

REGENERATION

The Order of Salvation in the Reformed View (Ordo Salutis)

Election/Predestination	This is the foundation of salvation, referring to God's eternal choice of individuals for salvation in Christ, based entirely on His grace and purpose, not human merit.	Ephesians 1:4-5 Rom 8:2-30
Gospel Call	The outward proclamation of the gospel to all, calling sinners to repentance and faith in Christ.	Romans 10:14-17 1 Cor 1:23
Inward Call	The work of the Holy Spirit in effectively calling the elect, drawing them to Christ in a way that infallibly leads to salvation.	1 Cor 1:24 Rom, 8:30
Regeneration	The Spirit's sovereign work of renewing the heart, enabling the sinner to respond in faith and repentance. Regeneration brings the individual into spiritual life and union with Christ.	John 3:3-8 Titus 3:5 John 6:63, 65
Conversion (Faith and Repentance)	The sinner, now regenerated, responds to the gospel by trusting in Christ (faith) and turning away from sin (repentance). These are distinct but inseparable aspects of conversion and are both gifts of grace	Mark 1:15 Acts 20:21 Eph 2:8-9
Justification	The legal declaration of righteousness, based on Christ's imputed righteousness, wherein the believer is pardoned and accepted as righteous in God's sight.	Romans 5:1; Galatians 2:16
Adoption	God receives us into His family as beloved sons and daughters. Adoption grants us full rights and privileges of God's household. salvation is not only about pardon but also about belonging.	John 1:12; Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:4-7
Sanctification	The ongoing work of the Spirit in making the believer holy, progressively conforming them to the image of Christ.	(Romans 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:2
Glorification	The final stage of salvation, where the believer is fully conformed to the image of Christ and dwells, eternally in the presence of God.	Rom. 8:30 1 Cor. 15:42-

“With all these considerations in view, the order in the application of redemption is found to be, calling, **regeneration**, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, glorification. When this order is carefully weighed we find that there is a logic which evinces and brings into clear focus the governing principle of salvation in all of its aspects, the grace of God in its sovereignty and efficacy. Salvation is of the Lord in its application as well as in its conception and accomplishment.”¹

*Image from <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheologyDiscussionGroup/posts/23875866875352151/>

- The question we want to meditate on is *how does a spiritually dead person respond to a call of salvation with faith and repentance?*
- In other words, if man is dead, how can he be converted?
- “An *effectual* call, however, must carry along with it the appropriate response on the part of the person called. It is God who calls but it is not God who answers the call; it is the person to whom the call is addressed. And this response must enlist the exercise of the heart and mind and will of the person

¹ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 87.

concerned. It is at this point that we are compelled to ask the question: how can a person who is dead in trespasses and sins, whose mind is enmity against God, and who cannot do that which is well-pleasing to God answer a call to the fellowship of Christ.”²

- **There is a step between the inward call of salvation and the response of the person...it is regeneration.**
- Remember, we have distinguished between a general call of the gospel and an effectual call of the gospel. Both are necessary for salvation, but only the effectual call saves the sinner.
- This means, as Murry states, “It is the glory of the gospel of God’s grace that it provides for this incongruity. God’s call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel.”³
- This *operative grace*, as Murray calls it, is the grace that operates in the person to bring him from death to life...it is the operation of regeneration in the individual person.
 - “In regeneration, man is entirely passive; God is the sole active agent in bringing about the creative miracle of the new birth.”⁴
- “As the gospel comes to us, God speaks through it to summon us to himself (effective calling) and to give us new spiritual life (regeneration) so that we are enabled to respond in faith. Effective calling is thus God the Father *speaking powerfully to us*, and regeneration is God the Father and God the holy Spirit *working powerfully in us*, to make us alive.”⁵
- *What is regeneration?*⁶
 - “Regeneration is an immediate re-creation of the sinful nature by God the Holy Spirit and an implanting into the body of Christ.”
- This is a complete and total act of God the Holy Spirit without the actions of the dead sinner. It is an instantaneous event but has everlasting effects and benefits.
- **Why is regeneration so important in our salvation?** It resolves the biblical conflict between a dead sinner who must respond to a spiritual invitation to salvation.
 - In other words, how can a dead man respond to an offer of spiritual life?

² Murray, *Redemption*, 95.

³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴ MacArthur, 577.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 700.

⁶ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 4: Soteriology*, 29

- “Before salvation, before the intervention of the Holy Spirit, you and I were spiritually and morally dead, unable to understand, let alone respond to, anything spiritual or spiritual truth. We were both unable and unwilling to seek or desire a right relationship with God.”⁷
- **1 Corinthians 2:14** “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”
- As a natural man, as an unspiritual man, one cannot accept nor understand that the things of the Spirit of God because they are only examined or appraised by the Spirit of God.
- With this understanding, in order to know those things of the Spirit, one must possess the Spirit.
- To possess the Spirit means that one has been regenerated, or in other words, born again.

Bible Verses About Regeneration

- Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus is the most insightful regarding this mysterious doctrine.
- Jesus told him in **John 3:3** “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
 - Jesus set the necessity of two things here. One, He says *truly truly*...this underlines the weight of the statement that He is about to make.
 - Jesus uses this language in most cases when He is going to introduce foundational doctrines.
 - “So, when Jesus leads off with the words *verily, verily* (or truly, truly)...He is not merely saying, ‘Believe me, this is true.’ He is actually saying, ‘I know this is true *firsthand*.’ Since many of these comments are on heavenly, spiritual, or godly issues, Jesus’ use of *verily, verily* is part of His consistent claim of divinity. Jesus is not merely aware of these truths: He is the One who originated them!”⁸
 - The first necessity is that Jesus is going to speak from His own authority, the next necessary truth is that *we cannot see the kingdom of God without being born again*.
 - **This is the absolute necessity of regeneration**. Without being regenerated, it is absolutely impossible for someone to see the kingdom of God.
- Admittedly the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus is a difficult conversation to interpret. There have been many ideas and thoughts on the specific interpretation.

⁷ [https://www.gracetoliveradio.org/blog/2019/8/31/the-holy-spirit-revisited-regeneration-and-illumination#:~:text=Regeneration%20is%20the%20work%20of,Spirit\)%20do%20the%20heavy%20lifting.](https://www.gracetoliveradio.org/blog/2019/8/31/the-holy-spirit-revisited-regeneration-and-illumination#:~:text=Regeneration%20is%20the%20work%20of,Spirit)%20do%20the%20heavy%20lifting.)

⁸ <https://www.gotquestions.org/verily-verily.html>

- One thing is sure that all Biblicists can agree on, "...this is a supernatural work; it is done from above by the immediate power of God, and it's something only God can do. You cannot cause yourself to be reborn."⁹
 - How does it happen? How is one born again...Jesus answers that in **John 3:6-7** "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"
 - In other words, the *pneuma* is like the *pneuma*. The wind, of course, blows wherever it wants, sometimes very powerfully, but we cannot see it. We can see only the consequences of it, the manifestation of its power, but we don't fully know where it's coming from or where it's going. Everyone who is born of the Spirit is somewhat like that, because spiritual rebirth is the work of God¹⁰
- There are no un-regenerate Christians. Furthermore, there are no people who have been regenerated and then de-regenerated. Once God has done this work in the person, it is done for all time.
- **Titus 3:5** "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of **regeneration** and renewing by the Holy Spirit..."
 - This is the only use of this very specific word (*παλιγγενεσία*) by the Apostle Paul.
 - It means *new birth, reproduction, renewal, recreation, regeneration*.
- **1 Peter 1:3** "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be **born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."
 - Being born again has God as the active agent, the subject of the verb *born again*.
 - We are the ones who *were caused* to be born again. We are a passive recipient of God's great mercy in our regeneration.
- **1 Peter 1:23** "...for you have been **born again** not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God."
 - Here again, we have the subject *you* but it is being acted upon so it is passive.
 - You have been born again...through the living and enduring word of God.
- **James 1:18** "In the exercise of His will **He brought us forth** by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures."

⁹ R. C. Sproul, *John*, (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

- The phrase *he brought us forth* is ἀποκυέω and means to give birth to or to produce.
- This is an active verb with God's will being exercised as the subject and "us" being the object.
- Once again, we did not **do** anything for this to take place.
- **Ephesians 2:5** "...even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)..."
 - Again, we were dead in transgressions and then we were made alive together with Christ.
 - We did not make ourselves alive and then come to Christ.
- **Galatians 6:15** "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but **a new creation.**"
- **2 Corinthians 5:17** "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is **a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."
- The doctrine of regeneration is all over the NT because of the necessity of it.
- Without being regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, our hearts would remain dark, and we would never know God.

God the Father is the author or source of our regeneration and aims at the heart

- If you remember back to our study on the "heart" of man, it was made clear that man needs a new heart.
- Man's heart is the central command for that he thinks, he says, he feels, he wills, and so on.
- Before salvation, before regeneration, man's heart is only and always evil.
- It's not that man's heart doesn't want to go to God...as if he can be convinced. It is a fact that man's heart **can't** go to God, it is absolutely impossible for man to go to God with a dead heart.
- Regeneration aims at the heart of man. Man does not need to have his works renewed nor does he need to think better of himself.
- Man needs a new heart. "Jesus came, not to make bad people good, but dead people alive."
- **Psalms 51:10** "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me."
- **Ezekiel 11:19** "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh..."
- **John 1:13** "...who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

God the Son is the mediator or the One who our regeneration is through

- **2 Corinthians 5:17** “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
- **Romans 6:11** “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”
- **1 Corinthians 1:4** “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus...”
- The way that we have a regenerated heart is because we are now in Christ.
- It is through Him...that is His death and resurrection that we are brought into new life.

God the Holy Spirit is the agent or the One who applies it to us

- **Titus 3:5** “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit...”
- **John 6:63** “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”
- **John 3:5-8** “Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. {6} That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. {7} Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ {8} The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’”
- **2 Corinthians 3:6** “...who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”
- We don’t know how it works but we know that it is the work of the Spirit who is applying this to our inner beings.

THE INSTRUMENT OF REGENERATION

- How does God effectively call people to salvation and then regenerate them to new life?
- As we looked at already, it is through the preaching, teaching, and reading of God’s Word that the Spirit of God works in the hearts and minds of unregenerate people.
- **Romans 10:17** “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the *word of Christ.*”
- **1 Peter 1:23** “...for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring *word of God.*”

- **James 1:18** “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the *word of truth*, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.”

The Word and the Spirit working

- **Acts 10:44** “While Peter was still **speaking** these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were **listening** to the message.”
- **Acts 16:14** “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was **listening**; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things **spoken by Paul**.”
- **2 Thessalonians 2:14** “It was for this He called you **through our gospel**, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- As the outward call of the gospel goes to all men, it is God who is giving light to a dark and hostile mind.
- **2 Corinthians 4:6** “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

THE CHARACTER OF REGENERATION¹¹

- **Heavenly Birth:** Our new births have a specific heavenly origin.
- Ferguson says, “In other words, if we are Christians it can only be because God has wonderfully intervened to give us new life. Every Christian ought to think long and hard about this, because we have an inevitable and at times very worldly tendency to regard some ‘conversions’ as being more wonderful and amazing than others. ‘Miraculous’, we say when a famous celebrity is ‘born again’, and of course we are right. But the miracle involved in the new birth of John or Jane Smith, whose name never appears in either Christian or secular press, is not less miraculous, no less wonderful and no less a cause of joy in heaven.” (51)
- It is from this heavenly birth that we would do well to study and pray for further insight. We should be searching the Scriptures “to see the rich measure of grace that God pours into every new child of God!”
- **God-given life:** It is only by God’s sovereign grace that anyone is ever born again. “
- “It may be objected that to place so much initiative in the hands of God is to remove all responsibility from the shoulders of man. But this is to misunderstand. To say that regeneration takes place by divine

¹¹ List taken from *The Christian Life* by Sinclair Ferguson, 50-55.

initiative does not deny that men must repent and believe in Christ. Jesus taught that regeneration is a sovereign, divine act. But when one enquirer raised mental objections to such evangelical doctrine by asking: 'Lord, will those who are saved be few?', Jesus' reply was: 'Strive to enter through the narrow door' (Luke 13:24). In a word: Do not confuse things that differ. Your duty is to make sure you have followed in the way of salvation yourself.”

- It is a mistake, as Ferguson says, to *confuse things that differ*. Men can get so caught up on either side of the same coin.
 - On one side, since it is a sovereign and divine act, men can think they have nothing that is required of them.
 - On the other side, since the Bible is clear that men must repent and be saved, the focus can be simply on that.
 - Our focus should be to know and follow God. Yes, God gives life but it is equally true that man must respond to life that God is giving.
- **Psalm 119:10** “With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments.”
- “When the soul is thus conscious of ‘following the Lord fully,’ there is a peculiar dread of wandering...when the heart is *fully* in pursuit of its object...there is carefulness, less wandering thoughts should be habitual...daily progress in the heavenly walk is not maintained by *yesterday’s* grace. Humble and dependent prayers must fetch in a fresh supply continually – “*O let me now wander from thy commandments.*”¹²
- I think the balance here is well said. We are in full pursuit of God’s commandments because God has already worked in our hearts to bring us to life.
- **Transforming Power:** The transforming power of our regeneration is complete and total. Not that we are now what we are going to be, but we are no longer totally depraved as the Spirit of God has regenerated our total being.
- *The mind is illuminated.*
 - We now can see the kingdom of God. We see the world with new eyes. We know that there is a spiritual battle and the lost world is under the control of the wicked one.
 - We now read Scriptures and our hearts are being made full but at the same time longing for more.

¹² Charles Bridges, *Psalm 119: An Exposition*, 21.

- *The heart is purified.*
 - We now have new tendencies and dispositions towards right living. Our lives are no longer about what we can get out of them but how we can glorify God.
 - Our motivations for living have changed and our focus is now to live because we have been loved.
- *The desires are renewed.*
 - Our desire is now to please God; no longer living in the desires of the flesh but according to the Spirit. Our desires are no longer self-pleasing but God-pleasing.
- *We begin to live a new life.*
 - The new life is now characterized by love...love for God, love for those in the world, and especially a love for those in the church.
 - There is a new freedom...the freedom from the bondage of sin and a new desire to live according to the One who has saved you.

THE HEART NOW ACTS OUT OF A NEW NATURE

- What is the application of regeneration? In other words, how can we know that we have been regenerated by the Spirit?
- “The heart is the seat of the potency that determines our nature, the center of our being that indicates the direction and predisposition of all that occurs in our spiritual life.”¹³
- When Scripture tells us that we are new creatures in Christ and that for us all things are new (2 Cor. 5:17), that we were dead in sin but now we have been raised up to eternal life by God in Christ (Eph. 2:5,6), and that the dominion of sin has been broken in our lives (Rom. 6:1-14), the Word of God is clearly informing us that we are no longer wicked but are righteous, not only in status, but also in disposition of heart by which we hate sin and hunger and thirst for righteousness.¹⁴
- **2 Corinthians 3:14-15** “But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. {15} But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart...”

¹³ Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 32.

¹⁴ <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2009/the-true-nature-of-the-christians-heart/?srsltid=AfmBOopg9pkKoXbhAlNim0JBk1j2ZLISMmi3Ir-C7Cck9hZQJfz5z0ai>

- In regeneration, the “veil” is lifted from our hearts and we are made alive. The Spirit now illuminates us so that we can see the glory of Christ.
- It is only now that the process of sanctification can take place.
- “The heart is therefore also the place where the Holy Spirit, who renews the nature and governs the new life, makes His abode.”¹⁵
- **Romans 5:5** “...and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”
- **Galatians 4:6** “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”
- Your new heart has a new leader...it is no longer the sinful and depraved flesh, but the Holy Spirit who now lives and directs our steps.
- **When does this happen?**
 - **2 Corinthians 3:16** “...but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”
- That is where we are going to be next time...*conversion*.
- We are going to discuss what the Bible says about our repentance and faith.

¹⁵ Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 33.