

CHAPTER EIGHT
THE NECESSITY OF FAITH-PRECEDING REGENERATION IN THE
SPIRITUALLY-DEAD

The Molinist Position: The unregenerate person is not only able to ignore and reject Jesus Christ as Savior, he is able to trust in Jesus Christ without a previous, decisive, and divine act that regenerates him.

Theological Truth #5 That Favors Calvinism: Though the unregenerate person is able to ignore and reject Jesus Christ as Savior, he is morally unable to trust in him and so, faith in Jesus Christ as Savior will take place only after the previous, decisive and divine act of regeneration.

“What difference does it make?” is not only a now famous retort given by the former U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, at a January 2013 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on the September 11, 2012 American Diplomatic Compound and CIA annex attack in Benghazi, Libya, but it also may be a question the perceptive reader asks at this point in this book. Certainly, how a person views divine sovereignty and human choice will have tremendous bearing upon whether or not they have a healthy sense of dependence upon God and his providence and, at the same time, a healthy sense of responsibility in their choices.

Yet, more than this, as we can see in the above summary statements on the two positions, there is a significant difference between how Molinists and Calvinists view the application of the redemptive work of Christ to a person. This does not mean the basic evangelistic approach of each of the two positions will not include some of the same general actions that are needed in any outreach to the lost: The need to share the gospel, the need to pray, and the helpfulness of loving relationship and ethical example as context. It also does not mean that beyond these same general actions, individuals who hold to each position will have nuanced differences that are present beyond what is the result of holding to Molinism or Calvinism.

Be all this as it may, I believe that any Christian who understands and holds to soft deterministic Calvinism, as the Bible teaches and as I have set forth in this book, will be encouraged not only with the importance of his responsible actions in the evangelism of the lost (thus refuting those who claim Calvinism drains evangelistic motivation), he will have greater motivation to wield the weapons God has given for this end (the gospel and prayer), and he will stand in greater awe of God for saving him, when for sure, apart from God's effective grace, he himself would never have trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior.

The way I will approach the subject of divine sovereignty and human choice in the salvation of persons in this chapter is to use Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2:1-10 to give direction to our discussion. Additionally, as each main point is raised, I will also interact with the rest of Scripture to provide additional support.

As we look at this passage in Ephesians, along with the rest of Scripture, we make the following fourfold discovery about how God applies redemption to the lost and thus support our fifth theological truth.

All Observe The Same Phenomena In The Lost And In Those Who Profess Belief

In Ephesians 2, its context, and in the rest of the New Testament, we discover the two main groups of people that hold different relationships to Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:18 Paul calls one group "those who are perishing," that is, those lost or unsaved (see also Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-12; 4:17-19) and those "who are being saved" (see also Ephesians 1:2; 2:4-10; 4:1). Furthermore, we can distinguish two sub-groups among those who are lost: There are those clearly lost and who make no profession to be otherwise (see above passage on the lost). Additionally, there are those who are lost, but profess to be saved (see 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Peter 1:10-11; Rev. 2:9; 3:1-3)—people whose works do not match genuine faith and repentance (Mt. 3:8; Romans 2:6-10; James

2:16-26), many of whom demonstrate their lost state eventually by walking away from their profession (1 John 2:18-19). We also can distinguish two sub-groups among those who are being saved: Those who are reasonably and faithfully seeking to follow Christ and those who, at a given time, are not (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-4; Eph. 4:17-5:21; 1 Thes. 1:1-10).

Thoughtful Christians who have been in and around the Church any time at all and who are paying attention to life experiences, observe these phenomena that include all kinds of people making good and bad choices, righteous and sinful decisions, and who are at different places in life when it comes to God's moral will. What is more, such persons observe the majority of people in the world seem to have little genuine interest in Christ and Christianity and yet, all who do trust in Christ seem to have some kind of radical change from their previous state to that of following Christ. Not only does all this leave us with the sense that we do make genuine and free choices and that there is, at the very least, significant spiritual disinterest and/or rebellion to be overcome in anyone who trusts Christ, but that whatever view of divine sovereignty and human freedom to which a person holds, that view must take into consideration these phenomena. If it does not, it does not appear to measure up to reality.

Part of what I argued in Chapter Seven, where we dealt with how humans make free choices, is that Calvinism deals with freedom in a manner that not only deals better than Molinism with the biblical material, but also fits better with our experience. Following that line of thought, I will argue in this chapter and the next that Calvinism does a better job in explaining why we have all the various phenomena just described among the saved and unsaved.

To begin, Calvinism outpaces Molinism in providing a biblical and realistic view of man's plight without Christ. This leads to our second discovery we must grasp to understand how God applies redemption to humans.

Inherited Sin

Calvinism surpasses Molinism in providing a biblical and realistic view of man apart from Christ in the doctrine of “inherited sin” or what traditionally has been called “Original Sin,” and the implications drawn from this doctrine. Again, we turn to Ephesians 2 in order to explain.

In the first three chapters of the letter to the Ephesians Paul sets forth blessings that saints have in Christ, and all this in preparation for calling them to live out their blessed life as a new and transformed community (chapters 4-6).¹ As he begins in chapter 1, he includes not only the blessings of election and predestination unto salvation and sanctification (1:4-5), he also writes of redemption and forgiveness of sins (7), the lavishing of God’s rich grace (7-8), an inheritance (11), sealing of God’s ownership, as well as a guarantee of God’s continued and complete work by the Holy Spirit (13-14), the immeasurable greatness of God’s power in the saints to save and transform—the same power by which he raised Jesus Christ from the dead (19-21), and the prominent place he gives the church as the body of Christ, the very body that displays the fullness of Christ (22-23).

Once Paul has set forth these amazing, rich, and gracious blessings, he wants to explain in chapter 2 the depth of the mercy and love (cf. v. 4) God has displayed toward saints in taking them from their plight (2:1-3) and making them the new people he had begun to describe in chapter 1 (2:4-10), and in giving them a prominent place in his redemptive plan as his people who are reconciled to him and to each other (2:11-22).

¹ We should note that this characteristically Pauline and New Testament theological emphasis, that the indicative of what Christ has accomplished precedes and ought to lead to the imperative of what God commands, fits with the view of salvation and sanctification we present in this and the following chapters. To put it in other terms, the transformation of the sinner by God’s regeneration—a work that can happen in union with Christ, leads to the heart of the person being so changed they can trust in, love, and follow God. This is another way of saying God must take the initiative to bring about decisive change.

The first passage that we will delve into is comprised of the three verses that highlight the predicament of people who are without Christ or who do not yet have Christ (2:1-3). These first three verses of Ephesians 2 read:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² 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 – ³ 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.

Whether Paul intends to say that men apart from Christ are dead “by means of the trespasses and sins” (an instrumental of means for both nouns) or “in the trespasses and sins” (locative of sphere for both nouns), there appears to be little, if any, real difference, and both concepts are taught in other texts. Elsewhere, Paul clarifies that man’s natural state is that he is separated from God (cf. Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 2:14-18), both because he is born a sinner and because he commits actual sins (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). As such, man operates in the realm of sin and death (perhaps Col. 2:13) and so each person is one who is dead in that realm and he also is as one who is dead because of that sinfulness and those sins—which also comprise death that reigns over man (cf. Rom. 5:14).

What Paul writes here about man being dead also appears to agree with the entirety of Scripture in general and with the first pages of Genesis in particular. In regard to the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” Adam was commanded, “you shall not eat,” and was also told that “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Though Adam did not die a full physical death the day he and Eve ate, nevertheless, he was now in a state of separation from God, from the fruitfulness and realization of the purpose and powers intended for him, separated from Eve, and so he was dead spiritually and the power of physical death now reigned in his body. It appears that this death that is true of all fallen men can be defined as follows:

Death is a divine curse, a road upon which we all are born, caused by our sin and leading to more sin and death. It has distorted and directs every part of who we are, leaving us unable to fellowship

*with God and to carry out fruitfully the purposes for which we have been created. In death we are separated from God, from his saving and transforming grace, from loving him, from his protection against our satanic enemy, from peace with self and others, and from physical health. If death is not addressed in this life, it becomes permanent in the next.*²

Here in Ephesians 2:1, Paul seems to affirm this death is the state of all people from birth. In this death, according to Paul elsewhere, we find also the doctrine of inherited sin. In Romans 5:12 we read: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” “Inherited sin,” writes Wayne Grudem, means that, “We inherit sin from Adam in two ways... We are counted guilty because of Adam’s sin.... [And,] We have a sinful nature because of Adam’s sin.”³ Traditionally, this reality has been referred to as “original sin,” because this sin “is derived from the original root of the human race...it is present in the life of every individual from the time of his birth...[and] because it is the inward root of all the actual sins that defile the life of man.”⁴ “Virtually every Christian [theological stance] has some doctrine of original sin.... The consensus of historic Christianity...is that the biblical view of the fall requires us to affirm some concept of original sin.”⁵

² Tom Barnes, *A Matter Of Life Or Death: Discovering What It Is To Be Fully Alive* (Holywell, UK: EP Books, 2015), 38.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000, repr.), 494, 496.

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, New Combined Edition), vol. 2, 244. Grudem, *Systematic*, 494, explains why he uses “inherited sin” rather than “original sin”: “...because the phrase ‘original sin’ seems so easily to be misunderstood to Adam’s first sin, rather than to the sin that is ours as a result of Adam’s fall.... The phrase ‘inherited sin’ is much more immediately understandable and less subject to misunderstanding...[provided we grasp that] our legal guilt is inherited directly from Adam and not through a line of ancestors....”

⁵ R. C. Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 121. Sproul (127) adds that, “to be in the state of original sin is to be in the state Scripture calls ‘the flesh.’”

Another way to speak of the sinful nature we have because of Adam's sin is to say we have "inherited corruption," i.e. "our nature includes a disposition to sin,"⁶ so much so that Paul can write of all people without Christ in Ephesians 2:2-3: "you... were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Sometimes this "corruption that pervades the whole person" is referred to as "total depravity" or "radical corruption"—not to imply, though, that each man is as bad as he could be.⁷ However, sin impacts and corrupts every part of man. Sam Storms puts it this way: "The doctrine of total depravity is not meant to suggest that all people are as bad as they can be. Nor does it mean that all people commit every sin of which they are capable. It simply means that the totality of their being is polluted by sin and selfishness."⁸ In the intellect we see it in that the person who does not have the Spirit of God to transform his thinking, judges the gospel of Jesus Christ as unnecessary at best or pure foolishness at worst (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:13-14). In the affections and will we see this corruption in that apart from the regenerating work of God's Spirit (cf. 1 John 3:1-8; Titus 3:5-6), a person will never desire and choose Christ (Rom. 8:7-8; Heb. 11:6; 1 John 5:1-5).⁹

⁶ Grudem, *Systematic*, 496.

⁷ Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* 117-118.

⁸ Sam Storms, *Chosen For Life: The Case For Divine Election* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 55. John Piper, *Five Points: Toward A Deeper Experience of God's Grace* (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 18-22 affirms that "man's depravity is total in at least four [other] senses." 1. "Our rebellion against God is total." (Rom. 3:9-11, 18) 2. "In his total rebellion, everything man does is sin.... Outward conformity to the revealed will of God is not righteousness in relation to God, [i.e. it is done for his glory]." (Rom. 14:23; 7:18) 3. "Man's inability to submit to God and do good is total." (Rom. 8:7-8 [compare v. 9]; Eph. 2:1-3) 4. "Our rebellion is totally deserving of eternal punishment." (Eph. 2:3; Mt. 5:29-30; 10:28; 13:49-50; 18:8-9; 25:46; 2 Thes. 1:6-9; Rev. 14:9-11; 20:10)

⁹ The way that 1 John 5:1-5 teaches this truth is in two ways. First, John affirms that "everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ" has "already been born of God" (author's translation on the last clause). In other words, there is a decisive and transformative work that must take place in a person so she believes—one that precedes the faith. The second way is that John views faith and love of God as synthetically parallel. In other words, to trust in Christ as Savior also means there is a love and delight in God and how Christ has provided for salvation involved in the faith. An implication is that this affection will not be present apart from God's transformative work (cf. also 2 Cor. 4:4, 6).

As can be seen, radical and inherited corruption of inherited sin results in an inability that I will term a moral inability. Before we take up this third discovery we make that helps us understand how redemption is applied to people, though, there is another topic we must address.

The Unregenerate And Regenerate

Since I speak in this chapter of the regenerate and unregenerate person, regeneration, and the regenerating work of the Spirit, we need to define terms. By the regenerating work of God's Spirit (or regeneration) I mean "the inner renewal by the Spirit of God which takes place when a person becomes a Christian"¹⁰ and, I would add, that effectively enables him to receive and rest upon Christ alone for his salvation. Regeneration has a number of other descriptions in the Bible attached to it that provide clarity:¹¹ It is a new creation (John 3:1-8; Titus 3:5-6), that is, the creation of a new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-11) or we could say a new birth (John 3:1-8; 1 Peter 3:3; 1 John 5:1), a resurrection in Christ unto new life (Rom. 6:1-11) that involves the giving of a new heart or way of thinking, desiring, and choosing (Ezek. 36:25-32)—which could also be termed the giving of a new nature (Mt. 7:15-20)—which transfers the person from the realm of flesh to that of Spirit, to be led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:5-9; Gal. 5:16-26), which includes faith in the Savior and the carrying out of his will (Rom. 6:6, 14, 16-23; Rom. 8:7-9 [in light of Heb. 11:6]).

We must not miss, then, that in the Spirit's regeneration of the sinner would also be included the work that brings the person to trust Jesus Christ as Savior: the effective calling. The effective

¹⁰ H. Burkhardt, "Regeneration," in Sinclair Ferguson, David F. Wright, J. I. Packer, Ed's., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 574.

¹¹ For these descriptions I am dependent upon Charles Leiter, *Justification And Regeneration* (Hannibal, Missouri: Granted Ministries Press, 2009, Kindle Edition), 47-123.

calling (cf. Rom. 8:30; Eph. 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:9) 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 do[es] persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.”¹² This work of the Spirit is not dependent upon or in any way limited by the person’s choice or the innate knowledge God would have of that choice. It flows absolutely from God’s sovereign grace (see Chapters 4-5 of this book).

When I use the terms unregenerate and regenerate I am speaking of the person who has not experienced the regenerating work of God’s Spirit and one who has, respectively.

It should be noted that the Molinist would speak of these terms in a different manner. As will be seen later in the chapter, they would typically believe that a person must first believe and this results in the work of regeneration.¹³ For them there is a kind of grace that precedes such faith (so it is prevenient) that enables any person to initiate the faith, but that grace is not effective or decisive. In the case of those whom God has chosen, based upon his innate knowledge they would trust Christ given the set of circumstances that are actualized around them, God does work graciously in them to enable such faith, but not in a manner that is decisive or effective, i.e. not in a manner that is not first dependent upon their choice.

As can be seen in Kenneth Keathley’s soft libertarian Molinism, some Molinists can affirm in Adam’s fall, “the ability to choose the right thing was lost” and “even the best person is unable naturally to respond to God (John 6:44, 65; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4).”¹⁴ Where his view

¹² *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, #31.

Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* 189, writes: “The doctrine of irresistible grace is so called because of its monergistic action and efficacy. Historically it has been called effectual calling.”

¹³ Molinist, Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation And Sovereignty* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010, Kindle Edition), Introduction, writes: “...regeneration does not precede conversion.”

¹⁴ Keathley, *Salvation*, 86.

would differ from the soft deterministic Calvinism presented in this book is at least two points. To begin, he affirms that “though depravity makes sin inevitable, it does not make any particular sin necessary.”¹⁵ He adds: “We are like inmates [in a prison], free to roam about a prison but never to leave.”¹⁶ I commend Keathley for seeking to deal with a wide range of the biblical material. Nevertheless, as I previously noted in Chapter Seven, based both upon what Scripture teaches about God’s exhaustive governance and how human choice functions, each human choice is determined.

The second difference has to do with the decisive way God must work upon the unregenerate man so that he can and will believe. Though Keathley would come close to the biblical position of the inherited sin and radical corruption we have set forth here, nevertheless, properly understood these realities leave humans in a state that there is no actual alternativity for humans when it comes to doing what is good. God must first regenerate the person for the good to be chosen. Such regeneration will lead to a positive response to the salvation invitation.

Lynne Rudder Baker, in speaking about the three categories of choices humans typically make,¹⁷ rightly argues:

¹⁵ Keathley, *Salvation*, 87.

¹⁶ Keathley, *Salvation*, 86.

¹⁷ Lynne Rudder Baker, “Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge,” *Faith And Philosophy*, 20, 4 (October 2003): 467. Those three categories are: (A) Willing what is good, e.g. to love God. (B) Willing what is evil, e.g. to hate God or harm one’s neighbor. (C) Willing what is morally neutral, e.g. to accept an offer of a job that is not immoral.

I am not pressing her three categories even though it is true that one can argue about the third category that humans can make such choices either out of sinful motives or righteous motives, and so no decision is absolutely morally neutral. Sproul, *What Is Reformed?* 129, helpfully explains that the unregenerate can perform “works of civil virtue,” however, they are not seen as good by God, given their motives: “...sinners in their fallen condition are still capable of performing what the Reformers called works of ‘civil virtue.’ Civil virtue refers to deeds that conform outwardly to the law of God. Fallen sinners can refrain from stealing and performs acts of charity, but these deeds are not deemed good in an ultimate sense. When God evaluates the actions of people, he considers not only the outward deeds in and of themselves, but also the motives behind these acts [cf. Mt. 12:36-37; Rom. 2:6-10; 1 Cor. 4:5]. The supreme motive required of everything we do is the love of God [Mt. 22:37f.]. A deed that outwardly conforms to God’s law but proceeds from a heart alienated from God is not deemed by God a good deed [cf. Rom. 14:23].”

(1) “No human wills what is good unless God causes her to will what is good.”

(2) “Some human beings will what is good.”

(3) “God causes some human beings to will what is good.”

As this chapter unfolds I will argue that the Bible sets forth regeneration and effective calling as I have espoused it, not as the Molinist would.

We move on now to address the moral inability that is present in the unregenerate person and what is meant by that. This is the third discovery we make that helps us understand how God applies redemption to humans.

Moral Inability

Erik Thoennes writes: “Inherited guilt and corruption leave every [unregenerate] person completely unable to save himself or to please God. There are at least six ways this pervasive inability affects everyone. Until God intervenes with his sovereign, gracious, saving power, mankind is totally unable to:

- Repent or trust Christ (John 6:44; cf. John 3:3; 6:65)
- See or enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3)
- Obey God and thereby glorify him (Rom. 8:6-8)
- Attain spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 2:14)
- Live lives pleasing to God (Rom. 14:23; Heb. 11:6)
- Receive eternal or spiritual life (Eph. 2:1-3)”¹⁸

¹⁸ Erik Thoennes, “Sin,” in ESVSB, 2530.

This moral inability appears to be part of what Paul intends by saying that unregenerate people are “dead in the trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). In other words, in a similar way that we say a car is “dead” when it will not start and therefore function as it was intended, so humans are “dead” when we are unable to do that which we are created to do by God—trust in, love, and thus, follow him (cf. Gen. 2:16-17; Rom. 1:5; 14:23; 16:26).

I have labeled this moral inability, in the first place, to distinguish it from natural inability. The latter “is so called, because mere nature, as the word is [commonly] used, is concerned, without anything of choice.... [In other words,] we are said to be naturally unable to do a thing, when we cannot do it if we will....”¹⁹ An example of natural inability would be the paraplegic former figure skater who sits in her wheelchair, longing to skate as she watches others, but she is unable to do so.

I also have called this moral inability to highlight that it is located in the will, based upon the reality we discovered in Chapter Seven—a human being chooses according to their strongest motive at the time. In other words, based upon their preference, they choose.²⁰ Given the total depravity of humans, i.e. their radical corruption, the unregenerate person never desires God and Jesus Christ as a Savior since, in accordance with his nature and the antecedent movements, habits, ways of thinking, and the additional blinding activity of Satan (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4) present in

¹⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom Of The Will* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library Edition, Calvin College, accessed April 2015, [cel.org/ccel/Edwards/will](http://ccel.org/ccel/Edwards/will)), I, 4 (page 2).

²⁰ An example of what I mean by moral inability is found in Isaiah 49:15. There, in order to drive home the point that the LORD will never forsake his people, a moral inability that most mothers have toward their children is used: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.” The way this question and answer works is to rely upon the reality that most mothers would not be able to forget or abandon her nursing child, and yet there are a few who could. This example is most likely chosen because it represents an area of life where people will experience strong commitment from one to the care of another. And yet, God far surpasses this in his commitment to his people. For those moms implied in this verse who cannot abandon their child, this is a moral inability (in a good way). They cannot because they are so compelled in their affections toward their baby.

the heart, he does not see the need for Christ, he does not see Christ as sweet and glorious, and so he freely ignores, freely rejects the salvation that God offers. In other words, because he has these preferences and antecedent movements, he is morally unable to choose the greatest good.²¹ In other words, “he is under the influence or prevalence of a contrary inclination, or has a [lack] of inclination”²² toward Christ. So, in one sense he is free in his choice, since he is exercising his will as he truly desires. In another sense, the unregenerate person is in bondage in that he is morally unable to choose the good of Christ.²³

According to Paul in Romans 1:19ff., no person can ever stand before God and have an excuse that he did not have a chance, for God has made himself known through general revelation. Implied also, is that he has given to man the faculties to understand and respond to that revelation (intellect, affections, will).²⁴ And, yet, the unregenerate man, merely on his own, will never want to trust in Christ that he might know God (cf. Rom. 3:10-18). “Do [unregenerate] people have a free and unfettered will by which they are able to believe? The Bible declares that

²¹ Webster’s Dictionary (1828 ed., on-line), defines “moral” in this way: “Reasoning or instructing with regard to vice and virtue.” In other words, it has to do with thinking, desiring, and choosing in regard to what is good or bad, right or wrong.

²² Edwards, *Freedom*, III, 4 (p. 129).

²³ Lynne Rudder Baker, “Why Christians,” 464: “As Luther argued in his debates with Erasmus, we do not have the power to do good on our own.”

The *Westminster Confession Of Faith*, 9, 3, agrees: “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.”

For an overview of the Augustinian-Calvinist approach to the bondage of the will, see John H. Gerstner, “Augustine, Luther, Calvin, And Edwards On The Bondage Of The Will,” in Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware, Ed’s., *The Grace of God, The Bondage Of The Will*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 279-295.

²⁴ R. C. Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 135: “We human beings...have the natural ability. To make choices. We have been given the necessary natural equipment. We have a mind that can process information and understand the obligations imposed by the law of God. We have a will that enables us to choose what we want to. Prior to the fall we also had a good inclination to the good what was lost in the fall. Original sin does not destroy our humanity or our ability to make choices. The natural ability or faculty remains intact. What was lost is the good inclination or righteous desire for obedience.”

they do not. The teaching of Scripture is that all people are born into this life corrupt in nature and therefore ill-disposed to the gospel and to the truth.”²⁵ As Paul implies in Ephesians 2:1, “[The unregenerate] are as unresponsive to [God] as a corpse. So we should not hesitate to affirm that a life without God...is a living death, and...those who live it are dead even while they are living.”²⁶

How deep, pervasive, and influential is mankind’s sin nature (inherited sin and radical corruption) that continually leads people farther away from God? Consider the following:

- Sin is an active force that indwells humans, not only inciting them to sin, but the more sinful choices are made, the deeper it takes hold and the more habits in that direction are formed that shape future thinking, affections, and choices—such that sinners are enslaved to and habituated in sin (Gen. 4:7; Ps. 36:1; Rom. 6:17; 7:17; 2 Pt. 2:14, 19).²⁷ In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul affirms this when he not only writes that the unregenerate live in the state of sin, but also follow “the course of this [fallen] world [system],” and follow “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (note how their very identity is that of being characterized by disobedience) and then by their very “nature,” Paul says, such are “children” who deserve and are under God’s “wrath.”
 - In John 8:34 Jesus clarifies of the unregenerate that “everyone who [continually] commits sin is a slave to sin” and then further explains this includes the reality that man’s volition follows his character (Jn. 8:42-44a), which is ultimately shaped by the volition, the desires of his master—Satan (Jn. 8:44b). There truly is a moral inability to see one’s need for Christ and to trust in him apart from God’s gracious work in him (Jn. 8:43; cf. also John 10:26). At the same time, those who are part of Jesus’ flock, his sheep, hear his voice, he knows them, they follow him, and he gives them eternal life (John 10:27-28).²⁸

²⁵ Storms, *Chosen*, 54.

²⁶ John Stott, *The Message Of Ephesians: God’s New Society* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979), 72.

²⁷ Gen. 4:7: “And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you....” Psalm 36:1: “Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart....” Rom. 6:17: “...you who were once slaves of sin....” Rom. 7:17: “So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.” 2 Peter 2:14: “They have hearts trained in greed.” 2 Peter 2:19: “...they themselves are slaves of corruption.”

²⁸ John 8:42-44: “Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

- The result of the fall of man and his spiritual death, as well as sin's impact on him is that, "every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Given how humans make choices, this leads to more thinking, desires, and choices that, even if outwardly virtuous, are from unrighteous motives and for unrighteous purposes. This means that apart from regeneration, the imputed righteousness of Christ, reconciliation to God, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Titus 3:5-7 [cf. also Eph. 2:17-19; Phil. 3:9]), "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Is. 64:6 ["polluted garment" is a dirty menstruation cloth]).²⁹
- Man, in this state of sin and apart from regeneration, deceives himself about what is important and whether or not he needs God's salvation in Christ. Jeremiah 17:9 puts it this way: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Satanic-infused blindness also deepens this deception: "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers" (2 Cor. 4:4).
- Jeremiah 13:23 puts it this way about moral inability, after affirming that an Ethiopian (probably what we would call Sudanese today) cannot change his skin color, nor a leopard his spots: "Neither can you start doing good, for you always do evil" (NLT). Part of the reason is that sin has impacted man's intellect, affections, and will with the result that no one sees their need for Christ or desires him apart from a previous and decisive work of God (Rom. 3:10-12; 1 Cor. 2:14).³⁰
- This state includes the inability to trust in Christ as Savior, simply because an unregenerate person will not see Christ as needed, nor will he desire to trust in Christ. Paul writes in Romans 8:7-9 that apart from Christ and without the Spirit a person cannot please God: "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." Then, the author of Hebrews reminds us that faith is a central part of pleasing God (Hebrews 11:6): "And without faith it is impossible to please him...." The implication is that apart from God's

John 10:26-28: "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 Titus 3:5-7: "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Ephesians 2:17-19: "And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...." Philippians 3:9: "...and be found in [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...."

³⁰ Romans 3:10-12: "...as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'" 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

initiating, decisive, and transforming grace in regeneration a person cannot trust in Christ because he will not.³¹

Martin Luther, then, was accurate to paint man's plight apart from regeneration in this light:

According to the apostle [Paul]...it is not merely the lack of a quality in the will or indeed merely the lack of light in the intellect, of strength in the memory. Rather it is a complete deprivation of all rectitude and of the ability of all the powers of the body as well as the soul and of the entire inner and outer man. In addition to this, it is an inclination to evil, a disgust at the good, a disinclination toward light and wisdom; it is love of error and darkness, a fleeing from [genuinely] good works and a loathing of them, a running to what is evil....³²

At this point some may ask, "But, how is this fair? How can God hold a person responsible for that which he cannot do?" Certainly, throughout church history many have asked this. In fact, it was an issue that Pelagius raised in his controversy with Augustine. The 16th c. German instructional tool, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, #9, takes up this very question: "Does not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in his law, that which he cannot perform?" The answer given is this: "Not at all; (a) for God made man capable of performing it; but man, by the instigation of the devil, (b) and his own willful disobedience, (c) deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts." I would also add that, as we learned in Chapter Seven, a person operates freely in that he does what he desires—even if it flows out of his nature and the habituation of antecedent decisions and actions.

An example may help. Suppose that a person chooses to begin drinking alcoholic beverages, eventually becomes an alcoholic, tries to quit drinking because of problems it has caused, yet, as

³¹ Later in Hebrews (13:20-21), in a passage we have already looked at, we discover that pleasing God (which would include trusting him) comes by his grace: "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, **working in us that which is pleasing in his sight**, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (emphasis added)

³² Martin Luther, *The Bondage Of The Will*, edited and translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Cambridge: James Clarke/Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1957), cited in Sproul, *What Is Reformed?* 124.

the Twelve Steps of *Alcoholics Anonymous* puts it, feels “powerless” to do so. They have created a situation in which there may be a dependency upon the alcohol that is tied to habituation (this is how they have medicated their pain in the past) and even chemical processes in the body (to try and quit brings too many adverse effects to the body). Given this addiction, they become drunk, get in the car, are involved in a wreck that takes another life, and are found guilty of “intoxication manslaughter.”³³ In such a situation, do we deny that the person feels powerless and cannot beat this addiction on their own? Usually not, especially if we have had exposure to substance abuse at all. At the same time, do we think that they are not morally responsible for what happened? Again, not at all:

*A conviction for intoxication manslaughter can result in a lengthy prison sentence. In some states a 20 year prison sentence is possible, while others may provide for 10 years or more. ...States (including Texas) also often have mandatory minimums associated with intoxication manslaughter charges. This means, for example, that if you are sentenced to 20 years in prison you may have to serve at least 2 years before you are eligible for release on parole.*³⁴

In a similar fashion, the person who is morally unable to do that which is righteous, morally unable to trust in Christ apart from God’s regenerating work, and so lives a life of unbelief and sin is responsible for what they choose to do—and rightly so. Having all the faculties they need to respond to God’s general revelation of himself and so being naturally able to call upon God and his grace for salvation (and having God’s grace available to them—Acts 17:27), they are rightly held responsible by God.

The Three Main Views Toward The Human Condition And Faith In Christ

³³ See www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/intoxication-manslaughter-texas.htm (accessed Jan. 15, 2017).

³⁴ See www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/intoxication-manslaughter-texas.htm (accessed Jan. 15, 2017). We might even argue that responsibility is heightened since there are so many sources of help available for the alcoholic, such as A.A. groups, *Celebrate Recovery* groups, and in-patient treatment centers.

Having covered the ground we have at this point, we can now outline the three main views throughout Church history toward humans in their natural state (that is, without Christ) and how such persons move to faith in Christ.

The first we will call Pelagianism. Named for “a British layman who gained acceptance in Rome c. 400 as a teacher of Christian asceticism,” and who entered a doctrinal controversy with Augustine,³⁵ this approach believes that responsibility for one’s actions must be based upon a full ability of all types (not just natural, but also moral) and so humans must be able fully, before any regenerating work of God’s Spirit or any prevenient grace, to trust in Christ as Savior. It discounts inherited sin and radical corruption. As we have seen so far in this chapter on the spiritually dead state of man apart from God’s grace, it is virtually impossible to argue for this position based upon Scripture. It does certainly allow for libertarian freedom. However, Molinists do not argue for this position. Nor does any other Bible-believing, biblically-informed, and biblically-consistent person.³⁶

The second view is one we will label Prevenient Grace. Though we will look at this view in more depth shortly, I will introduce it here. Molinist, William Lane Craig, says the following about this approach:

I, with I think virtually all Christians who are not Pelagians, will affirm the need for prevenient grace. Natural man does not seek the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to Him. So, no one apart from God’s initiative would ever come to God, and I think that is the bondage of the will of which Paul speaks. We are lost in sin, and therefore it needs to be God’s prevenient grace that reaches out and begins to draw people through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to Himself. But the difference would be, again, that whereas the Calvinist sees that calling and drawing as

³⁵ D. F. Wright, “Pelagianism,” in Sinclair Ferguson, David F. Wright, J. I. Packer, Ed’s., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 500.

³⁶ For this material on Pelagius I am indebted to Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* 121-23. Sproul goes on to write (124): “Pelagius was condemned at the Synod of Carthage in 418. Subsequent church councils reaffirmed the doctrine of original sin and repeated the denunciations of Pelagius’s teaching. Even the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century made it clear that Pelagianism seriously distorts the biblical view of the fall.”

irresistible, I would say that somewhere along the line that it is resistible. As Stephen said to the Jewish persecutors of his day, "You hard-necked people! You always resist the Holy Spirit!"³⁷

Prevenient grace is a grace that comes before belief, a grace that God exercises toward sinners so that they have the ability to overcome inherited sin and radical corruption. It returns to them full and actual alternativity, so they can either choose Christ or reject him freely in the indeterministic (or libertarian) sense. This is the main view of Molinism—recognizing the impact of sin upon human ability to trust in Christ and positing a work of grace that is not decisive or effective. As Craig goes on to say about the difference between the Molinist and Calvinist: “[For the Molinist]...grace is not irresistible. The person really can do differently in those circumstances if he wants to. It is just that he cannot escape God knowing how he freely would choose. But God takes hands off and says, ‘All right, it is up to you. Do what you want.’”³⁸ In the event of the person who will trust Christ in the world God actualizes, God chooses that person, based upon his innate knowledge of that choice and the reality he has actualized the circumstances that lead to and surround that choice. Yet, aside from the prevenient grace, the person’s faith (their choice) originates in them in an indeterministic manner.

³⁷ Craig, in Paul Helm, William Lane Craig, “Calvinism Vs. Molinism: Paul Helm And William Lane Craig,” JBTM, 11, 1 (Spring 2014), 71. The quote from Stephen is found in Acts 7:51. P. S. Watson, “Grace,” in Alan Richardson, Ed., *A Dictionary Of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 148-49, defines “prevenient grace” in this way: “The activity of God’s grace preceding or going before (archaically: ‘pre-venting’) any movement of man towards God or goodness. This is vividly symbolized in infant baptism, where God acts toward the infant that has no awareness even that God exists. Opinions differ as to the extent and the means of this activity, but there would be widespread agreement today: that it is universal, God seeking everywhere to move sinners to repentance, draw unbelievers to faith, and quicken the conscience of both Christians and non-Christians; that it may operate through outward means (e.g. the words and actions of other persons), or by some more direct influence on a man’s interior life; and that it does not operate coercively or irresistibly.” Matthew A. Postiff, “The Theological Viability Of Middle Knowledge” (An unpublished paper presented to Dr. William W. Combs for Seminar In Soteriology, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 13, highlights that Molina also affirmed what today would be called prevenient grace. The word “prevenient” comes from a Latin word that means “come before.”

³⁸ Craig, “Calvinism Vs. Molinism,” 73.

The third view is the Calvinist position, which is presented in this book. It argues that based upon the inherited sin and radical corruption of humans, as well as the lack of biblical evidence for prevenient grace (and evidence against it), humans do not possess the moral ability to trust in Christ as Savior. They will never want to do that, even though they are acting freely in their unrighteousness. When God works in the elect to call them to himself, he does this effectively and so gives them the desire for Christ and the ability to choose him freely. In other words, they believe because they have been regenerated and effectively called by God's Spirit. As Paul Helm insightfully comments: "In Calvinism, there is a stronger view of sin and the way in which it binds the will such that God's grace cannot only be offered to man. It has to be imparted to them for these men and women to become reborn and to become liberated from their sin."³⁹ I would also add that Calvinism gives a better and more biblically-consistent explanation of how God effectively works in humans, to transform them to trust and obey.

The fourth discovery we make about how God applies redemption to people is a direct refutation of prevenient grace, the view Molinism posits as a bridge from inherited sin to the libertarian free choice of faith in Christ. It is also a direct support for effective calling.

A Refutation Of Prevenient Grace And Support For Effective Calling

The doctrine of prevenient grace is not only refuted by the lack of evidence for it—especially when texts that are set forth to support the doctrine are properly understood (e.g. John 1:9),⁴⁰ it is

³⁹ Helm, "Calvinism Vs. Molinism," 66.

⁴⁰ A very good treatment of this issue is found in Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace In The Wesleyan Sense?" in Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware, Ed's., *The Grace Of God, The Bondage Of The Will*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 365-382.

also refuted based upon how the Scripture speaks of the work that God does in a sinner to save her.

In Ephesians 2:1-10 the apostle Paul's language is such that it does not leave room for a grace that is operative in all people and that enables them either to trust in Christ or to reject him. Rather, the picture is more consistent with what Calvinism has commonly termed "effective calling."⁴¹ I offer the following evidence for this assertion.

To begin, Paul's language in 2:1-3, as we have seen above, appears to describe the state of any unregenerate person, and to assert that there is moral inability in the unregenerate, rather than a condition in which each person is able to trust in Christ without a more effective and decisive work. We also have seen how the rest of Scripture affirms this state of spiritual death and moral inability as well.

Many Molinists will respond at this point: "Wait, we acknowledge 'the lost do not have the capacity in their natural state to turn to God,'⁴² and that in addition to the sufficient grace that all humans have to respond with contra-causal freedom, for those whom God innately knows will trust in Christ, given the world and circumstances that have been actualized, there is an efficacious grace with which God operates toward them so that they can be saved—albeit, the difference between merely sufficient and efficacious grace lies 'in the response of the human will to that grace'⁴³ and that efficacious grace merely 'stirs and solicits the will of man, but...may be

⁴¹ The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, #31, explains: "Effect[ive] 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 do[es] persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel."

⁴² Keathley, *Salvation*, 106.

⁴³ William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?" in Clark H. Pinnock, Gen. Ed., *The Grace Of God And The Will Of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995, repr.), 157.

either accepted or resisted by the human will.”⁴⁴ Such a response must be understood, however, in the context of a theological model that makes God’s governance conditional upon human choice. After all, the human “will’s decision to cooperate with” God’s efficacious grace is what is decisive in the person’s faith,⁴⁵ and this is so much the case that, “There are some possible persons who could not freely receive Christ under any circumstance.... Only if God coerced them would they believe in Christ....”⁴⁶ In fact, “many of the unsaved may actually receive greater divine assistance and drawing than do the saved,”⁴⁷ and yet not respond positively.

The problem with this response is at least twofold. To begin, it takes us back to a position where we are affirming that God’s governance is dependent upon and limited by human choice. We have displayed the deficiencies of this position in Chapters 4-5.

The other problem with this response on the part of the Molinist leads to the second bit of evidence in behalf of effective calling and against prevenient grace. Paul’s language for how God saves is stronger than what Molinists posit here. There is spiritual death and moral inability present up until the point when God regenerates, with the result that the person is alive, believes, and the person begins to live in a new and characteristically righteous (but not perfect yet) manner. Consider again what Paul writes here:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air...and were by nature children of wrath.... But God...made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.... For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it

⁴⁴ Craig, “Rapprochement?” 141.

⁴⁵ Craig, “Rapprochement?” 157.

⁴⁶ William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility Of Divine Foreknowledge And Human Freedom* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf And Stock Publishers, 1999, repr.), 147. Postiff, “The Theological Viability,” 30, also agrees with this assessment.

Craig, “Rapprochement?” 160, affirms that Molina’s successor, Suarez, allowed room for God mysteriously to “achieve such a person’s salvation by overpowering his will,” however, this is not the typical Molinist position since it appears to move beyond indeterministic freedom or at the very least is inconsistent with that view of freedom.

⁴⁷ Craig, *The Only Wise*, 136.

is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The point at which the change comes for the saved person is found in the clause, “But God...made us alive together with Christ.” We see here that God makes the first move and this first move is not something that only makes belief possible (but yet it could still falter). Rather, it accomplishes the intended purpose. The compound verb translated, “made...alive together with” (*syzōpoieō*),⁴⁸ shows that the death and inability of the preceding verses has been reversed by God and it has been done in union with Christ and his saving work. This last point is crucial, for it reminds the reader that the very manner in which God chose the elect in eternity past is that he would carry out his saving work in them through Christ and with them united to Christ (cf. Eph. 1:4-5) and so having ordained their union with Christ and his life, death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. Eph. 1:20-23; 2:5-6, 13, 15, 18, 19),⁴⁹ God regenerates, reconciles, and transforms such persons. To put this another way, the person to whom redemption is applied is made alive because Christ accomplished salvation and was made alive again through the resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11ff.). The action, then, of making alive or raising from the dead is based upon the perfect work of Christ and cannot fail! Paul presents this effective, efficacious, fool-proof, life-giving work of God as taking place without any intervening work between being dead and it.

In addition to Paul’s language here, as well as other evidence we looked at in Chapter Five for the decisive and effective gracious work of God in the elect, in Titus 3:5-7 Paul clearly teaches that God’s gracious work in those whom he saves is effective (it accomplishes what he

⁴⁸ The only other time this verb is used in the New Testament is in the parallel Colossians 2:13.

⁴⁹ The verb *syzōpoieō* is the first of three compound verbs in verses 5-6 which are tied to Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and session (which were mentioned in 1:20-23) and the effects of which are seen in 2:8-10, 13, 15, 17-19).

sets out to accomplish) and so it does not include an antecedent gracious work in all persons such that the gospel can be rejected or accepted. There he writes: "...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

The compound clause, "by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit," reveals the means whereby God applies salvation to a person.⁵⁰ In the same way that, in rural areas where pivot irrigation systems are found, the pipes and hoses are not the cause of the water being applied to the field (that would be the pump), but only the means through which the application take place, so when a person believes and experiences washing, this addresses the means through which the salvation is applied and takes effect. The cause of the salvation is Christ alone. The term "washing" (*loutron*) describes the cleansing from sin that takes place when a person trusts Christ—a cleansing that is signified in baptism.⁵¹

Most likely Paul intends the word "regeneration" (*paliggenesia*) to be a subjective genitive, meaning that the regeneration brings about or it results in the washing. This compound term (which literally means "re-birth" or "birth again") is used only here and in Mt. 19:28, where it refers to the future new age, the new heaven and new earth. Here in Titus 3:5 its most likely

⁵⁰ The preposition is *dia* (better "through" with the genitive). This is the same preposition used in Ephesians 2:8 when Paul asserts, "For by grace are you saved **through** faith."

⁵¹ The term *loutron* (an ablative of means here) is used to refer to "bath," "washing," "washing of baptism" (BAGD, 480). It is used in the LXX only in Song of Solomon 4:2; 6:6—where it refers to the bathing of sheep—and in Sirach 31:25 where it speaks of the ceremonial washing of an individual after touching a dead body. In the New Testament it is used only here and in Ephesians 5:26. There we read that Christ gave Himself for the Church "in order that He might sanctify [her] having cleansed [her] with the washing of water in/by the spoken word."

meaning is a “renewal,” a “basic reorientation of moral life.”⁵² Paul’s point is that when a person is renewed or regenerated, they trust Christ as Savior, are forgiven and cleansed, and so they are saved because the saving work of Christ is applied (see 2:14; 3:7 [cf. also Eph. 2:8-9]).

In the remainder of the compound clause, “and renewal of the Holy Spirit,” Paul gives more explanation for how the regeneration takes place. It is a renewal (*anakainōsis* [ablative of means])⁵³ that the Holy Spirit brings about (also a subjective genitive). In other words, the Holy Spirit renews, that is he so changes the person’s intellect, affections, and will, it can be thought of as a rebirth, a making new of the person, since they view the need for salvation, Christ, their life, and what God desires differently than they previously have. This leads the person to trust in Christ, to have his redemptive work applied, and so to be saved.

We also see in verse 7 that this Holy-Spirit-generated renewal and rebirth brings about the person “being justified by his grace.” Since elsewhere we learn that God’s imputation of Christ’s righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; 1 Peter 3:18) and his declaration that the person is forgiven and righteous (what is meant by justified) is “by faith” (Rom. 5:1a), this is another affirmation that the regeneration or renewal of the Spirit not only precedes faith, but also effectively brings about faith and the application of redemption.⁵⁴ Paul Helm agrees and helpfully explains:

*It is clear from Scripture that though it may be prudent...to use the word “permit” ...when referring to God’s providential relation to sin and evil, God’s providential relation to redemption is altogether more positive. He does not merely **permit** the redemption of men and women, nor does he merely provide **for** it; he **provides** it.”⁵⁵*

⁵² J. Guhrt, DNTT, 1:184-85.

⁵³ This noun is used only here and in Romans 12:2, where it speaks of a renewing of the mind as one progresses in sanctification.

⁵⁴ For three other passages that teach the necessity of rebirth (or regeneration) and that it precedes faith, see John 3:1-8; 1 Peter 1:3; and 1 John 5:1f.

⁵⁵ Helm, *The Providence Of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 102.

An additional bit of evidence for effective calling and that refutes the position of prevenient grace has to do with what Paul says about saving faith. In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul writes: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Even though the pronoun “this” is neuter and “grace” and “faith” are both feminine, the best explanation is that the “this” refers to the entire process of salvation—which would include the application of redemption through the person’s faith. This “use of the neuter to take in the whole of a complex idea” is not only grammatically acceptable, but appears to be “common in Greek” (see Eph. 6:1 for another example).⁵⁶ Though William Lane Craig sees the neuter as referring to the whole process, he excludes “faith” as part of the gift, based upon what he sees to be implications from Pauline theology elsewhere:

...the word “this” is in the neuter gender in Greek. “Faith” is feminine. So Paul is not referring to faith as the gift of God; rather, commentators will say it is the whole process of salvation by grace through faith, which is the gift of God. And nowhere does Scripture speak of faith as a work, which we perform, which merits salvation. Over and over again Paul opposes faith to works. Faith and works are opposite to each other and I think that one of the mistakes Calvinists make is thinking that if we exercise faith in God we have somehow performed a work. That is a very non-Pauline point of view.... It is the passive acceptance of what someone else has done on your behalf.”⁵⁷

Craig is right in saying that Paul sees salvation by grace through faith as opposed to the pursuit of such salvation or righteousness through one’s own works (e.g. Rom. 4:1-8; Gal. 2:16; 3:7-14; Phil. 3:9). However, he is inaccurate in concluding that faith and works are opposites in all ways, for genuine faith always brings about obedience, that includes good works (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14) and this is so much the case that God can judge a person—including the saved—based upon his works (Rom. 2:6-10). He is also inaccurate in affirming that saving faith merely “is the passive acceptance of what someone else has done on your behalf.” It is this

⁵⁶ S. M. Baugh in “Ephesians,” in the ESVSB, page 2265.

⁵⁷ Craig, “Calvinism Vs. Molinism,” 72.

misunderstanding, more than anything else, that leads Craig to the faulty conclusion that faith would not have to be a gift from God to one who is spiritually dead. There are several reasons I say this:

- In the context of Ephesians 2:8-9, as we have already seen, the person is spiritually dead up until the point that God saves them (applied through the exercise of faith). We have seen this means that the person is unable to do that which pleases God, to carry out his ultimate purposes, which includes faith in God. Because of this, the person must have a decisive work of God done in him that he might believe.
- Additionally, we also note in context that God's saving act here in Ephesians is seen as a spiritual resurrection ("...you were dead...but, God...made us alive..."). Such giving of life in Scripture means at least in part God giving the ability to carry out his purposes and to do the things which God originally intended for us to do, including dependence upon him (cf. Gen. 2:7ff.).
- We also see elsewhere that faith for Paul is not a passive acceptance, but carries with it antecedent thoughts and affections that are anything but passive. In this saving faith the person actively desires what God offers in Christ since he sees this salvation as important and necessary, rather than folly (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14). In fact, the unregenerate person is blind to the light that is in the gospel, a light that is the glory of God which is found in Christ (2 Cor. 4:4-6). The regenerate person sees this glory of God in Christ, which includes a very positive and active movement—all because God has actively worked in his heart to see this glory (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6). Also, in this saving faith is included a love for God that desires his glory (Rom. 2:6-7; 4:20) and desires to please him (Rom. 8:7-9; 1 Thes. 4:1). Some might say, "But Tom, if these antecedent movements are so active, how could they be part of a faith that is a gift from God?" The answer lies in the view of God's sovereignty and human choices we have set forth in this book. God can and does work in such a manner that he can decisively bring about these convictions and desires in a person and yet the convictions and desires are coming from the person and also are seen as his. So, though faith is a gift, it also becomes the faith of the person.
- Additionally, we see elsewhere that faith and repentance are gifts from God. Acts 11:18: "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." Philippians 1:29: "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake...." 2 Timothy 2:25: "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth...." 1 Peter 1:20-21: "[Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ **who through him are believers in God**, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (emphasis added)
- Another reason we see faith is not passive and, by implication is not arising in the person in a contra-causal manner, is that elsewhere (Phil. 2:13) Paul says that it is God who works in us both to have the desire and the ability to carry out what is his good pleasure or his will—and in context, this not only involves desiring to glorify God before others (2:15), but also "holding fast to the word of truth" (2:16), which would include faith.

What we are seeing, then, is that the Calvinist is not affirming that God coerces people (as if they are kicking and screaming) to come to him.⁵⁸ Rather, “Reformed theology...teaches that God so works in the hearts of the elect as to make them willing and pleased to come to Christ. They come to Christ because they want to.”⁵⁹

- Finally, we know this faith is not passive because elsewhere in Scripture it includes having a reverence for God and standing in awe of him (Jer. 32:40), repentance, which includes a grief and hatred of our sin and desire to turn to God with new obedience (Mt. 3:8; Acts 2:38; 20:21), a humility that realizes our inability to have true and genuine life apart from Christ (Mt. 5:3; John 15:5), and a love for God (1 John 5:1-5).

What we are seeing about faith is that it includes a strong preference for God and for his salvation in Christ, which means that God has moved the sinner from not preferring him to preferring him. As such, the person freely trusts in Jesus Christ as Savior, because it is the very thing he most desires. Paul believes that apart from the regenerating work of God’s Spirit, this would never take place, since the unregenerate is in a state of hostility toward God (cf. Rom. 5:10; 8:7; 2 Cor. 5:20).

Before moving on, we will look briefly at a view of middle knowledge that comes quite close to Calvinism, a model proposed by the successor to Molina, another Jesuit priest, named Francisco Suarez (1545-1617).⁶⁰ According to Suarez, God first decides to predestine certain individuals to salvation and then, based upon his middle knowledge, knows what graces will effect a free and saving response from each of those individuals, yet without coercion, and

⁵⁸ Contra Keathley’s take on Calvinist theology (*Salvation*, 107).

⁵⁹ Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* 158.

Keathley, *Salvation*, 102-3, offers an illustration of his own view, namely that God’s saving work is like an unconscious man picked by an ambulance and on the way to the hospital he wakes up. There is nothing he can do to save himself and if he chooses to stay in the ambulance and received treatment at the hospital, he will be saved. However, he can also ask the driver to stop the ambulance and let him out. So, Keathley seeks to argue for a monergistic salvation that is also resistible. In other words, the sinner has actual alternativity. The problem with this view is not only this is not what Scripture teaches (for as we have seen, God’s regenerating work accomplishes its intended end), but it certainly does not capture what the Calvinist and what the Bible argues—namely that the will of the person is changed so that their preference is to be saved.

⁶⁰ This and the following material on the view of Suarez comes from Postiff, “The Theological,” 13, and Craig, “Rapprochement?” 159-60.

without God actually causing the change in the person's heart. He called such graces congruent graces. In regard to those who are not chosen by God, the grace given to them is sufficient, but they freely reject it because it is not congruent for them.

There are at least two deficiencies in this model proposed by Suarez—deficiencies which also should discourage anyone else from holding to this model. To begin, it appears to replace what we learned about the immeasurable combination of God's causative and permissive movements in his governance (Chapter Six) with merely permissive governance on the part of God, which is a problem, especially in reference to the work of salvation. Related to this is the second deficiency, and that is it lacks any sense of God transforming the heart of the sinner so they can see Christ as desirable and needed, so they desire and prefer him, and thus receive and rest upon him alone for salvation. As such, it discounts not only what the Bible says about how humans make choices (see Chapter Seven), but it also discounts the plight of the sinner apart from Christ and the need for faith-preceding regeneration in the spiritually dead sinner.

One of the reasons we spent so much time looking at how God is absolutely sovereign, ordains all, and how humans make genuine free choices in Chapters 4-7 is found in the topic we are examining now. If we do not see that God must decisively and causatively work in the heart of the sinner to save him, we have distorted the biblical view of salvation and how it is applied.

The final bit of evidence for effective calling and against prevenient grace has to do with the characteristic change that comes as evidence of salvation. In Ephesians 2:10 Paul provides further explanation (the *gar*, "for" introduces this) on the assertion that we are saved by grace, through faith, not by works, and so we cannot boast (2:8-9). The truth of this is especially seen in the reality that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." The term translated "workmanship" (*poiēma*)

is used in the New Testament only here and in Romans 1:20, where it speaks of the things God created in the world. The focus in the term appears to be that as a new creation, we are the result of God's work, his redemption, and not our own work.⁶¹ God has worked in a manner that from our intellect, affections, and will outward, we are new, with overall new preferences, and a new ability, to be a new person (cf. Eph. 2:15-22; 4:22-24), and this, with the results that we can and should live in a new manner (Eph. 4:1-32), which is like the God-man, Christ (Eph. 5:1-2). Though this does not mean we will live perfectly in this age, the resultant new life demonstrates the power and presence of the Holy Spirit (who applies the person, power, and presence of Christ), the very one who is the sign we belong to God and the "earnest payment" or "guarantee" that God will complete his salvation in us (Eph. 1:13-14).⁶²

Ephesians 2:10 supports the idea, then, that God brings about a decisive and determinative work upon the saint so that she can live a new life, one that includes "good works," which in Pauline and New Testament theology, speak of the effects of God's genuine salvation and transformation (Acts 9:36; Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14; James 2:14-26; Heb. 10:24). This work God does is part of the complex of his redemption-applying-works that begins with his raising the person to new life (Eph. 2:4-5).

The effective nature of this work is also highlighted in Ephesians 2:10, when Paul writes of the good works, "which God prepared beforehand (*proetomazō*) that we should walk in them."

⁶¹ According to F. Thiele, DNTT, 3, 1152-55, the term is used only sparingly in the LXX. In Classical Greek it often "denotes the finished work, the product...."

⁶² Abraham Kuyper, *The Work Of The Holy Spirit*, trans. by Henri DeVries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 529-30 (cited in Steven L. Porter, "The Gradual Nature Of Sanctification: *Sarx* As Habituated, Relational Resistance To The Spirit," *Themelios*, 39, 3 [2014]: 470-483): "But we should not imagine that every believer is instantly filled and permeated. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit finds him filled with all manner of evil and treachery.... His method of procedure is not with divine power to *force* a man as though he were a...block, but by the power of love and compassion so to influence and energize the impulses of the feeble will that it feels the effect, is inclined, and finally consents to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.... This operation is different in each person."

The verb “prepare” (*hetoimazō*) with the prefix on it (*pro*) is a way of emphasizing that God ordained good works for the Christian. At the very least this is displaying part of the purpose behind God’s saving work, including his regeneration of the person. If we were correct in our assessment of how God governs in Chapters 4-6 and how human choices are determined in Chapter Seven, we should have no problem here grasping what Paul is saying—namely that God has decisively worked in the person that she can and will live out good works. It is a similar concept to what Paul writes in Philippians 2:13 (NLT), that “God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”

Effective Calling Is Not Coercion

By this point in our study we should be able to see that God’s grace in his effective calling of the elect is not a matter of bringing a person “kicking and screaming” to him,⁶³ nor it is a forcing of the person to trust Christ or love God against their will. Instead, by receiving this grace, “a person is freed from his or her slavery to sin and granted spiritual freedom: the freedom to willingly and gladly serve the living and true God” and so it is “liberating” (cf. John 8:31-36).⁶⁴ Paul Helm adds:

*...all that is implied in divine rescuing and bringing to life is the establishing of a relationship, the key to which is not incompatibilistic human freedom but the unilateral establishing of a loving relationship that will not let go until it has secured reciprocal love by recreating it. According to Augustinianism, God in grace establishes a genuinely personal relationship with people who are incapable of establishing it for themselves.*⁶⁵

⁶³ Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* 158: These are the very words used by a seminary president who disavowed predestination. He does not believe God brings people to him “kicking and screaming.”

⁶⁴ Paul Helm, “The Augustinian-Calvinist View,” in James K. Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, Ed’s., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 170. John 8:31-36 reads: “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” ...³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ...³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

⁶⁵ Helm, “The Augustinian,” 172.

Helm goes on to explain that what God does in regenerating the sinner is similar to saving someone who is unconscious (and thus unable to respond), bringing them back to consciousness, and so enabling them to respond. John Piper agrees:

[Effective Calling] never implies that God forces us to repent or believe or follow God against our will.... [Effective Calling] 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.⁶⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the necessity and reality of faith-preceding regeneration in the spiritually dead and so it has refuted the Molinist view of the application of redemption and supported the Calvinist position.

Yet, more than this, it also has left us in awe of our great God! Though man is “dead in the trespasses and sins,” yet for all who have trusted Christ, we know that “God...made us alive together with Christ”! And yet, no person is turned away from Christ. It remains true that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13) and that for all those who reject God’s revelation of himself, “they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20) and responsible for their sin. It is also true that for all eternity those who know Christ as Savior will join in the chorus that recognizes apart from Christ we can do nothing of eternal significance (John 15:5) and that our “salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!” (Rev. 7:10)

⁶⁶ John Piper, *Five Points: Toward A Deeper Experience Of God’s Grace* (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 31.

Such awareness also sets the stage for how we progress in the Christian life, that is, in sanctification. It is in a spirit of dependent responsibility, which we will look at in the next chapter.