

# Effectual Calling, Regeneration, and the Word:

## The Gill–Westminster Confession Tension

### Final Revised Edition — Definitive Assessment

*Romans 4:16–17 | The Creative Fiat | John 5:25 Logical Sequence | Ezekiel 37 | Three Forms of Unity | The Purpose of the Gospel | Clark's Completeness Principle | The Laodicean Warning*

A High Calvinist Study | John Gill · Gordon Clark · David Engelsma

*Analogy of Faith | Sola Scriptura | Monergistic Soteriology*

---

## I. Introduction: The Question Defined

The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF, 1646) is the defining doctrinal standard of the Presbyterian Reformed tradition, produced by the Westminster Assembly under parliamentary commission during the English Civil War. The 1689 London Baptist Confession (LBC) — consciously modeled after the WCF, differing only on ecclesiology and baptism — carries the same soteriology into the Baptist tradition. Both confessions affirm the five points of Calvinism without reservation.

Yet a genuine intra-Calvinist tension exists concerning the precise relationship between regeneration, effectual calling, and the Word of God. This tension is most sharply represented in the contrast between the Westminster Standards and the position of John Gill (1697–1771), whose systematic theology remains one of the most rigorous expressions of High Calvinist soteriology. The significance of Gill's position is sharpened by the fact that he stands in tension not with a foreign confessional tradition but with his own — the 1689 LBC, whose Chapter 10 on effectual calling mirrors WCF 10.1 virtually word for word. Gill's exegetical and logical conclusions outran his own confessional tradition, which is precisely what fidelity to Scripture demands when a confession falls short of scriptural precision.

The question is not whether salvation is monergistic. The question is strictly logical: In the *ordo salutis*, does the sovereign act of regeneration occur immediately — directly by the Holy Spirit, without the instrumental mediation of the Word — or mediately, through the Word of God as the divinely appointed instrument? As the following analysis demonstrates, the exegetical, logical, and canonical weight of evidence sides decisively with Gill. The WCF formulation suffers from a precision deficit that has generated centuries of unnecessary ambiguity, and confessional ambiguity is never faithfulness to God's Word. Significantly, the Three Forms of Unity — the confessional standards of the Continental Reformed tradition — particularly the Canons of Dort, stand closer to Gill's position than to the WCF's formulation, as Section III will demonstrate.

*"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." — James 1:18 (KJV)*

*"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." — 1 Peter 1:23 (KJV)*

## II. Confessional Background: The WCF and the 1689 LBC

### A. The Westminster Confession (1646)

The WCF was produced under the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant (1643) between England's Long Parliament and Scotland. Scotland — thoroughly Calvinist since John Knox brought Reformed theology from Geneva in the 1550s — agreed to provide military support to Parliament against Charles I in exchange for England's commitment to reform its church along Presbyterian lines. The WCF was the theological product of that covenant.

Scotland adopted the WCF wholesale and it remains her confessional standard to this day. England never fully implemented it. The Restoration of Charles II (1660) and the Great Ejection of 1662 — in which approximately two thousand ministers were expelled from Anglican pulpits for refusing conformity — ended the Puritan reform project within the Church of England. Those ejected ministers became the founders of English Nonconformity: Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists. John Gill was born thirty-five years after the Great Ejection into that Nonconformist Baptist stream — the direct heir of men who had refused Anglican accommodation at enormous personal cost and whose theological uncompromise proved more durable than the irenicism of those who remained and negotiated.

### B. The 1689 London Baptist Confession

The 1689 LBC was deliberately modeled after the WCF. Its framers adopted the Westminster theological architecture wholesale, modifying only ecclesiology and baptism. The soteriology — including the Chapter 10 language on effectual calling 'by His Word and Spirit' — was carried over from WCF 10.1 with minimal alteration. Gill's tension is therefore not with Presbyterianism but with his own Baptist confessional heritage, which makes his insistence on precision all the more significant. He did not import a foreign critique — he applied the Scripture's own logical demands to the tradition he inhabited.

---

## III. The Three Forms of Unity and Their Bearing on the Tension

The Three Forms of Unity are the confessional standards of the Continental Reformed tradition — Dutch, German, and French Reformed churches — as distinct from the British Reformed tradition represented by the WCF and LBC. They consist of the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1618–1619). Their bearing on the Gill-WCF tension has been largely overlooked in treatments of this debate, which is a significant omission — because the most precise of the three, the Canons of Dort, stands considerably closer to Gill's position than to the WCF's formulation.

## A. The Belgic Confession (1561)

The Belgic Confession was authored primarily by Guido de Brès, a French-speaking Reformed pastor in the Netherlands, drawing heavily on Calvin's Institutes and the French Confession of 1559. Article 24 addresses regeneration and faith in the context of justification, stating that true faith is worked in man by the hearing of God's Word and by the operation of the Holy Spirit. This formulation, on the surface, appears to support the mediate position. However, it does not enter the precise question of whether the Word is the instrument of the initial impartation of life — the conception stage — or the instrument of the bringing forth of already-conceived life into conscious faith. The Belgic describes the overall operation by which a believer comes to saving faith without making the logical distinction Gill insists upon. It is imprecise in the same direction as the WCF but less committed to the mediate reading. It is broadly compatible with both positions — which, by Clark's completeness principle, means it is an incomplete statement on this specific question.

## B. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

The Heidelberg Catechism, authored primarily by Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus under Elector Frederick III, is the most pastoral and experiential of the three forms. Its question-and-answer format was not designed to adjudicate the precise mechanics of the *ordo salutis* — it addresses the believer's conscious experience of faith and salvation. Question 65 asks how faith is worked and answers: 'by the Holy Spirit, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel.' This is the clearest statement in the Three Forms of Unity supporting the mediate position — faith is worked by the Spirit through preaching.

However, the conception/birth distinction established in Section X resolves the apparent tension. Question 65 is addressing how the believer comes to conscious faith — the brought-forth stage, the experiential realization of spiritual life through the proclaimed Word. It is not addressing the initial impartation of spiritual life — the conception stage. The Heidelberg describes the bringing forth; it does not address the prior act of spiritual conception. Applied through the conception/birth framework, Q.65 is fully consistent with Gill's position: the Spirit works conscious, evangelical faith in the heart through the preaching of the gospel — in the soul He has already immediately and sovereignly conceived. The Heidelberg is not a counter-argument to Gill; it is a description of effectual calling in the already-regenerate soul.

## C. The Canons of Dort (1618–1619)

The Canons of Dort are the most theologically precise of the three forms and the most directly relevant to this debate. Produced by the Synod of Dort in direct response to the Arminian Remonstrance, they represent the Reformed tradition's most careful systematic statement on the mechanics of sovereign grace. The Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine — on the corruption of man and the manner of his conversion — address regeneration with a specificity the Belgic and Heidelberg do not, and their conclusions are substantially more favorable to Gill's position than to the WCF's formulation.

### **Dort III/IV Article 11 — The Spirit's Immediate Penetrating Act**

Article 11 describes the Spirit's regenerating work as follows: God 'not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same

regenerating Spirit, He pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised; infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, He quickens.'

The structure of this article is decisive. The gospel is mentioned as an element alongside the Spirit's internal work — but the description of the regenerating act itself names no instrument. The Spirit pervades, opens, softens, circumcises, infuses, quickens — these are all direct, immediate acts of sovereign divine power upon the soul. No Word is present as an instrument in this description. The gospel is externally preached; the Spirit internally and immediately acts. The conjunction is not the Spirit working through the gospel — it is the gospel externally and the Spirit immediately, as two distinct operations. This is structurally closer to Gill's two-stage distinction than to the WCF's joint-operation formulation.

### **Dort III/IV Article 12 — The Decisive Statement**

Article 12 is the most explicit statement on this question in any major Reformed confessional document: 'And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which God works in us without our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation, that after God has performed His part, it should still remain in the power of man to be regenerated or not.'

Dort explicitly and unambiguously states that regeneration is 'in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel.' The external preaching of the gospel is explicitly denied as the efficient cause of regeneration. Regeneration is a new creation, a resurrection from the dead, a making alive — wrought by God without our aid, and not by external preaching. This is John Gill's position stated in confessional language. The Canons of Dort — the confessional document produced specifically to define the precise mechanics of sovereign grace against Arminianism — are more compatible with Gill's immediate regeneration than with the WCF's mediate formulation.

## **D. The Comparative Verdict**

The confessional landscape on this question is therefore not Gill against the entire Reformed tradition. It is more precisely:

**Gill and Dort III/IV Articles 11–12:** *Regeneration is the immediate, direct, sovereign act of the Spirit — not effected by external preaching. The gospel is present alongside but not as the instrument of the regenerating act. This is the position of the most precise confessional statement the Reformed tradition has produced on this specific question.*

**WCF 10.1 and its derivative 1689 LBC:** *The mediate formulation — 'by His Word and Spirit' — is imprecise enough to host both positions. It has hosted them simultaneously for four centuries. By Clark's completeness criterion, it is an incomplete statement on this specific question.*

**The Belgic Confession:** *Broadly compatible with both positions — imprecise in the same direction as the WCF but less committed. Incomplete on this specific question by the same criterion.*

**The Heidelberg Catechism Q.65:** *Describes effectual calling — the brought-forth stage — not the initial impartation of life. Fully consistent with Gill's position when the conception/birth distinction of Section X is applied.*

The significance of this comparative picture cannot be overstated. The ordinary assumption — that the Gill-WCF tension pits Gill against the mainstream of the Reformed confessional tradition — is incorrect. The mainstream of the Continental Reformed tradition, at its most precise point, corroborates Gill. The WCF's imprecision is not the norm of the Reformed tradition — it is a deficiency of the British Reformed tradition's formulation that the Continental Reformed tradition, at Dort, did not share. This means Gill's position is not a departure from the Reformed consensus — it is an articulation of what the Reformed tradition's most precise confessional document actually says.

---

## IV. The Purpose of the Gospel — A Positive Account

*Gill's position does not diminish the gospel — it properly defines and honors it by placing it where it actually belongs. The mediate position, in attempting to honor the gospel by making it the instrument of regeneration, paradoxically assigns it a function it cannot perform and obscures the functions it actually does perform. This section establishes the gospel's true and glorious purpose before the WCF's misidentification of that purpose is analyzed.*

The gospel is external, exciting the God the Holy Spirit generated life within. The word 'exciting' here carries its original Latin force — *excitare*: to call out, to rouse, to set in motion. The gospel does not create the life. It excites it. It calls forth from hiddenness into visibility the spiritual life the Spirit has already immediately and sovereignly conceived in the elect soul. This single formulation simultaneously honors the absolute sovereignty of the Spirit — the life is Spirit-generated, not gospel-generated — and the absolute necessity and glory of the gospel, which is the appointed external instrument by which that internally conceived life is brought forth into full, conscious, covenantal, worshipping, relational existence before God.

### A. Information and Proclamation

The gospel is first and irreducibly cognitive — it communicates propositional truth about the person and work of Christ. The already-conceived soul requires content: who Christ is, what He has accomplished, what it means to repent and believe, what the promises of God in Him are. The gospel provides this content. Romans 10:14 — 'how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?' — is not a statement about the instrument of regeneration; it is a statement about the necessary cognitive content of saving faith. You cannot trust a Christ you have never heard of. The gospel informs — it supplies the propositional content that the regenerate mind, now alive to God, can receive, apprehend, and rest in. Gordon Clark's insistence that all knowledge is propositional finds its soteriological application here: the already-conceived soul receives the gospel as propositional truth and is brought forth through it into explicit, cognitive, confessional faith.

### B. Effectual Calling — The Bringing Forth

As the conception/birth distinction establishes, the gospel is the appointed instrument of effectual calling — the bringing forth of already-conceived spiritual life into conscious, explicit, covenantal existence before God. The internal life conceived by the Spirit is brought forth into the light of conscious faith through the external proclamation of the gospel. This is not a diminished role — it is the appointed means by which God brings His elect from secret, hidden spiritual life into the full,

conscious, experiential possession of salvation. The gospel does not produce what was not there; it brings forth what is already there. This is its appointed glory.

## C. Assurance

The gospel is the ground of the believer's assurance. Christ's objective, historical, accomplished work — His active and passive obedience, His resurrection, His present intercession — is the external, unchanging, extra nos foundation on which the elect soul rests its confidence before God. Assurance is not found by looking inward at the quality of one's own faith or the degree of one's own sanctification — it is found by looking outward to the proclaimed, objective facts of the gospel. The Reformation principle is precise here: assurance is grounded in the external Word, not in internal experience. The gospel provides the objective anchor that the internal life of faith requires. Without the gospel's external proclamation of what Christ has objectively accomplished, the regenerate soul has no stable ground on which to rest its conscious confidence before God.

## D. Sanctification and Growth

The gospel is the appointed instrument of the believer's ongoing growth in grace. John 17:17 — 'sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.' The Word of God, applied by the Spirit to the regenerate soul, is the means of progressive sanctification — mortifying the old nature, vivifying the new, conforming the elect to the image of Christ. The gospel does not merely bring forth life; it nourishes, develops, and matures it. 1 Peter 2:2 follows immediately after the seed/birth language of 1:23 — 'as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.' The conceived, born, living soul feeds on the Word. Growth is the gospel's ongoing ministry to the already-living.

## E. Worship

The gospel is the content and occasion of the church's worship. It is proclaimed, sung, prayed, enacted in the sacraments, and celebrated in the assembly of the saints. The church's entire liturgical life is a response to and proclamation of the gospel — the corporate, external, visible expression of what the Spirit has worked internally and individually in each member of the body. The gospel calls the already-living soul into the community of worship — the new covenant assembly — where the blessings of redemption are declared, ratified, and corporately received. The sacraments in particular are gospel-seals: external, visible confirmations of the internal, invisible reality of covenant membership and its promises.

## F. Union with Christ

The gospel is the instrument through which the elect soul is brought into conscious, experiential, covenantal union with Christ. Regeneration — spiritual conception — plants the seed of the divine nature in the soul. But the conscious, relational, personal union with Christ — knowing Him, trusting Him, loving Him, abiding in Him — is formed and deepened through the gospel. John 15:3 — 'you are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you' — is the gospel functioning as the instrument of the believer's ongoing union with Christ through the Word. The gospel brings forth the conceived life into explicit personal relationship with the Christ it proclaims.

## G. Why the Gospel Must Be Preached

This positive account of the gospel's purpose explains with precision why preaching is not optional, not secondary, and not diminished by Gill's position. The gospel must be preached — not because God could not bring forth the elect without it in some absolute sense, but because He has sovereignly appointed it as the external instrument of bringing forth and all that follows: assurance, sanctification, worship, growth, and union. His appointments are not arbitrary but wise and purposeful. The gospel is preached because God has ordained preaching as the means of effectual calling and ongoing spiritual life — not because the preached gospel has any inherent power to impart life, but because God accompanies it with His Spirit who excites the already-conceived life into full expression.

This also explains why the unregenerate do not respond to the gospel — not because the gospel failed to regenerate them, but because there is no conceived life within them to be excited. The gospel excites what is there. Where there is nothing, nothing is excited. The elect hear and respond because the Spirit has already conceived life within them that the gospel excites into full conscious expression. The reprobate hear the same gospel and remain unmoved — not because God failed but because no life was there to be excited. The sovereignty of God in salvation is preserved without remainder. The necessity and glory of the gospel are honored without confusion.

*"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" — Romans 10:14 (ESV)*

*"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." — Romans 10:17 (ESV)*

These texts are not about the instrument of regeneration. They are about the necessity of the gospel as the external instrument of effectual calling — the appointed means by which the already-conceived elect soul is brought forth into conscious, explicit, saving faith. The gospel is indispensable without being generative. It is powerful without being primary. It is the voice that calls Lazarus forth — but the life that responds to that voice was given by the sovereign creative act of the Spirit before the voice was heard.

---

## V. The Westminster/LBC Position: Mediate Regeneration

### A. The Confession's Language

WCF 10.1: 'All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ.' The conjunction 'by His Word and Spirit' is the crux. The Confession presents Word and Spirit as jointly operative in the single act of effectual calling — without logically distinguishing between the act of regeneration and the Word's ministry. WCF 10.2 affirms man's total passivity — 'altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call' — but still frames the Spirit's quickening within the joint operation of Word and Spirit.

## B. The Exegetical Texts Claimed

**1 Peter 1:23:** *The incorruptible seed by which believers are born again is identified as 'the word of God,' connected to gospel proclamation in verse 25.*

**James 1:18:** *God 'of his own will begat us with the word of truth' — the dative *logō alētheias* read as instrumental.*

**Romans 10:17:** *'Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' — applied to the regenerating act itself.*

**John 5:25:** *'The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live' — hearing read as the instrument of life.*

## C. The Fatal Weakness

Each of these texts, carefully examined, fails to establish mediate regeneration through the preached gospel. The WCF conflates two logically distinct operations — the immediate creative act of imparting spiritual life, and the subsequent ministry of the Word to the now-living soul — and treats them as a single undifferentiated act. This conflation is the source of the precision deficit that has made WCF 10.1 hospitable to contradictory interpretations for nearly four centuries. A statement that requires qualification to mean what it intends to say was, by that very fact, incompletely formulated from the outset.

---

## VI. John Gill's Position: Immediate Regeneration

### A. The Core Distinction

Gill insists on a rigorous logical distinction between regeneration and effectual calling. Regeneration is the sovereign, immediate act of the Holy Spirit imparting spiritual life to the elect soul — entirely prior to and independent of any instrumentality, including the Word. Effectual calling is the subsequent act by which God calls the now-regenerate soul through the Word to conscious faith and repentance. The Word is the instrument of effectual calling, not of regeneration itself.

*"Regeneration is an act of God's grace, which is not performed by means of the word, but is an immediate act of the Spirit of God upon the soul." — John Gill, **Body of Divinity***

Gill's argument is grounded in the nature of spiritual death and the logic of creation. A corpse cannot hear. If the unregenerate man is truly dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), then the Word — which requires a hearing recipient — cannot be the instrument that produces the very life necessary for hearing. To say the Word regenerates is to introduce a logical impossibility: the means requires the very capacity it is supposed to produce.

### B. Gordon Clark's Epistemological Corroboration

Gordon Clark (1902–1985) approaches the question of regeneration from a different angle than Gill — not primarily exegetical but epistemological — and arrives at the same conclusion by rigorous logical necessity. Clark's foundational thesis is that all knowledge is propositional and that the

Logos of John 1:1 — the eternal rational Word of God — is the necessary precondition of all human cognition. Man does not derive knowledge from sensory experience or from the physical act of hearing words; he knows because the divine Logos is the light that illumines every man (John 1:9) and the rational ground of all intelligibility.

Applied to regeneration, Clark's argument runs as follows. If saving knowledge — the knowledge of God, of sin, of Christ, of the gospel — requires the direct illuminating action of the divine Logos upon the mind, then that illumination cannot be mediated through the physical hearing of proclaimed words as if the physical act of hearing were the instrument of the cognitive transformation. The dead mind is not merely uninformed — it is spiritually and cognitively incapacitated. The Logos does not address an existing cognitive capacity in the unregenerate soul; He creates the very capacity He then employs. This is not the preached gospel reaching a hearer — it is the divine Logos reconstituting the mind's ability to receive the truth the Logos Himself is.

Clark's completeness principle reinforces Gill's position on the confessional level. Clark insisted that every theological statement must be formulated with sufficient logical precision to exclude its contradictory without remainder. A statement that admits contradictory interpretations is not a precise statement — it is an ambiguous one, and ambiguity in theology is not breadth but failure. WCF 10.1 — 'by His Word and Spirit' — has admitted contradictory interpretations for nearly four centuries. By Clark's own criterion, it is an incomplete statement. A logically adequate formulation of effectual calling must distinguish between the immediate regenerating act of the Spirit and the subsequent ministry of the Word to the living soul — which is precisely Gill's distinction. Clark's epistemology and Gill's exegesis arrive at the same architectural conclusion by independent routes.

### C. David Engelsma's Covenant Theological Corroboration

David Engelsma approaches the Gill-WCF question from the angle of covenant theology — specifically the Protestant Reformed tradition's insistence on the unconditional, unilateral character of the covenant of grace. Engelsma argues that the covenant of grace, properly understood, is not a bilateral agreement in which God offers and man conditionally accepts — it is a sovereign divine administration in which God establishes, maintains, and fulfills His covenant with the elect entirely on the basis of His own sovereign purpose and Christ's mediatorial work, with no human condition standing between the divine promise and its certain fulfillment.

This covenantal framework has direct implications for the regeneration debate. If the covenant of grace is unconditional — if God's sovereign purpose to save the elect admits no human condition, no human instrumentality, no human act that stands between the divine decree and its execution — then regeneration, as the first act of the Spirit's application of covenant grace to the elect soul, must itself be unconditional and immediate. To make the preached Word a necessary instrument of regeneration is to introduce a condition into the application of the covenant — the condition that the Word must be present and heard — which Engelsma regards as a subtle compromise of the covenant's unconditionality.

Engelsma also presses the implications of the covenant of redemption — the eternal intra-Trinitarian pact in which the Father gives the elect to the Son and the Son undertakes to secure their salvation. The elect are given to Christ unconditionally in eternity; Christ's mediatorial work secures their redemption historically and unconditionally; the Spirit applies that redemption to each elect soul immediately and sovereignly in time. Every link in this chain is unconditional. The introduction of a necessary instrumental means — the preached Word — at the point of the Spirit's

application weakens the final link and implicitly conditions the Spirit's sovereign act on a secondary cause. Engelsma's covenant theology therefore arrives at Gill's conclusion: the Spirit's regenerating act is immediate, unconditional, and sovereign — the Word is the instrument of the subsequent effectual call, not of the regenerating act itself.

Engelsma further argues — consistent with the Laodicean warning of Section XII — that the Reformed tradition's tendency toward confessional ambiguity on this point reflects an ecumenical accommodation that sacrifices theological precision for institutional unity. The Protestant Reformed tradition, in Engelsma's formulation, stands for the full, unqualified implications of sovereign grace precisely at the points where other Reformed bodies have softened or qualified them. On regeneration, the full implication of sovereign grace is Gill's position: the Spirit acts alone, immediately, without instrument, and the Word follows as His appointed means of calling the living soul to conscious faith.

## D. Gill's Exegetical Responses

**On James 1:18:** *The word of truth is the gospel — this is its plain sense and need not be denied. The decisive exegetical point, however, lies in the verb *apokueō* itself. This word does not mean to conceive — it means to bring forth, to deliver, to give birth to what has already been conceived. Conception and birth are not the same act. The gospel does not conceive spiritual life; it brings forth into conscious experience the life the Spirit has already secretly conceived in the elect soul. The dative *logō alētheias* therefore attaches to the bringing-forth stage — effectual calling — not to the prior act of spiritual conception. The WCF has misidentified which stage of the process James 1:18 is describing. The gospel is the instrument of delivery, not of conception.*

**On 1 Peter 1:23:** *The same conception/birth distinction applies. The incorruptible seed is already present — it is the new divine nature implanted by the Spirit in immediate regeneration. The word of God is the appointed means by which the soul born of that seed grows into conscious life, which is precisely why Peter moves immediately to 'as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word' (1 Peter 2:2). The seed precedes the word's ministry; the word nurtures and brings forth what the seed has already produced.*

**On Romans 10:17:** *Faith that comes by hearing is evangelical, conscious faith in the already-regenerate soul — the brought-forth stage, not the conception stage. It is the conscious formation of saving faith in the living soul through the proclaimed Word.*

**On John 5:25:** *Hearing is the activity of life, not its cause. Addressed fully in Section IX.*

---

## VII. The Logical Conflict

### A. The Sequence Problem

The WCF holds that Word and Spirit operate simultaneously in effectual calling — no temporal or logical priority of regeneration over the Word's ministry. Gill insists on a logical priority of regeneration: the Spirit must first give life before the soul can receive the Word savingly. These are not merely different preferences — they are contradictory logical architectures, and only one can be correct. The biological analogy that resolves the sequence question definitively — conception prior to and independent of birth — is developed fully in Section X.

## B. The Dead Cannot Receive an Instrument

If total depravity means what both positions insist it means — and it does — then the unregenerate soul has no spiritual receptivity whatsoever. Not diminished receptivity. Not latent receptivity. None. The Word, as an external means, requires some capacity of reception in order to function instrumentally. That capacity cannot be produced by the instrument that requires it. This is elementary logic. Gill's position honors it; the WCF position does not.

## C. The WCF Response and Its Insufficiency

The WCF response — that the Spirit creates receptivity in the very act of speaking — attempts to resolve the logical problem by making the creative act and the instrumental act simultaneous. But this simultaneity, taken seriously, collapses into Gill's position: the Spirit's sovereign creative act produces life, and the Word is present as the appointed occasion. The WCF formulation obscures this rather than resolving it, which is why it has generated the centuries of ambiguity it has.

---

# VIII. The Abraham Argument: Romans 4:16–17

*This section incorporates new exegetical observations arising from a study of Abraham's travels and Paul's argument in Romans 4, with direct bearing on the Gill-WCF tension.*

## A. Romans 4:16–17 Is Directly and Centrally About Abraham

Romans 4:16–17 is not a passage in which Abraham merely provides an illustration. Abraham is the subject of Paul's entire argument from 4:1 through 4:25 — the federal representative of the covenant of grace, whose justification by faith apart from works (4:2–3), circumcision (4:9–11), and law (4:13–15) establishes the monergistic pattern of salvation for all the elect. Paul's question in 4:1 — 'What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?' — governs everything that follows.

*"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring — not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations' — in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." — Romans 4:16–17 (ESV)*

## B. The Critical Distinction: Terah vs. Abraham and Sarah

A careful reading of the Abraham narrative establishes a distinction that sharpens Paul's argument in Romans 4:17. Terah fathered Abraham at age 70 (Genesis 11:26). While late by modern standards, this was within the patriarchal norm — no miracle required, no biological impossibility overcome. It was natural human generation, however tardy.

Abraham and Sarah's situation was categorically different — not merely advanced age but twofold biological impossibility. Paul describes Abraham as *nenekrōmenos* (Romans 4:19) — a completed

state of bodily deadness with respect to generative capacity. Sarah faced constitutional barrenness that predated age (Genesis 11:30 establishes this before age was a factor) plus post-menopausal age at 90. John Gill observed that this double impossibility was precisely what made the miracle complete and the faith required to believe it specifically the faith Paul is defining — faith in the God who raises the dead. The contrast is ontological: Terah's fatherhood belongs to the order of natural generation; Isaac's birth belongs to the order of resurrection and new creation.

### C. Creatio Ex Nihilo as the Pattern of Regeneration

Romans 4:17 defines God as *ton kalountos ta mē onta hōs onta* — the one who calls into existence the things that do not exist. This is the language of creation *ex nihilo* — the language of the divine creative fiat, not the language of gospel proclamation (*kērussō, euangelizō*). This is the word of Genesis 1:3: 'Let there be light.' Light did not exist and then receive the command. The fiat produced the existence. There was no prior receptivity in the void. The creative word and its effect are not instrument-and-recipient — they are a single sovereign ontological act.

Paul applies this language directly to the act by which God saves. The God who saves is the God who calls into existence things that do not exist. This is not an analogy to regeneration — it is Paul's own theological definition of the divine act underlying all salvation. And it is precisely Gill's position: the regenerating act is immediate, sovereign, creative, and ontologically prior to any capacity of reception in its object.

---

## IX. Three Decisive Exegetical Arguments

*The following three arguments, taken together, constitute a conclusive canonical case for Gill's position. Each independently demonstrates that the WCF's mediate regeneration reading is exegetically untenable.*

### A. The Creative Fiat vs. Gospel Proclamation

The WCF's reading of James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23 depends on identifying the gospel as the instrument of the initial impartation of spiritual life — the conception of the new soul. But this conflates two categorically different divine acts. The gospel is the instrument of the bringing forth of already-conceived life, not of conception itself. The precise exegetical case for this distinction is made in Section X. The broader categorical distinction between the creative fiat and gospel proclamation is as follows:

**The creative fiat:** *God's sovereign address that produces its own object — 'Let there be light' (Genesis 1:3), 'Lazarus, come forth' (John 11:43). This word does not find a recipient; it creates one. It is ontologically productive, not instrumentally persuasive. It belongs to the order of creation, not communication.*

**The proclaimed gospel:** *The preached Word addressed to those already alive, by which the Spirit works faith, repentance, and sanctification in the regenerate soul. This word finds recipients — but only because they have already been made alive to receive it.*

The word by which God regenerates belongs to the first category, not the second. John 1:13 eliminates every human instrumentality from the act of new birth: 'born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.' The new birth is God's act alone — in the same category as the original creation.

The canonical paradigm is Lazarus (John 11:43). Lazarus was four days dead — tetartaios, John notes emphatically (11:39), precisely to eliminate any suggestion of suspended animation or residual vitality. The command 'Lazarus, come forth' did not find a recipient; it created one. Lazarus heard because he was raised — he was not raised because he heard. The hearing was the first fruit of resurrection life, not its instrument or condition. This is the model of all regeneration.

## B. John 5:25 — Hearing Is the Activity of Life, Not Its Cause

'The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live' (John 5:25 KJV).

The WCF reads this as: the dead hear the voice, then life follows. Hearing is prior; life is the result. But this reading is logically incoherent. A corpse has no auditory capacity — not diminished, not latent, not suppressed, but none whatsoever. Hearing presupposes a living subject. The correct logical sequence is:

*The voice of the Son of God is sovereignly addressed to the dead → the creative fiat imparts life → the now-living soul hears → and by that very hearing lives consciously before God. The hearing is the evidence of life already given, not the instrument by which life is given.*

This is structurally identical to Lazarus. The command reached him as a sovereign creative word that produced its own preconditions. His ears functioned because he was raised. This also definitively resolves the WCF's appeal to Romans 10:17. 'Faith comes by hearing' describes the post-regeneration process by which the already-living soul comes to explicit evangelical faith through the proclaimed Word. Romans 10 is addressing the conscious formation of saving faith in the regenerate soul — not the initial impartation of spiritual life. Conflating these two logically distinct operations is the precise error of WCF 10.1.

Gordon Clark's epistemological principle reinforces this: rational and spiritual apprehension depend on the Logos as the condition of cognition itself. The Logos does not address an existing capacity in the dead soul — He creates the capacity He then addresses. The creative act is prior to and productive of the receptive act.

## C. Ezekiel 37 — The Dry Bones and the Two-Stage Act

The valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14) is the most powerful canonical corroboration of Gill's position. Its absence from most treatments of this debate is a significant oversight — it provides not merely an analogy but the Spirit's own inspired dramatization of the structure of regeneration.

The bones are yebēshot me'od — very dry (37:2). Maximum desiccation, maximum distance from any residual vitality, maximum impossibility of self-generated life. The Spirit's question — 'Can these bones live?' (37:3) — is designed to eliminate every natural affirmative answer before the divine answer is given. The sovereign prophetic command — 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD' (37:4) — does not presuppose living hearers. It is a creative fiat addressed to the dead, which produces what it commands.

Crucially, the passage records two structurally distinct acts:

**First act (37:7–8):** *The word over the bones produces bodily reconstitution — the rattling, the sinews, the flesh, the skin. The body is structurally reformed. But verse 8 notes: 'there was no breath in them.' The body exists before the breath enters.*

**Second act (37:9–10):** *The word commands the Spirit/breath (ruach) to enter. The breath comes in and they live — 'an exceeding great army.' Conscious, animated life follows structural reconstitution.*

This two-stage structure is the canonical model of Gill's distinction between regeneration and effectual calling. The first act — structural reconstitution — corresponds to immediate regeneration: the sovereign implantation of the new nature, prior to any conscious response. The second act — the breath entering — corresponds to effectual calling: the conscious animation of the regenerate soul into explicit faith and life before God.

The immediate canonical context, Ezekiel 36:26, must not be overlooked: 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.' This is God's unilateral, immediate, monergistic act — no instrument named, no human cooperation required, no Word proclaimed to the stone heart before the transplant. The new heart is given. This is regeneration proper. Ezekiel 37 then dramatizes its structure.

One further and decisive observation: Ezekiel's prophesying is not the efficient cause of the resurrection — it is the appointed occasion through which the Spirit works His sovereign act. Ezekiel does not animate the bones; the Spirit does. The prophetic word has no inherent power to impart life — the power is entirely the Spirit's immediate action. This is Gill's precise point: the preached Word does not regenerate. The Spirit regenerates, immediately and sovereignly. The Word is the appointed occasion of effectual calling, not the efficient cause of regeneration.

---

## X. Conception and Birth — A Necessary Distinction

*This section establishes the biological, logical, grammatical, and canonical principle that governs the exegesis of James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23 in Section XI. It is not a preliminary observation — it is the foundational framework on which the decisive exegetical argument of this document rests.*

### A. The Biological Reality

Conception and birth are not the same act. They are not simultaneous. They are not interchangeable. Conception is the act by which life is imparted — the moment at which a new living being comes into existence. Birth is the act by which that already-existing life is brought forth

into the world — delivered into conscious, independent existence. The life present at birth is not a new life created at birth. It is the same life that was conceived, now brought forth. No one disputes this in the natural realm. It is a fixed biological and logical fact.

The child born is not the child created at birth. It is the child who was already alive, already developing, already possessing all that it was by nature — now delivered into the world. Birth does not impart life. Birth brings forth life already given. The means of delivery — however appointed, however necessary for the bringing forth — do not create the life they deliver. They bring forth what was already there.

## B. The Logical Structure and Asymmetrical Dependency

The distinction generates a clean and irreversible logical sequence:

**Conception:** *The impartation of life by an act entirely independent of and prior to the one being conceived. The conceived has no role in its own conception — no capacity, no cooperation, no receptivity precedes the act in the one receiving life. Life is simply given, sovereignly and immediately.*

**Gestation:** *The development of the conceived life in preparation for birth. The life grows according to its nature. It is genuinely, fully alive — but not yet brought forth into conscious, external, interactive existence.*

**Birth / Bringing forth:** *The delivery of the already-living into conscious, external, interactive existence through the appointed means of delivery. The means of delivery do not create the life they bring forth. They are instruments of delivery, not of conception.*

The logical dependency between these stages runs in one direction only and cannot be reversed. Birth depends on conception — there is nothing to bring forth unless life has already been given. Conception does not depend on birth — the conceived life is fully real before birth occurs. This asymmetry is absolute and irreversible.

Applied to the Spirit and the gospel: the gospel depends on the Spirit for its efficacy as the instrument of bringing forth. The Spirit does not depend on the gospel to impart life — He imparts life immediately and sovereignly in the act of spiritual conception, prior to and independent of the gospel's ministry. The gospel brings forth what the Spirit has already conceived. Conception does not depend on birth. The Spirit does not depend on the gospel. This is the same asymmetrical dependency stated in biological terms — and it is fatal to the WCF's mediate position in the same way it would be fatal to claim that a child is created at birth rather than at conception.

## C. The Grammatical and Lexical Evidence

The Greek verb at the center of James 1:18 is *apokueō* — translated 'begat' in the KJV. This word does not mean to conceive. It means to bring forth, to deliver — the act of parturition, not conception. The Greek word for conception is *sullambanō* — used precisely in Luke 1:31: 'you will conceive (*sullambanō*) in your womb and bear a son.' James does not use *sullambanō*. He uses *apokueō* — the word for bringing forth what has already been conceived.

This is not an imported distinction. James himself uses *apokueō* two verses earlier in 1:15 in an unambiguously parturition sense: 'sin, when it is fully grown (*apokueō*), gives birth to death.' The

fully developed sin delivers — brings forth — its offspring of death. The word is unambiguously parturition in 1:15. James then uses the same word in 1:18 for God's act toward the elect. The intra-chapter parallel is decisive: whatever *apokueō* means in 1:15 it means in 1:18. It means parturition — bringing forth — in both instances. The WCF has read a delivery word as a conception word, and the resulting confusion has persisted for four centuries.

The dative *logō alētheias* — with the word of truth — therefore attaches to the bringing-forth stage, not to the prior act of imparting life. The word of truth is the gospel in its plain sense — this need not be denied. But the gospel is the appointed instrument of delivery, not of conception. The dative of manner describes how the bringing forth occurs — through the gospel — not how the initial life was given.

## D. The Analogy of Faith — Canonical Corroboration

Scripture corroborates this distinction at multiple points, and the consistent canonical pattern demands it:

**John 3:6:** *'That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' The new birth is attributed entirely to the Spirit — no Word named, no gospel instrument present in the description of the birth itself. The Spirit conceives; what is conceived is spirit. The bringing forth through the Word follows.*

**John 3:8:** *'The wind blows where it wishes... so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' The Spirit's movement in regeneration is sovereign, invisible, and untrackable — precisely the character of conception, which occurs secretly and without observable external cause. The bringing forth is visible; the conception is not.*

**Ezekiel 36:26:** *'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.' No instrument named. This is the act of spiritual conception — the sovereign, immediate implantation of new life before any Word is proclaimed to the stone heart.*

**Ezekiel 37:** *The bones are reconstituted before the breath enters — the structure of the new nature is established before the animating breath brings forth conscious life. The prophetic word is the instrument of bringing forth, not of the prior structural reconstitution.*

**1 Peter 1:23 / 2:2:** *The incorruptible seed — the divinely implanted new nature — is already present. The word of God then brings forth and nourishes the life that seed has produced: 'as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word.' The seed precedes the word's ministry. The word brings forth and nourishes what the seed has already produced.*

**Galatians 4:19:** *Paul describes himself as 'in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you' — *ōdinō*, birth pangs, the labor of bringing forth. Paul's ministry is the delivery process. The Christ-life being brought forth was already conceived by the Spirit in these believers. Paul's apostolic labor is the instrument of the bringing forth, not of the original conception.*

**Romans 4:17:** *God calls into existence things that do not exist — *creatio ex nihilo*, the language of conception, not of delivery. The creative fiat imparts life where there was none. The gospel then brings forth that life into conscious faith.*

The canonical pattern is without exception: the Spirit conceives immediately and sovereignly; the Word brings forth into conscious existence what the Spirit has already conceived. The WCF's reading of James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23 requires misidentifying which stage of this pattern the gospel instruments. The analogy of faith does not permit that misidentification.

## E. The Verdict of the Distinction

The conception/birth distinction resolves the apparent tension between Gill's position and the biblical texts the WCF appeals to — not by denying those texts but by correctly identifying what they are describing. James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23 are describing the bringing forth — effectual calling through the gospel. They are not describing the initial impartation of spiritual life — immediate regeneration by the Spirit alone. Both are true. Both are real. They are simply not the same act. The WCF's error is not citing the wrong texts — it is reading texts about delivery as if they described conception.

Once this distinction is in place, the entire debate clarifies. Gill is not denying that the gospel brings forth the elect into conscious faith. He is insisting that the life the gospel brings forth was not given by the gospel — it was given by the sovereign, immediate, creative act of the Holy Spirit prior to and independent of the gospel's ministry. The Spirit conceives. The gospel delivers. These are not competing claims about the same act — they are descriptions of two logically distinct stages of the one work of salvation. Gill's position honors both stages in their proper order. The WCF conflates them into one.

---

## XI. James 1:18 — The Text Examined

*"Boulētheis apekuēsen hēmas logō alētheias, eis to einai hēmas aparchēn tina tōn autou ktismatōn."* — James 1:18 (NA28)

### A. Three Features of the Text

**'Of his own will' (boulētheis):** *The verse does not begin with the word of truth — it begins with God's will. This word describes a deliberate, sovereign, completed act of divine purposing. It governs everything that follows. Whatever 'the word of truth' means in this sentence, it is subordinate to and defined by that sovereign will — not the other way around.*

**'Begot he us' (apekuēsen) — the lexically decisive word:** *As established in Section X, apokuēō is the word for bringing forth — parturition, not conception. James uses it in 1:15 of sin bringing forth death, and in 1:18 of God bringing forth the elect through the word of truth. The intra-chapter parallel is determinative: the word means delivery in both verses. God is the sole agent; the elect are the sole object. The act of bringing forth is entirely God's — but what is being brought forth into conscious existence is life already conceived by the immediate act of the Spirit. The WCF reads this as conception; the lexicon demands it be read as delivery.*

**'With the word of truth' (logō alētheias — the dative case):** *In Greek, the dative case is the grammatical form used for indirect objects — the person or thing to whom or for whom something is done. But Greek extends the dative into several related functions, and the form of the noun alone does not tell you which function is intended. Context must decide. The Westminster position reads this as a dative of instrument — God brought us forth by means of the word of truth, the way a midwife delivers with instruments. But since apokuēō describes delivery rather than conception, the dative of manner is the precise reading: the word of truth is the appointed means and manner of the bringing forth. The gospel is not the instrument of conception — it is the instrument of delivery. The life was already there. The gospel brings it forth.*

## B. The Analogy of Faith Applied

With the conception/birth distinction established in Section X, every canonical text aligns behind Gill's reading. Romans 4:17 describes the creative fiat — conception language. Ezekiel 36:26 gives the new heart with no instrument named — conception, Spirit alone. John 1:13 excludes all human agency from the new birth. John 3:6 attributes the new birth to the Spirit alone. John 5:25 places hearing after life — the brought-forth soul hears, not the unconceived. Lazarus hears because he is raised. Every text the WCF claims for mediate regeneration is a text about bringing forth — delivery — not about the initial impartation of life. Gill's reading is not only grammatically legitimate — it is the reading demanded by the consistent canonical pattern.

## C. Eleven Implications of the Mediate Position

If the WCF mediate reading of James 1:18 — and of regeneration generally — is followed to its logical conclusions, it produces consequences the WCF itself cannot consistently sustain. Each of the following is a direct implication of the mediate position, not an external objection imported from outside:

**1. It compromises total depravity.** *If the Word functions as the instrument of regeneration, the unregenerate soul must possess some capacity to receive it — some residual spiritual aptitude that allows the Word to take effect. But total depravity denies any such capacity. The mediate position, pressed logically, requires a less-than-total depravity in order to function.*

**2. It makes regeneration contingent on the preacher.** *If the Word is the necessary instrument, regeneration cannot occur where the Word is not proclaimed. This creates an immediate and unresolvable problem for elect infants, the mentally incapacitated, and those who die before hearing the gospel. The WCF concedes this in 10.3 — effectively admitting the Spirit can work without the Word in exceptional cases. But a principle that admits exceptions has already undermined itself.*

**3. It introduces synergism through the back door.** *If hearing the Word is structurally necessary to regeneration — even passively — then the act of hearing becomes a human contribution to the regenerating process, however involuntary. This is not Arminianism, but it introduces a dependency on human instrumentality incompatible with pure monergism.*

**4. It confuses instrument with efficient cause.** *The Spirit is the efficient cause of regeneration — the one who acts. The Word, on the WCF reading, becomes a necessary co-condition. But a necessary co-condition of an effect shares in its causation. The WCF never intends this — but the logic of its formulation tends there unless constantly qualified. Which is itself Clark's point: an incomplete statement requires perpetual qualification to avoid its own implications.*

**5. It cannot account for Old Testament saints.** *The preached gospel in its New Testament fullness was not available to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, or the prophets. If the proclaimed Word is the instrument of regeneration, what instrument was employed for them? Gill's position requires no instrument in any dispensation — the Spirit acts immediately in every age without exception.*

**6. It undermines God's sovereignty in timing.** *If the Word must be present as the instrument, then the moment of the new birth is — at least structurally — dependent on the availability of a preacher or a text. This places the timing of regeneration partly outside God's immediate sovereign control and into the chain of secondary causes. Gill's immediate regeneration leaves the timing entirely in God's hands.*

**7. It contradicts John 3:8.** *'The wind blows where it wishes... so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' The new birth is explicitly characterized as sovereign, invisible, and unbound by observable cause. If the Word is the necessary instrument, the new birth is actually traceable — it follows the Word. But Christ says it is not traceable. The mediate position structurally contradicts John 3:8; Gill's position honors it fully.*

**8. It conflates regeneration with conversion.** *Regeneration is the impartation of spiritual life — spiritual conception by the Spirit alone. Conversion is the conscious turning of the now-living soul to*

*God in faith and repentance through the Word — the bringing forth into conscious existence. See Section X for the full distinction. The WCF collapses these two into a single act. Scripture consistently distinguishes them.*

**9. It cannot adequately explain Ezekiel 36:26.** *'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.'* No instrument is named. No Word is proclaimed to the stone heart before the transplant. God acts unilaterally, immediately, sovereignly. The mediate position must either ignore this text, read an instrument into it the text does not provide, or treat it as an exceptional case — all of which are exegetically unsatisfactory.

**10. It makes the Spirit derivative rather than primary.** *On the WCF reading, the Spirit works through the Word — structurally placing the Word as the initiating element the Spirit accompanies. But the consistent biblical pattern is the reverse: the Spirit is the sovereign agent; the Word is His instrument when He chooses to employ one. The Spirit is never presented in Scripture as conditioned by or dependent on the Word. He moves sovereignly; the Word follows His movements.*

**11. It makes the Spirit dependent on the gospel — which is logically impossible.** *The gospel depends on the Holy Spirit for its efficacy in every instance without exception. The Holy Spirit has never depended on the gospel — He existed and acted before any gospel was proclaimed, before any Scripture was written, before any word was preached. This dependency is irreversible and asymmetrical. The WCF's simultaneity appeal — that Word and Spirit operate together at the same moment with neither prior — does not resolve this asymmetry; it conceals it. For two things to be truly simultaneous, they must be genuinely independent of each other. But Word and Spirit are not independent: the Spirit can act without the Word (WCF 10.3 concedes this); the Word cannot regenerate without the Spirit (no Reformed theologian has ever claimed otherwise). This asymmetry is fatal to the simultaneity argument. Furthermore, logical priority is not the same as temporal priority — two events can occur at exactly the same instant and yet one can be logically dependent on the other. The foundation of a building and its walls may be laid simultaneously, yet the foundation is logically prior. Even granting simultaneity in time, the Spirit remains logically prior to the Word as the independent sovereign agent whose act grounds the Word's efficacy. The simultaneity claim cannot flatten this logical dependency. And if the WCF insists the Spirit uses the Word as His instrument, it has already conceded Gill's point: instrument-use requires logical priority of the agent over the instrument. Agent first, instrument second, effect third — this sequence is irreducible. The gospel depends on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not depend on the gospel. No appeal to simultaneity changes the logic.*

### ★ Implication 12 — Special Treatment: The Ordinary/Extraordinary Means Distinction Is Not a Biblical Category

*This implication deserves particular weight because the ordinary/extraordinary means distinction is one of the most widely received and least questioned constructs in Reformed theology. Its prevalence does not indicate its validity — it indicates how deeply the mediate position requires a theological accommodation that Scripture itself does not provide.*

The ordinary/extraordinary means distinction was introduced into Reformed theology specifically to handle the cases the mediate regeneration position cannot account for on its own terms: elect infants dying in infancy, the mentally incapacitated, Old Testament saints who lived before the full gospel proclamation, and those who die without ever hearing the proclaimed Word. WCF 10.3 concedes the problem directly: 'Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth.' This concession is the crack in the entire mediate edifice. The moment the WCF admits the Spirit works when, where, and how He pleases — without the Word, without means — it has conceded Gill's foundational principle. It has simply quarantined the concession to an 'extraordinary' category to protect the ordinary means doctrine from the logical consequences of its own exception.

The distinction fails on four grounds, each of which is decisive independently:

**First — it is not a biblical category.** *Scripture nowhere divides God's saving acts into ordinary and extraordinary modes. The distinction is a theological construct — an accommodation engineered to reconcile the irreconcilable: the mediate regeneration position on one side, and the undeniable pastoral and biblical reality that God saves elect souls without the Word on the other. John 3:8 presents no ordinary/extraordinary division: 'so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit' — not 'so it ordinarily is' and 'so it extraordinarily is in exceptional cases.' The uniformity is total and unqualified. The Spirit moves where He wills in every case without exception. A theological category that Scripture does not supply and that exists solely to rescue a position from its own exceptions is not a category — it is an admission.*

**Second — it is logically self-defeating.** *A principle that admits exceptions is not a principle — it is a default. If the Spirit can and does regenerate without the Word in the extraordinary case, then the Word is not the instrument of regeneration — it is the appointed accompaniment of regeneration in certain cases. But that is precisely Gill's position stated in different language. The extraordinary means concession does not qualify the mediate position — it negates it. To say 'the Word is the instrument of regeneration except when it is not' is to say the Word is not the instrument of regeneration. The WCF's own exception clause in 10.3 is the most powerful argument for Gill's position in the entire Confession.*

**Third — it introduces a contingency into God's sovereign act.** *The ordinary/extraordinary construct presents God as adapting His mode of operation to the availability of creaturely means — ordinarily working through the Word because the Word is available, extraordinarily working without it when the Word is not. This places the mode of God's sovereign regenerating act in partial dependence on the availability of a secondary cause. A God who ordinarily requires the Word to regenerate is a God whose sovereign act is — in the ordinary case — contingent on a creaturely instrument. But God is not contingent in any case. He does not adapt to circumstances. He sovereignly appoints and governs circumstances. His act of imparting spiritual life is not conditioned by what means happen to be present — it is the unconditioned, immediate, sovereign act of the Holy Spirit in every case without exception. The ordinary/extraordinary distinction introduces into the doctrine of regeneration precisely the kind of creaturely contingency that the doctrine of divine sovereignty exists to exclude.*

**Fourth — it misidentifies what the means of grace are for.** *The means of grace — Word, sacraments, prayer — are not instruments of spiritual conception. They are instruments of the bringing forth and nurture of already-conceived spiritual life. They operate on souls already alive. They presuppose regeneration; they do not produce it. When this is understood — as the conception/birth distinction of Section X establishes — the ordinary/extraordinary problem dissolves entirely. The Word is always ordinary in its proper sphere: the sphere of effectual calling, the bringing forth of already-conceived life into conscious faith, and the ongoing sanctification of the regenerate. It is never the instrument of the prior act of spiritual conception in any case — ordinary or extraordinary. There are no extraordinary cases of regeneration without means, because no case of regeneration involves means. The means belong to the subsequent stage in every case. Gill's position does not require an extraordinary category because it does not make a claim about ordinary means that the extraordinary category is needed to protect.*

The prevalence of the ordinary/extraordinary distinction in Reformed theology reflects not its biblical warrant but the persistence of the mediate regeneration error it was constructed to accommodate. Remove the error and the accommodation becomes unnecessary. Gill's immediate regeneration requires no such distinction — the Spirit always acts immediately and sovereignly in the act of spiritual conception, in every case without exception, and the Word always operates in its proper sphere of effectual calling and sanctification in every case where it is present. There is no ordinary. There is no extraordinary. There is only the sovereign Spirit who conceives when, where, and how He pleases — and the gospel which brings forth what He has conceived.

## D. The Verdict on James 1:18

James 1:18 is a text about delivery, not conception. The verb *apokuéō* — established by its own intra-chapter use in James 1:15 — describes the bringing forth of life already conceived, not the initial impartation of life. The word of truth is the gospel — the instrument of delivery, the appointed means by which the Spirit brings the spiritually conceived elect soul forth into conscious faith and union with Christ. The WCF has misread a delivery text as a conception text. Eleven downstream implications follow from that misreading, none of which the WCF can consistently sustain. Gill's reading — that the gospel brings forth what the Spirit has already immediately and sovereignly conceived — is exegetically demanded, logically clean, canonically corroborated, and requires no qualification. The dead man is as dead as Scripture says he is — until the Spirit conceives new life in him, and the gospel brings that life forth into the light of conscious faith.

---

## XII. Two Methodological Principles

### A. Clark's Completeness Principle: Incomplete Statements Invite Error

Gordon Clark maintained that theological statements must be precise enough to exclude their contradictories without remainder. A statement that requires subsequent qualification to mean what it intends to say was imprecisely formulated from the outset — not merely underarticulated, but logically deficient. Logical precision is not pedantry; it is faithfulness to a God who is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Applied to WCF 10.1, the historical record renders the verdict. The phrase 'by His Word and Spirit' has hosted both mediate and immediate regeneration positions for nearly four centuries within the Calvinist tradition. Contradictory positions claiming the same confessional warrant is not evidence of the statement's breadth — it is evidence of its inadequacy. A logically complete statement excludes its contradictory. WCF 10.1 does not. It is therefore, by Clark's criterion, an incomplete statement — one that left room for private interpretation, misinterpretation, and contradictory opinion precisely because it did not say everything that needed to be said.

This is not a minor editorial observation. Confessions exist precisely to define the boundaries of orthodox doctrine and to exclude error. A confessional statement that cannot perform this function has failed at its primary task. The history of the WCF on this specific point is a case study in the consequences of confessional imprecision. Gill's formulation — regeneration is the immediate act of the Spirit; effectual calling employs the Word subsequently — is logically clean, excludes its contradictory, requires no qualification, and maps directly onto the canonical evidence. It is the superior theological statement by any standard of logical adequacy.

### B. The Laodicean Warning: Unity Without Truth Is Not Scriptural

The letter to Laodicea (Revelation 3:14–22) is addressed to a church that was not overtly heretical. Its sin was temperature — neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. The risen Christ declares this condition more repugnant to Him than open apostasy: 'I will spew you out of my mouth' (3:16). The Laodicean church was self-sufficient and comfortable: 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing' (3:17) — blind to its own wretchedness.

In confessional and theological terms, lukewarmness maps directly onto the refusal to press doctrinal precision to its logical conclusion because precision produces division and division is uncomfortable. The ecumenical instinct — to keep the confessional tent broad enough that contradictory positions can shelter under it — feels like charity. Christ calls it nauseating. The church's unity is founded on the truth (John 17:17 — 'sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth'), not on the suppression of the truth's sharp edges in deference to institutional peace or confessional loyalty.

The history of the Puritan reform movement in England is the institutional illustration. Those who remained within the Church of England — accepting enough Anglican forms to stay within the establishment while protesting its errors — achieved neither reform nor a pure church. Those who refused accommodation entirely and separated — the Pilgrim Fathers (1620), the Massachusetts Bay Puritans (1630) — built institutions that shaped a civilization precisely because they refused to negotiate the truth for institutional belonging. Theological uncompromise, historically speaking, proved more durable and more fruitful than irenicism. The Great Ejection of 1662 sealed the verdict: two thousand ministers chose ejection over conformity. Their theological heirs include the entire stream of English Nonconformist Calvinism from which Gill himself descended.

Applied to this debate: a conclusion that softens its verdict in deference to confessional sensitivities — that offers mediation where the evidence demands decision — is the Laodicean temperature in theological form. Elijah's challenge at Carmel is the alternative: 'How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him' (1 Kings 18:21). The evidence follows Gill. The conclusion must say so.

*Theological precision is not divisiveness — it is faithfulness. The refusal to be precise is the true divisiveness, because it allows error to persist under cover of apparent agreement.*

### XIII. Comparative Summary Table

Issue	WCF / LBC Position	Gill's Position	Verdict
<b>Nature of regeneration</b>	Mediate — through Word and Spirit jointly	Immediate — Spirit acts directly, prior to and independent of the Word	<b>Gill. The dead cannot receive an instrument. Rom. 4:17; Ezek. 36:26 name no instrument.</b>
<b>The Word's role in regeneration</b>	Instrument of regeneration and effectual calling together	Instrument of effectual calling only — addresses the already-living soul	<b>Gill. The proclaimed gospel presupposes life in its recipient. Lazarus; John 5:25.</b>
<b>James 1:18 / apokuéō</b>	Dative of instrument — gospel is the means of regeneration	Dative of manner — gospel is the means of bringing forth life already conceived by the Spirit	<b>Gill. Apokuéō = parturition not conception (James 1:15 intra-chapter parallel). Section X.</b>
<b>John 5:25</b>	The dead hear, then	Hearing is the activity of	<b>Gill. A corpse has no</b>

Issue	WCF / LBC Position	Gill's Position	Verdict
	live — hearing is the instrument of life	life — the fiat produces life; hearing is its first fruit	<b>auditory capacity. Hearing presupposes a living subject.</b>
<b>Ezekiel 37</b>	Not prominently employed in WCF exegesis of regeneration	Two-stage act: bones reconstituted before breath enters — regeneration then effectual calling	<b>Gill. Ezek. 36:26 names no instrument. New heart given before any Word is received.</b>
<b>Three Forms of Unity — Dort III/IV Arts. 11–12</b>	WCF assumes Dort supports its mediate position — the two confessional streams are rarely distinguished	Dort explicitly denies regeneration is effected by external preaching. Spirit pervades the soul immediately.	<b>Gill. Dort III/IV Art. 12: regeneration is 'in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel.' Section III.</b>
<b>Purpose of the gospel</b>	The gospel is the instrument of regeneration — it produces spiritual life	The gospel is external, exciting the Spirit-generated life within — informing, bringing forth, assuring, sanctifying, uniting	<b>Gill. The gospel excites what the Spirit has conceived. It does not produce what was not there. Section IV.</b>
<b>Confessional precision</b>	WCF 10.1 has hosted contradictory positions for four centuries	Gill's formulation is logically clean — excludes its contradictory, requires no qualification	<b>Gill. By Clark's criterion, WCF 10.1 is an incomplete statement.</b>
<b>Abraham / Romans 4:17</b>	God's spoken promise to Abraham is the instrument of faith	God calls into existence things that do not exist — creatio ex nihilo precedes and produces faith	<b>Gill. The creative fiat produced Abraham's faith. Terah's fatherhood was natural; Isaac's birth was ontological miracle.</b>
<b>Laodicean test</b>	WCF ambiguity has enabled false unity through imprecision	Gill demands precision — an incomplete confession is not faithfulness	<b>Gill. Christ commends neither cold nor hot theology but condemns lukewarm confessionalism (Rev. 3:16).</b>

## XIV. Conclusion: The Evidence Sides with Gill

*This conclusion does not offer a mediating resolution. The exegetical, logical, and canonical evidence warrants a definitive verdict. That verdict is stated without qualification.*

John Gill is correct.

Regeneration is the immediate, sovereign, creative act of the Holy Spirit imparting spiritual life to the elect soul — entirely prior to, and entirely independent of, the instrumental mediation of the preached Word. The Westminster Confession's formulation of effectual calling 'by His Word and Spirit' is, on the precise question of regeneration, an imprecise statement that has failed the test of confessional adequacy by hosting contradictory interpretations for nearly four centuries. By Gordon Clark's completeness principle, a statement that requires qualification to mean what it intends to say was not complete when it was written. The 1689 LBC, modeling the WCF on this point, inherited the same deficiency. Significantly, the Canons of Dort — the most precise confessional statement the Reformed tradition has produced on the mechanics of sovereign grace — stands with Gill, not with the WCF. Dort III/IV Article 12 explicitly states that regeneration is 'in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel.' This is not a peripheral document. It is the confessional product of the same Reformed tradition that produced the WCF — and it is more precise, more exegetically grounded, and more logically consistent on this specific question.

The canonical evidence is conclusive:

**Romans 4:17:** *God calls into existence things that do not exist. This is creatio ex nihilo — the language of the divine fiat, not gospel proclamation. The God who saves speaks life into dead bodies without prior receptivity in the object.*

**John 5:25:** *Hearing is the activity of life, not its cause. A corpse has no auditory capacity. The fiat produces life; hearing is life's first fruit. The logical sequence cannot be reversed.*

**Ezekiel 36:26 / 37:** *The new heart is given unilaterally, with no instrument named. The bones are reconstituted before the breath enters. Regeneration is structurally and logically prior to the animated conscious life that follows.*

**John 11:43 — Lazarus:** *Four days dead, no residual vitality. The command of Christ produced its own preconditions. He heard because he was raised. He was not raised because he heard.*

**Genesis 1:3:** *Let there be light. The paradigmatic creative fiat produces its object without prior receptivity. This is the model of all divine regenerating acts.*

**John 1:13:** *Born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Every human instrumentality is excluded from the act of new birth.*

The WCF and 1689 LBC are not heretical on this point — they remain within Calvinist orthodoxy, and their insistence on total passivity in regeneration is correct and important. But correct orthodoxy and precise orthodoxy are not the same thing. Gill completed what the Westminster divines left imprecise — not from outside the Reformed faith but from its deepest logical interior. And the Canons of Dort, which the WCF tradition rarely distinguishes from its own formulation, actually corroborates Gill's conclusion — making this not a departure from the Reformed consensus but a recovery of what the Continental Reformed tradition's most careful document already confessed.

The confessional-ecumenical instinct that recoils from this verdict must be examined against Revelation 3. The risen Christ does not commend lukewarm theology. The church's unity is founded on truth (John 17:17), and the truth here, pressed to its logical and exegetical conclusion, is the truth Gill identified: the Spirit regenerates the elect immediately, sovereignly, and without instrumental mediation — and the Word then calls the living soul to conscious faith, repentance, and union with Christ.

“Even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved.” — **Ephesians 2:5 (ESV)**

## XV. Federal Headship, Eternal Imputation, and the Sovereign Character of God

### A. The Structural Principle: Reckoning by Decree

Federal headship and imputed righteousness are not merely analogous doctrines — they are expressions of the same underlying principle: God reckons, treats, and acts toward individuals on the basis of a representative union constituted by His sovereign decree, not by the individual's own acts performed in time. This principle is not a legal mechanism God arbitrarily employs — it is a direct expression of who God is. He is the sovereign Lord whose decree constitutes reality, whose word calls into existence things that do not exist (Romans 4:17), and whose imputation is therefore ontological and creative, not merely declarative.

In federal headship, Adam's sin is imputed to all he representatively heads — not because each individual personally committed Adam's act, but because God sovereignly constituted Adam as their federal head and his act as their act. The union is decreed; the imputation follows the decree (Romans 5:12–19). In imputed righteousness, Christ's active and passive obedience is imputed to the elect not because they personally performed it, but because God sovereignly constituted Christ as their federal head and Surety in the covenant of redemption, and His acts are reckoned as their acts (Romans 5:17–19). The structural identity is exact in both cases: sovereign decree constitutes a representative union; the representative acts within that union; the act is reckoned to those united by decree; the individual receives the consequence — condemnation in Adam, righteousness in Christ — on the basis of the union, not their own acts.

Both federal headship and eternal imputation are therefore reflective of God's sovereign character — the character of the God who does not derive His knowledge from observing reality but whose knowledge and decree constitute the reality He declares. When God imputes righteousness to the elect in Christ, He is not making a declaration that corresponds to an already-existing state of affairs — He is bringing into existence by sovereign declaration the very state of affairs His decree establishes. This is why Gordon Clark insisted that justification is not God observing faith and then responding with a declaration of righteousness — it is God's sovereign creative act of reckoning that produces the reality it declares.

### B. Eternal Imputation and Its Historical/Temporal Realization

Imputation in Scripture operates on three planes that must be distinguished without being separated. Confusing them produces either hyper-Calvinist antinomianism — if the eternal absorbs the historical — or Arminian conditionalism — if the historical is made the ground of the eternal. Gill navigates between both errors by holding all three planes in their proper logical relationship.

**The eternal plane — the ground:** *In the covenant of redemption — the eternal intra-Trinitarian agreement in which the Father gave the elect to the Son and the Son undertook to be their Surety — the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the elect was decreed and, in Gill's formulation, effectively accomplished in the mind and purpose of God before time. This is the sovereign reckoning of the God who inhabits eternity and does not reckon sequentially as creatures do. When God decreed the elect to be righteous in Christ, that decree was not a promissory note waiting on historical events to give it*

*substance — it was the eternal ground that made those historical events necessary and certain. This is structurally identical to federal headship in Adam: no individual personally committed Adam's sin before their birth, yet they are reckoned as sinners from the moment of their existence because the federal union was divinely constituted before time. The reckoning precedes the experience; the decree precedes the consciousness of it.*

**The historical plane — the execution:** *Christ's active obedience — His perfect fulfillment of the law throughout His incarnate life — and His passive obedience — His bearing of the elect's sin and satisfying divine justice at the cross — are the historical acts through which the eternal decree was executed in time. These acts were necessary not to make the imputation true — it was eternally true in the divine decree — but to make it just. The cross is not where God decided to impute righteousness to the elect; it is where God publicly demonstrated and historically executed the imputation He had eternally decreed (Romans 3:25–26 — 'to demonstrate His righteousness... that He might be just and the justifier').*

**The experiential plane — the realization:** *The elect soul's conscious experience of justification — receiving and resting in Christ's imputed righteousness by faith — is the temporal realization of what was eternally purposed and historically accomplished. It is not a new act of imputation at the moment of faith; it is the Spirit bringing the elect soul into conscious awareness and personal reception of a righteousness that was always already theirs in Christ by eternal decree and historical execution. Faith is not the ground of justification — it is the instrument by which the already-justified elect soul consciously apprehends what Christ has done.*

These three planes are not three separate justifications. They are one justification — one divine act of reckoning — viewed from three angles: its eternal ground, its historical execution, and its personal application. Gill's eternal justification is not a fourth doctrine alongside the others — it is the recognition that the one divine act has its ultimate root in the eternal sovereign decree, not in the temporal act of faith.

---

## XVI. The Ordo Salutis — If the Conclusion Is True, the Order Is Thus

*The ordo salutis presented here is not a starting assumption or a confessional tradition to be defended. It is the necessary logical sequence demanded by the arguments of this document. If the foregoing exegetical, logical, and canonical case is sound — and the evidence demonstrates that it is — then the following order is not one option among many. It is the order that the sovereign character of God, the structure of the covenant of redemption, the principle of federal headship, the doctrine of eternal imputation, the conception/birth distinction established in Section X, and the immediate regeneration of the Holy Spirit together require. It could not be otherwise.*

### A. The Eternal Foundation — One Divine Act Viewed from Multiple Angles

The ordo does not begin with election as an isolated sovereign choice — it begins with the eternal self-expression of God's sovereign character in decree, covenant, federal headship, and imputation simultaneously. These are not sequential steps in eternity — they are one eternal act of the sovereign God viewed from different angles. The sequential ordo only begins when this eternal act unfolds in time.

**1. Election:** *The eternal, sovereign, unconditional choice of specific individuals unto salvation — made in God's own counsel before time, apart from any foreseen faith or merit in the creature. Election is the foundation of everything that follows. Nothing flows upward to condition election; everything flows downward from it (Ephesians 1:4–5; Romans 9:11–13).*

**2. Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis):** *The eternal intra-Trinitarian covenant in which the Father gives the elect to the Son and the Son undertakes to be their Surety and Mediator. The elect are secured in Christ before time (John 6:37–39; 17:6). This is the eternal ground of all redemptive acts in time.*

**3. Predestination:** *The ordaining of the elect to glorification and to all the means by which that end is reached — calling, regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification. Predestination is the broader decree of which election is the central act (Romans 8:29–30).*

**4. Eternal Imputation / Eternal Justification:** *In the covenant of redemption, Christ is constituted the federal head and Surety of the elect. His active and passive obedience are decreed to be reckoned to them. In Gill's formulation, the elect are justified in the eternal purpose and reckoning of God before time — not as their conscious experience, but as the immovable eternal ground of their historical justification. This is the necessary implication of federal headship applied consistently: as condemnation in Adam was reckoned before the individual's birth, so righteousness in Christ was reckoned before the individual's conversion.*

## B. The Historical Execution

**5. Definite Atonement:** *Christ's active obedience — perfect law-keeping credited to the elect — and passive obedience — His bearing of the elect's sin satisfying divine justice — accomplished historically at the cross for the elect specifically. Not for all without exception, but for all without distinction among the elect. The eternal imputation is historically executed and publicly demonstrated to be just (Romans 3:25–26).*

## C. The Temporal Application — The Sequential Ordo in Time

**6. Regeneration — Spiritual Conception:** *The immediate, sovereign, creative act of the Holy Spirit imparting spiritual life to the elect soul — entirely without instrumental mediation, directly, by divine fiat. This is the spiritual conception: the new nature implanted (Ezekiel 36:26), the new heart given, life imparted where there was none. The soul is passive; God alone acts. No instrument is named because none is employed. This is logically prior to and independent of the Word, faith, or any other means. As conception in the natural order precedes and is independent of birth, so spiritual conception precedes and is independent of the gospel's bringing-forth ministry.*

**7. Effectual Calling — The Bringing Forth:** *The sovereign act of God through the proclaimed Word of the gospel by which the already-regenerate — already spiritually conceived — soul is brought forth into conscious faith, repentance, and union with Christ. The gospel is the instrument of delivery here — and only here. As birth in the natural order brings forth the life that conception already gave, so effectual calling through the Word brings forth into conscious existence the life the Spirit has already immediately and sovereignly conceived. This is where Romans 10:17 properly belongs: faith comes by hearing — in the already-living, already-conceived soul being brought forth into the light of conscious faith.*

**8. Faith and Repentance:** *The first conscious exercises of the new spiritual life — not causes of regeneration but its fruits. Faith is the instrument by which the elect soul lays hold of Christ and His imputed righteousness. Repentance is the turning of the regenerate will from sin toward God. Both are gifts, not human contributions (Ephesians 2:8; Acts 5:31).*

**9. Justification Consciously Received:** *The forensic declaration of righteousness consciously received and rested in by the elect soul. This is the temporal, experiential realization of what was eternally decreed and historically executed. It is entirely by grace through faith, with no human merit*

*contributing (Romans 3:24–26; 5:1). Faith is the instrument of reception, not the ground of the reckoning.*

**10. Adoption:** *The gracious act by which the justified elect are received into the family of God as sons and daughters, with all the privileges of sonship — the indwelling Spirit of adoption, access to the Father, and heirship of the eternal inheritance (Romans 8:15–17; Galatians 4:4–7).*

**11. Sanctification:** *The progressive work of the Holy Spirit conforming the elect to the image of Christ throughout earthly life — mortifying the old nature, vivifying the new, producing holiness and obedience. Sanctification is not the ground of justification but its necessary fruit. It employs means — the Word, prayer, the ordinances — but the power is entirely the Spirit's (John 17:17; 2 Corinthians 3:18).*

**12. Perseverance:** *The sovereign preservation of the elect by divine power — grounded not in their own will or faithfulness but in God's immutable electing purpose, Christ's intercession (John 17:11; Romans 8:34), and the sealing of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13–14; 4:30). The elect cannot finally or totally fall away.*

**13. Glorification:** *The final, eschatological completion of redemption — the resurrection of the body, the perfecting of the soul, and the eternal enjoyment of God in the new creation. This is the telos toward which the entire ordo moves. Election purposed it; every subsequent step secured and advanced it; glorification consummates it. Romans 8:30 states it in the past tense — 'those whom he justified he also glorified' — because from the standpoint of the eternal decree, it is as certain as if already accomplished.*

## D. The Two Gill Distinctives That Define This Ordo

Two features distinguish Gill's ordo from the standard Westminster ordo and both flow necessarily from the arguments of this document:

First, eternal justification — steps 1–4 above are not sequential steps but one eternal divine act. Gill's placement of justification in the eternal decree is the necessary implication of federal headship applied consistently. If Adam's condemnation was reckoned before the individual's birth, Christ's righteousness was reckoned before the individual's conversion. The temporal experience of justification (step 9) is the conscious realization of what was eternally decreed and historically executed — not a new act but the personal appropriation of an accomplished reality.

Second, the logical gap between regeneration and effectual calling — steps 6 and 7 are two distinct acts where the WCF treats them as one. Regeneration is the immediate Spirit-alone act; effectual calling employs the Word to the now-living soul. This distinction is not a fine theological nuance — it is the structural spine of the entire document's argument, demanded by total depravity, the creatio ex nihilo pattern of Romans 4:17, the logical sequence of John 5:25, the two-stage structure of Ezekiel 37, and the asymmetrical dependency of the gospel on the Spirit rather than the Spirit on the gospel.

---

## XVII. Final Statement

This is not Gill's private opinion. It is the doctrine demanded by the analogy of faith, confirmed by the structure of the divine creative acts from Genesis 1 through Ezekiel 37 through John 11 through Romans 4, required by the logic of total depravity consistently applied, grounded in the sovereign character of the God whose decree constitutes reality, and necessitated by the principle of federal

headship applied without remainder. A dead man cannot receive an instrument. God does not need one. The gospel depends on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not depend on the gospel.

*"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." — John 3:8 (ESV)*

*"Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceeding great army." — Ezekiel 37:9–10 (ESV)*

The wind is sovereign. It blows where it wills. It does not wait upon an instrument. It does not ask permission of the valley. It enters the dead bones and they live — because the LORD has spoken it, and He will do it.

### ***Soli Deo Gloria***

*The sovereign Spirit gives life to whom He will, when He will, by His own immediate act — without instrument, without condition, without negotiation.*