**Foundations (40 of 60) Effectual Calling - RC Sproul**

What comes first, faith or the new birth? That's our topic today on Renewing Your Mind. For centuries, Calvinists and Arminians have argued about how people come to faith in Christ. And it really comes down to this single question, what role do we play in our own salvation? Does God act alone in changing a sinner's heart? Or does this change of heart rest on the sinner's willingness to be changed? Today on Renewing Your Mind, Dr. R.C. Sproul takes up this subject as he continues the series called Foundations, an overview of systematic theology.

Here's the founder of Ligonier Ministries, Dr. R.C. Sproul. Anytime we have a discussion about election or about predestination and the sovereignty of divine grace, we immediately have to face the question of what it is that God does when He intervenes in a person's life in order to bring that person to faith. We have a discussion throughout church history on this matter, the historic distinctions between the Augustinian school that says that election is purely the sovereign activity of God and the semi-Pelagian school, which sees a cooperative venture between man and God, that that issue in the final analysis usually comes down to the question of at what point or how does a sinner come to saving faith? And again, both sides, Calvinism, Arminianism, Augustinianism, semi-Pelagianism, both agree that grace is an absolute fundamental necessity for salvation.

The difference is to what extent grace is necessary or to what degree is it necessary. And what it comes down to is at the point of regeneration, and remember we talked about regeneration as one of the works of the Holy Spirit, the question is in the first step of the turning of the sinner from spiritual death to spiritual life, is that step accomplished through what we call monergism or synergism? I would say that the whole controversy between Arminianism and Calvinism, between semi-Pelagianism and Augustinianism boils down to these two words and their explanation. Well, what do they mean? Well, monergism comes from, as the word suggests, the prefix mon- which means one, and the word erg- in the English language refers to a unit of work or labor, so it's at the root of the word energy, and so that monergism has to do with one worker, where one person is doing the work.

Synergism has to do with two or more people working together. The prefix sun- means with or together with, and so this has to do with cooperation or a cooperative venture. Again, Aquinas understood it this way.

Is the grace of regeneration operative grace or cooperative grace? When God quickens a person who is dead in sin and trespasses, when the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner, does He lend power to an exercise or to an enterprise with which the sinner must add some of his energy, some of his power, in order to bring about the desired effect? Or is the work of regeneration a unilateral, monergistic work of God? Is it God and God alone who changes the heart of the sinner, or does God offer His assistance to change the heart of the sinner, and that that gracious work of changing his heart in the final analysis rests on the willingness of the sinner to be changed, on his cooperation with the offer of redeeming grace? That's what it comes down to. Let's take a look at some of the biblical texts that are relevant to our concern here. We already looked, I believe, at the Ephesians text earlier, but I'll make another visit to it since it is so important.

Chapter 2 of Ephesians, "...and you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, and the Spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom we also once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, just and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." Paul is looking back now, and he's speaking to his friends and fellow converts among the Ephesian Christians, and he reminds them of who it is who raised them from spiritual death, that while they were dead in their sins and trespasses, God the Holy Spirit quickened them, raised them from the dead spiritually. Now, I remind you that dead people don't cooperate. My favorite analogy for what Paul is talking about here is the resurrection of Lazarus from the tomb.

Lazarus had been dead for four days, and the only power in the universe that could bring that corpse out of that cave was the creative, energizing power of God. And Christ didn't invite Lazarus out of the tomb. He didn't wait for Lazarus to cooperate.

He said, Lazarus, come forth. And by the sheer divine power of that imperative, that which was dead became alive. Then, of course, He cooperates.

I mean, He walks out of the tomb, but there was no cooperation at the point of the change of His nature from death to life. And in similar fashion, what we hear Paul saying here is, you're in a state of spiritual death. You're by nature children of wrath, and according to Jesus, no one can come to the Father unless it is given to him of the Father.

And in your flesh, you can do nothing, and that doesn't mean a little something, and that left to yourself, you will never choose the things of God. And while you're in this state of spiritual death, walking according to the course of this world, walking according to the prince of the power of the air, obeying the lusts of your flesh, just like everybody else in the world, while you're in that state, God makes you alive. Now, after He makes you alive, do you reach out? Do you stretch? Do you come? Do you believe in all? Yes, but it's that initial step, that first step.

Is it something that God and God alone does, or does God just come right up to you and woo you and say, come on, entice you, encourage you, whispers into the ears of a deaf man, come on, you know, speaks to a dead man and say, will you please cooperate with me? Choose this day whom you will serve. No. He intervenes to change the disposition of the heart of that spiritually dead person by His Holy Spirit.

Now, Paul goes on, but God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive. When did He make us alive? When we were dead. By grace you have been saved and raised us together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Again, this whole thing is an exercise in which Paul is extolling the marvelous wonders of divine grace. From his opening paragraph here to the letter to the Ephesians where he talks about the sweetness of predestination and our being elect in Christ and all of this to the glory of the grace of God, and now he's showing how God works this and shows the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus, and then he says it again. Listen to this, verse 8, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Now, notice that he says it's by grace that we're saved, through faith, and then he says, and that is not of yourself. Now the question we have to ask is what is the antecedent of that? Is it the salvation? Is it the grace? No.

Grammatically, the antecedent of that is the word faith. You're justified through faith, but even the faith that you have is not something that you generate. That is not of yourselves.

It doesn't come out of that hard heart. It doesn't come out of that fallen nature. It is the creative activity of God.

That is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, and that's what we were saying when we were talking about double predestination, that in the hearts of the elect, God intervenes into their lives, changes the disposition of their soul, creates faith in a heart that was faithless. Now, that is absolutely repugnant to semi-Pelagians of all time.

They say that God is a gentleman, the Holy Spirit is a gentleman. He would never, you know, unilaterally come in and change somebody's heart against their will. Remember that our will is always and everywhere opposed to God, and the only way we're ever going to choose Christ willingly is if God intervenes to make us willing by recreating the soul, changing the disposition of the heart, raising us from spiritual death, and giving us spiritual life, so that now we not only can choose Christ and will choose Christ, but we do it willingly.

I remember, I mentioned before, somebody asking a person about did they believe in Calvinism, and the professor said, no, no, no. He says, I don't believe in a God who would arbitrarily choose some people to be saved and bring them kicking and screaming against their will into the kingdom of God while at the same time stiff-arming those other ones who desperately want to be there. When I heard that, you know, I just shook my head, and I said, whoa, if that's Calvinism, I'm as opposed to Calvinism as this man is.

How could it be so distorted? What he was saying is that God is never arbitrary, and just because the reason for your election is not in you does not mean that God is capricious and whimsical and arbitrary or that He has no reason for election. But he goes on and says that God arbitrarily selects some people and drags them kicking and screaming against their will. The whole point of regeneration is the change of the will, where the unwilling are made willing by the Spirit of God, where those people who hated the things of God because they were spiritually dead now have a whole new disposition, a new heart.

That's what Jesus said, unless you are born again, you can't even see the kingdom of God, let alone enter it. Jesus sees as the necessary condition for entering the kingdom of God, the absolutely essential first step for any response of faith is that you are regenerate. Now the basic difference between Reformed theology and non-Reformed theology is the order of salvation with respect to the relationship of faith and regeneration.

The vast majority of professing evangelical Christians believe that faith comes before regeneration. In other words, in order to be born again, you have to believe. You have to choose Christ.

If you choose Christ, make your decision, then in response to that choice and that decision, God will make you reborn. Reformed theology has been after that since the days of Augustine, or I should say since the days of Paul, because if that were the case, I would have absolutely no hope of the salvation of any person in this world, because no matter how persuasive you are, no matter how eloquent you are, no matter how powerful you are, no matter how influential you are, how in the world are you going to persuade a spiritually dead person who is at enmity with God, who is utterly in the flesh, who apart from regeneration and being reborn can't even see the kingdom of God, how are you going to persuade that person to choose Christ whom he doesn't want at all? I can't change the heart of another person. I can present the message.

I can argue for it and try to be convincing. I can give them the case for it. I can be faithful to the gospel, but unless God changes the heart, I can plant, somebody else can water, but only God can bring the increase.

Only God has the power to change the nature of a human soul. And so, we would say that regeneration precedes faith. That's the essence of Reformed theology right there, that it's God the Holy Spirit who first changes the disposition of the soul before anybody has faith.

Now, when I believe, whose faith is it? Is God believing through me? No. I'm the one doing the believing. Do I choose Christ? Yes, I choose Christ.

God doesn't choose for me. I'm choosing Christ. I'm responding.

I'm not being dragged, kicking and screaming against my will. The whole point is that my will has been changed, and so now that which I hated before I love and I rush to the Son, because that's what I want, because God has given me the desire for Himself in my soul. And then, the other part of that distortion, God's stiff-arming people who desperately want to be in there.

What? A distortion of the biblical view of natural man that has the idea that natural man is running around desperately trying to find God, trying to enter in the kingdom, but God says, nope, sorry, you're not on the list. You can't come in. Remember that the whole human race is dead in sin.

There's nobody trying to come to Christ apart from the grace of God, from the special grace of God. Finally, as I said, both sides in this dispute agree that grace is a necessary condition. Where they really disagree on that point of monergism and synergism is whether or not the grace of regeneration is effectual, or to use the more popular language, irresistible.

There are those that say you have to have the grace of God in order to come to Christ. Before anything else has to happen, grace must come first. It must be prevenient or coming before.

But that prevenient grace that comes without which you couldn't even come to Christ is not irresistible. You have the power to refuse it. So again, that assisting grace that is offered to you, you either cooperate with it or you don't cooperate with it.

And in the final analysis, your entire salvation depends on whether you, while you're still dead in your sin and trespasses, while you are still unsaved, while you are still a child of darkness and in the flesh before you were born again, your whole salvation depends upon you cooperating. That's why I say it's a hopeless theology. I wouldn't spend five minutes in the ministry if I believed that.

I would sleep in tomorrow morning because it doesn't take seriously the biblical view of the radical character of human fallenness, that we are simply unable to convert ourselves and even to cooperate with it because that cooperation, you see, presupposes that a change has already taken place. And until that change has taken place, nobody will ever cooperate. I say it simply to my friends.

I say, are you a Christian? They say, yes. I say, are your friends or another neighbor or family member not a Christian? Right. Why is it that you're a believer and that person isn't? Is it because God gave you grace that He didn't give them? Oh, no, no, no.

God gave us equal grace. I say, okay, if God gave you equal grace and you're a believer and He isn't, why is it? Is it because you're more righteous than that person? Now, what are they going to say a hundred times out of a hundred? No, I'm certainly not going to say that. You better not say that because now you've not only denied election, you've denied the gospel as well.

They say, well, is it because you're more intelligent? No, because if you say yes, I'm going to say, why are you more intelligent? Where did you get your intelligence? Does God give you more intelligence than He gave you? I say, well, why is it? Well, because I said yes and He said no. I said, I know that. That's what we are exploring.

Why did you say yes? How can you not sit there and believe that it isn't because you're more righteous? When you gave the right response and your friend gave the wrong response, I'm going to say the only reason you gave the right response is because God in His grace so changed and shaped you. You are the craftsmanship created unto conformity to Christ Jesus. God rescued you, changed your heart.

That's why there's no righteousness in it. If He only offered you that and left the decisive matter in your hands, then you do have something of which to boast, and it is because you're more righteous than the person who said no, because it's the answer to God that is the right answer is yes, and to say no to God is a sin. You didn't sin.

He did sin. You have something of which to boast. But people, that's at the point when they begin to say, well, maybe I shouldn't say that.

Yeah, but don't wait until we get to that point before you don't say that. Don't say it ever, you know, at any point. Now, one last text real quickly, in Romans, the famous golden chain that we read about in Romans 8, everybody's favorite verse, we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren, whereover whom He predestined, these He also called, whom He called, He justified, whom He justified, these He glorified. There's a chain here, a sequence that begins with foreknowledge, and from the foreknowledge is predestination, and from the predestination there's what? The calling. From the calling to justification, to the justification, glorification.

Now, this is an elliptical statement where every commentator understands that there's something assumed in the text that's not spelled out, and that is the word all. All whom God has foreknown, has He predestined, and all whom He has predestined, has He also called, and all of the called are the justified, and all who are justified are glorified. Now, the point that is so important here is that people look at this text and they say, well, see, foreknowledge is first, and that's why we believe in the prescient view of election that God knows in advance who's going to accept the call and who isn't, and on the basis of that knowledge, He chooses us.

Well, again, whatever view of predestination you have has to begin with foreknowledge because God cannot predestine anything or anyone He doesn't know about in advance, so that there's no surprising that it starts with foreknowledge. But notice that all who are foreknown are predestined, and all who are predestined are called. So it's talking here about not everybody in the world, but only the predestined who are foreknown, and all who are predestined are also called.

Now, the key point here is everyone who is called is justified, which means that everyone who is called gets faith, which means this text cannot be talking about what we call the external call of the gospel, where everybody is called indiscriminately in the public preaching of the gospel, but it is talking about the internal call, the operative call of God the Holy Spirit when God the Holy Spirit effectually changes your heart. That's what we call the effectual call of God the Holy Spirit who brings to pass in our heart what God has designed that He do from the foundation of the world that predestination may be fulfilled, that all who are predestined will be called effectually by the Holy Spirit. All who are called by the Holy Spirit will be justified.

All who are justified will be glorified. If we applied Arminian categories to this golden chain, you would have to say some who are foreknown are predestined, some who are predestined are called, or some who are called are justified, some who are justified are glorified, and the whole text means nothing. I'm Arminian, and I'll see you next time.

I'm Lee Webb. Next weekend we'll continue this series in Systematic Theology with Dr. R.C. Sproul. Join us for a study titled, Justification by Faith Alone.

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