

## An Exposé on Reformed Theology (RT) and Calvinism (CV), Part 6

### Do We Have Unscriptural Expectations?

Barry O'Dell

It is my desire that the articles in this exposé have been enlightening to all who read them. Sadly, it is the case that influences from denominational dogmas have impacted the Lord's church throughout history. The New Testament repeatedly warns of departures from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 1 Jn. 4:1). Most mainline denominations, in one form or another, hold to particular points of Calvinism. Unfortunately, there are those within the Lord's church who also hold, or at least appear to hold to, Calvinistic beliefs.

Steven Lawson, writing for [ligonier.com](http://ligonier.com) wrote, "Not only was Adam's sin imputed to all his descendants, but the sin nature of Adam is transmitted to us in the moment of conception. Since the fall, it has been passed down from parent to child, and we have all inherited that sin nature" (<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-is-total-depravity>). In an effort to support this view of man, Calvinists like Lawson will reference Psalm 51:5 - a passage we dealt with earlier in this series. To those who hold to a "sinful nature" view of humanity, the only hope for man to escape that condition is by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the sinful human heart. Because, the Calvinist says, man is radically corrupted, he cannot come to God unless he is one of the elect, having been predestined by God before the foundation of the world. To the careful student of the Bible, the foolishness of that view is clear! So many passages of Scripture, both Old and New Testament, utterly destroy the RT/CV doctrines of predestination and sinful nature.

If the RT/CV doctrines of an inherited sinful nature and predestination to salvation are false (and they are), why do we hear some of the things we hear from our pulpits? Why is it that Christians are told, with no regard to a contextual explanation, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10)? This writer has, on more than one occasion, heard a preacher use Romans 3:10 against Christians without exploring the original context of Psalm 14:1-3 and without explaining what Paul was doing in Romans 3. What a horrific misuse of the word of God! A child of God who hears that may then turn his Bible to First John 3:7 and read, "Little children, let no man deceive you:

he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous." Well, which is it? Can man be righteous or not?

That is not the real question though. Obviously, man can be righteous. The real question that must be answered is this - Is man capable of obeying God's revealed will of his own volition and, having done so, be right with God? Calvinism's answer is "No, he cannot." The doctrines of RT/CV necessitate a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart so that a person can even come to faith. That is an unscriptural expectation. There is one passage that is cited most frequently in an attempt to justify this view. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them" (Eze. 36:26-27). And, just as with Romans 3:10 and Psalm 51:5, there is no explanation

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of the immediate context. Those who reference Ezekiel 36:26-27 to "prove" their false teaching never include verse 28 which says, "And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God." For that matter, Ezekiel 36:29-32 continues the same thought in regard to promises given to the "house of Israel" (Eze. 36:32). For those who use this passage in this way, are you also expecting an increase in corn (v. 29), a multiplication of fruit trees (v. 30), and cities to be rebuilt (v. 33)? Context is key! The context of Ezekiel 36 is Babylonian captivity and promises of restoration to the promised land. However, when one places unscriptural expectations upon God or the Holy Spirit, context becomes less important. Proof texting becomes more important. We must know that the definition of proof texting is, "the method by which a person appeals to a biblical text to prove or justify a theological position without regard for the context of the passage they are citing."

In regard to handling Scripture, God's people must be known for their fidelity to the text. God's word is referred to as a sword (Heb. 4:12), a hammer, and a fire (Jer. 23:29). No one, with any good sense will be careless with a literal sword, hammer, or fire!

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**R**eformed Theology affirms that because of man's sinful nature, he is totally unable to repent and believe the gospel. Furthermore, RT expresses that man's three faculties of mind, heart, and will, which must be receptive to the gospel, have neither the ability to receive the truth nor even the desire to have such ability. RT goes on to say that man's total being is not only unable to either come or want to come to Christ, but every part of his nature is actively opposed to Christ and His truth. For RT, "regeneration" is a process where God does something within the sinner (i.e., a miracle of which one is unaware) which enables him to believe or have faith. RT also describes this as the "new birth." Essentially, according to RT, the process of "regeneration" or the "new birth" is the exclusive work of God through the person of the Holy Spirit. Friends, the great implication to these corrupted positions is that man has no part whatever in regeneration or the new birth. According to RT, the "new birth" or "regeneration" is God giving us, miraculously I may add, the spiritual life that enables us to do what we must do, but cannot do because of our sinful nature. What a convoluted mess! RT's position is that when the Bible says man is dead in sin, it means that man's mind, heart, and will are all spiritually dead in sin, and thus stands in need of a "miraculous intervention" from the Holy Spirit to take care of this spiritual issue. One can see that RT's positions regarding these matters make it impossible for an individual to know whether or not he is saved (1 Jn. 2:3; 5:13). Questions arise in the reasonable thinker's mind, such as: *How can I know for sure when the Holy Spirit operates on my heart to enable me to believe or have faith? Why can't I just read and study the Bible and genuinely obey its commands? If the Holy Spirit fails to operate on my heart, does that mean I am forever lost and God is setting me up to fail?* In the remainder of this article we will consider some "proof texts" that RT uses to "support" their doctrine regarding this matter. I will also set out to consider these verses within their respective contexts.

John 1:11-13 reads, "*He came to His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*" When considering any verse of the Bible, at least two factors must be kept in mind: 1) One must determine the meaning of the verse

in light of it's immediate context. 2) No interpretation should be placed upon a difficult passage that would make it somehow contradict other passages of clearer meaning. These two factors should be kept in mind as we consider various passages throughout the remainder of this article.

RT/CV asserts that one cannot believe until he first receives the Spirit's direct operation. After that "experience," he then is able to believe the gospel message. However, the above verses teach the exact opposite. Notice that the "power" to "*become children of God*" is given only to those who ALREADY BELIEVE! Friends, these verses have absolutely nothing to do with a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. The verses strongly suggest that those who, in faith, are willing to "receive" Christ are granted "*the power to become children of God.*" The word translated as "right" (NKJV) or "power" (KJV) is the Greek word *exousia*. The concept of the word has to do with God giving the one who believes the privilege or authority to become children of God. The passage further contends that this "*children of God*" relationship doesn't occur because of a physical birth, or a birth brought about by man's will. Rather, it is by means of a spiritual birth that such is accomplished. The details of this birth are laid out in John 3:3-5. According to the passage of consideration, the one who "*believes*" is only granted the "*right to become*" God's child. Clearly, he is not a child of God merely by the act of believing. Rather, the believer has the "*right*" (the freedom of action) to respond by further acts of obedience (e.g., repentance, confession, and baptism) which lead to the actual forgiveness of sins (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:10; Gal. 3:26-27).

John 6:44-45 reads, "*No one can come to Me, except the Father which sent Me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught by God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh unto Me.*" This passage of Holy Writ has been one of the most abused among RT/CV. For example, John Calvin taught that man is "*so enslaved by the yoke of sin, that he cannot of his own nature aim at good either in wish or actual pursuit.*" Thus, according to Calvin, one is unable to come to Jesus unless he or she is drawn by the Holy Spirit in some direct way - a way in which man is completely uninvolved. Calvin even affirmed, that "*the grace of God is insipid to men, until the Holy Spirit gives it it's*

***"...coming to Jesus is from an intellectual and emotional decision to submit to Christ."***

## *The Holy Spirit and Regeneration...*

savor.” Don’t forget that RT/CV claims that this “savor” is a “miraculous intervention.” On the contrary to RT/CV’s corruption to the above passage, the passage stands clear. Jesus makes it clear that the only route to Him is by means of the drawing power of His Father. Two questions are in place: 1) Is the drawing power of God irresistible? That is, is the divine drawing an appeal to man’s mind or is it a force so strong that man is unable to resist it? 2) Is the drawing miraculous by a direct movement of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart? RT affirms that it is utterly impossible for a man to come to Christ of his own volition. Rather, God must initiate the action. RT/CV also affirms the Holy Spirit moves upon some, to turn them from unwilling to willing. It is alleged that God’s drawing power is always triumphant. It simply cannot be resisted. Notice carefully HOW God draws men to Christ according to the above passage.

First, one must be “taught.” The word “taught” comes from the Greek word *didaktos* and the word has to do with the concept of “being instructed.” In First Corinthians 2:13 it is used of the teaching that comes from the Holy Spirit, but is made known by means of words through inspired men. Thus, one is “drawn” to Jesus through means of teaching. One is not “drawn” by some miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit.

Second, notice the word “heard” from the main passage of our consideration. This word is paramount because it is necessary in coming to Jesus properly. The word “heard” stems from the Greek word *akouo*. In this passage it is a hearing with a view to learning.

In other words, it involves receiving information about something. Thus, I must hear the correct information if I desire to be “drawn” to Jesus by the Father!

Third, consider the word “learned” from our passage. This word comes from the Greek word *manthano*. The concept behind this word is “to gain knowledge by instruction.” It entails more than just being exposed to information. It denotes the idea of comprehending the significance of what has been taught. In other words, the word conveys the idea of understanding. No individual is ready to come to Jesus unless they understand His message. Paul stated that one “obeys from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered” (Rom. 6:17). Friends, this proves that one’s decision to properly follow Jesus cannot be coerced. Rather, it proves that one comes to Jesus through his or her own personal will.

Finally, notice the word “comes.” Coming to Jesus is not the result of some direct, miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit beyond the human will. Rather, the coming to Jesus is from an intellectual and emotional decision to submit to Christ! It is simple. God draws. People come. Those who decide to come, have been “taught.” They have “heard.” They have “learned.”

Dear readers, these passages, and others that RT uses to “support” their doctrine, have absolutely nothing to do with a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human heart. The Spirit of God works through the power of the gospel to bring one to faith in the Son of God (Rom. 1:16).

## *Do We Have Unbiblical Expectations?*

Yet, when it comes to the Biblical text, many are very careless, teaching and expecting things that the Bible does not say! Acts 2:38 is treated just like some treat Ezekiel 36. One of the views that is held within churches of Christ is that the Holy Spirit, upon one’s baptism into Christ, literally and bodily indwells the Christian, enabling said Christian to overcome sin. Please understand, this article is not addressing the indwelling question. Do not lose sight of the question that serves as the title of the article because we are addressing unscriptural expectations! Acts 2:33 says, “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.” We must be able to answer these two questions - what could be seen and heard and what had been shed forth as a result of the promise of the Holy Spirit? The answer to both of those questions must be answered within the context of the promises of Joel 2:28-32. This

is what those people were “seeing and hearing.” Here is something else to think about: If it is the case that the Holy Spirit literally indwells the Christian and gives him the ability to overcome his “sinful nature” (and I heard a “preacher” make that claim based on Acts 2:38), whose fault is it when the Christian does sin? Could it not be claimed that the Holy Spirit was at fault because, as some are teaching, He is supposed to “enable” me to overcome sin? This is precisely what RT/CV teaches. Man has a sinful nature and, as such, there must be a divine, miraculous intervention from the Holy Spirit. And, by the way, the “gift of the Holy Spirit” is mentioned only twice in Scripture and both times it is within a miraculous context. Perhaps our goal in understanding Scripture should not be to find a doctrine to which we hold. Perhaps it should be to carefully examine a passage within its context, come to conclusions that are warranted only by the evidence, and not have unscriptural expectations.

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- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
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