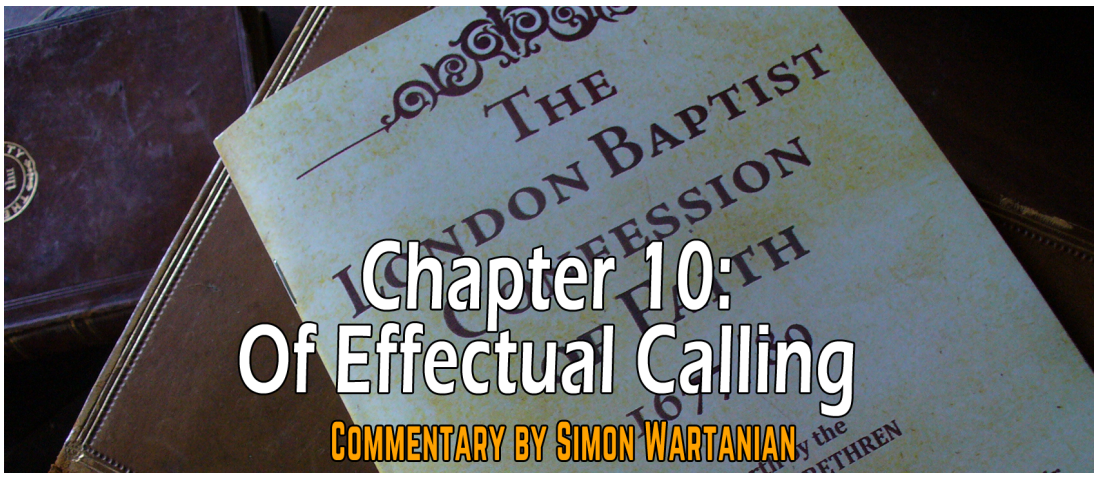
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 10: Of Effectual Calling - Commentary

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Chapter 10: Of Effectual Calling

This entire chapter is about the Calvinistic doctrine that has been called Irresistible Grace. Unfortunately, that has been misunderstood to mean that men never disobey and resist God, but that is not how the phrase has been historically defined. Rather, it means that the resistance which natural man always has to the Spirit (Acts 7:51) is overcome when God decides to save a person.

The material in this chapter has a connection with what we have already dealt with. There would be no effectual calling if there was no predestination, so that should be kept in mind. **Predestination** is dealt with in **chapter 3**, so I will not make a case for predestination here, but will take it for granted.

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§1 Those whom God hath predestinated unto life, he is pleased in his appointed, and accepted time, effectually to call

1. Those whom God **1** hath **predestinated unto life**, **2** he is pleased in his **appointed**, and **accepted time**, **3** effectually to **call, 4 by his Word 5** and **Spirit**, **6 out of that state of sin and death** in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ;
   7 enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God;
   8 taking away their heart of stone, and **giving unto them a heart of flesh; 9 renewing their wills,** and by his almighty power **determining them to that which is good**, and **effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ**; **10** yet so as **they come most freely, being made willing by his grace. 11**
   1. Rom. 8:28-29[1]
   2. Rom. 8:29-30; 9:22-24; 1 Cor. 1:26-28; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9
   3. John 3:8; Eph. 1:11
   4. Matt. 22:14; 1 Cor. 1:23-24; Rom. 1:6; 8:28; Jude 1; John 5:25; Rom. 4:17
   5. 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Peter 1:23-25; James 1:17-25; 1 John 5:1-5; Rom. 1:16-17; 10:14; Heb. 4:12
   6. John 3:3, 5-6, 8; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6
   7. Rom. 8:2; 1 Cor. 1:9; Eph. 2:1-6; 2 Tim. 1:9-10
   8. Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 2:10, 12; Eph. 1:17-18

9. Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 31:33
10. Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:27; John 6:44-45; Eph. 1:19; Phil. 2:13
11. Ps. 110:3; John 6:37; Rom. 6:16-18

Those **whom God hath predestinated unto life**, He, **in His appointed and accepted time**, **effectually** calls to Himself **by His Word and Spirit** (Rom. 8:28-29; 1 Cor. 1:23-24; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; John 3:5-6; 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6). That which was planned from eternity is applied and actualized in time. They are called **out of that state of sin and death** (Eph. 2:1-6) and transferred to the "state of grace" (**chapter 9:4**). He enlightens our minds **spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God** (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 1:17-18), for fallen man cannot accept and understand the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14). He takes from us that **heart of stone**, which is full of sin and gives a new **heart of flesh** (Ezek. 36:26), which desires to love and obey Him. He renews our **wills** and sets us free from slavery to sin. The ability and willingness to desire and do the good comes **by His almighty power** (e.g., Phil. 2:12-13; Heb. 13:20-21). It is by grace alone and it is the work of God in us. He draws us **to Jesus Christ** in such a way that we will **effectually** and certainly come to Him, **yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace** (Ps. 110:3; John 6:37; Rom. 6:16-18). God changes our nature and gives us the desire to believe and come to Christ. This is the miracle of regeneration. No one comes to Christ against their will. But the Holy Spirit works so powerfully in us that those who did not desire Christ, come to desire Him and most willingly and freely cast themselves upon Him.

Called by the Word and Spirit

It is the Word of God–the precious gospel, which comes to us, which is the message of salvation used by the Spirit to awaken us to newness of life. God has ordained to call His elect people through the means of preaching the gospel. Notice that the Confession says *effectually call* because there are two types of calling: 1) the general call and 2) the effectual call. By the **general call** of the gospel, we mean the simple preaching of the gospel to all who are able to hear and understand the proclamation. In this sense, all who are able to hear (or read) and understand the call of the gospel are invited but are not supplied with the Spirit to make them willing to accept the gospel. This is the case in Matthew. 22:14, which I believe is the only explicit instance on which this "general call" is based. Clearly, our Lord there distinguishes between those who are called and those who are chosen. A lot of people are called, in the sense of Matthew 22:14, but few people are chosen. The **effectual call**, on the other hand, is the call of the gospel proclamation used by the Spirit to cause us to be born again. We don't merely hear the gospel, but the Spirit applies the message of the gospel to our life and grants us the ability to accept the call of the gospel and respond positively. It is in this sense that most passages that speak of God's calling are concerned with. My favorite passage on the effectual calling of the Spirit and the gospel proclamation is in 2 Thessalonians 2–

> 2 Thess. 2:13-14 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers **beloved by the Lord**, because **God chose you** as the firstfruits **to be saved**, through sanctification by the Spirit and **belief in the truth**. 14 **To this he called you through our gospel**, so that you may **obtain the glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In contrast to those to whom God sends delusions because they refuse to love the truth (2 Thess. 2:11-12), Paul praises and thanks God because He has chosen the Thessalonians. He always gives thanks to God for their salvation. He is thankful that they're beloved and they are elect. God's choice was made in eternity as is elsewhere clear in Paul (Eph. 1:4-5, or if the alternative option is more correct: "Some manuscripts *chose you from the beginning"*), but the *application of that work begins with the effectual calling*. In v. 14, Paul says that they were called to be saved, but how were they called? The answer is through the proclamation of the gospel by Paul and his companions. It is by means of the gospel, which Paul elsewhere says is the "power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16), that God called us to be saved. He called us for a purpose: we are to obtain the glory of our Lord, we are to be co-heirs with Him. For those who object to election on the basis that it invalidates evangelism, please consider this passage. Both election and evangelism are contained in the text with no hint of contradiction. In fact, God's sovereign election is praised! God elected and God sent the gospel through Paul to the Thessalonians to bring them to saving faith.

Do you wonder why when the gospel is proclaimed some people mock and others receive the Savior? To some, the gospel is utter foolishness. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1–

> 1 Cor. 1:22-24 For **Jews demand signs** and **Greeks seek wisdom**, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a **stumbling block** to Jews and **folly** to Gentiles, 24 **but to those who are called**, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God** and the **wisdom of God**.

Jews demanded signs from the Lord Jesus and likewise from His disciples. The idea of a crucified Messiah just couldn't fit their expectations and theology. On the other hand, the Greeks seek wisdom, they seek σοφία (*sophia*), they're known for their love of philo*sophy.* But even to the Greeks, the preaching of Christ crucified is foolishness, but more troubling is talking to them about resurrection (see Acts 17:32)! To both of these groups, the message of the cross is foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18). But there is something different in v. 24. Paul explains the problem that Jews and Greeks have with the message of the cross and then follows that in v. 24 with a "but." Yes, it is true that He is a stumbling block and foolishness to these groups, but there is another group. Those who are *called*. Who are they? Well, they are the ones who see the Lord Christ as He is, not a stumbling block nor folly, but the power and wisdom of God. What is then the difference in the third group? Nothing in themselves, it is merely in the fact that *God has called them*. Paul is speaking of two groups, each group containing both Jews and Gentiles (or Greeks), but the second group has something different about it. They're not merely "Jews and Gentiles," but they are the *called* (and elected) Jews and Gentiles. Those Jews and Greeks who had heard the message of the cross preached and concluded that it is folly and a stumbling block were outwardly (general) called, but the Jews and Greeks in v. 24 were called internally, effectually and especially by the Sovereign Holy Spirit so that they see Christ as He is. It is the calling of God which made the difference between the groups in vv. 22-23 and 24. This effectual call came to the believers through the preaching of the gospel and brought them to faith.

Another very clear passage on the special and effectual call of God is Romans 8:28-30, which we have discussed in **chapter 3** when dealing with Unconditional Election. Many more passages speak of our calling, which you may look at as: Romans 1:6; 8:28-30; 9:24; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Galatians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 14; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3:1; 1 Peter 2:9, 21; 2 Peter 1:10; Revelation 17:14.

It is with all this in mind that the Lord Jesus says, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all" (John 6:63). If it was not for the sovereign operation of the Spirit, the message of the cross would be folly to us. But according to the Father's eternal purpose, it pleased the Spirit, when we heard the gospel, to regenerate us and raise us up from spiritual death and make us willing to receive the Lord Jesus and see Him as our only hope in life and death. Our nature has to be changed and we have to be made new creatures to be able to respond to the gospel positively. The Lord Jesus says, "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). You have to be born again to see and be able to choose the kingdom. You cannot see or choose the kingdom unless you have been born again. This is all the work of the Spirit of God as the Lord says, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" referring back to the promise of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36:25-27. Entering and seeing the kingdom is the same thing. We need to be born again by the Holy Spirit to be able to do that.

Here is a list of the things to which we have been called:

- we have been called to belong to Jesus Christ and be saints (Rom. 1:6-7; cf. 1 Cor. 1:2);
- we have been called to be justified (Rom. 8:29-30);
- we have been called to be vessels of mercy, prepared beforehand for glory (Rom. 9:23-24);
- we have been called into the fellowship of God's Son (1 Cor. 1:9);
- we have been called to peace (1 Cor. 7:15);
- we have been called to the grace of Christ (Gal. 1:6);
- we have been called to freedom (Gal. 5:13);
- we have been called to the hope of the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:18; cf. 4:4);
- we have been called to belong to the one body (Col. 3:15);
- we have been called into God's kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2:12; cf. 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3);
- we have been called to holiness (1 Thess. 4:7);
- we have been called through the gospel to obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus (2 Thess. 2:14);
- we have been called to eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12);
- we have been called to be holy (1 Pet. 1:15);
- we have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9);
- we have been called to suffer for the sake of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21);
- we have been called to bless those who curse us that we may obtain a blessing (1 Pet. 3:9).

Thanks, glory, honor, and praise be to the mighty Spirit of God Who has caused us to be born from above.

State of Death and Sin

It is not good people whom the Lord calls by His Word and Spirit. Neither it is those who are neutral and would love to be with God, rather it is those who are in the state of sin. It is those who are totally depraved. It is those who are dead and

soaked in sin. All they know is sin (Rom. 14:23). It is those people who by their sinful nature and thanks to the fall of Adam, are dead in sins and trespasses. This is who we were before the Spirit called us to that which we do not deserve which God had beforehand ordained that we would attain.

See for more **chapter 6** on the **Total Depravity** of man (**see also this**) and **chapter 9** on the **will of man in the State of Sin**.

Enlightening our Minds

God changes our nature and cleanses us (Ezek. 36:25-27) and thereby He also cleanses and enlightens our minds and enables us to understand the things of God. The commission which Paul received was:

> Acts 26:18 to open their eyes, so that they may **turn from darkness to light** and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

We lived in sin and darkness (Eph. 2:1-3; Matt. 4:16), but the light of the Lord has enlightened us. He has turned us from the darkness and sin that we previously loved to the light of the glorious gospel. We were blinded by sin and Satan, but God has shone His light in us–

> 2 Cor. 4:4-6 In their case the **god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers**, to keep them from seeing the **light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God. 5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has **shone in our hearts to give the light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We were held in darkness by the god of this world, but God in His mercy has reached down to us and shone the light of Christ in us. This work is described as nothing other than a *re-creation*. Just like God, at the beginning said "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3), so likewise there had to be a work of spiritual creation in our hearts. He made the light of Christ to shine so that we would see the glory of God, Who is actually a person, even our Lord Jesus Christ. He shone the light of the gospel so that we would acknowledge Him as the Lord of everything and the Savior of our souls. So that we would see His beauty and treasure Him above all things as the satisfaction of our souls.

> Eph. 1:17-18 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of **revelation in the knowledge of him**, 18 having the **eyes of your hearts enlightened,** that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

Paul prays that the believers may more and more know God intimately and understand His work. He prays that God would especially reveal to us Himself and the riches of the salvation that He has given us. He prays that we would be freed from our sin and made children of the living God. He wants not their physical eyes, but their spiritual eyes—the eyes of their hearts, to be enlightened so that they may, at the present, behold the glory of God and in the future, in our flesh see God (Job 19:26-27). God reveals Himself to His children through His Spirit and infallible Word.

The natural person does not understand the things of God, but the one who is spiritual, i.e., led by the Spirit, is made able to understand the things of God (1 Cor. 2:9-16). We have received the mind of Christ in His Word and Spirit to understand the things of God. This is not given to everyone but only to those who are led by the Spirit of Christ and who are called according to His purpose. The apostle calls us to continually strive to live according to God's will, which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We are not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, rather we are to "be transformed by the renewal of [our] mind[s]" so that we would know what God's will is for us (Rom. 12:2). We are commanded to continually walk according to the light given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Renewal of Nature

We are renewed. A completely new nature is given to us at the new birth. Paul says that when we are in Christ, we become a new creation. The old passes away, but now the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17). There is a change in nature through which we are now willing to come to the Lord Jesus. This is the promise that I love about the New Covenant:

> Ezek. 36:25-27 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your

idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will **give you a new heart**, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and **give you a heart of flesh**. 27 And I will **put my Spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

The heart is the center of one's being. It is where their will and nature is. This is what the Lord promises to do, He will change our nature. He will change the most fundamental aspect of our being, which has been corrupted by lawlessness and sin. The cold, dead heart of stone will be exchanged for a living heart of flesh. It is a heart that will be made willing and able by the Spirit Who will be given to us to obey God and His Law. The new heart will be able and willing to love God because it is no longer a heart of stone and dead in sins. A similar promise is in Jeremiah 31:31-34. He makes us alive from the state of "dead in our trespasses" (Eph. 2:5-6). This is nothing less than a spiritual resurrection (John 5:25-26) by which we are brought to life with God. We are made new creations, indeed (2 Cor. 5:17).

Effectual Drawing

The Confession speaks of God drawing those who were called *effectually* to Jesus Christ. The foremost passage upon God drawing people must be John 6:44. We have discussed this passage in **chapter 3** on divine election, but let's take a quick look at it again here.

John 6:44 **No one can come** to me unless the Father who sent me **draws him**. And **I will raise him up** on the last day.

It is pretty simple actually and the words are not difficult nor ambiguous. No one has the *power*, *desire* or *ability* to come to the Lord Jesus. All are *unable* and *unwilling* to come to the Lord Jesus because they have no desire to come to Him. They are unable because they are unwilling. That would mean that no one can get saved. But thanks be to God for the "unless" in the passage. No one can come unless the Father draws them. No one has the willingness or ability unless drawn by God. It is God Who draws us and gives us that willingness and ability. Notice that the calling is *effectual* in the sense that it brings the results that God desired. The "him" who is drawn by the Father to the Son is the same "him" who is raised up on the last day (John 6:39, 40, 54). The Lord does not fail in what He intends. All who are drawn, definitely and perfectly come to the Lord Jesus and see Him as He is–the Savior and Lord of His people. They look up to Him and embrace Him as the only hope of salvation and relationship with God (John 6:37-40).

Made Willing by His Grace

We are made willing by God to do that which is pleasing in His sight. Psalm 110:3 says that "Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power" or as the KJV says, "they shall be willing." God is able to make us alive and willing to accept the offer of salvation and change our will and nature. It does not mean that we act against our desires for that is absurd (see **chapter 9**), but it means that God frees our will, which was captured by sin and Satan. God does not violate our will, rather *He frees a violated will.* It is God Who draws us to the Lord Jesus and thus makes us willing to come to Him (John 6:37, 44). In our sinful state, we would never come to Him, but God has made us willing by His grace to come and receive the Savior Who paid the penalty for our sin in our place.

For more on this see chapter 9 on the **will in the State of Grace**.

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§2 This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone

2. This effectual call is of **God's free and special grace alone,** not from anything at all **foreseen in man,** nor from any power or agency in the creature, **1** being **wholly passive therein,** being dead in sins and trespasses, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit; **2** he is thereby **enabled to answer this call,** and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it, and that by no less power than that which raised up Christ from the dead. **3**
    1. 2 Tim. 1:9, Titus 3:4-5; Eph. 2:4-5, 8-9; Rom. 9:11
    2. 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:5
    3. John 6:37; Ezek. 36:27; John 5:25; Eph. 1:19-20

This **effectual call** is only because of **God's free and special grace** (2 Tim. 1:9, Titus 3:4-5), and not because of anything **foreseen in man, nor from any power or agency in the creature** (Rom. 9:11). If God would look to us without Christ then He will only see enemies and rebels in us who hate Him. Therefore, there is nothing in us which would move God

to be gracious to us, to elect us or to effectually call us to Him. Therefore, it is truly of **God's free and special grace alone** that we have been called to Christ and have fellowship with the triune God. In this **effectual call** or regeneration, we are **wholly passive**. We are being acted upon by God the Holy Spirit in taking the heart of stone and giving us the heart of flesh; in setting us free from the dominion of sin; in renewing our wills; in coming to indwell us. Until **quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit**, we are **dead in sins and trespasses** (Eph. 2:1). After this passive work performed on us, we are **enabled to answer this call** of God by faith. We then **embrace the grace offered** in this call and this we will do **by no less power than that which raised up Christ from the dead**, i.e., the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:19-20). This great resurrection Power is still at work in us.

Not From Anything At All Foreseen

That God's decision in election was not based upon anything foreseen in us is the clearest in Romans 9:11 –

> Rom. 9:10-13 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though **they were not yet born** and had **done nothing either good or bad**—**in order that God's purpose of election might continue**, not because of works but because of him who calls— 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Admittedly, this is a difficult passage to process emotionally. It is not difficult to *understand* what is being communicated. It is simply difficult to *accept* emotionally because it goes against a lot of things we cherish. The simple fact is that God decided before the birth of Jacob and Esau, indeed, from all eternity, to save the one and condemn the other without anything based in them. They hadn't done anything good or bad. Some, at this point, may object by saying, "yeah, but God saw that Jacob would believe," but that runs in the face of Paul's argumentation in the favor of election, let alone that the biblical authors knew of no such idea as "foreseen faith" or "God looking through the corridors of time." But most importantly, it runs against the objection later raised in v. 14. Why would anyone think that God is unjust if His decision was in actuality based on foreseen faith? That objection would not have been raised. But it is because God's election was based solely in Himself and not in anything in Esau or Jacob, or for that matter–nothing in all people, that the objection is raised. It is necessary, therefore, according to v. 11, for God's purpose in election to stand that God's choosing of Jacob over Esau was based on nothing in them. It was necessary "in order that God's purpose of election might continue." Not because of anything in them, but simply because it is God Who effectually calls. Paul actually is arguing that if election was based on the person elected, then it is not election.

Before they were created, God decided to save the one and damn the other; God decided to love the one and hate the other. The very idea of election according to Paul depends upon the fact that nothing in man is the moving factor for God's choice, but the choosing factor is in the One "who calls." It is something in God that motivates Him to choose the one and pass over the other. This moving factor is said to be "his own purpose and grace" (2 Tim. 1:9), "the purpose of his will" and the end of that is "the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:5-6) and He did this "according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). I know of no text which places the moving factor of the eternal election to salvation of individuals in them. It is always God and His will. Therefore, the idea of election being based upon "foreseen faith" is foreign to Holy Writ.

Wholly Passive

That we were passive in the process of regeneration could be seen by simply reflecting upon the metaphor and the reality of human birth (or resurrection), because such a metaphor is used for our regeneration (e.g., John 3). It is God Who works upon us and we are receiving the work being done. We are being acted on. It is He Who takes the heart of stone. We don't "give Him our heart." He takes the heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh, which loves and desires Him (Ezek. 36:25-27). It is He Who writes His laws upon our hearts (Jer. 31:31-34). We don't write them upon our heart, we merely receive His work in us. It is He Who in the words of Peter "caused us to be born again" (1 Pet. 1:3). He brought us to newness of life and just like natural birth, babies do not contribute anything to their birth. They do nothing to make themselves be born. It is the doctors who bring the little baby out without any effort from the baby. So likewise, the Lord when He regenerates us, He does His work monergestically. Without human effort (Synergism). He alone does the work of regeneration and the new birth and we are merely recipients of amazing grace.

Paul expressly denies any human effort in Romans 9:16. Neither man's willing nor his working (running, exertion) contribute to his salvation, nor help in the process of regeneration. But it is only God Who has mercy. It is only Him Who is working to make us new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Don't forget the fact that we were dead in sins (Eph. 2:1-3), we were *not* sleeping or half dead. We were dead in our sins. All we did was sin (Rom. 14:23). We were dead to righteousness (Rom.

6:20). Now consider the example of Lazarus' resurrection (John 11). What did Lazarus contribute to his resurrection? Nothing! He was rotting in the grave, but the Lord Jesus in mercy and love calls: "Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43). It is the Lord Jesus Who brought him back to life. He did not do anything in the process when life came back in him. It was God Who worked to bring Lazarus back to life without any effort from his side, either in his will or deed. So likewise is the new birth, which is a spiritual resurrection (John 5:25-27). We are passive in regeneration. But when we are regenerated with the new nature that God has put in us, the new heart, we love and desire the God Whom we hated before regeneration and willingly, according to our new nature, delight in and choose Him. We are not passive in the Christian life; we are only passive in regeneration.

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§3 Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit

3. **Elect infants** dying in infancy are **regenerated and saved by Christ** through the Spirit; who worketh when, and where, and how he pleases; **1** so also are **all elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called** by the ministry of the Word.
    1. John 3:3, 5, 6, 8

Elect infants dying in infancy are not saved because they are infants or because they have not committed any actual sins or because they're innocent. Rather, they are **regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit** (John 3:3-8; 6:63; Titus 3:5-6). This is certainly a special operation of the Spirit which Scripture does not shed much light upon. Yet in this special way, **all elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word** are regenerated and saved. These include infants, unborn children, and the mentally handicapped.

What is the meaning of the phrase **elect infants dying in infancy**? This phrase does not say who is elect or who is not. It neither says that all dying infants are elect, nor that some dying infants are elect. The phrase is used to distinguish **elect infants dying in infancy** from *elect infants living on*. Furthermore, it stresses the fact that every person who is **regenerated and saved by Christ** must have been **elect** and that they are saved **through the Spirit** (John 3:8; Luke 1:15, 41-44). About the working of the Spirit in these kinds of persons, the Confession stresses the sovereignty of the Spirit and does not say how this is accomplished because the Scriptures are silent on this.

The Phrasing of the Confession

It seems that most copies of the 1689 contain the word "elect" before "infants." Spurgeon's version does not contain it. Dr. Sam. Waldron says that indeed the phrase "elect infants" was in the original 1677/89.[2] The phrase "elect infants" is original and not a later addition as is evident from the sister confessions (the Westminster and Savoy confessions). This merely shows the caution that the framers took in making a statement upon a subject which is not as clear in Holy Scripture. I do not believe that by saying "elect infants" they assumed that all other infants were in damnation. Rather, by "elect" they wanted to assert that their salvation is solely by grace and not through deserving it or merit, even if they die in infancy. Furthermore, the phrase is placed in contrast to "elect infants living to grow up." Those elect infants will be called by the ministry of the Word and Spirit as paragraph 1 makes clear.

In the following paragraphs, I'm going to argue the case that Pastor MacArthur made in Safe in the Arms of God. I think that he made a decent biblical case for infant salvation. I do not mean that he answered every question that could be posed, but I thought it was a good case for what happens to those who die in infancy and those who are disabled. I know that some Reformed people disagree with him, usually because of his Dispensationalism, but hear him out. I have also benefited from:

- Matt Perman – What happens to infants who die? – He mentions what John Piper believes.
- ChristianAnswers.Net – What is the eternal destiny of an infant or young child who dies?
- Theopedia – Infant salvation
- Sam Storms – Do All Infants Go to Heaven?
- R.C. Sproul – What happens to children who die before they can accept the gospel?
- Loraine Boettner, Reformed Doctrine of Predestination - Infant Salvation
- Jesse Johnson - Theologians on infant salvation – Calvin, Hodge, Warfield, Spurgeon, Boettner.
- Albert Mohler - The Salvation of the 'Little Ones': Do Infants who Die Go to Heaven?

Infant Salvation

We are now approaching a very difficult and touching subject. It is very emotional and that is obviously understandable. We do not neglect our emotions, but the Scriptures are the infallible standard of truth. So our search for the answer must begin and finish with Holy Writ. What has God said on this subject? This question does not merely concern infants, but also unborn babies and the mentally disabled.

Persons

First, we must begin with the question: "Are fetuses human persons?" I believe that the biblical answer is positive. The first go-to-text is **Jeremiah 1:5**. There the Lord speaks about Jeremiah's ordination and election. Before Jeremiah came out of the womb, the Lord knew him and talked about him as a "you" and not an "it." In **Psalm 139:13-16**, the writer speaks of God Who formed him from the very beginning in the womb until the end. God had determined his days before there was any. The Lord saw the person, He didn't see a fetus who became the writer of the Psalm. But He saw him who once was a little fetus. In **Luke 1:41-44**, upon Mary coming to Elizabeth, the baby John in Elizabeth leaped in her and could express his feelings. Elizabeth does not refer to him as a thing or as merely a fetus, but she says the *baby* leaped in her. He was able, even in the womb, to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15), which is only for persons and was able to express emotions. The Law gave the same protection for unborn children as for adults. In **Exodus 21:22-23**, we read of the punishment of someone fighting a husband and who hits his pregnant woman. If there was harm, *the lex talionis* was to be followed. Calvin observes on v. 22:

> *If men strive, and hurt a woman*. This passage at first sight is ambiguous, for if the word death (39) only applies to the pregnant woman, it would not have been a capital crime to put an end to the foetus, which would be a great absurdity; for the foetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being, (homo,) and it is almost a monstrous crime to rob it of the life which it has not yet begun to enjoy. If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a foetus in the womb before it has come to light. On these grounds I am led to conclude, without hesitation, that the words, "if death should follow," must be applied to the foetus as well as to the mother. Besides, it would be by no means reasonable that a father should sell for a set sum the life of his son or daughter. Wherefore this, in my opinion, is the meaning of the law, that it would be a crime punishable with death, not only when the mother died from the effects of the abortion, but also if the infant should be killed; whether it should die from the wound abortively, or soon after its birth.[3]

Therefore, this question concerns even unborn human beings.

Are All Sinful?

Any biblically faithful theology of salvation must begin with the fact that all humans are sinful and therefore deserve damnation. This is admitted by David when he says that he was conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5). The meaning is not that his father and mother had unauthorized sex, but that from the very beginning of his life he was sin-tainted. David writes again, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3). There is no such thing as a sinless human being. Albert Barnes comments on the last portion of the psalm with these words:

> This language simply traces his sin back to the time when he began to exist. The previous expression traced it to "his birth;" this expression goes back to the very beginning of "life;" when there were the first indications of life. The idea is, "as soon as I began to exist I was a sinner; or, I had then a propensity to sin - a propensity, the sad proof and result of which is that enormous act of guilt which I have committed."[4]

Furthermore, the fact that they die proves that they are in sin, albeit not having committed any actual sins yet. Nonetheless, they are sinful according to the federal headship of Adam. This is clear in Romans 5:12; 3:23; 6:23. All sinned in Adam although they were not in the Garden. There, Adam stood as our federal head. He represented us before God (see **chapter 6** about the federal headship of Adam). Death came as a result of sin. In fact, the Bible attributes death to the sin of Adam and not so directly to personal sin. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned". Sin came into the world through the transgression of Adam of God's covenant. Through his sin came the punishment and curse of the covenant—death. And the punishment spread to all mankind because "all sinned" in their federal head—Adam. And if they die, they must die because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). If they receive the wages of something, it must mean that they have it.

Barnes' observations on Romans 5:12-21 concerning the sin of Adam and its extent even to the death of infants is here

interesting for the subject at hand:

> Moreover, there are certain facts connected with the moral history of mankind, which present insuperable difficulties, if we deny the doctrines of representation and imputed sin. “How shall we on any other principle account for the universality of death, or rather of penal evil?” It can be traced back beyond all personal guilt. Its origin is higher. Antecedent to all actual transgression, man is visited with penal evil. He comes into the world under a necessity of dying. His whole constitution is disordered. His body and his mind bear on them the marks of a blighting curse. It is impossible on any theory to deny this. And why is man thus visited? Can the righteous God punish where there is no guilt? We must take one side or other of the alternative, that God inflicts punishment without guilt, or that Adam’s sin is imputed to his posterity. If we take the latter branch of the alternative, we are furnished with the ground of the divine procedure, and freed from many difficulties that press upon the opposite view.
>
> It may be noticed in this place also, that the death of infants is a striking proof of the infliction of penal evil, prior to personal or actual sin. Their tender bodies are assailed in a multitude of instances by acute and violent diseases, that call for our sympathy the more that the sufferers cannot disclose or communicate the source of their agony. They labor with death and struggle hard in his hands, until they resign the gift of life they had retained for so short a while. It is said, indeed, that the case of infants is not introduced in Scripture in connection with this subject, and our author tells us, that they are not at all referred to in any part of this disputed passage, nor included in the clause, “death reigned, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” On this, some observations will be found in the proper place. Meanwhile, there is the fact itself, and with it we are concerned now. “Why do infants die?” Perhaps it will be said that though they have committed no actual sin, yet they have a depraved nature; but this cedes the whole question, for that depraved nature is just a part of the penal evil, formerly noticed. Why are innocent infants visited with what entails death on them? One answer only can be given, and no ingenuity can evade the conclusion, “in Adam all die.” The wonder is, that this doctrine should ever have been denied. On the human family at large, on man and woman, on infant child, and hoary sire, on earth and sky, are traced the dismal effects of the first sin.[4]

If these little children were not in sin, they would not have died. But it is because they are born and conceived in sin that they die. This would mean that *they do deserve to go to hell* if God wanted to give them what they deserve. Therefore, any theology about infant salvation must stress the fact that infants are not sent to heaven because they’re sinless or good; they are not. They are in the sinful federal head, Adam, who broke the covenant. But they are sent to heaven solely because of God’s grace, not because they deserve it. Don’t forget this emphasis!

That’s why I believe the Confession uses the language of “elect infants.” The phrase neither says that all dying infants are elect, nor does it suppose that there are non-elect infants. Theologians from both sides believe this. What the phrase does, is ground the salvation of the infant or the mentally handicapped in the sovereign grace of God and the internal work of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the phrase is contrasted with infants who live past their infancy. Those infants will be called by the usual operation of the Spirit along with the Word, as paragraph 1 teaches. But elect infants will be called by the special operation of the Holy Spirit.

Sinful, But Not Willful Rebels

Hereby I mean that it is true that infants are born sinful and from their earliest times they demonstrate that they’re leaning toward sin, but they are not making their choices with understanding. They do not understand the implications of their choices and deeds because their understanding and other capacities have not yet matured. There is no question about what happens to older children/people who have never heard the gospel. Romans 1 clearly says that they’re without an excuse.

> Rom. 1:18-23 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who **by their unrighteousness suppress the truth**. 19 For what can be **known about God is plain to them**, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, **have been clearly perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are **without excuse**. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and **exchanged the glory of the immortal God** for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Do you see the stress that Paul lays upon the *willful* disobedience and rebellion of people to the general revelation of God?

Verse 18: They are actively holding down the truth. They are fighting the truth by their unrighteousness. They don’t want it to come out. It is like a ball in a swimming pool. All that you need to do to have the ball come on the surface is *nothing.* To have the ball under the water you’ll have to push the ball down. This is exactly what these people are doing. But can unborn

children, infants, and little children truly be said to do this?

Verse 19: The knowledge of God is clear and plain to all those who actively suppress the truth of God. They know that God exists and they hate Him. They know it because it is God Himself Who reveals Himself to them in nature.

Verse 20: They know that God exists and they perceive and understand His power and nature from the creation around them. The word for "perceive" is the Greek καθοράω (*kathorao*, G2529), which Thayer's Greek Definitions defines as "to look down, see from above, view from on high" and "to see thoroughly, perceive clearly, understand"[5]. It is on this basis that they are "without excuse." They do not have a leg to stand on because they know that God exists from the things that He has created. They have a bird's eye view. They clearly understand that God exists and willfully rebel against Him. It is those who have no excuse. Paul does not have in mind those who are mentally disabled and therefore cannot understand and perceive the world around them, nor does he have in mind those who are infants and are not mature in their understanding. He is speaking about and against those who clearly know God and they hate Him, and everyone does that. God's wrath is revealed against all men who suppress the truth and everyone outside of Christ does exactly just that. Whether in false religion or denial of religion.

Verses 21-22: They knew God. They did not merely know *about* Him, they knew *Him* and His person from the creation around them, which demonstrates His eternal power and divinity. But they don't delight to honor Him because of their sinful nature which is against the true God of heaven and earth. Their thinking is worthless because they did not start with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). They actively exchanged the glory of God for worthless things. Again, the question rings: Can this be said of unborn children, infants, little children or of those who are disabled? In this scenario, it seems that this group mentioned about do indeed have an excuse.

Does it now mean that this group (unborn children, infants, little children, disabled) deserves heaven? No, because we have already established that all are conceived and born in sin. But in the scenario that Paul is painting in Romans 1, they have an excuse, namely that they are not willfully rebellious, nonetheless, they are born in sin (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). They do deserve God's wrath on the basis of Adam's federal headship, not on the basis of what Paul says in Romans 1. In Romans 1, the group that Paul is focusing on are those who are able to understand the creation around them and yet they are willfully rebellious to God's revelation. He is not speaking about infants, little children, the disabled or unborn children.

Some may say that we may have confidence about the children of believers, but an unbeliever may have no confidence that their child is in heaven. I do not find this view satisfying or consistent with Unconditional Election. To my mind, since God is sovereign He can save whomever He wants, whether He wants to damn all infants or save them, or save some and damn others that's His sovereign choice which I'm bound to honor and glorify Him for that. But the problem comes when people say that if the parents of the child are believing then the child will be with God, but if not then the child is probably not in the presence of God. It seems to me that this view compromises or doesn't believe in God's free and sovereign election. There is something else outside of God that is influencing His choice about the destiny of the particular infant whether heaven or hell based on the parents of the child. But I have not found any biblical evidence which would lead me to believe this. This is a view common among Reformed paedobaptists. The Canons of Dort 1:17 says, "Since we must make judgments about God's will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but **by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included**, godly parents **ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children** whom God calls out of this life in infancy." As Reformed Baptists, we have a different Covenant Theology and our issue would be with the idea that the natural offspring of believers are included in someway in their parents' covenant. See **chapter 7** on the covenants and **chapter 29** on baptism.

Children of believers are not sent to heaven or specially favored by God because they're children of believers. It is no doubt a great blessing to have faithful parent(s). But it does not place one in a Covenant of Grace with God or grant special covenantal privileges. John 1:13 says that the children of God "were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." They are reborn by the will of God. It is the children of promise, not of the flesh who are heirs of salvation (Rom. 9:8). Therefore, if God has decided to choose between infants who would go to hell and those who would go to heaven, I don't see any reason for believing parents to have confidence that their child is with God just because they're believers. Plus, God does not punish the sin of the parents (e.g., unbelief) on the children (Ezek. 18:20; Deut. 24:16), rather, everyone pays for their own sins. Therefore, in this case, unbelieving parents could also have confidence (but unbelievers want nothing to do with the true God) that their children may be with God. The consequences of sin may come upon more generations, but the sin of the father is not imputed to the son. Therefore, I believe that God will not consider the sin of the parents in making His choice, otherwise, it would not be free in the highest sense as in Romans 9:11 (**see above**).

The Lord was angry with the generation of the Israelites in the wilderness who continually tempted Him. He promised that they shall not enter into His rest (Heb. 3:16-19). The Lord promised that "Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers" (Deut. 1:35). The Lord waited 40 years until that generation completely died out (Num. 32:13). Yet, in Deuteronomy 1, the Lord answers the concern of this "evil generation" about their children. The Lord said, "And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, **who today have no knowledge of good or evil**, they shall go in there. And **to them I will give it, and they shall possess it**" (Deut.

1:39). The Lord denied the blessings to the fathers, yet granted them to the children. They are described as those who "have no knowledge of good or evil". This means that they are not mature enough to understand and act upon that understanding as their parents were. Notice also that the description of "have no knowledge of good or evil" is directly attached to "your children" and "your little ones". It is not spoken of those who are of age and understanding. Dr. Albert Mohler writes:

> We believe that this passage bears directly on the issue of infant salvation, and that the accomplished work of Christ has removed the stain of original sin from those who die in infancy. Knowing neither good nor evil, these young children are incapable of committing sins in the body – are not yet moral agents – and die secure in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.[6]

This passage would serve as an indication that God's mercy and grace are not dependent upon the faithfulness of the parents, but upon His sovereign will. Many commentators believe that the reference to the "more than 120,000 persons who **do not know their right hand from their left**" in Jonah 4:11 are to children for whom the Lord is concerned. They are described in similar words as in Deuteronomy 1:39 to indicate innocence (not sinlessness).

Biblical Passages

Let's look at a few biblical passages which support infant salvation.

David's Case

The go-to-text about infant salvation is often 2 Samuel 12. This is obviously the one wherein David's child, who was conceived of adultery, dies. I admit that I had often dismissed this passage as not strong, but I have changed my mind because of John MacArthur.

> 2 Sam. 12:19-23 But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." 20 Then David arose from the earth and **washed and anointed** himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the LORD and **worshiped**. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. 21 Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." 22 He said, "While the child was **still alive, I fasted and wept**, for I said, 'Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' 23 But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him**, but he will not return to me."

It is easy to minimize the importance of this episode, but the question is: does what happens justify David's actions? David was pouring himself out in fasting and prayer that God would be merciful to the child and let him live. But God did not let the child live, rather He took his life. David was hoping that God would listen to his cry and answer the prayer positively and let the child live. But God did not. Once David hears that the child is dead, his time of mourning is ended. He washes himself, he eats and goes and worships the Lord. That is pretty weird, actually. For a lot of people, more mourning will come when the child dies. We are not inclined, when a tragedy like this strikes, to go on and worship God and cleanse ourselves. But this is exactly what David does. His reasoning is that he will go to the child, but the child will not come to him.

Some have tried to say that David here merely means that when he dies he will be buried in the earth together with his infant child and therefore the "place" where he will meet him is simply the grave. Talk about a great comfort (not)! Is this really what David meant? Was this the reason which caused him to stand up, clean himself and go in worship to the Lord, namely, that he would be buried in the same place as his child? I can't understand how can this be of any comfort to a parent losing a child. Rather, David is speaking of heaven. This is the same David who wrote Psalm 23, wherein we read: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and **I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever**" (v. 6; see also Ps. 16:11; 17:15; 73:24-26). This is the David who knew that he will be together with God once he dies. He wasn't hoping to be with his child in the grave, but in the presence of God. That is what brings hope and comfort to him. This child is not lost, rather he will meet him in eternity with God. He is safe in the arms of God. It is here that David grounds his comfort and confidence.

This may be seen to be the case when we look at what David did when Absalom died. Absalom rebelled against his father David and wanted to be the king in his place, but then he is caught in the bushes by his hair and later killed. We are familiar with this story, I'm sure. While David's men have won the war against Absalom, David is worried about his son. The war is not important to him. He wants to know whether Absalom died or not (2 Sam. 18:28-29). Then the news came to David of Absalom's death:

> 2 Sam. 18:32-33 The king said to the Cushite, “Is it well with the young man Absalom?” And the Cushite answered, “**May the enemies of my lord the king** and all who rise up against you for evil **be like that young man**.” 33 And the king was **deeply moved** and went up to the chamber over the gate and **wept**. And as he went, he said, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! **Would I had died instead of you**, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

Do you see the difference between what David did when his infant child died and when Absalom died? In light of this, can David’s comfort about his infant child be said to be that they will be together in the grave? Obviously, David is grieved about the death of Absalom to the point that he would have switched places with him! How great is that? Obviously, David believed that his son Absalom would be separated from God and will go to the place of the wicked. That’s why he would have rather switched places with him as any parent would desire for their children. It is understandable. It is in light of this that we must understand the story about David’s infant child. When we see the contrast we cannot merely say, “oh yeah, it means that David will go to the grave with his child.” David does not stop from mourning for Absalom until rebuked by Joab (2 Sam. 19:1-8). Yet he stops from mourning when the infant child dies. Joab describes him as that he would have been happy if they lost the battle, but that Absalom was still alive. So much and so deep was his groaning and mourning over Absalom’s death because he had no hope.

Become Like Children

There are important passages in Matthew 18 and 19. Most of the time that I have heard arguments for Paedobaptism they have pointed to the fact that the Lord Jesus did not hinder children from coming to Him, He welcomed them and therefore we should baptize our babies too. Or something along that line. My purpose here is not to argue against the Paedobaptist use of these passages, but to notice what we can learn about the subject at hand–infant/child salvation. Jesus tells his disciples who came to ask Him about the great in the kingdom of heaven that they must become like little children else they will not enter the kingdom. In order to enter the Kingdom, one needs to be like a child. What does this mean? I believe that John Gill is right in commenting: “that is, unless ye learn to entertain an humble, and modest opinion of yourselves, are not envious at one another, and drop all contentions about primacy and pre-eminence, and all your ambitious views of one being greater than another, in a vainly expected temporal kingdom; things which are not to be found in little children”[7]. The Presbyterian Albert Barnes comments:

> *And become as little children.* Children are, to a great extent, destitute of ambition, pride, and haughtiness. They are characteristically humble and teachable. By requiring his disciples to be like them, he did not intend to express any opinion about the native moral character of children, but *simply that in these respects* they should become like them. They should lay aside their ambitious views, and pride, and be willing to occupy their proper station--a very lowly one. Mk 9:35 says that Jesus, before he placed the little child in the midst of them, told them that “if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.” That is, he shall be the most distinguished Christian who is the most humble, and who is willing to be esteemed least, and last of all. To esteem ourselves as God esteems us, is humility. And it cannot be degrading to think of ourselves as we are. But pride, or an attempt to be thought of more importance than we are, is foolish, wicked, and degrading.[4]

The Lord Jesus, therefore, says that a redeemed believer is just like a child. He certainly used the child for illustration to demonstrate the foolishness of the disciples’ question, but I believe that He did also mean that “to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” The Lord is clear in Matthew 19:13-15 in this:

> Matt. 19:13-15 Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, 14 but Jesus said, “**Let the little children come** to me and do not hinder them, **for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven**.” 15 And he laid his hands on them and went away.

It appears that the disciples had not learned their lesson from the previous chapter. They wanted to hinder children from coming to the Lord Jesus as in their time they did not have a high view of children like we now do. The disciples did not want the children to bother the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s reply is strong and to the point. He does not want the children from being hindered. He wants them to come to Him! The Lord describes them as belonging to the Kingdom. “To such”—it is to them and those who are like them that the Kingdom belongs. The Lord also means what He said in the previous chapter about us having to become like children, but certainly, the stress primarily is laid upon the real children before Him whom He will bless. It is those who belong to the Kingdom. Therefore, little children and infants are indeed saved by God’s grace and are *not* excluded from the Kingdom. MacArthur believes that perhaps the majority of the redeemed in heaven died as children or in infancy as the death rate of infants in birth was very high in the previous centuries, therefore for the Lord Jesus to say “to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” he means that it is populated of such. It is populated by little children. (Whether they remain little children or other such questions, this is not the place of inquiry nor am I the person to answer these questions. I

don't know.)

From Every Tribe

Another line of evidence, which supports infants' salvation may be seen from Revelation 5:9; 7:9. I believe that these passages are very interesting, though perhaps in themselves not conclusive. What we read here is basically that there are people redeemed by the blood of the Lamb from all corners of the world. In heaven and on the New Earth, there will be people from every place on earth. There would be representatives from every tribe and nation. But how can this be said about tribes and places where the gospel has not (yet) come? The Bible is clear that those who are mature in their understanding know that God exists and they hate Him and therefore they are without excuse (Rom. 1:18-23). That won't work. They will not be pardoned simply because they had not heard the gospel. They knew the God against whom they sinned, that is the basis of their condemnation, not because they rejected the gospel. But it would be *literally* true if what is spoken of here are unborn children, infants, children, and the disabled. In this case, we would certainly have representatives and people from all over the world, even places where the gospel has not yet conquered them. Not conclusive in itself, but certainly strengthens our case, I believe.

Condition of Accountability

Dr. MacArthur does not speak of the *age* of accountability, but the *condition* of accountability. In his own words:

> A child who has not reached moral culpability is a child who has not reached sufficient mature understanding to comprehend convincingly the issues of law and grace, sin and salvation...
>
> At some point the child's maturation, he or she comes to have an understanding of law and grace. In other words, the child begins to comprehend and *understand* these principles: God has rules and commandments; sin involves the violation or breaking of God's laws; forgiveness of sin has been made possible through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross; the grace of God allows for all who believe in and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and submit to Him as Lord to be cleansed of their sin and live in the newness of life and joyful obedience to Him.
>
> From child to child, that precise age varies. It is the "conditional" that counts, not a calendar.[8]

It is not a specific age, which God has set that when someone gets passed that they are condemned, while those under that age no matter what they've done or what kind of understanding they have they are saved. Rather it is the *condition* of the child. A child who understands the gospel and willfully rejects it and rebels against God obviously does not have an excuse. But one who is still immature in their understanding and in a sense has "no knowledge of good and evil" (Deut. 1:39), will have an excuse according to Romans 1. God ultimately decides what the condition of accountability is and He always does that which is just (Gen. 18:25).

Damnation by Works

We are saved by grace but damned by works. A very convincing point that Pastor MacArthur makes is that the inhabitants of hell are always described as those who have willfully and rebelliously sinned against God. In his own words:

> Scripture teaches that we are *saved* by grace, but we are *damned* by work. Scripture teaches that eternal punishment is the wage due those who have willfully sinned. Nowhere in the Bible is anyone ever threatened with hell merely for the guilt inherited from Adam. Instead, whenever Scripture describes the inhabitants of hell, the stress is on their *willful* acts of sin and rebellion (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:[5-]6; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Scripture always connects eternal condemnation with works of unrighteousness – willful sin.[9]

This, I believe, to be one of the strongest points raised for infant salvation. When we add this to what we saw above from David, it becomes very convincing. Let's examine Pastor MacArthur's claims. That we are saved by grace without any merit is the start and finish of all biblically faithful theology. There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation. Even the group under consideration (unborn children, infants, little children and the disabled) are not saved because they are little or disabled, but because of sovereign grace. There's no question about that. We have argued for **Unconditional Election** in **chapter 3**, therefore, ultimately, no human choice is decisive in salvation but God's (Rom. 9:16).

The next claim which we will take up concerns *damnation by works.* Is it true? Yes, I believe it indeed is true. We are not damned for no reason, we are always damned for our sins. And yes I believe in **Reprobation**. That this is the case may be seen from the passages which describe, for example, what things keep us from heaven. Nowhere do we read of people being sent to hell because of Adam's sin. Let us admit that the **Bible is simply silent on whether there are children in hell/Hades.** You may check all the references that Dr. MacArthur gives where things are described which keep us out of

heaven, in no list is there anything other than willful disobedience to the Law of God. They are choices that we consciously make and sinful lifestyles that we live in. Furthermore, we are also judged according to our works. 2 Corinthians 5:10 declares, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for **what he has done in the body, whether good or evil**." We are to answer for what *we* have *done* in our body. Notice that we do not have to answer for Adam's sin. Adam's sin makes us incapable of righteousness and faith apart from the sovereign Holy Spirit. But we will not answer for Adam's sin, but our own. Romans 2:6 says, "He will render to each one **according to his works**". The Son of Man "will repay each person according to **what he has done**" (Matt. 16:27; see also 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12; see also **chapter 32**). All this serves to demonstrate that we are not judged for Adam's sin, but for our own personal sinning and that this judgment is according to what we have done in the body.

How Are They Saved?

It is certainly a special operation of the Spirit unlike the one we know wherein He regenerates them. The Confession in this paragraph states, "**Elect infants** dying in infancy are **regenerated and saved by Christ** through the Spirit; who worketh when, and where, and how he pleases; so also are **all elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called** by the ministry of the Word." They are saved by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit and by the Lord Jesus Christ. They are saved from damnation. Had they been sinless or not subjects of damnation, there would be no need for them to be saved. This is also the case for all who are incapable of being outwardly called. For those who *are* capable of being outwardly called, the Confession in the first paragraph said that this happens "by his Word and Spirit". But since these persons under consideration in paragraph 3 are not capable of being outwardly called, they are saved by the special operation of the Holy Spirit and by Jesus Christ, their Savior.

We don't have many examples, therefore, we must be careful in this. But there is the example of John the Baptist who was saved from the womb. Luke 1:15 says that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb. This language of being filled with the Holy Spirit is always associated with believers, never with unbelievers. See for example Luke 1:41, 67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9, 52; Ephesians 5:18. In every instance, it speaks exclusively about believers, therefore we have the warrant to believe that John was indeed regenerated and given the Holy Spirit even from the womb—before he was born, he was already saved. Therefore, it is perhaps also the case with those who die in the womb or infancy. The important thing is that they are saved by the Spirit and through Christ's blood, not because of their righteousness.

Conclusion

God is absolutely sovereign over life and death, salvation and damnation. It is not luck or fate which takes a child's life away, whether in the womb or outside the womb. It is the Sovereign God Who takes life and gives life (Ex. 4:11; Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6; Ps. 139:16; Job 1:21). For whatever wise and holy purposes, He was pleased to ordain the death of the child. We don't understand His ways. Sometimes they seem so unreasonable or cruel to us, but He is most just and holy and He will do that which will further His glory and His purposes. But we take comfort that the Lord in sovereign grace takes those who are mentally ill, disabled, unborn, infants and those who are not yet mature in their thinking (children) into His fold and cleanses them by grace through Christ's blood.

I think that I have tried to provide some positive evidence, namely, David's case and some negative evidence, namely, that only those who have willfully rebelled against God are said to be in hell. They are persons, therefore, if they do not go to hell they do not simply vanish, but are by grace welcomed into God's presence. This is how I understand the subject and I hope that some light has been shed. I recommend getting a copy of **MacArthur's book**. It is short, good, but be careful because it is tear-jerking because of the testimonies of those who have lost children who are now safe in the arms of God. We may rest assured that the Judge of all the earth shall indeed do that which is just (Gen. 18:25)!

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§4 Others not elected...may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet not being effectually drawn by the Father

4. Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some **common operations of the Spirit,** **1** yet not being effectually drawn by the Father, they **neither will nor can truly come to Christ,** and therefore cannot be saved: **much less can men that receive not the Christian religion be saved**; **2** be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess. **3**
    1. Matt. 7:22; 13:20-21; 22:14; Heb. 6:4-5
    2. John 6:44-45, 64-66; 8:24; 1 John 2:24-25, 29
    3. Acts 4:12; John 4:22; 17:3

Many people could deceive us and sit under **the ministry of the Word** (Matt. 13:20-21; Heb. 6:4-5) and be called to respond to the gospel and may even outwardly do so, but this does not place them into a state of grace. They may even **have some common operations of the Spirit** (Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 6:4) and a changed life, but this falls short of regeneration and effectual calling. Just ponder the words in which the Lord Jesus will speak to hypocrites on the last day in Matthew 7:21-23! They will remain hypocrites because aside from the true and effectual work of the Spirit, **they neither will nor can truly come to Christ** and this means that they **cannot be saved** (John 6:64-66; 8:24). Furthermore, salvation is not to be sought outside the **Christian religion**, even if they live "good" lives **according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess**. All these things cannot save them. Christ alone saves, by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9).

Unbelievers in the Congregation of the Believers

That unbelievers find themselves in our churches is no secret. In some churches, there are more church-goers than true believers. Of this, John the apostle writes:

> 1 John 2:19 **They went out from us**, but **they were not of us**; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that **it might become plain that they all are not of us**.

The false teachers, prophets, and professors went out of the congregation because they did not actually belong to the mystical body of Christ. They were not believing in their hearts. For whatever reason, they found themselves in the congregation of the saved, while they themselves were not. This is the way it is going to be in the church buildings, congregations, and the world until Christ comes (Matt. 13:30). The church universal consists of the elect alone and only God perfectly knows who are His. But as the church universal finds itself in local congregations, it is a mixed group of elect and reprobate, because elders cannot see into people's hearts and they take their profession at their word, not knowing whether they're being deceived. Some people will even be working miracles and think that they were Christians all the while they were not. The most terrifying thing is to be self-deceived.

> Matt. 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, '**Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name**, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, '**I never knew you**; depart from me, **you workers of lawlessness**.'

These people did not "fall away," because they did never truly and savingly know the Lord Christ. They pretended to be believers and followers of His, all the while having no evidence that they, in fact, were. The Lord Jesus denounces them in the strongest words. He does not say "I knew you, but now I don't." But it is: "I ***never*** knew you." The Lord distances Himself from those who merely professed His name and did things in His name, but they did not truly know Him or belong to Him. So likewise and sadly, there will be people with whom we go to church who will receive this severe denouncement from the Lord because they did not truly know Him. Let us always preach the gospel, *especially* in the church where many hypocrites gather.

Only the Christian Religion Can Save

That Christ is the only Savior is plain from the New Testament. By the "Christian religion," the Confession means Christ. Salvation is only found in Him and is through Him. Many passages are plain on this point. The reason why it is only through Christ is because He is the only propitiation—the satisfaction of God's wrath for the world (1 John 2:2; Rom. 3:25). He is the only sacrifice that was provided for the forgiveness of sins. To receive forgiveness, we must have faith in Him. That is the way that we receive the application and effects of the propitiation made for us on the cross. No other religion provides man with a solution to this major sin problem. Essentially, all other religions are work-based. You have to do something to earn heaven or whatever it is. While biblical Christianity alone is the religion of pure grace. It answers the need of man. It answers the problem of man's sin. But not only that, it presents us with Someone Who can go between us and between God—the God-Man—Christ (see **chapter 8 on Christ the Mediator**). He Who is sinless would stand between us and God to plead on our behalf on the basis of His finished work on the cross and not because of anything that we've done. Sinful man needs a mediator who would go between him and a most holy and just God. That mediator was provided in the God-Man, the Lord Christ, Who died for our sins, purchasing our salvation and ourselves for God (Rev. 5:9-10) and in due time, bringing us into a harmonious and loving relationship with God.

That the Lord Christ is the only way may also be seen in passages that plainly say that. In John 14:6, the Lord Himself claims to be "the Way" to the Father. He is not merely a way, but He is the ἡ ὁδὸς (*he hodos*). He is the only and definite Way to the Father. All other ways do not lead to Him. All roads do lead to God, but not all roads lead to heaven and peace. We must all appear before God, but only those who come through Christ will receive acceptance, all others will perish and pay for their sins because there was no propitiation for their sins, therefore they have to try to propitiate God in their suffering. Peter says that there is no other name given to man by which we can be saved (Acts 4:11-12). Among all mankind, there is no one who can stand between us and God and reconcile us back, save the Lord Christ. It is only through Him that we find forgiveness and salvation. There is no other. All other roads lead to damnation, but only Christ gives us eternal life. See also Acts 10:42-43; John 3:36; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 1 John 5:11-12.

There is a lot of pressure on Christians in the name of *love* to compromise on this vital point. It is not "loving," some complain, to tell people that they cannot come to the Father any other way than through the Lord Christ. But it is loving. It is, in fact, hateful not to tell them, because you are not telling them the truth as witnessed by God Himself. It would lead them to damnation. God has not provided us with multiple ways of salvation, but there is only one way. The Way is through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who is the only propitiation provided by God for our sins (1 John 2:1-2). We must not compromise. We will not compromise. We must stand fast on the Word of Christ.

To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(2 Thessalonians 2:14)

Footnotes

1. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
2. ^ *Some editions of Dr. Waldron's exposition leave out the word "elect," but those editions were written when he was using Spurgeon's version and later came to know that "elect infants" is original as in the Savoy and Westminster. In his words on Facebook were: "The quote you gave is, I think, from the first or second edition of my book (1989, 1995). In the edition of the Confession I was using way back then "elect" was missing. In the third edition in 1999 I corrected this. Your quotation made me check and sadly in the fourth edition (2009) somehow Evangelical Press reverted to earlier editions not including my preface or the corrections to chapter 10. I need to talk to them about this. At any rate, "elect" was present in the original 1677-89 of the Confession." The quote that I gave was from the 2013 edition of his Exposition was: "The questions over the meaning of the phrase, 'infants dying in infancy,' are a bit more complicated. In the Westminster Confession the word 'elect' is present, while it is deleted in the 1689 Confession. Its deletion does not, however, materially change the meaning of the phrase. The phrase, 'infants dying in infancy,' does not assert that only some infants dying in infancy are saved. It does not exclude that possibility, but it does not assert it. It does assert that at least some infants dying in infancy are saved. That is all that it necessarily asserts."*
3. ^ *John Calvin. Commentaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
4. a, b, c *Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
5. ^ *Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. See reference for the Strong's number.*

6. ^ *Albert Mohler - The Salvation of the 'Little Ones': Do Infants who Die Go to Heaven?*
7. ^ *John Gill. Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
8. ^ *John MacArthur. Safe In the Arms of God. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson 2003). pp. 37-38.*
9. ^ *Ibid., p. 80.*