

The Killing Effects of HyperCalvinism

By Bob Ross

THE Bible is a dangerous book! That may sound rather strange, yet Peter plainly says in our text that some wrest the Scriptures, to their own destruction. And human experience reveals this to be so: many go to hell, stumbling over verses of Scripture which have been perverted, twisted, distorted, misapplied, and misused. Sadly, yet to many, the Bible is only a means of heaping condemnation upon condemnation. As Paul said of the Gospel, it is the “savour of death unto death” (2 Cor. 2:16).

The doctrines taught in the Bible relating to the sovereignty of God, referred to in religious circles as “Calvinism,” also as “the doctrines of grace,” are doctrines of the Book that are the occasion for many people “choking” on the Word. The misuse and abuse of these doctrines will deaden and kill. Babies in Christ, unless taught properly, most likely will rebel against these truths, else be misled and their spiritual lives twisted. We know nothing so deadening to spirituality as to run into hyper-Calvinism as a result of a distorted faith regarding the sovereignty of God and related doctrines.

Hyper-Calvinism and the misuse of Calvinism will kill a number of things in the Christian, in the preacher, and in churches.

IT WILL KILL GOSPEL PREACHING TO THE LOST

Paul believed in the sovereign grace of God, the depravity of man, and related truths, and was as strong on these doctrines as any preacher that ever lived. Romans 8 and 9 reveal just how plainly Paul taught these great Bible doctrines. Yet Paul believed in preaching the Gospel. He said in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

He knew that it was the Gospel that God had ordained as that instrument by which the Holy Spirit would effectually call men to salvation. It therefore was “*power*” to Paul. In Ephesians 1:13, he wrote, “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” And in 2 Thessalonians 2:14, he reveals that those chosen in the beginning are called by the Gospel, “Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul's earnest desire was “to preach the Gospel in the regions beyond” (2 Cor. 10:16). It was by this Gospel that he had been instrumental in the salvation of the Corinthians, “For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15). Throughout the Bible, where the new birth or conversion is mentioned, the birth is always said to be “of” God, but the means of this birth is “by,” “with” or “through” the Word, the Gospel.

But those who have run into error on the sovereignty of God and related doctrines scorn the idea of preaching the Gospel to the lost. They seem to fear that one of the non-elect might slip into the gate! They seem to be more concerned about shutting the gate to the reprobate than opening it for the elect! I heard one of them say one time, “I don't preach to catch dead fish; I fish for live fish.” He forgot to mention that in the parable spoken by the Master, some of the “live” fish were cast away (Matt. 13:48). Yet this reveals some of the perversions that are used to justify not preaching to the lost.

I heard another one of the hyper-Calvinists say that he just sought to preach the Gospel to those who had been “quickenened.” But the truth was, he hadn't been preaching the Gospel to anybody, but had been going around arguing about election and predestination with anyone who would listen to him. That was all he was concerned about.

Once a man loses sight of the fact that God calls men to Christ through the Gospel, that man will have no confidence in the preaching of the Gospel. He will begin to separate the new birth from the preaching of the Word of God and won't have any concern for presenting the Gospel to the lost. He will say, "Why preach to a dead man?" He has lost sight of the fact that God speaks to dead men by the Gospel, for His Spirit rests upon it.

I once asked a Hardshell preacher how he understood Mark 16:15—"preach the Gospel to every creature." Instead of telling me, he said, "Why, if I took your view, I would have to preach to every cat, dog, rat, cow, horse, and every other creature on earth." This again reveals how distorted hyper-Calvinists can get once they lose sight of the Gospel in the call of the elect to Christ.

Christian, stop for a moment and think: how were you brought to Jesus Christ? Was it not through contact with the Word of God, perhaps as you either heard or read from it? If so, then learn from your own experience, as well as from the Bible, that this is how God calls men to salvation. The word for "power" in Romans 1:16 is the word for *dynamite*; that is what God has made the Gospel of His Son—a stick of dynamite to blast the elect from the power of sin and the devil, bringing them to Jesus Christ.

The sovereignty of God, rightly understood, will not kill Gospel preaching; it will not kill missionary concern; it will not kill personal witnessing. Rather, it will give the Christian a solid foundation for Gospel preaching and witnessing. Since he knows that God will definitely save some through preaching of the Gospel, he goes forth sowing the seed of the Word on all kinds of soil, preaching to every creature, as the Master has commanded.

IT KILLS PRAYER

Those who run into error on the doctrines of grace have their prayer life deadened. They lay down on the sovereign purpose of God and say, "Well, if I pray, it won't change things; if I don't pray, it won't change things." So prayer is deadened through such a perverted approach to the doctrine of sovereignty.

Jesus was a Man of prayer (John 17). He is our Example. Paul believed in sovereignty, yet he didn't lack a burden of prayer: "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Rom. 9:2). "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1).

He instructed Timothy to pray likewise, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:1,2).

Our prayer life ought to be like our preaching of the Gospel; that is, we ought to pray for the salvation of every man, just as we preach the Gospel to every man. It does not matter that God has not purposed to save every man—that is His business; it is our business to be concerned to the extent that we desire the salvation of every man. We should not want anyone to go to Hell! God would have us recognize His sovereignty in salvation and have us ask Him to manifest His converting power, regardless of whether or not this is His own secret purpose in the case of every man we pray for. If we neglect to pray on the grounds that we don't know whether or not God is going to save a person, then we will never pray for the salvation of anyone! We don't ever know whether or not God will save a person for whom we pray.

Our business is to preach to every man and to pray for every man. If we do this, we will be certain to pray for all those whom God will call to salvation. The fellow who sits around trying to pick out the man he thinks God will save, and then prays for him, will most likely miss praying for some whom God saves. But

if we make it a point to pray for every man (as far as is humanly possible), then we will not fail to pray for those that God does save.

Erroneous extremes on God's sovereignty kill this approach to prayer. Those in hyper-Calvinism are never brought to the point of asking God to do anything, but they are always doting over his secret purpose. But God would have us pray as Hezekiah (2 Kings 20), who, although having a prophetic message that he would die and not live, poured out his soul to God in prayer and the Lord added fifteen years to his life. Had Hezekiah been a hyper-Calvinist, he would never have prayed as he did; he would have just sat down on the purpose of God. But the purpose of God in Hezekiah's case was to stir him up to pray, for actually it was God's purpose all along to add the fifteen years.

Likewise, we today are to take this attitude toward prayer. We are to reach that place of asking God for things that, when He performs, will be for His glory. We are not to merely pray a general prayer as, "Lord, have your way in our lives;" that is something He certainly will have: but we are to reach that place where we desire to have God act in certain ways, showing His hand in behalf of His people. And when He answers our prayers, it is not because we have persuaded Him, but because by grace we were moved to pray for the accomplishment of something which He had before decreed.

Mark it down: *God's general rule is to stir up His people to pray definitely for the thing which God will perform.* The church on Pentecost prayed for ten days before the power of the Spirit came. And prayer usually precedes the great acts of God for His people. Why? Because it pleases God to burden us to pray for those things God will give us. "Give us this day, our daily bread." Why pray that, if it is already determined as to whether or not we will have this bread? Because God would have us acknowledge His sovereignty and pray for these blessings He has determined to give us!

Don't fall into the God-dishonoring snare of hyper-Calvinism, which deadens a life of prayer.

IT KILLS A GRATEFUL SPIRIT

Paul said, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thess. 5:18). A Christian is to be grateful to God for the working of God's providence in his life. This is not to be some theoretical notion stored off back up in the cranium, but it is to be the daily meditation and activity of the believer's heart. He is to recognize the goodness of God in all things; he is to be grateful to God for His dealings.

It is wrong for a Christian to say, "Well, what is to be will be, so what happened was just what was planned." When a person divorces God from the events of life and fails to have a grateful heart, he has—perhaps unknowingly—run into the heresy of fatalism. Fatalism divorces God from the events of life, whereas the Bible reveals that He is the ever-living God who controls the smallest detail of life. Fatalism kills a spirit of recognition of the Divine Being and thus destroys the spirit of gratefulness. Even unsaved people believe in Fatalism, often saying, "When my number is up, I'll go," and similar remarks. They believe in "fortune tellers," the "writing in the stars" and other fatalistic notions. This doesn't manifest faith in the God who determines all events, but it is the spirit of fatalism—believing that all things are set, yet having no active gratefulness and joy in the heart toward God.

We ought to look back upon every day that we live and thank God for His mercy, goodness, provisions and all the other countless wonders of grace that He sheds upon us. We ought not to focus attention on the idea that these things were just "meant to be," but we ought to recognize the providential workings of Him who has brought everything to pass in a real, personal way.

IT KILLS DAILY WATCHFULNESS

Paul instructs Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4:16, to “take heed unto thyself.” And throughout the Word of God the Lord’s people are exhorted to “watch.” “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thess. 5:6).

We are to live each day with respect to what the Lord has set before us as our responsibility, rather than try to discern the secret purposes of God. We are not going to be judged by His own secret purpose, but by the revelation of responsibility clearly given to us in His Word. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).

But if we pay too much attention to the “secret things,” we will find ourselves lapsing in our “watching.” It seems to be a universal weakness in men to want to dig into the mysterious and unknown. Men seemingly like to learn some fanciful notion so they will be ahead of the other fellow. Many people will flock to hear “lectures on prophetic events” who would not sit for five minutes to hear a Gospel message on salvation.

And many people are this way about God’s sovereignty. They look lightly upon man’s revealed responsibility and revel in the counsels of the Almighty. This causes them to fail in daily watchfulness and shame and reproach are often the results. Sin becomes no burden to their souls, since it is in the secret purpose. A lack of prayer is of no concern to them, souls going to hell do not bother them, and the preaching of the Gospel is no burden; they have sat down on sovereignty and the spirit of concern has been deadened.

IT KILLS FORBEARANCE TO WEAKER BRETHERN

On this point, all of us who have come to see the truth of God’s sovereignty have most likely been guilty to some degree. In our joy of learning the doctrines of grace, we have, unconsciously perhaps, failed to stop long enough to consider that the “blindness in part” by our weaker brethren is but the same blindness from which it took the grace of God to deliver us. Thus we find ourselves being lifted up with a spirit of pride and we take the position of looking down in scorn upon those who do not see what we see.

In doing this we really are denying the very truth we profess to believe—the sovereign grace of God! How can we, wretched creatures of the dust, be lifted up against another wretched creature because he doesn’t see what we see! Ought we not rather to be moved with pity and love toward those believers who are yet in darkness on these doctrines? Is it right for us to thicken the darkness by our strife, hardness, and bickering?

The truth of God’s Word is not a club to pound over a weaker brother’s head; what if another had pounded our heads when we had so little light? Truth is not an axe to crack against another’s ribs, but it is a sharp knife, to be used by a surgeon, opening and cutting in such a manner that good is accomplished. I fear too many of us who believe in the doctrines of grace are better club men than surgeons. I confess my own faults in this regard, for I’m sure I have had a lack of forbearance with brethren who have not the same convictions as I. We must be patient, forbearing, longsuffering and, as Paul says, “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25).

We often hear, “I just don’t understand why so-and-so can’t see these truths.” Whoever says this has not realized why he *has* seen these truths! Once a person realizes why he has seen them, then he knows why the other person has not, and he will not be lifted up with a spirit of pride.

There is a difference of course, between the error a person holds and the person himself. We can look upon the error with righteous contempt, yet have forbearance, patience and love toward the erring brother. This is

the art of speaking the Truth in love—something we all need more ability in doing. It is difficult to do, as the flesh must have no place in it.

IT KILLS RESPONSIBILITY TO TRUTH

Paul stated that he did not shun to declare “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Yet there are some believers in the sovereignty of God who excuse themselves of responsibility to certain doctrines on the basis that the doctrines of grace are of greatest importance. As a result, such Bible teachings as baptism, the Lord's Supper, missions, church activity, prophetic truths, the woman's place in the church, and similar doctrines are slighted.

Those who do this are really denying the sovereignty of God. If they believe in a sovereign God, why don't they practice their faith and hear what He says? If a sovereign God revealed certain doctrines, did He intend that we should lay them aside as of “less importance”? It is not so much the doctrines involved as the matter of denying the very thing we profess to believe. In other words, if I say I believe in a sovereign God and that the Bible reveals His Word, I ought to follow what the Book reveals. If it says bump my head against the wall, I ought to do it, if this is the Word of the sovereign God I profess to serve. If I refuse to do what I know to be His revealed Word, then I deny what I claim to believe. I have faith without works to justify, or prove, my faith.

Of all the doctrines of the Bible, the sovereignty of God is the last one that a preacher or any other Christian should plead as an excuse to by-pass or minimize a single Bible truth. A preacher, especially, is under great responsibility to the sovereign God who has taught him the truth to pass it on to others in the spirit of reverence to God and love for the people. The fact that some may not receive this truth does not relieve us of the responsibility of teaching it. Our duty is not measured by what people will receive, but by what God has revealed.

IT OUGHT NOT TO BE

The foregoing are some of the things that ought not to be killed by believing such doctrines as predestination, election, depravity, limited atonement, effectual grace, and the like, but some people “wrest” these truths to their destruction. They “go to seed” on them and destroy spiritual graces and responsibilities. This is not the fault of God's truth, however, and we ought not to lay aside any doctrine simply because some choke on it. If we did that, what would be left to believe? The Scripture and experience, too, reveal that sinners stumble over our Saviour and the plain revelation, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

SOME THINGS WHICH CALVINISM KILLS THAT OUGHT TO BE KILLED

While it is true that the misuse of Calvinism, or running into the error of hyper-Calvinism, will kill spiritual graces and responsibilities that ought not to be killed, there are some things killed by the blessed doctrines of grace which certainly need to be slain. The very core of grace is the exaltation of God and the absolute subjection of man and the fruit of this truth, when properly received in the Holy Spirit, is the humbling of man and the glorification of God by the saved sinner. Consequently, the flesh with all its pride and carnality is crucified as grace operates in the soul. Grace has a killing effect upon the carnal mind and actions of the sinner's “old man.”

And saved people still have much that needs crucifixion! Our thoughts are certainly not altogether as God's thoughts and our ways are not fully His ways (Isa. 55:8). We are prone to lean upon the flesh, rather than trusting in the Lord with all our hearts (Prov. 3:5). All of God's people, seemingly, go through the “Arminian” period in their Christian lives. It has been said that “all men by nature are Arminians.” This simply means that men naturally exalt the flesh and its power and debase God and His attributes. It takes a

period of “growing in grace” to get away from some of the “vain imaginations” (Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 10:5) that are ingrained in the very nature of the depraved fleshly mind. The writer once was just a typical Arminian, not knowing the error of my way in my thinking about God. And, of course, there is still much that I need to learn of God and much in the flesh that needs to be crucified; we shall never reach the state of perfection until the resurrection.

What are some things of the flesh that the doctrines of grace kill? First—

A DEGRADATION OF THE GODHEAD

Arminianism talks about a God who fails. This is the doctrine of the fleshly mind, not the doctrine of the Bible. This doctrine degrades God and His glorious attributes. One man has said that hell is “a ghastly monument to the failure of the Triune God to save the multitudes that are there.” He says, “God Almighty couldn't save them! He did all He could. He failed” (Noel Smith).

God the Father is degraded by such a doctrine, for this makes His eternal will to be thwarted, although He “tried” to fulfill it. *God the Son* is degraded by such a doctrine, for it makes His work in vain and powerless to atone for sin apart from man's power. *God the Spirit* is degraded, for this makes Him a failure in His office work of effectually applying the atoning death and merits of the Son. You hear men talk about “sinning away your day of grace,” “crossing the deadline,” and the like; all of this kind of talk degrades the power of God's Spirit. Yes, men do resist the Spirit—no one whom God ever saved did less than resist the Spirit. But the resistance was not, and never can be, an effectual resistance. Like Paul, all whom God intends to save will find it hard to kick against the pricks and they will bow the knee to Jesus Christ as Lord!

The doctrine of sovereign grace kills such degradation of the Godhead for it exalts God in His true sovereignty and presents man in his state of depravity. It “amens” such verses as—

“He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?”—Daniel 4:35.

“Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.”—Psalms 135:6.

“The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand”—Isaiah 14:24.

“But He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth”—Job 23:13.

“For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?”—Isaiah 14:27.

The Arminian degradation of the Godhead needs to be killed in every person who becomes a child of God. The old merit-mongering, self-exalting, self-justifying, Pharisaical pride in us all needs to be slain with the sharp two-edged sword of God's divine revelation (Heb. 4:12). The doctrine of grace will do it, when received in the Spirit. Our God is not a failure in the least matter; grace never taught us that He failed; such a heresy is just a carnal doctrine. Let it be slain!

AN IMPROPER MOTIVE AND BASIS FOR WORLD-WIDE MISSIONS

No free-willer on earth believes in preaching the Gospel to every creature any stronger than the man who has rightly received the so-called “five points of Calvinism” (depravity, election, limited atonement,

effectual calling and security.) And I will just add, in passing, that the term “Calvinism” is used only for the sake of theological distinction as over against what is called “Arminianism.” These doctrines are not “Calvinism,” but the teachings of the Bible.

Now back to the point: we believe in world-wide missions, preaching and witnessing to every creature. This is our God's command (Mark 16:15). It is His revealed command that we are to attend to, not the secret purpose (Deut. 29:29).

William Carey, the famous missionary to India, was a believer in the doctrine of grace, as was Andrew Fuller, the man who “held the rope” for Carey back home in England. The well-known theologians of the past, such as Calvin, Luther, Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, Augustus Strong, J. P. Boyce, B. H. Carroll, and others believed the sovereign grace of God. Men like Augustus Toplady, who wrote “Rock of Ages,” Matthew Henry, J. R. Graves, J. M. Pendleton, and old John Bunyan taught the same.

Then there was the great revivalist, George Whitefield, and the “Prince of Preachers,” Charles Haddon Spurgeon—no one believed in sovereign grace more strongly than these men. Old Whitefield once said that he would just as soon preach to a graveyard as to lost souls, without the power of God resting on his message. Spurgeon said he wouldn't even go into the pulpit if he wasn't persuaded that God would call men to salvation by His power upon the Gospel.

Our old Baptist confessions have this doctrine shining in them; our Baptist forefathers stood for it; it is grounded in the teachings of God's Word. It doesn't kill the mission spirit; it doesn't kill the preaching of the Gospel to every creature. The strongest believer in grace, who believes that God's election is certain, will at the same time tell you that it is not his business to fulfill the secret will, but it is his responsibility, as a subject of His King, to preach the Word according to the King's commission.

But sovereign grace will kill the false motive and false basis of mission work so prevalent today. The idea of world conversion, “winning the world to Christ,” this “bringing in the kingdom” business—they all are rooted up by a proper understanding of grace and missions. Christ didn't tell us to convert the world; He told us to be “witnesses” to the world (Luke 24:48; Matt. 24:14). Through the Word He is calling His elect to salvation (2 Thess. 2:13,14). Those ordained to life will believe the gospel (Acts 13:48; John 6:44). Paul was willing to suffer all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10).

The goal of world-wide missions is not world conversion, but world witnessing, and the Lord will convert the souls. We don't need preachers “playing the Holy Spirit” and getting “decisions;” we need men obeying the Spirit and preaching the Gospel in power. Grace will kill such fleshly tactics as those used by many preachers, so-called evangelists, and missionaries who are eager to have a good number to report.

A PERVERSION OF SCRIPTURES

The doctrine of God's sovereignty will kill the approach to the Bible so prevalent among free-willers, such as just snatching any word or phrase here or there, yanking things out of context, to prove a point.

Let's notice a few illustrations of how Scripture is distorted by the man who is devoted to free-willism. It is enough for him to read John 3:16, “For God so loved the world,” to prove the notion that God “wants everybody saved.” He has his own preconceived notion about the term “world” and has studied it no further to learn its true Biblical usage.

Again, those who call for “decisions” will run over to Joshua 24:15 to uphold the notion of man's “choosing to be saved.” They never linger long in the verse to see what Joshua is talking about.

Others like “whosoever will,” in Revelation 22:17, as favoring free-willism and their notion about universal “opportunity.” They do not stop to consider that there is no promised blessing upon “whosoever won't,” nor do they refer to the source of a man's willingness to come to Christ (Phil. 2:13; John 6:44).

Another popular phrase, yanked out of context, is “God is not willing that any should perish” (2 Pet 3:9). This is not how it reads, but this is the way it is usually quoted. The free-willer overlooks the fact that Peter writes to the elect (cp. 1 Peter 1:2 and 2 Peter 3:1) and that the Lord's longsuffering is to “us-ward,” the elect.

Time and space would fail us to mention all the distorted positions on words and phrases that are marshalled in array to oppose the doctrine of God's sovereign grace in salvation. But once a person sees the truth on grace, he approaches these verses with a different thought in mind than just proving his point; he now wants to find out what his sovereign Lord reveals. He is not willing to set up a word or phrase, yanked out of context and interpreted by carnal reason, against a mountain of Scriptural truth on the sovereignty of God. If he has problems, he is content to have problems until he can “see” more clearly. He is not ashamed to admit his weaknesses and difficulties, but he is neither ashamed of the light he does have and he is not willing to yield an inch to what he now sees as being unscriptural teaching.

GRACE KILLS THE FLESH

We can sum up the latter part of this message on the killing effects of Calvinism by saying that grace kills the flesh in every area of thought and activity. God doesn't want fleshly thinking nor fleshly actions in our obedience to Him. We are not to approach His Word to understand it through the power of “reason,” but through His Spirit's blessing us with understanding (1 John 2:27). The Bible is a book of faith, revealed to faith, accepted by faith. It is not a book to be “proved” by reason, but a book for those of faith. We can believe in the miracles only on the basis of faith—that is, God said it and we accept it.

If we approach the Bible by “reason,” we cannot be anything but modernists, rejecting the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His atoning death, His resurrection and every other supernatural doctrine and event in the Book. The approach of “reason” to the Bible is exactly why many saints have not as yet accepted the doctrines of grace; they want to be able to reason things out, rather than just joyfully receive the revelation of God.

Grace kills flesh-inspired efforts, self-righteousness, self-exaltation, and all manner of pride and arrogance. It brings us low before the Lord and we think of ourselves as nothing and less than nothing. It will cause us to have the spirit of Isaiah, who, when He saw the Lord in His glory, said:

“Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”—Isaiah 6:5.

Hyper-Calvinistic “Hardshellism” Refuted

BECAUSE Arminianism is more prevalent in religious ranks than is Hyper-Calvinism, naturally the occasion for the defense of the truth has more often been in opposition to Arminianism and its idol, Dagon Free-Will. However, in recent years there has been a small drift in some areas toward Hyper-Calvinism, and there is always the alluring of the devil to draw men into error. Therefore, we believe we should warn people against this evil, pointing them to the Word of God for their stronghold.

THE HYPER-CALVINIST HARDSHELL HERESY WITH WHICH WE ARE DEALING

The particular error that we are now endeavoring to refute is the teaching of Hyper-Calvinists, or “Hardshells,” that the Spirit of God imparts spiritual life *apart from, without, or before the use of any means of revealing Christ to the sinner.*

It is because of this position that Hyper-Calvinists deny the Gospel or Word of God any place in a sinner's being made alive to God. It is this teaching which leads Hyper-Calvinists to deny the necessity and propriety of preaching the Gospel to spiritually lost sinners. They say that the giving of life is done by the Spirit apart from the use of any kind of a medium of revelation. The Gospel, they say, is of use only to those who have already been given spiritual life at some time previous to their hearing the Gospel preached.

We assert that the Hyper-Calvinist idea of spiritual life is not the spiritual life referred to in the Word of God, nor does the Spirit of God give any such life to men. We assert that this notion as to spiritual life is just another false doctrine of the devil, used to oppose the preaching of the Gospel to lost sinners. It is evident, then, why we are refuting this teaching.

QUOTATIONS FROM EMINENT MEN, SHOWING THEIR POSITION ON THIS SUBJECT

The outstanding preachers of the past who have held to the doctrines of grace taught no such heresy as regeneration apart from, without or before the use of means. Note the following quotations on this particular point:

John Gill (Baptist, 1697-1771). “The instrumental cause of regeneration, if it may be so called, are the Word of God, and the ministers of it; hence regenerate persons are said to be ‘born again...by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever,’ 1 Peter 1:23; and again, ‘of his own will begat he us with the word of truth,’ James 1:18.” (*Body of Divinity*, p. 534.)

Stephen Charnock (Puritan, 1628-1680): “The Gospel is the instrument whereby God brings the soul forth in a new birth... Sin entered into the heart of Eve by the word of the devil, grace enters into the heart by the Word of God... It is through the Word He begets us, and through the Word He quickens us.” (*Works*, Vol. 3, Discourse 4 on “The Word, The Instrument of Regeneration.”)

Abraham Booth (Baptist, 1734-1806): “In performing this work [effectual calling] of heavenly mercy, the eternal Spirit is the grand agent, and evangelical truth the honoured instrument.” (*Reign of Grace*, p. 98.)

John Owen (Puritan, 1616-1683): “The Holy Spirit doth make use of it [the Word] in the regeneration or conversion of all that are adult, and that either immediately in and by the preaching of it, or by some other application of light and truth unto the mind derived from the Word.” (“The Nature, Causes, and Means of Regeneration,” in the *Calvinistic Family Library*, Vol. 4, page 165.)

Arthur W. Pink (Baptist, 1886-1952): “The New Birth is effected by the Word of God applied by the Holy Spirit.” (Tract, “The New Birth,” p. 25).

C. H. Spurgeon (Baptist, 1834-1892): “The Word of God is the substance of faith—creating preaching; it is by the hearing of God's Word, and not by any other hearing that faith comes to the soul.” (*Met. Tab. Pulpit*, Vol. 18, p. 40.)

Thomas Manton (Puritan, 1620-1677). “God's means will prove successful in God's time. Urge your soul with the necessity of means: ‘Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God’ (Rom. 10:17). Without grace I cannot be saved, without the Word I cannot have grace... It is true, the Divine grace doth all, he begetteth us; but remember it is by the Word of Truth.” (*Exposition of James*, p. 100.)

Robert Haldane (Baptist, 1764-1842): “It [the Gospel] is the efficacious means by which God saves from sin and misery, and bestows on them eternal life—the instrument—by which He triumphs in their hearts, and destroys in them the dominion of Satan. The Gospel, which is the Word of God, is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. By it, as the Word of Truth, men are begotten by the will of God, James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23.” (*Commentary on Romans*, p.47).

Again, “There is no such thing as saving faith among heathens who have not heard of Christ.” (*Commentary on Romans*, 514.) On page 621, Haldane says, “No man is made a Christian by any power less than God's, and by no other means than God's Word. Christ wrought the obedience of the Gentiles through Paul, but the instrumentality belongs to God's Word, as well as the agency to Himself.”

Jonathan Edwards (Congregationalist, 1703-1758): “Now sinners in the congregation meet their minister in a state wherein they are capable of a saving change, capable of being turned, through God's blessing on the ministrations and labors of their pastor from the power of Satan unto God; and being brought out of a state of guilt, condemnation and wrath, to a state of peace and favor with God, to the enjoyment of the privileges of His children, and a title to their eternal inheritance.” (“A Farewell Sermon,” p. 122 in a volume entitled *Selected Sermons of Jonathan Edwards*.)

Thomas Watson (Puritan, died about 1689 or 1690): “The ministry of the Word is the pipe or organ; the Spirit of God blowing in it, effectually changes men's hearts.” (*Body of Divinity*, p. 154.)

The London and Philadelphia Confessions of Faith (both read alike): “Those whom God hath predestinated unto life, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, *by His Word and Spirit*, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God.” (Chapter 10, of Effectual Calling.)

Article ten of an old **Waldensian Confession**: “They believe moreover that no man can attain true faith, *unless he hear the Word of God*, according to that of Paul. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

Another Waldensian Confession says, “We are united with Christ, and made partakers of all His benefits *by faith*, trusting and confiding wholly to those promises of life which are given us *in the Gospel*.”

Needless to say, we could go on with such quotations from men of renown. These reveal that the Hyper-Calvinistic position is not one that has prevailed among those who have stood most firmly for the truth of God's sovereign grace.

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL LIFE?

The answer to this question is actually a refutation of the heresy of the Hyper-Calvinists. Spiritual life, according to the teaching of the Word of God, *is a faith-union with God through Christ*. It is not simply a union with the Spirit, nor is it a union with the Son or the Father; rather, it is a union with God—all three persons of the Godhead. The truth is, one cannot be in union with one of the persons in the Godhead without being in union with all three. There is only one divine, spiritual life, not three. In many places in the Word of God, we have all three persons referred to as giving us life. This does not mean that each of them gives us a life, but it means that in the life which we have of God each person of the Trinity is involved.

So to have spiritual life is to be in union with God. The Word of God says: “And this is *life eternal*, that they might *know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ*, whom thou hast sent.”—John 17:3.

This verse teaches that to have life *is to know God*. And, of course, *to know God is to know Him as He is revealed in Christ*. No man can know the Father apart from the Son. So we can truthfully say that no man knows God except in Christ; therefore, *no man has life unless he knows Christ. This is the kind of life that the Holy Spirit of God gives to the elect*.

But Hyper-Calvinists make spiritual life a sort of *spiritual deposit* (I prefer to call it “biological” since it has none of the fruits of the Spirit such as love for Christ) which the Spirit makes in men who perhaps have never even heard of Christ, much less have a knowledge of Him. Hyper-Calvinists teach that a heathen person, if he is elect, does not have to learn of Christ or know Christ, for he will be made alive by the Spirit.

You can easily see how this separates Christ and the Spirit to the extent that in giving life the Spirit does not give a knowledge of Christ. But the very work which the Spirit came to do is to bear witness of Jesus Christ. He came to give men life by bringing them into union with God as revealed in Christ. The kind of life He gives is not a life apart from Christ, but a shedding abroad of the knowledge of Christ in the heart or understanding of man, the seat of his affections, and the work at the same instant creates or produces faith, hope, love and other such graces.

You see, there is no such thing as spiritual life apart from a union with Christ, and there is no union with Christ, apart from a knowledge of Christ. *“He that hath the Son hath life”* (1 John 5:12); eternal life is to know God revealed in Christ (John 17:3). To think that a man could have the life of the Spirit of Christ and not know Christ is nothing but heresy. Life is union with Christ. The Bible says that those who know not God do not have life. In fact, the Bible teaches: *“The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* —2 Thess. 1:7,8.

In 1 John 5:13 the writer says that those who believe on Christ may *“know”* that they have eternal life. You see, life is always connected with knowing Christ.

The new birth is referred to as a *“creation in Christ Jesus”* (Eph. 2:10). Not merely a creation in the Spirit, but a creation in Christ. You see, the Spirit brings about a union of the elect with God as revealed in Christ.

The new birth is said to be a “translation.” Col. 1:13 speaks of the saints being *“delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son.”* The writer goes on to say that *“Christ in you”* is the hope of glory. How is Christ in us? Through the Spirit who gives us the knowledge of Him. He shines in our hearts to give us the knowledge of Christ.

Christ is referred to as the *“Bread of Life.”* Without eating of Him *“ye have no life in you”* (John 6:53). To eat of Christ is to partake of Him through a knowledge of Him, which of course involves faith. Notice, it is not eating of the Spirit that gives life, but eating of Christ. It is through Him that we have life.

When the “eyes” of the spiritually “blind” are opened they immediately see Christ. *“The people which sat in darkness saw great light,”* and that Light was Christ the Light of the World. When men are given life God commands the light to shine out of darkness to give *the knowledge of Christ* (2 Cor. 4:6). It is every one that *“seeth” the Son* who has everlasting life (John 6:40). The one who believes on Christ does not abide in “darkness.” (John 12:46). So the life of the Hyper-Calvinist is wholly different from the life in Christ.

In the new birth the Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts (Romans 5:5). This love is for Christ, for *“we love Him, because He first loved us.”* (1 John 4:19).

Romans 8:1 says that there is “no condemnation” to those “in Christ.” John 3:18 says that the one who believes on Christ is not condemned, but the unbeliever is condemned. John 5:24 shows that we pass out of

spiritual death into spiritual life, and that this involves a knowledge of God. Peter says we are “called out of darkness into his marvellous light,” and that light is the glorious knowledge of Christ. We are “quickened” from spiritual death (separation from God) to spiritual life (union with God). When one passes from spiritual death into spiritual life he has become united to Christ; he knows Christ and believes in Christ.

We could go on with the many Scriptures that bear upon this subject, but too many will simply make our article overloaded. So we leave these before the reader with the assurance that the error of the Hyper-Calvinist as to spiritual life is clearly seen. *Life is not a biological or even a spiritual deposit made by the Holy Spirit, but a spiritual union with Christ brought about by the Spirit of God shedding abroad the knowledge of Christ in the heart.*

Now in doing this work, the Spirit uses a *medium of revelation*. So let us now consider the truth that—

A MEDIUM OF REVELATION IS USED IN GIVING MEN A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

As we have before said, the reason Hyper-Calvinists have a heretical position toward the Gospel is because of their idea of spiritual life. If life is some sort of biological or spiritual deposit from the Holy Spirit without, apart from, and before the use of any means, then of course it is wrong to think that a medium of revelation or a means of the knowledge of Christ is needed. But if eternal life is what we contend—*knowing God as revealed in Christ*—then a medium of revelation is necessary. In other words, God must give some kind of revelation to man whereby he can know Christ. The Gospel, or glad tidings, of redemption through Christ must be revealed to man some way.

Now in order to develop this truth more fully, the necessity of revelation should be considered. Consider the fact that God is an incomprehensible, infinite Being and that man is a finite creation of limited powers, and it will immediately be recognized that if man ever learns anything of God it must be through a medium of revelation suited to instruct the finite creature. The fact that men have false and differing ideas about God proves that man is unable to comprehend God as He is. God is ever-present and all about us, but we are unable to comprehend Him. So man must have a revelation of God that he can comprehend, if he is to learn of God.

To illustrate: a child enters school for the first time. What is he taught? Geometry, chemistry, biology, botany? No, it would be generally useless to teach these things to a six-year-old. He should be taught the things which he can comprehend.

So God, being infinite and incomprehensible, must reveal Himself to us through mediums suited to our constitutions. We are finite creatures and you cannot put the infinite into the finite. All that we will ever know of God—even in Heaven—will be that which is revealed to us in a manner that we can comprehend.

Now let it be understood that we are not saying that God reveals Himself so that the depraved sinner in his lost condition will appreciate the things of God. That is not what we are saying. We are saying that the Spirit of God uses a medium of revelation to bring about a union with God. It is necessary that the Spirit use the revelation, not because the God-given revelation is insufficient to give the knowledge of God to a sinner, but because the spiritually “darkened” heart (understanding) of man must be penetrated. Only the Spirit can make the revelation effective.

Let us notice now a few examples of how God used a medium of revelation in revealing Himself to men and calling them unto Himself:

In the call of **Adam** God used the vehicle or medium of articulation (voice). Through this medium of revelation God brought Adam into union with Himself, which is spiritual life (John 17:3). In the case of

Noah, God likewise used articulation (voice). This was also the means of His revelation to **Abraham** and **Samuel**. In fact, in His earlier dealings with men, it seems that this medium was often used to reveal Himself to them. Notice that God used a dream in revealing Himself to **Jacob** (Gen. 28:13). **Moses** was called by the voice of an Angel in the burning bush, and we believe that Angel was Jehovah. When **Samuel** was called, you remember that he “did let none of His *words* fall to the ground.” (1 Sam. 3:19).

The call of **Paul** was by a vision. Hyper-Calvinists often hold this up to show that God saves according to their theory—that is, apart from the Word. But they fail to take into consideration the fact that *a medium of revelation was used* whereby Paul was given a knowledge of Christ. God had to use some medium, for Paul, a finite creature, could not have known of Him without it.

All of these men were called of the Lord and by means, or through a medium of revelation. Regardless of what kind of revelation was given, the substance of each was the same; that is, God gave a knowledge of Himself. Nowhere do we find God giving life in the sense of the Hyper-Calvinists; nowhere do men come into a union with Him apart from His revealing Himself. To know God is life, and therefore the Lord gives us the knowledge of Himself.

IN THESE LATTER DAYS GOD HAS PRIMARILY USED THE GOSPEL OR PREACHED WORD TO REVEAL HIMSELF TO MEN

God no longer speaks to men directly, in the same manner as He used articulation (voice) in speaking to Adam, Abraham and others. God speaks to us, yes; but He does so through other means.

The *medium of revelation* God has given to us in these days is His Gospel message. It reveals Christ unto us and is the message that the Spirit of God uses in uniting us to God. When we say that the Gospel is used, we mean this in the broad sense, including the written Word, the spoken Word and the Gospel in any other form. In other words, the written word is not always used in a direct sense; neither is the spoken word always used; but somehow the *Gospel* gets to men and they have the medium of revelation whereby Christ is revealed.

GOD IS ALSO PLEASED TO USE “EARTHEN VESSELS” IN PREACHING THE WORD

Paul said that we have the ministry of preaching the Gospel in “earthen vessels.” Hyper-Calvinists think that God gets more glory if He uses nothing and no one in His work. But Paul had an opposite opinion. He said that the reason God uses *earthen vessels* is “*that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*” You see, Paul was so far from thinking that his being used was keeping glory from God that he considered God's gracious use of ministers as being *for the purpose of glorifying God!*

Man is so weak that the power must *all* be of God. We could do nothing right in the ministry of the Word were it not for sovereign grace taking this depraved, helpless clay and guiding it aright. Oh, what power God has to take hold upon such wretched creatures and use them in performing the greatest of all miracles! Jesus promised that “*greater works*” would be done by those who lived after His ascension (John 14:12). Surely, God's use of earthen vessels in the ministry of the Word, by which men are brought into union with God, is the primary thing referred to by the Master. What else could He have meant, as we have no power whatsoever?

Yes, God is pleased to use earthen vessels, human beings, in His great work. The Bible says, “The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it” (Psa. 68:11).

No God-called preacher can take any glory whatsoever for what God does with and by him. If one did, it would be like a worthless piece of clay glorifying over itself after the sovereign potter had fashioned it into a lovely vessel. No, even after the servant of God has done all things, he is able to count himself unprofitable.

The case of Paul is clear, and it reveals why the Lord uses preachers. When Christ made Paul a minister of the Gospel, He said that He was sending Paul unto the Gentiles, “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”—Acts 26:18.

Paul regarded himself as being a spiritual father to the Gentiles who were brought to Christ by his ministry. He says, “For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus have I begotten you *through* the Gospel.”—1 Cor. 4:15. Of course, Paul meant only that he was a “father” in the sense of being the one God sovereignly used in giving the truth of Christ unto these people in the power of the Spirit. So it pleased God to use the one who had been an enemy of Christ and the Gospel to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles.

We might also briefly mention that God used Ezekiel to preach to the dry bones, and when the prophet preached, the bones came together by the power of God. God used the early church to preach to thousands and blessed the Word to the salvation of a great host. The eunuch was led to Christ by Philip.

When Paul and Barnabas returned from a missionary trip, “they rehearsed all that *God had done with them*, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles”—Acts 14:27. These are just a few instances of how God made use of human beings in performing His work.

SOME EXAMPLES OF GOD'S CALLING MEN BY THE WORD OR GOSPEL

As we have shown, God uses a means of revelation in calling men to Himself. We have called attention to some instances in the Old Testament, as well as the case of Paul; now notice a few examples of men being called by the Gospel.

The call of **the first disciples** was by the Gospel. John the Baptist pointed **Andrew** and another person to Christ, saying, “Behold the Lamb of God!”

Then Andrew was used to bear witness of Christ to **Peter**, and through the blessing of the Spirit of God “brought him to Jesus.” Read John 1 for the record of how others were called to Christ.

The call of **Matthew** was by the Word of God. “Follow me,” Jesus said, and that word was effectual.

The call of **Paul**, as we have mentioned, was by revelation. Notice, it was not, as Hyper-Calvinists teach, without means. The means used was the appearance of Christ to Paul. He was not in ignorance of Christ, as Hyper-Calvinists say is often the state of those who are supposedly given life by the Spirit; no, Paul was united to Christ, made alive, through this means of revelation. Without the knowledge of Christ, Paul would have had no spiritual life.

The call of the **Samaritan woman** was by the Word of God, and in this particular case, we have testimony to the fact that God will get His Gospel to all the elect. Verse 4 of John 4 says, “And he [Christ] *must needs* go through Samaria.” Why must Christ do that? Couldn't Deity have done otherwise? Yes, Jesus could have gone another way, and being God, He could have done anything. But He must needs go through Samaria for some of the last sheep were over there. Read this chapter and see how the woman and many other people were saved through the revelation of Christ given to them by *the preached Word* and *applied by the Spirit*. Notice in verse 39, “And many of the Samaritans of that city *believed on him for the saying of the woman*.”

You see, it is through the knowledge of Christ that men live, and by a *medium of revelation* God gives men the knowledge of Him.

In the salvation of the **Ethiopian eunuch** (Acts 8) the Word of God played an important part. It was through the exposition of the written Word that the eunuch came to the knowledge of Christ. The Spirit of God used Philip to lead this man to that knowledge. This is certainly a blow to the idea of the Hyper-Calvinists relative to the matter of preaching. *God here used a preacher to lead a man to the knowledge of Christ!* And it is only through a knowledge of Christ that we have union with God (John 17:3).

The salvation of the **Philippian jailer** reveals this same truth. Here a man has the spoken Word as a means of revealing Christ to him (Acts 16:30,31). The Spirit of God not only caused him to see his lost condition, but gave him life (union with God) through the knowledge of Christ.

Many other examples could be given, all illustrating that God uses a *medium of revelation* to give a knowledge of Himself unto men, and it is through this knowledge that men become united to Him. But these are quite sufficient at this time.

BORN “OF” THE SPIRIT, BUT “BY,” “WITH,” OR “THROUGH” THE WORD

In making preparation for this article, a writing by the Puritan Stephen Charnock was consulted. In it, attention is called to a most interesting distinction between being “born *of* the Spirit” and being “born *by* the Word:”

“The Scripture doth distinguish the efficient and instrumental cause by the prepositions *ek*, or *ex*, and *dia*. When we are said to be ‘born of the Spirit,’ it is, John 3:5, *ek pneumatos*; I John 3:9, v. 1, *ek theu*; never *dia pneumatos*, or *dia theu*; but we are nowhere said to be born *of* the Word, but *dia logou*, *by* or *with* the word, 1 Peter 1:23; and *dia uangelion*, 1 Cor. 4:15, I have begotten you ‘through the gospel.’ The preposition *ek* or *ex*, usually notes the efficient or material cause; *dia*, the instrumental or means by which a thing is wrought.” (*Works*, Volume III, page 309, “A Discourse of the Word, the Instrument of Regeneration.”)

This is a most enlightening distinction regarding the place occupied by the Spirit and the Word in regeneration. Both Calvinists and Hyper-Calvinists teach that men are born of the Spirit. But Hyper-Calvinist go astray when they discard the Spirit’s instrument whereby He reveals Christ to men. You see, the Spirit must use something whereby He can reveal Christ to men. This is the Gospel. Under the blessing of the Spirit, men comprehend the truth as to Christ. The work is all “of” the Spirit, but it is “*by*,” “*with*,” or “*through*” the Word, or Gospel. The Spirit’s uniting men to Christ, giving them life, is by the means which give the *knowledge* of Christ.

Notice the following passages in which this distinction is seen:

“That which is born OF the Spirit.”—John 3:6.

“Which were born...OF God.”—John 1:13.

“Every one that doeth righteousness is born OF him.” —1 John 2:29.

“Whosoever is born OF God...”—1 John 3:9.

“...because he is born OF God.”—1 John 3:9.

“Every one that loveth is born OF God.”—1 John 4:7.

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born OF God.”—1 John 5:1.

“For whatsoever is born OF God overcometh the world.”—1 John 5:4.

“Whosoever is born OF God sinneth not.”—1 John 5:18.

“He that is begotten OF God keepeth himself.”—1 John 5:18.

“...renewing OF the Holy Ghost.”—Titus 3:5.

Notice that it is not referring to being born “*by*” God, but “*of*” God. Being born “*of*” God means that He is the efficient cause or author of the new birth; to be born “*by*” the Word or Gospel means that it is *through* these mediums of revelation that God performs the work of uniting men to Himself. Notice the Scriptures which refer to this latter sense:

“Being born again...BY the word of God.”—1 Peter 1:23.

“Of his own will begat he us WITH the word of truth.”—James 1:18.

“For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you THROUGH the gospel.”—1 Cor. 4:15.

“He called you BY our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—2 Thess. 2:14.

“Now ye are clean THROUGH the word.”—John 15:3.

“Sanctify them THROUGH thy truth: thy word is truth.”—John 17:17.

Just as the Word is the instrument used by the Spirit in sanctification, so is it in regeneration.

“That he might sanctify and cleanse it WITH the washing of water BY the word.”—Eph. 5:26.

“The worlds were framed BY the word of God.”—Heb. 11:3.

The new birth is a “new creation.” Just as the first creation was “by the word,” so is the new creation.

THE BIBLE MAKES IT CLEAR THAT GOD'S WORD IS ALIVE AND POWERFUL

We must remember that when God speaks there is a power that goes with the word spoken. When Jesus emphasized the uselessness of the flesh in regeneration, He said, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63). You see, the Spirit's quickening is connected with the Word.

The Scripture, which is God's Word, is said to be “God-breathed,” given by the breath of God. The Word is not merely a natural thing, but supernatural. It is Spirit and it is Life. It is Spirit, because it is the Word of a Spirit, the Mighty God; it is Life because it gives knowledge of Christ, through whom we are united to God.

The Word is said to be “*the sword of the Spirit*” (Eph. 6:17). It is said to be “quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12).

The Psalmist had much to say of the Word's quickening power: “*Quicken* thou me according to thy *word*” (Psa. 119:25). “Thy *word* hath *quickened* me” (Psa. 119:50). “*Quicken* me according to thy *word*” (Psa. 119:154). “I will never forget thy precepts: for *with them* thou hast *quickened* me” (Psa. 119:93).

It was by spoken words that Christ raised Lazarus from the dead. It was by the spoken word that God used Ezekiel in giving life to the dry bones. Understand, we are not saying that the *letter* of the Word does this, but it is the *power that goes with the Word*. Many times it is not God's purpose to use the Word in an effectual way, but when it is, the Word is the Lord's weapon for the pulling down of strong holds (2 Cor. 10:4).

The Word of God, as the Spirit's “Sword” in His powerful hand, can quicken, give life, give light, beget, pierce, discern, give knowledge, bring forth fruit. It is called a “hammer” and a “fire.” It breaks, it purifies and it heals. It is a resurrecting power, for the dead hear the voice of the Son of God in the Word and come forth. Coming in the power of the Holy Spirit, it turns men from idols to serve the true and living God (1 Thess. 1:5,9). *Nowhere else is Christ revealed to men but in the Word of God!*

WHICH IS FIRST—LIFE OR FAITH?

This is an old question that has been a subject of study, discussion, and heated controversy all down through the ages. We do not know that we can solve the questions for others, but for our own selves we are satisfied with this position: *life and faith (or knowledge of Christ) are simultaneous so far as time is concerned, with the Spirit's work being the source of faith.*

We illustrate this truth in this manner: the sun and its rays are simultaneous, with the sun being the source of the rays. You cannot have sun-rays without the sun and you cannot have the sun and not have sun-rays. So it is with spiritual union with Christ. There is no faith without this union, but there is no union with Christ without a knowledge of Him (which comprehends faith).

Let it be understood, however, that this spiritual union with Christ is brought about entirely by the Spirit of God as the cause. Faith is His gift, not the act of depraved man. It is the act of man, yes, but only when the Spirit of God sheds the knowledge of Christ abroad in the heart. So men are active in believing in Christ.

That the work of the Spirit precedes faith, we do not deny. When we say that the work of the Spirit “precedes” faith, we mean it only in the sense that faith proceeds forth from Him as being the cause. It is by His grace that men believe.

Since His work is to create, produce or give faith by giving the knowledge of Christ to men, thereby bringing them into union with Him, faith and spiritual union (life) cannot be separated as to time so as to make one follow the other. When it is understood that the “quickenings” of the Spirit is the shedding abroad of the knowledge of Christ in the heart, creating faith simultaneously, then the question here being considered is no problem. For when this truth is seen, we no longer think of life as being some kind of deposit, but a faith—knowledg union with God in Christ. Therefore, the idea of life being something that is apart from faith and a knowledge of Christ is seen to be erroneous. But this is the very thing Hyper-Calvinists teach when they say that a man may be quickened to life at one time and be brought to faith in Christ at a later time. **HYPER-CALVINISTIC “HARDSHELLISM” REFUTED AND CONDEMNED BY THE PHILADELPHIA CONFESSION OF FAITH**

Sometime ago, I noticed an article by a Hardshell (or so-called “Primitive Baptist”) in which the claim was made that the Hardshells were the only Baptists who believed the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, hence

were in the true historical line of Baptists and Baptist doctrine. This is not the first time I have heard or read such a claim. But Hardshellism is in no wise in agreement with the Philadelphia Confession.

The claim of the Hardshells is that God does not use preaching or the written Word of God in bringing men to life in Christ. They contend that the Spirit of God, without the Word in any manner, gives men life. So far as Hardshellism is concerned it doesn't even matter whether or not a person ever hears of Christ, for they say the elect will receive this life anyway. So "spiritual life," according to Hardshell doctrine, amounts to nothing but something which I prefer to call *biological deposit*. This deposit contains no love for Christ, no knowledge of Christ, no obedience to Christ—it has nothing of Christ about it. It is just a lump of "spiritual life" of some kind.

The Philadelphia Confession is certainly not Hardshell on this matter. Before examining its contents, we wish to call attention to the fact that this Confession couldn't be a Hardshell confession for the simple reason that *it is nothing more than a slightly revised version of the Presbyterians' Westminster Confession. This is also true of the London Confession*, adopted by some English Baptists in 1689. In the "Foreword" of my copy of the London Confession, we read:

"It was based upon, and drew its inspiration from the Confession drawn up by the Westminster Assembly of Divines a generation earlier, and indeed differs only from it in its teaching upon those matters, such as baptism, the Lord's Supper and church government, upon which among the Reformed churches the Baptists differ from the Presbyterians."

So the *Westminster, London and Philadelphia Confessions* are practically identical. Surely, then, this confession did not originate with the Hardshells, nor does it express Hardshell doctrine, having been produced by Calvinists, rather than hyper-Calvinists.

Going now to the Confession, we see from the very first chapter that it is not Hardshell. The first paragraph of this chapter clearly shows *the place of the Word of God with respect to salvation*. It reads:

"I. The *holy scripture* is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Isa. 8:20; Luke 16:29,31; Eph. 2:20) *rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience*; although the (Rom. 1:19-22; 2:14,15; Psa. 19:1-3) light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give *that knowledge of God and his will, which is necessary unto salvation*. (Heb. 1:1). *Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners, to reveal himself*, and to declare His will unto His church; and afterward, for the better preserving and propagation of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh and malice of satan, and of the world to commit the same wholly unto (Prov. 22:19-21; Rom. 15:4; 2 Pet. 1:19,20) writing; which maketh *the holy scriptures to be most necessary*, those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased."

The significant parts of the paragraph, as opposed to Hardshellism, are printed in bold. Examine them carefully, keeping in mind the teaching of the Hardshells that the Word of God or Gospel has no place whatsoever in salvation. In contrast to their view, the Confession says the Scripture is the "*rule of all saving knowledge*," which is opposed to Hardshellism in that the Hardshells deny that a man needs *any* kind of knowledge for salvation. They teach that a man may be given life by the Spirit without ever hearing of Jesus Christ on this earth.

Notice, too, that the confession says a "knowledge of God and His will" is "*necessary to salvation*," which the Hardshells deny. Because this knowledge is necessary, the Confession says "therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners, *to reveal himself*."

Yes, to know God is life; Hardshell “life” is not found in the Bible. Jesus said: “And this is life eternal, that they might *know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*”—John 17:3.

God has, as the Confession states, revealed Himself in “*divers manners;*” this is the way whereby men come to *know* Him and become *united* to Him and therefore have *life*.

The Confession says God's “*former ways*” of revealing Himself are “*now ceased.*” Therefore “the holy scriptures are *most necessary* .” Thus speaks the Confession in opposition to Hardshellism.

The Hardshells are well known for their opposition to “means.” They often call missionary Baptists “Means Baptists.” Well, the Baptists who first adopted the Philadelphia Confession were also “Means Baptists.” In Article III, in paragraph six, we read:

“As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so He hath by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained (1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13) *all the means* thereunto; wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, (1 Thess. 5:9) are redeemed by Christ, *are effectually called* (Rom. 8:30; 2 Thess. 2:13) *unto faith in Christ*, by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect (John 10:26; 17:8) only.”

Notice that the elect are “effectually called unto *faith* in Christ.” It is not merely a “quickening” they receive, but they come to *faith* in Christ. How could they be called unto faith in Christ without the Word, the Gospel?

How does God “effectually call” to faith in Christ? By the Spirit alone? Let us hear the Confession again:

Article X, paragraph one: “Those whom God hath predestinated unto life, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time, (Rom. 8:30;11:7; Eph. 1:10,11; 2 Thess. 2:13,14) effectually to call, *by his word and spirit*, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation (Eph. 2:16) by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly (Acts 26:18; Eph. 1:17,18) to understand the things of God,” etc.

You see, this call is not simply the giving of life, but it is to salvation by Jesus Christ. It is a call which results in the mind being *enlightened in the things of God*. Yet you often hear Hardshells claim that the heathen who never hear of Christ and never know a jot or tittle about Him, if they are elect, are given life and shall go to Heaven. The Philadelphia Confession certainly is opposed to this notion.

Actually, the only persons mentioned in the Confession as being exceptions to the usual call of the Word and Spirit are infants and those “*who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.*” (Article 10). This has a reference, no doubt, to those who are *not balanced mentally* . If the Hardshells want to base their claim to life on this, they may do so.

This reference to infants and those who are “incapable,” clearly reveals that the normal or usual way of calling the elect is “by the ministry of the word.”In Article 14, on “Saving Faith,” the Confession states:

“1. The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ (2 Cor. 4:13; Eph. 2:8) in their hearts, and is *ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word* (Rom. 10:14,17).”Doesn't sound like Hardshellism, does it?Probably the strongest anti-Hardshell statement in the Confession is Article 20, paragraph 2:

“2. This promise of Christ, and salvation by Him, is revealed *only by* (Rom. 1:17) *the Word of God*; neither do the works of creation or providence, with the light of nature, (Rom. 10:14,17) make discovery of Christ, or of grace by Him, so much as in a general or obscure way; *much less that men destitute of the revelation of*

Him by the promise or Gospel (Prov. 29:18; Isa. 25:7; 60:2,3) should be enabled to attain saving faith or repentance.”

This is an absolute denial of the major doctrine of the Hardshells. The argument of the Confession is that nothing but the Word of God gives the knowledge of Christ unto men and those destitute of the Gospel cannot attain unto faith.

These quotations ought to be enough to convince any one, even a Hardshell, that the Philadelphia Confession is Calvinistic, not hyper-Calvinistic. It is not a Hardshell Baptist confession of faith, but a missionary Baptist confession.