

# **THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE SALVATION PROCESS**

By Dr. Andrew D. Chang<sup>1</sup>

## **INTRODUCTION**

Generally speaking, those who have a high view of the Word of God would agree that, "when an unsaved person exercises his faith in Jesus Christ, he can be saved." However, there is little or no general consensus as to how an unregenerate person comes to exercise his faith in Jesus Christ. Does he exercise the saving faith entirely on his own will or effort, or solely by the power of the Holy Spirit against or apart from human will, or somehow by both? Numerous pages have been written on this subject by the theologians of divergent persuasions down through the centuries; yet the issue is no clearer than before.

In the light of this, the writer in this article intends to discuss these questions: How does an unregenerate man come to exercise his faith, and what is the role of the Holy Spirit in this process? In dealing with these issues, the writer is going to interact with some major views, but special attention will be directed to the hyper-Calvinistic view.

## **PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS**

Before getting into the main discussion, it seems desirable to set some general criteria in order to reach a reasonable conclusion.

First, the conclusion must be free from any logical contradiction. Logical consistency is a negative test for truth. A logically consistent system is not necessarily true, but any system containing an obvious logical contradiction in it must be rejected as false. This point is quite clear when we consider its ramifications. Gordon Clark aptly puts it this way:

If contradictory statements are true of the same subject at the same time, evidently all things will be the same thing. Socrates will be a ship, a house, as well as a man; but then Crito too will be a ship, a house, and a man. But if precisely the same

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attributes attach to Crito that attach to Socrates, it follows that Socrates is Crito. Not only so, but the ship in the harbor, since it has the same list of attributes too, will be identified with this Socrates-Crito person. In fact, everything will be everything. Therefore everything will be the same thing. All differences among this will vanish and all will be one.<sup>2</sup>

Second, the conclusion must be well-balanced. If it overemphasizes one aspect of Biblical truth at the expense of the other important aspect(s), it may not be accepted as a reasonable conclusion. For example, if a conclusion gives full justice to the sovereignty of God, yet abandons, say, the justice of God, it may not be considered valid.

Third, if several fairly reasonable conclusions are possible and all of them seem to explain the most given data, the one which accounts for the most crucial ones without too much difficulty may be accepted as the most reasonable conclusion.

## MAJOR VIEWS

### Pelagian View

The Pelagian view on the salvation process can be summarized in one phrase: *plenary ability of man*. According to Pelagius, God has endowed man with the perfect freedom of will, and this freedom is such that through it man is capable of doing both good and evil. The power not to sin (*posse non picarre*) is in human nature since its very creation, and neither the sin of Adam nor the devil himself can destroy it. When man sins, man sins out of his own free will. Because of perfect freedom of will, man has no need of special grace for salvation. As David Knox puts it, "Man created with free will has no longer to do with God but with himself alone."<sup>3</sup> When man of his own volition repents and makes efforts to do salvific good, he can do it. Thus, in this view there is no role for the Holy Spirit to play in the salvation process. Man with his own natural plenary ability can save himself if he so wishes.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 103.

<sup>3</sup>*Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed., Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960), s.v. "Pelagianism," by David B. Knox, 400.

<sup>4</sup>For a further discussion on the Pelagian view, see Justo Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 2: 27-33; James Orr, *Progress of Dogma* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.), 153-62; Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian*

The Pelagians are eager to preserve the doctrine of human free will and responsibility, but failed in many respects.

First, the Pelagian view may not fall into the fallacy of a logical contradiction; but it fails to strike a proper balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. It overemphasizes human freedom and responsibility at the expense of divine sovereignty.

Second, this view also does not fully account for the given biblical data. (1) It cannot properly explain the death of Christ. The apostle Paul says, "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law (  $\mu$  ), then Christ died needlessly" (Gal 2:21). (2) It is diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Bible. Ephesians 2:8, among others, clearly teaches that divine grace is *absolutely necessary* for salvation; and 2:9 says that salvation is not the result of any human works or efforts. (3) It does not account for the biblical doctrine of total depravity. Passages such as Romans 1:18; 7:18; 8:7; Ephesians 2:2; 4:18 clearly teach man's lack of merit in God's sight and his rebellious state; but Pelagians entirely disregard these passages.

Therefore, in spite of their strenuous effort to solve the difficult theological problem, this view must be rejected as untenable.

### **Arminian-Wesleyan View**

Unlike Pelagians, adherents of this view have no hesitation in asserting the absolute necessity of divine grace for salvation due to the total inability of man. Arminius, for example, explicitly states this in "The Declaration of Sentiments":

This is my opinion concerning the free-will of man: *In his primitive condition* as he came out of the hands of his Creator, man was endowed with such a portion of knowledge, holiness and power, as enabled him to understand, esteem, consider, will, and to perform THE TRUE GOOD, according to the commandment delivered to him. Yet not of these acts could he

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*Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975, reprint), 132-33; G. W. H. Lampe, "Christian Theology in the Patristic Period," in *A History of Christian Doctrine*, eds. Hubert Cunliffe-Jones and Benjamin Drewery (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 23-186, esp., 149-69; *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, s.v., "Pelagianism," by David Knox, 399-400; *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), s.v., "Pelagius, Pelagianism," by Bruce L. Shelley, 833-34.

do, *except through the assistance of Divine Grace*. But in his *lapsed and sinful* state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, and affections or will, and in all his powers, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good. When he is made a partaker of this regeneration of renovation, I consider that, since he is delivered from sin, he is capable of thinking, willing and doing that which is good, but yet *not without the continued aids of Divine Grace*.<sup>5</sup>

John Wesley is no less committed to the doctrine of total depravity than Arminius or Calvin. "In what sense is Adam's sin imputed to all mankind"? was a question discussed at the first Methodist Conference in 1744. Here is the answer to which Wesley lent the weight of his approval:

In Adam all die; that is, (1) Our bodies then became mortal. (2) Our souls died: that is, we were disunited from God. And hence, (3) we are all born with a sinful, devilish nature. By reason whereof, (4) we are children of wrath, liable to death eternal (Rom 5:18; Eph 2:3).<sup>6</sup>

If man is totally unable to save himself, and he is in absolute need of divine grace, how does it work out in salvation process? In this conjunction, the doctrine of prevenient (=preceding) grace steps in. Arminius explains it as follows:

This grace [prevenient grace] goes before, accompanies, and follows; it excites, assists, operates that we will, and cooperates lest we will in vain. It averts temptations, assists and grants succor in the midst of temptations, sustains man against the flesh, the world, and Satan, and in this great contest grants to man the enjoyment of victory. It raises up again those who are

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<sup>5</sup>James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, 3 vols. (Auburn and Buffalo: Derby, Miller and Orton, 1853), 1:252-53.

<sup>6</sup>John Wesley, *The Works of Rev. John Wesley*, 3d edition, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 8:277.

conquered and have fallen, establishes and supplies them with new strength, and renders them more cautious. This grace commences salvation, promotes it, and perfects and consummates it.<sup>7</sup>

Wesley is more explicit in explaining this grace:

For, allowing that all souls of men are dead in sin by *nature*, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature. There is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called "natural conscience." But this is not natural: it is more properly termed "prevenient grace." Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man.<sup>8</sup>

Wesley was in agreement with those theologians in the Augustinian-Calvinistic tradition regarding the total depravity of man. Natural man has within himself no possibility of reaching out to God, no freedom vis-a-vis God. This leaves the matter of salvation solely up to God's grace. Salvation is by grace alone, not by works. Nevertheless, man cannot be saved without freely responding to God. In Wesley's thought, as Umphrey Lee aptly puts it, "Natural man is a logical abstraction";<sup>9</sup> for there is no such thing as a natural man; no man is entirely devoid of grace "unless he has quenched the Spirit." This grace which goes before grants man the gracious ability to respond to the call of the gospel, but--and this distinguishes Wesley from Calvin--man is also capable of rejecting this call in the abuse of his freedom.<sup>10</sup> Alongside the fact that man is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) must be set the prevenient grace of God at work in all men without any distinction.<sup>11</sup> According to Wesley, grace is "free for all and free in all." This grace is a manifestation of a powerful, divine assistance, originating from God and administered through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit upon the basis of Christ's redemptive work on the cross.

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<sup>7</sup>Arminius, *Works*, 2:700.

<sup>8</sup>Wesley, *Works*, 6:512, sermon 85, "Working out our own salvation," part iii, section 4.

<sup>9</sup>Umphrey Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1936), 124.

<sup>10</sup>William Greathouse and Ray Dunning, *An Introduction to Wesleyan Theology*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 67.

<sup>11</sup>Arthur Wood, "The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), 215.

It is applied freely and unconditionally to all men everywhere without any distinction, who are under the desperate effects of the fall. It prepares and continues sufficiently to consummate a full and complete salvation for all who carefully cooperate and do not resist the influence thus offered.<sup>12</sup>

One thing to be noted in discussion of grace is that Arminians make no distinction between common grace and efficacious grace. According to William Pope, Arminians reject the doctrine of common grace because they refuse to believe that any divine influence secured by the work of Christ on the cross is imparted without reference to final salvation.<sup>13</sup> Arminians also feel that prevenient grace does not fall under the same condemnation; for even though it is given to all and not all will accept, yet it is given with the salvation of the soul in view. Actually, this grace marks the beginning of God's work of salvation.<sup>14</sup> Orton Wiley points out that the continuous cooperation of the human will with the originating grace of the Holy Spirit merges prevenient grace directly into saving grace without any distinction between common grace and efficacious grace.<sup>15</sup>

This, however, does not mean that the prevenient grace, apparent in human conscience, is enough to enable man to turn to God in faith. By means of preaching, a testimony, a song, or some providential occurrences, the Holy Spirit arouses the sinner, who is dead in trespasses and sin, to his lost condition. When God reveals Himself and speaks to human consciousness through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, man on the basis of the prevenient grace is able to reject or accept; if he positively responds to it, it will further lead to confession of sin (=acknowledging one's sin), repentance (=turning to God), and faith in Jesus Christ,<sup>16</sup> which is equal to salvation.

Thus, in this view, the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation process is quite limited, though not denied. Only on the basis of the positive human response is the Holy Spirit able to work, and even that work can be resisted.

Like the Pelagian view, this view does not fall into the fallacy

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<sup>12</sup>For the exposition of the prevenient grace, see Harlan R. Gerlach, "The Arminian Doctrine of Prevenient Grace" (Dallas Theological Seminary, Th.M. thesis, 1956), esp. 5-16.

<sup>13</sup>William Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1882), 2:390.

<sup>14</sup>Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1960), 43.

<sup>15</sup>H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2 vols. (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1940), 2:357.

<sup>16</sup>Greathouse and Dunning, 77-80.

of a logical contradiction. Actually, this view is logically very consistent. But this view does not seem to strike a good balance in its approach. The exponents of this view think this is the best approach to account for the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in the realm of salvation. Of course, this view fully explains the human responsibility for his own eternal destiny, yet it does not give the due credit to the sovereignty of God, though it explains God's mercy (love) and justice. Moreover, it is very doubtful whether the Bible lends any support to the idea of universal prevenient grace for all men without any distinction. Adherents of this view quote some scriptures to support their view--i.e., John 6:44; Jeremiah 31:33; but the quotations are out of context and the exegesis is strained.

Another criticism to be discussed is the charge that the Arminian view is synergistic. Charles Horne, for example, says, "In the Arminian view, the human will is considered to be one of the causes of regeneration. This position is clearly synergistic."<sup>17</sup> To those who label Arminianism as synergism, not only Arminianism but also any system which leaves room for human response in the salvation process (i. e., moderate Calvinism like Dallas Theological Seminary) is considered synergism.<sup>18</sup>

In the estimation of this writer, a system which leaves room for human response in salvation process is not necessarily synergistic. If the human response is made possible entirely on his own volition and strength, it can be undoubtedly labeled as synergistic. However, if even that response is the result of the enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be synergistic. It is still to be classified as monergistic, though not in the same sense of Calvinistic tradition. Thus, the essence of the synergistic question revolving around the Arminian system can be summed up in one sentence: *Is the human response made possible on man's own or by the work of the Holy Spirit?* It is not very easy to give a decisive answer to this question because it can go either way. If one lays emphasis on the origin of the prevenient grace, one would say that Arminianism is not synergistic because the prevenient grace has its origin in God. However, if one focuses on the universal aspect of the prevenient grace, one would say that the exponents of this view merely pays lip service to God for the origin of the grace. In this case, a close

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<sup>17</sup>Charles M. Horne, *Salvation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 108.

<sup>18</sup>Arthur C. Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 3, 9; cf. 359-64.

parallel with deism can be made. Deists certainly recognize God as the Creator of the universe, but once He created the world, He withdrew from the world, and now God is virtually non-existent. Likewise, Arminians recognize God as the originator of the prevenient grace; but, once He gave it to all men without distinction based upon the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross, His influence is virtually non-existent. Actually, man with prevenient grace can be considered in his natural state. In that case, Arminian prevenient grace is not much different from a Pelagian natural moral ability. When Arminius was asked about the difference between the two, his response to the question was simply that the former was of grace and the latter was of human effort.<sup>19</sup> His answer, however, is not very satisfactory. When we consider the origins of the two, it is quite clear that, as Arminius himself states, one is from divine grace and the other is from human effort. However, when we consider the present state of both, prevenient grace is no different from the Pelagian natural moral ability. Thus, depending upon one's perspective, Arminians can be viewed either way. Consequently, this writer will suspend his judgment on this issue.<sup>20</sup>

### Hyper-Calvinistic View

Hyper-Calvinists are those who adamantly adhere to the so-called "Five Points of Calvinism" (TULIP) formulated in the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). No system of theology is more strongly committed to the doctrine of total depravity and subsequent need of divine grace in salvation than Hyper-Calvinistic theology. For example, the Canons of Dort (chapters 3 and 4, article 3) state:

Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sins, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to

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<sup>19</sup>Donald M. Lake, "Jacob Arminius' Contribution to a Theology of Grace," in *Grace Unlimited*, 238.

<sup>20</sup>For a further discussion on the Arminian-Wesleyan view, in addition to the above-mentioned references, see Carl Bangs, *Arminius* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); Alan P. E. Sell, *The Great Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983); Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983); Howard A. Slaate, *The Arminian Arm of Theology* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), esp. 9-69.



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return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation.

The Westminster Confession is no less explicit on this:

From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions (VI, 4).

This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is hereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it (X, 2).

Since adherents of this view consider man dead in sin, they often use a corpse model to explain the state of an unregenerate man. Loraine Boettner approvingly quotes Warburton:

In the Epistle to the Ephesians Paul declares that prior to the quickening of the Spirit of God each individual soul lies dead in trespasses and sins. Now it will surely be admitted that to be dead, and to be dead in sin, is clear and positive evidence that there is neither aptitude nor power remaining for the performance of any spiritual action. If a man were dead, in a natural and physical sense, it would at once be readily granted that there is no further possibility of that man being able to perform any physical actions. A corpse cannot act in any way whatever, and that man would be reckoned to have taken leave of his senses who asserted that it could. If a man is dead spiritually, therefore, it is surely equally as evident that he is unable to perform any spiritual actions, and thus the doctrine of man's moral inability rests upon strong Scriptural evidence.<sup>21</sup>

Since the natural man is a spiritual corpse, no enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit will get any response from the unregenerate man.

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<sup>21</sup>Arthur Wood, "The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), 215.

Thus, the only logical way for a man to be saved is by being regenerated first. When the Holy Spirit by His own sovereign choice decides to grant grace to the dead sinner, that grace is irresistible on man's part. Since the sinner himself is dead, he is passive in the entire salvation process. Actually, he cannot do anything. Boettner says, "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."<sup>22</sup> Only after the Holy Spirit by His irresistible grace leads a sinner to regeneration apart from or often against the human will is the sinner able to exercise his faith in Jesus Christ. Wayne Grudem states, "Regeneration must come before we can respond to effective calling with saving faith."<sup>23</sup> Culance says, "Now life comes before faith. . . . Faith is exercised by the living not by the dead."<sup>24</sup> According to Heinrich Heppe, many post-Reformation Reformed theologians also taught along this line.<sup>25</sup> Boettner goes on to say, "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."<sup>26</sup>

It is also to be noted that, in this view, faith is not the means or the instrumental cause of salvation, but the Word of God is. This seems to be quite logical since the exponents of this position teach that saving faith is the result of regeneration.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, in this view, the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation process is absolute and irresistible. He does everything apart from human will. Louis Berkhof puts it this way:

The only adequate view is . . . that the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of regeneration. This means that the Holy Spirit works directly on the heart of man and changes its spiritual condition. There is no cooperation of the sinner in this work whatsoever. It is the work of the Holy Spirit directly and exclusively (Ezk. 11:19; Jn. 1:13; Acts 16:14; Rom. 9:16; Phil.

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<sup>22</sup>Boettner, 163.

<sup>23</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 700. See also 702.

<sup>24</sup>Culance, 182.

<sup>25</sup>Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 526-27.

<sup>26</sup>Boettner, 164.

<sup>27</sup>Horne, 48. See also Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941), 474.

2:13). Regeneration, then, is to be conceived monergistically. God alone works, and the sinner has no part in it whatsoever. This, of course, does not mean that man does not cooperate in later stages of the work of redemption. It is quite evident from Scripture that he does.<sup>28</sup>

This view, at first glance, seems to be very logical and consistent; but, upon closer examination, some logical inconsistencies as well as unscriptural contentions will be revealed. (1) It seems very logical to say that, since man is totally dead like a corpse, the Holy Spirit must give him life first in order for him to believe and to do the salvific good. However, it must be remembered that if a man is a spiritual corpse, he is not able to do either good or evil. The Bible, of course, describes man as being unable to perform any salvific good; but, at the same time, it describes man as being able to do some spiritual evil (Matt 23:37; Rom 1:18). If man is a spiritual corpse, he cannot do spiritual evil, either. But the proponents of this view consistently say that man is free to do evil, though not free to do good. This seems to reveal that either this view is logically inconsistent, or man is not a spiritual corpse as they contend. (2) According to this view, man can exercise his faith in Jesus Christ only after being regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Thus, *regeneration precedes faith*. The problem is, if a man is already imparted a new life, what is the use of faith? Why is it necessary for the already regenerated (=saved) man to exercise his faith in Jesus Christ? Isn't it a mere addendum? This seems to be in direct opposition to the teachings of the Bible (i.e., Acts 16:31). The Bible says that if a man believes in Jesus Christ he can be saved. However, the adherents of this view have placed the cart before the horse and say that if a man is saved he then can believe in Jesus Christ as personal Savior. (3) The contention that regeneration precedes faith can be criticized from another perspective as well. The Bible clearly teaches that faith is the necessary prerequisite for the receiving of the Holy Spirit, not vice versa (Acts 19:2; Gal 3:2). Since the regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and sealing of the Holy Spirit all occur simultaneously as a result of faith in Jesus Christ, it is contrary to the teachings of the Bible to say that regeneration comes before faith.

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<sup>28</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 473.

Realizing this difficulty, Grudem, another staunch defender of this view, takes a novel approach to this issue. According to him, the primary reason why evangelicals often think that faith comes before regeneration is that they see the outward results of regeneration after people come to faith.<sup>29</sup> Thus, in his estimation, evangelicals often confuse regeneration *per se* and the results of regeneration. This leads him to distinguish between the initial impartation of divine life by the Holy Spirit and the outward evidences of regeneration.<sup>30</sup> He puts it this way:

Thus "being born again" is thought of not in terms of the initial impartation of new life, but in terms of *the total life change that results* from that impartation. If the term "regeneration" is understood in this way [i.e., regeneration in the sense of the result of regeneration], then it would be true that regeneration comes after saving faith.<sup>31</sup>

If his view proves to be valid, the exponents of the Calvinistic-Reformed view on the issue of regeneration and faith may be greatly relieved. However, his view is untenable for two reasons. (1) The reason why evangelicals put faith logically prior to regeneration is not because they confuse regeneration and the results of regeneration, but because they want to be conformed to the teachings of the Bible. The issue is not whether the results of regeneration follow regeneration because nobody doubts that the results of regeneration come after regeneration. Everybody knows that the effect follows the cause, not vice versa. In order to avoid this insurmountable difficulty, Grudem subtly shifts the focus of the issue from regeneration itself to the outward evidences of regeneration. The crux of the issue is not whether the results of regeneration follow regeneration, but whether the initial impartation of divine life comes before the saving faith or after it. Since the Bible always teaches "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31), not the other way around, Grudem's effort does not seem to be very successful. His view is diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Bible. (2) If, as Grudem says, "faith in Christ for salvation is the first result that we see" following

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<sup>29</sup>Grudem, 703.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 703-4.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 704.

regeneration,<sup>32</sup> the order he suggests seems to be as follows: regeneration first, then the saving faith (=a result of regeneration), and finally salvation. Here, he seems to place a chronological gap between regeneration and salvation. Now, the question is, what is the difference between regeneration and salvation? Of course, both refer to the different aspects of one event: the former, the impartation of divine life; the latter, the forgiveness of sin. However, both occur simultaneously. There is no chronological gap between the two. Therefore, to put regeneration chronologically prior to salvation does not square with the teachings of the Bible. Once a person is regenerated, he receives the divine life and belongs to God's family. The moment he is born again, his name is recorded in the heavenly book of life. If then, why is it necessary for him to have a saving faith and be saved? Why should an already-regenerated person be saved? This is the Achilles' heel for the hyper-Calvinistic theologians.

Therefore, it must be concluded that even Grudem's novel approach is not sufficient to eliminate the difficulty with which the proponents of the hyper-Calvinistic view in general are faced.

R. C. Sproul, another vocal representative of hyper-Calvinism, in an attempt to mitigate the harshness of this position, suggests an alleged solution to this issue. He states,

Reformed theology does not teach that God brings the elect "kicking and screaming, against their wills," into his kingdom. *It teaches that God so works in the hearts of the elect as to make them willing and pleased to come to Christ.* They come to Christ because they want to. They want to because God has created in their hearts a desire for Christ. Likewise the reprobate do not want to embrace Christ earnestly. They have no desire for Christ whatever and are fleeing from him.<sup>33</sup>

By making such a "moderate" statement, Sproul attempts to make himself look like a moderate Calvinist. However, his statement cannot stand criticism. He seems to say that even an unregenerate, by the work of the Holy Spirit, can be willing to come to Jesus Christ for salvation. If this is an accurate understanding of his position, he cannot

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997), 159 (italics added).

escape the charge that he contradicts himself. Because in the same book he strongly opposes the view that God the Holy Spirit must first woo or entice the unsaved to come to Jesus before they believe in Him.<sup>34</sup> He also contends that "The unregenerate person must be regenerated *before he has any desire for God.*"<sup>35</sup> In another book, Sproul makes a similar contention: "The point is that seeking is something that unbelievers do not do on their own steam. *The unbeliever will not seek. The unbeliever will not knock.* Seeking is the business of believers."<sup>36</sup> According to him, a spiritually dead man cannot have any desire to come to Jesus for salvation unless the Holy Spirit first forcefully and compulsively drags him to God and makes him alive.<sup>37</sup> He goes on to say that "the point is, however, that unless we first receive the grace of regeneration, we will not and cannot respond to the gospel in a positive way."<sup>38</sup> If then, how can "God so work in the hearts of the elect as to make them willing and pleased to come to Christ"? Does he make a concession that the unregenerate person is not a corpse as he and other Calvinists contend? If the unsaved is a dead corpse, no enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit will be able to make the sinner responsive to the call of God unless the Holy Spirit irresistibly regenerates him first. A dead man cannot respond to anything at all.

Therefore, it must be stated that even Sproul's attempt does not prove to be convincing at all. His argument is logically contradictory on the one hand, and biblically unfounded on the other. Unless the hyper-Calvinistic theologians give up their fundamental doctrine that regeneration precedes faith, no attempt to reconcile the role of faith and regeneration will bear any fruit.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 153-55. Referring to the word " " (draw) in John 6:43-44, James 2:6 and Acts 16:19, Sproul says that the word means "to compel by irresistible superiority." He supports his view by quoting Oepke in *TDNT* (2:503). However, it must be stated that Sproul's view is not convincing for two reasons. First, his quotation from Greek lexicons is too selective. According to *BAG* (p. 251), the word " " may mean "draw, attract," used "of the pull on man's inner life" in the figurative sense. He includes John 6:44 in this category. Even Oepke in the same article Sproul quotes says that the word " " can be used of drawing to somebody in love, and "this usage is distinctively developed by John." Then, he concludes by saying that "if we take the apparently contradictory statements together, the choice of grace and the universality of grace are both of a gravity and significance to shake the conscience." Second, it is common knowledge among Greek students that the meaning of a word is determined by the context in which the word is employed. Depending upon the context, a word may mean several things. Therefore, it is to be concluded that Sproul's argument is not very plausible.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 136 (italics added).

<sup>36</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), 111.

<sup>37</sup>Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 136, 153-54.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 186.

Another criticism to be leveled against the hyper-Calvinistic view is the lack of balance. As is well known, the most salient feature of hyper-Calvinistic theology is the emphasis on the sovereignty of God. This emphasis is also seen in the issues related to the salvation process. As is discussed above, the exponents of this view teach that regeneration is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit, and human response is not involved at all because, "if man contributes anything whatever to his salvation, *even his own responsiveness of heart or the exercise of his own faith*, then salvation is no longer by grace. For it becomes a cooperative effort between man and God in which the decision of man and not of God determines the issue."<sup>39</sup> The emphasis upon God's sovereignty is fully understandable because it is in accordance with the teachings of the Bible. We should never water down God's sovereignty. But does God's sovereignty rule out the possibility of human response *in toto*? If the human response is the result of man's own effort, it certainly undermines God's sovereignty in the salvation process; if the human response itself is somehow the work of the Holy Spirit, it does not undermine God's sovereignty nor the doctrine of total depravity (an idea that will be further discussed in "A Balanced View"). The Bible certainly teaches the sovereignty of God, yet at the same time equally strongly teaches human responsibility for his eternal destiny. In the estimation of this writer, the Calvinistic-Reformed view overemphasizes God's sovereignty at the expense of human responsibility.

Another problem related to the issue of balance is God's justice. Can God's justice be justified on this view? Berkhof, for example, contends,

The fact that God favors some and passes by others, does not warrant the charge that He is guilty of injustice. We can speak of injustice only when one party has a claim on another. If God owed the forgiveness of sin and eternal life to all men, it would be an injustice if He saved only a limited number of them. But the sinner has absolutely no right or claim on the blessings which flow from divine election. As a matter of fact he has forfeited these blessings. Not only have we no right to call God to account for electing some and passing others by, but we

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<sup>39</sup>Custance, 3.

must admit that He would have been perfectly just, if He had not saved any.<sup>40</sup>

In response to this, Henry Thiessen would raise a question:

It is also admitted that God is not obliged actually to save anyone even though Christ has provided salvation for men. But it is difficult to see how God can choose some from the mass of guilty and condemned men, provide salvation for them and efficiently secure their salvation, and do nothing about all the others, if, as we read, righteousness is the foundation of His throne. God would not be partial if He permitted all men to go to their deserved doom; but how can He be other than partial if He selects some from this multitude of men and does things for them and in them that He refuses to do for the others, if there is not something about the two classes that makes the difference?<sup>41</sup>

This writer is of the opinion that Thiessen's question deserves some serious consideration. If God intends to save some and do nothing for the rest, He will be charged either with injustice, malevolence, or with powerlessness. If God is all-loving, all-powerful and all-just as the Bible describes, He must do something for all men whether they accept God's provision or not.<sup>42</sup>

### **A Balanced View, or Moderately Calvinistic View**

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<sup>40</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 115.

<sup>41</sup>Henry Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1949), 346 (old edition); 260 (new edition).

<sup>42</sup>For further discussion on the hyper-Calvinistic view, in addition to the above-mentioned references and standard systematic theology, i.e., Charles Hodge, Buswell, and Shedd, see also John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), esp. 95-104; Charles Horne, *Salvation*; David Steele and Curtis Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963); Leonard J. Coppes, *Are Five Points Enough?* (Manassas, VA: Reformational Educational Foundation, 1980), esp. 48-58; B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), esp. 87-104; Edwin Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972).



This is the view the present writer is going to defend in this article. Since his view is already presented here and there while evaluating some major views, a brief summary of his view seems to be in order here.

First, this writer fully recognizes the doctrine of total depravity, but it is very doubtful whether an unsaved man is a spiritual corpse as some hyper-Calvinists contend. Charles Ryrie defines total depravity as "the unmeritoriousness of man before God because of the corruption of original sin," and, thus, "there is nothing man can do to merit saving favor with God."<sup>43</sup> Norman Geisler says, "It [total depravity] means man cannot *initiate* his own salvation, not that he cannot *receive* it by faith."<sup>44</sup> This is the view this writer holds. He also understands death as separation, not as a corpse. Physical death is the separation of the material part from the immaterial part, spiritual death is the separation of man from God, and eternal death is the eternal separation of man from God's presence. If death means a corpse, eternal death means an eternal corpse, thus making the eternal punishment meaningless. Since man in his natural state is entirely separated from God, and since he cannot move the first step toward God, God must take the first move toward man in the provision for the gift of salvation as well as in the application of salvation to each individual.

Second, God made provision for all men to be saved. This writer will not spend much time on this idea because it is not the main thrust of this article. There are manifold evidences in support of unlimited atonement, but this writer believes 2 Peter 2:1 is one of the strongest biblical supports for unlimited atonement.<sup>45</sup>

Third, the Holy Spirit does the convicting ministry when the

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<sup>43</sup>*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v., "Depravity, Total," by Charles C. Ryrie.

<sup>44</sup>Norman L. Geisler, "Angelology and Anthropology" (Unpublished class notes. Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 1980), 28 (in the anthropology section).

<sup>45</sup>For further discussion, see this writer's article, "2 Peter 2:1 and the Extent of Atonement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (January-March 1985): 52-63; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 825-41; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 318-23; I. Howard Marshal, "Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles," in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 51-69; Terry L. Miethe, "The Universal Power of Atonement," in *The Grace of God, the Will of God*, 71-96; Vernon C. Grounds, "God's Universal Salvific Grace," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock, 21-30; Donald M. Lake, "He Died for All: The Universal Dimensions of the Atonement," in *Grace Unlimited*, 31-50; Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1967), 33-145; Norman F. Douty, *The Death of Christ* (Irving, TX: Williams & Watrous Publishing Co, 1978), 9-166.

gospel is preached.<sup>46</sup> Robert Lightner says, "The Holy Spirit brings the sinner under conviction and draws him to the Savior, but He does it only through the Word. No one was ever saved apart from the Scriptures in some form or another."<sup>47</sup> Charles Ryrie also states a similar view:

Thus the convicting work of the Spirit is the placing of the truth of the gospel in a clear light before the unsaved person so he acknowledges it as truth whether or not he receives Christ as personal Savior. Conviction is making the message clear, not the saving of the soul--that's regeneration."<sup>48</sup>

This is different from the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace in that the convicting ministry is not universal in its scope. It is limited only to those who hear the gospel in one form or another. There is no such thing as the convicting ministry apart from the Word of God. That is why believers should be encouraged to share the gospel with the unsaved as often as possible.

This is also different from the Calvinistic doctrine of the external (general) call. They associate it with the ministry of the word but also teach that "the general call is to be freely and universally offered."<sup>49</sup> However, this writer limits the convicting ministry to the hearers of the gospel.

Fourth, this writer believes that the human response comes in at this point. When the gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit by His convicting ministry makes the message clear, enlightens the mind of the unsaved who are blinded by Satan,<sup>50</sup> and presents Jesus Christ to the hearer as the only one who can save him from sin. When the sinner recognizes his lost condition by the ministry of the Holy Spirit and acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the only Savior, he is able to believe or reject Jesus. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ ( μ ) (Rom 10:17).

<sup>46</sup>For further study on the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit for the unregenerate, see Robert A. Pyne, "The Role of Holy Spirit in Conversion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (April-June 1993): 203-18; Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, the Savior and Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 153; D. A. Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 547-66.

<sup>47</sup>Robert Lightner, *The God of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 131.

<sup>48</sup>Charles Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 75.

<sup>49</sup>Horne, 47; also Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 469-70.

<sup>50</sup>Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, the Savior and Salvation*, 153.

Faith is not man's contribution to salvation but the means or channel by which man receives the gift of salvation. It is man's response to God's effectual call. Nobody is saved because of faith, but because of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is not the efficient cause of salvation, but the instrumental cause. Faith in the Bible is never regarded as work (Rom 3-4). G. C. Berkower writes,

Nowhere does faith take on the guise of a work, of human achievement which in one way or another effectualize justification. The preposition through (dia) and of or by (ek) points us to the way in which man is granted salvation in Christ. In Galatians 2:16, through faith and of faith are parallel. The shading in terminology offers no real difficulty, since no preposition is ever used with such a grammatical case of the noun faith as to render necessary a translation like because of or by reason of faith. Faith is never put forward as a work of creativity, of mediacy, or merit. It is never given as a ground of justification.<sup>51</sup>

Gresham Machen also writes in a similar fashion:

The faith in man, rightly conceived, can never stand in opposition to the completeness with which salvation depends upon God; it can never mean that man does part, while God merely does the rest; for the simple reason that faith consists not in doing something but in receiving something. To say that we are justified by faith is just another way of saying that we are justified not in slightest measure by ourselves, but simply and solely by the One in whom our faith is reposed.<sup>52</sup>

Faith is man's positive answer to God's grace. Faith is not merely intellectual assent to divine truth. A head knowledge is essential to salvation, but it alone is not saving faith. Saving faith is the whole-hearted trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Leon Morris says,

Faith is the attitude whereby a man abandons all reliance in his own efforts to obtain salvation, be they deeds of piety, of

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<sup>51</sup>G. C. Berkower, *Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 80.

<sup>52</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 172.

ethical goodness or anything else. It is the attitude of complete trust in Christ, of reliance on Him alone for all that salvation means.<sup>53</sup>

Fifth, the moment an unregenerate man by the ministry of the Holy Spirit decides to exercise his faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit efficaciously and irresistibly leads him to salvation (=regeneration). As John F. Walvoord says, "Efficacious grace immediately results in salvation in all cases because it is accomplished by the omnipotence of God."<sup>54</sup>

However, it is to be noted here that this writer believes that efficacious grace operates only on prepared hearts. The Holy Spirit works irresistibly on the willing heart, but not on the rebellious heart against its will. Nobody is taken by force into the kingdom of God "kicking and screaming" against his will. As H. D. McDonald rightly points out, if we understand that by being saved we get into a new personal relationship with God, the idea of constraint or compulsion in the salvation process must be rejected as inappropriate. A good personal relationship can never be based on compulsion or force against will.<sup>55</sup>

The preparation of the heart, however, is not coming from man. It is the result of the enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Man, in his own natural ability, cannot make this preparation possible. Actually, man in the natural state does not seek God at all (Rom 3:11). Apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the blind mind of the unregenerate can never be enlightened. Walvoord seems to teach along this line when he states, "Efficacious grace never operates in a heart that is still rebellious, and no one is ever saved against his will."<sup>56</sup>

Thus, in this view, the role of the Holy Spirit is very extensive in the salvation process; yet, at the same time, it fully recognizes human responsibility.

In the estimation of this writer, this view seems to be the most viable option for several reasons.

First, as to logic, there does not seem to be any logical

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<sup>53</sup>*The New Bible Dictionary*, 2d edition, eds. J. D. Douglas et al. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), s.v. "Faith," by Leon Morris.

<sup>54</sup>John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), 122.

<sup>55</sup>H. D. McDonald, *Salvation* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 57-60.

<sup>56</sup>Walvoord, 124.

inconsistency.

Second, as to balance, this view certainly fully recognizes the sovereignty of God, but at the same time does not ignore the human responsibility in the salvation process. Moreover, this view seems to best explain both God's love and justice. If God is loving and just, it follows that He must do something for all men without any discrimination, regardless of their response to God's grace.

Third, as to data, this view seems to explain the biblical data quite successfully. It does full justice to the total inability of man. At the same time, it does not water down the sovereignty of God; nor does it negate human responsibility. It also adequately accounts for efficacious grace.

In a nutshell, salvation is all by God's grace; yet human responsibility is not entirely ruled out. Man, by the help of the Holy Spirit, can accept the gift of salvation prepared by God in eternity past.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The above-mentioned four views can be diagrammed as follows:

### **Comparison of the Salvation Process**

ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT- 103

	Pelagian	Arminian- Wesleyan	Hyper- Calvinistic	Balanced
Natural man	Able	Unable <sup>1</sup>	Unable	Unable
Necessity of Grace	Unnecessary for Salvation	Necessary for Salvation	Necessary for Salvation	Necessary for Salvation
Resistibility of Grace	Yes	Yes	No	No <sup>2</sup>
Role of the Holy Spirit	None	Limited	Absolute	Extensive
Efficient Cause	Man	H.S. (& Man) (?)	H.S.	H.S. through the Word
Instrumental Cause	None	Prevenient Grace (?)	Word of God	Faith
Human Response	Necessary	Necessary	Unnecessary & Impossible	Necessary

Note 1. In the Arminian system, the state of natural man is a logical abstraction only. All men by prevenient grace are able to cooperate. So depending upon one's perspective, natural man can be viewed as either able or unable.

Note 2. In the Balanced View, God's grace works irresistibly only on the willing and prepared heart. For the unwilling and rebellious heart, divine grace can be resisted.

On this view the *ordo salutis* would be as follows:

1. preaching of the gospel and convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit
2. exercise of faith---]
3. efficacious grace--} these three are chronologically
4. regeneration -----] simultaneous
5. justification
6. sanctification

In conclusion, it must be stated that because of its logical consistency, balance, and ability to explain the biblical data, the

balanced view, or the moderately Calvinistic view, seems to be the most viable option for evangelical Christians who are committed neither to Arminianism nor to Calvinism, yet desire to be true to the teachings of the Bible.