

EDC Panel Night | The "How" of the Gospel | Regeneration, Justification, Sanctification

I remember being a new Christian and experiencing a real change that had been brought to what I felt and loved, how I talked to people and the way I wanted to treat people, and most importantly I wanted to be near to God.

Not long after becoming a Christian... I remember writing a prayer in my journal.
"God what have you done to me? I want to be obsessed with understanding the change you've brought to my life?"

What is happening in salvation?... How does God save us through the proclamation and work of Jesus?

Andrew talked earlier about having clarity on *what* the gospel is...

- We now want to shift and talk about the "how" of the gospel?
- Your reading was particularly about the the doctrines of regeneration, justification, and sanctification.

One of the ways this is often talked about is what's called the *ordo salutis*... Latin term... "order of salvation"

- While that's not a term found in Scripture... it is an attempt to take from Scripture the various things we see happening in God's saving work applied to a person... and the order or way those things happen.

We are talking about things like election, calling, regeneration, repentance and faith, conversion, justification, sanctification, perseverance and glorification...

Herman Bavink

"Regeneration, faith, conversion, renewal.... are words that are used to summarize and describe the entire change which takes place in a man."

It is true that Scripture seem to show us that there is a kind of order in the way we experience the working of salvation in our lives...

- ... but it's probably not helpful to put these things on a timeline... some people have tried to do this... but you could hardly parse things out that way...
- Some aspects of salvation are instantaneous (regeneration, justification) and other parts are experienced in process (progressive sanctification)... while still other aspects are instantaneous but still not yet (perfected sanctification and final glorification)

One of the main Scriptures people point to.... to talk about an order of salvation is Romans 8:30

Romans 8:30 (ESV)

30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

- Notice what seems to be a logical order of the way salvation both works on a person... "the how"... and it experienced by them.
- This list isn't meant to be exhaustive and Paul's concern wasn't even to make a case for an *ordo salutis*... but to simply suggest that God's saving work is deep and textured...

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As we get into regeneration, justification and sanctification... I want us to understand what's at the hub of the wheel.

- We don't get the *ordo salutis* without the hub.

That hub is... Union with Christ

- The thing that is happening at the most foundational level in salvation is union with Christ.
- Salvation is attachment to Jesus.

The most repeated way the NT talks about a Christian is to talk about being "in Christ"... that is especially the refrain of the book of Ephesians.

- ***To be a Christian is to see your whole life as being carried out and affected by attachment to Jesus.***

The book of Colossians picks up on the same idea and says we are to understand ourselves as having died and yet risen with Christ... even to the degree that whatever life we have now is a life that is *hidden in Christ*.

Think about what Paul says in Galatians 2:20

Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

20 I have been crucified with Christ...

- Paul sees the death of Jesus *for sin* as his own death *to sin*...

We could keep going... another popular one...

2 Cor 5:21

He who knew no sin became sin for our sake, so that we might become the righteousness of God (HOW?) in him.

Over and over again the idea is that to be a Christian is to be united to Christ such that all that is ours (namely sin and death) we offer to him and he absorbs the judgement for it... and all that is his (namely righteousness and life before God) he offers to us and we enjoy the benefits of it.

To be a Christian is to say... I want the life that is pleasing to God... and I believe that is found in only one life... Jesus.

- I want to be united to him in every way that I was previously united to Adam.
- I want to be crucified with him.
- Raised with him
- Seated with him.
- I yield everything that is me to everything that is him.

It's not just that union with Christ is at the core of how it is that we are saved and what it means to be saved... ***but it's at the core of the Father's plan and purpose for salvation from eternity past.***

"union with Christ must begin with God's gracious decision, made before the creation of the world, to save his people in Christ... God decreed that Christ would have a people who belonged to him from eternity to eternity. ***Those chosen to be saved, in other words, were never contemplated by the Father apart from Christ or apart from the work of Christ as to do for them - there were chosen in Christ.*** God did not decide first to save his people from their sins, and then later to bring Christ as the executor of that salvation. Union with Christ is not something "tacked on" to our salvation; it is there from the outset, even in the plan of God. As Herman Bavink used to say, Christ must never be thought of apart from his people, nor his people apart from Christ... It is only because of our preassigned union with Christ from before the creation of the world that all the blessings of salvation eventually come to us. Here at the very beginning all human effort is excluded. To God be all the praise!" - Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*.

So the the bit we have left in this time... I will comment on regeneration, justification, and sanctification...

Regeneration

Regeneration is an entirely divine work... 100% the work of God alone to bring a person from spiritual death to life.

Think about what Paul says in Eph 2...

Ephesians 2:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **⁵** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

In verse 5... There is a contrast of being dead in sin to being made alive... and it truly is a being made alive...

- A dead person can't do that for themselves.
- If its going to happen at all it takes the work of someone outside of them.

This is also commonly referred to as being born again... this is what Jesus was talking about in John 3 with Niccademus.

- How can a person go into his mother's womb again... well you can't and that's the point...
- If you're going to have your sensibilities to the things of God awakened... God himself is going to need to do this.
- Apart from him we are remarkably spiritually unresponsive... even dead.

So regeneration is an instantaneous act God where he makes a sinner alive to the truth of the gospel... enabling them to respond to the gospel in faith... and live a new life submitted to Jesus.

- Some traditions would disagree on this...
 - Regeneration happening at baptism or after conversion
 - Catholic view... happening at infant baptism... cleansed from original sin and regenerated.

But we hold with the reformed tradition that this is happening before conversion primarily because of what the Bible says about our condition of spiritual deadness and inability to love God or respond to God...

- If that is going to happen at all... God is going to have to do something to make it possible...
- We see that as regeneration before conversation and making conversion possible.

Titus 3:4-7 (ESV)

4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, **6** whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7** so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Very practically and pastorally... this doctrine is critical for us to understand both what is already happening in a person when they come up to us in responding to the gospel... and in how desperate we are for God to move on people.

- There is no amount of pastoral savvy we have to make regeneration happen.
- Think about the people you care deeply about that you've shared the gospel with and haven't responded.
- Think about how crazy it is that some unlikely people respond to the gospel and people that you would think more likely don't respond...

- But when someone does respond... we can know with confidence that God is already working.
- We don't need to give them false assurance and tell them they are saved... let's let the process play out... but we can know that they are "not far from the kingdom of God."

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Justification

This is the precious doctrine that motivated Luther and the reformation... the doctrine that seemed to really motivate the gospel-centered movement 20-30 years ago...

Justification is an act of God where he imputes or credits the perfect righteousness of Jesus... to those who respond to the gospel and place their faith in Jesus alone for their salvation...

- Justification is the judicial act of God where the judgement that Jesus bore for sin is counted as judgement for our sin... and therefore our sins are seen as completely paid for... forgiven... and we are considered perfectly acceptable and righteous in the eyes of God.
- Luther and the Reformers were clear to throw a flag in the ground and say... the teaching of Scripture is justification by faith alone in Christ alone... and not by works.

Paul says in Romans 3 that through the death of Christ, God is both the just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 1:17 (ESV)

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

The reason that it's really important to get right is because... especially in our context...

- Lots of people come out of religious backgrounds that were very heavy on morality and works.
- The default assumption is that their righteousness before God is based on their ability to keep up morally and religiously.
 - Good days you can confidence before God... on bad days... good luck.
 - This is where you'll see people all the sudden trying to over-correct with religious promises and commitments... in an effort to tip the scales and atone for themselves.
- The problem with that is... it's not biblical... and you jump on the never ending treadmill of religious performance where you never have the assurance that you've done enough.

Galatians 2:21 (ESV)

21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

There's a ton to say on this... but just at a discipleship level in our congregations... we have people who are all over the map.

- Some having a hard time for all kinds of reasons to ever believe that God could really love them.
- Some are really proud of themselves and have no trouble believing that... and think to themselves... well of course he loves me.
- Tim Keller once called these 2 camps, self-provers and self-abusers.

Justification is a gracious doctrine that is meant to both humble the proud and lift the humble toward Jesus.

- To the proud this doctrine says... there's only one work and one righteousness that stands before God and it's not yours... but it's available to you if you surrender and submit to a bloody cross that was necessary for you.
- To the humble this doctrine says... stop beating yourself up and trying to prove yourself to God... that's already been done for you... Jesus is more than enough for you.

Even back to that verse in Titus we read...

5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy,

- To the proud you say... you're not given salvation because of anything to do with you or what you think is your righteousness. You need an alien righteousness that you don't have to stand before God.
- To the humble you say... righteousness and salvation aren't waiting for you to catch up... you don't earn it... it's offered... in Jesus.

Last thing I'll say here... this is why all of our teaching and preaching must land with Jesus.

- Even the default Christian mindset is often... yea, yea, yea... Jesus... but what else for peace with God?
- The Bible says...

Romans 5:1 (ESV)

5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Sanctification

Of these 3 doctrines Sanctification is interesting... because both regeneration and justification are both completely the work of God... and yet sanctification is that aspect of salvation that is both our work and God's work.

- Sanctification is both instantaneous and a process.

We often think of sanctification in the progressive sense... where a believer grows slowly and steadily over time into maturity in Christ to live a life of increased obedience to Jesus.

- ... and in that we no doubt have a responsible role to play... we are an active participant.

Philippians 2:12-13 (ESV)

12 ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **13** for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So both the work of God and the work of the Christian... but one where God is the one holding the process together by providing (2 Peter 1) everything we need for life and godliness... through Christ.

- That's really important important we can only grow in Christ through our union with Christ... the hub of the wheel.

1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)

30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

This is really important... our sanctification... while it is a process that we live out through learning obedience to Jesus... it is something that has already been purchased/ secured for us in Christ.

- Phil 1:6... he who started the good work, will complete it...
- It is a process in real time, but a process with an assurance.

That is really important on a practical & pastoral level...

- We will have guys we are discipling... we have even our own sin struggles... that at times will start to wonder... "am I ever going to make it"... "will I ever get better and beat this thing..."
- Sometimes in despair in the fight against sin we will assume that our justification is based on our sanctification...
 - as I mentioned earlier... many believe default into thinking... that our good standing with God is based on our ability keep up.
- That's not true and that is why it's important to get these doctrine right...
 - The only way we are able to grow in Christ and with his help... is because we have been made right with God.
 - Our growth comes from our standing with God... NOT for our standing with God.

This is where we have to see these doctrines working together... like spokes in a wheel.

- We've been made alive to God (regeneration)
- We've been declared right with God through the work of Jesus (justification)
 - but it doesn't stop there... like sometimes we treat it... as though... okay, you better shape up now or else... he's gotten you this far... now show yourself approved.
- Where this works together is this...

The judge declares us righteous... walks us out of the courtroom out back and shows us his car...

- He tells us to get in.
- He takes us to his house... walks us inside and shows us our bedroom.
- You're now my child and I'm your father... this is adoption the prized jewel of the gospel.
- This means he's now committed to us in the process of rehab... to walk with us the slow death of killing the old orphaned addictions to sin and death... as we learn a new manner of life (sanctification)
- That's sanctification... it's rehab.

So the NT talks about sanctification in 3 senses all are really important so that we understand the security that is ours in the really hard process.

- Positional... in one sense... because you've been justified... you've also been sanctified... made Holy united to Jesus before the face of God. (1 Cor 6:11)
 - God already sees you as holy.
- Progressive... you're not yet holy in your manner of life and you're rehabbing toward this through daily discipleship... regular repentance and faith.

Hebrews 10:8-10 (ESV)

10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Hebrews 10:14 (ESV)

14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

- The process of learning to live out in real time what God has already made you to be before his face.
- Perfected... God will finish the job and on the great day we will be with Jesus and like Jesus, completely dead to sin.

Romans 8:30 (ESV)

30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

The how of the gospel

- Through the proclamation of the work of God's Son...
- God makes sinners alive to repent of sin and trust on the Son
- He declares sinners righteous and holy in his sight by faith in his Son alone
- He adopts us as his children and walks with us in rehab to grow after the pattern and manner of life of his Son... befitting of the family.
- He fills us with his Spirit and places us in the church where we both get to learn what's happened to us, what's happening to us and what to do about it with other people who are also following his Son

Finally... all of this is happening by the will of the Father... empowered by the Holy Spirit... united to the person and work of the Son... Jesus says this...

John 6:37-40 (ESV)

37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. **38** For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. **39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. **40** For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."