

FAITH IS OUR FIRST SERVICE

Parts of the New Testament express different “steps” in salvation – indicating a certain order to these steps. An example is Romans 8:29-30, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” Christian theologians have thus attempted to define a Biblical “Order of Salvation.” How we think about this “Order” will have profound impact on how we view ‘faith.’

One camp of Christian theologians is the Arminian camp. They define the Order of Salvation as follows:

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| 1) outward call | 5) justification |
| 2) faith/election | 6) perseverance |
| 3) repentance | 7) glorification |
| 4) regeneration | |

In this conceptualization of the “Order” the outward call of the gospel goes forward and is equally accessible to all. The gospel demands faith; and for those who comply and put their faith in Jesus, God looks favorably upon them. Scripture indicates that God foreknew those that would put their faith in Jesus. So on this basis God has chosen to elect these individuals. The Bible also says that we are justified by faith and so faith is naturally followed by repentance, regeneration, and justification. Turning away from this faith is a real and ongoing danger for Christians and so perseverance is necessary. For those who do persist to the end, glorification is their reward.

A second camp of Christian theologians is the Reformed camp. They define the Order of Salvation as follows:

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| 1) election | 6) conversion (faith & repentance) |
| 2) predestination | 7) justification |
| 3) gospel call | 8) sanctification |
| 4) inward call | 9) glorification |
| 5) regeneration | |

In this conceptualization, conversion (faith and repentance) comes after regeneration. Faith is, therefore, understood to be the first part of service (post-Salvation).

This seems to fit better with the larger understanding that faith is not a good work that we do that earns us salvation. Rather it is a free gift of grace (Eph. 2:8-10). Also, the presence of faith in our lives therefore assures us of God’s working and regeneration (Apart from which we would not have faith).

(John 3 and the telephone example.)

Canons of Dort III/IV

Article 11: The Holy Spirit's Work in Conversion

Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in the elect, or works true conversion in them, God not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, God also penetrates into the inmost being, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. God infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant. God activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.

Article 12: Regeneration a Supernatural Work

And this is the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help. But this certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God's work is done, it remains in human power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not less than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God, but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, people themselves, by that grace which they have received, are also rightly said to believe and to repent.