

TEN

The Holy Spirit and the Application of Redemption

Daniel J. Baker – *Systematic Theology* – 2025

Introduction

We have said that the one way of salvation in the Bible is through the promised Redeemer, the Redeemer who is first indicated in the word in the Garden about the “offspring” of the woman who will “bruise” the “head” of the serpent and accomplish God’s promised redemption. God’s Redeemer is Christ. In our last chapter we examined his person and work, which was necessary for our salvation. But for that work to benefit us, it must be *applied* to us. For this reason, John Murray and others have spoken in terms of *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.¹ The *application of redemption* takes us into the realm of the Spirit’s work in the life of the believer, those diverse activities of the Spirit that bring us from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. It is true with our salvation

¹ John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955).

that “all of God does all that God does.”² And yet, salvation in another sense is *from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit*. If we emphasized “through the Son” in the last chapter, in this chapter we will emphasize “by the Spirit.” The diverse works of the Spirit that result in our redemption are typically captured with the phrase the *ordo salutis*, Latin for “the order of salvation.” First, though, we want to look at the person of the Holy Spirit.

The Person of the Holy Spirit

When we looked at God as a Trinity, we said much about the Holy Spirit. The Bible’s basic teaching on the Trinity is that “our God is one God” (Deut 6:4; Isa 44:6; 1 Tim 2:5; 1 Cor 8:4), “our one God is plural in nature” (Gen 1:1–3, 26; 3:22), “our one God is three distinct persons” (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14), and “the three persons of the Godhead have a distinct relationship with one another” (Jesus the eternally begotten and “only-begotten God,” the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son). The Spirit is thus fully God with a divine essence, and yet he is also a distinct Person of the Trinity. As we next look at the names used to describe the Holy Spirit, we will learn more of his distinctiveness in relation to the Father and the Son.

Names of the Spirit

“The Spirit of God”: The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Gen 1:2); when Balaam prophesies, it says, “the Spirit of God came upon him” (Num 24:2; cf. 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 19:20). Job 33:4 says, “the Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” At the baptism of Jesus, we read that “the Spirit of God” was “descending like a dove and coming to rest” on Jesus (Matt 3:16). The name

² Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 15.

“Spirit of God” captures two important things about the third person of the Trinity. One is that he is a “Spirit” and thus a non-physical being, an aspect which also speaks to his deity, since “God is spirit” (John 4:24). The second aspect which “Spirit of God” underscores is that he is the Spirit who is “of God.” Unlike “the spirit of man” (Eccl 3:21; Zech 12:1) who is “of man” and thus finite and human, the Spirit “of God” is infinite and fully divine. The “of God” at times seems to communicate the Spirit who is “from God,” as at Jesus’s baptism (Matt 3:16). But at other times the “of God” seems to mean “of God’s very nature” and thus fully divine (Gen 1:2).

“Holy Spirit”: The Spirit is often called “the Holy Spirit” (Ps 51:11; Isa 63:10–11), and his work in us and the Son of God is extremely varied. Jesus is conceived and born through the work of “the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35). He “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33), and Jesus was baptized with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22). Unforgivable is blasphemy against “the Holy Spirit” (Matt 12:32; Mark 3:29). We are to make disciples, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:20). David wrote Psalm 110 “in the Holy Spirit” (Mark 12:36), and “the Holy Spirit” will give us what we need to say “in that hour” when we are on trial for our faith (Mark 13:11). John the Baptist will be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:15); Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Simeon all prophesy through “the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41, 67; 2:25–26); and Jesus even ministered in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:1; 10:21; Acts 1:2). Jesus will send “another Helper” who is “the Holy Spirit” (John 14:26); Jesus breathes on the disciples with “the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22); and Pentecost is the disciples being baptized “with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5, 8; 2:4). “The Holy Spirit” was given by the Father to the Son and then poured out on the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:33). The disciples in Acts minister in the power of “the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:8; 7:55) and are “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:31). “The Holy Spirit” is “God” (Acts 5:3–4), and resisting God is “resisting” the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). Disciples can be “baptized with the Holy Spirit” subsequent to

conversion (Acts 2:4; 8:14–17; 19:2–7; cf. 13:52; Rom 1:). Elders are commissioned by “the Holy Spirit” (Acts 20:28). Through “the Holy Spirit” we can “abound in hope” (Rom 15:13). Christians are “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19), and “the Holy Spirit” enables us to say, “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3). The name “Holy Spirit” reveals much about the third person of the Trinity. “Spirit” points to his nature as a non-physical and yet divine being (John 4:24). The adjective “holy” means that his distinctive *holiness* is underscored. Of all the attributes that could be ascribed to this third person of the Trinity, holiness is the one that seems most appropriate to the biblical authors. “Holy” means “set apart”: “There is none holy like the LORD” (1 Sam 2:2), and only God can be said to be “holy, holy, holy” (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8). To call the Spirit “holy” thus points to the divinity of the Spirit of God. But because being “set apart” means being “set apart *for God*,” “holiness” also speaks to the way he is utterly devoted to the Godhead and his purposes and set apart distinctly to bring them about.

“The Spirit of the Lord”: A third name for the Holy Spirit connects him more directly to Jesus Christ, who is often referred to as “Lord” in our New Testament: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17). “The Spirit of the LORD” in the Old Testament typically means “the Spirit of Yahweh” (Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; Isa 40:13; Ezek 11:5). In 2 Corinthians 3:17, the reference is to Christ. The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father, the Son, and the entire Godhead. In all these ways, he is the Spirit of the Lord.

“Helper”: In John 14–16, the Spirit is uniquely referred to as “Helper” or “Another Helper.” “Helper” is from the Greek *paraklētos* (παράκλητος), a word that can mean “one who is called to someone’s aid” or “one who appears in another’s behalf” like a “mediator, intercessor, helper.”³ In John 14:16 Jesus promises to send “another Helper, to be with you forever.” Jesus will leave the disciples, but the promise is that this “other Helper” will never leave

³ παράκλητος, BDAG, 766.

us. In John 14:26 the “Helper” will “bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you”; in 15:26 he is said to “bear witness about me.” “The Helper” is said to be sent both from the Son (15:26) and the Father (14:26).

“God”: In Acts 5 there is a fascinating dialogue between Peter and the lying couple Ananias and Saphira. In that conversation, they are accused of lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3) and then in the same breath of lying to God: “You have not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:4). This is a clear statement of the deity of the Holy Spirit.

“The Spirit of adoption”: In Romans 8:15 we get another rich phrase to describe the Holy Spirit: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” The Spirit here is identified uniquely with our spiritual adoption as children of God. We will look at this more below under the “order of salvation.” Here the Spirit is being identified by a work that he does, in this case the work of making us into adopted sons of God. Murray says, “He is called ‘the Spirit of adoption,’ not because he is the agent of adoption but because it is he who creates in the children of God the filial love and confidence by which they are able to cry, ‘Abba, Father’ and exercise the rights and privileges of God’s children.”⁴

“Seal” and “Guarantee”: In Ephesians 1:13–14 there are two terms that speak to the way the Spirit secures us in our salvation: “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” Being a seal, he is God’s “stamp of approval” that places on us the divine approval, an approval never to be removed. This “seal” can also be understood in the way that an envelope might be “sealed” with melted wax and an imprint of a king’s signet ring. Being “sealed” it

⁴ Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, Vol 1, 296.

cannot be opened by anyone except for the Lord himself. And then in these verses the Spirit is “the guarantee of our inheritance.” He is like a down payment that is paid to convey that the whole amount will be transferred later. The down payment is a true part of the inheritance, but it is nonetheless only a down payment of a much larger but future receipt of money. This speaks to the way the Spirit gives us a foretaste of coming heavenly glories. It is a true taste of these glories, but it is only a foretaste as the coming experience will be incomparably greater to what we know now.

“Living water”: In John 7, the Spirit is compared to “living water”: “‘Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:38–39). “Living water” is a phrase that can mean moving water, as with a river, compared to the still and stagnant waters of a pond. Yet, it also means life-producing. Our God is “the fountain of living waters” (Jer 2:13; 17:13), and from him flows the river promised in Ezekiel 47:1–12: “So everything will live where the river goes” (47:9). The promise in John 7 is that the life of the Spirit in us will be so abundant and overflowing it will be like a fountain bursting out from within us.

Words associated with the Spirit

Looking at these names for the Holy Spirit it is fascinating how the Spirit is often presented as water flowing (John 7:37–38) or being poured out (Isa 32:15) or filling up a person (Exod 31:3; Acts 4:31) or baptizing a person (Matt 3:11). He is connected to a wind blowing (John 3:1–8; Gen 1:2) or God breathing (John 20:22). He “falls on” people (Ezek 11:5; Acts 10:44). He is thus intimately connected with the activity and energy of God on the move. He is not still but working to accomplish all that the Triune God has determined. And where he goes he brings life and vitality and freshness. He brings new life, new growth, new strength, new hope.

It is for these reasons the people of God have often prayed, “Breathe on me, breath of God.”⁵

The Spirit’s Work in the Old and New Testaments

The Old Testament presents a variety of activities of the Holy Spirit, but these are not always fully explained. The Spirit is first observed “hovering of the face of the waters” in Genesis 1:2, and this solidifies the fact creation is a Trinitarian work and not simply a work of the Father. In Genesis 2:7, “the LORD God” breathes into man’s nostrils “the breath of life,” and the man becomes “a living creature.” “Breath” here is from the word *neshāmāh* (נֶשְׁמָה), but elsewhere this idea of the “breath” in us is from the word that often gets translated “spirit” as in Psalm 104:29, “When you take away their breath (*ruach*, רוּחַ), they die and return to their dust.” We see this same breath/Spirit interplay in Ezekiel 37 where the prophet sees a “valley” that is “full of bones” (37:1). Throughout the passage the word “breath” in the ESV is *ruach*, (רוּחַ), which can also be translated “Spirit.” This ties the prophecy to Ezekiel 36:26–27, where God promises, “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” This prophecy has an echo in Ezekiel 37:5, “Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath (*ruach*, רוּחַ) to enter you, and you shall live.” This interplay between “breath” and “Spirit” in passages like these illustrates a vital truth: *There is no spiritual life apart from the work of God’s Spirit in us.* There is even a hint that there is no natural life apart from the work of God’s Spirit.⁶

⁵ Edwin Hatch, “Breathe on Me, Breath of God” (1878).

⁶ “It is evident from the Old Testament that the origin of life, its maintenance, and its development depend on the operation of the Holy Spirit. The withdrawal of the Spirit means death” (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 425).

In terms of the Spirit's salvific (saving) work in the soul, the Spirit's work in the Old Testament was prominent but not as understood as in the age of the new covenant. Christ brought not only a change to our experience of God but also our understanding of God's ways. In the writings of John and Paul we get a much expanded understanding of how God works on the soul to bring it from death to life, from unbelieving to believing. The categorical statements made in the New Testament do not only apply to new covenant saints, however, but they are true as soon as sin enters the world and therefore true throughout salvation history. I am speaking of statements like what Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5). This did not become true in the New Testament but was always true. That is why Jesus rebuked Nicodemus for not knowing it (John 3:10).

Then there is Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 2:10–14 about the necessity of the Spirit to understand "spiritual" things. Without the Spirit a person is only "natural" and cannot understand spiritual truths. Once again, this does not become true with the new covenant but was always true. So, where there is faith in God and growth in God, there is the Holy Spirit at work, whether in the Old Testament or New. A change that does occur in the new covenant has to do with the Spirit's *empowering* work (his role in prophecy and spiritual gifts). This change is prophesied in Joel 2:28–32a and occurs at Pentecost. I will say much more about this in our next chapter on life in the Spirit.

The Application of Redemption

Having looked at the Holy Spirit more generally, now we turn to the application of redemption. Here we see how the Spirit brings us from being dead in sins to alive in Christ, from being outside of Christ to belonging to Christ, from being an enemy of God to being among his redeemed. We start with union in Christ, a topic that

connects at every level with the application of redemption. Then we will turn to the “order of salvation” proper.

Union with Christ

John Calvin sets up the topic of union with Christ well in his *Institutes* by asking,

We must now examine this question. How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son—not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason, he is called “our Head” (Eph 4:15), and “the first-born among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). We also, in turn, are said to be “engrafted into him” (Rom 11:17), and to “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27); for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we obtain this by faith. Yet since we see that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel, reason itself teaches us to climb higher and to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.⁷

The union of a believer with Christ is a key part of our salvation, since our salvation is from eternity and always a salvation “in Christ.” It happens subjectively at a point in time, where we are “called effectually into the fellowship of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9),”⁸

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.1.1.

⁸ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 165.

and yet the Father chose us before the foundation of the world “in Christ” and no part of the blessings of salvation comes to us except “in Christ.” As John Murray says, “union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.”⁹ Truly, “it underlies every step of the application of redemption.”¹⁰ Union with Christ is sometimes called “the mystical union,” which speaks to both the idea of a “mystery” in how fallen humanity can be united with a holy God but also the spiritual and experiential nature of this union. As Murray says, “union means also communion and communion constrains a humble, loving walk with him who died and rose again that he might be our Lord.”¹¹

In John’s Upper Room Discourse, Jesus details the new union with God that will be ours with his ascension and sending of the Spirit. The new state of things is none other than a dynamic and mystical union with the Godhead: “You will know [the Spirit of truth], for he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17); “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14:20); “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). And this new union entails profound spiritual blessings.

It is in Paul’s writings where the idea of being “in Christ” gets significant development. “In Christ” we have received “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” from “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:3). Ephesians 1:4–5 says our eternal election was “in him” and we are “predestined” for “adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.” In Ephesians 2:4–7 we are “made...alive together with Christ,” “raised...with him,” and “seated...with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” in order

⁹ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 161.

¹⁰ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 161.

¹¹ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 171.

to be recipients of the “immeasurable riches” of God’s “grace in kindness...in Christ Jesus.” But good works are also a benefit of being “in Christ,” since “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Here in Ephesians 2, where we are “made alive together with Christ” (2:5) and later said to be “without Christ” (2:12) before salvation, it seems clear that our “actual union with Christ” begins with regeneration (Hoekema) when we were “called effectually” by the living God (Murray).¹²

If we look back at the redemptive work of Christ, we see in Paul that our union is with Christ there, too. When we are “baptized into Christ Jesus,” we are “baptized into his death,” “buried...with him,” “raised” with him, all that we might “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3–4). That is why Paul can say, “in him we have redemption through his blood” (Eph 1:7).

There is more still. When we exercised “faith” in Christ, we “put on Christ” (Gal 3:26–27). “In Christ Jesus” we possess “wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). The “love of God” is ours “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39). We have “now no condemnation,” because we are “in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). We are “a new creation,” since we are “in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17). We who once were “far off have been brought near” to God “in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:13). “God in Christ” has forgiven us of all our sins (Eph 4:32).

Clearly, our union with Christ is an all-encompassing aspect of our salvation. Now we want to drill down into the application of redemption in more detail.

The *Ordo Salutis* (“Order of Salvation”)

Beginning in the 1700s, theologians began to speak of an *ordo salutis*, Latin for “order of salvation.” Yet, the phrase is not used in

¹² Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 59; Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 165.

Hodge's 19th century *Systematic Theology*. Even in Bavinck, the phrase does not seem to have acquired its full status as a technical term of systematics, though conceptually it is there even in Medieval works. In Berkhof and other 20th century works, the phrase is used as a regular part of the theological vocabulary. Berkhof says, "The *ordo salutis* describes the process by which the work of salvation, wrought in Christ, is subjectively realized in the hearts and lives of sinners."¹³

Berkhof speaks to the issue of whether the Bible gives us an "order of salvation." On one hand it does not, since no passage presents all the various works of the Spirit that combine to bring us to Christ and keep us in Christ. And yet, the Bible does two things which allow us to speak of an *ordo salutis*: "(1) It furnishes us with a very full and rich enumeration of the operations of the Holy Spirit in applying the work of Christ to individual sinners"; and "(2) It indicates in many passages and in various ways the relation in which the different movements in the work of redemption stand to each other."¹⁴ Taken together, then, we are on good grounds to articulate an "order of salvation."

In this "process," we can associate some of these with the moment of our conversion (effectual calling, regeneration, faith and conversion, justification, adoption), some later (Spirit baptism, progressive sanctification), and some later still with our resurrection (glorification). At times we are articulating steps in a "process" that are only logically ordered but really simultaneous in time. Effectual calling/regeneration comes before faith, but these are effectively simultaneous within the soul. Still, John Murray is right to say of an individual's experience of redemption: "We must not think of it as one simple and indivisible act. It comprises a series of acts and processes," and it is this series of events we are concerned with in this chapter.¹⁵ They are thus *distinguishable*, even though in the

¹³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 415.

¹⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 416–17.

¹⁵ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 79–80.

salvation of an individual they are *inseparable*. They represent an unbroken and unbreakable chain. This is why the *ordo salutis* (especially as it is presented in Rom 8:28–30) has been called “the golden chain.”¹⁶

One difficulty for us as we try and parse the process of our salvation is that systematic theology uses terms in ways that do not always precisely map on to the Bible’s terminology—even when the same term is being used. As an example, “sanctification” in the Bible often means that definitive act where a person is *set apart by the Holy Spirit to belong to God forever*. This is how it is used in 1 Corinthians 1:2, where Paul speaks of “the church” and “saints” as those “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” More often in Christian discussion, we mean *progressive* sanctification when we speak of sanctification, which is the process of *becoming more holy in our behavior as a result of our conversion to Christ*.

You might argue that making fine distinctions in the steps of our salvation is unnecessary, and that what matters is only that the soul is saved. But once again, we do it because the Bible uses these terms, and we want to understand God’s revelation to us.

Election

Our salvation begins with our eternal election. We dealt with election above in our chapter, “God and His Creation: His Decree, Creation, and Providence.” There I said, “***Election*** refers to God in eternity past choosing some to be saved in Jesus Christ.” This active, personal, and salvific (saving) choosing is what is at the heart of the doctrine of ‘election.’ It is a choice based entirely on his own good pleasure and nothing either good or bad in us. Ephesians 1:4–5 and Romans 9:11–12 were two passages cited there. We could have added John 15:19 where Jesus says to his disciples in the Upper Room, “I chose you out of the world” (John 15:19). And also 1 Peter 2:8, where Peter refers to those who “stumble” over Christ,

¹⁶ E.g., *Canons of Dort*, “Rejection of the Errors” 2 under “Divine Election and Reprobation.”

who is “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense” (citing Isa 8:14) and then says, “They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.” In contrast to this, God's people are “a chosen race” to be “a people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9). In the language of Romans 9:22–24, God “prepared beforehand” some who are to be “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” and some who are “vessels of mercy” who are “prepared beforehand for glory.” All of this is done that God’s “glory” in salvation might be made known (Eph 1:6, 12, 14).

At the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), where the gathered leaders wrote the five points that became what we call “the Five Points of Calvinism,” their first point had to do with “Divine Election and Reprobation.” On God's election, they said,

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath 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. This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally, to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy and for the praise of His glorious grace. (*The Canons of Dort*, I.7)

The glory of unconditional election is that we can know God chose us before we chose him. He loved us before we loved

him. He sought us, long before we sought him. And though there is “no one who seeks for God” (Rom 3:11), there is a God who seeks out his people to redeem them and make them his forever.

General (External) Calling

In the process through which we were saved, a step often included is the “general” or “external call.” This is not *God’s* call referenced in passages like Romans 1:6–7; 8:30; 1 Corinthians 1:1–2; Jude 1:1; Revelation 17:14. God’s call cannot be resisted or disobeyed and is a spiritual call. *The general or external call is what happens in evangelism and the ministry of the church when a person communicates the gospel and invites listeners to believe in Christ.* Throughout the book of Acts, we see examples of the gospel being preached, but the responses vary greatly. In Acts 13:16–47 Paul preaches a thorough unveiling of the good news in Jesus. Some of his Gentile listeners were “rejoicing” at what they heard, and Luke explains that “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). He is alluding to God’s sovereign election here. But these were not the only listeners. There were “Jews” present who not only rejected this good news but “stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:50). They had heard the same external call, but they rejected it fiercely. This external call is not an irresistible one but is quite resistible. Still, it is helpful to realize that for almost all of us, there was some moment when we did hear the gospel message through some means of God’s choosing.

Effectual (Internal) Calling

Effectual calling speaks to the moment when the Holy Spirit speaks the internal, inaudible, spiritual summons of God to come alive in Christ. It is called “effectual” or “internal” calling to distinguish from the “general” and “external” call we referred to in the last section. Where the general call of God can be resisted, the effectual calling of God cannot be. It is like the powerful “Let there be!” directives in creation (Gen 1:3, 6, 13), where things are made, refashioned, and brought to life by the mere word of God. God’s

spiritual summons is like Ezekiel prophesying to the dry bones, and with mere words, the dry bones are formed into persons and then given “breath” to live and become a great army (Ezek 37:1–14). Perhaps the language of “calling” was used originally because of moments in Jesus’s ministry when he “called” the disciples to himself (Matt 4:21; 9:9; Mark 1:20; 3:13). “Calling” is used to describe our spiritual calling to Christ in places like Romans 1:6–7, where we are described as “the called (*klētos*) of Jesus Christ” and the “called saints,” meaning we are “called to belong to Jesus Christ” and “set apart by God to be saints.” In Romans 8:28, this same adjective “called” is used to speak of Christians as “those who are called according to his purpose.” Revelation 17:14 uses the adjective even more vividly: “They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called (*klētos*) and chosen and faithful.”

The verb “call” (*kaleō*) is used in similar fashion to speak of a divine summons of God in Romans 8:29: “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” This verse is a powerful statement on the issue, since it reaches all the way back to our being foreknown and predestined by God (Rom 8:29) and all the way ahead to when we are “glorified.” So certain are all these steps in our salvation, that they are written in the aorist, a past tense that makes it sound as if they have already happened! If we go to the end, it speaks of God’s elect being “glorified.” Who will be “glorified”? Those who are “justified.” Who will be “justified”? Those who are “called”? Who are “called”? Those who are “predestined.” The “called” does not include everyone but only those who were “predestined” to be saved and who are certain to be “glorified.” Romans 8:30 has been called “the golden chain” because of how it speaks of an unbreakable chain of events more precious than all the treasure in the world. In 1 Corinthians 1:9, Paul says we were “called into the fellowship of his Son.” We are to remain where we were when God “called” us to himself (1 Cor 7:18,

20–24). Abandoning the gospel is said to be abandoning “him who called you in the grace of Christ” (Gal 1:6; cf. 5:8). Our life is to be marked by living consistently with “the calling to which you have been called” (Eph 4:1), which includes being “called to the one hope that belongs to your call” (4:4). Paul says that God “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace” (2 Tim 1:9).

This “effectual calling” is related to one of the “five points of Calvinism,” the one we call “irresistible grace.” The “grace” that God speaks into our lives at this moment of “effectual calling” is not a grace that can be resisted. But more accurately, the issue is that we will not *want* to resist it. And because we will not *want* to resist it, we will not resist it. It is a grace that makes unreceptive hearts receptive to his invitation to salvation. It is a grace that makes a heart that will not seek after God (Rom 3:11) into one that desperately seeks after him. We can see the subtlety of God’s grace in Acts 16 with Lydia. Luke writes that “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14). Earlier in Acts, this irresistible grace is there as Gentiles listen to Paul “and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). The moment of transformation can be described this way: “Through this special call the Holy Spirit performs a work of grace within the sinner which inevitably brings him to faith in Christ. The inward change wrought in the elect sinner enables him to understand and believe spiritual truth; in the spiritual realm he is given the seeing eye and the hearing ear. The Spirit creates within him a new heart or a new nature.”¹⁷ Our next section will examine this change in our hearts in more detail.

Regeneration

As we indicated, regeneration is the result of God’s effectual calling. To use the language of Ezekiel 36:26, ***regeneration*** is

¹⁷ David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R, 1963), 48.

where we are given “a new heart,” when our “heart of stone” is removed by the Spirit of God and is replaced by “a heart of flesh.” In the language of John 1:13, it is where we are “born...of God.” In the language of 2 Corinthians 5:17, it is when we become “a new creation” in Christ, where “the old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Such language is metaphorical, of course, but it does capture the radicalness and newness of the inner transformation that the Spirit works in us. We are not what we were and become something different. The Spirit does this work—not in a coercive way that destroys our internal resistance but in a monergistic (“one-worker”) way nonetheless that brings about a change in our wills as well. With our changed will, we desire God, we want God, we pursue God.

At this point we meet a profound difference between Reformed and non-Reformed approaches to this heart change in regeneration. For the Reformed, it is a categorical and sweeping truth that before the Spirit’s work, we are “dead in...trespasses and sins” and come to life in Christ only by the Spirit’s work of regeneration (Eph 2:1). The Spirit brings about “regeneration” and this regeneration brings about the faith we exercise to be justified. Evidence for this is in 1 John 5:1, “everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.” Herman Ridderbos notes that such a passage makes it “absurd” to say that we can choose or not choose whether to be born-again.¹⁸ “Born of God” is a perfect passive verb. Something has happened *to us* and was not accomplished *by us*. And as a perfect verb, this thing that happened *to us* has ongoing effects experienced *in us*. The verse points to two of these effects. We “believe that Jesus is the Christ,” and we “love the Father.” In other words, we are saved! That is the unavoidable, irresistible consequence of being “born of God” (i.e., born-again, regenerated).

¹⁸ Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 47.

Yet, for the non-Reformed and especially the Arminian view, God extends to *all people* something that is called “prevenient grace,” which is enough of his grace to regain free will and choose Christ but not so much grace that we certainly *will* choose Christ. We become like Adam in the Garden, able to choose or not choose to follow Christ.¹⁹ For the Arminian, *grace is always resistible*. The problem with such a view is the absence of any biblical text to support it. The idea is a logical deduction that gets inserted into the Bible’s revelation, so protect their understanding of God’s love and man’s free will. Of course, grace preceding our response of faith is presented in the Bible, but the very nuanced understanding of “prevenient grace” I am describing is not. Nuances and deductions are part of systematic theology, of course. But it is important to call it what it is, in this case.

Arminian regeneration contradicts 1 John 5:1 as we unpacked it above. It also contradicts other passages in John’s writings that speak of the results of being born again. Those who are “born of God” do not continue in sin (1 John 3:9), they love God (1 John 4:7), and they know God (1 John 4:7). Those who are “born again” enter “the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). They can also be said to be “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). It is a way of being born entirely different from natural birth, which can occur by the decision of a couple (John 1:13). Though not really the point of John 1:13, it is a reasonable implication of the verse that a person’s individual will is not the decisive issue with spiritual rebirth. It is to be “born...of God” in a sovereign, monergistic (“one worker”) manner. Another text speaks to the issue more indirectly: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44). This “drawing” of the Father involves the Spirit’s work of regeneration and is not a “drawing” that can fail to achieve its objective. John’s writings paint a vivid picture of what we *will* do when we are born again, not

¹⁹ For one presentation of this issue, see Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 68–69.

just what we are *able* to do if we happen to *choose* it. He is saying more. Of course, ability is necessary for us to choose the right path. But John is telling us that we are not only given the ability, but we will exercise that ability and then choose God. That is what a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26) will do when our heart of stone has been removed. Other passages that speak of faith as the result of our heart change include Romans 10:17, “so faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” The spiritual, effectual “word of Christ” comes and changes unbelief to “faith.” We can add 1 Corinthians 12:3 as well, “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit works first, and our cry of “Jesus is Lord!” is the result. That is the Reformed doctrine of regeneration, and the teaching of God’s Word.

Conversion (Faith and Repentance)

As we said, the unstoppable result of regeneration is ***conversion***, *where we exercise personal faith and repentance*. This is really shorthand for *faith and repentance*, since the two are inseparable: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). At times the condition for salvation is presented as “repentance” (Matt 4:17; Luke 5:32; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 2 Tim 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9), though most of the time it is said to be faith (John 3:16; 20:30–31; Acts 8:12; 11:17; 16:31; Rom 1:16–17; 3:22; 10:9–10). Though faith has a kind of foundational position, the two are really a unity, since saving faith will *always* be followed by repentance, and no repentance is possible apart from faith.

Repentance means to turn both away from something and toward something. With respect to conversion, ***repentance means turning away from our sins and a self-directed life and turn toward Christ as our Lord and Savior and Master***. Repentance is behavioral, but it is also a change in our disposition and conviction. It means we adopt a new attitude toward our sins and Christ. Our

sins are seen for what they are, and we want to *turn away from* them. Likewise, Christ is seen for who he is, and we want to *turn toward* him. When you see repentance in this light, it is clear why it overlaps so much with faith.

Faith is complex. We know from James 2:14–26 that there is such a thing as “dead faith,” which means a faith that is not accompanied by good “works.” Like we said already, true saving faith will always be accompanied by repentance, which means good works. In James 2 the apostle writes that “even the demons believe—and shudder!” (James 2:19). James rightly asks, “Can that faith save him?” (James 2:15). We are interested in *saving faith*, not dead faith. What is saving faith?

True saving faith is an accurate knowledge about Christ we believe to be true and important and that leads us to place all of our trust in Christ. John Murray writes that true saving “faith is knowledge, conviction, and trust.”²⁰ Letham refers to “the elements of saving faith” using the traditional terms “knowledge (*notitia*),” “assent (*assensus*),” and “trust (*fiducia*).” He notes that “all three of these elements are present together in some degree or other,” even if the amount of each might vary.²¹ Seeing these three aspects of faith is helpful. True faith must include a true knowledge about Christ as he is presented in the Bible. Faith is not an exhaustive knowledge of Christ, since the finite can never comprehend the infinite. And yet, faith must believe the right things about the right Person, or it is not saving faith. Remember, many religions have a belief about Christ, but there is a basic falsehood about what they believe to be true about Christ. Their belief does not rest in true knowledge of Jesus. True faith believes in true things about Christ. It believes the basic presentation of him in the Bible, which would also include believing in God as Creator, God as Trinity, the Bible as the Word of God, and the reality of sin and judgment. With Christ, true faith believes that he is fully God and fully man, that he

²⁰ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 110.

²¹ Letham, *Systematic Theology*, 672–73.

was born to Mary, fully obedient throughout all his life, that he truly died on a Roman cross, that he was buried and then raised from death three days later. Faith would also believe that he ascended to heaven and will return again to judge the living and the dead. To understand these things fully is not possible and certainly not necessary for saving faith, but to have some knowledge of these things is essential for our faith to be saving faith.

Second, this knowledge about Christ is not something we actively doubt to be true, but there is a “conviction” (Murray) that these facts are true, important, and have a personal connection to me. I have knowledge of a great many things that feels relatively unimportant to me. Saving faith understands the facts about Christ and understands them to be true and important. And then third, these facts and my sense of them leads me to place my confidence and trust in Christ.

We can think of saving faith is like an engineer’s relationship to a foot-bridge thousands of feet over a canyon. The engineer understands the science of bridges and made elaborate drawings for this particular bridge based on this knowledge. Then the bridge was built with great effort, expense, and time. His conviction about the facts of structures and load bearing led to the building of the bridge. But the final test is when the engineer himself walks across the bridge with the canyon floor thousands of feet below. If the bridge fails, he dies. His faith in the bridge means he *trusts in it to support him and protect him from certain death*. Saving faith in Christ is like that. We know true things about him, we are convinced these things are true and important to us, and we have placed all our trust in him because of it. We are often not aware of these steps or elements of faith, but for faith to be true faith, it will include all three aspects.

John Calvin emphasized these ideas in a slightly different manner in his *Institutes*. He spoke of faith this way: “Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds

and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”²² “Firm and certain” means there is always assurance in the DNA of true and saving faith. It is a leaning into Christ with a confidence that he is for us and receives us as his own. This is not to deny the subjective aspect of assurance where it seems to come and go, rise and fall according to our whimsical hearts and inconsistent obedience. Yet, because faith implies “trust” in Christ, there can be no faith without real “trust.” Later he says, “Faith is a knowledge of the divine benevolence toward us and a sure persuasion of its truth.”²³ Calvin adds a helpful dimension in pointing out that saving faith is keenly aware of God’s “divine benevolence” toward us and feels a “sure persuasion” of that divine favor and love. Faith understands at a deep level that *I belong to Christ, and he belongs to me. I am his, and he is mine.*

Justification

In the “order of salvation,” what follows conversion (faith and repentance) is justification. ***Justification*** is *God’s declaration that we are righteous in his sight.* Though English hides it just a bit, the words in our New Testament for “justification” (“just,” “justify”) and “righteousness” (“right,” “righteous”) are from the same Greek root, *dik-*. The Greek for “justify” is *dikaioō*, and the Greek for “righteousness” is *dikaioṣunē*. We would naturally assume that God only declares obedient people to be “righteous,” and for him to do otherwise would be unjust and wrong. He is the righteous Judge, after all. Yet, the New Testament is clear that we are justified (declared righteous) *by faith*. Many statements in the New Testament confirm this idea. Paul says our “righteousness” in Christ is “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:22). Later in Romans he will say that “with the heart one believes and is justified” (Rom 10:10). This mirrors what we see with Abraham, for “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him

²² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.2.7.

²³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.2.12.

as righteousness” (Rom 4:3). Because justification is by faith and not by works, the gospel is the amazing truth that God “justifies the ungodly” (Rom 4:5) and it is “by his grace as a gift” (Rom 3:24). In Galatians 2:16 Paul will make this absolutely clear using a surprising amount of redundancy, “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Other passages possess the equivalent idea but use slightly different language. Psalm 32:1–2 is cited by Paul in Romans 4:7–8, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” “Righteousness” is not mentioned, but the passage describes those who are “blessed” by God, and who could be blessed but the righteous? Yet, the blessed ones here are not sinless. Their righteousness must come in another way than perfect obedience to God’s revealed will. A parallel idea from LXX Isaiah 28:16 is that “whoever believes in him will not be ashamed,” which is cited in 1 Peter 2:6 and Romans 9:33. Faith in God, which means faith in his mercy and promises and Messiah, makes us those who are righteous and thus justified, blessed, and unafraid of being “ashamed” in any future judgment.

Yet, how can it be that God can declare the “ungodly” to be righteous (Rom 4:5) and yet not be unrighteous himself? For any human judge to do this, he is committing an act of great injustice: “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD” (Prov 17:15). The missing link when it comes to our salvation is what is called “imputed righteousness.” Faith unites us with Christ, and when we are united with Christ, our sins are “imputed” (counted) to him and his righteousness is “imputed” (counted) to us. That is what Paul means when he says, “Christ Jesus...became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). Our “righteousness” is not a righteousness we have *achieved*,

but it is a righteousness we have *received* through faith in Christ. He achieved it and then gives it to us as a gift. John Murray writes, “Justification is therefore a constitutive act whereby the righteousness of Christ is imputed to our account and we are accordingly accepted as righteous in God’s sight.”²⁴

This understanding of justification is far apart from the Roman Catholic idea of justification. Where the key idea for the Protestant Reformed is the idea of an “*imputed* righteousness,” for Roman Catholics the key idea is an “*infused* righteousness.” The word “infused” appears often in the Council of Trent, which in some ways is the great response of the Roman Catholic Church to the Reformation, occurring in the 1540s on the heels of it. “Infused” means that Christ puts his righteousness into us by grace, but then with this new infused righteousness we have new ability to obey. With that new ability to obey, we become more righteous in our behavior and then on the last day we might have sufficient righteousness to then be declared righteous in God’s sight. I say “might,” because for the Roman Catholic, it is wrong to have real “assurance” that we are among God’s elect. In the “Sixth Session” of Trent where “Justification” was discussed, they call it “rash presumptuousness” to believe you are among God’s elect.²⁵ This directly contradicts the New Testament, which assumes you can “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith” (2 Cor 13:5). Since, for the Roman Catholic we are ultimately judged by our works and not on the basis of Christ’s own righteousness, it makes sense they would say, “If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God; let him be anathema” (Canon 11). Notice

²⁴ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 124.

²⁵ Council Fathers, *General Council of Trent, 1545–1563 A.D.*, trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), VI.12.

the “anathema” at the end. This is a very strong statement, wishing the person “accursed” and separated from Christ who claims such a thing. These Catholics were not mincing words regarding the Reformed Protestants. The very heart of the Reformed gospel is to the Roman Catholic something worthy of the fires of hell. Officially, the Roman Catholic Church has not retracted these statements, and they remain official church teaching. Justification understood this way is a recipe for constant anxiety, since we can never know if we have obeyed enough, and it turns the rest and assurance of the New Testament upside-down. What is to give us peace (Rom 5:1; 14:17; Matt 11:28–30) now gives us fear; what is to give us deep gratitude for undeserved mercy (Eph 2:4–9) now turns our attention on ourselves and our behavior to see if we measure up.

Martin Luther came of age when this Roman Catholic understanding of salvation and justification was in the air. It drove him almost mad as he tried to achieve peace with God through his obedience. In the mercy of God, God showed him that the error in his thinking had to do with this issue of how a person is made right (justified) with God. He realized that “the righteousness of God” in Romans in passages like Romans 1:16–17 was not a standard of behavior we achieve but it is a gift we receive. In memorable language he speaks of his breakthrough:

There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here

I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.²⁶

By such a justification and such an imputed righteousness, the glory and grace of our God is revealed, and he becomes “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

Adoption

Adoption is the next step in the order of salvation, and we place it here really by working through the logic of the steps in our salvation. Our *spiritual adoption* is a new status we receive from God whereby we become children of God, and in this adoption, we also receive the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of adoption in whom we cry out “Abba! Father!” With adoption, God becomes our Father and we become his children. It makes sense to think of this as following after justification, since achieving a positional righteous standing through justification would seem to precede the relational new standing that is ours in adoption. Hoekema actually places adoption within his chapter on justification and calls it one of the “positive benefits of justification.”²⁷ Similarly, in the *Westminster Confession*, *Savoy Declaration*, the 1689, and the *Trinity Confession of Faith*, the chapter on “adoption” follows immediately after the chapter on “justification.” All four of these confessions communicate the same glorious truths:

In and for the sake of his only Son Jesus Christ, God has graciously granted the gift of adoption to all those who are justified. By this, they are numbered with and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God. They have his name put upon them, receive the Spirit of adoption, and have access to the throne of grace with boldness. They are enabled to cry, “Abba, Father.”

²⁶ Martin Luther, “Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings,” in *Career of the Reformer IV*, vol. 34 of *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1960), 336–37.

²⁷ Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 185.

They are pitied, protected, provided for, and disciplined 10 by him as by a father. They are never cast off but sealed to the day of redemption and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation. (*TCOF* 12)

The paragraph is summarizing a great many biblical texts, ones like Ephesians 1:5, “He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ”; and Galatians 4:4–5, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

Sinclair Ferguson points to the great assurance that our adoption is to produce. Remember, in Romans 8:15 Paul said that we have now received “the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Such a cry is a cry of total confidence, total assurance, total rest in our place as God’s children. Ferguson reflects on this,

Adoption is not a change in nature, but a change in status. If we fail to see this truth, we will miss the significance of our adoption. Similarly, if we think of adoption as based on anything we have done, or on what we are, then we will jeopardize our assurance of God’s Fatherly relation to us. Adoption is, instead, a declaration God makes about us. It is irreversible, dependent entirely upon his gracious choice, in which he says: ‘You are my son, today I have brought you into my family.’”²⁸

Adoption in the Roman world had a particular meaning. Trevor Burke helps us to see why this is important for us,

The resulting effect of adoption was to place the adopted person for all legal purposes in the same position as if he had been a natural child in the

²⁸ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Children of the Living God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1987), 36.

potestas [paternal authority] of the adopter. The adopted son took his adoptive father's name and rank. He acquired rights of succession on death in his new family and lost all such rights as he had in his old family.²⁹

J.I. Packer in *Knowing God* helps us to see another side of adoption: *adoption is greater than justification*. Of course, the two are inseparable, and there is no adoption without justification. But note what he says,

Adoption...is the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification....Adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves....To be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the father is greater.³⁰

Now, it might seem that we are sons *and daughters*, and in some sense we are. Yet, the consistent emphasis on being a “son of God” has to do with inheritance. The son received the inheritance, so to be called “sons of God” (Matt 5:9; Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26) means you will receive a future inheritance from God. For a girl, though, it is not wrong to think of yourself as a “daughter of God,” so long as you note the significance of your “sonship” with respect to your future inheritance.

One thing about the Bible's treatment of adoption is that it seems to have two aspects to it, one objective and the other subjective. That is, like Ferguson indicates, it is indeed a new “status” we have with God. We are no longer his enemies, but we are his adopted *sons*. Our adoption is certainly a new status before God. And yet, the Bible also points to the subjective side of our adoption.³¹ We are to feel and think differently as a result of it.

²⁹ Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 69.

³⁰ Packer, *Knowing God*, 186, 187, 188.

³¹ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 132–34.

Paul’s statement about “the Spirit of adoption” producing in us the cry of “Abba! Father!” is a statement about a new assurance and confidence we have, not just a new status. There is a fascinating presentation of this in Galatians 4:4–6,

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

What is fascinating here is the order in which things happen. We are redeemed *so that* we might receive “adoption as sons” (v. 5). By the end of verse 5 we are now adopted as sons. But then in verse 6, Paul writes that “because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’” We are sons *and then* the Spirit of sonship is given to us. Commentators dispute whether Paul means a chronological order here, but the verse does allow that our experience of adoption to happen in this two-step process.³² The distinctive of the first step would be a new status as sons, and the second step would point to a new assurance as sons. We will say more about this below when we talk about Spirit baptism. In this discussion the important element is that salvation means God is now “our Father in heaven” (Matt 6:9) who invites us to rest in his love for us, care for us, and who also encourages us to bring all of our needs and requests to him. We know him as Creator and Judge and Almighty God, but we also know him as “Abba! Father!”

Progressive Sanctification

The next step after adoption in the order of salvation is progressive sanctification. ***Progressive sanctification*** is the gradual process by which a Christian becomes more and more like Christ in their character. Where other steps of our salvation happen

³² See for example footnote 1220 in Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 345.

instantaneously, like justification, a distinctive of progressive sanctification is that it happens gradually over a span of time. Salvation changes our relationship with sin, and this is instantaneous. In Romans 6, Paul speaks of the way a Christian has “died to sin,” and he even asks, “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom 6:2). Since we have died with sin, we are no longer enslaved to it. Union with Christ does this, and it is a permanent change. The importance of this is that a Christian can never say, “I couldn’t help it, I had to sin.” Romans 6 is the definitive statement that we are not and never will be again a slave to sin. And yet, sin remains a force in our lives, to such an extent that 1 John reminds us, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8, 10). Sin *remains*, even though we have died to it in a definitive manner. And because sin remains, our battle against sin will continue until we see Jesus face-to-face. On that day, “we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). The battle in this life is indeed a battle, which is why Paul says, “the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Gal 5:17).

Progressive sanctification in older writings is often referred to as simply “sanctification.” Chapter thirteen in the *Westminster Confession* (also the *Savoy Declaration* and 1689) is named “sanctification,” but is referring to “progressive sanctification.” Yet, in the Bible there is a “sanctification” that happens with our regeneration and instantly. It is typically called “definitive sanctification.” The word “sanctification” has to do with being “set apart” for God and his purposes. The verb “sanctify” and noun “sanctification” are connected to the words related to “holy.” “Holy” things and people in the Old Testament were “sanctified to the LORD,” as a vivid reminder that God himself was to be “sanctified” in the eyes and hearts of all people (Exod 29:43; 31:13; Lev 10:3; 20:8). This aspect of being “set apart” is behind some of

the uses of “sanctification” in the New Testament. Paul says the church is all “those sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2), and he refers to Christians as formerly in sin “but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

John Frame says, “the instantaneous beginning of sanctification is called *definitive sanctification*, contrasted with the ongoing process of *progressive sanctification*. The first is a single act of God that happens at a single point in time. The second is a continuing work of God with which he calls us to cooperate.”³³ The ongoing work of becoming set apart for God is captured in 1 Thessalonians where Paul says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess 4:3), and prays, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23). Frame is right to point out our initial being set apart as a work God does sovereignly and directly where our increasing in holiness is a work with which we participate. It is his power always, but it is his power working in and through us. We get a vivid sense of the combination of God’s work and ours in Philippians 2:12–13, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Perseverance

God’s grace in our lives is a saving grace, and it is also a *preserving* and *protecting* grace. Those whom he saves he will keep in that salvation. Jesus encouraged his disciples as the Good Shepherd, and told them, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch

³³ Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 986.

them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:28-29). Paul says, "he who began a good work in your will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). Those who have trusted in Christ for salvation will continue in that belief until they see him face-to-face. The name typically attached to this doctrine is "perseverance." *The doctrine of perseverance is the truth that God in his grace will empower his people to persevere in their faith and repentance until they see Jesus face-to-face.* Or in the words of the TCOF:

Those whom God has accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace but will certainly persevere to the end (TCOF 19.1; cf. WCF 17.1; 1689 17.1).

The Spirit in us is even called "seal" and "the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Eph 1:13-14). Thus, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all said to be engaged in keeping us until the end. His saving grace in us will not fail to accomplish its purpose!

Now there are places that seem to indicate faith can be lost. Jesus speaks of seed falling on "rocky ground" where the word is received "with joy" but then "they fall away" (Mark 4:16-17). Paul says he hopes the Corinthians have not "believed in vain" (1 Cor 15:12). And then most famous in this regard is Hebrews 6:1-9, which speaks of tasting "the heavenly gift" and even sharing "in the Holy Spirit" but then falling away. Such passages are not simple to navigate, and we need to be honest as we deal with them. At a basic level, we need to acknowledge that they sure *sound* like a Christian can fall away from the Lord. We can add to this the people we have known who seemed to be believers but then stopped following Christ. Such examples seem to confirm that Christians can indeed "fall away." We can say a few things in response.

First, to think through the issue of Christians falling away from the faith, we need to remember that the Bible is God's Word

and so without error and without contradiction. God is not a person and so cannot and will not ever contradict himself. He is always fully consistent, and his Word is the same. Regarding perseverance, then, the passages which say a Christian cannot be lost (John 10:28–29) do not contradict those that seem to indicate a person can follow Christ for a time and then stop following Christ.

Second, it is simply true at a basic and factual level, that if a person does not persevere in faith until the end, they will indeed be lost forever. The warning passages have a place in our Christian journeys, because they remind us of the need to persevere in our faith. We are not to treat our faith casually and flippantly, as if absolutely no effort on our part is required to maintain our Christian faith and repentance. God’s sovereign and sustaining grace is never meant to make us presumptuous or indifferent to Christ and what he asks of us. In other words, let the warning passages inspire you to persistent faith and obedience.

Third, the warning passages remind us that a person can experience a lot of what Christianity offers and still not be converted. A person might be miraculously healed, sense God’s presence in a vivid manner, be overwhelmed at an evangelistic meeting, and give half their sizable fortune to the church—and yet not be internally regenerated. As people, we are emotional and psychological creatures. We can be self-deceived, temporarily persuaded, and elaborate pretenders—to ourselves and to others.

Fourth, we need to remember what regeneration is. When God’s eternal election is exercised in our lives through his effectual call, the regeneration we experience is not something that can be undone. It can no more be undone than our physical birth can be undone, and we return to the womb. It is not just a subtle change like changing our mind about the greatest basketball player ever (is it Michael Jordan or LeBron James?). We change our mind when we get new data that affects our decision, at least sometimes. But regeneration is a creative act like God creating the universe in the first place. Paul speaks of us as “a new creature” (2 Cor 5:17) when

we are born again. Such an act of God's power can never be undone. We cannot be un-created and un-born and un-regenerated.

Fifth, we can keep all these ideas together if we think of those who "fall away" as those who were only superficially living a Christian life and not truly converted. Like Judas, they appeared to be saved but were not. Usually when someone does prove later to be an unbeliever, the signs of their superficial faith are visible in hindsight. But this is not always true. Sometimes the only proof that they were never believers is that they are not a believer today. Of course, self-deception can work in different ways. At times a person thinks he is a Christian but is not, and at times a person does not think he is a Christian but is. Perhaps the so-called unbeliever is not rejecting Christ but is bitter at God for a tragic loss or bitter disappointment. This can cause someone to stop praying, attending church, or identifying as a Christian. But such a person might just be a disobedient Christian and not a true unbeliever. As in a human relationship, bitterness at someone can be a sign that we still deeply care about the person and the relationship.

Sixth and finally, how can we be sure we are in the faith and not one of those who are self-deceived? Paul said, "examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith" (2 Cor 13:5). John says he wrote his first letter "to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). These imply that knowing we are in Christ is possible. How can we? 1 John is a profoundly helpful book in this regard. It presents principles to help us "know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). First, our faith is in the true Christ, the one who came in the flesh and yet is the true Son of God (1 John 4:2; 5:1). Second, we love God and his God's people (1 John 4:7). Third, we are walking in obedience, even if an obedience that is imperfect (1 John 3:6; 1:8–10). Such assessments are always imperfect, since faith can feel hot or cold, our obedience can be better and worse, God can

feel distant or close. And yet, these basic tests are good places to start in determining if our faith is genuine.³⁴

Glorification

When discussing the order of salvation, the final step explored is usually “glorification.” *Glorification is the final stage of our salvation where we see Jesus face-to-face and become like him, living forever in a glorified body and soul without sin, sickness, death, or any of the weaknesses that are the result of sin and the fall.* I will cover this topic only briefly here, because it will be dealt with in detail when we cover “personal eschatology.” Glorification refers to the final stage of redemption, the great day of our resurrection. At our physical death, Christians will experience the glory of departing and being “with Christ” (Phil 1:23), something the thief on the cross experienced the moment he died (Luke 23:43). The time when our soul is with Christ but our body decaying in the ground is a temporary state, even if it will be wonderful. The final state for Christians is when our body is reunited with our soul at the resurrection. Murray makes the edifying observation that where death can be experienced individually and a person can go to be with the Lord alone, our resurrection will be something that all the people of God experience together: “All together will be glorified with Christ.”³⁵ All believers will receive a glorified body on that final day. It is a body Paul says is “imperishable,” “raised in glory,” “raised in power,” and it is a heavenly body and no mere body of dust (1 Cor 15:42–49). In our glorified body and soul, we will never again cry, die, mourn, or experience pain (Rev 21:4). Forever, “we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). What a day that will be! I will hold off saying more until a later chapter.

³⁴ For a good popular work on assurance of faith see Greg Gilbert, *Assured: Discover Grace, Let Go of Guilt, and Rest in Your Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019). For a detailed look at the topic of falling away from Hebrews 6 see Wayne A. Grudem, “Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from Hebrews 6:4–6 and the Other Warning Passages of Hebrews,” in *The Grace of God and the Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 133–82.

³⁵ Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, 175.

Conclusion

This study of the order of salvation has tried to explain a lot of different theological ideas and biblical truths. And yet, all of this is really saying one single thing. In the words of J.I. Packer, it is saying, “God saves sinners.” I will let Packer have the last word.

To Calvinism there is really only *one* point to be made in the field of soteriology: the point that *God saves sinners*. *God*—the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son and Spirit; three Persons working together in sovereign wisdom, power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people, the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father's will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing. *Saves*—does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory: plans, achieves and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies. *Sinners*—men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, unable to lift a finger to do God's will or better their spiritual lot....Sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present and future, is of the Lord, to whom be glory for ever; amen.³⁶

³⁶ J. I. Packer, “Introductory Essay,” in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1959), 6.