

A Philosophical Discussion of the Christian
Doctrines of

The Fall of Man and the
Regeneration of the Holy Spirit

By Kenny Pearce

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

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§ 1

Introduction and Basic Definitions

One of the defining characteristics of Christian theology has always been its love of paradoxes: God is three, yet also one; Christ is God, yet also man; believers are saints, yet also sinners. However, despite the frequent occurrence of *apparent* contradictions, Christian thinkers have nearly always insisted upon the absence of *actual* contradictions in their teaching. In fact, much of the writing of Christian intellectuals, from second century apologist Justin Martyr to present-day philosophers Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga, is devoted to the resolution of these apparent contradictions. While it may not be possible to arrive at many Christian doctrines through the use of reason alone, independent of revelation, believers have traditionally insisted that their doctrines are logical and self-consistent. The primary purpose of a philosophical discussion of any Christian doctrines is therefore to construct a coherent understanding of the doctrines discussed, so as to demonstrate Christian beliefs in general to be both internally and externally coherent – that is, consistent with one another, and consistent with our experience of the world around us. Here I shall construct such an understanding of two specific Christian doctrines, each of which is central to Christianity and closely connected to the other: The Fall of Man, and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

§ 1.1

The Scriptures on the Fall of Man

Let us begin with a basic understanding of what is meant by these phrases and how they are derived from Scripture, since neither phrase actually appears there. “The Fall of Man” is the name tradition has given to the account of the sin of the first human beings and its consequences as recorded in Genesis 3. This story is crucial to any traditional Judeo-Christian explanation of why the world is the way it is. We are told in

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by **Kenny Pearce**

chapter one verses 26 through 30 that God gave man dominion over the earth. As a result of this, man's act of rebellion against God is taken to have far-reaching consequences, such that Paul teaches that in the eschatological future “... the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”¹ and that, in the present, “... the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God ... For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now”² and this is generally understood to be a result of Adam's sin. This is sometimes seen as following from the curse God pronounces back in the Genesis story: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread ...”³

The consequences to the rest of the creation are not, however, the only consequences of the Fall, at least as understood by the New Testament. Paul tells us that, “through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ...”⁴ This would appear to suggest two additional results of the Fall, and these are the two which are usually emphasized in Christian theology: First, all mankind is somehow morally culpable for what occurred in the Garden that day⁵ and as a result human beings, in their natural state, are separated from God and in some (spiritual) sense “dead.” This is the doctrine known as “Original Sin.” Second, all mankind now has a propensity – perhaps even an irresistible desire – to sin. This is what is meant by such passages as “the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,”⁶ and “all have

1 Romans 8:21. Scripture taken from the New King James Version (henceforth “NKJV”). Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Used by permission. All rights Reserved.

2 Romans 8:19, 22

3 Genesis 3:17-19

4 Romans 5:12

5 This claim of culpability, known as 'original guilt' is denied by some Christian thinkers, especially in the Eastern tradition; the spiritual death and corruption claim – 'Original Sin' properly so-called – is an essential part of the Christian tradition and has not been denied by Christian thinkers on any large scale.

6 Jeremiah 17:9

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by Kenny Pearce

sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”⁷ This too has been traditionally understood as a result of the Fall.

§ 1.2

The Scriptures on the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit

The Regeneration of the Holy Spirit is the primary unique promise of the New Covenant, as the Atonement must have been retroactively available to believers during the period before the coming of Christ,⁸ and represents a supernatural intervention by God in the Person of the Holy Spirit to reverse the effects of the Fall. The reversal of the effect upon the whole of creation is affirmed by the first passage cited,⁹ and Paul seems to intimate a similar reversal of the effects within us when, shortly thereafter, he notes that, “we also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is not seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?”¹⁰ The specifics of this “redemption” are outlined elsewhere, and are the reversal of the other two effects of the fall – culpability before God for Adam's guilt, and a propensity to sin. Regarding our culpability, Paul says, “as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”¹¹ This “free gift” does not, strictly speaking, belong to the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit, it belongs to the Vicarious Atonement, but it is nonetheless relevant to the current discussion as it is a definite part of the reversal of the Fall. As to our propensity for sin, God promises twice

⁷ Romans 3:23

⁸ This must be the case because it is clear from Hebrews 11, etc., that people who lived before Christ will be in heaven, yet Hebrews 10:4 says that “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins,” and essentially the entire book of Galatians is devoted to showing that obedience to the Law could not bring salvation. The only solution is to say that the believers of the Old Covenant looked forward to the coming Messiah for salvation, just as we look backward to His finished work.

⁹ Romans 8:21

¹⁰ Romans 8:23-24

¹¹ Romans 5:18

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by **Kenny Pearce**

in Ezekiel that He will “give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.”¹² This is a direct reversal of the Jeremiah passage cited earlier. Likewise, after explaining the already completed effect of the Vicarious Atonement in removing from the believer culpability in Adam's sin (and his own specific acts of sin)¹³, Paul goes on to give a promise for the future: “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.”¹⁴ That is, believers are already forgiven for being sinful creatures, but God is not content with this. After assuring the adulteress that He had no wish to condemn her, Christ commanded her, “go, and sin no more.”¹⁵ The Regeneration of the Holy Spirit is the progressive effect of the Spirit in the believer's life drawing him ever closer to God and restoring him to the glorious state for which God intended him, as Jesus prayed, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them.”¹⁶

§ 2

Mind

§ 2.1

Effects of the Fall and the Regeneration Primarily in the Mind

Excepting the effect on the rest of creation, which is less central to Christianity than the other effects, all of the effects of the Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit relate primarily to the mind. This is self-evidently obvious as the other effects of the fall relate to the behavior of humans and their relationship to God. Human behavior is determined by volition, and volitions are formed in the mind. It is the essential nature of God to be all and only mind, as must be the essential nature of any being for whom the

¹² Ezekiel 11:29, 36:26

¹³ This is sometimes called “positional sanctification” as it has to do with the believer's position with God

¹⁴ Romans 5:19

¹⁵ John 8:11

¹⁶ John 17:22. This is sometimes called “conditional sanctification” as it has to do with the believer's actual condition in the world

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by Kenny Pearce

possession of a physical body is not an essential characteristic.

This being the case, it is absolutely necessary, in order to understand precisely what occurred at the Fall of Man, and precisely what the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit is, to understand the mind of man and the mind of God. We shall consider the mind of God first.

§ 2.2

The Mind of God

God is a rational Being. This is evident not only from Scripture, but from the world. God created a world that functions according to set laws which rational minds find comprehensible. The world conforms to the rules of logic, and in the vast majority of cases this conformity is immediately apparent.¹⁷ Richard Swinburne following many Christian philosophers and theologians before him, understands divinity to be a single, indivisible property, and he has written that this property is best classified as “pure, limitless, intentional power”¹⁸ Swinburne correctly points out that irrationality, as a general rule, hinders the human will and he therefore claims that in order for any being to have “pure, limitless, intentional power,” that is, to bring about successfully whatever he tries to bring about and not to be causally determined as to what he tries to bring about by anything external to himself, he must be perfectly rational. Swinburne is correct in that God cannot possibly be ruled by non-rational desires and still be omnipotent and perfectly free, however he goes wrong when he claims that “An agent subject to no non-rational influences, that is, no causes in any way influencing how he will act, is a perfectly free agent. He will pursue the good without hindrance. He will fulfill all his obligations (as he sees them), and do much good beyond obligation. Where there is (he believes) a best

¹⁷ While God could probably not have created a world that did not in reality correspond to the rules of logic (e.g. a world in which it was possible for a certain thing to exist and at the same time not exist), He could easily have created a world that was far more bizarre and incomprehensible than this one; a world that appeared to flout those laws.

¹⁸ See Swinburne, *The Christian God*, esp. Ch. 7

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by Kenny Pearce

possible act open to him, he will do it.”¹⁹ What Swinburne fails to see is that rationality can only provide the means – it cannot provide the ends. A perfectly rational being with no non-rational influences will not only not do the best possible act open to him, he will not do *anything*. After all, why should he? Swinburne would answer that he should for moral reasons, but why be moral? Some might say to avoid pain on earth or in the after-life, for himself or others. Why avoid pain? A being with no non-rational influences would be ambivalent to physical pain and have no concept of emotional pain.

There is, however, the possibility of a being who is subject to non-rational influences, but is never overcome by them. Such a being's ends would be determined by the non-rational impulse, but he would always keep his ultimate ends in sight and act rationally to bring those ultimate ends about without being side-tracked by more short-sighted fulfillments of pleasure. This last is, after all, what happens to Christians who knowingly sin. They are looking to their highest desire, the desire for heaven and God's approval, but, due to non-rational influences, are drawn aside to more short-term pleasures which conflict with their long-term goal. This would not happen to a perfectly rational being, even if he was subject to non-rational impulses.

Because God is perfectly rational and He chose to create the universe, it must be the case that He is the sort of being described above. There is, in God, an non-rational impulse – a divine equivalent of human emotion – which provides the ends for which His rationality provides the means. In this way, God has reason to act, and yet is perfectly free.

This sort of picture of God is seen in Scripture, and to write it off as poetic anthropomorphism would be to interpret the Scripture in an unnatural way and introduce philosophical difficulties in the process. God is seen as being angry,²⁰ motivated by

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 68-69

²⁰ See e.g. Psalm 76:7, Isaiah 54:8, Hebrews 3:17

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by **Kenny Pearce**

compassion,²¹ wanting things²², and so forth. There can be absolutely no justification for a thinker of any theological persuasion giving the Bible any reading other than a simple, straightforward one when the unnatural reading introduces more logical problems than the natural one, and so we must conclude that God *is* moved by some non-rational impulse, but He is clearly not ruled by it. God's ends are provided by the non-rational impulse, and He pursues those ends in a perfectly rational fashion, not turning aside for the pleasures of the moment whenever the non-rational impulse brings about a desire of that kind, but following through with patience to achieve the best possible outcome – that is the outcome that results in the fulfillment of the most and greatest of His desires.

§ 2.3

The Mind of Man

Man, the Bible tells us, is created in the image of God.²³ One possible understanding of this is as an allusion to the custom of ancient emperors placing statues or paintings of themselves throughout their realms in order to show their subjects who was the ruler of the land. Human beings are made in the image of God so that by looking at other human beings, as well as by looking into ourselves, we may know who God is and that He rules the universe. Therefore we may safely assume that prior to the Fall, when human beings existed in their perfection, they were like God in the relationship of the non-rational impulse to the rational mind – that is, God provided them with a non-rational impulse to give them the ends He wanted them to strive for, but, initially, the non-rational impulse was in complete submission to the rational mind. A cooperation existed between the two. The non-rational impulse gave man ends such as becoming the best human being he could be, and obeying the commands of God, such as to procreate and fill the earth and rule over it.²⁴ The rational mind dominated the non-rational impulse

21 See e.g. Exodus 33:19, 2 King 13:23, Nehemiah 9:31, Psalms 103:13, James 5:11

22 See e.g. Hosea 6:6

23 See Genesis 1:27

24 See Genesis 1:28

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by Kenny Pearce

so that the greatest of these desires was always followed, with complete patience and the full end in sight. The Fall represents the first time that man turned aside from this, and the non-rational impulse dominated the rational mind. The reasons for this, and the reasons that it had all of the effects it did, shall be discussed later.

In addition to the submission of the non-rational impulse to the rational mind, the rational mind was fully and voluntarily submitted to God. This is, in fact, the necessary result of any purely rational agent having true beliefs about God. If there is a being who is omniscient and omnibenevolent there can never be any rational reason to rebel against Him (assuming, of course, that the rational mind in question is set to an end which is “good” on the same definition of goodness used in the omnibenevolence claim). This, again, is why a Christian, or, in fact, any traditional Western monotheist, who sins knowingly has beyond doubt been overcome by the non-rational impulse.

§ 3 The Fall

The Bible gives us the story of the Fall first and foremost as a simple historical narrative. A series of events occurred at a time in the remote past, near the time of the initial creation of the world. It has sometimes been suggested that these are to be understood only mythically and not as literal truth. I do not wish to discuss here the conflicting claims about the genre conventions and truth-conditions of the early chapters of Genesis. Instead, I merely wish to point out that the New Testament²⁵ talks about the Fall as though it were an historical event and draws theological conclusions from it accordingly. This means that, if the Genesis account of creation and the Fall is figurative, it must be a metaphor of such great aptitude that correct theological conclusions can be reached by taking it literally. Because of this, I will proceed on the assumption that the

²⁵ Especially the passage we have been discussing in Romans 8

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by **Kenny Pearce**

events narrated in Genesis 3 literally occurred at a time in the remote past and draw theological conclusions accordingly, as Paul does.

The narrative tells of how Eve is approached by a talking serpent (who apparently has legs, since his legs are taken away as punishment in 3:14) who begins to seek by his “cunning” to attempt to deceive her into eating the fruit of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”²⁶ which God had forbidden her to eat. He is eventually successful and Eve eats the fruit and gives some to Adam, which he also eats. Upon eating the fruit of the tree, both suddenly realize that they are naked, and feel the need to hide their bodies from each other and God. After this, God comes first to Adam, and asks him if he has eaten the fruit. Adam admits, however indirectly, to wrongdoing, but blames Eve for giving him the fruit. Eve, in turn, blames the serpent. God then curses the serpent for his sin, curses the ground for Adam's sake, and gives punishments to both Adam and Eve. He tells Eve, “In pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”²⁷ He tells Adam that he will be required to work hard at farming ground that will no longer be cooperative until the time that he returns to the ground in death. God then expels Adam and Eve from the Garden so as to bar them from access to the Tree of Life, which apparently would have allowed them to live forever.

There are many interesting elements just in the bare narrative. The critical point for our purposes, however, is the question of how sin managed to enter a perfect world. The obvious answer is that a force from outside that perfect world, the serpent, whom the New Testament identifies as Satan,²⁸ entered it and created some sort of imbalance. This brings up the question of where the serpent came from. He cannot initially have been evil, because God would not create an evil being, so he too must have fallen.²⁹ But what caused his fall? There may indeed be danger of infinite regress here. It must be remembered that

²⁶ 2:17

²⁷ 3:17

²⁸ See Revelation 12:9

²⁹ The Jewish tradition views Satan as an instrument of God for testing humans, but the New Testament vehemently denies this. See James 1:13, Revelation 12, etc.

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by Kenny Pearce

the subject of the Bible is the relationship of God to man, and the state of the angels prior to the creation of man is certainly not relevant to this subject. However, in recognizing these limits to what has been revealed to us, we may well leave serious issues of theodicy unsolved.

An even greater question is why such an imbalance between the rational mind and the non-rational impulse was even possible. Is this due to an imperfection in man (and the serpent in whatever form he originated) as created by God? Clearly this cannot be the case. An omnipotent and omnibenevolent God would not create an imperfect being, and so man's vulnerability to this sort of influence must be a part of his perfection as a creature of God. The simplest explanation for how this might be true is the finite nature of man. God is infinite in every way: His non-rational impulse is infinite, but His rational control is also infinite, which makes His non-rational impulse and His rational control exactly equal. Since it is the natural purpose of the rational mind to provide the means while the non-rational impulse must provide the ends, when the two are equal we may assume that the non-rational impulse will remain in submission to the rational mind, providing it input but never completely overpowering it. Neither God's rational mind nor His non-rational impulse could possibly be increased, as both are infinite. However, man is finite in both of these areas, and this is not an imperfection – man ought not to be infinite, it is not compatible with his nature and purpose. This leaves open the possibility that man's non-rational impulse could be increased, and this could put it out of balance with the rational mind. This is most likely exactly what happened at the Fall. When the serpent came, looking to destroy the perfection of God's creation, he perceived this weakness (which was not a flaw, but a part of the perfection of the creation) and targeted it.

The arguments used by the serpent are particularly fascinating in that he never directly lies. He first asks Eve a question: “Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by Kenny Pearce

every tree of the garden?”³⁰ Here he suggests that God has contradicted Himself, since God first said that they could eat of any tree of the garden, but then commanded them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.³¹ Eve responds correctly and explains what God commanded, including His statement that “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”³² The serpent then contradicts this, telling Eve, “you shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”³³ This is not a lie either. Eve seems to have thought God meant physical death, and the serpent argues, and is proved correct by the end of the story, that Eve will not physically die immediately after eating the fruit. There are two interesting things about the serpent's next assertion. First, the serpent is playing on Eve's God-given desire (a component of the non-rational impulse) to become the best human being she can be. Nothing is better than God, and so becoming like God is the ultimate gratification of this impulse and it must look appealing to her. Secondly, the serpent promises that she will be like God in a specific way – she will know good and evil. Now this is a very curious and very deceiving promise, because Eve already knew all about good - after all, God spent most of Genesis chapter 1 making the things that she would have known in the garden and calling them good – but she knew nothing of evil because it didn't exist in her world. For this reason, the serpent is telling her exactly the truth: when she eats the fruit, she will know good and evil (incidentally, he fails to mention that she already knows good), and God knows good and evil, so in a sense she will be more like God. What he doesn't tell her is that by failing to follow the commands of God she will come to know evil not just intellectually but experientially and so be separated from God beyond her ability to reconcile herself. Her intellect is overpowered by her non-rational impulse and she takes the bait.

30 3:1

31 2:16-17

32 2:17, 3:3

33 3:4-5

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by Kenny Pearce

Adam's situation is even worse. In addition to all of the reasons for Eve to eat the fruit, Adam has one more: his wife already has, and she has been changed by it to such a degree that he will be fundamentally different from her in a new way that will hamper his ability to relate to her unless he takes the fruit. Adam is thus motivated by both the desire to become the best human being he can be and his desire for his wife (including all of the related emotional and physical desires), both of which are initially positive impulses implanted by God. Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 2:14 that Adam was not deceived by the serpent. This means that Adam walked into this sin with both eyes open, probably due to the second reason, his great desire to be with his wife. Because of the way Paul uses this fact, it appears that he saw it as leading to a generalization (not an absolute law) about the different ways in which men and women tend to sin: men tend to know full well that they are sinning and walk in with both eyes open, as did Adam, whereas women tend to be deceived and momentarily believe that they are doing the right thing, as Eve apparently did. It is not clear whether this has to do with the initial constitution of man and woman as initially created by God, or if men inherit the flaw of Adam and women the flaw of Eve. Whatever the case, Paul seems to think that this generalization is of broad enough applicability to be used as a rationale for the governing structure of the Church.

What the theory I have presented here claims is essentially that the perfect world God initially created was, as a necessary consequence of its perfection, characterized by an extremely precarious balance between many elements, especially rationality and irrationality. Its order was perfect and complete and all that was in it was good, and left to itself it would most likely never have fallen. Certainly Adam and Eve had free will and *could* have chosen to eat the fruit without the influence of the serpent, but they would have had no reason to and so it is safe to assume that they would not, in fact, have exercised their free will in such a way independently of the serpent's influence. The serpent represented a foreign element; a being from another world (the spiritual realm) who entered the Garden and tipped the scales of the precarious balance in the direction of

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by Kenny Pearce

the irrational by heightening the strength of the non-rational impulse to a degree which would not have otherwise occurred. Once this single event occurred a chain reaction was triggered. In the process of disregarding the rational mind, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and so were brought out of harmony with Him, and their rational minds, no longer in complete control of their actions, were also removed from submission to God. This separation from God left the humans without His wisdom and so they often did not know which alternative was the morally correct one. Outside the Garden, having the knowledge of good and evil, they were confronted with new situations unlike any they would have encountered within it, and so memory could not provide them with the correct action to take. More damaging than their ignorance was the lack of internal harmony. The rational and the non-rational were now fighting for control of the individual, and this is the fight between the spirit³⁴ and the flesh³⁵ Paul describes in Romans 7. The fight takes place within the the conscious mind.³⁶ This makes man no longer the master of himself. He is at the mercy of his non-rational desires. Furthermore, without the guidance of the rational mind, these non-rational desires become twisted and are directed onto targets other than the proper ones. A man's procreative desires are misdirected onto a person who is not his wife. His desire to become the best human being he can be is twisted into a desire to be better than others, or causes him to deceive himself into falsely believing that he is already better than others. His desire to rule the earth becomes a desire to rule over his fellow human beings, rather than to join his fellow men in ruling the rest of creation as God intended. As this list clearly shows, tension and separation are created not only between man and God, but between one man and another, and even between a man and himself.

Beyond this, are the effects on the creation. Because man had been given dominion over the earth and subsequently removed himself from the dominion of God,

34 Greek, πνευμα

35 Greek, σαρξ

36 Greek, ψυχη, usually translated “soul”

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by **Kenny Pearce**

unwittingly placing himself under the dominion of the devil, he indirectly gave over the earth to Satan.³⁷ This explains how Paul can speak of the creation being delivered from bondage.

There are indirect effects of the Fall even more far reaching than these. The most noticeable are the indirect effects of man's separation from God. These lead to God sending the previously mentioned punishments. In the end Christian theology has almost always claimed that every true evil in the world is a results, directly or indirectly, from the Fall of Man.³⁸

§ 4 Regeneration

God was not content to leave the earth under the dominion of sin and Satan. While the answer to the question of what He ought to do about this no doubt came easily to Him, it is not so for us. Analyzed from a human perspective the situation creates a clear conflict between two central aspects of God's character: holiness, and love.

God loves His creations, and so it is immediately obvious that He would want to reclaim them, for His sake and their own, when they were removed from their initial perfect state. However, His holiness poses a problem as to how exactly to go about this. Any world that contains sin cannot possibly be considered to fully belong to God, because sin is the one thing a holy God can never own. As a result, in order to reclaim the world God would have to eliminate everything sinful in it. However, the central point from which this sinfulness spread to the whole earth was also His most beloved creation, the human race. As a result God's character allowed for only one option: To restore holiness to the human race without destroying it, and let the human race be the center

³⁷ This is not to be construed as total and absolute dominion. God clearly maintained a certain degree of control over the earth after He gave it into the dominion of man, and the same holds after the Fall.

³⁸ On this, see Alvin Plantinga, “The Free Will Defence,” and Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?*

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by Kenny Pearce

from which this new holiness might spread, just as it was the center from which sin spread. The beauty of God's plan is further enhanced by its perfect symmetry: “Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.”³⁹

The positional sanctification that took place in the Vicarious Atonement satisfied the punishment that justice, an element of holiness, demands. The specifics of this occurrence lie beyond the scope of this paper. However, positional sanctification is not sufficient to allow for complete and eternal communion with God. One must not be merely recognized as righteous in some legal sense, but actually *be* righteous. This is because individual acts of sin prevent even those who have been forgiven through the atoning work of Christ from having the closest relationship with God they possibly could.⁴⁰ Thus it is the love of God, at least as much as His holiness, which motivates Him to the work of regeneration. He wants man not only not to be destroyed in His effort to reclaim the earth for Himself, but to be brought into the closest relationship with Him possible, both for man's sake and His own. Likewise, God's love for man will motivate Him to take action to give man peace both within himself and with his fellow humans.

As a result of all of this, God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, has undertaken to produce within man a “second work” of sanctification, or regeneration, following the completed work of atonement. As has been stated, it is the purpose of this regeneration to reverse all those effects of the Fall not reversed in the atoning work of Christ. While

³⁹ Romans 5:18-19

⁴⁰ This should not be interpreted as meaning that there is something beyond receiving Christ's atoning sacrifice which is required for admission to heaven. The Bible promises in Philippians 1:6 that “He who has begun a good work in you will be faithful to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” and this represents a promise that those whom He has justified He will also glorify, i.e. make righteous and holy (see Romans 8:30). There will not be a single believer who is not fully regenerated by the Holy Spirit in the world to come.

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by **Kenny Pearce**

salvation happens instantly, as is shown by the story of the thief on the cross,⁴¹ regeneration is a progressive work, taking place slowly over the course of the believer's life and never quite brought to completion in this world,⁴² as is shown by many of the Scriptures we have already discussed.⁴³

The above discussion of the Fall has specific consequences for the exact form that this Regeneration must take. The Holy Spirit enters the life of the believer at salvation⁴⁴ and immediately begins the work of regeneration. There are two basic elements of this work: bringing the rational mind back into subjection to God, and bringing the non-rational impulse back into subjection to the rational mind. The first represents the Spirit's work in bringing the believer into complete communion with God. The second is His work in bringing the believer harmony within himself. The two together entail that the believer will reach communion with his fellow regenerate human beings, although not necessarily with the unregenerate. In this way the believer, by the time he arrives in the world to come, is returned to his original perfect state.

However, according to what has already been said, this account of the Regeneration is not yet complete. There is still another element: the element that has to do with the world external to the believer. The section of Romans 8 that we have already discussed in some depth is very telling on this subject:

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creations itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the redemption of our body. For we were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for

41 Luke 23:39-43

42 John Wesley famously denied this, affirming a view of sanctification that was progressive, but might in some cases be completed in this life. See his “Notes On Christian Perfection.”

43 E.g. Philippians 1:6, and the future tense “will be made righteous” in Romans 5:19

44 Of course the Spirit is active in the believer's life before salvation in what Wesley called “prevenient grace”. This is a necessary doctrine because of Jesus' teaching that “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). Prior to salvation the Father acts through the Spirit to “woo” us.

“The Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit”

by **Kenny Pearce**

why does one still hope for what he sees?⁴⁵

This passage tells us first that the creation will be regenerated (“redeemed”) in the future, and second that the regeneration will include our physical bodies. As Paul points out elsewhere,⁴⁶ “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” In Paul's description of the resurrection of the dead in this passage he says that “this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”⁴⁷ The implication is that at the resurrection we will receive some sort of glorified spiritual bodies which are new, and yet somehow the same bodies we had before⁴⁸ and this seems to be the highest culmination of some work which effects the entire physical world, which is what John was referring to when he said that he saw “a new heaven and a new earth.”⁴⁹ The whole creation will ultimately be redeemed by the supernatural work of God to form again a universe at the height of its perfection populated by people at the height of their perfection, everything being just as God designed it to be.

§ 5

Conclusion

For the human being, as for God Himself, mind is the fundamental principle of reality. Events begin in minds, either the mind of God or of some other being to whom God has granted a degree of freedom. They are perceived by minds, and it is within minds that decisions are made as to how to respond to the perceived events, thus creating new events. It follows clearly from this that an events with effects as fundamental and far reaching as the Fall of Man and the Regeneration of the Holy Spirit must begin in minds.

45 vv. 20-24

46 1 Corinthians 15:50

47 1 Corinthians 15:53

48 The word picture in the Greek is of our mortal bodies “wearing” immortality as a cloak.

49 Revelation 21:1

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The first began in the mind of man in the form of a decision to disobey God. The second began in the mind of God in the form of a decision to forgive man and restore him to his original glory.

Man, as a being who is fundamentally mind, has his perfection primarily in a mental harmony with God, himself, his fellow man, and the world around him. The Fall represented a disruption of that, and the Regeneration its restoration. Man removed himself from his perfection, only to find that he could not regain it on his own. God in His infinite love has done the work, requiring of man only that he desire to return to his former perfection. Therefore the mind of man first, and then the physical world were destroyed by man's own actions in the fall and, likewise, the mind of man first, and then the physical world, will be restored by God through regeneration.