

What does man contribute to salvation?

Chapter 10, Effectual Calling

section 1.1

All those whom God has predestined to life, and those only

From a biblical perspective there have been only two kinds of people in the world throughout human history.

- Those who have been predestined to life
- Those who have not

Chapter 3 of the confession reminds us of this fact.

“By the decree of God, for his own glory, some men and angels are predestined to everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death.

What does it mean to be “predestined”?

- The Arminian (17th century Dutch theologian who rejected Calvinism) view is that God looked ahead into the future and saw who would respond to the offer of the gospel and in turn predestined them to eternal life.
- The Augustinian (4th century bishop of Hippo in northern Africa) view states that God, before the foundation of the world chose certain individuals from among the fallen member of Adam’s race to be the objects of His unmerited favor.

Predestination and election are linked together here. In election, God chooses certain individuals. In predestination, God chooses these certain individuals *to be* saved.

section 1.1

All those whom God has predestined to life, and those only ***God is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit,***

There are two different callings that are required for God to bring a person to believing the gospel, which can save them. These two callings are the outward call of the gospel and the inward call of the Spirit.

The outward call

Also known as the “external call” of the gospel. This call is offered to anyone who hears the words, “*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved*”. This call is not restricted to any particular age or nationality or class of people. It is offered to all kinds of people regardless of station in life or color of skin. Scripture tells us this:

*John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, **that whoever believes** in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

*Mat 11:28 "Come to me, **all you who are weary and burdened**, and I will give you rest.*

*Rev 22:17 **Whoever is thirsty, let him come**; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*

This external call is made exclusively through the Word of God, either heard or read. These words contain eternal life and salvation and joy. And yet so many people who hear these words do not respond.

We all know from personal experience people who hear the gospel message and yet do not respond to the invitation. Instead, they remain people who are:

Separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. Eph 2:12

The reason for this is because according to God's word the outward call is only half of what is required. The other half is the inward call of the Spirit.

This calling of the Spirit is nothing less than a supernatural work of God that opens the eyes to see what could not be seen before and the ears to hear what could not be heard before.

Out of sin and death

section 1.2

All those whom God has predestined to life, and those only God is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, ***out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature***,

It is hearing the gospel and responding to God's grace through his Spirit that the sinner is plucked from the clutches of sin and its consequences.

Ephesians 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.

Dead to the things of God that is.

Colossians 3:5 (These things comprise the earthly nature): sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

section 1.3

All those whom God has predestined to life, and those only God is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, ***to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ: enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving to them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ,***

Out of death and into grace and salvation (the Spirit enlightens, removes, renews, determines)

The Spirit does this by creating within the sinner a new heart or a new nature. The will of the sinner undergoes liberation from the bondage of sin so that the will is now able to go in a God ward direction.

Imagine all of the sudden, knowing how to play the piano or understanding the Greek language.

*1 Peter 1:1-2 To God's elect, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, **through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood:** Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

This first work of God in salvation is election, but in time and space comes the call of the gospel and then the Spirit's work is called regeneration. Jesus had a conversation with Nicodemus regarding this requirement in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

*John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, **no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.**"⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"⁵ Jesus answered, "**I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.**"*

'8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"

Born Again

Jesus tells Nicodemus of the necessity of being born again or born from above in order to see the kingdom. Then he says that a person must be born of water and the Spirit.

Now whole forests have been chopped down and large rooms filled with books trying to explain what this means. There are two popular interpretations:

- Water being physical birth.

But the reading seems to indicate a single birth comprising both water and Spirit. Much like me saying to enter the freeway you must *turn at the onramp* and *accelerate*. They are two elements of the same action of entering the freeway.

- The water of baptism.

But the meaning of true Christian baptism not having been instituted by Christ at this time would not have meant much to Nicodemus.

A third and perhaps better way of thinking is to link the water and the Spirit to the pouring out of God's Spirit at the end times as prophesied by the Old Testament writers.

*Isaiah 44:3-4 **For I will pour water** on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; **I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring**, and my blessing on your descendants. 4 They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.*

*Ezek 36:25-27 **I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean**; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. **And I will put my Spirit in you** and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

It's important to see that the major motif in the New Testament is not being born again.

So, if it's not being born again, what is it? Justification!

There is so much stuff out there in the Christian sub-culture about personal transformation, which is directed inward and self-centered. This is because so much emphasis is place on the spiritual temperature and self-improvement of the person, and whether or not they are staying unstained by the world. This tends to obsess a person towards navel gazing, and not glorifying God.

The major idea linked with salvation in to New Testament is justification. Regeneration is required for the sinner to turn to God in faith so that justification can be imputed to them, but regeneration in and of itself cannot save. Only **election, the atonement and the Spirit's calling combined can do it.**

section 1.4

All those whom God has predestined to life, and those only God is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ: enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving to them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power

determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, *yet they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.*

I have heard people argue that election means that we have no choice in the matter of salvation. That if you are chosen before you were born then you have no free will in the matter. In other words, that you are a slave to what God has predestined you to, either heaven or hell.

But we must remember that human sinfulness did not remove free will from the creature; it only restricted it to what is natural for fallen creature who were made in the image of God to want.

In regeneration the Spirit does not drag anyone into the kingdom **against his or her will**; He does however **make them willing to come.**

It's like knowing the difference between playing in the gutter, or a day at the beach!

section 2.1

This effective call is from God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive in it, until, being made alive and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is then enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered in it.

Single work

This renewing of our hearts and wills to believe in the gospel is pure gift from God. Just as we were totally passive in our first birth, we are also totally passive in our regeneration.

This idea is called “monergism” meaning “single work”. God is the sole active party in bringing the sinner to faith. Yet, much of the evangelical preaching is centered around our doing something in our salvation; by accepting Christ, praying a prayer, making a decision for him, raising our hand and walking down an aisle.

“**Decisional regeneration**” can also be called semi-pelagianism, or synergism. They are all pointing to the same thing. It's the idea that man is able to work with God in being saved.

To say that man contributes to his salvation goes against the doctrine of human sinfulness. Even if you say that God does 99% and all you have to do is provide the last 1% by deciding to believe then that 1% must be a meritorious work that God accepts.

To say that I can do even 1% of something that God will accept (accepting only what is perfect) is to say that there is at least a part of me (however small) that is not stained by sin.

To dead to make a choice

The Bible however says that we are all sinners and wholly sinners. There is nothing good within us; even our best intentions are sinful at their core. The Heidelberg is helpful here.

Q. Why can't our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least part of it?

A. *Because the righteousness which can stand before the judgment of God must be absolutely perfect and wholly in conformity with the divine Law. But even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin."*

If this statement is true for the Christian, how much more for the unbeliever.

Our only contribution

So, what do we contribute to our salvation? **Sin and rebellion!** That makes sense if one holds to the doctrine of total inability. If we are born into this world enslaved to sin, hostile to God and hating his law, and that by nature, then how could one come to Christ on his or her own steam?

We have all the free will to go to hell, but not to heaven.

We have free will, but that will is wholeheartedly against God. Sinning is what we want to do, rebellion is our natural bent. This is why a person who has not been regenerated by the Spirit of God cannot come to Christ.

But the wild card in the deck is the work of the Holy Spirit who comes when and to whom he chooses and gives them a new nature that not only can but wants to say yes to God's offer of salvation.

***(God) who has saved us and called us with a holy calling,** not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, -- 2 Timothy 1:9*

*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to **His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,** -- Titus 3:4-5*

*Even when we were dead in trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), -- Ephesians 2:5*

*"Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, **when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God;** and those who hear will live. -- John 5:25"*

***All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,** and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. -- John 6:37*

section 3.1

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when, where and how he pleases.

Notice first, that the Confession says, "elect infants who die." It does not say no elect infants are saved, or all elect infants are saved. It is vague on this point for good reason.

Those who believe that fallen mankind still possesses moral free will to choose or reject the offer of the gospel are in kind of a pickle here. The consequence of decisional regeneration leads to the fact that no infants at all could be saved; seeing that all must come to Christ by their own free will and exercise saving faith.

Age of Accountability?

(this is thick in the evangelical culture) see Time magazine article.

Because of this problem that comes from saying that to be saved you must make a decision for Christ there comes a teaching called the "age of accountability." But to fix one problem this teaching creates others.

- If that were true that all infants are saved and are truly God's sheep, as it says in John 10:

John 10:27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.29

Then all people would be saved because all people were once infants. This would also gut the doctrine of original sin, which the Bible clearly teaches.

Psalms 51:5-7; 58:3-5, 1 Corinthians 7:14

- But the problem with this teaching gets worse in that God, having saved them as infants, at a certain age, pulls the free gift of salvation out from under them, placing them in the perilous position of going to hell if they do not choose him of their own free will.

Our liberal thinking brothers in the PCUSA take a different tack in trying to deal with this language in the confession.

They decided to add to the confession what they call a declaratory statement to "soften" this point of the Confession:

"It is not to be regarded as teaching that any who die in infancy are lost. We believe that all dying in infancy are saved."

But how can we come to that conclusion in light of the fact that all are sinners and under God's condemnation from the womb.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. (Psalms 51:5).

It would be to say those who die in infancy are saved by virtue of their dying in infancy. The Confession says "elect infants" are saved by Christ through the Spirit working when and how he pleases, without defining how many and it is there that we should also stop.

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." -- Acts 4:12"

It is through Christ work and the Spirit's supernatural calling that any will be saved.

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." -- John 3:8

section 3.2

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when, where and how he pleases. ***So also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.***

Infants as well as those who do not have the mental capacity to understand the gospel are under the curse of sin and the wrath of God because of it just like everybody else.

If then they are to be saved it cannot be because God would be unjust not to save them. Rather, God would be just and right to condemn everyone to hell. God's gift of eternal life is something that no human being deserves.

We can have hope that God will save infants of believers and those who cannot understand the gospel by reason of physical limitation. There are scriptures that give us this hope:

*(Luke 18:15 NIV) People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.***

*Acts 2:39 **The promise is for you and your children** and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

By covenant promise we can and should have a firm hope for the salvation of our children but we may not demand it from God.

section 4.1

Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit

Just as there are two kinds of people in the world, there are within the visible church those who are Christ's and those who are not. The parable of the wheat and the tares points out this truth.

Mat 13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

Again, two different callings are required to enter into the kingdom. A person can hear the gospel 1000 times, work diligently in church committees, live a decent life and never even exceed the speed limit, but if they have not been drawn by the Spirit to see their sin and need of a Savior, they have no true faith in Christ and they are lost.

A good example of this is looking at the failure of Peter and Judas. Both were members of the Lord's inner circle. Both witnessed the miracles and heard the teaching of Jesus. But when each of them denied the Lord, one by betrayal and the other by rejection, how they dealt with their guilt was very different.

Judas

Matthew 27:3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders.

Matthew 27:5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Here is the law doing its work to completion. Galatians 3:24 *"the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ."*

Peter

The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Luke 24:12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

What was the difference between the two?

Luke 22:31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

The promise to God's elect is that God will bring us to faith and keep us in the faith. If you want to know who is elect, it is those who persevere to the end. For Jesus said:

John 6:39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

section 4.2

Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, **yet, they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved:**

To have tasted the goodness of God through relationships with those who are saved, to have partaken of the **sacraments** and **heard the message of salvation**, yet not know God is perhaps the worst condition one could be in.

To outwardly act like a Christian and yet have no life with Christ within through the Holy Spirit is liken to been given the inheritance of a billionaire but rejecting it because you couldn't believe it was really for you. Or offered a cure for a deadly disease that you have, and not thinking you need it.

The most terrible judgment awaits those who cling to the Church and manifest outward signs of Christian life, but have never been given a new nature or have ever been justified.

For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. *But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire." -- 2 Peter 2:20-22*

section 4.3

Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet, they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, not being diligent to frame their lives according the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may is nowhere found in the Word of God.

Those who would say "all religions eventually lead to the same God" are here rebuked by the confession. Jesus Christ is Mediator between God and man.

(1 Tim 2:5) For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.

Then those who do not believe in Christ have no access to God at all.

- There is no salvation in living a moral life, or being ecologically responsible.

- There is no salvation in being a good Buddhist, or a good Muslim, or a good Hindu.
- There is no salvation in being a good Jehovah's Witness, or a good Mormon, or a good Moonie.

Why? Because no one is good and everyone needs the true Mediator Jesus Christ.

A person will stand before God either **in their own righteousness**, which will condemn them or the **righteousness of the Mediator**, which will save them.

Any other way of trying to come to God apart from the gospel is useless. Even if the native in the deepest part of the Amazon were living a "good" life according to the rules of his tribe and their traditions concerning God he will not be saved. For there is no "good" native.

There is no way for him to obey the absolute moral law of God. He is still in sin and he has no mediator.

1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

In summary:

Not all people will be saved from their sin, this is clear from many passages regarding the separation of the sheep and the goats.

Out of those who will not be saved there will be:

- those who heard the outward call of the gospel.
- Those who never did.

Both groups of people will be justly condemned because of their sin and disobedience.

The people who heard the gospel **will be judged for rejecting it** (according to their fallen, sinful nature) for which they are responsible.

On judgment day these people will have the **double guilt** of knowing that **their sin** is what brought this judgment upon them and also **that they were so close to the truth** and ignored it. Again it must be said that God alone brings people into his kingdom, but to be part of the kingdom only to be shut out at the end is simply horrible.

The people who never heard the gospel will be judged for not living in accordance with the **general knowledge of God** and moral standards they did have, and it is by these very standards that their guilt before God will be measured.

If those in the church who are not called by the Spirit in that effectual way cannot be saved,

how much less those who believe in a different God.

But again, the wild card in the deck is the gospel. **We don't know whom God has chosen.** So, we are free to share the truth with anyone at any time, knowing that God will bring those he loves into the kingdom in his own time.

We don't have to worry if we said the right things or gave the most pervasive argument possible. It is God who saves not us. We are to be obedient witness of the truth and allow the Spirit to work when and where he chooses.