

The Work of the Holy Spirit in Salvation

by John F. Walvoord

The sermon explores the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, specifically efficacious grace and regeneration, emphasizing the sovereignty of God and the necessity of divine intervention in the salvation process.

Scripture: John 1:13, John 3:3, Romans 6:13, Romans 8:30, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:5, Ephesians 4:24, Philippians 1:6, Titus 3:5, James 1:18, 1 John 5:12

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Salvation Doctrine"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches about the profound work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, focusing on two key aspects: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Efficacious Grace and The Work of the Holy Spirit in Regeneration. He emphasizes the importance of understanding these doctrines to eliminate confusion on the assurance of salvation and the necessity of God's power in winning souls for Christ. Walvoord highlights that the doctrine of efficacious grace is firmly rooted in Scripture, emphasizing the certainty and effectiveness of God's call to salvation. He also delves into the doctrine of regeneration, explaining that it is solely an act of God, resulting in the impartation of eternal life and a new nature in the believer.

Transcript

[Author's Note: Continuing the study of the present work of the Holy Spirit, after consideration of the relation of the Holy Spirit to the unsaved world in the previous article, we begin here the discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. Two important aspects are considered in this number: (1) The Work of the Holy Spirit in Efficacious Grace, and (2) The Work of the Holy Spirit in Regeneration. To follow in the next article will be three other important present works of the Holy Spirit: (3) The Baptism of the Holy Spirit, (4) The Indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit, (5) The Sealing of the Holy Spirit. The relation of the Holy Spirit to the spiritual life of Christians and His ministries in future ages will be treated later.]

Introduction.

From a practical standpoint, there are few subjects more worthy of careful study than that of the work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of the believer. For the one who believes in Christ, it is a glorious revelation of the working of God in his own heart, the foundation of his spiritual experience and the ground of his hope of glory. Much of the confusion on the subject of assurance of salvation would be eliminated if the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation were made clear. It would destroy the philosophy of salvation by works. It would deliver the assurance of our salvation from the realm of emotional experience. It would give the baptism of the Holy Spirit its proper place and wrest the doctrine from its erroneous expositors in the

holiness movements. It would provide the basis for understanding how God is working in His own in this age.

To the preacher of the Gospel, the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, rightly understood, is a necessary background to accurate Gospel preaching. The necessary work of God, the human factors, and the evident need for the power of God in winning any souls for Christ are seen in their proper relation. The preacher is delivered from dependence on self or homiletical skill, and without diminishing the effort to preach the Gospel in power he is led into conscious dependence upon God and the power of prayer for fruitfulness in ministry. His own relation to the Holy Spirit who alone can save is made a matter of paramount importance.

Any writer familiar with the many attempts at expounding these doctrines must approach the task with humility. The doctrines are so vast in their implications. The possibilities of intrusion of human wisdom where only the divine will suffice are ever present. The discussion which follows here seeks only to interpret accurately the Scriptures.

I. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Efficacious Grace

1. A Biblical Doctrine.

The doctrine of efficacious grace is preëminently a doctrine of the Scriptures though its title is theological. The Scriptures speak frequently of a divine call to salvation which results in certain salvation (Rom 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28, 30; 9:11, 24; 11:29; 1 Cor 1:1, 2, 9, 24, 26; 7:15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24; Gal 1:6, 15; 5:8, 13; Eph 1:18; 4:1, 4; Col 3:15; 1 Thess 2:12; 4:7; 5:24; 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 1:9; Heb 3:1; 9:15; 1 Pet 1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10; 2 Pet 1:3, 10). This divine call which results in salvation is called efficacious grace because it is an operation of grace which is efficacious or effective. It has in view the ministry of the Holy Spirit which is certainly effectual in revealing the Gospel and in leading to saving faith. In contrast to this work of God is the general call to salvation given to all who hear the Gospel. In this sense, Christ said, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt 9:13). This call to repentance and faith was not always heeded, as demonstrated by the fact that Christ also said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt 22:14). An examination of the many references to calling in the New Testament will reveal, however, that in most instances, they refer to the efficacious call. Efficacious grace, then, stands in contrast to common grace as the effectual call stands in contrast to the general call. For practical purposes, the grace provided is involved in the call given, and divine calling and the grace which is inherent in it are the same subject.

A study of the many passages dealing with the effectual call brings out several important aspects of the truth. The first of these is that the doctrine is unmistakably Biblical. Salvation and the divine calling are seen to be inseparable, one without the other being impossible. Christians are "called to be saints" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2); called to "eternal life" (1 Tim 6:12); called "out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet 2:9); called "unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus" (1 Pet 5:10); and called "to glory and virtue" (2 Pet 1:3). Paul was "called to be an apostle" (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1). "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified" (Rom 8:30). Christians are referred to as "the called of Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:6), and "the called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). An interesting reference is found in 1 Corinthians 1:23, 24, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." To those not called, the Gospel remains foolishness, but to the called it is the power

of God. We may conclude from these many passages that the work of the Holy Spirit in calling effectually to salvation is revealed abundantly in Scripture, and that the ministry is very important.

2. Efficacious Grace an Act of God.

While the nature of efficacious grace in its operation is inscrutable, it is clear from Scripture that it is an act of God dependent solely upon God for its execution. Reformed theologians are in substantial agreement upon this point, and the Scriptures bear a consistent testimony. Events of all classes may be distinguished by certain inherent characteristics which it is most important to discern. This is particularly true of efficacious grace. As Charles Hodge writes: "There are, as has been before remarked, three classes into which all events of which we have any knowledge may be arranged. First, those which are produced by the ordinary operations of second causes as guided and controlled by the providential agency of God. Secondly, those events in the external world which are produced by the simple volition, or immediate agency of God, without the cooperation of second causes. To this class all miracles, properly so called, belong. Thirdly, those effects produced on the mind, heart, and soul, by the volition, or immediate agency of the omnipotence of God. To this class belong, inward revelation, inspiration, miraculous powers, as the gift of tongues, gift of healing, etc., and regeneration."¹ To this third class belongs the work of efficacious grace.

The Scriptures bear consistent testimony to the fact that efficacious grace is an act of God. Every reference to divine calling presumes or states that it is an act of God. It is specifically linked with the sovereignty of God as opposed to human choices. Hence Paul speaks of being "called to be an apostle" (Rom 1:1) etc. Never in the Scriptures is divine calling attributed to human choice. It is rather an act of God proceeding from omnipotence.

In keeping with their doctrine of total depravity and total inability, Reformed theologians have insisted that efficacious grace is an immediate act of God accomplished without human assistance. While they freely admit the necessity of the work of common grace as an antecedent in which the individual hears and understands the Gospel and sees his own need of salvation, efficacious grace is defined as the instantaneous work of God empowering the human will and inclining the human heart to faith in Christ. Efficacious grace immediately results in salvation in all cases because it is accomplished by the omnipotence of God. The Westminster Confession of Faith states it as follows:

"I. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an 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, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

"II. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it."²

Efficacious grace because of its nature is not to be considered a process, but rather, an instantaneous act of God. Whatever preparation precedes this belongs to common grace which cannot by its nature bring to salvation. Many a Christian can bear witness to the work of God in common grace leading to salvation, but the work of efficacious grace is distinct and decisive. In a moment the soul passes from a state of spiritual

death to spiritual life. As an act of God, the work is inscrutable. As the human mind does not inquire how God can create all things out of nothing, or how God could make man a living soul though composed of the dust of the earth, so the human mind need not inquire how God works in efficacious grace.

3. Efficacious Grace Certainly Effectual.

Efficacious grace by its very title indicates that it is always effectual in bringing the soul to salvation. In this it is sharply contrasted to common grace. Common grace may be successfully resisted, and even if considered sufficient to bring to salvation, as Arminians hold, it is not efficacious. It is not that efficacious grace is greater in extent and power than common grace, and therefore efficacious, but rather that in its nature, proceeding from the omnipotence of God, it is certainly effective. It may be admitted that some of the acts of God may be successfully resisted. The pleading of the Spirit grieved by sin in the life of the Christian may be resisted and go unheeded. The work of common grace does not presume a willingness to receive the truth, but efficacious grace is an immediate act of God which by its nature cannot be resisted. As Charles Hodge writes: "According to the Augustinian doctrine the efficacy of divine grace in regeneration depends neither upon its congruity nor upon the active cooperation, nor upon the passive non-resistance of its subject, but upon its nature and the purpose of God. It is the exercise of 'the mighty power of God,' who speaks and it is done. This is admitted to be the doctrine of Augustine himself."³

Efficacious grace is irresistible not in the sense that it is resisted and all such resistance is overcome, but it is irresistible in the sense that it is never resisted. Its nature forbids it. It is irresistible in that it is certainly effectual. Dr. A. H. Strong, accordingly, prefers not to use the term irresistible: "We prefer to say that this special call is efficacious,-that is, that it infallibly accomplishes its purpose of leading the sinner to the acceptance of salvation. This implies two things: (a) That the operation of God is not an outward constraint upon the human will, but that it accords with the laws of our mental constitution. We reject the term 'irresistible,' as implying a coercion and compulsion which is foreign to the nature of God's working in the soul. (b) That the operation of God is the originating cause of that new disposition of the affections, and that new activity of the will, by which the sinner accepts Christ. The cause is not in the response of the will to the presentation of motives by God, nor in any mere cooperation of the will of man with the will of God, but is an almighty act of God in the will of man, by which its freedom to choose God as its end is restored and rightly exercised" (John 1:12, 13).⁴

A proper view of efficacious grace, then, fully recognizes its certain result in the salvation of its beneficiary. In every case, the one who receives efficacious grace is instantly saved. While in the experience of the individual, faith in Christ is a result of choice and act of the human will, it is nevertheless a work of efficacious grace. Efficacious grace never operates in a heart that is still rebellious, and no one is ever saved against his will. It is rather that "God worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

At least four arguments may be advanced in proof of the assertion that efficacious grace is bestowed and that it is certainly effectual. First, efficacious grace is certainly effectual by its nature as an act of God. As has been shown, this act, proceeding from the omnipotence of God, and being independent of human volition, is certainly effectual by its nature. God's persuasion may be resisted as evidenced in the operation of common grace, but God's acts cannot be resisted in that they are supported by omnipotence and the sovereignty of His will. As Charles Hodge says, "If this one point be determined, namely, that efficacious grace is the almighty power of God, it decides all questions in controversy on this subject.... Volumes have been written on the contrary hypothesis; which volumes lose all their value if it be once

admitted that regeneration, or effectual calling, is the work of omnipotence."⁵

Second, the doctrine of efficacious grace is necessary to the doctrine of predestination. It is essential to the plan of the universe that all the elect be saved. It is therefore necessary that more than common grace be given to the elect. It must be effectual in bringing the elect to salvation. Predestination and effectual calling are definitely linked in Scripture. God calls according to His purpose (Rom 8:28), and it is further revealed: "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom 8:30). It is manifest that the calling herein mentioned is the efficacious call. All who are predestinated are called, and all who are called are justified and glorified. A distinction is clearly made here between the general call of the Gospel and the particular call which is effectual. Whatever may be the mysteries of the relation of this efficacious call to the operations of the human will, the fact of a certainly effectual call remains. It is necessary that the elect come to Christ to fulfill the covenant of redemption (John 6:37, 39; 17:12).

Third, the work of efficacious grace is necessary in view of the absence of spiritual life before regeneration. Herein lies the foundation of the doctrine of efficacious grace. A man spiritually dead cannot do a spiritual work. Total depravity demands as its corollary the doctrine of efficacious grace. According to Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." While there are diverse interpretations of this passage, the implication clearly is that grace, salvation, and faith all proceed from God, and do not rise in the heart of the unsaved apart from an act of God. Charles Hodge writes on this point, "All who hold that original sin involves spiritual death and consequent utter inability to any spiritual good, do also hold that his recovery from that state is not effected by any process of moral suasion, human or divine, but by the immediate exercise of God's almighty power."⁶ If one accepts the Biblical revelation of man's state of spiritual death and total inability, he must accept the doctrine of efficacious grace as the solution to the problem. Common grace does not provide life nor does it renew the human will. It consists chiefly in enablement in understanding the Gospel and its issues, and understanding itself does not bring the ability to act upon that new knowledge.

Fourth, the work of efficacious grace as wholly an act of God is supported by analogy from the doctrine of regeneration. Like efficacious grace, regeneration is an act of God, not a process, matter of persuasion, or rational change. If regeneration is wholly an act of God, instantaneous, and independent of human assistance, efficacious grace may well be in the same category. Both are equally inscrutable, and both are equally essential to salvation.

4. Objections to the Doctrine of Efficacious Grace.

It is natural that a doctrine which depends in large measure on faith rather than reason should be opposed on various grounds. A common objection is that this doctrine is contrary to all human effort to believe. The Scriptures, however, give adequate witness both to the fact of the effectual call and to the human responsibility to believe in Christ. The problem of the relation of human effort to divine undertakings is always real, and the solution cannot be reached apart from faith. The fact of divine undertaking in efficacious grace should not discourage human effort to believe, however, except that men should not seek to do what only God can do. In the realm of salvation, men should seek to be saved, but not to save themselves. The secret of salvation remains in trusting God to save us. The fact that we need a work of grace before we can believe should make us recognize all the more the inability of the natural man, and should make men cast themselves on God for the work which He alone can do. The blind man who besought Christ to heal him was not hindered in his plea by his own total inability to heal himself. Rather,

his own need drove him to Christ who alone could help him. The doctrine of total depravity instead of discouraging human effort to turn to God should magnify the power of God and reveal our utter need of salvation. We are reminded in Scripture, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). On the one hand, the certainty of the call of God is seen—all the elect shall come to Christ. On the other hand, everyone who comes shall not be cast out. The human responsibility of coming to Christ remains. view is wholly lacking in an adequate explanation of this certainty.

The doctrine of efficacious grace must remain essentially inscrutable to human minds. All the problems cannot be solved, but the difficulty lies in our lack of knowledge of the supernatural work of grace which results in salvation and our faulty comprehension of the working of our own wills rather than in any disharmony with revealed truth. The fact of the effectual call is supported by such abundant Scripture reference as to forbid denial. A rejection of this doctrine removes from salvation the divine certainty which it most certainly possesses.

II. The Work of the Holy Spirit in Regeneration

Introduction.

Few doctrines are more fundamental to effective preaching than the doctrine of regeneration. Failure to comprehend its nature and to understand clearly its necessity will cripple the efficacy of Gospel preaching. Both for the Bible teacher and the evangelist an accurate knowledge of the doctrine of regeneration is indispensable. The Biblical concept of regeneration is comparatively simple, and a study of its theological history is not entirely necessary to accurate preaching. The history of the doctrine, however, reveals its natural pitfalls and may warn the unwary of the dangers of a shallow understanding of regeneration. The doctrine of regeneration offers a rich reward to those who contemplate its treasures and live in the light of its reality.

1. The Meaning of Regeneration.

The word regeneration is found only twice in the New Testament (Matt 19:28; Titus 3:5), but it has been appropriated as the general term designating the impartation of eternal life. Only one of the two instances in the New Testament is used in this sense (Titus 3:5), where reference is made to "the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." The Greek word *παλιγγενεσι* is properly translated "new birth, reproduction, renewal, re-creation" (Thayer). It is applied not only to human beings but also to the renewed heaven and earth of the millennium (Matt 19:28). In relation to the nature of man, it includes the various expressions used for eternal life such as new life, new birth, spiritual resurrection, new creation, new mind, "made alive," sons of God, and translation into the kingdom. In simple language, regeneration consists in all that is represented by eternal life in a human being.

Theological usage of the word regeneration has tended to confuse rather than enrich the word. Other words such as conversion, sanctification, and justification have been either identified or included in the concept of regeneration. Roman Catholic theologians have regarded regeneration as including all that is embraced in salvation, not only justification and sanctification, but even glorification. Regeneration is taken to include the means, the act, the process, and the ultimate conclusion of salvation. Protestant theologians have been more cautious in extending the meaning of regeneration. The early Lutheran theologians used regeneration to include the whole process by which a sinner passed from his lost estate into salvation, including justification. Later Lutherans attempted a clarification of the doctrine by holding that justification

did not include a transformation of life, thereby excluding sanctification from the doctrine of regeneration. The Lutheran Church continues to hold that infants are regenerated at the moment of water baptism, however, at the same time affirming that this regeneration signifies only their entrance into the visible church, not their certain salvation. Regeneration becomes then merely a preparatory work of salvation. On the subject of infant regeneration, the Lutheran theologian Valentine writes: "May the child be said to be regenerated by the act of Baptism? We may properly answer, Yes; but only in the sense that the established vital and grace-conveying relation, under imputed righteousness and the Holy Spirit, may be said to hold, in its provisions and forces, the final covenanted development."⁷ Valentine objects, however, to the statement that baptism regenerates children. Elsewhere, Valentine writes, "Justification precedes regeneration and sanctification."⁸ It is clear that Lutheran theology does not use the term in the Biblical sense of impartation of eternal life. The Lutheran theology does, however, exclude sanctification from the doctrine of regeneration.

Reformed theologians have failed to be consistent in usage also, and have shared to some extent the errors embraced by others. During the seventeenth century, conversion was used commonly as a synonym for regeneration. This usage ignored a most important fact, however, - that conversion is the human act and regeneration is an act of God. Further, conversion, while usually related to regeneration, is not always so, as demonstrated by its use in connection with Peter's repentance and restoration (Luke 22:32), as prophesied by Christ. Even Calvin failed to make a proper distinction between regeneration and conversion. Charles Hodge, however, argues effectively for the necessary distinction in the meaning of these terms.⁹ Shedd agrees with Hodge and cites the following contrasts: "Regeneration, accordingly, is an act; conversion is an activity, or a process. Regeneration is the origination of life; conversion is the evolution and manifestation of life. Regeneration is wholly an act of God; conversion is wholly an activity of man. Regeneration is a cause; conversion is an effect. Regeneration is instantaneous; conversion is continuous."¹⁰

For the last century, Reformed theologians have agreed that regeneration properly designates the act of impartation of eternal life. As Charles Hodges states it: "By a consent almost universal the word regeneration is now used to designate, not the whole work of sanctification, nor the first states of that work comprehended in conversion, much less justification or any mere external change of state, but the instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life."¹¹ In a study of the doctrine of regeneration, then, the inquirer is concerned only with the aspect of salvation related to the impartation of eternal life. Other important works which may attend it, be antecedent to it, or immediately follow it must be considered as distinct works of God.

2. Regeneration an Act of the Holy Spirit.

Regeneration by its nature is solely a work of God. While sometimes considered as a result, every instance presumes or states that the act of regeneration was an act of God. A number of important Scriptures bear on the subject of regeneration (John 1:13; 3:3-7; 5:21; Rom 6:13; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:5, 10; 4:24; Titus 3:5; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 2:9). It is explicitly stated that the one regenerated is "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Regeneration is likened unto resurrection, which by its nature is wholly of God (John 5:21; Rom 6:13; Eph 2:5). In other instances regeneration is declared to be a creative act, the nature of which assumes it to be the act of God (Eph 2:10; 4:24; 2 Cor 5:17). It may be seen clearly, then, that regeneration is always revealed as an act of God accomplished by His own supernatural power apart from all other agencies.

The work of regeneration is properly ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Like the work of efficacious grace, regeneration is often ascribed to God without distinction as to Persons, and in several instances is ascribed to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit severally. The First Person is declared to be the source of regeneration in at least one instance (Jas 1:17-18). Christ Himself is linked with regeneration several times in Scripture (John 5:21; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 5:12). Again, the Holy Spirit is declared the agent of regeneration (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). As in other great undertakings of the Godhead, each Person has an important part, in keeping with Their one essence. As in the birth of Christ, where all the Persons of the Godhead were related to the conception of Christ, so in the new birth of the Christian the First Person becomes the Father of the believer, the Second Person imparts His own eternal life (1 John 5:12), and the Holy Spirit, the Third Person, acts as the efficient agent of regeneration. The work of regeneration can be assigned to the Holy Spirit as definitely as the work of salvation can be assigned to Christ.

3. Regeneration the Impartation of Eternal Life.

As the word itself implies, the central thought in the doctrine of regeneration is that eternal life is imparted. Regeneration meets the need created by the presence of spiritual death. The method of impartation is, of course, inscrutable. There is no visible method or process discernible. By its nature it is supernatural and therefore its explanation is beyond human understanding. The Scriptures in presenting the impartation of eternal life use three figures to describe it.

Regeneration is sometimes presented in the figure of new birth. As Christ told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). In contrast to human birth of human parentage, one must be born "of God" (John 1:13) in order to become a child of God. According to 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." The figure is eloquent in portraying the intimate relation of the child of God to his heavenly Father and in relating the kind of life the believer in Christ receives to the eternal life which is in God.

Frequently in Scripture, regeneration is portrayed as spiritual resurrection. The Christian is revealed to be "alive from the dead" (Rom 6:13), and God "even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ" (Eph 2:5). Christ Himself said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). The fact of our resurrection is made the basis for frequent exhortation to live as those raised from the dead (Rom 6:13; Eph 2:5-6; Col 2:12; 3:1-2). Regeneration is determined largely by the attitude taken toward efficacious grace. Pelagian and Arminian theologians, holding as they do to the cooperation of the human will and the partial ability of the will through common grace or natural powers, recognize to some extent the presence of means in the work of regeneration. If the total inability of man be recognized, and the doctrine of efficacious grace believed, it naturally follows that regeneration is accomplished apart from means.

Reformed theology in keeping with its doctrine of efficacious grace has held that the human will in itself is ineffectual in bringing about any of the changes incident to salvation of the soul. As related to faith, the human will can act by means of efficacious grace. The human will can act even apart from efficacious grace in hearing the Gospel. In the act of regeneration, however, the human will is entirely passive. There is no cooperation possible. The nature of the work of regeneration forbids any possible human assistance. As a child in natural birth is conceived and born without any volition on his part, so the child of God receives the new birth apart from any volition on his part. In the new birth, of course, the human will is not opposed to regeneration and wills by divine grace to believe, but this act in itself does not produce new

birth. As in the resurrection of the human body from physical death, the body in no way assists the work of resurrection, so in the work of regeneration, the human will is entirely passive. It is not that the human will is ruled aside, nor does it waive the human responsibility to believe. It is rather that regeneration is wholly a work of God in a believing heart.

All other means are likewise excluded in the work of regeneration. While regeneration is often preceded by various antecedents such as the work of common grace and accompanying influences, these must be sharply distinguished from regeneration. Even the work of efficacious grace, though simultaneous with regeneration, and indispensable to it, does not in itself effect regeneration. Efficacious grace only makes regeneration possible and certain. Regeneration in its very nature is instantaneous, an immediate act of God, and in the nature of an instantaneous act, no means are possible. The fact that regeneration is consistently revealed as an act of God and the Scriptural revelation of the doctrine of efficacious grace are sufficient evidence for excluding the possibility of the use of means in effecting regeneration.

4. Regeneration Not Experimental.

Until the matter has been considered carefully, it is a striking thought that regeneration is not experimental. In Christian testimony, much has been said of the experience of regeneration. If regeneration is instantaneous and an act of divine will, it follows that regeneration in itself is not experimental. It may be conceded freely that abundant experimental phenomena follow the act of new birth. The experiences of a normal Spirit-filled Christian may immediately ensue upon new birth. This fact does not alter the non-experimental character of regeneration. If it be admitted that regeneration is an instantaneous act of God, it is logically impossible for it to be experimental, in that experience involves time and sequence of experience. It may be concluded, therefore, that no sensation attends the act of new birth, all experience proceeding rather from the accomplished regeneration and springing from the new life as its source. In the nature of the case, we cannot experience what is not true, and regeneration must be entirely wrought before experience can be found. While the regenerated soul may become immediately conscious of new life, the act of regeneration itself is not subject to experience or analysis, being the supernatural instantaneous act of God.

The non-experimental nature of regeneration if comprehended would do much to deliver the unsaved from the notion that an experience of some sort is antecedent to salvation, and in turn, it would prevent those seeking to win souls of expecting in partial form the fruits of salvation before regeneration takes place. The popular notion that one must feel different before being saved has prevented many from the simplicity of faith in Christ and the genuine regeneration that God alone can effect.

The non-experimental nature of regeneration has also, unfortunately, opened the door for the teaching of infant regeneration as held by the Lutheran Church. It is argued that if regeneration is not experimental, there is no valid reason why infants cannot be regenerated. Even Shedd approves the idea of infant regeneration on the ground that regeneration is not experimental in the following statement: "Regeneration is a work of God in the human soul that is below consciousness. There is no internal sensation caused by it. No man was ever conscious of that instantaneous act of the Holy Spirit by which he was made a new creature in Christ Jesus. And since the work is that of God alone, there is no necessity that man should be conscious of it. This fact places the infant and the adult upon the same footing, and makes infant regeneration as possible as that of adults. Infant regeneration is taught in Scripture. Luke 1:15, 'He shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.' Luke 18:15, 16, 'Suffer little children to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of God.' Acts 2:39, 'The promise is unto

your children.' 1 Cor 7:14, 'Now are your children holy.' Infant regeneration is also taught symbolically. (a) By infant circumcision in the Old Testament; (b) By infant baptism in the New Testament."¹² It is doubtful if any of the proof texts offered by Shedd really prove infant regeneration. While it is true that many Christians never know a crisis-experience to which the act of new birth may be traced, there is no certain Scripture warrant for affirming infant regeneration, at least in the present age. The normal pattern for regeneration is that it occurs at the moment of saving faith. No appeal is ever addressed to men that they should believe because they are already regenerated. It is rather that they should believe and receive eternal life. Christians are definitely told that before they accepted Christ they were "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). The case of those who die before reaching the age of responsibility is a different problem. The proper position seems to be that infants are regenerated at the moment of their death, not before, and if they live to maturity, they are regenerated at the moment they accept Christ. Infant baptism, certainly, is not efficacious in effecting regeneration, and the Reformed position is in contrast to the Lutheran on this point. The doctrine of infant regeneration, if believed, so confuses the doctrine as to rob it of all its decisive character. No one should be declared regenerated who cannot be declared saved for all eternity.

5. The Effect of Regeneration.

The work of regeneration is tremendous in its implications. A soul once dead has received the eternal life which characterizes the being of God. The effect of regeneration is summed in the fact of possession of eternal life. All other results of regeneration are actually an enlargement of the fact of eternal life. While life itself is difficult to define, and eternal life is immaterial, certain qualities belong to anyone who is regenerated in virtue of the fact that eternal life abides in him.

a. A New Nature.

In the nature of eternal life, it involves first of all the creation of a divine nature in the regenerated person. Without eradicating the old nature with its capacity and will for sin, the new nature has in it the longing for God and His will that we could expect would ensue from eternal life. The presence of the new nature constitutes a fundamental change in the person which is denominated "creation" (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15) and "new man" (Eph 4:24). A drastic change in manner of life, attitude toward God and to the things of God, and in the desires of the human heart may be expected in one receiving the new nature.

The new nature which is a part of regeneration should not be confused with the sinless nature of Adam before the fall. Adam's nature was a human nature untried and innocent of sin. It did not have as its source and determining its nature the eternal life which is bestowed in a regenerated person. The human nature of Adam was open to sin and temptation and was peccable. It is doubtful whether the divine nature bestowed in connection with regeneration is ever involved directly in sin. While the Scriptures are clear that a regenerated person can sin, and does sin, the lapse is traced to the sin nature, even though the act is that of the whole person. This must not be confused with various statements to the effect that a Christian can be sinless or unable to sin. The state of sinless perfection can never be reached until the sin nature is cast out, and this is accomplished only through the death of the physical body or the transformation of the body without death at the rapture.

Even the new nature, though never the origin of sin, does not have the ability sufficient to conquer the old nature. The power for victory lies in the indwelling presence of God. The new nature provides a will to do the will of God, and the power of God provides the enablement to accomplish this end in spite of the

innate sinfulness of the sin nature. The state of being in the will of God is reached when the will of the new nature is fully realized. Eternal life and the new nature are inseparably united, the nature corresponding to the life which brings it into being.

b. A New Experience.

While regeneration in itself is not experimental, it is the fountain of experience. The act of impartation of eternal life being instantaneous cannot be experienced, but the presence of eternal life after regeneration is the source of the new spiritual experience which might be expected. New life brings with it new capacity. The person who before regeneration was dead spiritually and blind to spiritual truth now becomes alive to a new world of reality. As a blind man for the first time contemplates the beauties of color and perspective when sight is restored, so the newborn soul contemplates new revelation of spiritual truth. For the first time he is able to understand the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. He is able now to enjoy the intimacies of fellowship with God and freedom in prayer. As his life is under the control of the Holy Spirit, he is able to manifest the fruit of the Spirit, utterly foreign to the natural man. His whole being has new capacities for joy and sorrow, love, peace, guidance, and all the host of realities in the spiritual world. While regeneration is not an experience, it is the foundation for all Christian experience. This at once demands that regeneration be inseparable from salvation, and that regeneration evidence itself in the normal experiences of a yielded Christian life. Regeneration that does not issue into Christian experience may be questioned.

c. Eternal Security.

One of the many reasons for confusion in the doctrine of regeneration is the attempt to avoid the inevitable conclusion that a soul once genuinely regenerated is saved forever. The bestowal of eternal life cannot be revoked. It declares the unchangeable purpose of God to bring the regenerated person to glory. Never in the Scriptures do we find anyone regenerated a second time. While Christians may lose much of a normal spiritual experience through sin, and desperately need confession and restoration, the fact of regeneration does not change. In the last analysis, the experiences of this life are only antecedent to the larger experiences the regenerated person will have after deliverance from the presence and temptation of sin. Regeneration will have its ultimate display when the person regenerated is completely sanctified and glorified. Our present experiences, limited as they are by the presence of a sinful nature and sinful body, are only a partial portrayal of the glories of eternal life. Through the experiences of life, however, the fact of regeneration should be a source of constant hope and abiding confidence "that he which hath begun a good work....will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:16).

Dallas, Texas

(Series to be continued in the Oct-Dec Number, 1941)

1 Systematic Theology, Vol. II, p. 683.

2 Chapter X.

3 Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 680.

4 Systematic Theology, pp. 792-793.

5 Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 683.

6 Op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 705-706.

7 Christian Theology, Vol. II, pp. 329-330.

8 Ibid., p. 237.

9 Op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 3-5.

10 Dogmatic Theology, Vol. II, p. 494.

11 Op. cit., Vol. III, p. 5.

12 Op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 505-506.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-f-walvoord/the-work-of-the-holy-spirit-in-salvation/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net