

# **The Ordo Salutis**

## Election

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He has out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect and the foundation of salvation. [The Canons of Dort, Article 7]

1. Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (1Pe 1:18-20)
2. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: (Eph 1:3-4)
3. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Rom 8:29)

## The Fall

The fall of Adam into sin might not seem like a proper part of the ordo salutis, but the view that one takes of the fall controls much of the rest of the ordo salutis. It is important to have the correct understanding of the fall but, unfortunately, most people either outright reject it or attempt to water down its significance.

There was a man named Pelagius who was a British monk and a theologian. He lived from 354 AD to 418 AD. I won't say he was a Christian monk or a good theologian, but he was a very well-educated man and was very influential in his day because he was able to frame his theology in ways that seemed plausible. He was a man deeply concerned about the moral ills of society and he blamed the doctrines of grace for this. Pelagius denied the imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin and the inheritance of the fallen nature by virtue of our union with him. He taught that people were born with an upright nature, free from original sin and had the same moral freedom from birth that Adam had. He believed that all men were free to sin or not to sin. Pelagius was vigorously opposed by Augustine and his doctrine was condemned by the Council of Carthage in the year 418.

The main problem with Pelagianism is that it is utterly contrary to Scripture. And not just that but there is a problem explaining why everyone sins and everyone dies, including infants. Romans 5:12-21 teaches that death came into the world and spread to all men because of the one sin of Adam. The idea of imputation is there strongly expressed – the emphasis on the one sin is impossible to deny:

(12) as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned

(18) Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation;

(19) For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, (Romans 5:12,18,19)

As can be easily gleaned from the principle of the one and many in Romans 5:12-21, the denial of the imputation of Adam's guilt would require the same denial of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. And this is unfortunately for there is no other means of redemption from sin. So, the only possible means of salvation in Pelagianism is by one's own merit. Unfortunately, this belief is more quite common among the people on the streets. If you press them on original sin, they will admit they don't really believe it.

Following the official condemnation of Pelagianism, attempts were made to find a middle ground between the Pelagianism and the doctrines of grace taught by Scripture. This is cleverly called "semi-pelagianism" and eventually became the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic church. It teaches that the beginning of faith involves a free act of the will, though not denying that God's grace altogether. For instance, the Council of Trent declares that

If any one shall say, that, since Adam's sin, the free will of man is lost and extinguished; or, that it is a thing with a name only, yea, a title without a reality, a figment, in fine, brought into the Church by Satan; let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Canon V)

And so, while not outright denying the doctrine of original sin as Pelagians do, the Roman Catholic church took a pinch of grace and added it to Pelagianism. In the final analysis, it is not that far from Pelagius taught, though dressed up a bit.

Finally, among Protestants, another mediating position between semi-pelagianism and the doctrines of grace was put forth by Arminius who taught the necessity of prevenient grace, which means that it is God who initiates the work and that the sinner must respond by free will. Prevenient grace is not regeneration and Arminianism teaches that the sinner must cooperate with prevenient grace in order to come to God and to receive salvation. This doctrine agitated the church in the early 1600s and a group of Arminian theologians known as the Remonstrants brought a complaint to the Synod of Dort in 1618 in which they affirmed total depravity but then turned right around and denied it with the doctrine of prevenient grace which supposedly raises men to a neutral condition and enables them to believe the gospel and so to come to God for salvation prior to regeneration.

Many Arminians can speak in such a way that it almost seems as if they are affirming the doctrines of grace but, when pressed on the order of regeneration and faith, Arminians will always be found to believe that faith comes prior to regeneration. This theology makes God out to be trying to save as many as possible but failing more often than not and unable to do anything about it since it places man in the driver seat. Prevenient grace supposedly raises men to a neutral condition and then leaves the decision to them. But what makes one man to differ from another? It isn't grace. Arminians can't explain why some are saved and others are not and this turns faith into a work that man must do. Salvation is not of the LORD in this case but really of men. This is a flat out denial of Scripture, such as Rom 9:16,

So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.  
(Rom 9:16)

Arminian theology appeals to the flesh and can easily fool the unwary and the untaught. As Paul wrote, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal 5:9). Even a pinch of Pelagianism is sufficient to turn the doctrines of grace into a poisonous stew – and we say with the men of old, “oh man of God, there is death in the pot” (2 Kings 4:40).

The main reason that such an endless war has been waged against the doctrines of grace, with all the force of intellect and cleverness that men can muster, is that this doctrine is altogether offensive to the natural man.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor 2:14)

But, as Ephesians 2:1 makes clear, the natural man is dead in his trespasses and can no more seek after God than could Lazarus rise from the dead and come out of the tomb on his own. It makes no sense to talk Lazarus being brought to a condition in which he was not dead but not alive either in order to decide if he wanted to be resurrected. Prevenient grace is nowhere taught in Scripture and when analyzed is completely ridiculous. The natural man cannot have faith --

Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.  
(Romans 8:7-8)

But without faith *it is* impossible to please Him (Heb 11:6)

And so, Scripture tells us what we might find offensive – that God chooses some for salvation among the fallen mass of mankind – “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Rom 9:21).

And so we move on to consider the effectual call which is by God’s free and sovereign grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man; and who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby made willing to answer this call, and to freely embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

## Calling

The Bible teaches only two kinds of call from the gospel to man: the common and the effectual. There is no natural call uttered by the voice of natural or general revelation. Though the light of nature clearly reveals that there is a God that light provides no conception of how to approach Him or even that God is remotely approachable. It is only through the word of the gospel that we understand how God can be approached, that His absolute holiness precludes any approach apart from Christ. He Himself has stated as clearly as words can express it, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Me” (John 14:6).

## Common Call

Now although God does not at all intend the salvation of the non-elect, yet he deals with the greatest truth and seriousness when he calls them, nor can any charge of mockery or deceit be brought against him. All that are called by the gospel, says the Synod of Dort, are seriously called, for God seriously and truly shews in his word what is acceptable to him, and also seriously promises rest for their souls, and eternal life, to all that come to him by faith.

[Benedict Pictet, Christian Theology, Bk 7, Ch 2]

1. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price (Is 55:1)
2. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: (Mat 28:19)
3. For many are called, but few are chosen. (Mat 22:14)
4. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. (Rev 22:17)

But this common call is ineffective apart from regeneration because “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2Co 4:3-4).

Nevertheless, some of those called externally do respond positively to the gospel as we read in the parable of the sower that some when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but having no root in themselves, endure for a time. But when affliction or persecution arises for the word's sake, they fall away. (Matt 13:20-21). Sure, there is a response of belief, but it is a superficial form of belief which may have the appearance of saving faith, that is, until something comes along which reveals the true nature of the heart – the self-love is greater than love for Christ.

## Effectual Call

So, while there is an external call that goes out indiscriminately, that call is in itself ineffective, as it comes to those who are spiritually dead with profoundly deaf ears, unless it is accompanied by the quickening work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. In this sense of the word ‘call’ is always effective –

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Romans 8:30)

Here, in the golden chain of salvation, all those who are called are justified – not one falls through the cracks. This call comes to those who are elect in Christ. It is a particular call, as Jesus said in John 10, “he calleth his own sheep by name” (John 10:3)

The work of the Holy Spirit in the effectual call is to form Christ in the heart – this is regeneration – and it is the first aspect of our union with Christ, “Christ in us, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27).

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:6)

The effectual call is effectual because along with the external call comes the internal call which provides the change of heart needed to respond to the call. That is, the effectual call includes regeneration, as Jesus' call to Lazarus by name to come forth from the tomb included the giving of life to his dead body to enable him to respond to the call. That is sovereign, irresistible grace and a picture of regeneration.

## Regeneration

Regeneration is spoken of in different ways in the Bible. Ezekiel calls it, "a taking away the stony heart, and giving a heart of flesh" and as "giving a new heart, and putting within us a new spirit" (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26).

John calls it being "born again," (John 3:3,6) "born of God," (John 1:13; 1 John 3:9, 4:7, 5:1) and "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5,6,8). He calls it a "passing from death to life" (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14).

In many places it is spoken of as a quickening, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). Paul wrote that "You has He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). "you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him" (Col 2:13).

Paul speaks of it as a "being alive from the dead." (Rom. 6:13.) He speaks of "being a new creature—old things have passed away, and all things become new." (2 Cor. 5:17). He calls it the "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

All these various ways of speaking about regeneration make it clear that regeneration is the unilateral work of God. We have as much choice in the matter as does a baby when it is born into the world – exactly none. We contribute exactly nothing to regeneration and do precisely nothing to prepare ourselves for it any more than we did something to prepare ourselves for our natural birth. "It is the Spirit who quickens, the flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63).

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

The "passing from death to life" is by the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit and it is an instantaneous change. Just as there are no intermediate stages between life and death (a person is either alive or dead) there is no process which brings a person by stages from death to life. It is an instantaneous change that cannot be opposed or aided. It is effectual because it is the sovereign work of the Spirit directly in the person. It is the absolutely essential requirement of salvation – without it there is only the flesh which cannot have saving faith.

# Conversion

## Conviction

Conviction is essential to the effectual call but can also take place apart from the effectual call since the Spirit's work is to convict the world of sin.

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me (John 16:8-9)

Conviction does not always lead to conversion because conviction of unrenewed souls leads them to fight against God and duty, not because He is misconceived, but because He is in some sense, for once, rightly conceived. There is, of course, distortion of mental view concerning him as long as sin reigns, but conviction causes men to fear and hate, because the sinful soul now begins to see Him with less error, as a sovereign, holy, just, and wrathful God. But conviction is a necessary part of true conversion because conversion requires both turning from sin and turning to Christ.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent ... (Act 2:37-38a)

## Repentance Unto Life

Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace by which a sinner comes to recognize the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, grieves over his sin as utterly contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God, and flees to Christ for forgiveness and salvation.

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. (2 Cor 7:9-10)

Repentance is viewed as a turning from the vanity of sin to the Living God (Acts 14:15). It is also represented as "putting off" and "putting on" as Paul wrote in Eph 4 and Col 3,

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph 4:22-24)

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: (Col 3:8-10)

It is impossible to separate repentance unto life and saving faith because they are opposite sides of the same coin. Jesus united them in his preaching, "saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mar 1:15).

No one truly repents unto life who does not turn to Christ in faith and no one truly turns to Christ in saving faith who does not repent unto life. There is the “sorrow of the world” which is a form of repentance which the apostle said works death – because it is the turning from one sin to a different sin. People sometimes feel sorry for something they are doing and stop doing it for some other reason than because it is offensive to God; rather because it harms their reputation, their business, their relationships with people. True repentance always comes to Christ for forgiveness.

## Saving Faith

Saving faith includes knowledge, assent and trust – it is not easy to define exactly what must be known and believed. Saving faith always involves the gospel as God is pleased to make it effective –

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (James 1:18)

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. (1 Peter 1:23)

Saving faith not only believes the word of truth but “keep it and bring forth fruit with patience” as we read in Luke’s version of the parable of the sower.

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. (Luke 8:15)

Saving faith is not merely belief in the gospel but puts wholehearted trust in Christ, and rests in that trust. Saving faith abides in Christ – it places every aspect of one’s life in the hands of Christ and rests in that. “Abide in me, and I in you” – there is no other way to bring forth fruit with patience apart from abiding in Christ.

Saving faith cannot exist apart from repentance unto life. The debate over “lordship salvation” in the 1980s was initiated by those who taught that they could have genuine saving faith while remaining in their sins. Those who adopted this position were generally dispensationalists who affirmed that salvation is absolutely free from any conditions and that the law has absolutely nothing to do with the Christian. This is a position known as antinomianism which means “against the law” and is a fundamental misunderstanding of grace, of saving faith and its object.

While it is absolutely true that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, it must be understood that the saving grace of the gospel always includes repentance.

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. (Act 11:18)

Believing in a Christ that is Savior but not LORD is to believe in a false Christ. He came to save His people FROM their sins not to save them and allow them to remain in their sins. True saving faith must begin in regeneration and not be merely a human decision. The Christ in whom we must believe is both LORD and Christ (Acts 2:36). It is impossible to have Him as Savior without having Him as LORD and anyone who thinks they can have Him as their Savior and yet continue in unrepentance is fooling himself.



He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (1 John 2:4)

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:9)

That is, once again, true saving faith must flow from regeneration otherwise it is a superficial kind of faith which does not include repentance unto life. True saving faith is bound up with repentance unto life because both flow from the same fountain of life which springs up in the soul by the grace of God.

## Justification

Saving faith unites us with Christ – it is brought into existence by the work of the Holy Spirit implanting Christ in the heart by the Word of God. And saving faith flees to Christ, it runs into the strong tower and stays there forever. Saving faith is the effect of regeneration which is Christ in the heart. Christ in us gives us the ability to truly believe in Christ and there is no other way. This two-fold relationship – Christ in us and us in Christ – is our union with Him.

When we are in union with Christ by faith, we are accounted as righteous by the very righteousness of Christ which He hammered out during His earthly ministry. He earned eternal life by His own perfect obedience and therefore justification is not a legal fiction or contrary to fact declaration. We are actually righteous in God's eyes because we are in union with the Righteous One who bore the full penalty for our guilt on the cross. By means of union with Christ, God can justify the ungodly and yet remain perfectly just.

To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Romans 3:26)

Justification by grace alone through faith alone is the article by which the church stands or falls. It is by grace because saving faith is the product of regeneration and this faith joins us with Christ who is our righteousness. It is “of Him [that] ye are in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).

## Adoption

Contrary to the idea of liberal theology, people are not children of God by nature. And contrary to the thinking of many Christians, we are not children of God by regeneration. Though we are born of God, there is still the need for our adoption to be counted as children of God. John 1:12-13 separates the two

—

But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

The Son of God is the only-begotten of the Father and we can only be children of God through union with Him. We are “predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” and that comes about by our being in Christ by grace and therefore “accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:5,6).

## Sealing by the Holy Spirit

The sealing of the Spirit is sometimes confused with regeneration but we must be careful to distinguish the two. Scripture clearly places the sealing after believing –

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, (Eph 1:13)

Arminians typically confuse regeneration and indwelling/sealing by the Spirit because they really need a verse that teaches that regeneration follows and depends on the free will of men. But there are none!

By way of analogy, when a man purchases a house which is a real fixer-upper, all broken down inside and uninhabitable, he will first renovate the interior to some extent to bring it into a habitable condition before he moves in with his family. Likewise, regeneration and sealing are different works of the Spirit – in the first He make the house indwellable and in the second He indwells.

Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. (2 Cor 1:22)

## Progressive Sanctification

Sanctification can be thought of as the process of the outworking of the new life which was implanted in us as a seed form at regeneration. While we are accounted as perfectly righteous by God by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, we are not, in ourselves, perfectly righteous by either regeneration or by justification. We must be accepted by God as perfectly righteous in Christ and adopted before progressive sanctification can even begin. Otherwise, our motive is not gratitude and love but fear of damnation – and fear is no ground of sanctification.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:18)

While sanctification is progressive, it is not a work that we do. We don't begin the Christian life by grace through faith and then leave that aside while we sanctify ourselves through our efforts to keep the law. On the other hand, we don't "let go and let God" as if sanctification was entirely the work of God as is regeneration. On the contrary, we are called to be active in our sanctification. Sanctification is by grace through faith and continues the process of conversion – we must continue to repent of our sins and believe the gospel of free grace. There is mystery in this as Paul commanded the Philippians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13).

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (Rom 8:13)

We are not passive in this and yet it is "by the Spirit" that we mortify the deeds of the flesh. There are many who attempt to mortify the deeds of the flesh BY THE FLESH and go from bad to worse. They work very hard to stop sinning and either fail outright and fall into the same sin over and over or, perhaps worse, succeed and become proud of themselves for their success. These are the ones who say, "Keep

to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.” But God says, “These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day” (Isaiah 65:6).

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. (1 John 5:4)

Progressive sanctification is the outworking of regeneration in the soul which always results in repentance unto life and saving faith. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us – but if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and by grace we turn from them through faith. We are wholly dependent on the Holy Spirit to accomplish this in us and yet we cannot simply let go and let God do the work independently of us. Progressive sanctification is synergistic – it is the work of the Holy Spirit through our own wills, as we confess our sins and believe that Christ has paid it all and that we are accepted in Him. The gratitude and love which justification and adoption by free grace generate in us is the absolutely essential engine of sanctification because, as Jesus said, “if you love ME, then you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (1 John 5:3)

The converse holds as well: if we are not keeping His commandments, then it is because of a lack of love for Him. We naturally love the world and the things of the world but believing the gospel must generate love in the heart. If not, there is either a lack of understanding of the gospel or a lack of genuine belief. In either case, the solution is never to try harder to keep the commandments but to repent of our lack of love for Christ. The problem must always be dealt with in the heart before the will can be affected. The solution is to come to a deeper realization of what Christ has done for the salvation of sinners and our own wickedness which is willing to ignore Him and turn from Him to continue in unrepentant sin.

This is the battle of a lifetime. There are no shortcuts and there is no easy way to victory. “strait is the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt 7:14).

## Glorification

There isn’t much to be said about glorification – as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor 2:9)

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

We will just end with this, which ties everything together – the certainty of glorification for the elect:

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Rom 8:30)

So let us be diligent to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Everything is in Christ – our election is in Christ, our calling is in Christ, our justification is in Christ and our glorification is in Christ.

To Him be the glory now and always. Amen.