing the book; he writes, "I am not writing this book to stop the divide. I am writing to clearly identify the two sides of the fault line and to urge the reader to choose wisely." (7) Then, leaving no stone unturned, Baucham surveys each cultural inflection point, examining with it the evangelical response. Next, Baucham connects the dots for his reader by explaining each event in its proper context, providing ease of understanding and clarifying what happened and its importance. The reader will complete this book possessing a solid knowledge of what has for many been difficult to grasp and understand.

The book opens with what seems to elude many writers of critical social justice—definitions. The first few pages explain the origin of Critical Race Theory and introduce us to its thought leaders: Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Peggy McIntosh. While the book's opening provides a cursory mention of Marxian Conflict Theory, the Gramscian idea of hegemony, and the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, the author expects the reader to do more research on his own for a deeper look into these foundational concepts. However, key terms are defined: Critical Race Theory, Convergence Theory, and Intersectionality.

With an eye on his detractors, Baucham begins his book with his story. More than simple storytelling, Baucham builds a case aimed directly at his detractors who have charged Baucham, and those who hold his ideas, of not being in touch with the "black experience." Baucham begins by explaining his childhood as one raised by a single mother, growing up during desegregation and struggling to find his way in an environment filled with racism.

Next, Baucham examines the cultural fissures that exposed the fault lines. One by one, the cases of those whose names have made headlines receive examination: Breonna Taylor, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, Tamir Rice, and George Floyd. In addition, the author explains the role of narrative and how it often clouds the truth. He does this by examining the cases of those whose names may be unfamiliar to the reader. However, the circumstances regarding their tragic death are similar to those more recognizable names. With the stage set, the author argues that critical social justice is a new religion with its order of creation.

Baucham begins to magnify the lens at this point in the book, shifting from the broader cultural perspective to examine the fractures within evangelicalism. It is here where the book takes on a detailed account of the fault lines within church culture. While Baucham does name names, his tone is a matter of fact apart from impugning motive. As many have charged Baucham with attacking his opposition, Baucham simply states what was said, providing context as he challenges the idea he disagrees with.

Baucham goes to great lengths in removing doubt about the seismic shift that has taken place within evangelicalism. He does this, in part by exposing the new canon of critical social justice advocates. This new canon includes books of the authors of critical race theory. In addition, Bauham charges that new priests have been appointed to oversee the work of antiracism, as all with white skin are guilty sinners in need of the salvation provided by the new religion. Baucham points out in his book that there is no remission of sins for the sin of racism. Forgiveness is unavailable for those found with the wrong color of skin. The very definition of racism has shifted from an act between those of different skin colors to the notion that every inequity is the direct result of systemic racism.

As the debate continues, Baucham's critics are gathering. In the book, Baucham writes, "In the current climate, debate is becoming a lost art—partly because of a general decline in the study of logic and rhetoric, but mostly because of the general feminization of culture and its consequent disdain for open verbal combat" (132). Baucham describes another aspect of the problem: far too many evangelicals are subject to the "Eleventh Commandment," which is "Thou shalt be nice … and we don't believe the other ten." This cultural moment is an environment where Critical Social Justice thrives as its circular reasoning is unassailable. Critical Social Justice argument seems impervious to research, statistics, or logic as any response contrary to its presuppositions are met with the charge of racism. Time and time again, Baucham exposes the traps often created by this line of thinking.

The book, *Fault Lines*, is filled with data, statistics, and reasoned arguments about crime, abortion, and violence within the black community. At the same time, Baucham explains the lengths to which critical social justicians are willing to deconstruct language so that they may justify an action that is antithetical to a Christian worldview.

Baucham closes the book with some critical admonitions regarding the way forward with the precision of a surgeon. Apart from spoiling the conclusion of this work, I would urge you to pick up a copy of this book. This is a book that every person reading this (and others who won't) should have on their shelf. The times are far too important not to have this one in your library.

Gerald Bray. *The Attributes of God: An Introduction.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. 160 pp., $15.99 Paperback.

Reviewed by James R. Mook, Associate Professor of Theology and Director of Ph.D. Studies, The Master's Seminary.

Are the attributes of God all inherent in God's being, or do some exist only within relations within the Trinity and/or between God and creatures? Are all the attributes of God only revealed in the Bible, or must some of the Divine attributes be shown to people through His relations with them? These are some of the major questions that Gerald Bray claims to answer in *The Attributes of God: An Introduction*.

Originally from Canada, Gerald Bray is a veteran theologian, church historian, educator, much published author, and ordained minister in the Church of England. He was educated at McGill University, Montreal (B.A.), and the University of Paris-Sorbonne (M.Litt. and D.Litt.). He has served as librarian of Tyndale House, Cambridge (1975–1978); parish minister in the parish of St. Cedd, Canning Town (1978–1980); professor of ecclesiastical history and doctrine at Oak Hill Theological College, London (1980–1992); professor of ecclesiastical history, theology, and ancient languages at Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, AL (1993–2006); Research Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School (2007–present); Distinguished Professor of Historical Theology at Knox Theological Seminary, Fort Lauderdale, FL (present); and director of research at the Latimer Trust at Oak Hill Theological College, London (present). Bray's large number of authored works include: *The History of Christianity in Britain and Ireland*; *The Church: A*

Theological and Historical Account; *God Has Spoken: A History of Christian Theology*; *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology*; and *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*.

At the outset of his *Attributes of God,* Gerald Bray asserts concerning God's attributes that there is a "strong" case for "a significant Greek influence on Christian theology" because early in the spread of the gospel, Christian "evangelists" adapted the "methods and terminology" of Greek philosophical assigning of attributes to various "categories of being" (11). However, they "transposed" Greek "philosophical language" to a "different dimension" because God's existence as Creator is distinct from the creation with its "constraints of space and time." Often this Creator-creation distinction resulted in describing God by negativing terms, because human words cannot "express infinity." Therefore, while Greek terms were used to describe Divine attributes, Greek concepts were not, but rather biblical concepts from the OT were maintained. With these overall assumptions, Bray contends that the "early Christians" followed biblical thought closely, theologians of the Middle Ages reworked the church's theology into the "classical structure" of God's "essential attributes" "to do better justice to the biblical revelation," and the Protestant Reformation, while holding to this "classical structure," "focused on the personal relationship" between God and His people, emphasizing God's holiness, righteousness, and goodness. (12) Bray concludes the background of his thesis (12–13) by asserting that since the Reformation, God's "relational attributes" "have become steadily more important" so that "almost all" theologians now separate the Divine attributes into two divisions: (1) "those that belong to God's incommunicable essence"; and (2) the "communicable" attributes, which "express his relationship with human beings." Bray observes that the terminology for this distinction along with the classifications of the attributes have varied among the theologians through the years. Bray claims that he has written his book to remedy the confusion concerning the classification of the Divine attributes in the present time due to the lack of "systematic attention."

Thesis. The author's thesis (13) is that the Divine attributes should be divided into two categories, which he names "the *essential* and the *relational*." For the essential attributes, Bray claims to build on John of Damascus' categorizations, but for the relational attributes, largely he has had to go his own way because many of these attributes have been "misunderstood and misinterpreted." Bray claims that the relational attributes need to be seen "in a broader framework" to facilitate understanding of them. The explicit purpose of the book is to not to provide an "exhaustive account" of everything about the attributes, but to provide a framework in which to "place and evaluate" questions about the attributes.

Bray's support for his thesis consists of, first, focusing on the relationship between God's being and His attributes. Then the author discusses God's "essential attributes" and His "relational attributes." Bray concludes with considering the "relevance" of God's attributes to Christians in the present and then gives an appendix in which he summarizes the history of the study of God's attributes in the history of theology. Concerning God's being, Bray asserts that the Bible emphasizes that God's being is "completely different from anything we experience in the world" due to the distinction between the Creator and the creatures. Resemblances between God and humans exist, but "these are relative and not absolute." So, the difference

between God and humans is "one of kind," not only "of degree." (16) Since the word "being" is used differently of God than of creatures, even so God's attributes must be interpreted as different from those of creatures. Therefore, Divine attributes are sometimes expressed by negative words (e.g., "immortal," "invisible") and others are deductions from God's actions recorded in the Bible (e.g., "omnipresence," "omnipotence," and "omniscience"). Bray contends that God communicates with humans by "shared personhood," but "personhood" is neither an attribute of human nature nor Divine nature, because "personhood" transcends these natures. Humans have personhood even if they lose their material nature and acquire a spiritual nature. Personhood has attributes that both God and humans have, but with "fundamental differences" between God and humans: humans are creatures, finite, and—after human disobedience—sinful. Even so, humans' understanding of God's attributes is imperfect due to the fact of being created in God's image and likeness. (17)

The Bible depicts God as different from anything else. The Hebrew Bible does not use philosophical terms for God's attributes. These (e.g., "immortal") appear only in the later NT epistles to Greek or Hellenized people – but only by brief mention, without discussion of their meaning. (17) However, in reading the Bible, one is left with the impression that the attributes expressed later in the NT and the ancient church by philosophical language were "implied all along." In the Bible God's attributes are "fundamental" to His revelation of Himself, but rarely specifically mentioned (e.g., "invisibility"). (19) The Bible did not systematize depictions of God's presence and power as attributes represented by specific terms. Nevertheless, the content of the doctrine of Divine attributes was always present. Therefore, Gentile converts never had to be told what God is like, nor did they refuse to adopt the "Jewish understanding of God's nature." (20)

Bray presents God's attributes through an outline in which the attributes are divided between attributes "*essential* to his being" and the "*relational"* attributes—"descriptions as he relates to us" but "unique to his being" yet "shared with us" only analogically. God is "holy, righteous, and good" "in an absolute sense," but humans can be so "only within the limits of our finite nature." (21) Bray first discusses the "essential" and then the "relational" attributes, first as these attributes "are in themselves," and then as humans "perceive them." (21–22)

Interaction. Written by an author with extensive experience in church historical and theological research, this book contains positive qualities that encourage its reading. First, the appendix is well worth reading and perhaps could have served as an early chapter, since it provides a historical context for the author's intentional building on the "classical structure" of the attributes, a structure that he asserts began to form with earlier theologians (e.g., Origen, Lactantius, Augustine, and the Athanasian Creed) specifying attributes belonging only to God's nature (e.g., simplicity, immutability, uncreatedness, incomprehensibility, and eternality). (111–113) Of special note in his detailing of the ancient foundation of the "classical structure" is Bray's turn to John of Damascus' (c. AD 675–749) articulation of negative terms (Greek terms mainly prefixed with alpha-privatives) specifying God's attributes in relation to time and space and attributes defining God's "being" and "nature." (113–116) In addition to this foundation, the author gives analytical summary of the history of the development of the "classical structure" through the western middle ages, the Reformation (especially the Reformed wing), the modern defense by later

theologians (e.g., Charles Hodge, Herman Bavinck, Karl Barth, and Cornelius Van Til) in opposing religious liberalism (e.g., Socinians, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Isaak August Dorner), and the "contemporary scene" (e.g., Wayne Grudem, Michael Horton, Millard Erickson, and Wolfhart Pannenberg). (116–144) Concerning the modern development, Bray observes a shift in emphasis "from the traditional concern with God as he is in himself (the incommunicable attributes) to God as he appears to us." (139) Although this appendix is very synthetic and omits consideration of at least several influential theologians (e.g., Louis Berkhof, Arminian theologians), it is a virtual invitation to more deeply study this development.

Second, Bray connects the study of God's attributes and their overall twofold categorization to many Scripture passages. Because of the brevity of this book within the series, "Short Studies in Systematic Theology," it is understandable that most of the Scripture references would have little-to-no exegetical explanation. Nevertheless, what is given seems an invitation to exegete the passages cited as proofs to further test the author's assertions.

In spite of commending this book to further stimulate study and discussion of the Divine attributes, there are aspects of Bray's treatment that are sources of concern.

Terms and definitions. Although categorizing the attributes (perfections) of God is a time-honored enterprise after the closing of the canon of the Bible, it should be noted that all categorizations are made by humans. This fact does not prevent categories from being sound inferences from the assertions of Scripture concerning God. As Bray has shown, from the earliest post-apostolic era of church history, the Divine perfections have been divided into two major divisions. However, Bray's choice of the labels "essential" and "relational" for these categories is troubling. These words might lead to the inference that the "relational" attributes are not in the essence of God and depend on the existence of the creatures for these "relational" attributes to exist or to be complete. Even though Bray says these attributes "remain unique to his being and are shared with us only in terms of analogy," still he says that these attributes "are descriptions of him as he relates to us." (22) To help prevent people from concluding that the "relational" attributes are nonexistent unless they are shared with people (even by analogy), the time-tested categories of "incommunicable" and "communicable" should be preferred (as did Bavinck and Berkhof). And the first category should be defined as those perfections in which creatures are least like God, and the second category should be defined as those perfections in which creatures are more like God.

Another point of concern is Bray's assertion that certain attributes of God are inferred by humans from their experience of God. So, he claims that humans conclude that God has "essential" attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience based on their experience of God's presence, power, and knowledge. (59) And Bray contends that humans conclude that God is holy, righteous, and good because of their experience of God as such, most clearly as a consequence of the fall. (89–90) What seems needed is assertion that God is all these perfections inherently, even without the existence of creation. God is good in and of Himself (Ps 25:8).

Also causing concern is Bray's assertion that there are "secondary" attributes (invisibility, impassibility, and immutability), which result from the "primary" attributes (simplicity, incorporeality, and stability). Bray even raises the possibility that the "secondary" attributes might not be called "attributes in their own right,"

depending on one's definition of them. (32) This one-way dependency between various perfections of God also marks Bray's treatment of the "relational" (communicable) attributes. Indeed, he asserts that holiness, righteousness, and goodness are "descriptions" of how God's relationship with creatures is manifested in action. Bray states that these attributes "describe the standards he imposes on us in order for us to conform to his mind or will." (85) Bray seems to open the possibility of inferring that God in His simplicity of being has a hierarchy of dependency among His perfections. To prevent this apparent contradiction of simplicity, it would be better to see each of God's perfections as identical with God's nature/being and so equally mutually qualifying.

Trinitarian concerns. The above problems result in problems in Trinitarianism, especially in Christology. It is well that Bray defines the Divine attribute of "impassibility" as the Triune God not being able to be "affected by an external power," not able to be "harmed" nor have His power "compromised," but still able to emotionally react to human pain, have love between the Persons of the Trinity, and care for and love God's people. (37, 39, 41, 42) And it is well that Bray denies patripassianism, the ancient modalistic heresy that the Father suffers as the Son. (40) However, to protect the Son as Deity from enduring suffering from humans, Bray contends that Jesus suffered only in His humanity, because as the impassible God, He cannot "share" man's pain in His Divine nature. (36, 43, 52) What is missing in Bray's consideration of Jesus' suffering is that to fully exhaust eternal death, God's eternal punishment of humans for their sin, Jesus in His Divine nature had to fully suffer that eternal death. Bray seems to contradict Anselm (AD 1033–1109), who in his *Cur Deus Homo* (AD 1095–1098) argued that in addition to Him being human, Jesus had to be God to fully pay the eternal punishment of eternal death that man owed to God. According to Anselm, Jesus had to be man to be punished, because only man owed the punishment. However, only as Deity could Jesus do what man could not: suffer eternal death from God the Father.

Another apparent Trinitarian difficulty is how Bray distinguishes between "personhood" and the Divine nature in the Trinity. Again, Bray does well to insist on the distinction between the "persons" of the Trinity and their common "nature." (43, 44) At issue is whether Bray is also correct in denying that personhood is inherent in God's nature, but rather is only in the Persons of the Trinity and that "the persons control their common nature and not the other way around." (78–84) To Bray, God's personal relationality is sourced in the Persons of the Trinity, not in their common Divine nature. One of the questionable foundations for Bray's position on personhood and nature is that humans are able to lose part of their nature in death and decay, and yet maintain their personhood. (78) This analogy seems to be "theology from below." And it raises unnecessary tension with the Christological reality that Jesus' personhood came with His Divine nature at the incarnation, not from His human nature.

Conclusion. Other problems could have been considered: Bray's lack of mention of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture; his denying that "jealousy" is a Divine attribute (93); and his succinctly confining to His humanity Jesus' obedience to the Father (95–96). Nevertheless, those who are seriously studying the perfections (attributes) of God should read this book slowly and thoughtfully for its strengths and apparent problems in order to be challenged in their thinking about Theology Proper.

John D. Currid. *The Case for Biblical Archaeology: Uncovering the Historical Record of God's Old Testament People.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020. 288 pp., $29.99 Paperback.

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Distinguished Research Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

John Currid has been a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary for about twenty-five years, teaching at their Jackson and Charlotte campuses. His doctoral studies (University of Chicago) focused on archaeology, and he served on the staff of archaeological digs at Carthage (Tunisia), Bethsaida, Tell el-Hesi, and served as the director of the Lahav Grain Storage Project. Besides the current volume reviewed here, Currid has published (as the author or editor) numerous volumes that focus on archaeology: *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*; *Doing Archaeology in the Land of the Bible*; *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas* (editor and author); and *ESV Archaeology Study Bible* (senior editor). Besides these works, Currid has written numerous commentaries and reference works that focus on biblical studies. He is a clear writer and thinker that readers will appreciate.

In his introduction to this volume, Currid lays out some key parameters that guide his archaeological work and interpretation of varied discoveries, offering various archaeological examples that support these parameters. First, as a realm of biblical context, archaeology primarily helps provide a life setting for biblical texts—"sheds light on the historical and material contexts in which the events narrated in the Bible occurred" (1). When textual and archaeological evidence converge, the latter can provide confirmation and illumination for the biblical text, but not proof. Believing that the Bible does not need to be proved but stands well enough on its own, he quotes Spurgeon, who wrote: "Scripture is like a lion. Who ever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose; it will defend itself" (3). Contrary to modern thinking that is biblical and historically uninformed, Currid regards archaeology as a tool to demonstrate the historical foundation for biblical events, people, and practices. After providing a brief definition of archaeology (4), he states that the primary goal of archaeology is "to discover, observe, preserve, and record the buried remains of antiquity and to use them to help reconstruct ancient life" (5). He goes on to emphasize that archaeology has clear limitations. Any reconstruction of culture based on archaeology is "by nature fragmentary, piecemeal, and incomplete" (6).

In *The Case for Biblical Archaeology*, Currid lays out his material of nineteen chapters in three major parts: "Setting," "A Journey through the Land," and "Aspects of Society." Each section has several chapters that delineate the section topic. Each chapter ends with a text box containing key terms, a few important discussion questions, and suggestions for further reading. Currid provides forty-four photos in the volume—eighteen in the first two sections, twenty-two in the third section, and four in the third appendix.

The first part, "Setting," contains only four chapters and establishes the big picture for the details in the other sections. Currid provides brief, clear, and helpful overviews of the geography of Bible lands, the history of archaeological study in those lands, an explanation of method in excavating tells, and a short history of the lands of the Bible.

The second section—"A Journey through the Land"—provides a summary of key archaeological sites according to seven regions of the land, not including sites in Transjordan or NT sites: Galilee/the Sea of Galilee region, the Jezreel Valley, the Negev, the Shephelah, the Jordan River Valley, the Southern Coastal Plain, and the Central Highlands. Most archaeology volumes provide an overview of discoveries in accordance with archaeological periods, which has its benefits. However, Currid summarizes key archaeological discoveries region by region. To fully benefit from this approach, the reader needs to have an awareness of the biblical time frame for each archaeological period. To help with that, Currid provides a basic timeline of the ancient Near East in Appendix 1 (237–38). He also provides a detailed map with two key sections pulled out as insets on the next page to provide greater detail (70–71). Each chapter begins with a brief summary of the region. The site names appear alphabetically, providing the site name, a summary of discoveries and their biblical significance. Each site treatment ends with a text box providing suggestions for further reading. Although each site is only covered briefly, it provides significant information about the site that would help someone travelling through Israel or volunteering on a dig.

Part three, "Aspects of Society," covers seven aspects or features of Old Testament society: agriculture and herding, water, architecture, ceramics, the Hebrew language in archaeology, burial practices, and small finds. After providing a helpful historical overview of a given feature, Currid considers various specifics. Each chapter ends with a colored box providing key terms, discussion questions, and suggestions for further reading.

The final section, "Aspects of Society," continues the earlier examination of seven aspects or features of Old Testament society. Currid summarizes each aspect of society according to archaeological periods, working from the oldest (Neolithic) to the most recent (Iron Age). As a professor of Hebrew language studies, I was especially interested in his chapter, "The Hebrew Language in Archaeology" (205–15). Although just an overview, he summarizes branches/families of Semitic languages and addresses the origin of Hebrew and the language of the Patriarchs. He concludes the chapter by briefly considering twelve key archaeological finds that contain the Hebrew language written on them (inscriptions and seals).

This helpful volume ends with three appendices—"Basic Timeline of the Ancient Near East," "The Kings of Israel," and "Judah with Dates"—and "Extrabiblical References to the Kings of Israel and Judah." The last appendix considers sixteen discoveries that include writing about and refer explicitly to David or kings of the Northern Kingdom or Southern Kingdom. A glossary, select bibliography, and two indices ("Scripture" and "Subjects and Names") wrap up the volume.

Some reviewers have expressed concern that Currid did not engage the debate often surrounding the term "biblical archaeology." However, his explanation of the purpose and practice of archaeology demonstrates that he does not utilize archaeology to "prove" the Bible, the concerns of the worried critics.

Currid clearly favors a late date of Israel's exodus from Egypt (thirteenth century B.C.). This does not take away from the value of his book. In part two, with several sites that had a significant population increase in the Iron Age period, Currid refers to the newly arrived Israelites as the probable cause. In broader scholarship on this population increase issue, many scholars are more hesitant to identify the people

group causing it and will offer various suggestions. While the Israelites are an option to consider for this population increase in Iron Age I (as part of a late date of the exodus), it is important to realize that the Israelites as a cause of this increase is a possible correlation of the increase with a people group. However, sometimes it suggests that it provides an argument for the thirteenth century date for the exodus, which it does not.

The clarity of Currid's writing, his manner of presentation, and use of summary text boxes makes this volume a helpful introduction to the archaeology of God's OT people. His provisions of good appendices, glossaries, and indices add to the value of the book. I have already benefited from a number of Currid's observations for my Israel trip notes and course notes. For someone interested in a quality primer for OT archaeology, I give this volume high recommendation. Through this volume and others he has edited or authored, Currid has provided biblical readers another very helpful resource for their study and library.