

**Conversion to Jesus Christ:**  
**(8) God's Preparation of the Sinner unto His Salvation (part 2)**

Today we will consider another aspect of God's work of grace in the unconverted person by which God prepares him for the day when He will cause him/her to become born anew, that is, regenerated. It is only upon God creating new life in him that the sinner experiences transformation from his former life in sin to new life in Jesus Christ. But before his new birth, the Lord performs a work of grace in preparation for the day of his conversion.

Let us begin this morning with reading of the fall of our human race into sin. **Genesis 3:1-8** read as follows:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field, which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

<sup>2</sup>And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; <sup>3</sup>but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

<sup>4</sup>Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup>For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

<sup>8</sup>And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

We have thus far given seven Sundays to our study of this most important subject, "Conversion to Jesus Christ." Today is the eighth Lord's Day. I am not yet certain how much longer our series will be. We could easily call this series, "True and False Conversion", for that has been our emphasis, attempting to clarify true conversion from its counterfeit, false conversion. The first three Sundays we sought to answer the question, "Are We Converted?" The following two Sundays, we sought to show the teaching of God's Word that sinful man is unable to convert Himself to Jesus Christ, therefore, salvation is wholly a work of God's grace, by which He of His own sovereign will imparts His salvation to sinners, ones who are unable to save themselves. The transformation of the sinner into a child of God begins with God's work of grace in regeneration, in which God imparts spiritual life to the sinner who is dead in his sins. He is made to be a new creature, a new man or woman, who has true love for God. The new birth results in the sinner repenting of his sin and embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in faith.

Regeneration is one element in God bringing a sinner to salvation. We have already considered what we understand to be the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*). Here again is that order in which we see regeneration in the fifth position:

- 1) election/predestination (in Christ) (God chooses from eternity whom He purposes to save from sin)
- 2) atonement (when Jesus Christ was crucified to pay for the sins of His people)
- 3) gospel (general) call (this is to any and all sinners to repent of sin and believe on Jesus Christ)
- 4) inward (effectual) call (this is the summons of God to His elect to come to Jesus Christ)
- 5) regeneration (God's impartation of spiritual life in the sinner)
- 6) conversion (faith & repentance)

- 7) justification (The declaration of God that the believing sinner is pardoned of his sin and is regarded to be righteous before God. This state of justification, which is through faith alone in Jesus Christ, will deliver the true believer from condemnation on the Day of Judgment.)
- 8) sanctification (the gradual, progressive work of God's grace whereby the believer becomes more holy like Christ.)
- 9) glorification. (When the Christian passes from this life and is finally and fully delivered from the presence of sin).

Actually there has been difference of opinion on the nature and relationship of God's effectual call (#4) with God's act of regeneration (#5) of the soul unto salvation. Many reformed theologians have equated these two as one and the same--the effectual call of God is the same as regeneration, that is, the new birth. But if they may be distinguished, perhaps the treatment of **Louis Berkhof** should be considered. I have included some of his assertions in an appendix to these notes.

### I. God's Preparation of the Sinner for Regenerating Grace.

Now on the last occasion in which we addressed our subject, which was three Sundays ago, we began to consider a matter that is not listed in the *ordo salutis* listed above. We began to address **God's preparation of the sinner unto his salvation**. In other words, although the new birth is the first act of God by which He begins to do a work of grace *in* the sinner in order to transform him into a repentant, believing, obedient disciple of Jesus Christ, the new birth is not the first work of God in bringing that sinner to salvation. Prior to regeneration, God prepares the sinner to encounter salvation. God prepares people by His grace for the grace of regeneration. Our Lord taught, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Luke 5:31). The problem is that sinners do not see themselves as "sick" in need of the Great Physician. God's work of preparation of the soul unto his salvation is a work of grace revealing to the sinner his great need for Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

We considered the testimony of the apostle Paul of his conversion. The account in Acts 9 reads this way:

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

<sup>4</sup>Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

<sup>5</sup>And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

<sup>6</sup>So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:1-6)

My friend, **Dr. Doug Vickers**, the other day at our monthly NERF<sup>1</sup> meeting made reference to this passage. He pointed out that Saul had addressed Jesus as "Lord" in two places. In verse 5 we read Paul's words, "Who are You, **Lord**?" And then in verse 6 Paul said, "**Lord**, what do You want me to do?" Dr. Vickers said that between the first "Lord" and the second "Lord", Paul was born again, or, God had imparted the new birth to Paul.

In Paul's recounting this event in Acts 26, he revealed that the Lord Jesus said these words to him upon Him appearing to Paul. The Lord Jesus said, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Although the new birth is the first act of God by which He begins to do a work of grace *in* the sinner in order to transform him into a repentant, believing, obedient disciple of Jesus Christ, the new birth is not the first work of God in bringing that sinner to salvation. Prior to regeneration, God prepares the sinner to encounter salvation. God prepares people by His grace for the grace of regeneration. And God had been at work in

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<sup>1</sup> NERF is the New England Reformed Fellowship, of which I am involved. ([www.newenglandreformedfellowship.org](http://www.newenglandreformedfellowship.org))

Saul's life, even before his Damascus road journey, even while he had been "breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1).

Now again, it is important to understand that the soul's preparation is in no way meritorious nor does it qualify the soul for regeneration. But the Lord must prepare the soul otherwise the hating, rebellious sinner, would not hear and respond to the grace of God in the gospel. God inclines the ear to hear and works upon the mind and will of a person, prior to that day the truth of the gospel floods his understanding and he bows his will to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In speaking of this work of grace by which God prepares the sinner for regeneration, we surmised from Paul's life that God had revealed to Paul *his guilt due to his sin* even before he saw the glorified Jesus on that road to Damascus. Today I would like to focus on another work of preparation that God must perform in a soul in preparation or with view to his conversion to Jesus Christ. I would argue, therefore, that this is an essential aspect of true conversion to Jesus Christ, without which, one may suspect that he has been deluded by false conversion. What is this work of preparation?

***God must humble a sinner, bring him to see his helplessness, that is, his inability to effect any change in himself that would commend him before God.***

The sinner must come to see that he is powerless, and thereby wholly dependent upon the mercy and grace of God to do for him that which he cannot do for himself.

The importance of this matter is great. The origin of this need may be traced to the passage that we read, **Genesis 3:1-8**. There we read of the fall of Adam and Eve, our first parents, into sin, thereby plunging the entire human race into a fallen state of sin. God had originally created Adam and Eve as "upright" creatures (cf. Ecc. 7:29). He had created them in His image. They were holy creatures. They were in fellowship with God their Creator and they lived out their daily existence knowing and delighting in doing His will. He was their Creator, and as such He was their Master, but also His Companion. He had created them as ones who desired to know His will, and they had delighted in doing His will as their lives were played out in the garden paradise. God governed them by His law, which would have resulted in their eternal blessedness, not only for them, but also for all of their posterity.

But read in Genesis 3 of their fall into sin. The devil had tempted Eve, and Adam through Eve, to act in ways contrary to God's Word. The serpent tempted them to be the determiners of their own existence, that is, to be their own gods, to decide for themselves what was true, right, and good. Rather than live in obedience to God, those chose to determine for themselves how they might live. And when they sinned, Adam and Eve were confirmed in their sinful condition. Fallen men and women who descended from them have been characterized by a "***pervasive assumption of human autonomy.***"<sup>2</sup> What does this mean? The word "autonomy" is derived from two Greek words. "Auto" means "self." "Nomy", which is from the Greek word "*nomos*", is the word for "law." A person who has "pervasive assumption of human autonomy" believes that he is a law unto himself. He is the lord of his own life. He desires to control his own life, determine his own beliefs and values, and choose to live in the manner that he desires for himself.

More specifically, fallen man as a sinner assumes human autonomy in several ways. ***First, fallen man believes in his intellectual autonomy***<sup>3</sup>. He thinks that he has the ability to see and understand things rightly and assess what is true. Oh, he may think he needs some assistance. But with the right tools and resources before him he believes that he is competent to understand himself, his world, and how he may get along in the world. He does not need to rely upon God, except when he might need some assistance, but it is only God's help for him to do what he decides to do.

***Secondly, fallen man believes in his metaphysical autonomy.*** I wish I knew a better way to state it than using the word, metaphysical, but that is the best word to describe this aspect of fallen man's independent spirit. This essentially speaks to how a person views his human nature or the essence of his being. Fallen man has lost his sense of creaturehood, that he views himself chiefly as having been created by

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<sup>2</sup> An expression used by Dr. Doug Vickers in a paper he delivered recently to the New England Reformed Fellowship, entitled, "***The Divine Purchase.***"

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Vickers refers to this as *epistemological autonomy*, which h speaks to the way in fallen man determines reality.

God, one who receives meaning of life, guidance for life, and purpose for life by his knowledge that God had created him. As a fallen man, as a sinful man, he does not inherently possess the knowledge of having been created a person by a personal Creator. He does not view his existence or the meaning of his existence in relation to the One who made him, but rather, he is independent in himself. This is what metaphysical autonomy means. Oh yes, he may identify his personhood as the product of evolution, or perhaps the offspring of a particular ethnic or national group, but he does not naturally see himself as a creature of God from whom he derives his identity, value, and purpose.

And *thirdly, fallen man believes in his ethical autonomy*. He is a law unto himself. Since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, fallen, sinful man establishes for himself what he thinks to be standards of right and wrong. Oh yes, he may choose to adopt moral standards of others, or even those of God, say, aspects of God's laws, but he only does so because he wants to do so, not because they are the laws of God that God has established to govern the manner in which His creatures are to live.

The fallen world in which we live is attractive to these aspects of man's sinful condition. But to be drawn to the world is to render oneself in conflict with God, who has resolved to judge and condemn all that "live" in this world. This is what the Apostle John expressed:

For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16f)

If we had time and the need to do so, we could show how these three aspects of the fallen world appeal the three aspects of the sinner's "*pervasive assumption of human autonomy*." The fallen world resonates and reinforces the sinner's *intellectual autonomy* (the lust of the eyes), *his metaphysical autonomy* (the pride of life), and *his ethical autonomy* (the lust of the flesh).

But if a sinner is to become a Christian, this must change. The Christian is not governed by these desires, although the Christian continues to be tempted by these things. But the Lord God has declared that He will condemn all on the Day of Judgment who have ordered their lives according to the "world", as the Scriptures define it. **James** wrote,

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup>Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

<sup>6</sup>But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

"God resists the proud,  
But gives grace to the humble."

*People in their fallen state assume that they are competent to govern themselves*. In other words, they are *proud*, believing that they are self-sufficient, capable of deciding for themselves what is best for them. Every person believes that he has a right to govern himself. He believes he is competent, or at least as competent as those in authority over him. He wants to rule over himself. He reacts and rejects any and all efforts to control him. He wants to be "free!" But his desire for freedom is not so he can live freely before God, but that he might live according to his own desires, free from any and all constraints that someone or something may impose upon him.

But one cannot think and live this way and be a Christian. God transforms the sinner at regeneration, or the new birth, so that self no longer governs him as he had been formerly. The one born from above by the Holy Spirit is governed no longer by a "*pervasive assumption of human autonomy*." Rather He is born again. He is a new creature in Christ Jesus. Now he has a "persuasive desire for submission and obedience" to his God. He has rejected himself as lord of his life. Jesus Christ is Lord. He no longer views himself as an independent individual, isolated from all others, but he knows and delights that God is his Creator, that

Jesus Christ is his Savior, and that he is one of and numbered among the people of God. He is no longer proud, but rather humble. And God abundantly lavishes His grace upon him.

Now what we are saying is that although God causes the great change of direction in life when He causes the sinner to be born again, *God does a work of preparation upon that person before his conversion causing to become dissatisfied, disappointed, and disillusioned* with the way of life to which he had given himself. He longs for a life with true purpose. He desires to know the true God. He has come to see the futility and folly of a life lived apart from this God that He had not known relationally or experientially. He finds himself to be “poor in spirit”, desiring what he does not have. He “mourns” over his condition, regretting what he has done or failed to do. He is humbled by the realization of his wasted and squandered prior life. He has come to “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” In other words, he has become prepared by God’s grace for the grace of regeneration, even as he hears and receives unreservedly the gospel of Jesus Christ being presented to him. He may be encouraged by the words of our Lord who declared:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
<sup>4</sup>Blessed are those who mourn,  
For they shall be comforted.  
<sup>5</sup>Blessed are the meek,  
For they shall inherit the earth.  
<sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
For they shall be filled. (Matt. 5:3-6)

## II. The Transformation of Paul into a New Man

Let us consider again the Apostle Paul, with view to the attitudes and aspirations he had acquired as a Christian. These were not natural to Paul while unconverted. But upon conversion, God had transformed him into a new person. I would like us to consider his instruction to the Christians in the church at Philippi, in which the kinds of desires and delights that he sets before his readers should characterize us as Christians.

Let us read the first 11 verses of **Philippians 3**.

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.

<sup>2</sup>Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! <sup>3</sup>For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: <sup>5</sup>circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

<sup>7</sup>But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup>Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; <sup>10</sup>that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, <sup>11</sup>if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The major theme of the passage is *the centrality and sufficiency of Jesus Christ and the salvation that only comes through faith in Him*. Believers are to have their total faith, their sole confidence, in Jesus Christ for their salvation. This should be the desire and aim of our entire lives. Moreover, what is suggested by our passage is that this should be our intense resolve because of the danger of false teachers who would

direct them to have their confidence (faith) in something other than in Jesus Christ alone. In Philippi these false teachers were Jews who claimed to believe in Jesus as their Savior, but who taught that salvation was obtained not through Christ alone, but through faith in Jesus Christ plus the merit attained through their own works and their association with the Jewish nation according to the flesh.

In contrast to these false teachers who claimed they were Jews, **Paul declared that Christians are the true Israel, the covenant people of God.** Paul described the false claimants to that privileged relationship with God. In **verse 2** he had described them in very stark, condemning words. *“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!”* Our Lord Jesus Himself spoke to several churches in similar terms a number of decades after Paul wrote this letter. Our lord said to the church at **Smyrna**, “I know the blasphemy of those **who say they are Jews and are not**, but are a synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9). And then to the church at **Philadelphia**, Jesus said, “Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, **who say they are Jews and are not**, but lie -- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you” (Rev. 3:9). The New Testament teaches that the true Israel of God is comprised of true believers in Jesus Christ. Whether they are Jewish or Gentile is immaterial. God had declared all people to be guilty sinners (Rom. 1-3) so that He may have mercy on all kinds of sinners, whether they are Jewish or Gentile sinners.

In **verse 3** Paul described the **character of true Christians.** *“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”* **First, true Christians worship God in the Spirit.** What does this mean? First, then, to worship God in spirit involves one who worships God with his heart, and mind, and his will, not just his body. One’s spirit includes the heart (affections), the mind (knowledge), and his will. His whole life, every aspect of life, his entire life, is given to the pursuit of knowing God, experiencing God, serving God. Secondly, to worship God in spirit is essentially an internal matter rather than an external one. Thirdly, the one who worships God in spirit worships God because God is seen as deserving of the worship of His creatures. Fourthly, the one who worships God in spirit does so through the influence from and enablement of the Holy Spirit.

**Second, true Christians are ones who rejoice in Christ Jesus.** Now, the way that we described the true worship of true Christians, one might assume that the Christian might tend to look to these things that he renders to God as things in which he would place his confidence. But no, the true Christian does not rejoice in the things that he gives to God; rather, he rejoices in God’s Son that God has given to him. True Christians do not rejoice in themselves, but in their attachment to and interest in Jesus Christ.

Every true Christian rejoices in Jesus Christ. Even in the believer’s darkest hour, there resides in his soul a rejoicing in his Savior. “There are always some peaces of heaven in their hottest hells” (Thomas Boston). Every Christian has a conviction there is sufficiency in Jesus Christ for all things and everything that he needs. Every need of his life is satisfied in Jesus. The true believer rejoices in Jesus Christ alone for all of life.

In Jesus Christ alone the believer is satisfied, fulfilled, content, assured, and at peace. The believer sees that His Savior Jesus Christ is all and in all. For the believer, all things without Him are vanity. For the believer, all things find meaning, purpose, and value when considered in the light of Jesus Christ. Christ the giver of life, the promiser of life and life more abundantly makes endurable, and most things even pleasant for the believer that lives in Him. The true believer cannot imagine living in this world apart from Him. He Christ Jesus the believer is fulfilled. As Paul wrote elsewhere of believers: “You are **complete** in Him” (Col. 2:10).

**Third, true Christians have no confidence in the flesh.** This follows from the previous statement. If one rejoices in Christ Jesus, he will not rejoice in something else, especially, in himself. To place your confidence in Him alone, is to remove your confidence from all else but Him. Is it not supreme folly for a man or woman to have confidence in himself that he will be able to stand before God in the Day of Judgment? It is foolishness for a man to be confident in his own merit, the goodness of his own heart, the sincerity and purity of his own soul, and by these he thinks that he will escape condemnation on that Great Day. Paul once had all confidence in his flesh, but no more. Paul the Christian had no confidence in his flesh. He had all confidence in Jesus Christ.

This is why a true Christian cannot be characterized by sinful pride, self-righteousness, a judgmental, condemning spirit, an arrogant self-confidence that knows nothing of questioning oneself, one's own judgment. A Christian has great confidence in Jesus Christ, but he has little, if any, confidence in himself. And what little he does have in himself, he wishes it would be far removed from him for he has learned the folly of such thinking.

In **verses 3 through 7** we read of **Paul's rejection of his former ground of confidence before God.**

In order to show these Christians the danger and the folly of looking to something other than Jesus Christ alone for salvation, Paul cited his own credentials that he had once highly esteemed. But because they had prevented him from having his boast in Jesus Christ alone, when he came to Christ, he discarded those things he thought were meritorious as despicable things, things to be discarded as one would discard rubbish. He had repudiated those former aspects of his life in which he once rejoiced, because he had come to rejoice in Christ alone. Let us read **Philippians 3:4b-7**:

<sup>4</sup>though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: <sup>5</sup>circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup>But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

Paul had formerly trusted and rejoiced in these things:

(1) Circumcised the eighth day,

Paul's parents had started him out right. He was not a convert to Judaism, but he was born into Israel. He thought this brought to him merit or standing before God. He had been under the law of God from infancy. He was not as many, who lived an early life of sin and then had become converted (which, by the way, might have resulted in a bit of humility). He had always been in the "church", so to speak. From a youth he was a son of Abraham, or so he thought.

(2) Of the stock of Israel,

Paul was not a proselyte to Israel; he was born of Jewish stock. It was in his blood. He was a privileged and accepted person before God, or so he thought, because he was a Jew by birth.

(3) Of the tribe of Benjamin,

When the kingdom of Israel had divided after Solomon died, the tribe of Benjamin was one of the two tribes of the south who continued to worship God according to the law in Jerusalem, at the legitimate temple of God led by legitimate Levitical priests. The tribe of Benjamin was a chief tribe of Israel; it led the nation into battle. Paul was from *that* tribe. He was...

(4) A Hebrew of the Hebrews.

This thought may have flowed from the previous idea that he was from the tribe of Benjamin. There was no defection of his tribe from God when others defected (Of course they all had departed from God eventually)

(5) Concerning the law, a Pharisee;

The list thus far stressed what he had believed was his *identity* as a member of the people of God attained through natural birth. He then began to cite his *achievements* as a basis of "rejoicing" before God,

that is, his personal effort, devotion and commitment, his attainments. He had surpassed many others in Judaism. He was one of the elite within Israel.

(6) Concerning zeal, persecuting the church;

He had even gone beyond most Pharisees. He was a great defender of “the faith”, or so he thought. He would oppose and silence any who were a threat to what he had believed to be true. He was most zealous of God’s law.

(7) Concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Here he sums up his attainments. He obeyed and kept the law in every way that the law required of him. His confidence, his faith, his rejoicing in these things had governed his life before becoming a Christian. But when he had come to see, understand, and believe on Jesus Christ, he realized all these things had blinded him to the glory of the finality of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ alone as the basis of salvation from his sin. And so what was his response of faith? **Philippians 3:7, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.”** He repudiated anything and everything, desiring and trusting Christ alone.

Paul had complete trust in Jesus Christ alone for his salvation. We read in **3:8-11**.

<sup>8</sup>But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup>and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; <sup>10</sup>that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, <sup>11</sup>if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

**Paul’s great goal was to gain Christ (3:8).** Paul had before him a great desire, a great pursuit, a goal for which he purposed to live. He desired that he would *gain Christ*. He does not indicate that he had already “gained” Christ. He lived in this manner so that he *may* gain Christ. He had not yet fully achieved his goal. There was a present reality to his desire; he was in Christ and Christ was in him. But there is a future aspect to his words also. He cast all aside so that the outcome of his life would result in gaining Christ at the last.

All of the things in which he had formally trusted, in which he had formally rejoiced, he came to count as lost to him, and he was greatly pleased that it was so. He was not renouncing his great sins of the past. He was renouncing his greatest attainments and accomplishments! He had no regrets that they were all lost to him now that he had sought Christ. Those things had prevented him from desiring and seeking and finding Christ.

What had caused Paul to reject his former life was a new aspiration? He said that he cast those former things away from him as rubbish in comparison to what he described as “excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.” What Paul desired was “a personal relationship” with Jesus Christ.

Now, I hesitate to use that expression, “a personal relationship” with Jesus Christ, because it has so many wrong connotations because of the way it is used and the way that many understand it to be. Many assume that they have a relationship with Jesus Christ when in actuality they are strangers to Him. But others have convinced them and they have convinced themselves that they have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and it is very difficult to show them otherwise. They are convinced that they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ because they supposedly “gave their heart” to Jesus. Or, they believe that because they have had a moving, emotional experience with “Jesus” that they, therefore, have a “personal relationship” with Jesus. Sometimes this understanding of a personal relationship with Jesus is manifest in rather strange expressive ways. Christian writers and “artists” sing of Jesus in terms that more resemble the

emotions of a young, steamy romance between a young man and woman. This “Jesus as my boyfriend” theme, in my opinion, is weird and distasteful. It is void of biblical meaning and expression.

No, to Paul a “personal relationship” with Jesus Christ was seen in terms of a covenant participation and union with Jesus Christ through faith, a faith informed and based upon knowledge of His person and work. Notice what Paul said again. He wrote of his great desire to obtain the “*excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.*” A personal relationship with Jesus Christ has as its basis an acquiring of knowledge of who Jesus Christ is, and what He is doing as Lord and Savior.

The knowledge of Jesus Christ the Lord! Do you see the far surpassing excellence of knowing Jesus Christ? Do you see that a true understanding of life, true meaning in life, true peace and joy in life, are tied to your personal knowledge of Jesus Christ? This is what Paul had come to understand and when he saw that this was the source and substance of all life, he would cast aside all else to which he had formerly given himself, and he gave himself over to gaining Christ. He had come to see that if he were to have Christ, it would mean jettisoning all else for Christ. He said good riddance to it all.

God had transformed Paul from a sinner into a saint. He was no longer a person who had governed no longer by a “*pervasive assumption of human autonomy.*” Rather he was born again. He is a new creature in Christ Jesus. Thereafter Paul was characterized by the desire for submission and obedience unto his God through Jesus Christ. He had rejected himself as the lord of his own life. Jesus Christ was Lord. He no longer viewed himself as an independent individual, isolated from all others, but he knew God and delighted in that Jesus Christ was His Savior, that He is one of and numbered among the people of God. He was no longer proud, but rather humble. God had transformed him through the new birth.

May it be known to each of us with certainty that his experience has been our experience, that we are truly converted unto Jesus Christ.

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<sup>25</sup>Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began <sup>26</sup>but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith-- <sup>27</sup>to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (Rom. 16:25ff)

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Appendix:

**Louis Berkhof**

#### ON THE RELATION OF EFFECTUAL CALLING TO REGENERATION.

a. *The identification of the two in seventeenth century theology.* It is a well known fact that in seventeenth century theology effectual calling and regeneration are often identified, or if not entirely identified, then at least in so far that regeneration is regarded as included in calling. Several of the older theologians have a separate chapter on calling, but none on regeneration. According to the Westminster Confession, X. 2, effectual calling includes regeneration. This view finds some justification in the fact that Paul, who uses the term “regeneration” but once, evidently conceives of it as included in calling in Rom. 8:30. Moreover, there is a sense in which calling and regeneration are related as cause and effect. It should be borne in mind, however, that in speaking of calling as including, or as being causally related to, regeneration, we do not have in mind merely what is technically termed internal or effectual calling, but calling in general, including even a creative calling. The extensive use in Post-Reformation times of the term “calling” rather than “regeneration,” to designate the beginning of the work of grace in the life of sinners, was due to a desire to stress the close connection between the Word of God and the operation of His grace. And the prevalence of the term “calling” in the apostolic age finds its explanation and

justification in the fact that, in the case of those who were in that missionary period gathered into the Church, regeneration and effectual calling were generally simultaneous, while the change was reflected in their conscious life as a powerful calling from God. In a systematic presentation of the truth, however, we should carefully discriminate between calling and regeneration.

b. *Points of difference between regeneration and effectual calling.* Regeneration in the strictest sense of the word, that is, as *the begetting again*, takes place in the sub-conscious life of man, and is quite independent of any attitude which he may assume with reference to it. Calling, on the other hand, addresses itself to the consciousness, and implies a certain disposition of the conscious life. This follows from the fact that regeneration works from within, while calling comes from without. In the case of children we speak of regeneration rather than calling. Furthermore, regeneration is a creative, a hyper-physical operation of the Holy Spirit, by which man is brought from one condition into another, from a condition of spiritual death into a condition of spiritual life. Effectual calling, on the other hand, is teleological, draws out the new life and points it in a God-ward direction. It secures the exercises of the new disposition and brings the new life into action.

c. *The relative order of calling and regeneration.* This is perhaps best understood, if we note the following stages: (1) Logically, the external call in the preaching of the Word (except in the case of children) generally precedes or coincides with the operation of the Holy Spirit, by which the new life is produced in the soul of man. (2) Then by a creative word God generates the new life, changing the inner disposition of the soul, illuminating the mind, rousing the feelings, and renewing the will. In this act of God the ear is implanted that enables man to hear the call of God to the salvation of his soul. *This is regeneration in the most restricted sense of the word.* In it man is entirely passive. (3) Having received the spiritual ear, the call of God in the gospel is now heard by the sinner, and is brought home effectively to the heart. The desire to resist has been changed to a desire to obey, and the sinner yields to the persuasive influence of the Word through the operation of the Holy Spirit. *This is the effectual calling through the instrumentality of the word of preaching, effectively applied by the Spirit of God.* (4) This effectual calling, finally, secures, through the truth as a means, the first holy exercises of the new disposition that is born in the soul. The new life begins to manifest itself; the implanted life issues in the new birth. *This is the completion of the work of regeneration in the broader sense of the word, and the point at which it turns into conversion.*<sup>4</sup>

I believe that Berkhof is right in his statements. It would mean that in the *ordo salutis* regeneration should be placed in the position before the effectual call. The new birth enables the sinner to hear and respond to the call of the gospel in his effectual calling.

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<sup>4</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 470f.