

Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible 030

John 3:16

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Take your Bibles and go to Titus 3:5.

So here in Sunday School, we are continuing our study on our critique of "Neo-Calvinism vs. the Bible."

Neo-Calvinism vs. The Bible

- I. Calvinism's Mixed Blessing
- II. Why Critique Calvinism?
- III. The Source of Calvin's Theology
- IV. Calvin's Manner of Life
- V. TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture**
- VI. Conclusion

There are all the topics that we have covered, Roman numerals one (I) through four (IV). And we are at the point in the study where we are looking at TULIP, which is the Calvinistic acronym that they use for their theology.

V. Running TULIP Through the Grid of Scripture

- A. Total Depravity**
- B. Unconditional Election**
- C. Limited Atonement**
- D. Irresistible Grace**
- E. Perseverance of the Saints**

We have compared what Calvinists are saying to the Bible in the area of "T," Total Depravity; "U," Unconditional Election; "L," Limited Atonement; and then the "I," Irresistible Grace.

We are sort of explaining to folks why we at Sugar Land Bible Church do not just carte blanche—even though there might be some truth in some of the things said—adopt this. Our middle name is "Bible," right? "Sugar Land Bible Church."

We always want to test everything by God's Word, which is what you should do for any teaching, including any teaching you get from me. You should test it by the Word of God, which is not just your right as a Christian. It is your duty.

And God has given us a yardstick for determining truth. That is His Word. Are these things Scriptural? So we have been dealing with Irresistible Grace.

D. Irresistible Grace

1. **Calvinistic definition**
2. Calvinistic arguments
3. Man can resist God's grace
4. Man can resist God by disbelieving
5. John 6:44?

Here is what Neo-Calvinism means by Irresistible Grace. Bob Kirkland summarizes it. He says,

"'I' stands for Irresistible Grace. Faith is something that God irresistibly bestowed upon the elect without their having believed anything...By such reasoning, man...can't even hear the gospel—much less respond to the pleadings of Christ."¹

So if you are one of the elect, you kind of wake up one day and you are saved. How did that happen? Well, God irresistibly drew you to Himself. And this idea flows from the "T" in the Calvinistic system: Total Depravity.

¹ Bob Kirkland, *Calvinism: None Dare Call It Heresy; Spotlight on the Life and Teachings of John Calvin* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2018), 34.

What Calvinists mean by Total Depravity is inability. A human being, even when they come under the conviction of the Spirit, cannot respond to the gospel. Well, then who can get saved? Well, the elect get saved. They are infused something called the gift of faith. And as I will show you in a minute, they are regenerated first.

If that has happened to you, praise the Lord! You are one of the elect. If it has not happened to you, well, maybe you are not one of the elect. See how that works?

So when you get into this subject of Irresistible Grace, there are basically three things that are spoken of over and over again in the Calvinistic system.

2. Calvinistic Arguments

- a) **Faith is a gift**
- b) Regeneration precedes faith
- c) Lost man cannot seek God (Rom. 3:11)

(a) Faith is a gift. (b) Regeneration precedes faith. (c) These things are necessary because the lost man has an inability to seek God, even when they come under His conviction. So God has to do something on the front end for anyone to get saved.

So what we have done in this section entitled Irresistible Grace is started looking at these one by one. We finished up "faith is a gift" last time. I was working through the miscellaneous problems, in addition to other problems, with this "faith is a gift" idea. I think we made it down to the very last one, if memory serves.

a) Faith is a Gift?

- i. Calvinist Examples
- ii. Faith is a work?
- iii. Calvinist Proof texts
- iv. **Miscellaneous problems**

So if you want the rest of the teaching on that, just go back to last week's teaching to catch up on it. One of the things I wanted to point out is this idea that faith is a gift actually has roots in Roman Catholicism.

iv. Miscellaneous Problems

- Degree of faith mentioned? (Matt. 8:5-13)
- Responsibility to believe?
- Responsibility for not believing (John 3:18; 5:40)
- Confuses the instrument with the agent
- Reverses the subject (man)–object (God) relationship
- Romans 10:17
- Confuses how the Gospel is shared
- A lively corpse indeed?
- **Roman Catholic roots**

So notice this quote by Gary Nebeker. He wrote something called, "Is Faith a Gift of God? Ephesians 2:8 Reconsidered." He writes this.

"the concept of infused faith for salvation bears a marked resemblance to the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. That is to say, faith becomes a transmitted and efficacious element which God gives to men for salvation."²

² Gary L. Nebeker, "Is Faith a Gift of God? Ephesians 2:8 Reconsidered," Grace Evangelical Society News, July 1989, 1.

So "faith is a gift" kind of has a "Rome, sweet home" smell to it. That is what Becker is arguing here.

Now, if that is true—and I think there is a lot of truth to that—that should not surprise us, because who was John Calvin at the end of the day? Yes, he was a Protestant Reformer, but he was somebody who never had any ambition to start the Protestant movement.

John Calvin was training to be a Roman Catholic priest, and when he had his issues with Rome, he was trying to start a discussion. When Martin Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door in Wittenberg, Germany, his differences with the Roman Catholic Church, he was basically putting up a Facebook post and keeping the comments section stuff turned on.

So Luther was starting a conversation, and he was going to try to internally move the Roman Catholic Church in the right direction. And Luther and Calvin were later eventually shocked that they were being called "heretics" by the Roman Catholic Church. They were shocked that they were being kicked out of the Roman Catholic Church.

They were given what we might call the right foot of fellowship, you know. And when that happens to somebody, they do not just lose their Roman Catholicism. What happened is they moved into the Protestant movement. And again, as we have explained in this series, hats off to these guys. They did a lot of good. They put their necks on the line.

But there is this kind of view of the Protestant Reformers that all of a sudden what got downloaded into their brain was one hundred percent biblicism and rejection of Romanism. And that just is not true.

When somebody gets saved, they take with them a ton of junk with them from their unsaved life into their saved life, right? That is why we have to take seriously the middle tense of our salvation, which Romans 12:2 tells us is the renewal of the mind.

I got saved out of Episcopalianism, and I took a lot of Episcopalianism with me into my newfound, born again Christianity. And it took a lot of undoing for those mental patterns to stop, because they do not just stop instantaneously.

If they were to stop instantaneously, then there would be no need for progressing in our progressive sanctification, the middle tense of our salvation. So that is how to look at these Protestant Reformers.

It is like the church was in a tar pit for over a thousand years, called the Dark Ages. And once someone pulls you out of the tar pit, you still have all this junk on you, right? You have sand and gunk and dirt and junk. And then there is another process that has to be experienced, where you get rid of a lot of that junk.

That is really how to describe the Protestant movement. So you can take things that John Calvin said, and Luther also. Particularly in the "solas": "sola Scriptura," Scripture alone; "sola fide," faith alone; "sola Christus," Christ alone; "soli deo gloria," to the glory of God alone; "sola gratia," grace alone) These are all wonderful truths.

But the infant baptism still continued in Protestantism, even though that is not biblical. The Amillennial replacement theology still continued in Protestantism, although that is not biblical. So the fact that you would smell a little bit of Rome in Calvinism should not surprise us from that standpoint.

That is why the title of one of my books is "Ever Reforming." We are always reforming as the church. We are always making corrections to get back to what the biblical text is saying. So Dave Hunt, in his critique of Calvinism writes this,

"Most of those today, including evangelical leaders who hold Calvin in great esteem, are not aware that they have been captivated by the writings of a devout Roman Catholic, newly converted to Luther's Protestantism, who had broken with Rome only one year before."³

And Calvin, of course, at this point, was very young. He was twenty-five or twenty-six years old when he wrote his seminal treatise entitled "The Institutes of the Christian Religion." And as he was doing all of this stuff, he had only been out of the Roman system for about a year.

Dave Hunt here talks about how Calvin stayed in that Catholic system to a large extent, even when he came out of the system. Notice what Dave Hunt writes.

"Oddly, Calvin kept himself on the payroll of the Roman Catholic Church for nearly a year after he claimed to have been miraculously delivered from the 'deep slough' of 'obstinate addiction to the superstitions of the papacy.'"⁴

So if you read through a lot of the things John Calvin says, people kind of use him very selectively. They find some great anti-Roman Catholic statements and they quote those, but they forget some of the other ones where he held on to a lot of baggage.

And one of the things Calvin probably held on to was this idea that faith is a gift. Because the Bible does not teach that faith is a gift, as we have talked about. The other thing that Calvin held on to was Irresistible Grace: regeneration precedes faith, etc. And those ultimately are Roman Catholic type teachings.

Tom Steagall of Duluth Bible Church has an amazing book. It is called "Must Faith Endure for Salvation to Be Sure?" He has in that book a pop quiz. He has statements by

³ Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*, 4th ed. (Bend, OR: Berean Call, 2013), 42.

⁴ Ibid.

Calvinists, he has statements by Arminians, and then he has statements by Roman Catholics.

So he will give you the statement and then he says, "Who made this statement? Was it an Arminian? Was it a Calvinist? Was it a Roman Catholic?" And it is amazing how many questions you get wrong when you take his quiz because you say, "Well, this was a statement made by a Calvinist," but really it is a Catholic statement.

It opens your eyes to the fact that a lot of these things in Neo-Calvinism are sort of recycled Roman Catholicism for a Protestant audience. And that becomes one of the critiques of this "faith is a gift" idea. It has kind of a "Rome, sweet home" smell to it.

So in addition to all the other problems that we went through last time, that would be the one additional one that I did not have a chance to get to. So with the "faith is a gift" discussion behind us, let's move to the second part in the Calvinistic system, where they argue for the "I": the elect are irresistibly drawn to Christ.

And Calvinists are not only arguing here that faith is a gift, but they are arguing also here that regeneration precedes faith: you are born again first and you believe second.

2. Calvinistic Arguments

- a) Faith is a gift
- b) **Regeneration precedes faith**
- c) Lost man cannot seek God (Rom. 3:11)

Now, why would they teach that? Because it stems from their teaching on total depravity. If man has an inability to believe, then God has to do something on the front end or no one could get saved. And those things are. He infuses faith in some that sounds a lot like Rome. And the other thing is that He regenerates first so that people can believe, second.

a) Regeneration Precedes Faith?

- i. Definition
- ii. Calvinistic examples
- iii. Calvinist Proof texts
- iv. Biblical order
- v. Ordo-Salutis
- vi. An eschatological parallel
- vii. Why believe?

So let's start with some vocabulary. What in the world do we mean by "regeneration"? What does that even mean? We cannot talk about "regeneration precedes faith" until we define what regeneration is.

Regeneration is the impartation of divine life. It is spoken of in Titus 3:5. It is only one of two times where the word "regeneration" is used in the Greek text, the word "palingenesia" [παλιγγενεσία].

Regeneration

- Definition – impartation of divine life
- *Palingenesia* (Titus 3:5)
- Needed because of spiritual death – Gen. 2:16-17; Eph. 2:1
- New birth – John 3:5
- Accomplished through exposure to God's Word (Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23; Rom. 10:17; 2 Tim. 3:15)
- If you are born **once** you will die **twice**; if you are born **twice** you will die **once**

You can see that right here: "palingenesia" [παλιγγενεσία]. It is used in Titus 3:5 to describe the conversion of a lost person, and it is also used in Matthew 19:28 to describe the coming of the Millennial Kingdom.

And here I am not using it in the eschatological way it is used. I am using it in the soteriological way in which it is used. It literally means "beginning again." You recognize the word "-genesis" [-γενεσία] right? There is a book of the Bible that sounds like that: the Book of Genesis, the Book of Beginnings.

So that word "-genesis" [-γενεσία] is connected with "palin-" [πάλιν-], which means "again." "Palingenesia" [παλιγγενεσία] is a compound word, two words making up a single word. So literally, when Titus 3:5 talks about being born again, it literally means "beginning again." That is what the word "palingenesia" [παλιγγενεσία] means.

Notice how it is used related to the conversion of the lost in Titus 3:5. It says,

"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit," (Titus 3:5).

That is "palingenesia" [παλιγγενεσία] in Greek, translated "regeneration" (I am reading out of the New American Standard Bible). So regeneration is the impartation of divine life. It is the point at which a lost sinner becomes born again. Their body is now the permanent dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

And why do we need that to happen? I mean, we all agree that we need that to happen. We need that to happen because we are separated from God at the point of conception, because we have inherited a sin nature that is at war with God. So we are all in this state of spiritual death.

In Genesis 2:16-17 God was very clear: "the day you eat from the forbidden fruit is the day you shall surely die" (paraphrase). But Adam and Eve did not die that day, physically. Adam lived to the ripe old age of 930.

So why would Genesis 2:16-17 say, "In the day you eat thereof is the day you will die" (paraphrase)? Well, immediately, when Adam and Eve ate of that fruit, certainly the process of death started. It would just take a while. But they were spiritually separated from God from that point, in a state of spiritual separation.

That is what Ephesians 2:1 is talking about where it talks about how before we came to Christ, we were spiritually dead. There are four "d"'s there: dead, depraved, doomed, and demonically energized. Well, isn't that an exciting sermon? I have preached a sermon on that.

By the way, when we were in Ephesians 2:1, that was my outline: 4D. I wish it was 3D, but I could not make it work. Dead. Doomed. Depraved. Demonically energized. And that kind of a sermon does not pack the house out, right? Because, you know, you cannot understand your need for regeneration until you see how lost we are in Adam.

No one would reach out for a life preserver unless they figured out that they were drowning. No one would submit to a surgery unless the doctor tells them they have a short time to live. You have to get the bad news before you can receive the good news. And that is what you see going on there in Ephesians 2:1.

So once you understand that we are in Adam, separated from God, you understand the need for us to have a new birth. God needs to begin again through the impartation of divine life, called "regeneration," "palingenesia" [παλιγγενεσία].

That is the whole point of the conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus at night. Remember, Nicodemus came at night to talk to Jesus. I call it the "Nick at night" discourse. Nicodemus kind of secretly came in and said, "Who are You? And You are performing all these miracles. You must be somebody important."

And Jesus just gets right to the point. He says in John 3:5,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit..." (John 3:5).

That is regeneration.

"...unless one is born of water..." (John 3:5).

There is a lot of debate on what that means. I would just argue it is natural birth, and spiritual birth.

"...he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

Jesus says in John 3:6,

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

That is a reference back to the Book of Genesis, where everything produced after its own kind. It says that over and over again in Genesis 1 (Genesis 1:11, 12, 21, 25). So since everything produces after its kind, the flesh cannot give you the new birth.

The only thing the flesh can do is give you the flesh. The only thing works can do is give you religion. So you need a miracle—this is what Jesus is saying. You need something greater than yourself to come into you. That is what is called being "born again": born of the Spirit. Titus 3:5 calls it "regeneration."

And if that has not happened to a person, then that person is not a Christian. Because before I got saved, I used to think, "Oh, look at all those Christians. We have got the Methodist Christians, the Roman Catholic Christians, the Presbyterian Christians, the Mormon Christians. Oh yeah. And then there are the Born Again Christians."

I looked at Born Again as a sect within Christendom, although obviously at that time in my life I was very confused, thinking that Mormonism, Roman Catholicism, etc. were all part of the big umbrella, which they are not. But the truth of the matter is, there is only one type of Christian: the born again Christian.

If you have not been born again, I do not care where you go to church. You could be a MethoCathoBaptist, or a BapticostalFundamatic, whatever you want to be. If you have been born again, you are not part of the body of Christ.

And that is what Jesus was getting at in John 3(:5-6). He rebukes Nicodemus and says, "You are the"—definite article in front—"teacher of Israel, and you do not understand this" (John 3:10, paraphrase). Jesus is referring, I think, to Isaiah 36, which I will reference in a second, about how God is not going to accept the nation of Israel into His kingdom until they have been born spiritually. They have to have a spiritual birth.

So it is true with people in the Church Age. You cannot become a member of the church, the universal church, unless you have been born again. If you have never been born again, then you are still separated from God. So this is called the "new birth": John 3:5.

As you look at the next-to-bottom bullet point (see outline), what you will see is this new birth happens through an exposure to God's Word.

"So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

A pep talk, or a motivational talk, cannot create the new birth in somebody. They have to hear something from the Word of God. The Word of God is the instrument that He uses to make people aware of the fact that they need to be saved.

So you have all these pastors today, you know, that are in the pulpit being CEOs and basically giving a TED Talk, and pretending that it is a sermon, week after week. And the reason they do that is that it fills up churches.

But the truth of the matter is that people cannot get saved in that kind of climate. A pep talk, or higher principles for living, or whatever—your best life now, whatever it is—cannot save anybody. What saves people is the Word.

Now, the Word does not save you by itself, but it makes you aware of your need to be saved. Only the Word of God can do that. So when I got saved at the age of 16, the "Nick at night" discourse was a big deal to my conversion because I was Episcopalian at the time.

I was an acolyte in the church. They gave me this big necklace and big cross for memorization and perfect attendance, and all of these kinds of things. And so I thought I was on my way to heaven.

But I went to this home Bible study spring of 1983. My best friend in high school invited me, and the fellow leading it could tell I was not born again. So he privately showed me John 3:5. And it was almost like—I cannot really explain it—it was almost like the Holy Spirit's arm just came right off the page and slapped me right across the face.

Does that ever happen to anybody? Because that part about being born of the Spirit, I had never heard anything like that in Episcopalianism. And I did not even know what that meant. The Bible study leader tried to explain it to me. I do not even know if I fully understood it, but I knew one thing. Whatever it was, I did not have it.

And I do not think I could have been brought to that point, unless he pulled the Bible open and showed me in God's Word, John 3:5. So this is the new birth.

Notice that point at the bottom (see outline). This has always stuck well with me. I do not know who said it, but it says, "If you are born once, you will die twice. If you are born twice, you will die once." Think about that.

If you are born once physically but you have never been born again, then you will die twice. You will physically die, and then you will appear before the Lord at the Great White Throne judgment. And as your name is not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life, which is a record of all who have trusted in Christ throughout the ages, you are then cast into the lake of fire, which is called the second death.

So if I am physically born, and never born again, then here is my future: I will physically die and I will stand before the Lord of the Great White Throne judgment. Conversely, if you are born twice: physically born, and then born again through regeneration, you will only die once: physical death.

And even that you might not have to do, because we might be the Rapture generation. You might even get a pass on that one, but you will never show up at the Great White Throne Judgment. So that is why this spiritual birth regeneration, "palingenesia" [παλιγγενεσία], being born again, is such a big deal.

So how does this relate to Calvinism? What are Neo-Calvinists saying about being born again? They do not deny that you need to be born again. What they are denying is the instrument that God uses, to cause people to be born again.

It stems from the Calvinistic understanding of total depravity: inability—man cannot believe the gospel even when he is convicted by the Spirit. So if anyone gets born again, God causes them to get born again first and they believe second.

So I have some quotes here. As I give you these quotes, it is not attacking your favorite Bible teacher. I want you to see in writing that they actually teach this and that I am not mishearing things. Because I know something about misspeaking. I have mangled a syllable or two, many times, and I have said things that I have to come back later and correct.

In the heat of speaking, you can misstate something. Writing is very different. When you are writing, you are calmly and coolly and deliberately expressing your thoughts. These quotes from Calvinists are all not misstatements. They are all in Calvinists' actual writings.

Here is a quote from Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, in their book, "The Five Points of Calvinism." They say this. Notice the order of regeneration and faith here.

"Thus, the once dead sinner is drawn to Christ by the inward, supernatural call of the Spirit, who through regeneration makes him alive and creates faith and repentance within him."⁵

So in this quote, it is not that you are drawn, then you believe, and then you are regenerated, which is the right order. In this quote, the work that God does on the front end is not just drawing you, it is also regenerating you, and then you believe, second.

So there is a clear order here: regeneration is first, faith and repentance (I believe those are synonyms) occurs second. Regeneration precedes faith.

Here is another quote: John MacArthur in his book "Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles." He says,

"Furthermore, because of human depravity; there is nothing in a fallen, reprobate sinner that desires God or is capable of responding in faith..."⁶

Now, I agree with so much of what MacArthur is saying there, until he gets to the incapability of responding in faith. Lost sinners, particularly when they come under the inspiration of the Spirit by conviction, are capable of exercising faith.

John MacArthur says,

"From the viewpoint of reason, regeneration logically must initiate faith."⁷

Why is MacArthur using words like "reason" and "logically"? Because he is using very good logic. If your initial premise is right—if the lost sinner is in a state of inability, like an insensate rock that cannot respond at all—then what he says makes perfect sense.

But the problem is, as we have tried to show, that MacArthur's starting point is wrong. He has taken depravity and he has overstated it. He has turned human beings into sort of an insensate state, in which they are unable to respond.

While studying the "T," Total Depravity, we talked about why we do not think the Calvinist view is a biblical position, although we do embrace total depravity rightly understood. That is why MacArthur uses words like "reason" and "logically."

⁵ David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1963), 53.

⁶ John F. MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 62 & n. 8.

⁷ Ibid.

John Calvin was also an attorney, a master logician, and he knew how to argue from logic. But the problem with logic is if it is human logic, (a syllogism: major premise, minor premise, conclusion) it only works if your initial premise is right. If the foundation is off, then the logical syllogism is off as well.

So that is why MacArthur is not saying, "exegetically" or "biblically" in this statement. He is arguing from reason and logic, that regeneration must initiate faith: you are regenerated first and you believe second. Regeneration precedes faith. Very logical, if his understanding of "T," Total Depravity, is correct.

Here is a quote from Mike Riccardi. These are all statements that are being made at what is called The Gospel Coalition: Neo-Calvinism, the young, the reformed, the restless. And here is what Mike Riccardi says. He says,

"Regeneration is the cause of faith, not the consequence of faith."⁸

Well, I believe that regeneration is the consequence of faith. Riccardi is saying, "No, it is not the consequence of faith. It is the cause of faith" (paraphrase). So regeneration first: impartation of divine faith/life first, if you are one of the elect. Faith comes about secondarily.

Tom Wells—you may not know much about him, but he did write from a Calvinistic perspective the book "Faith: The Gift of God." He says,

"I am afraid we have come to think of faith and the new birth in just the opposite way....If a man must repent and have faith in order to be born again—if he must make some such decision about it—then he is the cause, in part at least, of his own birth."⁹

See, in the Calvinistic system, they do not want man to have any role at all, not even the role of receiving a gift. Wells says of that view, which is our view,

"No, the biblical view is quite the opposite. Put simply, it is this. A person must be born again in order to exercise faith."¹⁰

So regeneration precedes faith, and that can only happen for the elect.

Here is a quote from Steven Lawson. It is hard for me to talk about him since he has had a moral failure, I guess, of recent times, and I feel very badly for him. "There go I but for the grace of God," right? So this is not rock throwing. It is just showing you how the Neo-Calvinists system thinks.

⁸ Mike Riccardi, image posted on X advertising YouTube video (G3 Ministries, "Regeneration | Mike Riccardi," March 17, 2022, <https://youtu.be/5VOvU7SkoDc?si=Sw5VYdqp8n9bJnxf>), October 13, 2023, https://x.com/MikeRiccardi_/status/1712886700501094513.

⁹ Tom Wells, *Faith: The Gift of God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 58.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Lawson says,

"No one just wakes up one morning and decides to believe in Jesus Christ. The reason he believes is because the Holy Spirit convicts him of sin,..."¹¹

Steven, amen, I agree with that. You have to be convicted of the Holy Spirit in order to be awakened to your need to believe. But he does not stop there.

"The reason he believes is because the Holy Spirit convicts him of sin, draws him to Christ, raises him to life,..."¹²

Now the record starts to scratch. Whoops.

"...raises him to life,..."¹³

What do you mean by life? You know what he means by life? Regeneration. Not just conviction. Regeneration. And then this part of it we have already analyzed:

"...and grants him faith."¹⁴

So it is a statement that you agree with for eighty percent of it, until the end. He makes it look like you have to be regenerated so you can believe.

R.C. Sproul, in his book "Chosen by God," explains that according to the "Reformed view of predestination before a person can choose Christ he must be born again."¹⁵ So I am born again first, and I choose Christ, by way of salvation, second.

So again, Sproul is just stating what the rest of the Calvinists are saying: regeneration precedes faith and you get that if you are one of the elect. If you are not one of the elect, then too bad.

I went and saw James White debate here in Houston, against Leighton Flowers on John 6. You might find that on YouTube and look at that. It was a very, very interesting debate in terms of what both sides believe on this issue.

James White, in his book "The Potter's Freedom," writes,

¹¹ Steven Lawson, quote posted by Tiffany Gaskin on Pinterest, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/desiring-god--82753711894276595/>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 72.

"The Reformed assertion is that man cannot understand and embrace the gospel nor respond in faith and repentance toward Christ without God first freeing him..."¹⁶

Look at that. I am so much in agreement with that. But he keeps talking.

"...without God first freeing him from sin and giving him spiritual life (regeneration)." ¹⁷

So White is not teaching that people cannot get saved unless the Spirit draws them. If that were all he was saying, sign me up for that. But what he is saying is that regeneration has to happen first before a person can exercise faith and repentance.

James White continues on and he says,

"'Irresistible Grace' is a reference to God's sovereign regeneration of his elect; any other use of this phrase is in error."¹⁸

So the people that get regenerated so that they can believe are the chosen. Everyone else, through the doctrine of double predestination, is damned to hell. God is supposedly sending people to hell when they did not even have any ability to believe in the first place.

J.I. Packer writes,

"Without [regeneration] there is no faith in the redeemer, and therefore no benefit from His death...we are impotent to turn to Christ in repentance and faith; part of the effect of regeneration, however, is that faith dawns in our hearts."¹⁹

So, that faith dawns in the heart of a person that has already been born again, is basically what Packer is arguing.

And here is one of the clearest statements of it from Steele, Thomas, and Quinn. They say,

"Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage..."²⁰

¹⁶ James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 101.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ White, 137.

¹⁹ J. I. Packer, *Great Grace* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1997), 67.

²⁰ Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, 5-6.

This is what Calvinists call the "bondage of the will." So man, given the light he has, does not just suppress the truth. He cannot respond to it. I think there are a lot of people that hear the truth and suppress it, but that is not what Steele, Thomas, and Quinn are saying here. They are saying that man does not have an ability to understand the truth. He does not even have an ability to understand spiritual truth from Creation.

Remember Cornelius. Remember the Ethiopian eunuch seeking God. These men were responding to the light that they had. They were God seekers. And so God sent them Philip, in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch; and Peter, in the case of Cornelius, to give them the word through which they could be saved.

But Neo-Calvinism is basically saying that man does not even have the ability to respond to any light whatsoever.

"The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore he will not—indeed he cannot—choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ—"21

The worldwide convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit on the unsaved, which is described very clearly in John 16:7-11, is not enough. My question is, "If it is not enough, then why does God do it? Is He wasting his time?" Because I think it is enough.

But if you have a belief in total depravity, that it means inability, you do not think it is enough. So God has to regenerate first, not just convict—He must also regenerate.

"Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ—it takes regeneration by which He makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature."22

God is coming into your life whether you want it or not, if you are one of the elect. And He has to do it that way because you cannot respond to Him. Are we not analogized in the Bible, as the church, over and over again to a bride. Christ is the groom.

Can I ask you a question? When you got married, did you pick your spouse or did your spouse pick you? I hope the answer is "Yes," or else you might need some biblical counseling later. It is mutual. God says, "Yes," to me. He puts me under conviction. I have the ability to say "Yes," or "No."

Calvinism says, "No way. Man cannot have any role whatsoever." He cannot even reach his hand out like a beggar and receive money, because the mere act of him reaching out to receive a gift is a work in their mind.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

So what does God have to do to get anyone saved? He predestines people long in advance, and He regenerates them first so that they can believe, second. That is exactly what Steele, Thomas, and Quinn are saying here.

"Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ—it takes regeneration by which He makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation,..."²³

Yes it is. Faith is something that man contributes to salvation. Do you know why that is true? Because of Romans 4:4-5. As we have studied, Romans 4:4-5 says that faith is the one non-meritorious thing that we as lost sinners can do before God. Romans 4:4-5 tells us that our faith is not a work: it is non-meritorious.

That is why this whole system that God has devised, the system of grace, hinges on faith. "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness" (paraphrase, Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3, 9, 22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). Hebrews 11:6—"without faith it is impossible to please Him."

So God wants our faith. That is the one thing we can do that is non-meritorious and that is not a work. But Steele, Thomas, and Quinn say,

"Faith is not something man contributes to salvation, but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation—it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God."²⁴

So Steele, Thomas, and Quinn think that if man does anything, including believing, then somehow it is a work, which Romans 4:4-5 refutes.

So that is the definition of regeneration: the impartation of divine life, Titus 3:5. I have given you the statements from Neo-Calvinists showing you that they are all saying this.

Now, certainly Calvinists have Bible verses, right? They do. I mean, these people have Bible verses up one side and down the other. But what I have tried to explain is that the issue is not who is quoting the Bible, but are they quoting it in context.

The three rules of real estate are "location, location, location." The three rules of Bible study are "context, context, context." Watch Kenneth Copeland on TV, not to get doctrine, just "opposition research," as I call it.

I love watching that guy, from this standpoint. He has a Bible. He has it all marked up. He has tabs and things. I mean, he can flip here, and flip there, and quote this, and

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

quote that. But he has come up with this interpretation that he is a little god. And as a little god, he is entitled to a life of health and wealth. And he says, "You have to verbalize certain laws to receive this. And if you are not receiving it, then you do not have enough faith." So Joni Eareckson Tada, incarcerated in a wheelchair for life because of a diving accident, even though she is a devout Christian—not enough faith.

What a cruel thing to push on somebody. And yet you watch Kenneth Copeland, you watch the late Fred Price, you watch all of these guys teach this. Boy, they quote the Bible. The issue is, are they using the Bible correctly?

I mean, we understand that the devil quotes the Bible, right? Jesus, when he was talking to Satan, got into a Scripture quoting contest in Matthew 4(:1-11) and Luke 4(:1-13).

So the Neo-Calvinists have their verses. Here is one of their favorites. It is John 1:13. It says,

"who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13).

Calvinists say, "There it is. We are not born again by the will of man. It is not man's exercising his faith, through volition, in the gospel, that saves." And Calvinists say, "There it is, right there in the passage. Let's move on."

But doesn't verse 12 come before verse 13? Can I get an amen to that? This is really hardcore Bible study methodology right here. You want to understand verse 13? You gotta read verse 12, which comes right before it.

John 1:12 says,

"But as many as received Him,..." (John 1:12).

So man has to do something. You have to receive Christ. Well, what does that mean?

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name," (John 1:12).

Now, once you believe in His name, then you are born again (John 1:12-13). The entrance of the Holy Spirit into you is not accomplished by flesh, nor the will of man. But that is dealing with regeneration.

The instrument that God uses to regenerate the lost is that the lost, as they come under the conviction of God, must exercise their own volition and own free will, assisted by God, who will not believe for you. But God can sure bring you to the point of decision many times in your life.

They have to exercise that faith in God, and then they are born again. When I was teaching at the College of Biblical Studies here locally, I had a lot of Calvinists in my classes that really did not like me very much. And when I would talk like this, here is one of the verses they quoted: Ezekiel 26:24-28. This is Israel's regeneration in the last days. Ezekiel says,

“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new spirit and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:24-28).

And the students would say, "There it is in the Bible. God is doing this and God is doing that, and Israel is doing nothing to receive these goodies. And the reason Israel is doing nothing to receive these goodies is that Israel is the elect nation. I mean, it is very clear here that you need to have God's Spirit in you."

That is why Jesus is upset with Nicodemus, who does not understand this—"When I talk about a new birth, you've never heard that before, Nick?" That is a gross abbreviation there: a paraphrase. "'Nick at night,' you never heard that? You are the teacher of Israel. You never read Ezekiel 36? What is the matter with you?"

So Calvinists say that it is very clear: you have to be born again to enter into a relationship with God. It is true that God is not going to fulfill His millennial promises in and through the nation of Israel until they are regenerated. As much as I am pro-Israel and a Zionist and will speak up on behalf of the Jewish people today, they are not regenerated yet.

But at the same time, they are beloved on behalf of the fathers (Romans 9:28). You look at Israel in its unsaved state, not as it is now, but with the view that this is not the final form of what they are going to be, after they are nationally gathered.

There is a second work coming in which they will be filled with the Spirit. They will be born again. In fact, by the time you get to the end of the Tribulation Period, every living Jew on planet Earth will be born again. Isn't that amazing? I mean, who has seen such a thing?

Isaiah says, "A whole nation saved in a day. Who has ever seen anything like that?" (Isaiah 66:7-9). I mean, wouldn't it be something if the whole city of Sugar Land got saved? That would be like, "Wow!"

Ezekiel 36:24-28 is dealing with a whole nation. A whole nation is going to be regenerated. So these students would bring this to my attention, and would put all of the emphasis on what God does. God is putting His spirit in them. God is causing them to walk in His statutes (Ezekiel 36:24-28).

My response to them was, "You are not looking at the full counsel of God's Word. When you develop any doctrine, you have to look at everything God says. You are leaving out Matthew 23:37-39, where Jesus, speaking of Israel, lays out the condition that they have to meet, through their own volition, in order to be regenerated.

Jesus says to them,

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem,..." (Matthew 23:37).

There is a context here, right? This is not aimed at the First Baptist Church of Houston. Jesus is aiming this at the nation of Israel, and He is laying out for them what they have to do in order to experience the benefits of Ezekiel 36.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted her to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matthew 23:37).

"You would not have Me. You made a decision to push Me out. I came for you like a hen that wanted to gather her chicks under her wings. I was going to restore the whole Kingdom program through you. But you did not want Me."

"Behold, your house..." (Matthew 23:38).

Now what house is that? That is the temple. That is God's house. It is always God's house. "My Father's house will be a house of prayer" (paraphrase, Isaiah 56:7; Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). What does Jesus say here in Matthew 23:38? "It is your house. Why is it your house? Because you threw Me out of it. You take it now."

"Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!" (Matthew 23:38).

Jesus is speaking of what Rome would do forty years later (A.D. 70). The Romans would tear the whole temple down, brick by brick. And then Jesus does not stop talking. He keeps talking. If he just stopped at Matthew 23:38, I would probably be a replacement theologian. But after verse 38 comes verse 39.

"For I say to you,..." (Matthew 23:39).

Who is the "you"? Look at the context: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem" (Matthew 23:37). It is a generic "you."

“For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say,...”
(Matthew 23:39).

And there is where to put Romans 10:9-10, which everybody today uses as something stipulating that you have to do to confess Christ to be saved. Romans 10:9-10 belongs right here: it is what Israel has to do, because Romans 10 is in the Israel section of Romans. It is what Israel has to do in order to be regenerated.

“For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say,
“BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!””
(Matthew 23:39).

The quotation is Psalm 118:26, which is a Messianic psalm. What is going to trigger the Holy Spirit coming into the life of a dead nation? It is not God just pushing it into them against their will. They have to come to a point at which they will acknowledge Jesus as the Savior and publicly confess Him, because they have faith.

So when you are looking at Ezekiel 36 and you are trying to figure out, does regeneration precede faith, you have to throw into the mix Matthew 23, which clearly indicates that faith comes before regeneration, the exact opposite of what Neo-Calvinism is speaking of.