

No.17, Effectually Called into a State of Grace

By virtue of his original creation in the image of God man was initially found in a *state of innocence*, but as a result of his disobedience he fell into a *state of sin*. The two outstanding marks of man's fallen state are total depravity and total inability. His entire nature is both guilty and polluted by sin and is rendered incapable of willing or choosing that which is good. Therefore, man not only deserves to come under eternal wrath, he will apart from divine intervention.

However, the revelation of Scripture is that God does intervene in the affairs of men. According to His own eternal purpose He has chosen a people for Himself and unto salvation, a people whom He saves by His own direct and immediate operation upon their hearts by His Word and Spirit. Moreover, this purpose to save sinners is within the framework of the covenant of grace. Again note the words of our own Catechism – “*God having, out of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.*”

The important point to notice in this statement is that sinners are brought “into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.” Thus, according to God's eternal purpose, His people are brought into an estate of salvation or grace on the basis of the covenant of grace, the grace of that covenant being channelled to them through the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, in nature the Covenant of Grace is the sovereign application to the God's people of the grace purchased by, embodied in, and administered through the Lord Jesus Christ.

When our Catechism refers to being brought into this estate of salvation through a Redeemer, it is essentially stating that on the basis of the person and the work of Christ there is grace for sinners. According to the covenant of grace, Christ the eternal Son became man, taking the nature of those He was appointed to save in order to be their mediator, 1 Tim 2: 5. Furthermore, as the Godman, Christ accomplished redemption for His people through His perfect obedience, an obedience that culminated in His atoning death, Rom 5: 19 – “*By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*” Thus, by Christ's entire work, there is a procuring of the grace that His people need. All that is required to bring them into a state of grace and eventually into a state of glory, has been purchased and secured by Christ and is found in Christ alone, 1 Cor 1: 30.

However, to be brought into a state of grace requires the application of the merits of Christ's work to those for whom that work was done. Note the following statements from the Catechism.

(a) Q.29 – How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ? “*We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by His Holy Spirit.*”

(b) Q.30 – How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ? “*The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.*”

(c) Q.31 – What is effectual calling? “*Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel.*”

In these answers that define this application of redemption it will be noted that the emphasis is on the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings sinners into a state of grace by applying redemption to them in all of its aspects. But the initial work is that of *effectual calling*, which is essentially regeneration or the new birth. God's elect are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, are brought into union with Christ and receive all the blessings that Christ has won for them. Scripture makes it very clear that the application of the work of Christ infallibly takes place in the lives of those for whom it was wrought. See Rom 8: 29, 30 – Paul outlines the salvation of God's people from their fore-ordination to their glorification. Those foreordained to eternal life are predestined to be conformed to Christ's image, thus they are called, justified and finally glorified. Thus, without fail, the benefits of Christ's redemptive work are applied to His people, commencing with this effectual calling or regeneration. Since regeneration is the commencement of the application of redemption we will note a few points relating to it.

I. THE DEFINITION OF REGENERATION

In its theological sense regeneration deals with the beginning of spiritual life in the human heart. Berkhof – “*Regeneration is that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy.*”

The word “regeneration” is found only twice in Scripture. The Greek word translated “regeneration” signifies *a beginning again*. The word basically means “to recreate” – Titus 3: 5. See also Matt 19: 28 – here the word is used in relation to Christ's coming when a great transformation will take place, the reference serving to bring out the sense of the word – namely, a new beginning. But while the word is used only twice yet it has many equivalents in Scripture. E.g. *birth, born, begotten* all of which are employed to signify this commencement of spiritual life, John 1: 13; 3: 3-7; 1 Pet 1: 23 etc. Eph 2: 5 uses the verb *quickened* which means “to make alive”. Also Eph 2: 10 where the word “create” also emphasises the beginning of new spiritual life.

II. THE DISTINCTIVES OF REGENERATION

There are various leading features of regeneration.

1. It is the act of God, Eph 2: 10 – in physical creation the thing created does not contribute to its creation and the same is true in the spiritual realm. Regeneration is the creation of spiritual life within the soul, therefore the sinner is passive in the miracle that takes place.

2. The result of regeneration is that the subject of it becomes a new creation, 2 Cor 5: 17. Various other Scriptures show what this new creation comprises.

(a) The understanding is enlightened. The natural man's state is one of ignorance & darkness, Eph 4: 18. In contrast the regenerated person is brought into God's marvellous light, 1 Pet 2: 9, 2 Cor 4: 6. It is vital to note that this enlightenment is not mere intellectual knowledge but experimental, producing a consciousness of God, Christ & the truths of the Gospel.

(b) The will is renewed, Ps 110: 3 – the Lord makes sinners willing in the day of His power. Larger Catechism 67 – *“He doth in His accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by His Word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, **renewing and powerfully determining their wills**, so as they are made willing and able freely to answer His call.”*

3. Regeneration precedes and is the immediate cause of conversion. The two must never be confused. Regeneration is the instantaneous act of the Spirit upon the soul; an act that then results in conversion, which includes both faith and repentance. See John 1: 12, 13 – faith and repentance both follow the new birth, they do not precede it.

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