



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 156

Sovereign work of God – In theology there are two important words that differentiate the Reformed faith and all other views regarding the work of regeneration. These words are monergism and synergism. Regarding monergism, the prefix “mono” means one (monopoly, monorail), the root “erg” means a unit of work (energy), and the suffix “ism” refers to a viewpoint or ideology. Thus monergism refers to a work that is performed by one person. The opposite of this is synergism, with the prefix “syn” meaning with or together (synchronize, synagogue), thus a work that is performed by two or more people.

Reformed theology affirms that regeneration is a monergistic work, meaning that God is the only one performing this change in the heart of man, independent of human will or action. Man is entirely passive in regeneration (John 1:13; Romans 9:16; 2 Timothy 1:9). A spiritually dead man cannot do good, and does not want to do good (Jeremiah 13:23; John 3:20; Romans 3:11; 8:7-8). Seeking is the activity of those whose hearts have been changed. Thus regeneration is not a synergistic work between God and man, where God initiates the work but needs the cooperation of man for it to be efficacious.

Irresistible work of God – The effectual call of God is also sometimes referred to as irresistible grace. This does not mean that God coerces or forces a sinner to believe in Jesus against his will. Rather, this call of God is irresistible in the sense that God sovereignly accomplishes His ordained purpose in sinful man. The Holy Spirit rescues us from our enslavement to sin, liberates our will, eliminates our resistance, and gives us a desire for Him. As the Westminster Confession of Faith states, those who are so effectually drawn to Christ will “come most freely, being made willing by His grace” (Chapter 10, Section 1). This is a special work of God, not done for all humanity, otherwise per Christ all would have come to Him; but this is done only for those that the Father has given to the Son, those whom He has elected, and they will all come to Jesus, without any exception (John 6:37, 44). The elect are the Father’s gifts to the Son (John 17:1-2, 6-12; Hebrews 2:10-13), which will be kept to the end. This is what is meant by the irresistible grace of God, for it is effectual and will never fail (Psalm 65:4).

Mysterious work of God – In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus made an analogy between the wind and the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration (John 3:7-8). Just as the wind blows wherever it wishes, so the Holy Spirit regenerates as He wishes. And just as the wind is invisible, and we don’t know where it is coming from or going, so the Holy Spirit is invisible, and His coming and going is mysterious. We do not know how He raises the spiritually dead, for this is an inward, invisible and secret work of God. Though the work of the wind is mysterious to us, we do see and hear its effects. The same is true with respect to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. We see the effects of His work, that is, the changed lives of people, who love God and His Word, whereas they didn’t before.

Immediate work of God – The work of regeneration is an immediate work. First, this means that it is an instantaneous change of man’s nature, and not a gradual process over time. A person is either spiritually dead or alive; there is no in-between condition. Secondly, this means that God regenerates a person without any means. Just as God brought creation into existence without any means, and just as Christ healed the blind, the deaf, the lame and the dead without any means, so the Spirit regenerates spiritually dead people without the use of anything outside of Himself and His omnipotence.

Regeneration precedes faith – Regeneration is not the fruit of faith, rather, faith is the fruit of regeneration. Before being regenerated, a person has no disposition, inclination or desire for the things of God. But after regeneration that person is now inclined towards God. A person must first be born again before he can have faith (John 3:3; 6:44; Ephesians 2:1). His spiritually blind eyes, deaf ears and dead heart must be changed, not helped, before he can see, hear and desire Christ. And after a person has been regenerated, he will repent and believe in Christ (Ezekiel 36:26-27; 1 John 4:19).