

A. Introduction:

1. The relation between this article and the preceding two articles is to be found in the fact that in the days when this Confession was written, there were questions raised as to the relation between justification and good works. The age old charge that justification by faith resulted in profane Christians was raised. Against this charge the fathers wrote this article.
2. They therefore speak at length about good works as the result of sanctification. And, in order to make the point clear, they discuss the relationship between sanctification and justification.
3. This sanctification is however, made synonymous with regeneration. That is why the very strange sentence appears in this article, "We believe that this true faith...doth regenerate (man) and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin." This sounds exactly like mediate regeneration. However, the article, making no distinction between regeneration and sanctification, can easily do this.
4. This is not an error, but proceeds from the principle that regeneration can and is actually in Scripture spoken of in the broad sense of the word as sanctification. However, this does not mean that there is not another sense in which regeneration can also be spoken of.

B. Regeneration.

1. In the narrower sense, regeneration is the implanting of the principle of new life in the sinner, who is dead in trespasses and sin. It can be compared to the planting of a kernel of seed in the earth, or to the conception of a child. Regeneration in the wider sense of the word includes our conversion and even our sanctification. It can be compared with the sprouting forth of the seed from the earth, or the birth of a child whereby he comes to a conscious life. Scripture passages which can be consulted in this connection are: John 3:3, 8; I Peter 1:23; I John 3:9; James 1:18, I Peter 1:3.
2. Concerning regeneration in the narrower sense of the word we may notice the following elements:
 - a. It is a work of the Holy Spirit of Christ.
 - b. It is a work which takes place in a moment of time.
 - c. It is a work which is performed in the very depths of man's being--in his heart the center of all his spiritual and ethical life.
 - d. It takes place while the sinner although elect, is still dead in trespasses and sins.
 - e. It takes place beneath the level of the consciousness of man so that he is not at the moment aware of the work being performed. For "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit".
 - f. It is the implanting of the new and resurrection life of Jesus Christ, whereby the elect sinner is given a new heart, is raised from his spiritual grave, and is placed in abiding communion with the body of Christ.
 - g. It is a work which can never be lost, a principle of life which abides in the heart through all of life, through death itself, and on into eternity.
 - h. In the line of the covenant of God, the elect children are probably regenerated as early as conception within the womb.
3. It is also possible to say a few words about the manner in which this regeneration takes place.
 - a. We must distinguish between the seed of regeneration and the quickening of that seed. The seed of regeneration is the principle of the new life of Jesus Christ. This seed of regeneration, implanted in the heart, is quickened by the efficacious Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit. However, this efficacious Word of God is not the preaching of the gospel, but is the creative Word of God addressed to the heart immediately whereby the seed is quickened into life.
 - b. The fact that this can take place already at the moment of conception is because:

- 1) It is only the heart that is regenerated; the nature of the elect sinner is not regenerated except through the grave and the resurrection of the body.
 - 2) Already at conception there is principally in the seed the whole man including the heart, the soul, and the person; and there is perhaps even a certain consciousness, although not self consciousness.
 - 3) The sovereign, efficacious, almighty work of God in regeneration is not limited to time or place, or the full development of the elect people of God.
 - 4) The regenerated elect child is immediately susceptible to the Word of God as that Word is directed to him almost from the moment of birth on. There would be no point in a lapse of time after birth between the birth of a child and the work of regeneration, so that part of his life he would not even be susceptible to the preaching.
- C. Regeneration in the broader sense of the Word.
1. This work of God implies not only the implanting of the new life of Christ, but also the whole work of salvation as it is consciously applied to the believer. It therefore includes conversion and sanctification.
 2. This work is accomplished by the preaching of the Word whereby the gospel is addressed by the Spirit to the principle of regeneration, calling that new principle forth into consciousness.
 3. Thus the principle of regeneration renews and influences the mind and the will in such a way that the elect child of God is capable of hearing the gospel and desiring it, believing it and clinging to it. Yet this is not complete till death.
 4. This goes on all his life long as the gospel comes to him, and as he stands under its influence.
 5. In this way sanctification and conversion are effected. However, it must be observed in this connection, that while sanctification and conversion as well as faith are a process increasing in force as time goes on, nevertheless, all these things are principally accomplished in regeneration in the narrow sense. Then we are converted; then we are made holy; then indeed faith is implanted in our hearts.
- D. The article goes on to discuss the relation between justification and sanctification.
1. There is a difference between the two. Justification has to do with our state and thus frees us from the guilt of sin as a judicial act of God. It is a formal declaration of God whereby we are declared righteous. Sanctification, on the other hand, has to do with our condition and frees us from the pollution of sin. We are washed and cleansed from iniquity; the old man of sin is actually destroyed; the new man in Christ is quickened; we become holy.
 2. Yet the two are related.
 - a. Justification necessarily implies sanctification, for one's state and condition must always correspond. If one is justified, he will also be sanctified.
 - b. Justification is the ground for sanctification. Sanctification is not the basis for justification, for this would lead to the error that we are justified on the basis of our works.
 2. The importance of understanding this relationship is evident.
 - a. A profane Christian is impossible. If one is justified, he will also be sanctified. And the faith by which he is justified is a lively faith which can not possibly produce a profane justified person, but will produce good works.
 - b. Yet at the same time, our good works can therefore never be the basis for justification. And if they cannot contribute to our justification, they cannot contribute in any way to our salvation.
 - 1) Without justification, we cannot and "would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation"
 - 2) Our good works, even though approved by God, are of no account for our justification, for we are justified before we do good works, and God's approval upon our good works is simply the crown he places upon His own work in us.
 - 3) This is even, the article says, as a tree that cannot produce good fruit un-

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less the tree itself is first good. And the fact that we are first good before we can produce good works, is due to the fact that whom God justifies he must also sanctify.

- 4) Besides this, our works can never justify because even when we do good works, we remain unprofitable servants who have earned nothing, but only done our duty. And, we are not perfect, but continue to sin, while only one sin would be sufficient to send us to hell forever.
- c. Yet our works are indeed rewarded both in this life and in the life to come. But when God rewards us, it is but the reward of grace, for "It is through his grace that he crowns his gifts."
- E. Finally, there is a concluding remark concerning the assurance of our salvation.
 1. This assurance can never rest upon the basis of our good works, "For we do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them." If however, we do try to base our assurance on our good works, then "we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences continually vexed."
 2. Assurance only comes by relying completely upon the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior.