

# Monergism vs. Synergism

by John Hendryx

*If anyone makes the assistance of grace [to believe the gospel] depend on the humility or obedience of man and does not agree that it is a gift of grace itself that we are obedient and humble, he contradicts the Apostle who says, "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7), and, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). - Council of Orange*

My aim in this essay is to show from Scripture that faith is the result of regeneration, not the cause of it. A corresponding aim is to show that the opposite view is unscriptural and harmful to our understanding of the Gospel. Monergism and synergism are terms that may or may not be familiar to you but are of immense importance to evangelicals if we hope to maintain fidelity to the Scriptures as we enter the new millennium. This God-honoring but largely forgotten truth is critical to the blessing and renewal of the Church and key to understand if we are to successfully reform our thinking along biblical lines. These words describe two very distinct views of God's saving grace - the process wherein God changes a person from "dead in sin" to "alive in Christ."

To introduce you to this Scriptural doctrine let me begin by asking some questions that should help us begin to think about this issue: (1) What is man's part and God's part in the work of the new birth? (2) Why is it that one unregenerate person believes the gospel and not another? Does one make better use of God's grace? (3) Apart from the grace of God, is there any fallen person who is naturally willing to submit in faith to the humbling terms of the gospel of Christ? (4) In light of God's word, is our new birth in Christ an unconditional work of God's mercy alone or does man cooperate in some way with God in the work of regeneration (making it conditional)? Your answer to these questions will reveal where you stand on this issue. In the following paragraphs I hope to convince you of the deep importance of a biblical understanding of this issue to the health of our churches. This is because, for various reasons, a majority of modern evangelicals have abandoned the biblical position and thus thrown out the most important Scriptural truth that was recovered in the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

## Synergism

Before defining monergism, we should start on more familiar ground to 21st century man by explaining the more familiar "synergism", which the majority of our churches teach today. Synergism is the doctrine that the act of being born again is achieved through a combination of human will and divine grace. (From Greek *sunergos*, working together: *sun-*, *syn-* + *ergon*, work). The Century Dictionary defines synergism as

"...the doctrine that there are two efficient agents in regeneration, namely the human will and the divine Spirit, which, in the strict sense of the term, cooperate. This theory accordingly holds that the soul has not lost in the fall all inclination toward holiness, nor all power to seek for it under the influence of ordinary motives."

Synergism: A Belief That Faith Arises Out of An Inherent Capacity of the Natural Man.

In other words, synergists believe that faith itself, a principle standing independent and autonomous of God's action of grace, is something the natural man must add or contribute toward the price of his salvation. Unregenerate man, in this scheme, is left to his freewill and natural ability to believe or reject God. Synergists teach that God's grace takes us part of the way to salvation but that the [fallen, rebellious] human will must determine the final outcome. It does this by reaching down into an autonomous principle within in its fallen unrenewed nature in order to either *produce a right thought or create a right volition* toward God. But, the Scriptures are clear that as long as the natural man hates God he will not come to Him. In this system, then, grace is merely an offer or a help but does not do anything to change man's heart of stone or natural hostility to God. This means that God will only look

favorably upon and reward those natural men who are able to produce or contribute faith, independent of God's inward gracious call or spiritual renewal. This is a subtle, but serious, error that is plaguing the church of the 21st century. It is a misapprehension of the biblical teaching concerning the depth of our fallen nature and the radical grace needed to restore us. This leads me to believe that one of the greatest challenges facing the church today is its re-evangelization. While many evangelicals may understand the doctrine of "sola fide" (faith alone), that we must place our faith in Christ to be saved, it seems many have abandoned the biblical concept of "sola gratia" (grace alone). The Synergistic Conception of "Sola Fide" therefore must, by definition, draw on nature to cooperate with God's grace as the human fulfillment of a condition. Why do people believe this? I can only guess it is because by nature we want to maintain an island of righteousness, a last bastion of pride in thinking that he can still contribute something, be it ever so small, to our own salvation. It would involve great humility on our part to admit this. If the Church took more efforts to search the Scriptures and reform her doctrine on this point, I am convinced that a great deal of blessing would be restored and God would remove much of the current worldliness in our midst.

### **How is Monergism Different?**

In contrast, historic Christianity, as best explained by Augustine and the Reformers, would reject the above position and honor the more biblical position of monergism. This position teaches that salvation is entirely a work of God; That man can contribute nothing toward the price of his salvation and that one is saved wholly and unconditionally by grace through faith. That faith itself is a gift of God (Eph 2:8, John 1:13, 2 Tim 2:25, Phil 1:29, Hebrews 12:2, 1 John 5:1, Rom 3:24, Ezekiel 11:19-20; Ezekiel 36:26-27) which is not the cause, but the witness of God's regenerative grace having worked faith in the inner man. This gracious act of God was based on nothing meritorious in the individual, but rather, entirely on God's sovereign good pleasure (Eph 1:5). It was not because God knew which persons would believe of their own free will, *for there are no persons which fit that description*. This is because apart from grace their is no delight or inclination to seek God (in man's unregenerate nature). And since those dead in sin will not seek God (Rom 3:11), regenerative grace precedes justifying faith. God must, in effect, raise them from the dead- (see Eph 2:5, Col 2:13).

### **Regeneration is the Work of God Alone**

To get a better hold on this concept we should first define the meaning of the term "monergism" and then explore how it relates to the doctrine of regeneration (new birth). The word "monergism" consists of two main parts. The prefix "mono" signifies "one", "single", or "alone" while "ergon" means "to work". Taken together it means "the work of one". The Century Dictionary's definition of monergism is helpful here:

"In theol., The doctrine that the Holy Spirit is the only efficient agent in regeneration - that the human will possesses no inclination to holiness until regenerated, and therefore cannot cooperate in regeneration."

Very simply, then, monergism is the doctrine that our new birth (or "quickening") is the work of God, the Holy Spirit alone, with no contribution of man toward Christ's work, since the natural man, of himself, has no desire for God or holiness (ROM 3:11,12; ROM 8:7; John 3:19, 20). The unregenerate man, in his bondage, desires sin more than he desires God so as to always choose according to the corrupt desires of his fallen nature. Due to the unspiritual man's natural love of sin, and inability to save himself out of his love of sin, the Holy Spirit, in light of Christ's work of redemption, must act independently of the human will in His merciful work of regeneration, or none would be saved. Thus, monergism is just another way of more fully understanding the doctrine of "salvation by grace alone" (sola gratia). It must be stressed that the grace of God is the only efficient cause in initiating and effecting the renewal of our fallen will leading to conversion (John 1:13).

Monergistic regeneration is God's merciful response to the consequences of our fall in Adam which has resulted in natural man's moral inability. We must be clear that it does not apply to the entire process of salvation, but only to the first step in bringing a person to faith in Christ. It is only in God's power to bring to life a person who is spiritually dead. This means that a man's soul is utterly passive (if not hostile) until it has been regenerated. But when regenerated the disposition of his heart which once loved darkness is changed. He willingly turns to embrace the Savior since his hatred of God has been transformed to a love for Him (Ezekiel 11:19-20). In other words, God doesn't do the believing for us but empowers and restores us by the Holy Spirit to delightfully respond in faith and obedience. Man

will not and cannot offer any help in renewing himself spiritually without this grace. We can do nothing spiritual, including turning to Christ in faith, apart from God's grace which is grounded in the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. Later in this essay I will answer how this relates to preaching repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Note, I would like to clear up a common confusion about regeneration and justification. Regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit which brings us into a living union with Christ, only refers to the first step in the work of God in our salvation. It is universally agreed among evangelicals, myself included, that the second step, faith in Christ, must be exercised by the sinner if one is to be justified (saved). Therefore, justification is conditional (on our faith) ... but our regeneration (or spiritual birth) is unconditional; an expression of God's grace freely bestowed, for it is unconstrained and not merited by anything God sees in those who are its subjects. Regeneration and Justification, although occurring almost simultaneously are, therefore, not the same. Regeneration, has a *causal priority* over the other aspects of the process of salvation. The new birth (regeneration), therefore, is what brings about a restored disposition of heart which is then willing to exercise faith in Christ unto justification (Ezekiel 11:19; Ezekiel 36:26).

The Counsel of Orange (529) was held to deal with a controversy in the church that had to do with degree to which a human being is able to contribute to his/her own salvation. The clarity of its expression on this matter would have me reproduce one of its articles here. Canon 7 states:

*"If anyone affirms that we can form any right opinion or make any right choice which relates to the salvation of eternal life, or that we can be saved by assent to the preaching of the gospel through our natural powers without the effectual work of the Holy Spirit, who makes all whom He calls gladly and willingly assent to and believe in the truth, he is led astray from the plain teaching of Scripture by exalting the natural ability of man, and does not understand the voice of God who says in the Gospel, "For apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), and the word of the Apostle, "Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5)."*

### **Are There Any Biblical Examples of Monergism?**

As you read the following texts that convey the illumining, regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in our salvation, keep in mind the general principle that "no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). This means that only the Spirit can illumine our darkened mind since the "natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14).

When the church was in its infancy, Luke records in Acts that when Lydia was taught the gospel by Paul (Acts 16:14b): "the Lord *opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul*". What happened to Lydia (and Paul on the Road to Damascus) is what happens to everyone who comes to faith in Christ. If the Lord "opens our heart", the Holy Spirit is doing a supernatural work upon our closed heart, so that we "will give heed". The passage makes clear that resistance is no longer thinkable because the desire now is to give heed since the Spirit has taken what was once a dark heart and illumined the understanding. If the Lord "*opened Lydia's heart to give heed*" and then the Bible recorded that she still resisted, it would be a contradictory and nonsensical statement, yet this is what synergists would have us believe. If God overcame the will in the example of Lydia then there should be no further debate as to whether He does this in everyone who comes to faith in Christ. If hostile sinners are to believe, God must initiate the making our heart of stone into a heart of flesh:

"Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. Ezekiel 36:26-27

If God takes away our heart of stone, as this passage underscores, and then gives us a heart of flesh, we will infallibly come to believe and obey. There is no possibility or thought of resistance after the fact. Indeed fallen humans resist the Holy Spirit every day they live in unbelief, but God can sovereignly make His influences irresistible by changing the disposition of our hardened hearts which transfers us from death to life. The following passage even goes further by showing a unity between God's granting ability to come to Him with the work of the Spirit who alone gives life:

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. "But there are some of you who do not believe." ...65 And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." John 6:63-65

This gift of life is what we speak of in the inaugural work of God in regeneration. This verse clearly unites the Spirit, who gives life, and God who grants His people to come to Him. The words, "for this reason" point us back to the previous text. The flesh alone, without the life of the Spirit, profits nothing, according to Jesus own words. The passage carries a universal negative to the possibility of anyone naturally coming to Christ on their own ... but the Spirit gives the life, which is another way of saying, only that which is granted by the Father comes to Him. The words of Christ themselves carry the power of life as the Spirit works in and through them.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:5 Paul speaks plainly of the Spirit working with the word as the only means the Thessalonians came to know the Savior. Word alone is not enough to transform our heart: He says, "...for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." Later, in the same epistle, Paul thanks God for the faith that enabled the Thessalonians to believe:

"For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. I Thess. 2:13 (...which effectually worketh also in you that believe.)

Notice that it is man's reception of the Gospel that is the explicit grounds for which Paul is thanking and glorifying God! Paul gives God all the glory for man's initial reception of the Gospel, and correspondingly thanks God for it. In his second letter to the same church Paul reminds them again who deserves thanks for their faith:

"But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that

you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 2:13)

Our entire salvation, from first to last, is due to God alone, "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2), for from Him and to Him and through Him are all things ... and, therefore, all the praise, glory, thanks and honor for our new life is to be given to God alone. We must conclude that it is not scriptural to thank and praise God for His "95%" in salvation, and then give man credit for the last remaining bit. If God is thanked for man's new life in Christ, it must be because He alone is perceived as responsible for it

Jesus Himself explains this divine process in a similar instance when speaking with Simon Peter. Over and above all the other contrary voices which believed Jesus to be either John the Baptist or a mere prophet, Peter confesses, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" . Jesus, responded to Peter's confession: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for *flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*" The gospel of John picks up on this same language of flesh and blood when expressing how a person cannot convert himself without being born again: "*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) If we are "born of God", and not of our will, then it isn't our faith which God's responds to, rather it is grace which infallibly gives rise to our faith in response to God.*

John Piper, in his exegesis of 1 John 5:1 says this:

"In the New Testament God is clearly active, creating a people for himself by calling them out of darkness and enabling them to believe the gospel and walk in the light. John teaches most clearly that regeneration precedes and enables faith. "*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God*" ...The verb tense make's john's intention unmistakable: Every one who goes on believing [present, continuous action] that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God [perfect, completed action with abiding effects]. " Faith is the evidence of new birth, not the cause of it."

The following verses written by the Apostle Paul further drives home the point that we are saved because of God's internal purpose, not because of anything He has seen in us:

"...who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time..." Timothy 1:9

"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." Romans 9:16 1:13)

How often do you hear your pastor use this kind of biblical language and do serious exegesis of such passages? The Scriptures are filled with such pictures of Christ's work in our salvation, so why aren't our churches? Are we afraid that it might offend our sensibilities? Our pride? So instead of a full-orbed gospel that comes from the whole counsel of Scripture we have traded it for a kind of half-gospel. We do this by pulling out verses which we like that have enough biblical truth to get our attention yet we avoid the equally important passages which expose our utter spiritual impotence apart from grace. The absence of such a prominent biblical concept from our pulpits may explain our both anemic lack of influence in our world and the horrifying reality that 80 to 90% of those "making a decision for Christ" fall away from the faith. This is not to say that we should only speak of such things, but the only faithful church is the one which teaches exegetically through every verse in the Bible, not only topically, as some are in the habit of.

### **What About Free Will?**

Some have asked, if this is the case, have we no free will? It is clear that the natural man does indeed have a "freewill" to act according to his nature, that is, to choose according to his greatest natural desires, but he is morally incapable and *unwilling* to choose God on our own because he is "dead in sin", "loves the darkness" and "cannot understand" the things of God because "they are spiritually appraised." (1 Cor 2:14, Rom 8:7, John 3:19). Our greatest affections, therefore, determine what we choose to follow. And although mankind can do many "good things" he is spiritually impotent and unable to do any redemptive good since his "freewill" is bound, which really amounts to no freedom at all. Man will always choose what he desires most, and without the regenerative grace working in us by the Holy Spirit there is no desire for God. So, while we were yet in active rebellion against God (so it would have been completely just of God to pour His wrath on all of us), yet, taking pity on us, He was still willing to show his great love and affection toward us by bearing the punishment and wrath we deserved and

then apply the benefits of the atonement on His elect; those He had given His Son from eternity (John 17:9). J.I Packer said,

*"It is staggering that God should love sinners, yet it is true. God loves creatures that have become unlovely and (one would have thought) unlovable. There was nothing whatever in the objects of his love to call it forth; nothing in us could attract or prompt it. Love among persons is awakened by something in the beloved, but the love of God is free, spontaneous, unevoked, uncaused. God loves people because he has chosen to love them ... and no reason for his love can be given except his own sovereign good pleasure. - (from Knowing God p.124)*

So, here we clearly see that faith is not the cause of God's choosing us, but the result of it. Justification, of course, is the result of faith, but faith is inevitable result of God's efficacious and regenerative grace.

### **One Must First Be Able to Hear If One Is to Respond**

To further drive home the point, the Scripture teaches that in order for someone to believe the word of the gospel, they must first be able hear and understand what it says. In contrast to the synergistic scheme, the biblical position of monergism teaches that prior to being born again we all have an uncircumcised ear and a heart of stone. We were blind and taken captive by Satan to do his will (2 Tim 2:26). A fallen person with an uncircumcised ear, therefore, has no earthly way of hearing spiritual things much less understanding and believing the gospel (1 Cor 2:14). Our ears must first be supernaturally opened and a new heart given us (Ezek 11:19) so that we are even willing to hear God's word and come into vital union with Christ through faith. A man could more easily see without eyes or speak without a tongue than turn to Christ apart from the gracious, life-giving work of God in his soul. Our Lord asks, "Do men gather grapes from thorns?" No, every tree will only bring forth fruit from its own kind. What can be done then since we can naturally only produce bad fruit? In the work of the cross Christ gives TO US the very thing that He demands OF US. Our Lord tells us in Matt 12:33 that He must "Make the tree good, and his fruit will be good." In other words, the nature of the tree (corrupt or good) determines what kind of fruit it will have, so to bring forth good fruit it must be changed (we must be born again) or no good fruit (including faith) will be forthcoming. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 8:8; Matt 13:9)

Now if our ear is truly uncircumcised, if our eyes are truly blind and our heart is really hardened as stone, how can we even desire to turn to Christ? One must first have their ear circumcised (without hands, Col 2:11) before they could possibly even hear and respond to the gospel since an uncircumcised ear, by nature, cannot hear spiritual truths ... Similarly if they would come willingly, one must first have one's heart of stone be made a heart of flesh ( a change of nature); likewise, one must first have his eyes opened if he is to see. That is why Jesus says we must first be born again if we are to see the kingdom of God. "*Flesh gives birth to flesh but Spirit gives birth to spirit.*" (John 3:6) Those born of the Spirit, have the disposition of their hearts changed so that they delightfully believe the gospel as the first act of a newborn babe. The conclusion might be surprising to some but this means that regeneration is what actually produces faith and not the other way around. J.I. Packer says it this way:

*"Infants do not induce, or cooperate in, their own procreation and birth; no more can those who are 'dead in trespasses and sins' prompt the quickening operation of God's Spirit within them."*

### **How Does this Relate to Preaching Repentance and Faith in Jesus Christ?**

The preaching of the Word of God, therefore, is central to the salvation of His people. When spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit, the word of God has the power to graciously open people's eyes, unplug their uncircumcised ears, change the disposition of their hearts, draw them to faith, and save them (James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:23, 25). The word of God does not work in an "ex opere operato" (automatic) fashion, rather, it is the work of the Holy Spirit sovereignly dispensing grace (John 3:8), quickening the heart THROUGH THE WORD to bring forth life. So the written word itself is not the material of the spiritual new birth, but rather its means or medium. "The word is not the begetting principle itself, but only that by which it works: the vehicle of the mysterious germinating power"(ALFORD). It is because the Spirit of God accompanies it that the word carries in it the germ of life. The life is in God, yet it is communicated to us through the word. The gospel declares that repentance and faith (commands of God) are themselves God's working in us both to will and to do (2 Tim 2:25, Eph 2:5, 8) and not something that the sinner himself contributes towards the price of His salvation. Repentance and faith can only be exercised by a soul after, and in immediate consequence of, its regeneration by the

Holy Spirit (1 John 5:1; Acts 16:14b; Acts 13:48; John 10:24-26; Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 6:37; John 1:13; 1 Cor. 4:7; 1 Cor. 15:10; Jas. 1:17; John 3:27). From this we must conclude that mere rational arguments are not enough to save anyone. In our evangelism (as believers) we are "partners" with the Holy Spirit, heralding the gospel and exerting ourselves for their salvation but in complete dependence on the Spirit to do the actual converting. We pray because we believe God can actually renew our rebellious hearts. If natural men could deliver themselves then there would be no need to pray for them.

To those without the regenerating work of the Spirit it is impossible to understand the word and believe the gospel (1 Cor 2:14). Although natural (unregenerate) man, apart from the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, has an incapacity to embrace the gospel due to his revulsion of it, he is still responsible to obey it. Moral Inability (like a debt we cannot repay) does not alleviate responsibility.

As we reflect more deeply upon this, however, it is important that synergists consider the following question: Why does one man embrace Christ while another man rejects Him? If two men hear the gospel preached to them why is it that one man ultimately believes and not another? What natural ability did the one man have or autonomously produce that the other did not? What good thing in his nature moved him to accept the gift of forgiveness and embrace Christ as his Savior? Did he make better use of the grace God gave to him than the other man? The scriptures declare there is only one reason for rejecting the gospel; because one is wicked. There is also only one reason a man embraces Christ: the grace of God. Anything less than salvation by grace alone leaves man with a basis for boasting (Eph 2:8,9). If synergism is embraced, then there is the very real but subtle danger that men could boast that they made use of God's grace or had more wisdom than the man who rejected Christ. They could boast that they are different for, unlike others, they responded to Christ. The autonomous natural man would, then, ultimately determine His own salvation, not God. The Scriptures declare, however, that God does not quicken anyone based on some good thing He sees in them, but rather, it is due to His loving, merciful, good pleasure alone (John 1:13, Rom 9:16, Eph 1:5, 9,11, Luke 10:21, Acts 13:48). Don't get me wrong: We certainly must respond in faith to Christ to be justified, but it is grace itself which enables us to be obedient to the gospel. This position

alone strips the pride of man and gives glory to God alone for our new life.

C.H. Spurgeon once described the folly of trusting in natural ability by praying as a synergist would if he was consistent with his beliefs:

"Lord...If everybody has done the same with their grace that I have, they might all have been saved. Lord, I know thou dost not make us willing if we are not willing ourselves. Thou givest grace to everybody; some do not improve it, but I do. There are many that will go to hell as much bought with the blood of Christ as I was; they had as much of the Holy Spirit given to them; they had as good a chance, and were as much blessed as I am. It was not thy grace that made us to differ; I know it did a great deal, still I turned the point; I made use of what was given me, and others did not - that is the difference between me and them.' That is a prayer for the devil, for nobody else would offer such a prayer as that. Ah! When they are preaching and talking slowly, there may be wrong doctrine; but when they come to pray, the true thing slips out; they cannot help it." ( C.H. Spurgeon Freewill-- A Slave).

Thomas Watson, the Puritan divine once said, "God does not choose us for faith but unto faith". To erroneously believe the reason for our salvation resides in natural man himself is little different from the same meritorious or Roman Catholic Counter-Reformational system taught at the Council of Trent where Rome consciously denounced the teaching of monergism and embraced synergism. It was this very teaching of Rome that was so loudly protested against by the Reformers as discussed in *The Bondage of the Will* By Martin Luther.

Our wretched fallen estate prior to God's gracious act of regeneration in which we are only hostile to God and love darkness, keeps us from turning to Christ in faith. Synergism falls short because although God extends His gracious offer in that scheme, it still leaves us in our old nature with its corrupt desires to take hold of grace. We all believe that men may come if they will, but the "if they will" is the problem. C.H. Spurgeon beautifully explains this concept:

*The question is, are men ever found naturally willing to submit to the humbling terms of the gospel of Christ? We declare, upon Scriptural authority, that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, and so inclined to everything that is evil,*

*and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human will ever be constrained towards Christ. You reply, that men sometimes are willing, without the help of the Holy Spirit. I answer-Did you ever meet with any person who was? Scores and hundreds, nay, thousands of Christians have I conversed with, of different opinions, young and old, but it has never been my lot to meet with one who could affirm that he came to Christ of himself, without being drawn. The universal confession of all true believers is this-"I know that unless Jesus Christ had sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God, I would to this very hour have been wandering far from him, at a distance from him, and loving that distance well." With common consent, all believers affirm the truth, that men will not come to Christ till the Father who hath sent Christ doth draw them.*

In light of the overwhelming scriptural evidence for monergism, therefore, to believe that God merely gives us enough grace to choose for or against him is without evidence from the text. It would also leave salvation entirely in the hands of natural man by setting faith over against grace as an independent, autonomous, (ultimate, not penultimate) principle.

I say this often but I think it is worth repeating: in order to make sense of this doctrine we must first understand what exactly the condition of fallen man is. Most errors in regard to the doctrine of salvation have their roots in an deficient, unbiblical view of the moral and spiritual status of natural man prior to God's work of grace. At the fall mankind incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death and deservedly became subject to the wrath of God. The effects of sin on the will and entire person made men inherently and totally corrupt, utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God. With no recuperative powers to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly lost in sin. Man's salvation is thereby wholly dependent God's mercy and grace through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ (with the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit) alone (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-19; John 3:36; ROM 1:18; 3:23; 6:23; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 John 1:8). The theologians call it total depravity for a reason; not because man is as bad as he could be but because his unwillingness and inability to come to God, apart from grace, is total. If man's inability were merely physical handicap then he would not be culpable for his rejection of the gospel. But the inability I speak of is a moral inability. The difference can be seen in the analogy of a man who

borrowed a large sum of cash. He wickedly squanders all of his money in one night of riotous living. His inability to repay the debt does not alleviate him of his responsibility to do so. Therefore he is culpable for his inability, which is like unto the condition of man after the fall.

### **Synergistic Counter-Arguments**

Some might further argue that passages which command or invite *belief* prove that man has the ability to believe while in the flesh. But all of these commands such as "*If thou art willing*" and "*whosoever believes*", "*choose life*" are in the subjunctive mood. A conditional statement asserts nothing indicatively. Note that God also calls humanity to keep the 10 commandments, but it does not therefore, necessarily follow that man has the power to keep the commandments. A command does not imply the ability to fulfill it. The commands of God, rather, are meant to bring us to a knowledge of our impotence. With striking clarity, Paul teaches that this is the intent of Divine legislation (ROM 3:20, 5:20, Gal 3:19,24). God cures man's pride by the publication of the Law. God commands us to believe and obey but the purpose of this is to bring us to despair so that we will recognize our utter inability to do so driving us to Christ's mercy. When man recognizes that even humility itself is a gift of grace then and only then it is evident that God is truly working grace in a man. The law was never designed to confer any power but to strip us of our own, enabling us to recognize that salvation is a work of God alone. So if someone were to ask how one might be saved, the clear answer is "to believe in Christ" with the understanding that the opening of our understanding and desire to believe is itself God's gracious gift.

At first, many people might fight against this idea because it goes against everything they have ever been taught at their church. But I would challenge you to question your presuppositions. Carefully and prayerfully read the Scripture references I have given you because this is important. Remember that the affects of the fall on the mind and will rendered mankind wholly incapable and unwilling to come to God, where we would always reject Him if left to our own unregenerate nature. Being spiritually dead, the Scripture teaches that it is impossible for man to respond, no matter how attractive God is (1 Cor 2:14). Man's nature and disposition must first be changed (made alive Eph 2:5, born again John 3:3). To say that we would ever come to God by our own choice without God first making this effectual is to

underestimate the depth and totality of man's fall. We were spiritually dead. Dead men will not respond to pleading and reasoning alone (ROM 8:7) but only when coupled with the effectual call of Jesus who raises him spiritually, as He did the physical Lazarus. Yes, we must command man to repent and believe and we thus proclaim the Gospel to him, but the Holy Spirit has to enable and efficaciously draw him through our preaching if he is to come willingly (John 6:37, John 6:44, John 6:64,65 Ezekiel 11:19-20).

Our honor as believers is to preach Christ crucified and watch God do the work in regenerating a persons' soul through the quickening of the Holy Spirit. It is God alone that regenerates the dead or fallen spirit of His elect as we proclaim His word. He awakens poor sinners to a life of faith that they will see that Jesus, not in part, but in whole, has taken our sin upon Himself on the tree. His finished redemptive work is sufficient to put away our sins for all time. This is why world missions are so critical since the unregenerate can only come to Christ through hearing the word of God (Romans 10:13-15) by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. (*There are, however, notable exceptions to this rule. For instance, probable biblical historical examples of apostles or prophets, such as the Apostle Paul and John the Baptist, who received direct revelation. Or perhaps in cases of supernatural revelation to those who die as elect infants or invalids who would not otherwise naturally have the capacity to understand or grasp much of anything, let alone God's word. People can and have been saved by direct revelation and God defines who of these will hear His voice. Physical inability is no more a hindrance to God than spiritual inability. God created us, so why would it be difficult for God to whisper in the ear of an unborn soon-to-be-miscarried baby and have he or she understand enough to be reconciled with God?* ). In ordinary cases, however, God works concurrently with His church through prayers and the proclamation of His word to bring home His elect from every "tribe and language and people and nation."(Rev 5:8)

I hope this leads people to see that the biblical case for monergism is overwhelming, a constant theme that seasons the entire Bible. Synergism appears to be a system of theology that is forced awkwardly on the Scriptures - trying to read into the Word a hermeneutic governed by a theological predisposition that is most likely the result of man's unending desire to contribute something to his own

salvation. Synergists would be hard pressed to find real biblical evidence to back their position. I must emphasize, however, that I know many sincere brothers & sisters that hold to the synergistic position. My prayer is that all the Lord's people would go back to the Scriptures to earnestly seek God's will in this crucial matter.

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they

are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." ... He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." John 6:63-65

I conclude by giving you on the following pages a comparison chart between monergism and synergism which may be helpful to you in grasping the contrast of systems which greater clarity.

**Monergism:** In theol., The doctrine that the Holy Spirit is the only efficient agent in regeneration - that the human will possesses no inclination to holiness until regenerated, and therefore cannot cooperate in regeneration. God quickens us through the outward call cast forth by the preaching of His Word, disarms our innate hostility, removes our blindness, illumines our mind, creates understanding, turns our heart of stone to a heart of flesh. Only then do we see the beauty and excellency of Christ. This Spirit wrought work in the heart gives rise to a delight in His Word -- all that we might, with our renewed affections, willingly & gladly embrace Christ. Monergism is when God conveys that power into the fallen soul whereby the person **who is to be saved** is enabled to receive the offer of redemption. It refers to the first step (regeneration) which has causal priority over, and gives rise to, the moral and spiritual ability to comply with all the other aspects of the process of being **united to Christ**, (i.e., the ability to apprehend the Redeemer by a living faith, to repent of sin and to love God and the Mediator supremely) It does not refer to the whole process that it gives rise to (justification, sanctification), but only the granting of the spiritual capacity to comply with the terms of the covenant of grace.

**Synergism:** "...the doctrine that there are two efficient agents in regeneration, namely the human will and the divine Spirit, which, in the strict sense of the term, cooperate. This theory accordingly holds that the soul has not lost in the fall all inclination toward holiness, nor all power to seek for it under the influence of ordinary motives." This unscriptural view is the greatest threat to a true understanding of salvation in the Church today.

The following chart highlights some of the major points of difference in these systems:

Synergism	Monergism
<b>Cause of Regeneration</b>	
Regeneration is the work of Christ plus the good will of unspiritual man. What makes men to differ from one another is <b>not the grace of Jesus alone</b> , but Jesus plus the good will of unspiritual man.	Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit alone applying the the effectual crosswork of Christ to the unspiritual man. What makes men to differ is Jesus Christ alone.
Faith is the cause that triggers regeneration	Regeneration has causal priority to faith (Just as a person must have eyes before they see and ears prior to their ability to hear, so one must first have a new heart in order to understand spiritual truth)
Faith and affections for God are produced by the old nature.	Faith is not produced by our unregenerated human nature. It is the immediate and inevitable product of the new nature. The new heart (by nature) loves Christ.
God and Man work together to produce the new birth. God's grace takes us part of the way to salvation, man's unregenerate will must determine the final outcome. In other words belief in Christ gives rise to the new birth.	God, the Holy Spirit, alone produces regeneration with no contribution from the sinner (A work of God). The new birth is never spoke of in the imperative (not commanded), rather man must be born again by God.
God is eagerly awaiting the sinner's will.	God effectually enables the sinner's will.
The persons of the Trinity have conflicting goals in accomplishing and applying salvation: The Father elects a <b>particular</b> people; The Son dies for a <b>general</b> people and the Holy Spirit applies the atonement <b>conditionally</b> on those who exercise their autonomous libertarian free will.	The persons of the Trinity work in harmony - The Father elects a particular people (Eph 1:3-5), Christ dies for those the Father has given Him (John 17:9, 15; Rev 5:9) and the Holy Spirit likewise applies the benefits of the atonement to the same. (Regeneration is one of the redemptive benefits of Christ's work)
Restoration of <b>spiritual</b> faculties comes after the man without the Spirit exercises faith with his natural (innate) capacities. Has the ability to see spiritual truth even before healed. (see 1 Cor 2:14). Has spiritual capacity/desire to receive the truth, prior God's granting any spiritual ability.	"Light" itself is not enough for a blind man to see, his vision must first be restored. (John 3:3,6). Needs spiritual ability to receive truth prior to receiving it (1 Cor 2:12; John 6:63-65 & 37).
<b>View of Humanity</b>	
<i>The fallen sinner has the ability and potential inclination to believe even prior to the new birth</i>	<i>The fallen sinner has no understanding, moral ability or inclination to believe prior to the new birth. (1 Cor 2:14).</i>
There is enough good left in fallen man to turn his affections toward Christ.	Fallen Man has a mind at enmity with God; loves darkness, hates the light and does not have the Holy Spirit. "There is no one who seeks God" (Rom 3:11); Sinner would never turn to God without divine enablement and new affections.
Sinner needs help, is spiritually handicapped.	Spiritually dead sinner needs new nature (mind, heart, will), regeneration.
Natural man is sick and disabled like a drowning man so God would be uncaring if He didn't help by casting a rope.	Natural man is spiritually impotent and <b>morally</b> culpable for sin. Our moral inability is not like a <b>physical handicap</b> or a drowning man for which we would not be culpable but, rather, it is like a man who cannot repay a squandered financial debt. Inability to repay, therefore, does not relieve us of the moral responsibility to do so. God, in His mercy, does not merely throw us a rope, He dives in to make certain we do not drown.
Needs salvation from the consequences of sin - unhappiness, hell, psychological pain.	Needs salvation to remove the offense we've made against a holy God and from the power and bondage of sin.
The <b>natural</b> man is sovereign over his choice to accept or reject Christ - God conditionally responds to our decision. God's love for the sinner is, therefore, conditional.	The <b>natural</b> man can contribute nothing towards his salvation. Faith is a response rendered certain following the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit. We respond to God's unconditional love. (Acts 13:48; John 6:37)
Those fallen men who are saved, either <b>created</b> a right thought, <b>generated</b> a right affection, or <b>originated</b> a right volition that led to their salvation while some others did not have the natural wherewithal to come up with the faith that God required of them to obtain salvation. Therefore salvation is dependent on some virtue or capacity God sees in certain men. Not Jesus alone, but Jesus PLUS...	No Fallen man will create a right thought, generate a right affection, or originate a right volition that will lead to his salvation. We would never believe unless the Holy Spirit came in and disarmed our hostility to God. Therefore salvation is dependent on God's good pleasure alone (Eph 1:4, 5, 11), not some virtue or goodwill He sees in us.
Man's nature & affections do not determine or give rise to their choices. Even without the Holy Spirit working change in his heart, the sinner can still make a saving decision to believe the gospel. In this scheme God gives enough grace to place man in a neutral position which can swing either for or against Jesus. (An act of chance?)	Man's nature determines his desires/affections and give rise to the choices he makes. Jesus bears witness to this: "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit." Luke 6:43 Only Christ can "make a tree good and its fruit will be good." (Also see John 8:34, 42-44; 2 Pet. 2:19).

Synergism	Monergism
<i>View of the Gospel</i>	
The Gospel is an invitation	The Gospel is not merely an invitation, but a command (1 John 3:23)
Christ died for all our sins <b>except</b> unbelief	Christ died for all our sins <b>including</b> unbelief
<i>Sinners have the key in their hands. Man's will determines whether or not Christ's death is efficacious.</i>	<i>God has the key in his hand. God's eternal counsel determines to whom the benefits of the atonement apply.</i>
It would be unjust of God to not give everyone an equal <b>chance</b> .	If God exercised His justice then none of us would stand, since each of us is in active rebellion against an infinitely holy God. He owes us nothing and is under no obligation to save any person. Regeneration is, therefore, an act of pure, undeserved mercy because the justice we deserved, He poured out on His Son (thereby turning His wrath away from us).
After God makes one's heart of stone into a heart of flesh the Holy Spirit's call to salvation can still be resisted.	After God makes one's heart of stone into a heart of flesh, no person wants to resist. By definition our desires, inclinations and affections have changed so we willingly and joyfully turn in faith toward Christ.
Salvation is given to fallen sinners (unregenerate) who choose and desire Christ of their free will.	Apart from grace, there is no fallen sinner (unregenerate) who fits that description. A desire for God is not part of the old nature.
The grace of God is conferred as a result of human prayer	It is grace itself which makes us pray to God (Rom 10:20; Isa. 65:1)
God has mercy upon us when we believe, will, desire, strive, labor, pray, watch, study, seek, ask, or knock, apart from his regenerative grace.	To desire and seek God prior to the new birth is an impossible supposition. (Rom 3:11; 1 Cor 2:14) It is the infusion and quickening of the Holy Spirit within us <b>that we even</b> have the faith or the strength to will, desire, strive, labor, pray, watch, study, seek, ask, or knock and believe in the finished work of Christ.
Commands to repent and believe the gospel imply the ability of the sinner to do so.	The Command toward sinners to repent and believe does not imply ability. Divine intent of the Law, according to Scripture, is to reveal our moral impotence apart from grace (Rom 3:20, 5:20, Gal 3:19,24). The Law was not designed to confer any power but to strip us of our own.
God helps those who help themselves.	God only helps those who cannot help themselves. (John 9:41)
Unregenerate man contributes his little bit.	Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy Cross I cling.
Repentance is considered a work of man.	Repentance is a gift of God. (2 Tim 2:25)
One of the greatest gifts God gives humans is to never interfere with their free will.	The greatest judgment which God can inflict upon a man is to leave him in the hands of his own free-will. If salvation were left in the hands of the unregenerate sinners, we would indeed despair of all hope that anyone would be saved. It is an act of mercy, therefore, that God awakens the dead in sin to life since those without the Spirit cannot understand the things of God at all. (1 Cor 2:14)
With Man's will salvation is possible.	With man's will salvation (repentance and faith) is impossible, but with God all things are possible. (Matt 19:26; Rom 9:16; John 6:64,65) "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." John 3:6

Note: God acts unilaterally, taking the sole initiative in a free act of sovereign grace toward the sinner—grace that is altogether prior to, and effectually produces, justifying faith. The response of faith from the sinner is penultimate as it stands next to the ultimate sovereign grace of God in monergism. As the first act of a newborn baby is to breathe, so the act of faith is the first act of the regenerated sinner, in his/her new birth in Christ.