

# The Gospel Call, Regeneration, Justification & Adoption (What does it mean to become a Christian?)

Objectives are to discuss the following:

1. What Does It Mean to Become a Christian?

- What is the Gospel Call?
- What is Regeneration?
- What is Conversion?

2. What Are Justification And Adoption?

## What Does It Mean to Become a Christian?

### BFC Article 12 - Salvation

**12-1** Salvation is the work of God in which He reconciles fallen men to Himself, ultimately removes the consequences of the curse, and bestows upon His redeemed Creation the riches of His grace, all to His glory.

**12-2** Salvation is offered in the gospel to all men and is accomplished in all the elect. It is received by grace through faith and the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, apart from works or human merit. Salvation centers in a person, Jesus Christ, and receiving Him includes the remission of sins on the grounds of His shed blood on the cross, the imputation of His perfect righteousness, the reception of the Holy Spirit, and the impartation of eternal life.

### BFC Article 13 - Repentance

**13-1** Repentance unto life is a gift of God and a voluntary act of man, accomplished by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Repentance consists in knowledge of sin, a sense of guilt and corruption that results in the confession and forsaking of sin and a turning to God that results in loving, obedient service.

### BFC Article 14 - Regeneration

**14-1** Regeneration, or the New Birth, is an instantaneous creative act of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit, whereby divine life is imparted to those dead in sin, making them members of the family of God.

### Introduction: There is a Definite Order of Salvation - "Ordo Salutis"

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|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Election        | 6. Adoption       |
| 2. The Gospel Call | 7. Sanctification |
| 3. Regeneration    | 8. Perseverance   |
| 4. Conversion      | 9. Death          |
| 5. Justification   | 10. Glorification |

### What is the Gospel Call: Effective Calling

“Those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified” (Rom. 8:30)

- **Effective calling:** the act of God the Father, speaking through the human proclamation of the gospel, in which he summons people to himself in such a way that guarantees a response of saving faith.
- **Key verses:** Many verses speak of the specific calling or “summoning” of God.
  - 1 Peter 2:9 - “called out of darkness into His marvelous light.”
  - 1 Cor 1:9 - “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
  - 1 Thess 2:12 - “who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”
  - Other verses: 1 Peter 5:10, 2 Pet 1:3, Rom 1:6-11, Cor 7:15, Col 3:15, Gal 5:13, Eph 1:18, 4:4, 1 Thess 4:7, 1 Peter 2:20-21, 3:9, 1 Tim 6:12.
- Although it is true that effective calling awakens and brings forth a response from us, we must always insist that this response still has to be a voluntary, willing response in which the individual person puts his or her trust in Christ.
- Unless God works in people’s hearts to make the proclamation of the gospel effective, there will be no genuine saving response. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” An example of the effective call working is Lydia in Acts 16:14. When Lydia heard Paul preaching, “the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.”

### General Calling And The Gospel Call

- **External calling** - The gospel call offered to all people through human speech, even those who do not accept it, sometimes referred to as general calling.
- **Internal calling** - The effective calling of God that actually brings about a willing response from the person who hears it.
- The gospel call is *general* and *external* and often *rejected*, while the effective call is *particular*, *internal*, and always *effective*.
- It is important to understand that it is through the general gospel call that God actually effectively calls sinners to repentance. Romans 10:14 - “How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard.”

### Elements Of The Gospel Call

- Explanation of the Facts Concerning Salvation:
  - All people have sinned (Rom. 3:23).

- The penalty for our sin is death (Rom. 6:23).
- Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins (Rom. 5:8).
- Invitation to Respond to Christ Personally in Repentance and Faith.
  - When the New Testament talks about people coming to salvation it speaks in terms of a personal necessary response to an invitation from Christ himself. (Jn 1:11-12)
 

*“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)*
  - Any genuine gospel proclamation must include an invitation to make a conscious decision to forsake one’s sins and come to Christ in faith, asking Christ for forgiveness of sins. If either the need to repent of sins or the need to trust in Christ for forgiveness is neglected, there is not a full and true proclamation of the gospel! (Luke 24:47, Acts 2:37-38, 3:19, 5:31, 17:30, 20:21, Rom 2:4, 2 Cor 7:10)
- Promise of Forgiveness and Eternal Life.
  - The primary thing that is promised in the gospel message is the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God.
 

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him **should not perish but have eternal life**” (John 3:16). And in Peter’s preaching of the gospel he says, “Repent therefore, and turn again, **that your sins may be blotted out**” (Acts 3:19; cf. 2:38)*
  - There is also an assurance that Christ will accept all who come to him in sincere repentance and faith seeking salvation: *“Him who comes to me I will not cast out” (John 6:37).*

### What is Regeneration: How The Call Is Received

- **Regeneration** - a secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us. This is sometimes called *“being born again”* (using language from John 3:3-8).
  - Regeneration is totally a work of God. We play no active part in regeneration. (James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:3, John 3:3-8) We did not choose to be made physically alive and we did not choose to be born - it is something that happened to us. In the same way, regeneration is the sovereign work of God alone!
 

*“who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:13 ESV)*

*“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. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezek 36:26-27 ESV)*
  - Both God the Father & God the Holy Spirit are actively involved in the work of regeneration.

- Holy Spirit: John 3:8 - “born of the Spirit.”
- God the Father: Eph 2:5 - “God...made us alive together with Christ.” (Col 2:13, James 1:17-18, 1 Peter 1:3)
- The exact nature of Regeneration is mysterious to us.
  - This regeneration happens to us by sovereign mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. How we who were dead are made alive to God & in a very real sense have been ‘born again’ is a mystery.

*“Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”” (John 3:3, 8 ESV)*
  - This regeneration is something that affects us as whole persons. It isn’t that simply our spirits were made alive but that our whole person which was dead is now alive. 2 Cor 5:17 - “If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”
  - This regeneration is also an instantaneous event. It only happens once. The Holy Spirit in an unseen, invisible way awakens spiritual life within a person. The new birth experience may be seen, but it may also not be dramatically seen (ex. Children who are raised in a Christian home). However, the change from death to life will *inevitably* become evident over time in patterns of behavior and desires that are pleasing to God: heartfelt trust in Christ, an assurance of sins forgiven, a desire to read the Bible & pray, a delight in worship, a desire for Christian fellowship, a sincere desire to obey God’s Word, & a desire to tell others about Christ.
- In This Sense of “Regeneration,” It Comes *Before* Saving Faith

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when **we were dead** in our trespasses, **made us alive** together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—” (Eph 2:4-5 ESV)*

*“Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5 ESV)*

  - The new birth makes those who were dead alive, now enabling them to believe. Prior to being born again, unbelievers are unable to come to Christ or believe & understand. (Jn 6:44, 65, 1 Cor 2:14, Rom 3:11)
  - The very act of regeneration is the unseen work of God, while faith in Christ is the result of God’s work in us.
- Genuine Regeneration Must Inevitably Bring Results in Life
  - Trust/Belief in Christ: “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” (1 Jn 5:1)

- **Refrain from a life pattern of continual sin:** “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” (1 Jn 3:9) “Everyone who does what is right has been born of him.” (1 Jn 2:29)
- **A genuine Christ-like love:** “Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.” (1 Jn 4:7)
- **Overcoming the world:** “And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God has overcome the world.” (1 Jn 5:3-4)
- **Protection from Satan himself:** “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God [that is, Jesus] keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.” (1 Jn 5:18)
- Neither Jesus nor Paul nor John point to activity in the church or miracles as evidence of regeneration. They rather point to *character traits in life*. False prophets will be known by their fruits. (Matt 7:15-20)

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-23 ESV)*

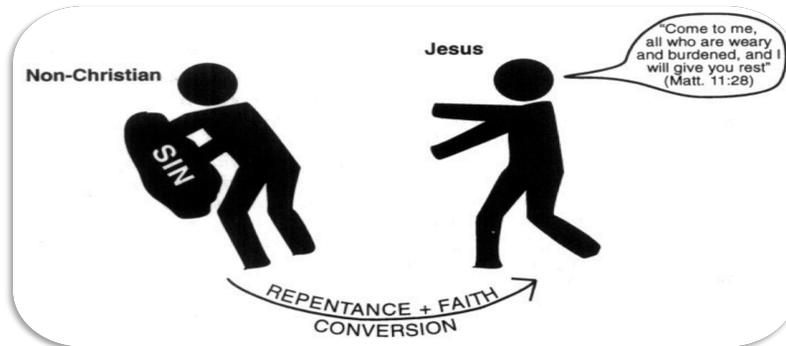
### **What is Conversion: How The Call Is Responded To**

- **Conversion:** is the willing response to the gospel call, in which there is sincere repentance of sin and trust in Christ for salvation. Conversion has three elements...
  - **Knowledge** - the facts of salvation. While the facts alone are not enough to save, the basic facts of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection are essential. (Rom 10:14, Jam 2:19)
  - **Approval** - the facts of the Gospel must be believed as true. This alone is not enough however. Nicodemus (Jn 3:2) as well as King Agrippa (Acts 26:27-28) agreed with certain truths about Jesus.
  - **Trust** - There must be a personal trust (not just a belief in the facts) in Jesus alone for forgiveness of sins and eternal life. A person must move from being an interested observer of the facts of the Gospel & teaching of Jesus to being someone who enters into a new relationship with Jesus. (John 3:16 - “Believe in him,” Matt 11:28-30 - “Come to me.”)

**Note:** The word “trust” is a word closer to the biblical idea than the words “belief” and “faith.” While these other words are used as well in Scripture our culture often misunderstands them to mean believe in the facts alone (head knowledge), or to have an irrational commitment to something that is not true.

- **Repentance** - heartfelt sorrow from sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ; a conscious decision to turn away from sin.
- An intellectual understanding that sin is wrong.
- An emotional approval of the teaching of Scripture - a sorrow for sin & hatred for it.

- A personal decision to turn from it & renounce it
  - **Faith** - turning to Christ to forgive those sins



**Conversion Is a Single Action of Turning from Sin in Repentance and Turning to Christ in Faith**

### We must beware of False Teaching

- We must beware of teaching that promotes the idea of accepting Jesus as “Savior” but not as “Lord.” True saving faith requires the acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord and inevitably involves repentance. While some places in Scripture only mention “faith” alone (Jn 3:16, Acts 16:31, Rom 10:9, Eph 2:8-9), there are many passages that also require repentance (Acts 20:21, Lk 24:46-47, Acts 2:37-38, 3:19, 17:30, 2 Cor 7:10). Jesus required those who would follow Him to turn from their sins before they come to follow Him (Luke 18:18-30, Luke 19:1-10, Jn 4:16, Jn 3:1-21).
- We must beware of an “easy-believism” gospel that omits a call to repentance. If the invitation of salvation omits the call to repentance it is **not** a legitimate Gospel offer. An invitation that is “watered-down” and doesn’t call sinners to a wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ including a turning from sin is a false gospel. This kind of invitation results in many people being deceived, thinking they have “accepted” Christ, but in the end they are not saved.
- Once we have initially repented & put our trust in Jesus Christ, it is important to realize that these attitudes of our heart continue throughout our lives as Christians. (Matt 6:12, Rev 3:19, 2 Cor 7:10, 1 Cor 13:13, Gal 2:20)

## **What Are Justification And Adoption?**

### BFC Article 15 - Justification

**15-1** Justification is the act of God's grace whereby the sinner is declared righteous solely through faith in the redemptive work of Christ. By this action the righteousness of Christ is imputed, sin is pardoned, and the sinner is restored to divine favor.

### Justification Is A Legal Declaration By God

- Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which he...

- Thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us
  - Declares us to be righteous in his sight
- Justification is God's response to our faith

*"It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."* (Rom 3:26 ESV)

*"Those whom He predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified."* (Rom 8:30)

### A Declaration That We Are Righteous Before God

- Because God as the judge declares us legally righteous in His sight, we fear no penalty from past, present, or future sins!

*"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies."* (Rom 8:1, 33 ESV)

- The sins of those justified are considered forgiven because God considered those sins as belonging to Christ, and Christ paid the penalty for them.

*"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (2 Cor 5:21 ESV)

### Justification By Faith Alone

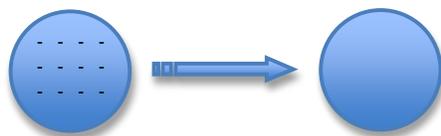
- **Sola Fide** (Faith Alone) - this cry from the Reformation is the primary breach between Roman Catholics and Protestants until this day
  - *Roman Catholics* believe that faith in Christ **plus** the use of the *means of grace* (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, mass, and penitence), will bring about justification when our lives are completely cleansed from sin (not in this life but in purgatory).

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* (Eph 2:8-9 ESV)

*"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Rom 5:1 ESV)

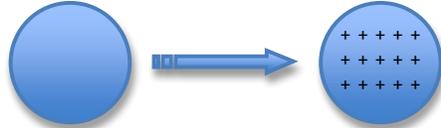
### How is God able to declare us righteous?

- By faith, God forgives iniquities. But if God merely declared us to be forgiven from our past sins, that would not solve our problems entirely, for it would only make us morally neutral before God.



Forgiveness of past sins is only one part of justification.

- However such a movement is not enough to earn us favor with God. We must rather move from a point of moral neutrality to a point of having positive righteousness before God, the righteousness of a life of perfect obedience to him. Therefore a second aspect of justification is that God must declare us not to be merely neutral in his sight but actually be righteous in His sight. In fact, he must declare us to have the merits of perfect righteousness before Him. We call this the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (Rom 3:21-22, 5:19). God imputes Christ's righteousness to us meaning that God thinks of Christ's righteousness as belonging to us or "reckoning" it to us as righteousness. (Rom 4:3-6, 5:17, Phil 3:9, 1 Cor 1:30)



Imputation of Christ's righteousness to us is the other part of Justification.

### **Adoption: Membership In A New Family**

- As justified, we have the distinct privilege to be called the sons of God through adoption.

*“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”* (Rom 8:15-17 ESV)

- The full reality of our sonship is yet in the future when Jesus Christ returns!

*“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”* (1 John 3:1-3)

- There are many privileges of adoption.
  - We can speak to God and relate to him as a good and loving Father who loves us, understands us & takes care of our needs. (Mt 6:9, 32, Lk 11:13, Gal 4:7, Rom 8:15-16)
  - We have been promised an inheritance in heaven. (Gal 4:7, Rom 8:17)
  - We are led by the Holy Spirit. (Rom 8:14)
  - We are disciplined by the Lord. (Heb 12:5-10)
  - We are also members of His family, therefore we have brothers & sisters in the Lord. (Rom 1:13, 8:12, 1 Cor 1:10, 1 Tim 5:1-2)