

IN RESPONSE - GOD'S WAY OF CONVERTING SINNERS

by Dennis Prutow

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"As the mission of Christ was rendered necessary by the fall of man, so the first dark intimation of Him was given immediately after the fall. It is found in the sentence of punishment which was passed upon the tempter."¹

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel (Genesis 3:15).

"There is good New Testament authority for seeing here the *protoevangelium*, the first glimmer of the gospel."² God insures Satan, manifesting himself in and through the serpent, receives the opposite of his plan. The devil sought perpetual friendship with Eve and her posterity. This friendship began at the fall. James 4:4 describes the situation.

Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?

Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

The word translated *hostility* may be rendered *enmity*. It is the same word used in Genesis 3:15 in the Greek Old Testament. The word translated *enemy* is the masculine form of the same root. The *world* is principally a spiritual realm defined by lust and pride (1 John 2:16). It is Satan's domain. It is filled with darkness (Colossians 1:13). Satan is the god of this spiritual realm opposed to the living and true God (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Everyone entering life by ordinary generation makes his or her entrance as a part of fallen humanity and as a part of this fallen spiritual realm. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 16, explains. Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression? The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgres-

sion. Fallen men and women have hostile dispositions. They are disinclined to serve God or appreciate the godly. Jonathan Edwards says:

They do not like holy men, for they know that such do not approve of that which [they] themselves love, and the lives of the godly are a condemnation of the wickedness of their own hearts and lives. Hence there is an enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent."³

Unbelievers always manifest the enmity Genesis 3:15 introduces.

A perpetual quarrel is here commenced between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil among men; war is proclaimed between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the women. It is the fruit of this enmity...[t]hat there is likewise a continual struggle between the wicked and the godly in this world. Those that love God account those their enemies that hate him, Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22. And all the rage and malice of persecutors against the people of God are the fruit of this enmity, which will continue while there is a godly man this side of heaven, and a wicked man this side of hell.⁴

We note not only the *presence* of enmity in Genesis 3:15 but the introduction of it by God. God produces a division within humankind. He separates people into two basic camps, the posterity of the woman, believers, and the posterity of Satan, unbelievers. "God destroyed the alliance between man and Satan, replacing it with enmity."⁵ Since the inveterate, deep seated, firmly entrenched enmity between the two camps was introduced by God, only God can remove this enmity and hostility.

Salvation comes to individuals when God removes their hostile attitudes toward Himself and replaces it with a loving disposition which freely embraces the Christ also promised in Genesis 3:15.

How does God go about breaking down the hostility within fallen human hearts thus enabling sinners to turn to, embrace and follow Jesus Christ? The answer to this question profoundly affects our approach to evangelism.

Outwardly and objectively, Christ brings peace by abolishing enmity. An example of this is in Ephesians 2:13-15.

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace.

This is salvation accomplished. Christ brings peace by His works of obedience to God's holy law and his death in payment for sin.

Salvation, the work of Christ, must also be applied to individuals. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 30, puts it this way. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ? The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling. The Spirit of God must bring home, in a subjective fashion, the objective work of Christ; the Spirit must apply the work of Christ.

With the background of Christ's objective working out of salvation by His life and death, we shall look at the subjective side of God's method for removing hostility from human hearts. God thus enables men and women to see, understand and turn to Christ for salvation.

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¹ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (McLean, VA: McDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 4.

² Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), p. 70.

³ John H. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries, 1992), vol. II, p. 242.

⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 30.

⁵ S. G. De Graff, *Promise and Deliverance* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1980), vol. 1, p. 47.

IN RESPONSE - AN EXPANDED ORDER OF APPLICATION OF SALVATION

by Dennis Prutow

John Murray explains the classic order of the application of salvation in *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.

[T]he order in the application of redemption is found to be calling, regeneration, faith, and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, glorification. When this order is carefully weighed we find that there is logic which evinces and brings into clear focus the governing principle of salvation in all of its aspects, the grace of God in its sovereignty and efficacy. Salvation is of the Lord in its application as well as in its conception and accomplishment.¹

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 31, combines effectual calling and regeneration. What is effectual calling? Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel. G. I. Williamson follows the catechism and sees effectual calling has two parts,

(A) Calling—the gospel is preached to sinners without distinction, and salvation is freely offered to all. (B) Regeneration—only when the Holy Spirit creates a new nature in a sinner is he able to 'hear' the gospel in a saving way....²

Note the link of effectual calling and regeneration as Williamson expounds the thinking of the Westminster Divines.

Why do some men accept the gospel offer? The answer is that some are *effectually* called. And they are effectually called because they not only hear the true gospel preached, but are also regenerated by the Holy Spirit. This process we may outline as follows: (1) The gospel is preached to a group of persons. All who hear the

gospel are dead in sin. They cannot believe it because they consider it to be foolish. (2) Then, in the case of some, the Holy Spirit performs a mighty work. It is called "quickenning" (Eph. 2:5), "creating" (2:10), "being born again" (John 3:4, 7), and "being raised from the dead" (Eph. 2:6). It is a miracle which restores man spiritually, as much as the miracles of Christ during His earthly ministry restored physical ability to the blind, deaf, lame, etc. (3) In such cases, the result of this regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is this: the gospel has a powerful effect. What before seemed foolish now pricks the heart (Acts 2:37). And what before seemed the word of men is now received "as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh" in them "that believe" (I Thess. 2:13)....

What effectual calling means can perhaps be seen more readily if we compare it with the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Lazarus was dead. He was not able to hear anything, or do anything, because he was dead. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ walked up to the grave and said, "Lazarus, come forth." This is similar to what we see...when a sinner hears the gospel. It "goes in one ear and out the other" because he is spiritually dead. But how different it is when the Holy Spirit regenerates the heart.... Just as our Lord gave Lazarus the power to hear His voice, so the Holy Spirit gives sinners the ability to hear and obey the gospel....

When a man has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit three things are bound to follow. (1) Such a person will see the truth of the gospel. As a blind man whose sight has been restored will see the beauty of the sunset, so this man will be able to see the gospel for what it is. (2) He will also feel a deep conviction as to his own unworthiness and guilt before God. He will feel his need of Jesus as his substitute who died to pay the price of his sin. This will not be something forced upon him. It will rather be something he feels because his re-

newed nature wants to act this way. (3) Therefore he will repent of his sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He will want to do this because he now realizes his own need, and that the work of Jesus Christ is the only remedy there is for that need. Thus the work of the Holy Spirit is not to force men to be saved, but "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith" (see Acts 26:18).³

John Murray speaks of calling and regeneration this way:

God's call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ.... God's grace reaches down to the lowest depths of our need and meets all the exigencies of the moral and spiritual impossibility which inheres in our depravity and inability. And that grace is the grace of regeneration.⁴

Effectual calling bears with it saving grace. This grace persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ presented to us in the gospel. By God's grace, the Spirit (1) convinces us of our sin and misery, (2) enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and (3) renews our wills. As seen earlier, unregenerate men and women may experience conviction of sin and a degree of illumination by the Holy Spirit.⁵ We shall discuss this point further. We shall also see the heart of regeneration is the renewing of the will. Since all this is true, we expand the order of salvation as follows: conviction, illumination, regeneration, conversion consisting of faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance and glorification.

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¹ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 87.

² G. I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism, Volume I: Questions 1-38* (Phillipsburgh: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), p. 117.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

⁴ Murray, p. 96.

⁵ "In Response," April 1997, p. 4

IN RESPONSE - GOD'S CONVICTION THROUGH THE WORD

by Dennis Prutow

The first step of God in drawing men and women to Himself is the work of convicting them of their sin and showing them their need of Christ. Jesus tells us this is the first work of the Holy Spirit; "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament gives this definition of the Greek word.

It means "to show someone his sin and summon him to repentance." This may be a private matter as between two people, as in Mt. 18:15; Eph. 5:11. But it may also be a congregational affair under the leader, as in the Pastorals: 1 Tm. 5:20; 2 Tm. 4:2; Tt. 1:9, 13; 2:15. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit in the world (Jn. 16:8), the exalted Christ in the community (Rev. 3:19), and of the Lord in the judgment at the *parousia* (Jd. 15).¹

Conviction is a legal term. To convict means to expose, prove guilty, and reprove. Jesus uses the same word in Matthew 18:15. "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." As in a courtroom, the proof is not always accepted. The jury of reason and conscience may reject the exposure of sin. Romans 2:14 and 15 makes this point.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them. When reason and conscience reject the proof and reproof of conviction, further hostility is inevitable.

The Holy Spirit uses two primary means to produce conviction. They are God's spoken Word and God's providential dealings with men and women. It is the duty of Christians to expose the error and sin of unbelievers.

Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord;

walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light *consists* in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light (Ephesians 5:7-13).

To expose the deeds of darkness means to reprove and convict regarding these sins. Believers ought to speak up concerning the sin of those around them to expose sin for what it is. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 14, helps us. What is sin? Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the Law of God. To expose sin and convict of sin, we must preach the moral law of God summarized in the Ten commandments.

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:19-20).

When individuals have a true and accurate knowledge of their sin in their heads, the Holy Spirit may convict them in their hearts and consciences of these violations of God's law. They may then truly feel their guilt before God.

Peter described to the Jewish people how they condemned and crucified the Son of God. "When they heard this they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37).

Peter, charging it upon them, awakened their consciences, touched them to the quick, and the reflection they now made upon it was as a sword in their bones, it pierced them as they had pierced Christ.²

Paul describes his personal experience with conviction in Romans 7:9. "I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died." Paul was self satisfied and self righteous as a Pharisee. He saw himself as headed for eternal life and heaven because of his own righteousness. "He is speaking of the unperturbed, self-complacent, self-righteous life which he once lived before the turbulent motions and convictions of sin...overtook him."³ When the commandments of God came home to him with the power of the Holy Spirit convicting him of sin, Paul saw he was a dead man. He was condemned by the law.

These two cases had a positive issue. They ended in conversion. Acts 24:24-25 presents the opposite, conviction of sin *without* conversion.

But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."

Felix was a notorious philanderer. Bold with the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul speaks to governor Felix about his sin, a serious lack of self control. Paul knows the priority of the Spirit to "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). Paul speaks of the righteousness of God and of Christ and of the judgment we face for our failure to meet the standard of God's righteousness. Felix becomes frightened. Fear is a manifestation of the presence of conviction. Hearers become frightened because of their lost status before God. Felix sends Paul away.

Whether conversion occurs immediately or not, this is where evangelism must begin. It starts with the work of the Holy Spirit in conviction of sin through the instrumentality of feeble preaching.

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¹ TDNT, vol. 2, p. 474.

² Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible, vol. 6, p. 26.

³ Murray, Romans, p. 251.

IN RESPONSE - PROVIDENCE, CONVICTION AND FEAR

by Dennis Prutow

In addition to direct proclamation of God's Word, Providence also works to bring people under conviction. In Psalm 83:13-18 David prays Israel's enemies will melt under God's power in creation. He prays the enemies of Israel will sense deep shame, humiliation and terror.

O my God, make them like the whirling dust; like chaff before the wind. Like fire that burns the forest, and like a flame that sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with Thy tempest, and terrify them with Thy storm. Fill their faces with dishonor, that they may seek Thy name, O LORD. Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever; and let them be humiliated and perish, that they may know that Thou alone, whose name is the LORD, art the Most High over all the earth.

Early in the history of Israel, God promised His people, "I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you" (Exodus 27:27). It is therefore appropriate to pray that God will engender fear in the hearts of unbelieving men and women when they come into contact with His church. How would God answer such a prayer? He might act through Providence placing men and women in situations where they have no recourse but to call out to Him.

God displays His might in earthquakes, floods, tornadoes and hurricanes. We often say, "It rained." Who or what is this "it"? The Bible says God controls the rain. We ought to "listen" to the acts of God. Jonah 1:4-5 is a good example.

The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.

"The ship's crew were alarmed by this mighty tempest.... Note, God can strike a terror upon the most daring, and make even great men and chief captains call for shelter from rocks and mountains."¹

Hugh Martin says of the mariners overcome by the Providence of God, Sailors are not speedily alarmed. They are proverbially brave and bold. But when even the crew themselves on this occasion were alarmed, we gather that the tempest was unusually terrific. God, indeed, employed no miracle raising this storm; but having a special purpose to serve by it, He stamped upon it a special terror, that His power and will might be the more readily recognized as engaged in it.²

We notice in each of the cases or circumstances cited, there is a certain attendant fear. I said above, fear is a characteristic of conviction. Fear fell upon Adam. "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10). "Felix became frightened" (Acts 24:25). The Philippian jailer was terrified by the earthquake and open jail. "When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped" (Acts 16:27). Sensing his just condemnation, the thief on the cross knew the fear of God (Luke 23:40). Christ struck complacent Paul to the ground. "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6).³

The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10). Yet we fear fear. Fear is evil and unwanted. However, Psalm 19:9 says, "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever." And Psalm 34:11 exhorts, "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

Fear is a strong motivator. As a result, Jonathan Edwards and other Puritan preachers understood natural fears engendered by Providence and enhanced by the Holy Spirit as the first acts of God preparing fallen sinners for the gospel.

When God convicts men and women of their sins, they are awakened to their

peril before God. John Gerstner describes such awakening.

The first thing that happens to a person who is unconverted—what brings us alive, usually, in the first instance, is what the Puritans use to call awakening.... What awakening means is this. The person who is in the pew and basically persuaded of Christianity but, nevertheless, not converted, and he is living in imminent danger so that if he falls over in his pew dead of a heart attack he goes immediately to hell, the first thing that happens to him, usually, if he is converted, is to be made aware of his peril. He knows it in a certain academic sense. It's preached from the pulpit and at the same time it comes home to him emotionally. What was in his head, as a sort detached externalistic concept, suddenly is felt in the depth of his being. "Dear me, if I die now I would go to hell; I'm under the wrath of God." He knew that. His pastor had told him faithfully all along that unless a person is converted he is going to perish. But suddenly he feels it; he is alarmed. He's scared.... Now that's the first step, usually, in a genuine conversion.⁴

Congregations sing about this fear, about turning to Christ as a result, and about God's great grace when they use John Newton's hymn, "Amazing Grace."

Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found—Was blind, but now I see./'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved;/How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed.⁵

By the grace of God, wretched sinners learn to fear. God awakens then to their peril. While fear may be unwelcome, sinners learn its importance. They may then call the grace of God in Christ precious.

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² Hugh Martin, *A Commentary on Jonah*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), pp. 83-85.

³ Authorized Version.

⁴ John H. Gerstner, *Reformed Evangelism* (Sterling: The Sterling Pulpit, 1996), pp. 3-4.

⁵ *Trinity Hymnal*, 402.

¹ Matthew Henry, vol. 4, pp. 1280-1281.