

Part 5 – Soteriology

section 2 Calling and regeneration

*What is the gospel message? How does it become effective?
What does it mean to be born again?*

Calling:

Calling may be defined as the gracious act of God whereby He invites



sinner to accept the salvation that is offered by Jesus. Jesus said: “Many are called but few are chosen.” Mat 22:14. The Gospel calling is for all men. But those who respond are “chosen”. However, Jesus also said “Come to me, you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” Mat 11:28. This can be likened to

a door with one sign on the outside: “Come to me...” and another sign on the inside: “Many are called...” From our point of view we chose Jesus. But we also need to see the plan and will of God in operation, which is only viewed on the inside.

In our study of calling and regeneration it is useful to learn the main terms used by theologians with reference to this theme. They are:

General or external calling:

With globalisation we may confidently say that Jesus’ statement: “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14) is about to be fulfilled. We have a responsibility as believers to announce the Gospel to every living creature (Mk 16:15), calling all mankind to repentance (Lk 24:47).

Effective or internal calling:

This is the call that actually brings about a willing response from the person who hears it.

Elements of the Gospel call:

In human preaching of the gospel three important elements should be included:

1. Explanation of the Facts concerning salvation:

1. All have sinned (Rom 3:23)
2. The penalty for our sin is death (Rom 6:23)
3. Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins (Rom 5:8)

2. Invitation to respond to Christ personally in Repentance and Faith.

Understanding the above facts and even agreeing that they are true is not enough for a person to be saved. There must also be an invitation for a personal response on the part of the individual who will repent of his or her sins and trust personally in Christ.

3. A promise of Forgiveness and Eternal Life. The primary thing that is promised in the gospel message is forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him *should not perish but have eternal life*”. “Repent therefore, and turn again, *that your sins may be blotted out and times of refreshing may come from the Lord*” Acts 3:19.

Coupled with the promise of forgiveness and eternal life should be an assurance that Christ will accept all who come to him in sincere repentance and faith: “He who comes to me I will not cast out” Jn 6:37.

Regeneration is God’s work.

Being born again is the work of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:8). Our work is to sow the seeds of the gospel and pray for the person. It’s notable that Jesus’ own preaching to individuals was very varied, from the word of knowledge to the woman at the well, to the command to the rich young ruler to sell all he had. When sharing our faith we are dealing with people’s eternal destiny and it needs to be done with much humility, prayer and wisdom.

Election and reprobation

In theology books there is much discussion of the concepts of election and reprobation and this leaflet is too short to adequately deal with these important terms. We recommend reading the arguments in Grudem on this subject. However, we must as always state that there will be many issues that our limited human understanding cannot fathom. Once we have

passed through the gates of Heaven we will see everything from the other side, and like a tapestry that looks tangled from behind, the clear and beautiful picture will emerge when we see things as God does. Then we will be lost in wonder, love and praise and give Him the Glory.

Election is the decision of God, taken before the foundation of the world, to choose some people to be saved. We can liken sin to an incurable disease that has affected all mankind. As all mankind have sinned and the result of sin is eternal death, nobody should be saved. But God showed his great love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died to pay the penalty for our sin (Rom 5:8). As in the starfish story, we represent God in the sense of being able to save some. Paul said: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Cor 9:22

Reprobation is the most difficult of concepts for our humanitarian mind-set. Reprobation is defined as God's sovereign decision to pass over others and not to save them. As we are made in the image of a loving God we rightly recoil against this doctrine. But Jesus' death on the cross makes it clear to us that it is God's will to save. Bearing in mind this clear demonstration of the loving character of God, we can state that God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet 3:9) but on the other hand man many times is "not



One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, "What are you doing?" The youth replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die."

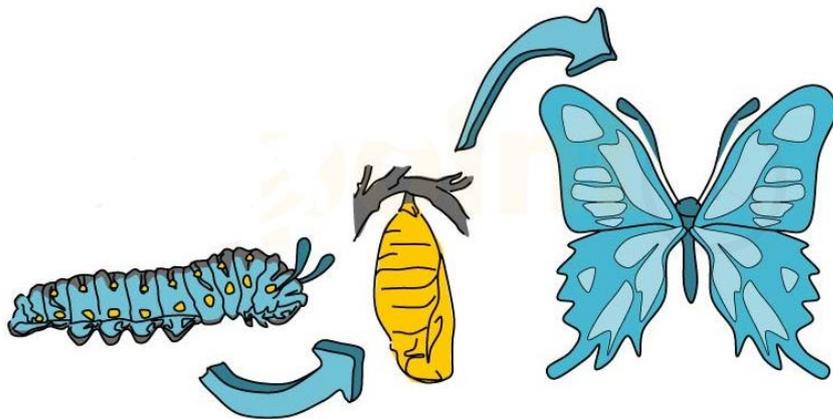
"Son," the man said, "don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make a difference!"

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said..." I made a difference for that one."

willing to listen” Eze 3:7, 1 Sam 8:7, etc. However, we believe that by his sovereign will God does give every man a chance to repent. This should drive us to our knees in prayer, even for those who don’t have the chance to hear the gospel, such as some closed countries of communism, Islam or unreached tribes.

Regeneration. “*Regeneration is a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us.*” (Grudem). This is usually called being “born again”; read John 3:3-8.

Regeneration is totally the work of God. We are passive in regeneration; just as we cannot be born physically by our own will, so it is with being born “of the Spirit”. Like the caterpillar changing into a butterfly, it is all completely miraculous and God’s work.



Paul specifies that it is God who “made us alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:5). Peter says that God “according to his abundant mercy *has given us new birth....*through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pe 1:3).

Genuine regeneration must bring results in life. John says: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him. He *cannot go on sinning* because he has been born of God” (1 Jn 3:9). Similarly Paul says in Romans 7, that a desire to do good shows that we “no longer live but Christ lives in us” (Gal 2:21). Lastly the ultimate proof that we have been born again is in John 3:14, “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers”

Questions for revision:

What do the following terms mean?

General or external calling; Effective or Internal calling

Election; Reprobation

Regeneration

What are the main elements of the gospel we should share with others?

How should we share the gospel and to whom?

Song: Salvation belongs to our God.