

Saved By Grace X – Dead Man Brought to Life

Introduction – Why, if the gospel is freely offered to all men, do some men choose to respond to it and are saved, while others, hearing the same message, choose to reject it and are lost? While the doctrines of election, depravity, and the atonement are doctrines that, in some sense, exist ‘*up there*’ in the heavens before our time, the doctrine of regeneration touches each of us in the here and now. Why did I respond and the other guy didn’t? Is it because of me or because of God? This is the question answered in the doctrine of efficacious grace.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Faith (Dan 4:28-37) – We do not know whether this Babylonian king was saved. We do know that, having been given a stupor from the Lord, it is only after the Lord grants him a sound mind that Nebuchadnezzar exalts the Lord. When he does, he declares that ‘no one can restrain His hand’. At the same time, his reason returned to him. Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man of his time, cannot control or resist the Lord when He makes him insane, nor when he brings him to his senses. What are we to learn of God’s sovereignty in the work of man’s repentance and faith from this? As God said to Sarai in Genesis 18, “*is anything too hard for the Lord?*”

Made Alive in Christ (Eph 2:4-5) – The experience illustrated by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 is taught as the doctrine of regeneration in Ephesians 2. We, who were dead in sin and trespasses, were made alive. The point is that ‘even when we were dead’ we were made alive. We weren’t able to respond on our own, but neither were we able to stop the work of regeneration. His rich mercy and great love with which He loved us, not our superior dexterity, good looks, or better decision making skills, is credited with how we end up alive.

Trinitarian Unity – God the Father elected those He would save before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:3-6) and He did so according to His own pleasure and not according to anything in the one He chose. Jesus laid down His life for His sheep and He did so without regard to whether they wanted Him to or not (Rom 5:6-11), reconciling His enemies to Himself. The Father elects, the Son redeems, and the Spirit effectually calls, and they each do so as sovereign God, purposing as one God in three Persons to accomplish the same final goal. In any other system, the Trinity is never acting in harmony.

The Order of Salvation – Modern evangelists (and some in the past as well) are guilty of getting this order wrong. The popular fashion is to teach that one must repent and believe in order to be born again. Here is ‘how to be born again’. But remember that John 3:7-8 teaches that the work of being ‘*born again*’ (literally, ‘*born from above*’) is something that must be done to us by the Spirit, not that we must do. And like the wind, we cannot control nor summon the Spirit.

A New Man – Remember, our dead man does not respond to the Spirit. Our dead man hates the Spirit. Our dead heart refuses to repent and believe. And so, God grants us a new heart (Ezek 36:26) and makes us a new man. That new man then does respond – he repents and believes because it is his pleasure – it is his new nature to do so. The Word is clear that this work of regeneration is the work of God, not of man (John 1:12-13, James 1:18).

But What About? – As with each of these doctrines, certain objections are naturally raised.

Ineffectual Calls – If God is earnestly trying to convert every person, we must admit that, to date, He is making a great failure of His work. Jesus makes a general call, “if anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” The question is, who is really thirsty? Dead men are not thirsty; stillborns do not cry out for air. We also see confirmed by Christ the fact that a ‘general call’ is not ineffective in accomplishing what God wants to accomplish. Judas accomplished God’s will. Pharaoh accomplished God’s will. Those at Pentecost who did not receive the Spirit and persecuted the church accomplished God’s will. But it is through that ‘general call’ that the Holy Spirit makes His effectual call and brings the dead to life.

Infinite Sovereignty – All Christians think of God as sovereign, but many stumble at His infinite sovereignty. This was the point of the story of Nebuchadnezzar. Not even the most powerful man in the world could ever thwart the decree of God, the power of His blind insanity, nor the intoxication of His saving grace.

Conclusion – B.B. Warfield said, “*a gospel of ‘whosoever will’ is not much use in a world of universal ‘won’t’.*” The reason you have responded to the gospel is because God is rich in mercy. The reason that someone you know has not is not because he or she is dumber or more stubborn than you. We all resist grace effectively until the Spirit of the living God says, ‘Stop’. When He does, we stop resisting because we want to stop resisting. We love because we want to love. We repent and believe because we want to repent and believe. But why do we want to now? Because God....