

# Pernicious Puritan Preparationism

As we have seen in other articles, the Puritans and their successors and sympathizers were the champions of experience-based navel-gazing religion. They even regarded doubting one's salvation and considering one's heart to be deceitful and desperately wicked as evidence of regeneration and humility.

But they did not confine their heresies to the Christian life. There is an entire body of work on what *must* happen in a sinner *before* regeneration in order to *prepare* him for regeneration. This is the heresy of preparationism. It involves a gracious work of the Holy Spirit in which the dead sinner is enabled to do good things to make his previously unprepared heart suitable for saving grace. Although all who are eventually saved must go through this process, not all who go through this process end up being saved. It is a heresy of partial depravity and resistible grace similar to the Roman Catholic and Arminian heresy of prevenient grace.

Martyn McGeown\* writes the following in his article entitled "The Notion of Preparatory Grace in the Puritans": "By this they meant, generally (with some variation), that an unregenerate sinner could prepare himself for the grace of regeneration by a serious consideration of his sins in the light of God's law. By careful self-examination the sinner could and ought to stir himself up to loathe his own sinfulness and to desire mercy ... , and by a judicious use of means (especially attendance upon the preaching of the gospel) he could put himself in the position of being a likely candidate for the New Birth. Most of the Puritans who advocated such views insisted that *God* prepares the sinner in this way. They were loath to suggest that man can do this *unaided* by the Spirit. However, they also taught that this preparatory grace was often present in reprobates so that preparation for regeneration did not necessarily lead to salvation in the end." [1]

Of course, since God uses the means of the gospel in saving His people, every unregenerate person should be encouraged to hear the true gospel preached. But that is not what the preparationists believed was the reason the unregenerate person should put himself under the preaching of the gospel. William Perkins, in his book *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, in a chapter tellingly entitled "What Must a Man Do That He May Come Into God's Favour And Be Saved?" wrote, "God gives man the outward means of salvation, especially the ministry of the word, and with it he sends some outward or inward cross to break and subdue the stubbornness of our nature that it may be made pliable to the will of God ... this done, God brings a man to a consideration of the Law ... he makes a man particularly to see and know his own peculiar and proper sins whereby he offends God ... he smites the heart with a legal fear ... he makes him to fear punishment and hell and to despair of salvation in regard of anything in himself." [1]

Notice what Perkins believed was the purpose of the preaching to the unregenerate. The preaching, in addition to "some outward or inward cross," is used to make the depraved nature "pliable to the will of God" by "break[ing] and subdu[ing] the stubbornness of our nature." According to Perkins and other preparationists, the depraved, hardened heart must be subjected to a pre-regeneration softening before God can work a saving work in that sinner. Thus, the "prepared" heart of an unregenerate person is not completely in rebellion to, at enmity with, and

hostile to God and the truth. It is not totally depraved. In fact, according to Perkins, the unregenerate sinner has at least some desire and ability to obey. He said in *A Grain of Mustard Seed or the Least Measure of Grace That Is Or Can Be Effectual To Salvation* that if an unregenerate person has “some little feeling of his wants, some weak and faint desire, some small obedience, he must not let this spark of grace go out” and that the unregenerate person should “labour to see and feel thy spiritual poverty ... labour to be displeased with thyself.” [1]

L.E. Brown\* writes the following in his article entitled “Colonial America’s Rejection of Free Grace Theology”: “Preparationism taught that an unbeliever is capable of acting in ways that may lead to salvation. Preparation was a sequence of steps one followed in order to acquire the willingness to believe, if faith came. ... The first preparatory step was discovering the commandments of God and a futile attempt to fulfill them. The next step was to experience ‘disappointments and disasters’ when the attempts to keep God’s law fails. Next in the sequence was an increasing sense of hopelessness that led to the recognition that only Christ could bring salvation. Then came ‘the infusion of saving grace,’ sometimes, but not always, immediately apprehended. This was followed by a lengthy struggle between faith and doubt. Finally, the sinner recognized himself as a recipient of God’s grace. This process may or may not include a moment when the individual was certain of passing from ‘death unto life.’ Two prominent pastors in the MBC [Massachusetts Bay Colony], Thomas Hooker and his son-in-law Thomas Shepard, were preparationists. ... Preparationism requires humiliation before the call, requiring active effort on the part of the aspiring convert. ... Like good Calvinists, they were quick to note that the works, taken as works, had no merit and could not produce salvation. Their theological innovation was to posit that these preparatory works were necessary but not sufficient. ‘If the covenant had any meaning, it signified a willingness on man’s part to believe in Christ’s redemptive power before Christ would accept him in spiritual union. The regenerative process was not an abrupt seizure of the will, but was advanced by easy stages wherein the prospective believer might prepare himself and show his readiness to believe.’ [2]

Fashionable Calvinist Iain Murray of the Banner of Truth, defends Hooker in *Thomas Hooker And The Doctrine Of Conversion*. Not surprisingly, in his attempt to defend Hooker, he shows himself to be a heretic. He starts by using John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* as the model of conversion (unable, of course, to use the Bible, with its models of Paul and Abraham): “Plainly, Bunyan saw conversion as no simple, easy event, no single step from unconcern to immediate assurance of salvation. Much more was involved. When Pilgrim left the City of Destruction, crying, ‘What shall I do to be saved?’ there was, Bunyan narrates, ‘a very wide field’ to cross, and a ‘slough of despond’ to be met, before he came to the wicket gate. Even with that gate passed, Christian – as we now see him to be – had further to go before he obtained the joy of assurance.” [3]

Murray quotes R.T. Kendall, who wrote the following in *The Influence of Calvin and Calvinism upon the American Heritage*: “Many people who have taken the time to wade through Thomas Hooker’s long sermons have been astonished that Hooker imputed to the natural, unregenerate man an extraordinary ability to take the initiative in seeking grace.” Murray passes this off as the

same argument the Antinomians used against the Puritans and says, “And, as the Puritans saw, at the root of that error lay a defective and one-sided definition of conversion. Although passive at the instant of regeneration that instant is a point in a process in which, before and after regeneration, man is active’.” [3]

Later, Murray defends preparationism in his own words, using a quote from Hooker’s *The Application of Redemption* to bolster his position: “His mind and conscience may be reached by the truth: indeed it is the preacher’s business to see that they are so reached, because until they are there will be no conviction of sin, and without conviction of sin there will be no subsequent conversion. If repentance means turning one’s back upon sin, and if conversion entails turning from sin to holiness, no one is going to see the need for such a change who has not first felt sin to be a burden. ... ‘First truths’, says Hooker, ‘come to the understanding to be judged, before they be delivered up and presented to the heart to be believed. ...’ There must, then, be a knowledge which prepares the way for faith and that knowledge consists, in the first instance, of the recognition of the need for a Saviour. Without such a conviction, men, far from being in a state of readiness to believe, treat the gospel as meaningless, for it proposes remedies for a sickness from which, they suppose, they do not suffer. Only a changed view of their real condition will show men their need to respond. ... Such is the thinking which lay behind the Puritan belief that evangelism must proceed from the starting point that men are careless and unprepared.” [3]

Thus, according to Murray, Hooker, and the rest of the preparationists, a “careless and unprepared” individual cannot be saved in that state. He must become a concerned and prepared unregenerate person. He cannot go immediately from darkness to light; instead, he must gradually enter the light, becoming more and more aware of his sinfulness, his inability to save himself, and ultimately his need of a Savior.

Murray then makes an astounding statement: “As Paul reminds the Christians at Rome, they had not first known the Holy Spirit as ‘the Spirit of adoption’ but rather as ‘the Spirit of bondage’.” He goes on to quote from Hooker’s *The Application of Redemption*: “The Spirit of bondage is required which may let in the light of the Law into the mind, and set on the power of it mightily upon the consciences of sinners, and so dazzle their eyes, and daunt their hearts with the dreadfulness of their sins, Romans 8.15, ‘You have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear.’ Fear produced by the law was the Spirit’s first work.” [3]

Hooker and Murray believe(d) that the “spirit of bondage” in Romans 8:15 is the Holy Spirit! This explains a great amount as to how the preparationists and false Holy Spirit Conviction advocates can attribute men’s legalistic thoughts and efforts to the Holy Spirit. But that was just Hooker and Murray, who are known for their Arminian-leaning heterodoxies. Those who read on might be in for a surprise as to who else believed that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of bondage.

Murray continues: “Men under conviction of sin, Hooker taught, generally pass through two stages, first, contrition, and second, humiliation.” He again quotes from Hooker’s *The Application of Redemption*: “The Lord hath promised to come into our souls if we humble them,

and make them fitting to entertain his Majesty; therefore sweep your hearts, and cleanse those rooms, cleanse every sink, and brush down every cobweb, and make room for Christ; for if thy heart be prepared and divorced from all corruptions, then Christ will come and take possession of it.' ... From what we have already considered it is clear that foremost in the thought of Hooker and his brethren was an insistence that where there is a readiness of heart to find all comfort in Christ it will invariably be preceded by an awareness of need. Christ delivers those who know themselves to be lost." [3]

First of all, this shows that the preparationists believe that unregenerate people can be truly contrite and humble. Secondly, this shows that preparationists believe in blatant conditionalism. The notions of making one's soul fitting for entry by humbling it, making room for Christ, and preparing and making ready one's heart sound like they come straight from an Arminian evangelism campaign.

Murray addresses another criticism of Hooker that comes from Norman Pettit's *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*: "In the first place, it is claimed that Hooker was insufficiently evangelical because *he put something before Christ*. Instead of calling men immediately to Christ, and to his grace, he required something else first – something, it is said, which turned the attention of men away from Christ to themselves. Men were called, says Pettit, 'to prepare the heart for salvation ... Rarely did Hooker preach ... without exhorting the unconverted to prepare for Christ.'" Murray's reply to the criticism includes the following: "Hooker held that no more conviction of sin is necessary than that which shows a man his need of Christ. Where that need exists, no one should delay in going to him. The problem is that for all men by nature the need does *not* exist and neither can it exist while pride, ignorance and self-righteousness are the dominant principles in the human heart. ... Preparation for faith is necessary because men must be taken off the things to which they presently trust. ... The gospel does not find men in a state of readiness to believe on Christ. Before such readiness occurs something first must be done to them by the Word and power of God." [3]

Note that Murray and the preparationists are saying that when an unregenerate man sees his need of Christ, this means that he is no longer like all men by nature (who do not see this need), and that pride, ignorance, and self-righteousness are no longer the dominant principles in this unregenerate man's heart. Murray and the preparationists believe that there are some unregenerate people in whom pride, ignorance, and self-righteousness are not the dominant principles! This is no longer a totally depraved man, no matter how much Murray and his ilk may protest.

Thomas Shepard was after the same mold as his father-in-law. In his three-chapter treatise entitled *The Sound Believer*, Shepard spent four out of five sections in the first chapter dwelling on what must happen before faith. He held that if these things did not happen in some degree before faith, then the person is not a true believer. As you read the following quotes from the first chapter, consider not only what Shepard considered necessary prior to faith, but also consider Shepard's view of the ability and state of unregenerate men under conviction,

compulsion, or humiliation, and compare it to what God says about the total depravity of all unregenerate people:

“[T]here is a fourfold act of Christ’s power, whereby he rescues and delivers all his out of their miserable estate. The first act or stroke is conviction of sin. The second is compunction for sin. The third is humiliation or self-abasement. The fourth is faith; all which are distinctly put forth (when he ceaseth extraordinarily to work) in the day of Christ’s power; and so ever look for actual salvation and redemption from Christ, let them seek for mercy and deliverance in this way, out of which they shall never find it; let them begin at conviction, and desire the Lord to let them see their sins, that so being affected with them, and humbled under them, they may by faith be enable [*sic*] to receive Jesus Christ, and so be blessed in him. It is true, Christ is applied to us next by faith, but faith is wrought in us in that way of conviction and sorrow for sin; no man can or will come by faith to Christ to take away his sins, unless he first see, be convicted of, and loaded with them. ...

“1. That compunction or sense of sin immediately follows conviction of sin in the day of Christ’s power. 2. The necessity of this work to succeed the other. ...

“[I]f it be proved that according unto the rule men must be broken and affected with their sin and misery before mercy can be truly apprehended or Christ accepted. What tell you me of such or such men? Let the rule stand, but let men stand or fall according to the rule; many are accounted gracious and godly for a time, much affected with mercy and Christ Jesus; yet afterward fall or wizen into nothing, and prove very unsound. What is the reason? Truly the cause was here: their first wound and sorrow for sin was not right ...

“[T]herefore it is a vain thing to think there is no need of such sorrows which drive from Christ, and that Christ can work well enough therefore without them; when as by the mighty power and riches of mercy in Christ, the Lord by wounding, nay, killing his of all their carnal security and self-confidence, saves all his alive, and drives them to seek for life in the Son.

“These things thus premised, let us now hear of the necessity of this work to succeed conviction.

“Else a sinner will never part with his sin; a bare conviction of sin doth but light the candle to see sin; compunction burns his fingers, and that only makes him dread the fire. ... Now, so long as he takes pleasure in sin, and finds contentment by sin, he can not but cleave inseparably to it. O, it is sweet, and it only is sweet; for so long as the soul is dead in sin, ‘pleasure in sin is death in sin.’ (1 Tim. v. 6.) So long as it is dead in sin, it is impossible it should part with sin; no more than a dead man can break the bonds of death. And therefore it undeniably follows, that the Lord must first put gall and wormwood to these dugs, before the soul will cease suckling, or be weaned from them; the Lord must first make sin bitter, before it will part with it; load it with sin, before it will sit down and desire ease. And look, as the pleasure in sin is exceedingly sweet to a sinner, so the sorrow for it must be exceedingly bitter, before the soul will part from it.

“... And hence it is they will never part with their weapons, until themselves be thoroughly wounded; and therefore the Lord must wound their consciences, minds, and hearts, before they will cast them by. ...

“You will say, May not the sweetness of Christ in the gospel, and sense of mercy, separate from sin, without any compunction? ... But compunction or sense of sin principally serves, in the hand of Christ, to turn the soul from sin. Aversion from sin is distinct from, and in order goes before, our conversion unto God. 2. Sense of sweetness of God’s grace in Christ keeps out sin, but it doth not thrust out sin at first. 3. Christ can not be effectually sweet, unless sin be first made bitter ... I dare not say, that this is any sound or thorough work, till after sorrow. .... they that have felt the bitterness of sin and wrath find it exceedingly hard to prize Christ, and to taste his sweetness; how shall they do it indeed that find none at all? Sweetness before sense of sin is like cordials before purging of a foul stomach; which usually strengthen the humor, but recover not the man.

“Because, without this, no man will either care for Christ, or feel a need of Christ; a man may see a want of Christ by the power of conviction, but he will never feel a need of Christ, but by the spirit of compunction.

“... [T]hese only are men that feel a need and necessity of Christ; these only will come to Christ, and be glad of Christ, and be truly thankful for their recovery of Christ.

“... Gospel grace can not be set out, much less felt, but in reference to sin and misery, which must be first felt, before it can be sweet. Because Christ will never come but only unto such as feel their misery; for you will say, A man may come to Christ without it: I say again, If he doth (as he hath many followers,) yet Christ will not come to him ... by sinners is not meant all manner of impenitent and hard-hearted sinners, but such as think and feel themselves such, and lament under it: now, God the Father sent him only unto such; he is sent not to heal the hard-hearted, but the broken-hearted ...

“[I]t consists of three things: – 1. Fear 2. Sorrow 3. Separation from sin. ...

“[T]he Lord Jesus, having cut asunder the first cord of Satan by conviction, breaks asunder the second by compunction, and causing the soul to feel and be affected with its misery; and as the whole soul is unaffected before he comes, so he makes the whole soul sensible when he comes, and therefore he fills the conscience with fear, and the heart with sorrow and mourning, so as now the will of sin is broken, which was hardened before these fears and sorrows seized upon it. ...

“That these fears are not merely natural, (as those Rom. ii. 15,) arising from natural conscience only, which only accuse of sin, but never affect; but they are supernatural ...

“Before this spirit of sorrow come, a man’s heart takes great delight in sin. It is his god, his life,

and sweeter than Christ and all the joys of heaven, and therefore there must be great sorrow; sin must be made exceedingly bitter. ...

“Because Christ will not be very sweet, unless this mourning under misery be very great ...

“It is a constant mourning, for so it is here called, a spirit of heaviness ... Hypocrites will mourn under sin and misery; but what is it? It is the hanging down the head like a bulrush in bad weather for a day. O, how many have pangs and gripes of sorrow, and can quickly ease themselves again! these mourners come to nothing in the conclusion. ...

“Separation from sin is the third thing wherein compunction consists: such a fear and sorrow for sin under a sinful estate, as separates the soul from sin, is true compunction; without which the Lord Christ can not be had: the soul is cut and wounded with sin by fear and sorrow, but it is cut off by this stroke of the Spirit, not from the being, but from the growing power of sin; from the will to sin, not from all sin in the will ... for compunction, contrition, brokenness of heart for sin, (call it what you will,) is opposite to hardness of heart ... such as makes a separation of that close union between sin and the soul; and hence it is that the Lord abhors all fastings, humiliations, prayers, tears, unless they be of this stamp, and are accompanied with this effect. ...

“Of exhortation. Labor for this sense of misery, for this spirit of compunction. How can you believe in Christ, that feel not your misery without him? A broken Christ can not do thee good without a broken heart ...

“The Lord Jesus, having thus broken the heart by compunction, ... goes on to humble him also; for though, in a large sense, a wounded, contrite sinner is a humble sinner, yet, strictly taken, there is a great difference between them ...

“Look, as pride is that sin whereby a man conceited of some good in himself, and seeking some excellency in himself, exalts himself above God, so humiliation (in this place) is that work of the Spirit whereby the soul, being broken off from self-conceit and self-confidence in any good it hath or doth, submitteth unto, or lieth under, God, to be disposed of as he pleaseth. (1 Pet v. 6. Lev. Xxvi. 41.) That look, as compunction cuts the sinner off from that evil that is in him, so humiliation cuts it off from all high conceits and self-confidence of good which is in him, or which he seeks might be in him; and so the soul is abased before God.

“... [H]e that trusteth to his duties and abilities is too big to enter in by Christ. The Lord must cut off his spirit, and lay it low, and make it stoop as vile before God, before it can have Christ in this estate; the Lord must not only cut it of from this self-confidence of duties, but also so far forth as that the soul may lie under God, to be disposed of as he pleaseth. ...

“The last question remains, What measure of humiliation is here necessary? Look, as so much conviction is necessary which begets compunction, and so much compunction as breeds humiliation, so so much humiliation is necessary as introduceth faith, or as drives the soul out of

itself to Christ; for, as the next end of conviction is compunction, and that of compunction is humiliation, so the next end of humiliation is faith, or coming to Christ, which we shall next speak unto. ...

“Now, there is a double resistance, or two parts of this resistance, like a knife without edges. 1. A resistance of the Lord by a secret unwillingness that the Lord should work grace. Now, this the Lord removes in compunction, and no more brokenness for sin or from sin is necessary there than that. 2. A resistance of the Lord by sinking discouragements, and a secret quarelling with him, in case the soul imagines he will not come to work grace or manifest grace. Now, this the Lord takes away in humiliation; and no more is necessary here than the removal of the power of this, which makes the soul, in the sense of its own infinite vileness and unworthiness, not to quarrel with the Lord, and, devil-like, grow fierce and impenitent, before and against the Lord, in case he should never help it, never pity it, never succor it.

“Look as it is with a vessel before it can be fit for use: it must first pass through the fire, and the earth and dross severed from it; then it must be made holy and empty, which makes it *vas capax*, a vessel capable of receiving that which shall be poured into it. ... if the Lord doth not sever you from sin in compunction, and empty you of yourselves in humiliation, you can not receive Christ, nor mercy – you can not hold them; and if ever you miss of Christ by faith, your wound lies here.” [4]

Thomas Shepard and the preparationists believed that unregenerate people who are in one of the preparatory stages are able to seek mercy and deliverance, to have true conviction and sorrow and mourning for sin, to be truly humbled and broken, to part with and thrust out and turn from and separate from sin, to have a true aversion to sin, and to truly care for and feel a need for Christ. They believed that these “convicted” unregenerate people are not like the impenitent and heard-hearted unregenerate people; they are broken off from self; the will of sin is broken; they do not take pleasure and comfort and delight in sin; they do not have carnal security, self-conceit, or self-confidence; their fears are supernatural, unlike the natural fears of other unregenerate people; and God does not abhor their fastings, humiliations, prayers, and tears like he does with the “unconvicted” unregenerate people.

William Ames, in his book *Conscience With The Power and Cases Thereof*, in a chapter tellingly entitled “How The Sinner Ought to Prepare Himself to Conversion,” wrote: “[I]t is first of all required that a man seriously looks into the law of God and make examination of his life ... it is required ... a conviction of conscience ... a despair of salvation ... a true humiliation of heart which consists of grief and fear because of sin ... to put a man in a state of grace it is required that there be such an apprehension upon the gospel as whereby a man judges it possible that his sins should be forgiven ... an earnest desire to obtain that mercy which in Scripture is called a spiritual hunger or thirst.” [1]

In the introduction to Ames’s *The Marrow of Theology*, editor and translator John Eusden writes that Ames “found that the Remonstrant insistence on man’s response in the drama of salvation

was a needed corrective for Reformed theology. ... Ames did not believe a sweeping, syllogistical declaration of the sufficiency of God settled the problem of salvation. There was much that man had to do; 'spiritual preparation' was called for if grace was to be experienced. ... How does one prepare for the beginning of salvation which can be known only in faith? ... Ames raised the question of what man should do to receive the gift of God. Man's paramount task was to make himself spiritually ready so that faith would actually occur and its experience might be truly his. ... In Ramist fashion Ames saw the issue of preparation as a question which every honest man faced: 'How can I be faithful?' .... Man should repent and confess, as Christ repeatedly urged; man should offer his unsure, ambivalent will to God in prayer that it might be informed and enlightened; he should do what he understands to be the will of the Father; and he should expose himself to the proclamations of the law and the prophets. Even a ready mind and spirit are counted as preparation ... Ames's insistence on preparation was taken to heart by his younger Puritan colleagues. Thomas Hooker, friend and admirer in England and Holland, carried out the Amesian idea in the New World and became, perhaps, the leading seventeenth-century physician of the soul." [5]

Ames and the preparationists believed that an unregenerate person has the ability to repent and confess, to have an informed and enlightened will, to do the will of God, to have a ready mind and spirit, to have "a true humiliation of heart," to have "an apprehension upon the gospel," to have "an earnest desire," and to have "spiritual hunger or thirst." It is no wonder that he did not consider the Arminians to be heretics; Eusden writes: "In the *Conscience* he asks if the Remonstrants are heretics and gives this answer: 'The position of the Remonstrants, as held by most in favor of it, is not properly a heresy but a dangerous error in the faith, tending to heresy.'" [5] And Ames was an advisor to the Synod of Dordt!

Norman Petit\*, in *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, gives further evidence of the preparationist heresy of partial depravity by presenting the views of Richard Sibbes. "Sibbes exhorts the sinner to 'entertain' the blessed messengers of the Spirit; to 'labour to subject [himself] to' the Spirit of Christ, to become aware of his sin and misery so that he becomes a bruised reed. Sibbes' work, *A Bruised Reed*, deals, among other things, with the subject of spiritual preparation. This bruising of the Spirit is something with which the sinner can co-operate. We must, 'join with God in bruising ourselves' and 'lay siege to the hardness of our own hearts.' To prepare for salvation the sinner is supposed to make his own heart tender so that it is more open to yielding to the Spirit." [1]

According to Sibbes and the preparationists, an unregenerate person can "subject [himself] to the Spirit of Christ" and can "make his own heart tender so that it is more open to yielding to the Spirit."

Joseph Alleine, in his book *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, wrote the following: "If ever you would be savingly converted, you must despair of your own strength. ... You that are unconverted, .... Come from your knees to the sermon, and come from the sermon to your knees. The sermon does not prosper because it is not watered by prayers and tears, nor covered by

meditation. ... Labour to get a thorough sight and lively sense and feeling of your sins. ... Meditate on the number of your sins .... The heart is never soundly broken till thoroughly convinced of the heinousness of its original and deep-rooted depravity. Here fix your thoughts ... Oh never leave meditating on the desperate contagion, the original corruption of your heart, till, with Ephraim, you bemoan yourself ... Oh labour to make this sin odious to your soul, and double your guard and resolutions against it, because this is most dishonouring to God and dangerous to you. Strive to affect your heart with a deep sense of your present misery. ... While men trust in themselves, and establish their own righteousness, and have confidence in the flesh, they will not come savingly to Christ. You must know your gain to be but loss, your strength but weakness, your righteousness rags and rottenness, before there will be an effectual closure between Christ and you. ... Henceforth renounce all your sins. If you yield yourself to the practice of any sin, you are undone. In vain do you hope for life by Christ, except you depart from iniquity. Forsake your sins, or you cannot find mercy. You cannot be married to Christ except you be divorced from sin. Give up the traitor, or you can have no peace with heaven. Keep not Delilah in your lap. You must part with your sins or with your soul: spare but one sin and God will not spare you. ... O sinner, hear and consider. If you part with your sins, God will give you His Christ. Is not this a fair exchange? I testify unto you this day, that if you perish, it is not because there was never a Savior provided nor life tendered ... Be fervent and importunate. Importunity will carry it; but without violence the kingdom of heaven will not be taken. You must strive to enter, and wrestle with tears and supplications as Jacob, if you would gain the blessing. ... Forsake evil company, and forbear the occasions of sin. You will never be turned from sin till you decline and forego the temptations of sin. I never expect your conversion from sin, unless you are brought to some self-denial, so as to flee the occasions. ... Set apart a day to humble your soul in secret by fasting and prayer, to work a sense of your sins and miseries upon your heart. ... Thus, I have told you what you must do to be saved. Will you now obey the voice of the Lord? Will you arise and set to the work?" [6]

An Arminian preacher could not have put forth a more conditionalist sermon. (See further down in this article for more of Alleine's conditionalism.) It is not surprising, then, to find the following from Iain Murray in the introduction to Alleine's book: "This book ... provides a true model of Puritan evangelism. ... More than one great evangelist had his views moulded by the following pages. George Whitefield, while still a student at Oxford, tells us in his Journals how Alleine's *Alarm* 'much benefited' him. Charles Haddon Spurgeon records how, when he was a child, his mother would often read a piece of *Alarm* to them as they sat round the fire on a Sunday evening, and when brought under conviction of sin it was to this old book he turned. 'I remember', he writes, 'when I used to awake in the morning, the first thing I took up was Alleine's *Alarm*, or Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*. Oh those books, those books! I read and devoured them. ...' With his heart thus burning with the fire of Puritan divinity, Spurgeon was prepared to follow in the steps of Alleine and Whitefield." [6] It is no wonder that both Spurgeon and Whitefield spoke peace to John Wesley.

Now we come to John Owen. It may be surprising to some, but Owen was a preparationist. In his famous *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, he had a chapter entitled "Works of the Holy

Spirit Preparatory Unto Regeneration,” in which he wrote the following:

“FIRST, in reference unto the work of regeneration itself, *positively* considered, we may observe, that ordinarily there are certain *previous* and preparatory works, or workings in and upon the souls of men, that are antecedent and *dispositive* unto it. ... But to return; I speak in this position only of them that are adult, and not converted until they have made use of the means of grace in and by their own reasons and understandings; and the dispositions I intend are only *materially* so, not such as contain grace of the same nature as is regeneration itself. A *material disposition* is that which disposeth and some way maketh a subject fit for the reception of that which shall be communicated, added, or infused into it as its form. So wood by dryness and a due composure is made fit and ready to admit of firing, or continual fire.” [7]

Note that Owen believed in a “material disposition” that “maketh a subject fit” for the reception of saving grace. He said that this “material disposition” is grace of a *different nature* than the regenerating grace; in other words, this preparatory grace is common, resistible grace (which Owen made very evident later in this chapter, saying that not all those who experience this preparatory grace are saved in the end). Owen compared these preparatory works to the drying out of wet wood, making the wood more fit for being kindled – as if God needed dry wood (a softened, prepared heart) in order to make a fire (regenerate a person)! Tell that to Elijah, who, to show the power of God, had twelve barrels of water poured over the sacrifice to the point that the water ran down around the altar and filled the trench before the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and the water (1 Kings 18:33-38)! God does not need a “dried out” heart to kindle it!

Here is more of Owen:

“First, There are some things required of us in a way of duty in order unto our regeneration, which are so in the *power of our own natural abilities* as that nothing but corrupt prejudices and stubbornness in sinning do keep or hinder men from the performance of them. ... A diligent *intension* of mind, in attendance on the means of grace, to understand and receive the things revealed and declared as the mind and will of God. For this end hath God given men their reasons and understandings, that they may use and exercise them about their duty towards him, according to the revelation of his mind and will. To this purpose he calls upon them to remember that they are men, and to turn unto him. And there is nothing herein but what is in the liberty and power of the rational faculties of our souls, assisted with those common aids which God affords unto all men in general. And great advantages both may be and are daily attained hereby. Persons, I say, who diligently apply their rational abilities in and about spiritual things, as externally revealed in the word and the preaching of it, do usually attain great advantages by it, and excel their equals in other things ...

“These things are required of us in order unto our regeneration, and it is in the power of our own wills to comply with them. ... *Ordinarily*, God, in the effectual dispensation of his grace, meeteth with them who attend with diligence on the outward administration of the means of it. ...

ordinarily he dispenseth his peculiar especial grace among them who attend unto the common means of it: for he will both glorify his word thereby, and give out pledges of his approbation of our obedience unto his commands and institutions.

“Secondly, There are certain *internal spiritual effects* wrought in and upon the souls of men, whereof the word preached is the immediate instrumental cause, which ordinarily do precede the work of regeneration, or real conversion unto God. And they are reducible unto three heads: —

“1. *Illumination*; 2. *Conviction*; 3. *Reformation*. The first of these respects the mind only; the second, the mind, conscience, and affections; and the third, the life and conversation: —

“1. The first is *illumination*, of whose nature and causes we must afterward treat distinctly. At present, I shall only consider it as it is ordinarily *previous* unto regeneration, and materially disposing the mind thereunto. Now, all the light which by any means we attain unto, or knowledge that we have in or about spiritual things, things of supernatural revelation, come under this denomination of illumination. And hereof there are three degrees: — (1.) That which ariseth merely from an industrious application of the *rational faculties* of our souls to know, perceive, and understand the doctrines of truth as revealed unto us; for hereby much knowledge of divine truth may be obtained, which others, through their negligence, sloth, and pride, are unacquainted with. And this knowledge I refer unto illumination, — that is, a light superadded to the innate conceptions of men’s minds, and beyond what of themselves they can extend unto, — because it is concerning such things as the heart of man could never of itself conceive, but the very knowledge of them is communicated by their revelation ... (2.) There is an illumination which is an especial effect of the Holy Ghost by the word on the minds of men. With respect hereunto, some who fall totally from God and perish eternally are said to have been ‘once enlightened,’ Hebrews 6:4. This light variously affects the mind, and makes a great addition unto what is *purely natural*, or attainable by the mere exercise of our natural abilities.

“2. *Conviction of sin* is another effect of the preaching of the word antecedaneous unto real conversion to God. ... And sundry things are included herein, or do accompany it; as, — (1.) A *disquieting sense of the guilt of sin* with respect unto the law of God, with his threatenings and future judgment. Things that before were slighted and made a mock of do now become the soul’s burden and constant disquietment. ‘Fools make a mock of sin;’ they traverse their ways, and snuff up the wind like the wild ass; but in their month, when conviction hath burdened them, you may find them. (2.) *Sorrow or grief for sin committed*, because past and irrecoverable; which is the formal reason of this condemning sorrow. ... (3.) *Humiliation for sin*, which is the exercise or working of sorrow and fear in outward acts of confession, fasting, praying, and the like. This is the true nature of legal humiliation, 1 Kings 21:29. (4.) Unless by these things the soul be swallowed up in despair, it cannot be but that it will be filled with thoughts, desires, inquiries, and contrivances about a *deliverance* out of that state and condition wherein it is; as Acts 2:37, 16:30. 3. Oftentimes a *great reformation of life* and change in affections doth ensue hereon ... In their own nature they are good, useful, and material preparations unto regeneration, disposing the mind unto the reception of the grace of God.

“Again: What he worketh in any of these effectually and infallibly accomplisheth the *end* aimed at; which is no more but that men be enlightened, convinced, humbled, and reformed, wherein he faileth not. In these things he is pleased to take on him the management of the law, so to bring the soul into bondage thereby, that it may be stirred up to seek after deliverance; and he is thence actively called the ‘Spirit of bondage unto fear,’ Romans 8:15. ...

“This work extends itself to the *conscience* also; but yet it doth not *purge the conscience from dead works, that we should serve the living God.* ... Two things it effects upon the conscience: — (1.) It renders it more *ready, quick, and sharp* in the reprovng and condemning of all sin than it was before. To condemn sin, according unto its light and guidance, is natural unto and inseparable from the conscience of man; but its readiness and ability to exercise this condemning power may, by custom and course of sinning in the world, be variously weakened and impeded. But when conscience is brought under the power of this work, having its directing light augmented, whereby it sees more of the evil of sin than formerly, and having its self-reflections sharpened and multiplied, it is more ready and quick in putting forth its judging and condemning power than it was. (2.) Conscience is assisted and directed hereby to condemn *many things in sin* which before it approved of; for its judging power is still commensurate unto its light, and many things are thereby now discovered to be sinful which were not so by the mere natural guidance under which before it was. But yet, notwithstanding all this, it doth not purge the conscience from dead works; that is, conscience is not hereby wrought unto such an abhorrency of sin for itself as continually to direct the soul unto an application to the blood of Christ for the cleansing of itself and the purging of it out. It contents itself to keep all things in a tumult, disorder, and confusion, by its constant condemning both sin and sinners.” [7]

If the reader would carefully read and reread the above quotes (and try to get around Owen’s verbosity), there are some positively stunning revelations here about Owen’s view of preparatory grace. Owen believed that diligent attention by the unregenerate to the common means of grace, which is totally within the natural ability of the unregenerate sinner, usually results in the special grace of regeneration. He believed that pre-regeneration illumination (which includes “super-added” knowledge that the natural heart could never conceive of itself as well as a special effect of Holy Spirit by the Word on the minds of unregenerate men) materially disposes the mind (makes the mind fit) for regeneration. He believed that, whereas “fools make a mock of sin,” someone who is under the conviction of the Holy Spirit no longer makes a mock of sin but is disquieted by sin. In other words, the person who is under the conviction of the Holy Spirit is no longer a fool. He believed that sorrow for sin, humiliation for sin, and reformations of life are “good, useful, and material preparations unto regeneration, disposing the mind unto the reception of the grace of God.” He believed that an unregenerate person, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, can truly “seek after deliverance.” He believed that preparatory grace makes the unregenerate person’s conscience “more ready, quick, and sharp” to condemn sin and that the unregenerate person discovers more things to be sinful than he could ever have naturally, without the aid of the Holy Spirit; thus, this unregenerate person’s Spirit-illuminated mind is really not the same as the natural non-Spirit-illuminated mind. Finally, incredibly, Owen believed that the “spirit of bondage” in Romans 8:15 is the Holy Spirit!

God's truth is in direct opposition to the preparationist heresy of partial depravity. Not a single unregenerate person understands, seeks God, does good, knows the way of peace, or fears God (Romans 3:11-12,17-18). Not a single unregenerate person receives or knows the things of the Spirit of God, because they are foolishness to him (1 Corinthians 2:14). Not a single unregenerate person can produce good fruits (Matthew 7:18). Even their mercies are cruel (Proverbs 12:10), and their prayers are an abomination (Proverbs 28:9). All unregenerate people without exception mind the things of the flesh, are at enmity towards God, are not and cannot be subjected to the Law of God or please God (Romans 8:5-8; Hebrews 11:6), are dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit working in the sons of disobedience, conducting themselves in the lusts of their flesh and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and mind (Ephesians 2:1-3), are dead in sins and the uncircumcision of their flesh (Colossians 2:13), love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil (John 3:19), and are slaves of sin (Romans 6:17,20). They can only bring forth dead works and fruit unto death (Romans 7:5; Hebrews 9:14).

In addition to teaching partial depravity, preparationists taught and teach common, resistible grace. When the sinner's heart is being "graciously prepared" for regeneration, that sinner can ultimately resist the "common operations of the Spirit" and go to hell.

McGeown writes the following of the preparationism of the Puritans: "Man could not produce these good things in himself, but the outcome of such good things did depend in part on man. If both the elect and the reprobate are the recipients of such common works of the Spirit, which do not necessarily issue in salvation, the implication is that man has a role to play. He must be careful not to suppress such works in him. ... The natural man can attain to this, and these preparatory actions may bear no saving fruit in the end." [1]

Murray says the following in agreement with Hooker: "Conviction of sin, even when attended by manifest evidence of the Spirit of God speaking to the conscience, is no evidence of a saving conversion. ... The New Testament gives clear indication of general or common operations of the Holy Spirit which can be experienced by the unregenerate man. ... Thus when a person comes under conviction, what results from that conviction is by no means a foregone conclusion. ... Conviction may be lost or thrown off ... 'Thus', writes Hooker [in *The Application of Redemption*], 'Millions of men perish, go within the view of Canaan, and never possess it'. It is, he says again, 'a dangerous and desperate mistake' to get no further than 'a legal reformation ... and here millions perish'. ... A person may get the burden of conviction off his back by a false belief that he has received Christ. '... They heal themselves before God heals them, make application before sound preparation.'" [3]

Shepard's *The Sound Believer* is full of such heresy:

"However, conviction is a work of the Spirit, though it should be but common; and wilt thou not be thankful for common mercy, suppose it be outward? How much more for this that is spiritual, though it should be common! especially considering that it is the first fundamental work of the

Spirit, and is seminally all. Sense of sin begins here, and ariseth hence; as ignorance of sin is seminally all sin. ...

“Do not judge of general and common workings of the Spirit upon the souls of any to be the beginnings of effectual and special conversion; for a man may have some inward and yet common knowledge of the gospel, and Christ is in it, before there be any sorrow for sin; yet it doth not hence follow that the Lord begins not with compunction and sorrow, because common work is not special and effectual work; when the Spirit thus comes, he first begins here, as we shall prove. ...

“Hence, see what is the great hinderance [*sic*] between the mercy of God and the soul of many a man; if it be not some sin and hardness of heart under it, whereby he cares not for Christ to deliver him, then it is some pride of spirit arising from some good he hath, whereby he feels no need of Christ, hoping his own duties shall save him; or else is above Christ, and not under him, willing to be disposed of by him.

“... [T]here is in many a one a heart desirous of his love; and this would quiet them, if they were sure of it: but they never came to be quieted with God’s will, in case they think they shall never partake of his love; but are above that, oppose, and resist, and quarrel with that, unhumbléd under that; the Lord therefore intending to bestow his favor only upon a humbled sinner, he will therefore hide his face until they lie low, and acknowledge themselves worthy of nothing but extremity of misery, unworthy of the least mercy.” [4]

As quoted before, Perkins wrote that if an unregenerate person has “some weak and faint desire, some small obedience, he must not let this spark of grace go out.” [1] To Perkins and the preparationists, the unregenerate’s desire and obedience, however weak, is evidence of grace, and it is possible that this grace will go for naught.

Petit writes the following about Sibbes: “Reprobates, he maintained, might immediately respond to the Spirit and so desire grace without excessive preliminary restraint. ... What is necessary is that the sinner does not resist the Spirit’s work in creating holy desires in him. The ‘sweet motions’ of the Spirit may be resisted, claims Sibbes. Those who obey the promptings of the Spirit and ‘turn towards God in obedience will receive the full benefits of the Spirit; those who resist are lost.’ ... ‘The Holy Ghost is given to them that obey, to them that do not resist the Spirit of God. For in the ministry of the Gospel the Spirit is given in some degree to reprobates ... they have the gracious motions offered them, but they do not obey them. Therefore the Spirit seizeth not upon them ... the Spirit is given to them that obey the sweet motions of it.’” Sibbes also wrote that some “will cast water themselves upon those sparks which Christ labors to kindle in them, because they will not be troubled with the light of them. ... The Holy Ghost hath often knocked at their hearts, as willing to have kindled some holy desires in them. How else can they be said to resist the Holy Ghost, but that the Spirit was readier to draw them to a further degree of goodness than stood with their own wills?” [1]

William Guthrie wrote in his book *The Christian's Great Interest*, "It will be hard to give sure essential differences between the preparatory work on those in whom afterwards Christ is formed, and those legal stirrings which are sometimes in reprobates. ... I shall offer some things which rarely shall be found in the stirrings of reprobates, and which are ordinarily found in that law-work which hath a gracious issue." McGeown responds: "That one qualifying word 'rarely' speaks volumes. ... What advice does Guthrie offer to the unconverted? In words very similar to Alleine he writes, 'work up your heart to be pleased with and close with that offer [of the Gospel], and say to God expressly that you do accept of that offer.' Guthrie expostulates with objectors thus: 'Or will any say, you cannot close with Christ? what is this you cannot do? Can you not hunger for Him, nor look to Him, nor be pleased with that salvation, nor open your mouth that He may fill it? Do not difficult the way to heaven, for it derogates much from all He hath done.' So, we see, that Guthrie believed that the unregenerate sinner could make himself be pleased with the Gospel 'offer,' could hunger after Christ and could therefore 'close with' the Saviour. However, such a sinner, pleased with Christ, and hungering after Him, may nevertheless perish." [1]

Again we come to John Owen:

"All these things may be wrought in the minds of men by the dispensation of the word, and yet the work of regeneration be never perfected in them. Yea, although they are good in themselves, and fruits of the kindness of God towards us, they may not only be lost as unto any spiritual advantage, but also be abused unto our great disadvantage. And this comes not to pass but by our own sin, whereby we contract a new guilt upon our souls. ... Some are no way careful or wise to *improve this light and conviction* unto the end whereunto they tend and are designed. Their message is, to turn the minds of men, and to take them off from their self-confidence, and to direct them unto Christ. Where this is not attended unto, where they are not used and improved unto the pursuit of this end, they insensibly wither, decay, and come to nothing. ...

"There is, indeed, an objection of some moment against the ascription of this work unto the energy of the Holy Spirit; for 'whereas it is granted that all these things may be wrought in the minds and souls of men, and yet they may come short of the saving grace of God, how can he be thought to be the author of such a work? Shall we say that he designs only a weak and imperfect work upon the hearts of men? or that he deserts and gives over the work of grace which he hath undertaken towards them, as not able to accomplish it?'

"Ans. 1. In many persons, it may be in the most, who are thus affected, *real conversion* unto God doth ensue, the Holy Spirit by these preparatory actings making way for the introduction of the new spiritual life into the soul: so they belong unto a work that is perfect in its kind. 2. Wherever they fail and come short of what in their own nature they have a *tendency* unto, it is not from any weakness and imperfection in themselves, but from the sins of them in whom they are wrought. For instance, even common illumination and conviction of sin have, in their own nature, a tendency unto sincere conversion. They have so in the same kind as the law hath to bring us unto Christ. Where this end is not attained, it is always from the interposition of an act of willfulness

and stubbornness in those enlightened and convicted. They do not sincerely improve what they have received, and faint not merely for want of strength to proceed, but, by a free act of their own wills, they refuse the grace which is farther tendered unto them in the gospel. This will, and its actual resistance unto the work of the Spirit, God is pleased in some to take away. It is, therefore, of sovereign grace when and where it is removed. But the sin of men and their guilt is in it where it is continued; for no more is required hereunto but that it be voluntary. It is will, and not power, that gives rectitude or obliquity unto moral actions. ... And these things are found in these operations of the Holy Spirit. They are in their own nature good and holy. Illumination is so; so is conviction and sorrow for sin, with a subsequent change of affections and amendment of life. ... Now, because it oftentimes maketh a great appearance and resemblance of regeneration itself, or of real conversion to God, so that neither the world nor the church is able to distinguish between them, it is of great concernment unto all professors of the gospel to inquire diligently whether they have in their own souls been made partakers of any other work of the Spirit of God or no; for although this be a good work, and doth lie in a good subserviency unto regeneration, yet if men attain no more, if they proceed no farther, they will perish, and that eternally. And multitudes do herein actually deceive themselves, speaking peace unto their souls on the effects of this work; whereby it is not only insufficient to save them, as it is to all persons at all times, but also becomes a means of their present security and future destruction. ...

“The *conversations* of persons who live and abide under the power of this work only is assuredly fading and decaying. Coldness, sloth, negligence, love of the world, carnal wisdom, and security, do everyday get ground upon them. Hence, although by a long course of abstinence from open sensual sins, and stating of a contrary interest, they are not given up unto them, yet, by the decays of the power of their convictions, and the ground that sin gets upon them, they become walking and talking skeletons in religion, — dry, sapless, useless, worldlings. But where the soul is inlaid with real saving grace, it is in a state of thriving continually. Such an one will go on from strength to strength, from grace to grace, from glory to glory, and will be fat and flourishing in old age. By these things may we learn to distinguish in ourselves between the preparatory work mentioned, and that of real saving conversion unto God. And these are some of the heads of those operations of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men, which oftentimes are preparatory unto a real conversion unto God; and sometimes, [by] their contempt and rejection, a great aggravation of the sin and misery of them in whom they were wrought.” [7]

John Owen believed that all the pre-regenerative operations of the Holy Spirit, including illumination and conviction of sin, can be lost as to any spiritual advantage if they are not “improved.” He believed that these preparations make way for the soul to have spiritual life and have a likelihood of leading to conversion, but if the unregenerate do not “improve what they have received,” it will all be for naught, since they, of their own free will, stubbornly refused the grace that was offered to them. He believed that the work of the Spirit is a good work, but it is insufficient to save, and if the sinner does not proceed any further, he will perish eternally. He believed that the walk of the person in whom this good work of the Holy Spirit was wrought will fade and decay if it is met with negligence and carnality. He believed that the operations of the Holy Spirit are often preparatory to true conversion, but sometimes they are not, due to man’s

contempt and rejection of them. So much for irresistible grace.

This heresy leads to the preaching of the well-meant offer. Here are some of Alleine's Arminian false-gospel calls to the unregenerate in *An Alarm to the Unconverted*:

“Now mercy is wooing you; now Christ is waiting to be gracious to you, and the Spirit of God is striving with you. ... Oh! Strike in with the offers of grace. Oh! Now or never. ... Strike in with the Spirit when He begins to work upon your heart. When He works convictions, O do not stifle them, but join in with Him, and beg the Lord to give you saving conversion. *‘Quench not the Spirit.’* Do not reject Him, do not resist Him. ... Thus yield yourself to the working of the Spirit, and hoist your sails to His gusts. ... O what hopeful beginnings have these often stifled! ... How many poor sinners have been enlightened and convinced, and been just ready to escape the snare of the devil, and have even escaped it: and yet wicked company has pulled them back at last, and made them sevenfold more the children of hell! In a word, I have no hope for you, except you shake off your evil company. Your life depends upon it: forsake this, or you cannot live. ... And now, beloved, let me know your mind. What do you intend to do? ... Well, do not put me off with a dilatory answer; tell me not later. I must have your immediate consent. If you are not now resolved, while the Lord is treating with you and inviting you, much less likely are you to be later, when these impressions are worn off, and you are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ... Will you set open the door and give the Lord Jesus the full and ready possession? ... Remember, you are now upon your good behavior for everlasting; if you do not make a wise choice now, you are undone for ever. What your present choice is, such must be your eternal condition. ... Now the Holy Spirit is striving with you. He will not always strive. Have you not felt your heart warmed by the Word, and been almost persuaded to leave off your sins and come to Christ? Have you not felt some motions in your mind, in which you have been warned of your danger, and told what your careless course would end in? It may be you are like young Samuel who, when the Lord called once and again, knew not the voice of the Lord, but these motions are the offers, and callings, and strivings of the Spirit. ... Now the Lord stretches wide His arms to receive you. He beseeches you by us. How movingly, how meltingly, how compassionately He calls. ... Behold, O ye sons of men, the Lord Jesus has thrown open the prison, and now He comes to you by His ministers, and beseeches you to come out. ... But it is a small matter that you turn me off; you put a slight upon the God that made you; you reject the compassion and beseechings of a Saviour, and will be found resisters of the Holy Ghost, if you will not now be prevailed upon to repent and be converted.” [6]

God's truth is in direct opposition to the preparationist heresy of common, resistible grace. Without any preparatory steps, the Holy Spirit immediately brings a sinner from spiritual death to spiritual life, takes away his old heart and old spirit, implants within him a new heart and a new spirit, and indwells him. He is made a new creation, dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ, so that he is no longer totally depraved and no longer serves sin. God's grace in regeneration is irresistible; that is, no man is able to resist the motions of the Holy Spirit to regenerate him. Regeneration is never preceded by any condition the sinner meets, can meet, or is enabled to meet. Conversion is the immediate and inevitable fruit of regeneration; therefore, a person may

not be regenerated without being converted. Conversion is that grace in which the Holy Spirit causes the sinner to repent and believe the gospel. The regenerate person is given a knowledge and understanding of the true gospel of salvation conditioned on the work of Jesus Christ alone and the realization that he was unregenerate when he believed a false gospel of salvation conditioned on the sinner. He counts all of his former life and deeds, whether religious or irreligious, as dead works, evil deeds, and fruit unto death. There is an immediate change from death to life, from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from unbelief to belief. (Deuteronomy 4:34-35; 30:6; Isaiah 45:6,20-25; Jeremiah 24:7; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:25-27; Zechariah 4:6; Matthew 13:23; Mark 16:16; John 1:13; 3:3-8; 6:37,40,44,63; 8:32; 10:3-5,27; 16:8-11; 17:2-3; Acts 16:14-15; Romans 1:16-17; 3:26; 5:5; 6:1-22; 7:6; 8:2,5-16,30; 1 Corinthians 2:10-12; 15:45; 2 Corinthians 4:2-6; Ephesians 1:13; 2:5; 4:22-24; Philippians 3:7-8; Colossians 2:11-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 9:13-15; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 5:20)

In many circles that claim to believe and proclaim God's sovereign grace, the Puritans are highly esteemed. Yet their heresies were pervasive, as we have seen in the last two issues. The truth about the Puritans is that they were merely grandiloquent heretics spewing empty, vain words based on emotions and experiences rather than God's Word.

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*\*Although authors such as McGeown, Brown, and Petit are quoted against the heresy of preparationism, this in no way is an endorsement of these authors or their churches or denominations.*