

Efficacious Grace

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1. TEACHING OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

THE Westminster Confession states the doctrine of Efficacious Grace thus: —
“All those whom God has predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it.¹

And the Shorter Catechism, in answer to the question ‘What is effectual calling?’ says, “Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely

¹ Chapter X, Section 1 and 2.

offered to us in the Gospel.”²

2. NECESSITY FOR THE CHANGE

The merits of Christ’s obedience and suffering are sufficient for, adapted to, and freely offered to all men. The question then arises, Why is one saved, and another lost? What causes some men to repent and believe, while others, with the same external privileges, reject the Gospel and continue in impenitence and unbelief? The Calvinist says that it is God who makes this difference, that he efficaciously persuades some to come to Him; but the Arminian ascribes it to the men themselves.

As Calvinists we hold that the condition of men since the fall is such that if left to themselves they would continue in their state of rebellion and refuse all offers of salvation. Christ would then have died in vain. But since it was promised that He should see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, the effects of that sacrifice have not been left suspended upon the whim of man’s changeable and sinful will. Rather, the work of God in redemption has been rendered effective through the mission of the Holy Spirit who so operates on the chosen people that they are brought to repentance and faith, and thus made heirs of eternal life.

The teaching of the Scriptures is such that we must say that man in his natural state is radically corrupt, and that he can never become holy and happy through any power of his own. He is spiritually dead, and must be saved by Christ if at all. Common reason tells us that if a man is so fallen so to be at enmity with God, that enmity must be removed before he can have any desire to do God’s will. If a sinner is to desire redemption through Christ, he must receive a new disposition. He must be born again, and from above (John 3:8). It is easy enough for us to see that the Devil and the demons would have to be thus sovereignly changed if they were ever to be saved; yet the innate sinful principles which actuate fallen man are of the same nature, although not yet so intense, as are those which actuate fallen angels. If man is dead in sin, then nothing short of this supernatural life-giving power of the Holy Spirit will ever cause him to do that which is spiritually good. If it were possible for him to enter heaven while still possessed of the old nature, then, for him, heaven would be as bad as hell; for he would be out of harmony with his environment. He would loathe its very atmosphere and would be in misery when in the presence of God. Hence the necessity for the inward work of the Holy Spirit.

In the nature of the case the first movement toward salvation can no more come from man than his body if dead could originate its own life. Regeneration is a

² Question 31.

sovereign gift of God, graciously bestowed on those whom He has chosen; and for this great recreative work God alone is competent. It cannot be granted on the foresight of anything good in the subjects of this saving change, for in their unregenerate nature they are incapable of acts with right motives toward God; hence none could possibly be foreseen. In his unregenerate state man never adequately realizes his utterly helpless condition. He imagines that he is able to reform himself and turn to God if he chooses. He even imagines that he is able to counteract the designs of infinite Wisdom, and to defeat the agency of Omnipotence itself. As Dr. Warfield says, "Sinful man stands in need, not of inducements or assistance to save himself, but precisely of saving; and Jesus Christ has come not to advise, or urge, or woo, or help him to save himself, but to save him."

3. AN INWARD CHANGE WROUGHT BY SUPERNATURAL POWER

In the Scriptures this change is called a regeneration (Titus 3:5), a spiritual resurrection which is wrought by the same mighty power with which God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead (Eph. 1:19,20), a calling out of darkness into God's marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9), a passing out of death into life (John 5:24), a new birth (John 3:3), a making alive (Col. 2:13), a taking away of the heart of stone and giving of a heart of flesh (Ezek. 11:19), and the subject of the change *is* said to be a new creature (II Cor. 5:17). Such descriptions completely refute the Arminian notion that regeneration is primarily man's act, induced by moral persuasion or the mere influence of the truth as presented in a general way by the Holy Spirit. And just because this change is produced by power from on high which is the living spring of a new and recreated life, it is irresistible and permanent.

The regeneration of the soul is something which is wrought in us, and not an act performed by us. It is an instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is not even a thing of which we are conscious at the moment it occurs, but rather something which lies lower than consciousness. At the moment of its occurrence the soul is as passive as was Lazarus when he was called back to life by Jesus. Concerning the soul in regeneration Charles Hodge says:

It is the subject, and not the agent of the change. The soul cooperates, or, is active in what precedes and in what follows the change, but the change itself is something experienced, and not something done. The blind and the lame, who came to Christ, may have undergone much labor in getting into His presence, and they joyfully exerted the new power imparted to them, but they were entirely passive in the moment of the healing. They in no way co-

operated in the production of that effect. The same is true in regeneration.³

And again he says:

The same doctrine on this subject is taught in other words when regeneration is declared to be a new birth. At birth the child enters upon a new state of existence. Birth is not its own act. It is born. It comes from a state of darkness, in which the objects adapted to its nature cannot act on it or awaken its activities. As soon as it comes into the world all its faculties are awakened; it sees, feels, and hears, and gradually unfolds all its faculties as a rational and moral, as well as a physical being. The scriptures teach that it is thus in regeneration. The soul enters upon a new state. It is introduced into a new world. A whole class of objects before unknown or unappreciated are revealed to it, and exercise upon it their appropriate influence.⁴

Regeneration involves an essential change of character. It is a making the tree good in order that the fruit may be good. As a result of this change, the person passes from a state of unbelief to one of saving faith, not by any process of research or argument, but of inward experience. And as we had nothing to do with our physical birth, but received it as a sovereign gift of God, we likewise have nothing to do with our spiritual birth but receive it also as a sovereign gift. Each occurred without any exercise of our own power, and even without our consent being asked. We no more resist the latter than we resist the former. And as we go ahead and live our own natural lives after being born, so we go ahead and work out our own salvation after being regenerated.

The Scriptures pointedly teach that the prerequisite for entrance into the Kingdom of God is a radical transformation wrought by the Spirit of God Himself. And since this work on the soul is sovereign and supernatural it may be granted or withheld according to the good pleasure of God. Consequently, salvation, to whomsoever it may be granted, is entirely of grace. The born-again Christian comes to see that God is in reality “the author and perfecter” of his faith (Heb. 12:2), and that in this respect He has done a work for him which He has not done for his unconverted neighbor. In answer to the question, “Who maketh thee to differ? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7), he replies that it is God who has put the difference between men, especially between the redeemed and the lost. If any person believes, it is because God has quickened him; and if any person fails to believe, it is because God has withheld that grace which He was under no obligation to bestow. Strictly speaking there is no such

³ Systematic Theology, II, p. 688.

⁴ Systematic Theology, II, p. 35.

thing as a “self-made” man; the highest type of man is the one who can say with Paul, “By the grace of God I am what I am.”

When Jesus said, “Lazarus, come forth,” a mighty power went along with the command and gave effect to it. Lazarus, of course, was not conscious of any other than his own power working in him; but when he later understood the situation he undoubtedly saw that he had been called into life wholly by divine power. God’s power was primary, his was secondary, and would never have been exerted except in response to the divine. It is in this manner that every redeemed soul is brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. And just as the dead Lazarus was first called back into life and then breathed and ate, so the soul dead in sin is first transferred to spiritual life and then exercises faith and repentance and does good works.

Paul emphasized this very point when he said that although Paul might plant and Apollos might water, it was God who gave the increase. Mere human efforts are unavailing. If a crop of wheat is to be raised, man can do only the most external and mechanical things toward that end. It is God who gives the increase through the sovereign control of forces which are entirely outside the sphere of man’s influence. Likewise, in regard to the soul it matters not how eloquent the preacher may be, unless God opens the heart there will be no conversion. Here especially man does only the most external and mechanical things and it is the Holy Spirit who imparts the new principle of spiritual life.

The Scripture doctrine of the fall represents man as morally ruined, unable by nature to do any good thing. The truly converted Christian comes to see his inability and knows that he does not make himself eligible for heaven by his own good works and merits. He realizes that he cannot move spiritually but as he is moved; that like the branches of a tree, he can make no shoot, nor put forth leaves, nor bear fruit, except as he receives sap from the root. Or, as Calvin says, “No man makes himself a sheep, but is created such by divine grace.” The elect hear the Gospel and believe — not always at the first hearing, but at the divinely appointed time — the non-elect hear but disbelieve, not because they lack sufficient evidence, but because their inward nature is opposed to holiness. The reason for the two kinds of response is to be traced to an external source. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh,” Ezek. 36:26. The “heart” in Biblical language includes the whole inner man.

Under the terms of the eternal covenant which was made between the Father and the Son, Christ has been exalted to be the mediatorial Ruler over the whole earth in order that He may direct the developing kingdom. This is one of the rewards of His obedience and suffering. His directing power is exerted through the agency of the Holy Spirit, through whom His purchased redemption is applied to all for whom it was intended and under the precise conditions of time and circumstance predetermined in the covenant. We are told that it is by no ordinary

providence of God that a man believes but by the same mighty power that was exerted when Christ was raised from the dead (Eph. 1:19, 20). As certainly as it was effective in the resurrection of Christ it will be effective when put forth in an individual, whether in a physical or a spiritual resurrection.

The physical and the spiritual worlds are each the creation of God. In the physical world the water is sovereignly changed into wine, and the leper is healed by a touch. The Arminian readily admits God's miraculous power in the physical world; why, then, does he deny it in the spiritual world, as if the spirits of men were beyond His control? We believe that God can change a bad man into a good man when He pleases. That is one form of authority which it is the right of the Creator to exercise over the creature. It is one of the means by which the world is governed; and when God sees that it is best for the welfare of the individual and for the development of His kingdom to thus work, it is not only permissible but right that He should do so. The effect follows immediately upon the volition, as when He said, Let there be light. "The Divine saving act," says Mozley, "is the bestowal of this irresistible grace. The subject of the Divine predetermination is rescued by an act of absolute power from the dominion of sin, dragged from it, as it were, by force, converted, filled with the love of God and his neighbor, and qualified infallibly for a state of ultimate reward."⁵

As the physical eye once blinded cannot be restored to sight by any amount or intensity of light falling upon it, so the soul dead in sin cannot acquire spiritual vision by any amount of Gospel truth presented to it. Unless the surgeon's knife or a miracle restore the eye to its normal condition, sight is impossible; and unless the soul be set right through regeneration it will never comprehend and accept the Gospel truth. In regeneration God bids the sinner live; and immediately he is alive, filled with a new spiritual life. Lydia, the seller of purple in the city of Thyatira, gave heed to the things which were spoken by Paul, because the Lord had first opened her heart (Acts 16:14). Christ taught this same truth when in His intercessory prayer He said concerning Himself that God "gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom thou hast given Him, He should give eternal life," John 17:2; and again, "For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom He will," John 5:21.

Under the covenant made with Adam, man's destiny depended on his own works. We know the results of that trial. Now if man could not work out his salvation when he was upright, what chance has he to do so since he is fallen? Happily for us, God has this time taken the matter into His own hand. And if God again gave man free will by which to work out his own salvation, what would He be doing but again instituting the dispensation which has already been tried and which ended in failure? Suppose a man is carried away by a torrent which he is unable to master, would it be reasonable or wise to take him out only to recruit his strength for a second trial? Would it not be a mockery to save him only to

⁵ The Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination, p. 8.

repeat the process? Since God does not repeat His dispensations it follows that the second time He would order salvation on a different plan. If further works are to be wrought, then God, and not man, will be the author; and the new dispensation, like the old, is adjusted to the state in which it finds man.

We are very sure that no property does, or can, attach to the will of man, whether fallen or unfallen, that can take it beyond the reach of God's sovereign control. Saul was called at the height of his persecuting zeal and was transformed into the saintly Paul. The poor dying thief on the cross was called in the last hour of his earthly life. When Paul preached at Antioch "as many as were ordained to eternal life (and only they) believed," Acts 13:48. If God purposed that all men should be saved He most certainly could bring all to salvation. But for reasons which have been only partly revealed, He leaves many impenitent. Through all of His works, however, God does nothing which is inconsistent with man's nature as a rational and responsible being.

One of the great short-comings of Arminianism has been its failure to recognize the necessity for the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit on the heart. Instead, it has resolved regeneration into a more or less gradual change which is carried out by the individual person, a mere change of purpose in the sinner's mind, which is a result of moral persuasion and the general force of truth. It has insisted upon "free will," "the power of contrary choice," etc., and has taught that ultimately the sinner determines his own destiny. In its more consistent forms it makes man a co-savior with Christ, as if the glory in redemption was to be divided between the grace of Christ and the will of man, the latter dividing the spoils with the former.

If, as Arminians say, God is earnestly trying to convert every person, He is making a great failure of His work; for among the adult population of the world up to the present time, where He has succeeded in saving one He has let perhaps twenty-five fall into hell. Such a view sheds little glory on the Divine Majesty. Concerning the Arminian doctrine of resistible grace Toplady says that it is:

a doctrine which represents Omnipotence itself as wishing and trying and striving to no purpose. According to this tenet, God, in endeavoring (for it seems that it is only an endeavor) to convert sinners, may, by sinners, be foiled, defeated, and disappointed; He may lay close and long siege to the soul, and that soul can, from the citadel of impregnable free will, hang out a flag of defiance to God Himself, and by a continued obstinancy of defence, and a few vigorous sallies of free will compel Him to raise the siege. In a word, the Holy Spirit, after having for years perhaps, danced attendance on the free will of man, may at length, like a discomfited general, or an unsuccessful politician, be either put to ignominious flight, or contemptuously dismissed, *re infecta*, without accomplishing the end for which He was sent.

It is unreasonable to suppose that the sinner can thus defeat the creative power of Almighty God. "All authority hath been given to me in heaven and on earth," said the risen Lord. No limit is set to that authority. "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" "He doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and no one can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?" In view of these passages and many others to the same effect it ill becomes us to imagine that God is struggling along with man as best He can, persuading, exhorting, pleading, but unable to accomplish His purpose if His will otherwise. If God does not effectually call, we may imagine Him saying, "I will that all men should be saved; nevertheless, it must finally be, not as I will but as they will." He is then put into the same extremity with Darius who would gladly have saved Daniel, but could not (Dan. 6:14). No Christian who is familiar with what the Scriptures teach about the sovereignty of God can believe that He is thus defeated in His creatures. Is it not necessary that a creature must have power to defy and thwart the purposes of Almighty God before his actions can be rewarded or punished. Furthermore, if God actually stood powerless before the majesty of man's lordly will, there would be but little use to pray for Him to convert any one. It would then be more reasonable for us to direct our petitions to the man himself.

4. THE EFFECT PRODUCED IN THE SOUL

The immediate and important effect of this inward, purifying change of nature is that the person loves righteousness and trusts in Christ for salvation. Whereas his natural element was sin, it now becomes holiness; sin becomes repulsive to him, and he loves to do good. This effective and irresistible grace converts the will itself and forms a holy character in the person by a creative act. It removes a man's appetite for sinful things so that he refrains from sin, not as the dyspeptic refuses to eat the dainties for which he longs, lest his indulgence should be punished with the agonies of sickness, but rather because he hates sin for its own sake. The holy and thorough submission to God's will, which the convert before dreaded and resisted, he now loves and approves. Obedience has become not only the obligatory but the preferable good.

But so long as people remain in this world they are subject to temptations and they still have the remnants of the old nature clinging to them. Hence they are often deluded, and commit sin; yet these sins are only the death struggles and frenzied writhings of the old nature which has already received the death blow. The regenerate also suffer pain, disease, discouragement, and even death itself, although they are steadily advancing toward complete salvation.

At this point many people confuse regeneration and sanctification. Regeneration is exclusively God's work, and it is an act of His free grace in which He implants a new principle of spiritual life in the soul. It is performed by supernatural power and is complete in an instant. On the other hand sanctification is a process

through which the remains of sin in the outward life are gradually removed, so that, as the Shorter Catechism says, we are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness. It is a joint work of God and man. It consists in the gradual triumph of the new nature implanted in regeneration over the evil that still remains after the heart has been renewed. Or, in other words, we may say that complete sanctification lags behind after the life has been in principle won to God. Perfect righteousness is the goal which is set before us all through this life and every Christian should make steady progress toward that goal. Sanctification, however, is not fully completed until death, at which time the Holy Spirit cleanses the soul of every vestige of sin, making it holy and raising it above even the possibility of sinning.

Strictly speaking, we may say that redemption is not fully complete until the saved have received their resurrection bodies. In one sense it was complete when Christ died on Calvary; yet it is applied only gradually by the Holy Spirit. And since the Holy Spirit does thus effectually apply to the elect the merits of Christ's sacrifice, their salvation is most infallibly certain and can by no means be prevented. Hence the certainty that the will of God for the salvation of his people is in no wise disappointed or made void by His creatures.

5. THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST'S WORK — EVANGELICALISM

We now come to discuss the sufficiency of Christ's work in the matter of redemption. We believe that by His vicarious suffering and death He fully paid the debt which His people owed to divine justice, thus releasing them from the consequences of sin, and that by keeping the law of perfect obedience and living a sinless life He vicariously earned for them the reward of eternal life. His work fully provided for their rescue from sin and for their establishment in heaven. These two phases of His work are sometimes referred to as His active and passive obedience. This doctrine of the sufficiency of His work is set forth in the Westminster Confession when we are told that by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself He "fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father had given Him."⁶ Had He only paid the penalty for sin without also earning the reward of eternal life, His people would then only have been raised up to the zero point. They would then have been on the same plane as was Adam before he fell, and would still have been under obligation to earn eternal life for themselves. To Paul's declaration that Christ is all in all in matters of salvation (Col. 3:11), we can add that man is nothing at all as to that work, and has not in himself anything which merits salvation. We should remember that the Gospel is not good advice, but good news. It does not tell us what we are to do to earn salvation, but proclaims to us what Christ has done to save us.

⁶ Chapter VIII. Section 5.

To doubt that any for whom Christ died will be saved, or that righteousness will eventually triumph, is to doubt the sufficiency of Jesus Christ for the work which He undertook in our behalf. On the cross Jesus declared that He had finished the work of redemption which the Father gave Him to do. But as Toplady remarks, “the person with power to accept or reject as he pleases must say: “No, thou didst not finish the work of redemption which was given thee to do; thou didst indeed a part of it, but I myself must add something to it or the whole of thy performance will stand for naught.”

Only those views which ascribe to God all the power in the salvation of sinners are consistently evangelical, for the word “evangelical” means that it is God alone who saves. If faith and obedience must be added, depending upon the independent choice of man, we no longer have evangelicalism. Evangelicalism with a universal atonement leads to universal salvation; and in so far as Arminianism holds that Christ died for all men and that the Spirit strives to apply this redemption to all men but that only some are saved, it is not evangelical.

We may further illustrate this principle of evangelicalism by supposing a group of people who are stricken with a fatal disease. Then if a doctor administers to them a medicine which is a certain cure, all who get the medicine will recover. In the same manner, if the work of Christ is effective, and if it is applied to all men by the Spirit, all will be saved. Hence to become evangelical the Arminian must become a universalist. Calvinism alone, which holds to evangelicalism with a limited atonement and asserts that the work of Christ accomplishes what it was intended to accomplish, is consistent with the facts of Scripture and experience.

6. THE ARMINIAN VIEW OF UNIVERSAL GRACE

The universalistic note is always prominent in the Arminian system. A typical example of this is seen in the assertion of Prof. Henry C. Sheldon, who for a number of years was connected with Boston University. Says he: —“Our contention is for the universality of the opportunity of salvation, as against an exclusive and unconditional choice of individuals to eternal life.”⁷ Here we notice not only (1) the characteristic Arminian stress on universalism, but also (2) the recognition that, in the final analysis, all that God does for the salvation of men does not actually save anybody, but that it only opens up a way of salvation so that men can save themselves, —and then for all practical purposes we are back on the plane of pure naturalism!

Perhaps the strongest assertion of the Arminian construction is to be found in the creed of the Evangelical Union body, or so-called Morisonians, the very purpose of which was to protest against unconditional election. A summary of its “Three Universalities” is found in the creed thus: “The love of God the Father, in the gift

⁷ System of Christian Doctrine, p. 417.

and sacrifice of Jesus to all men everywhere without distinction, exception, or respect of persons; the love of God the Son, in the gift and sacrifice of Himself as a true propitiation for the sins of the whole world; the love of God the Holy Spirit, in His personal and continuous work of applying to the souls of all men the provisions of divine grace.”⁸

Certainly, if God loves all men alike, and if Christ died for all men alike, and the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of that redemption to all men alike, one of two conclusions follows. (1) All men alike are saved (which is contradicted by Scripture), or, (2) all that God does for man does not save him, but leaves him to save himself! What then becomes of our evangelicalism, which means that it is God alone who saves sinners? If we assert that after God has done all His work it is still left for man to “accept” or “not resist,” we give man veto power over the work of Almighty God and salvation rests ultimately in the hand of man. In this system no matter how great a proportion of the work of salvation God may do, man is ultimately the deciding factor. And the man who does come to salvation has some personal merit of his own; he has some grounds to boast over those who are lost. He can point the finger of scorn and say, “You had as good chance as I had. I accepted and you rejected the offer. Therefore you deserve to suffer.” How different is this from Paul’s declaration that it is “not of works, that no man should glory,” and “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord,” Eph. 2:9; I Cor. 1:31.

The tendency in all these universalistic systems in which man proudly seizes the helm and proclaims himself the master of his destiny is to reduce Christianity to a religion of works. Luther had this very point in mind when he satirically remarked concerning the moralists of his day, “Here we are always wanting to turn the tables and do good of ourselves to that poor man, our Lord God, from whom we are rather to receive it.”

Zanchius says that Arminianism gently whispers in the ear of man that even in his fallen state he has “both the will and the power to do what is good and acceptable to God: — that Christ’s death is accepted by God as a universal atonement for all men; in order that every one may, if he will, save himself by his own free will and good works:— that in the exercise of our natural powers, we may arrive at perfection, even in the present state of life.” “The issue,” says Dr. Warfield,

is indeed a fundamental one and it is clearly drawn. Is it God the Lord who saves us, or is it we ourselves? And does God the Lord save us, or does He merely open up the way of salvation, and leave it, according to our choice, to walk in it or not? The parting of the ways is the old parting of the ways between Christianity and autosoterism. Certainly only he can claim to be evangelical who

⁸ The Religious Controversies of Scotland, p. 187.

with full consciousness rests entirely and directly on God and on God alone for his salvation.⁹

**“Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law’s
commands;
Could my zeal no respite
know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone —
Thou must save, and Thou
alone.**

**Nothing in my hands I bring
—
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked come to Thee for
dress —
Helpless look to Thee for
grace;
Foul, I to thy fountain fly —
Wash me, Saviour, or I die !”**

7. NO VIOLATION OF MAN’S FREE AGENCY

It is a common thing for opponents to represent this doctrine as implying that men are forced to believe and turn to God against their wills, or, that it reduces men to the level of machines in the matter of salvation. This is a misrepresentation. Calvinists hold no such opinion, and in fact the full statement of the doctrine excludes or contradicts it. The Westminster Confession, after stating that this efficacious grace which results in conversion is an exercise of omnipotence and cannot be defeated, adds, “Yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.” The power by which the work of regeneration is effected is not of an outward and compelling nature. Regeneration does no more violence to the soul than demonstration does to the intellect, or persuasion the heart. Man is not dealt with as if he were a stone or a log. Neither is he treated as a slave, and driven against his own will to seek salvation. Rather the mind is illuminated, and the entire range of conceptions with regard to God, self, and sin, is changed. God sends His Spirit and, in a way which shall forever redound to the praise of His mercy and grace, sweetly constrains the person to yield. The

⁹ The Plan of Salvation, p. 108.

regenerated man finds himself governed by new motives and desires, and things which were once hated are now loved and sought after. This change is not accomplished through any external compulsion but through a new principle of life which has been created within the soul and which seeks after the food which alone can satisfy it.

The spiritual law, like the civil law, is “not a terror to the good work, but to the evil”; and we find a good analogy for this in human affairs. Compare the law-abiding citizen and the criminal. The law-abiding citizen goes about his affairs day after day unconscious of most of the laws of the state and nation in which he lives. He looks to the government officials and to the police as his friends. They represent constituted authority which he respects and in which he delights. He is a free man. For him the law exists only as the protector of his life, his loved ones, and his property. But when we look at the criminal the whole picture is changed. He probably knows more about the statutes than does the law-abiding man. He studies them in order that he may evade them and defeat their purpose. He lives in fear. He defends his secret room with bullet-proof doors, and carries a revolver for fear of what the police or other people may do to him. He is under a constant bondage. His idea of liberty is to eliminate the police, corrupt the courts, and bring into general disrepute the laws and customs of society on which he tries to prey.

All of us have had experiences in our every day lives in which we refuse to do certain things, but upon the introduction of new factors we have changed our minds and have freely and gladly done what we before opposed. Certainly there is nothing in this doctrine to warrant the representation that, upon Calvinistic principles, men are forced to repent and believe whether or not they choose to do so.

But some may ask, Do not the many passages in the Bible such as, “If thou shalt obey,” “If thou turn unto Jehovah,” “If thou do that which is evil,” and so forth, at least imply that man has free will and ability? It does not follow, however, that merely because God commands man is able to obey. Oftentimes parents play with their children in telling them to do this or that when their very purpose is to show them their inability and to induce them to ask for the parents’ help. When men of the world hear such language they assume that they have sufficient power in themselves, and, like the selfconceited lawyer to whom Jesus said, “This do, and thou shalt live,” they go away believing that they are able to earn salvation by good works. But when the truly spiritual man hears such language he is led to see that he cannot fulfill the commandment, and so cries out to the Father to do the work for him. In these passages man is taught not what he can do, but what he ought to do; and woe to the one who is so blind that he cannot see this truth, for until he does see it he can never adequately appreciate the work of Christ. In answer to the despairing sinner’s cry the Scriptures reveal a salvation which is all of grace, the free gift of God’s love and mercy in Christ. And the one who sees himself thus saved by grace instinctively cries out with David,

“Who am I, O Lord Jehovah, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me thus far?”

The special grace which we refer to as efficacious is sometimes called irresistible grace. This latter term, however, is somewhat misleading since it does suggest that a certain overwhelming power is exerted upon the person, in consequence of which he is compelled to act contrary to his desires, whereas the meaning intended, as we have stated before, is that the elect are so influenced by divine power that their coming is an act of voluntary choice.

8. COMMON GRACE

Apart from this special grace which issues in the salvation of its objects, there is what we may call “common grace,” or general influences of the Holy Spirit which to a greater or lesser degree are shared by all men. God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust. He sends fruitful seasons and gives many things which make for the general happiness of mankind. Among the most common blessings which are to be traced to this source we may name health, material prosperity, general intelligence, talents for art, music, oratory, literature, architecture, commerce, inventions, etc. In many instances the non-elect receive these blessings in greater abundance than do the elect, for we often find that the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of light. Common grace is the source of all the order, refinement, culture, common virtue, etc., which we find in the world, and through it the moral power of the truth upon the heart and conscience is increased and the evil passions of men are restrained. It does not lead to salvation, but it keeps this earth from becoming a hell. It arrests the complete effectuation of sin, just as human insight arrests the fury of wild beasts. It prevents sin from being manifested in all its hideousness, and thus hinders the bursting forth of the flames from the smoking fire. Like the pressure of the atmosphere, it is universal and powerful though unfelt.

Common grace, however, does not kill the core of sin, and therefore it is not capable of producing a genuine conversion. Through the light of nature, the workings of conscience, and especially through the external presentation of the Gospel it makes known to man what he should do, but does not give that power which man stands in need of. Furthermore, all of these common influences of the Holy Spirit are capable of being resisted. The Scriptures constantly teach that the Gospel becomes effectual only when it is attended by the special illuminating power of the Spirit, and that without this power it is to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness. Hence the unregenerate man can never know God except in an outward way; and for this reason the external righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is declared to be just no righteousness at all. Jesus said to His disciples that the world could not receive the Spirit of truth, “for it beholdeth Him not, neither knoweth Him;” yet in the same breath He added, “Ye

know Him; for He abideth with you, and shall be in you,” John 14:17. The Arminian doctrine destroys the distinction between efficacious and common grace, or at best makes efficacious grace to be an assistance without which salvation is impossible, while the Calvinistic makes it to be an assistance by which salvation is made certain.

Concerning the reformations which are produced by common grace Dr. Charles Hodge says:

It not infrequently happens that men who have been immoral in their lives change their whole course of living. They become outwardly correct in their deportment, temperate, pure, honest, and benevolent. This is a great and praiseworthy change. It is in a high degree beneficial to the subject of it, and to all with whom he is connected. It may be produced by different causes, by the force of conscience, or by a regard for the authority of God and a dread of His disapprobation, or by a regard to the good opinion of men, or by the mere force of an enlightened regard to one’s own interest. But whatever may be the proximate cause of such reformation, it falls very far short of sanctification. The two things differ in nature as much as a clean heart from clean clothes. Such external reformation may leave a man’s inward character in the sight of God unchanged.. He may remain destitute of love to God, of faith in Christ, and of all holy exercises or affections.¹⁰

And says Dr. Hewlitt:

Can the corpse in the graveyard be aroused by the sweetest music that ever has been invented, or by the loudest thunder which seems to shake the poles? Just as soon shall the sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, be moved by the thunder of the law, or by the melody of the Gospel; can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil (Jer. 13:23).¹¹

The following paragraph by Dr. S. G. Craig very clearly sets forth the limitations of common grace:

Christianity realizes that education and culture, that leaves Jesus Christ out of consideration, while they may make men clever, polished, brilliant, have no power to change their characters. At the most these things of themselves only cleanse the outside of the cup; they do not affect the nature of its contents. Those who place

¹⁰ Systematic Theology, III, p. 214.

¹¹ Sound Doctrine, p. 21.

their confidence in education, culture and such like assume that all that is needed to change the wild olive tree into a good olive tree is pruning, spraying, cultivation and such like, whereas what the tree needs first of all is that it be grafted with a scion from a good olive tree. And until this is done all labor that is spent on the tree is for the most part wasted. We do not underestimate the value of education and culture, and yet one might as well suppose that he could purify the waters of a river by improving the scenery along the banks as suppose that these things of themselves are capable of transforming the hearts of the children of men As an old Jewish proverb has it: Take the bitter tree and plant it in the garden of Eden and water it with the waters there; and let the angel Gabriel be the gardener and the tree will still bear bitter fruit.¹²

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¹² Jesus as He Was and Is, pp. 191, 199