

Infused by Divine Life: Stephen Charnock and the Doctrine of Regeneration

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Perhaps less well known in some circles than his contemporaries Richard Baxter (1615–1691) and John Owen (1616–1683), Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) was, nevertheless, an influential Puritan preacher quite famous in his day.¹ Born in London in the parish of St. Katharine Cree, he entered Emmanuel College on May 30, 1642, receiving his bachelor of arts degree from Cambridge in 1646 before heading to Oxford, where he was incorporated Master of Arts in 1649.² He died in 1680 with only a single work published, *The Sinfulness and Cure of Thoughts*, while the remainder of his manuscripts issued posthumously.³ His most famous work is *The*

1. Biographical information on Stephen Charnock is limited. For dictionary articles, see Richard L. Greaves, “Charnock, Stephen (1628–1680),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), 137; J. C. Spalding, “Stephen Charnock,” in *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (The Harvester Press, 1982), 203–204. For more sustained attention on Charnock and his social location, see Julian E. Gutierrez S., “The Lord Reigns Supreme: An Investigation of Stephen Charnock’s Exegetical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology Concerning the Existence and Attributes of God” (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2017), 9–31; Larry Siekawitch, *Balancing Head and Heart in Seventeenth Century Puritanism: Stephen Charnock’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Great Britain: Paternoster, 2012) 18–28. For the theological matrix that undergirds Charnock’s thought, see Hansang Lee, *Trinitarian Theology and Piety: The Attributes of God in the Thought of Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) and William Perkins (1558–1602)* (PhD diss, University of Edinburgh, 2009), 38–75.

2. Due to his “singular gifts and unwearied exertions,” Charnock obtained a fellowship at New College Oxford and was promoted to Senior Proctor in 1652 before heading to Ireland to serve under Henry Cromwell. W. M. Symington, “Life and Character of Charnock,” in Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:5.

3. The five volume Banner of Truth set is a reprint of Charnock’s works from the 1864 James Nichol edition. James M’Cosh (1811–1894), former president of Princeton, asserted in his introduction to the 1864 collection that a memoir was imminent after the death of Charnock, but it never materialized and no evidence exists that a manuscript was produced.

Existence and Attributes of God, a set of discourses that reflect, in Puritan fashion, on theology proper. Equally impressive in terms of breadth and scope are Charnock's treatises on the doctrine of regeneration.

This article will explore Stephen Charnock's doctrine of regeneration and draw out implications for Christian spirituality.⁴ Much of the contemporary discussion concerning regeneration is polemical, arguing for or against a particular *ordo salutis* between the new birth and faith.⁵ While these discussions are important, my more modest approach will assume the traditional Reformed position—regeneration precedes saving faith—and investigate the fruit of the doctrine as it works itself out experientially and practically.⁶

Survey and Summary

The Church Fathers, enmeshed in the Trinitarian and Christological controversies that dominated the early councils, did not treat regeneration as its own locus of theological reflection, and often stumbled when they did articulate the doctrine.⁷ In defense of the Spirit's divinity, for example, Ambrose blurred the line between water baptism and Spirit-wrought regeneration,

James M'Cosh, "Introduction," in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 1:vii.

4. The term *spirituality* is unfortunately laden with ambiguity. Previously, I followed the definition given by Evan Howard where spirituality is "our actual, lived relationship with God through the Spirit of Christ" along with the "formulation of a teaching about the lived reality" and "the formal study of that relationship and those teachings," Evan Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 16. John Gill (1697–1771), however, now best captures my thinking. He wrote in his systematic theology that "doctrine has an influence on practice, especially evangelical doctrine, spiritually understood, affectionately embraced, and powerfully and feelingly experienced," John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, (Paris, Ark.: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1984) 1:34. In light of Gill, my own definition is that Christian spirituality is the integration of beliefs, experiences, and practices that make for a fully realized Christian life.

5. For an overview of recent polemics concerning the *ordo salutis*, see J. V. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517–1700)*, (Bristol, Conn.: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2012), 53–74. For an exhaustive biblical, theological, and historical analysis, see Matthew Barrett's dissertation, *Reclaiming Monergism: The Case for Sovereign Grace in Effectual Calling*, (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011).

6. Here, I am following Joel Beeke and others, who have maintained that real theology is not merely speculative but deeply experiential and practical. Joel R. Beeke and Paul Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2019), 1:125–28.

7. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 515.

as did Chrysostom, Augustine, and others.⁸ Strictly speaking, however, the word translated *regeneration* (παλιγγενεσία: *palingenesia*) is only found in two passages, Matthew 19:28 and Titus 3:5. Of these only the latter deals with regeneration as new birth, as it is considered in this article. The Matthew passage refers to the eschatological recreation of the world, while the Titus passage refers to what is traditionally thought of by regeneration—the beginning of new spiritual life. Considered as new spiritual life, there are a host of other biblical words and images that speak to this same reality. For example, when Jesus stressed the necessity of regeneration to Nicodemus in John 3:3 and stated, “unless one is *born again* (γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν), he cannot see the kingdom of God,” he clearly had in mind new life given by the Spirit (see John 3:6), even if the exact word *regeneration* is not used. Cast in this light, regeneration covers many biblical passages concerning God’s work in bringing new life to a dead soul.⁹

Reformed theologians who abandoned the sacramental system of Rome and rejected baptismal regeneration used the term *regeneration* to cover a range of distinct aspects of the salvation experience, from initial quickening to effectual calling, conversion, and even sanctification.¹⁰ Though they were flexible in their treatment of the doctrine, they were united in affirming the logical and causal priority of regenerating grace.¹¹ It is in Puritan

8. St. Ambrose, “Of The Holy Spirit,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd series*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) 10:144; For Chrysostom and Augustine, see Peter Gorday, ed., *Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 305.

9. To name just a few passages: Ezekiel 36:26; John 1:13, 3:3; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 2:29, 5:1.

10. This is not to say that baptismal regeneration was uniformly rejected by all, but that the prevailing Roman Catholic sacramental system and its concept of baptismal regeneration was rejected. While Catholics and some Anglicans continued to defend baptismal regeneration, Reformed theologians by and large did not. For further treatment on baptism in the Reformed tradition, see J. V. Fesko, *Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010) 79–155. For treatment on the Reformed position concerning regeneration, see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 515–32; Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 3:400–22. For a more ecumenical approach, see Thomas Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1992) 612–22.

11. For example, Antonius Waleus (1673–1639) treated regeneration under repentance as follows: “It is customary to consider this repentance in two ways: either as a spiritual disposition poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, or as an action from us that proceeds from that disposition. In the first way, it is properly speaking and in its strict sense called regeneration; in the second way, it is called repentance.” Polyander, Rivetus, Waleus, Thysius. *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae: Synopsis of a Purer Theology. Latin Text and English*

theology, however, that the experiential and practical dimensions of the doctrine are especially emphasized and thus provide rich resources for Christian spirituality.

The experiential and practical dimension of the doctrine was no less present in the work of Charnock, who was fond of describing regeneration as the infusion of divine life in the soul.¹² Charnock articulated his theology of regeneration in four theological sermons contained in volume 3 of his complete works. The title of each work reflects an area of doctrinal emphasis: *The Necessity of Regeneration*, *The Nature of Regeneration*, *The Efficient of Regeneration*, and *the Instrument of Regeneration*.¹³ While this paper will primarily focus on how Charnock developed his ideas, other Puritan and Reformed voices will help clarify and confirm Charnock's theological reasoning.¹⁴

Translation, ed. Roelf T. Velde and Willem J. van Asselt. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2:277. On this point, he echoes Calvin: "I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God." Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:601 (3.3.9). Of course, by repentance, both Calvin and Waleus mean something much deeper than a mere apology—an entire life of clinging to God.

12. Henry Scougal (1650–1678), though not writing about regeneration per se, expresses a similar sentiment: "I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed than by calling it a divine life." *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Mansfield Centre, Conn.: Martino Publishing, 2010), 30. Cf. Peter Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, ed. Brandon Withrow (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002), 7. Peter Van Mastricht was professor of theology in Utrecht while Charnock traveled the Continent from 1660–1675. We know Charnock spent time in France and Holland during the years he was absent from England and most likely developed his theology on account of his travels and study. Thus, it is unsurprising to find echoes of continental Reformed theologians such as Van Mastricht in his works. See also, Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic) 3:132; M'Cosh, "Introduction," *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, xix; Siekawitch, *Balancing Head and Heart*, 20.

13. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:7–335. As noted above, Charnock published only a single work in his lifetime. James M'Cosh intimates this was in part due to modesty. Charnock's work on God's providence was published the same year he died, his *Existence and Attributes* following the year after. The folio containing Charnock's treatises on regeneration were published in 1683. See M'Cosh's introduction in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 1:xxv–xxvi.

14. While exact citations to outside sources are not as extensive as one would like, many familiar voices show up throughout Charnock's work. He was acquainted with and referenced other Puritans such as Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), John Owen (1616–1683), and Richard Baxter (1615–1691). He cited Dutch theologians such as Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), and continental Reformed figures like Johannes Wollebius (1589–1629), Amandus Polanus (1561–1610) and Francis Turretin (1623–1687). To repeat a point from

The Necessity of Regeneration

Charnock's discourses concerning regeneration start by reflecting on John 3:3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Whereas in a state of depravity the end or terminus of mankind points only at death, by regeneration a soul is now fixed to its original telos in God.¹⁵ Thus, "regeneration in the soul," writes Charnock, "is absolutely necessary to a gospel and glorious state."¹⁶ A relative change—merely altering one's legal status as a sinner—is not enough. The deeper necessity requires "a real change in the subject," a true transformation of the entire soul.¹⁷ Charnock explains the necessity of regeneration in three broad movements. First, there are eight propositions regarding its necessity,¹⁸ followed by two further considerations: regeneration is necessary to gospel privileges,¹⁹ and regeneration is necessary to taste and savor the pleasures of heaven.²⁰ These reasons encompass the whole doctrine of salvation from the fall into depravity to the consummation of future glory.

First, Charnock explains the nature and scope of sinful depravity, which necessitates regeneration as the only remedy.²¹ Our depravity extends not just to guilt but describes a state of being.²² This state of sin affects every facet of the human soul. The mind, will, and affections lie corrupted and

above, after the restoration in 1660, Charnock spent 15 years traveling abroad, spending time in Holland and France while working out his theology. This explains the eclectic nature of his theology as well as justifies the inclusion of thinkers who either directly or indirectly assist in understanding Charnock on regeneration.

15. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:37.

16. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:15.

17. George Swinnock (1627–1673) echoes Charnock here by observing "the whole man" must be transformed. The parallels between Charnock and Swinnock are especially interesting given Swinnock was chaplain at New College, Oxford, when Charnock obtained his fellowship there in 1649. See George Swinnock, *By the Key of Regeneration*, in *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 5:16; Stephen Yuille, *The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock*, (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 30.

18. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:16–26.

19. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:27–47.

20. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:48–56.

21. Charnock's eighth proposition is contentious, according to Mark Jones and Joel Beeke. While they acknowledge Charnock assumes some general idea of regeneration, they submit it is problematic. However, Charnock clearly affirms that the spiritual doctrine of regeneration is wholly unknown to the natural mind, so the point of contention seems slightly overblown. See Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:184–185; cf. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, "The Puritans on Regeneration," in *Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 466–67.

22. Thomas Goodwin considered the import of such depravity when he wrote, "Guilt

skewed from their original design,²³ set upon the flesh and dead in sin.²⁴ The mind—that faculty whereby the soul makes sense of the world—is cockeyed, unable to rightly perceive God or self.²⁵ Instead of rightly perceiving reality, the mind carries a tincture of depravity into every perception.²⁶ The will, as that faculty which seeks to acquire what the mind perceives as good, is driven by corrupt habits ingrained by the fallen nature.²⁷ The affections, closely associated with the will, desire and delight in wickedness, and as such, cannot take pleasure in the offer of the gospel or love the God of the gospel.²⁸ Charnock concludes, “Because there was an universal depravation by the Fall, regeneration must answer it in its extensiveness in every faculty.”²⁹

The final portions cover the necessity of regeneration for this life under the gospel (a “gospel state”) and for life in a state of glory. While here on earth, both the demands and enjoyments of the gospel are inaccessible to those who have not had their nature remade by the power of God. This pertains both to religious duties as well as the enjoyment of spiritual communion with God. Charnock insists, “We must be born again; it is not a dead nature, nor a dead faith, can produce living fruit for God. We may as well read without eyes, walk without legs, act without life, as perform any service to God without a new nature; no, we cannot perform the least; a dead

of sin is one thing (the best are guilty), but a *state* of sin is a further thing.” *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), 6:77.

23. “Our end was actively to glorify God in service of him and obedience to him; but since man is fallen into this universal decay of his faculties, and made unfit to answer this end, there is necessary he should be made over again, and created upon a better foundation, that some principle should be in him to oppose this universal depravation, enlighten his understanding, mollify his heart, and reduce his affections to their due order and object.” Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:17; see also, 3:18, 26.

24. Romans 8:6, Ephesians 2:1, 4; 4:18; Colossians 2:13.

25. Calvin agrees: “Indeed, man’s mind, because of its dullness, cannot hold to the right path, but wanders through various errors and stumbles repeatedly, as it were groping in darkness, until it strays away and finally disappears.” *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.2.12 (270).

26. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:30.

27. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:34. Calvin writes, “The will, because it is inseparable from man’s nature, did not perish, but was so bound to wicked desires that it cannot strive after the right.” *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.2.12 (271).

28. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:40.

29. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:29. Swinnock is also emphatic on this point: “Except he be thoroughly and universally changed; his understanding by illumination, his will by renovation, his affections by sanctification, and his life by reformation, he can never obtain salvation.” *By the Key of Regeneration*, 17.

man can no more move his finger than his whole body.”³⁰ Since for Charnock all action springs from some principle, whether depraved or divine, the unregenerate are incapable of any gospel service, as the principle from which the action springs is corrupt. Neither can the unregenerate enjoy the blessings of the gospel—union and communion with Christ—without regeneration.³¹ Thus, the real beginning of a spiritual life is not found in the means of grace, spiritual disciplines, or religious duties. It begins with the grace of new life. This is the most pressing question Charnock accentuates in his uses for the doctrine, and it presses us to ask as well, Have I been born again?

Lastly, the demands and enjoyments of heaven require regeneration. Our fitness to the atmosphere of heaven and our ability to contemplate, love, and praise God depends on a nature suitable to divine blessedness.³² This new nature is what allows for the delights of eternity. Apart from this work, there would be no capacity to relish infinite holiness. Such blessedness is then “inlaid in the very frame of our souls.”³³ One should then expect a foretaste of these heavenly delights now if there really is life in the soul. If the spiritual taste has no appetite for divine things, it may indicate a lack of new life. Given that regeneration is necessary to all of life as it pertains to God, it follows that a deeper understanding of the nature of the change is in order.

The Nature of Regeneration

To understand the nature of regeneration, Charnock first defines the doctrine before positioning it around several clarifying points. He insists, “Every man in Christ hath a real and mighty change wrought in him, and becomes a new creature,”³⁴ but such a succinct summary begs for elaboration. Charnock obliges:

Regeneration is a mighty and powerful change, wrought in the soul by the efficacious working of the Holy Spirit, wherein a vital principle, a new habit, the law of God, and a divine nature, are put into and framed in the heart, enabling it to act holily and pleasingly to God, and to grow up in external glory... There is a change, a creation, that

30. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:33.

31. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:42–44.

32. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:51–54.

33. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:54.

34. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:86. Calvin writes, “The Spirit so imbues our souls, steeped in his holiness, with both new thoughts and feelings, that they can be rightly considered new.” *Institutes*, 3.3.8 (600).

which is not is brought into a state of being. It is a certain spiritual and supernatural principle, or permanent form, *per modum actus primi*, infused by God, whereby it is made a partaker of the divine nature, and enabled to act for God.³⁵

Since this work of God begins the supernatural life of every person who calls upon Christ as Lord in repentance and faith, Charnock distinguishes it from other aspects of the salvation experience to clarify its meaning.³⁶

1. Regeneration differs from *conversion* as an effect is differentiated from a cause. Conversion is the activity of the soul turning to God, but in regeneration the soul passively receives new life.³⁷

2. Regeneration differs from *justification* since by justification our legal standing is ameliorated, but by regeneration we are “assimilated [and] made like God.”³⁸ Though logically distinct, justification and regeneration are often temporally coextensive. Charnock observes, “The form of one is imputing, the form of the other is infusing.”³⁹ Justification releases from the guilt of sin, while regeneration washes the filth of sin.⁴⁰

35. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:88. Charnock and others often refer to this change as a physical change. By this is not meant that the soul is physical but that the change is deeper and more substantial than mere moral suasion. For example, while Peter Van Mastricht (1630–1706) calls regeneration a physical act that infuses life into the soul, he means only to distinguish the change of regeneration from a mere changing of the mind or affections. For a fuller explanation of how the word physical is used in this sense, see the translator’s note in Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, ed. Brandon Withrow (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002, 13–17. See also, n32 in Beeke, *RST*, 3:406.

36. Van Mastricht writes, “Not that regeneration...is the only thing required unto salvation—since beside this conversion, sanctification, and so on are necessary, in which the power bestowed in regeneration may be drawn forth into actual exercises of faith and repentance—but that all and everyone who is regenerated will also be brought to conversion, sanctification, faith, and repentance, and so to salvation.” *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 7.

37. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:88, 205. Francis Turretin (1623–1687) makes the same point: “Habitual or passive conversion takes place by the infusion of supernatural habits by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, actual or active conversion takes place by the exercise of these good habits by which the acts of faith and repentance are both given by God and elicited from man. Through the former man is renovated and converted by God. Through the latter, man, renovated and converted by God, turns himself to God and performs the acts.” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. (Philipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1994), 2:522.

38. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:89

39. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:90.

40. On this point, Charnock quotes from William Ames without an exact citation. The relevant portion, however, comes from *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.24.4–5.

3. Regeneration also differs from *adoption*. Adoption gives us the privilege of sons, while regeneration gives us the nature of sons.⁴¹ One is an intrinsic change in the nature of the subject and the other, an extrinsic change to the relation between God and the redeemed.

4. Finally, regeneration differs from *sanctification*. Sanctification is the gradual increase of holiness that depends on faith, whereas regeneration does not depend on faith. Regenerating grace must first infuse the soul for the believer to exercise saving faith, but from this implanted grace grows the faith necessary to grow in holiness.⁴²

Charnock curtails misunderstandings of regeneration by indicating what the doctrine does not teach. Specifically, regeneration is not the obliteration of one soul and the creation of a new soul, since “the essence of the soul and faculties remain the same, yet another light is darted in and other qualities implanted.”⁴³ Swinnock writes, “The faculties of [the] soul are not destroyed, but they are refined; the same viol but new tuned.”⁴⁴ Regeneration does not give the soul new powers nor remove affections and inclinations entirely. Neither does regeneration awaken some “gracious principle” lying dormant all along. Constrained by what the doctrine does not teach, Charnock then considers five facets of regeneration that fill out in greater detail what it means for the soul to undergo such change. For considerations of space, I will focus my attention on those portions where Charnock elaborates the most.

First, regeneration is a *real change* in the soul.⁴⁵ Charnock refers to this real change as a universal change in the whole man, reworking the mind, the affections, and the will by an exhaustive grace.⁴⁶ The terms, argues Charnock, used in Scripture to describe this change attest to its reality. It is called a “divine nature,” a “new man,” a “new heart,” a “new creation,” and a “resurrection.”⁴⁷ The reason for such a powerful change is that grace is

41. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:90.

42. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:90. Charnock refers to the progressive nature of sanctification as gradual sanctification, which grows out of infused habits of grace.

43. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:91.

44. Swinnock, *The Key of Regeneration*, 25.

45. This is the longest section in his treatment of the nature of regeneration. One explanation is that the deep and abiding change wrought within the soul frames and explains the other facets to come. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:94–104.

46. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:95.

47. 2 Peter 1:4; Ephesians 4:24; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ezekiel 36:26.

deposited in the very substance of the soul via union with God.⁴⁸ Since the grace of union is established in the soul's substance, no faculty of the soul is exempt from change.

The real change wrought by this transformation has both an internal dimension and an external dimension. Internally, union with God by grace, at times called a "divine infusion,"⁴⁹ changes both the vital principle from which life springs as well as the end, or *telos*, to which life points.⁵⁰ This vital principle is the life of God producing faith, "the first discovery of all spiritual life in us" as well as love—a "true fire.... The desire of the heart is carried out by God; his heart draws near to God, because his sole delight is in God, and his whole desire for Him."⁵¹ Along with this comes a new motivation behind the life and actions of the reborn creature.⁵² Subsequent to a new principle of life, there is now a new orientation of the soul. A previous life that aimed at death through self-love now anchors itself to love for Christ. Charnock writes, "The greatest distinction between a regenerate and natural man is this, self is the end of one, and Christ the end of the other."⁵³ Herein lies the external dimension, when a soul transformed by grace expresses outwardly what God has done inwardly. Charnock observes, "If there be not then new works, there is no new creation, for the chief intention and aim of God cannot be frustrated. Christ formed in a man is not a sleepy and inactive being."⁵⁴ This external dimension lays the ground work of a life devoted to good works.

Considered as *habit*, regeneration implants within the heart "an inward frame, enabling a man to act readily and easily, as when an artificer hath the habit of a trade."⁵⁵ Habit does not denote a repetitious pattern of behav-

48. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:96.

49. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:99.

50. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:98–101. A vital principle simply refers to the source of objects' ability to act as the thing it is. A crude analogy will do. A car's vital principle is gasoline, but there's nothing inherent in the gas itself that makes the car run. A different source of power compatible with a combustion engine could be substituted. The analogy works when one considers that new life in the soul changes the power by which a human soul operates. Goodwin offers eight arguments toward regeneration as a principle of new life in the soul. Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 6:193–201.

51. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:98.

52. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:99–100.

53. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:83.

54. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:104.

55. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:104. Van Mastricht considers regeneration only as a power or principle of action, denying that regeneration in a strict sense can be considered as a habit. The reason is that regeneration merely confers the ability

ior, as its contemporary usage suggests. Instead, Charnock deploys the Aristotelean concept of habit, specifically in a Thomistic key.⁵⁶ Habits are “stable dispositions that develop the power of our faculties and render us capable of performing actions of high quality.”⁵⁷ Thus, as Charnock applies the concept to regeneration, a habit moves the soul “rationally, sweetly, and readily” to attain the spiritual goods presented by the gospel.⁵⁸ The infusion of gracious habits is necessary because, left to himself, a man cannot by the exercise of his will clasp hold of the things of God.⁵⁹ God infuses the soul with a “spirit of love, a spirit of grace, whereby as their understandings are possessed with a knowledge of the excellency of his ways, so their wills are so seasoned by the sweetness of this habit, that they cannot because they will not act contrary thereunto.”⁶⁰ A readiness is placed in the will so that joy and delight issues in response to spiritual goods.⁶¹ This also illustrates the sharp distinction between Aristotle and Charnock. For Aristotle, and perhaps for synergists as well, habits are cultivated by education and training.⁶² For Charnock, the habits we acquire through spiritual rebirth are gifts of grace that cannot be acquired through effort. What is conferred by

to act upon spiritual goods, whereas a habit is the possession of a potentiality to act whether the act is exercised or not. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 26.

56. Given Charnock’s education at Cambridge and his use of Aquinas in his *Existence and Attributes of God*, it is unsurprising that Aristotelean concepts helpfully explain his biblical theology. See Gutiérrez, *The Lord Reigns Supreme*, 24–26. Gutiérrez also points out the five explicit references made to Aristotle in Charnock’s works. Siekawitch covers Aristotle’s influence but a bit more obliquely. *Balancing Head and Heart*, 37–47.

57. Servais Pinkers describes the Thomistic understanding of habit. Servais Pinkers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 225.

58. Michael Horton argues that the idea of infused habits has no place in covenant theology. However, his argument is based on two aspects important to keep in mind. First, Horton places the emphasis on the Word to mediate regeneration. Charnock agrees. Second, Horton sees little conceptual space between effectual calling and regeneration, arguing for a unity between these. Charnock distinguishes these conceptually but allows they might exist coextensively. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 2011), 572–77.

59. Goodwin explains that, contrary to the opinions of Arminians, Catholics, and others who defend so called free will, the infusion of gracious habits is necessary to the initial experience and a life of good works thereafter. *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 6:189.

60. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:106.

61. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:106.

62. For a helpful summary, see the glossary definition of “education” [(1) moral education and habits (ethos)] in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 1985), 395.

grace can be cultivated but not habituated. Practically speaking, this empties us of all boasting and striving to acquire through our own means what must be granted by God alone.

Importantly, Charnock connects the unicity of this habit to the nature of God. He writes, "As the divine essence of God is one, yet contains all perfections eminently... So the grace infused into the heart contains in it virtually all the perfections wherein it may agree with the nature of God's holiness."⁶³ There are parallels between God's simplicity and the simplicity and unity of this infused habit. For Charnock, all the attributes of God are essentially one, but they can be distinguished as they refract through human experience.⁶⁴ Similarly, the infusion of a gracious habit into the soul is also one, though it can be considered differently, as it refracts through the experience of salvation. When this habit expresses itself in the understanding, it refers to the knowledge of God; when considered under the affections, it is called motion to God. And as it refers to the will, is the choice of God above all else. Just as the attributes of God refract through the mind and so appear diverse, though they are unified in the divine nature, so, too, the grace by which God implants new life in the soul germinates and funds all the graces present in the salvation experience.

Given the discussion above, an important question arises. If the grace deposited in the soul is as powerful as explained, why does Christian experience attest to weakness, frailty, and even failure? If my soul has been infused with gracious habits, why does it seem I still wrestle against the old life? Charnock observes that a "life infused with divine activity" experiences grace seminally present but not fully mature.⁶⁵ The most basic form of this new life is a clinging to God in faith and repentance with a subsequent spiritual life that "abounds in its vigor," battling against the old life in pitched spiritual warfare.⁶⁶ In other words, regenerating grace enlivens and empowers a fight against sin; it does not remove the need to fight against sin. Only when we step into eternity will the battle conclude.

This section on the activity of the soul is deeply edifying. A real principle of grace moving in the heart, no matter the current experience of ebb

63. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:107.

64. Charnock affirmed a classic position on divine simplicity, sometimes called Thomistic, and this is the basis for understanding the unity of the gracious principle deposited in regeneration. For more on Charnock's position on simplicity, see Gutierrez, *The Lord Reigns Supreme*, 52–55.

65. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:109, 107.

66. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:110.

and flow, cannot but make progress in the spiritual life. And as Charnock observes, this is independent of any one experience. Especially helpful is what Charnock calls a difficulty to sin. While the soul may not experience universal victory over sin, there is universal hatred for sin since “righteousness and holiness is the very constitution of the new creature.”⁶⁷ Sometimes the best evidence of progress in the spiritual life is hatred for besetting sins and failures.

The Efficient of Regeneration: Part 1

The Efficient of Regeneration receives the greatest emphasis by far, broken into two books spanning 140 pages. The biblical foundation of this section comes from John 1:13, where John observed that anyone born again is born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Charnock sees in this verse twin doctrines, one which denies man the ability to regenerate himself and the other which affirms God as the sole efficient of regeneration. The first doctrine, *Man, in all his capacities, is too weak to produce the work of regeneration in himself*,⁶⁸ unpacks in greater detail the anthropological reasons for which human creatures cannot produce regeneration in themselves. The second doctrine, *God alone is the prime efficient cause of regeneration*,⁶⁹ completes the discourse by emphasizing aspects of the doctrine of God that make regeneration monergistic in nature.

The reader will immediately notice these doctrines interpenetrate—discussing one entails considering the other. As will be seen, though there is an emphasis in each part, both treatises undulate between the doctrine of God and the nature of man. In part 1, after making exegetical comments on John 1:1–13, Charnock focuses his attention on explaining why no creature could ever be the cause of his own regeneration, presenting five propositions to support his claim. Again, I will focus my attention on the more substantial sections.⁷⁰

The first proposition precludes any *preparation* for the grace of regeneration.⁷¹ As creatures who possess rational faculties, mankind is certainly

67. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:109.

68. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:169.

69. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:249.

70. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:166–69, 177. I had initially thought to include Charnock’s discussion on the nature of human freedom, but space constraints preclude his discussion. Nevertheless, categories such as *libertarian freedom* and *compatibilism* seem woefully inadequate.

71. Van Mastricht helpfully distinguishes three kinds of preparation, two of which are

equipped to receive grace, but as illustrated by the word *infusion*, no one can infuse himself. The creature is wholly passive; this is a work of God. Even spiritual activities, though apparently preparatory, are not formally so since there is no meritorious connection between preparations and received grace.⁷² Aside from the fact that humans cannot lay any obligation on God, especially given our fallen nature, there are two important anthropological considerations that make preparation impossible.⁷³

First, to prepare for regenerating grace a person must understand and desire the change. But the mind is buried in corruption and its capacities broken; “the understanding conceives only such thoughts as are pleasing to the law of sin.”⁷⁴ Charnock observes that “though the light of the sun did shine a thousand times brighter than it doth, and strike upon the face and eyelids of a man with the greatest glory, yet if there be a spot upon the apple of his eye, if he wants a seeing faculty, he can apprehend nothing.”⁷⁵ It is not a lack of faculties that restricts human beings from spiritual things, but the inability to morally exercise those faculties.⁷⁶ But just as the mind is darkened to the things of God, so, too, nothing but depraved desires live inside a hardened heart.⁷⁷ There are, then, two mutually informing facets to the

by God, and thus permissible, the other being a work of man, and so denied. If by preparation one means a kind of slowly inching towards the things in God readying for regeneration, Van Mastricht observes, “He must doubtless do it by a previous principle of life, and so must be supposed alive before life is implanted in him.” *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 28.

72. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:178–79. Martin McGeown takes issue with some Puritans on this topic of preparation. The basic idea is that sinners might in some sense dispose themselves to grace by preparing for it. His fundamental disagreement is that Puritan notions of preparation are at odds with biblical theology and the Reformed confessions. Charnock, while defending the use of means of grace, denies preparation of any kind. See Martyn McGeown, “The Notion of Preparatory Grace in the Puritans,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 41, no.1 (2007): 58–84

73. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:184–88.

74. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:170.

75. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:185.

76. Charnock observes that if human beings lacked the proper faculties to obey God’s commands or seek after God, then God would be monstrous in commanding that which was outside human nature. Charnock grants freedom to the human will but denies that any human will exercise that will towards godliness. It is the moral problem. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:171–73. Van Mastricht agrees, writing, “A man who is spiritually dead can hear spiritual truth; he can also, grammatically at least, understand what he hears. He can moreover approve in his judgement, at least speculatively, what he understands; and... have some kind of affection toward what he approves,” but all of these are fruitless without a change in nature. Van Masticht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 11.

77. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:174–78.

problem: the mind fails to grasp the truth of the soul's condition, but even if it did the will is bound to craven lust.⁷⁸ While it might be argued that some do seem to desire grace, these desires never rise above mere wishful thinking, as evidenced by a life of sin thereafter.

The second proposition deals with the *production* of regenerating grace. When Charnock argues that no one can have a hand in producing grace in the soul, he makes this argument around two interlocking links. The first link draws upon the doctrine of God. God's sovereign independence and providence,⁷⁹ wisdom and power,⁸⁰ and foreknowledge and prescience⁸¹ rule out human assistance in grace since "God is the first cause, upon whom man depends in all kinds of actions, much more in supernatural actions."⁸² Charnock makes the further point that if men could cause grace, they would effectively be self-caused creatures, which is impossible. If God's activity and power depended on cooperation, then God's knowledge would be contingent and ever changing, His will to save possibly unfulfilled and frustrated, and His wisdom called into question at making covenant promises that cannot be eternally guaranteed.⁸³ More tragic, the blood of Christ by which the new image is drawn upon the soul would have been spilled for the bare possibility that some believe instead of securing salvation for those whom God intended.⁸⁴

The second link joins the doctrine of God with the doctrine of man. Charnock considers man in a threefold state—as created, as fallen, and as redeemed—to show mankind incapable of producing grace. As no man played a part in initial creation, no man comes to the assistance of God in the act of re-creation. Charnock wryly states, "Man might as well have planted the divine image in his soul at first as restore it after it was lost."⁸⁵ Adam, though created in innocence and perfection, failed to cling to God.

78. Charnock writes, "What is not spiritually discerned cannot be spiritually desired." Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:187; see also, 190.

79. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:188.

80. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:189.

81. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:189.

82. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:188. One of the propositions I did not cover similarly relies on the nature of divine causation. Just as creatures and objects are sustained in being by continual creation, so, too, are the regenerate sustained by a continual supply of grace. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:209.

83. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:188–89, 190–91.

84. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:188, 190.

85. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:195; cf. Swinnock, *The Key of Regeneration*, 20.

How can it be that fallen creatures “with all these fetters [can] of ourselves put ourselves in a better state and act against nature?”⁸⁶ If Adam as created failed, mankind as fallen is worse, since the will of every human after Adam is warped and dead. There exists nothing but corrupt desires that delight in sin and hearts filled with wickedness.⁸⁷

These arguments are more than mere deductions, sufficient as that would be. True theological reflection is, at its heart, experimental. Thus, Charnock’s arguments are testable by experience. Given the enormous struggle against sin common to Christians after regeneration, the suggestion that an unregenerate person might in some sense succeed where Spirit-empowered believers fail is more than a stretch.⁸⁸ Moreover, if the unregenerate merely needed exposure to the truths of the gospel to choose and desire them, why are not more regenerated? Simply put, a deeper and more comprehensive work in the soul is needed.⁸⁹

The first two propositions argued that mankind can neither produce nor prepare for grace. In this third proposition, Charnock argues that neither can human creatures cooperate with grace.⁹⁰ This at first seems to make a problem for conversion. As Charnock acknowledges, God does not repent and believe for people; they must do it themselves. The more fundamental question that Charnock addresses is, *How* can people repent and believe, given their fallen state? Charnock addresses the problem by distinguishing between the power to act and the act itself. We are active *in primo actu* but not *in primo actus*.⁹¹ That is, we actively exercise the power to repent and believe but we passively receive the power to do so from God. In the first

86. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:195.

87. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:196–97.

88. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:200.

89. “Our motion to God must proceed from some higher cause than barely the proposal of the object, and a conviction by it.” Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:200. Cf. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:533–37. This was basically the Socinian and Remonstrance error, that only a presentation of truth was required and by the exercise of reason men might know salvation.

90. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:205–208. This does not, however, mean there is no place for human agency. As Van Mastrich observes, “The Reformed, although they acknowledge a moral agency of God in the external call of the gospel which is previous to regeneration, and though they allow both a physical and moral agency together in conversion which follows regeneration, yet in regeneration strictly so called admit only a mere, absolute, physical agency.” Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 38. “Physical agency” refers to a real and concrete change rather than a mere moral persuasion. See n36 above.

91. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:205.

act of a regenerated soul, there is concurrence between God and the soul, but the diffusion of divine life that grants the power to repent and believe requires no concurrence, any more than the shining of the sun depends on cooperation from the flowers that it causes to grow.⁹² Several arguments support this claim.

First, the state of mankind as fallen precludes any co-working with God.⁹³ Titus 3:3 and Ephesians 2:2–3 clearly indicate that all human activity proceeds from a nature defined by lust, sin, and flesh—we sin by a strange and sad necessity.⁹⁴ Nothing latent in human nature could cooperate with God any more than a stone could cooperate in transforming into flesh. Second, and relatedly, the work of regeneration is the very principle required to cooperate with the work of God. The act of turning to God presupposes the first act of God in turning us to Himself; as Charnock states, “*actus secundus* supposeth *actus primum*.”⁹⁵ Third and fourth, if cooperation preceded regeneration, then God could not be considered the author of grace but a coauthor, thus making whoever worked with God in the creation of a new nature a worthy corecipient of the subsequent glory.⁹⁶ This, however, is impossible, since God does not share His glory with anyone (Isa. 42:8).

The Efficient of Regeneration: Part 2

Charnock reemphasizes in part 2 of the *Efficient of Regeneration* that God acts unilaterally in bringing new life to the soul.⁹⁷ By way of illustration, he reflects upon Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones to emphasize this unilateral activity.⁹⁸ Those bones, lying dead and heaped in a mound, are

92. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:205. John Owen points out that opposition to grace cannot, in fact, be directed to the internal working of God’s power but only to the external presentation of it. Since the work of the Spirit is internal to the soul, souls cannot resist grace. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1852), 3:318.

93. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:206.

94. Quoting Bernard, Calvin writes, “Thus, the soul, in some strange and evil way, under a certain voluntary and wrongly free necessity is at the same time enslaved and free: enslaved because of necessity; free because of the will.” *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.3.5 (296).

95. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:206.

96. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:207.

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

98. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:249–50.

brought to life only by God's breath. Charnock concludes, "Whatsoever, therefore, is holy, good, and spiritual in us, we owe to the new creating grace of God. All graces are his χάρισμα, his free donatives, over and above his common largesses to nature, a present from his infinite liberality."⁹⁹ Two emphases stand out in this section, one theological and one anthropological.¹⁰⁰ I will unpack the theological emphasis in two parts and then address how Charnock thinks about life in the soul anthropologically.

That God is the efficient cause

When Charnock argues that it is necessary for God to be the efficient of regeneration, he does not mean God's work is practically but not essentially indispensable. Charnock's argument aims for *theological necessity*; that is, considering the divine nature, regeneration is not only incoherent but impossible unless God is the efficient cause.¹⁰¹ These arguments grow out of his view of divine causation. First, Charnock repeats a fundamental truth that sustains all reality—God is the first cause of all things. Therefore, regeneration cannot depend causally on creatures any more than creatures can subsist or sustain their own existence. Charnock argues,

To say any creature can move to God, without being moved by God, or live without his influence, is to make the creature independent on God in its operations; and if it be independent in its operations, it would be so consequently in its essence...besides, if it be not created by him, it may subsist without him, it stands in no need of his quickening.¹⁰²

99. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:250.

100. Space constraints prohibit detailing just how much biblical data Charnock wrestles with to form his theology and spirituality of regeneration, but it is important to note he was first a biblical theologian. However, since Charnock spends more time wrestling through issues of theology proper coupled with descriptions of how God works upon the soul, I have passed over his exegetical reflections. As an example, Charnock writes "As it is a *call* out of the world, God is the herald (2 Tim. 1:9); as it is *creation*, God is the creator (Eph. 2:10); as it is a *resurrection*, God is the quickener, (Eph 2:5); as it is a *new birth*, God is the begetter, (1 Peter 1:3); as it is a *new heart*, God is the framer, (Ezk. 36:26); as it is a *law in the heart*, God is the penman, (Jer. 31:33); as it is a *translation* out of Satan's Kingdom, and making us denizens of the Kingdom of Christ, God is the translator, (Col. 1:13); as it is a *coming to Christ*, God is the drawer, (Jn. 6:44); as it is a *turning* to God, God is the attracter." Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:53–54; see 3:249–52.

101. I think the word "necessity" can be used in a loose colloquial way that belies its actual meaning. It seems prudent to clarify that the kind of necessity spoken of is strict.

102. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:254.

Since regeneration is the creation of new life in the soul, a creature cannot be the cause of his own regeneration any more than a creature can be the cause of his own creation. An effect cannot precede its cause. Charnock then conjoins God's causal activity with divine covenant promises. Divine promises are fulfilled only by divine operation. He contends, "It is necessary that his power make good what his goodness hath promised."¹⁰³ When God says, "I will give you a new heart," He bonds Himself to a promise fulfilled exclusively by divine power.

The third theological consideration in this section links God's casual power and promises to divine foreknowledge. For Charnock, divine foreknowledge is independent of both time and creaturely willing.¹⁰⁴ God does not investigate the future to see what will happen or what creatures will do, but intuits all things by a kind of internal gaze.¹⁰⁵ This internal gaze refers to God's exhaustive knowledge of Himself and His will, grounding the knowledge of what will be in the knowledge of what God wills.¹⁰⁶ Thus, when God foresees a future work of grace (Romans 8:29), He foresees what His will has determined.¹⁰⁷ A kind of divine causal chain thus encircles regeneration. God knows and guarantees that which He has determined and promised because He causes and brings to pass the regeneration His people require.

Divine Perfections

In the section outlined above, Charnock discharges theological arguments derived from his understanding of divine causation. This next section unfolds how various divine attributes stand in relation to regeneration.¹⁰⁸ These perfections, reified when spoken of in the abstract, crystalize the attributes in the discrete act of regeneration. What perfections of God are eminent in this work? Several stand out.

103. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:254.

104. Charnock assumes a Boethian position. God's knowledge is direct and intuitive and he does not "look in the future" because He is outside of time, seeing instead all of time in one instant. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 1:352–53, 484.

105. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 1:461–64, 497–98.

106. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:255.

107. "If he did foreknow it, then he willed it, otherwise his foreknowledge depended upon an uncertain cause, and he might have judged that to come to pass which never might; unless the cause be determined by God, it is merely contingent." Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:255.

108. Charnock does not track with his *Existence and Attributes* perfectly, but he does join the doctrine of regeneration to the doctrine of God at a very granular level.

Charnock offers *mercy and goodness* as the first and chief of God's attributes displayed in monergistic regeneration. Some may think justification best manifests this mercy, but Charnock is clear: "There is as much of God in *imparting his nature* as in *imputing the righteousness* of his Son."¹⁰⁹ But this impartation of grace, which is regeneration, transacts in union with Christ. By this union, believers experience God's paternal affection for Christ and drink in His benefits.¹¹⁰ Not only is grace manifest in the creation and the subsequent re-creation of a soul but mercy as well. Mercy means more than mere forgiveness. God could have simply forgiven sin, but Charnock sees regeneration as a superadded grace, more pronounced and profound than forgiveness.¹¹¹

God's *sovereignty* also manifests in this work, since not everyone who hears the Word is transformed. Charnock observes, "Some hear the word, others the Spirit in the word: some feel the striking of the air upon the ear, others the stamp of the Spirit upon their hearts."¹¹² No explanation is given for why God transforms one and not the other. God has given men all they need, every faculty and capacity of body and soul required to fulfill their divine obligations. If a person does not respond, the blame falls not on God. We search in vain for causes ultimately hid from us.¹¹³ Grace is a treasure that God is free to dispense or keep at His good pleasure; it perfectly displays His sovereign love.¹¹⁴

Charnock next anchors regeneration in divine *wisdom*, a wisdom that radiates through every facet of salvation, from the first glimmer of concern displayed for the lost to the glory that redounds as God redeems.¹¹⁵ Such wisdom is revealed in the *nature* of the new birth.¹¹⁶ Human beings are

109. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:266.

110. "He performs the other act of love, which is to assimilate us to himself, and bring us into a state of imitation of him, endowing us with the principles of resemblance to him." Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:264.

111. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:266.

112. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:267.

113. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:268.

114. Charnock articulates a typical Reformed view on the two wills of God. He writes, "For there are two acts of his sovereign will: one whereby he doth command men to do their duty, promises rewards, and threatens punishment, but the subject is to be disposed to do God's will of precept. Here comes the other act of his sovereignty, whereby he wills the disposing such and such hearts to the accepting of his grace, and doth will not to give others that grace, but to leave them to themselves." Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:269.

115. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:270.

116. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:271.

crafted into temples of the living God, the Lord Himself dwelling in hearts prepared for His glory.¹¹⁷ The heart, affections, and habits are now framed and imprinted with a divine cause. The regenerated soul is a special work of the wisdom of God, the “soul of the soul,” as Charnock puts it.¹¹⁸ Not only the nature of the new birth but the *means* declare it to be the fruit of divine wisdom, as it is through the propagation of the gospel that God instills gracious habits.¹¹⁹ The *manner* of it also reveals God’s wisdom. Great wisdom works in the hearts of men, bending them in the direction God desires without working contrary to their nature.¹²⁰ It must be the highest example of divine skill to move us where we would not go, enlighten to us what we would not understand, and make loveable to us the things that we naturally despise. Charnock wraps up reflections on divine wisdom with an *argumentum a fortiori*. If God exercised wisdom in forming creation out of nothing, then *a fortiori* is wisdom revealed in regeneration.¹²¹ Regeneration displays more wisdom than creation, since in regeneration God takes a shattered human soul and reframes it to mirror the divine nature more closely than at its inception.¹²²

The attribute of God’s *holiness* is also seen in this work.¹²³ Charnock observes, “The Spirit is called a spirit of holiness, not only as he is the efficient, but as he is the pattern, and like fire transforms into his own nature; for that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”¹²⁴ The second creation radiates God’s holiness. This holiness reflects God’s nature in much the same way Christ reflected the holiness of God’s nature. But God’s holiness resided in Christ essentially and intrinsically while redeemed men possess this holiness derivatively. Thus, to be renewed in the image of the Son is to

117. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:271.

118. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:271.

119. Van Mastricht observes that the use of external means precludes thinking of regeneration as though God were dealing with inanimate objects. *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 39.

120. “He so tunes the strings that they speak out willingly what naturally they are most unfit for.” Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:270.

121. “[Regeneration] is not a new molding the outward case of the body, but the inward jewel wrapped upon the view of men; the spirit of the mind, which being more excellent, requires more skill for the new forming of it.” Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:271.

122. “The grace in the new birth is nearer the likeness of God than the figure of men in the first birth.” Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:272.

123. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:272.

124. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:273.

mirror in a creaturely way the infinite holiness of God. Charnock calls the holiness that God grants us “the implantation of grace in the heart,” and such holiness is as necessary to the felicity of God’s people as God’s power and mercy.¹²⁵

Lastly, Charnock sets the glory of regeneration within the context of God’s *power*. As no man can open the eyes of the blind, neither does any man have the power to bring understanding to a depraved mind.¹²⁶ After presenting several biblical examples of divine power working on behalf of God’s people, Charnock elucidates two ways in which regeneration displays the power of God. First, Charnock draws out the analogous ways in which divine power is used in creation as well as re-creation.

One word created the world, many words are combined for the preparation of a new heart. It is easier to make a thousand glasses than to set together one that is dashed in pieces. It is easier for God to make a world...and create thousands of men in his image, as bright as Adam’s, than to bring that into form which is so miserably defaced.¹²⁷

Second, Charnock sees in the power working to bring about faith the same power by which Christ defeated the grave.¹²⁸ Specifically, the power indicated in Ephesians 1:19–20 explicitly ties the grace of believing to the power wrought in Christ’s resurrection. Similarly, in passages such as Romans 6:4, the new life given by regeneration is plainly attached to the resurrection of Christ. This has the twin effect of revealing not only the magnitude and power of grace believers have received, but the depths of their spiritual depravity prior to God’s grace, since nothing less than the power of God by which Christ was raised was sufficient for their salvation.

Life in the Soul

How God acts upon the soul monergistically in regeneration is a deep mystery, and while a theological explanation is difficult, it is also necessary. Monergism does not undermine the fundamental nature of human beings as rational and moral agents. As Charnock explains, while the work is unilateral, it is also congruous with the essential nature of mankind. Men and

125. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:273.

126. Charnock draws attention to John 9:23 and 2 Peter 1:3. No one can bring sight to the blind except God, and only by God’s power are all things pertaining to life and godliness given. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:273.

127. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:274.

128. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:276–77.

women are not beasts or rocks, but creatures possessing understanding, will, and affections.¹²⁹

God therefore works by way of spiritual illumination of the understanding, in propounding the creatures happiness by arguments and reasons, and in a way of spiritual impression upon the will, moving it sweetly to the embracing of that happiness, and the means to it which he doth propose; and indeed without this work preceding, the motion of the will could never be regular.¹³⁰

Thus, regeneration is primarily a work upon the mind, the will, and the affections in a way that dignifies instead of undermines humanity as created in the image of God. Charnock first addresses the understanding.

Enlightening the Mind

The first work of regenerating grace is to bring an understanding of the gospel.¹³¹ Charnock writes, "Opening the eyes precedes the conversion from darkness to light... The first appearance of life, when God raiseth the soul, is in the clearness and distinctness of its knowledge of God."¹³² Charnock is fully in line with his contemporaries on emphasizing the mind in regeneration.¹³³ Thomas Goodwin, for example, echoes Charnock on this point, writing that the work of the Spirit is especially pronounced on the mind in regeneration. Just as physical bodies are constituted to perceive physical objects, so the spiritual mind must be formed to understand spiritual things.¹³⁴ George Swinnock agrees and likens this work on the mind to opening the windows of the soul so that light may flood in.¹³⁵ Van Mastricht, like Charnock, observes that when regeneration applies to the faculty of the understanding it is called illumination and effects new

129. "He diffuseth a super natural virtue into the soul, not to thwart it in that course of working he appointed it in the creation, but to move it agreeably to its nature as a rational being." Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:279.

130. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:279.

131. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:280.

132. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:279.

133. As a reminder from above, Charnock was well acquainted with his contemporaries and was fond of quoting from Goodwin. He also quoted Turretin, and years spent in the Netherlands make it very likely he was familiar with Van Mastricht. While exact quotations are not always present, echoes of other Puritan writers are scattered about Charnock's work and references to them can helpfully elucidate and buttress the points Charnock makes. See also M'Cosh, "Introduction," in *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 1:xiii.

134. Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 6:162, 164–66.

135. Swinnock, *The Key of Regeneration*, 27.

spiritual perceptions.¹³⁶ Turretin identifies this as the “first degree of efficacious grace” so that by “infusing his vivifying Spirit...gliding into the inmost recesses of the soul, reforms the mind itself, healing its depraved inclinations and prejudices.”¹³⁷

To strengthen this claim, Charnock points out that the Bible accentuates the “faculty in man appointed to the apprehension of the gospel message.” That is, the gospel is described as knowledge, wisdom, revelation, etc., to emphasize the rational means by which God effects change in the soul.¹³⁸ While the work begins in the mind, it must terminate in the will to effect faith.¹³⁹ The understanding must take in the light of the gospel and diffuse it to the will so that the will is transformed and then embraces what it takes to be good. Charnock then explains how the Spirit works upon the mind in regeneration.

First, the Spirit of God sets the mind in proper order by removing naturally occurring blinders and prejudices.¹⁴⁰ He writes,

Since the mind is filled with fogs, and incapable to perceive the splendor of divine truths, God acts upon the mind by an inward virtue, causing the word proposed to be mixed with an act of faith, which he begets in the soul, whereby it apprehends the excellency of that state presented to it in the gospel.¹⁴¹

136. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 22; cf. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:279.

137. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:523. Charnock will make the same point on removing prejudices as well.

138. “It is called *knowledge* (2 Peter 1:2), *wisdom* (1 Cor 1:30); it is called *sight* that comes before believing (John 6:40); it is called *revelation* (Gal. 1:16) opening the heart (Eph. 1:18); comprehending (Eph 3:18).” Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:280.

139. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:280. Writing nearly 75 years after Charnock, Jonathan Edwards acknowledges the same: “Gracious affections do arise from the mind’s being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand and apprehend divine things.” Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 266.

140. Swinnock writes that, before regeneration, sin stood before our minds like a “strumpet dressed in her attire of pleasure and profit,” but was stripped naked and shown for the evil and ugly truth that it was—spiritual disease and disgrace. Swinnock, *The Key of Regeneration*, 28.

141. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:281.

The faculties of the mind, as John Owen also observed, are given grace such that the natural faculties “understand savingly.”¹⁴²

Second, the Spirit brings the perceptive powers of the mind in contact with the external object of the gospel. Just as a blind man whose sight is restored now has his faculty of sight brought to bear upon external objects, so the mind of a man spiritually enlightened naturally comes to bear upon the gospel.¹⁴³

Third, the mind must not only see and understand, but must maintain contact. The Spirit suspends the object in the mind, fixing it so it does not blow this way or that, but stays to do its work. The Spirit does this work through the Word: “And it is called the ingrafted word, fastened to the soul as a graft to the stock; when the heart is opened by the Spirit, the word is inserted in and bound to it, and at last the heart becomes one with the word, and grows up with it.”¹⁴⁴

Fourth, the mind is convinced upon the evidence.¹⁴⁵ God does not save absent human reason, but “the Spirit excites that reason he hath enlightened to judge of those excellent things he doth propose, and the strength of the arguments he backs them with, which are so clear and undeniable that they cannot be refused by the mind.”¹⁴⁶ The will cannot be made to choose that which is repugnant to the mind. After regeneration, the good things of the gospel are sweetly presented and rightly understood.¹⁴⁷

Sweetly Inclining the Will

The work God does in the mind must also be accomplished in the will and the affections.¹⁴⁸ Charnock writes, “The will is inclined, as well as the

142. Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 3:331.

143. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:281.

144. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:282.

145. Van Mastricht notes that regeneration works upon the simple understanding and also affects the judgment, so that the truths of the gospel become more than generally true in the abstract but personally true and “profitable for them at this very time.” *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 23.

146. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:283.

147. Edwards rightly points out the distinction between knowing things notionally and speculatively, and knowing them with a sense of sweetness, love, and by a sense of the heart. *Religious Affections*, 272.

148. While Charnock affirms a typical Puritan faculty psychology of understanding, will, and affections, the will and affections are treated under one heading. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:284. Cf. “For the Holy Ghost implants in the heart or will by regeneration a new inclination or propensity toward spiritual good.” Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 23.

understanding enlightened, whereby spiritual things are approved with a spiritual affection; the same hand that darts light into the mind, puts heat into the will."¹⁴⁹ Charnock offers four interlocking propositions to further clarify this work of God upon the will.

First, there is an immediate supernatural work of God upon the will so that the gospel is embraced,

not that the understanding only is enlightened, and the will follows the dictate of that without any further touch of the Spirit upon it; but the will, as it is a will, and therefore cannot be forced, there is need of a moral cause which may determine it according to its nature, and draw it by the cords of a man.¹⁵⁰

The work of God upon the will is not coercive or by external compulsion. As Turretin helpfully points out, "The Spirit does not force the will and carry it unwillingly to conversion, but glides most sweetly into the soul."¹⁵¹ Instead of coercion, God draws "by the cords of a man," which is to say that God works upon the soul in harmony with the faculties with which He created it.

Charnock sees the various biblical terms used to describe the internal work of God on the soul as evidence that regeneration is not merely intellectual persuasion but conversion of the will and affections as well.¹⁵² He writes, "If faith be principally in the will, as I think it is, as to consent; and the words *leaning, resting, coming* rather note an act of the will than an act of the understanding; there is then an operation of God upon the subject, viz. the will, in implanting it."¹⁵³ The reason is that the will and affections are as diseased as the mind. In fact, mere understanding is not the heart of the problem. As Charnock reads Scripture, the deeper issue is a hatred and aversion to righteousness, which is a problem principally of the affections and will:

149. "As the power of God raiseth every part of Christ, so the same power raiseth every faculty of the soul." Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:283. Cf. Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 24–25.

150. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:284.

151. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:524.

152. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:284. Van Mastricht carefully distinguishes more layers to which regeneration applies than Charnock. For Charnock, the work of regeneration works upon the will and the affections but these are addressed at the same time, whereas in Van Mastricht there is a further category, "regeneration in the inferior faculties," that is addressed.

153. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:285.

There is no less power requisite to make us spiritually willing than to make us spiritually knowing, since the corrupt habits in our wills are rather stronger than the prejudices in our understandings; therefore there seems to be a distinct act in removing the resistance from the one as well as the expelling the darkness from the other.¹⁵⁴

Regeneration rehabilitates the will and not only expels habits and affections that shrink from God but sweetly moves the soul toward that which is holy.

Second, though this is an immediate work of the Spirit, it is neither compulsive nor by force.¹⁵⁵ Forcing assent would be contrary to what it means to have a will. Charnock argues, "It is not forced because it is according to reason, and the natural motion of the creature; the understanding proposing, and the will moved to an embracing; the understanding going before with light, the will following after with love."¹⁵⁶ The will is a rational faculty, and as such can only be moved upon rationally.¹⁵⁷ Reformed theology is often mischaracterized on this point, that somehow God is forcing Himself on people. But as Charnock points out, "Since the main work consists in faith and love, it is impossible there can be any force; no man can be forced to believe against his reason, or love against his will, or desire against his inclination."¹⁵⁸ Regeneration is a transformation of the inclinations.

Third, the emphasis of God's work on the will is not described in terms of power but love. By emphasizing love over power, Charnock does not mean God acts without power per se but without coercive or oppressive power. God is love and as such pours power through the prism of love to draw sinners sweetly, pleasantly, and irresistibly. God's infinite love "is not an extrinsic force, but intrinsic and pleasant to the will; he bends the creature so, that at the very instant wherein the will is savingly wrought upon,

154. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:285; cf. Swinnock, *The Key of Regeneration*, 33.

155. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:286.

156. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:286–87.

157. Like Charnock, because this inducing work of the Spirit is cast through the rational faculties, Edwards and the Reformed tradition behind him sees this as a work commensurate with what it means to have a will, instead of violating the will's freedom, as so often is the charge. Edwards writes, "As to the gracious leading of the Spirit, it consists in two things; partly in instructing a person in his duty by the Spirit, and partly in powerfully inducing him to comply with that instruction." *Religious Affections*, 282.

158. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:287.

it delightfully consents to its own happiness." This work is "sweet and alluring... it is a sweet efficacy, and an efficacious sweetness."¹⁵⁹

Finally, as intimated above, this work is "insuperably victorious."¹⁶⁰ Or as Turretin explains, God is a "delightful conqueror."¹⁶¹ There is a necessity that draws the soul, not by compulsion but by divine immutability. God wins over the mind, affections, and will every time. God secures His promise and preserves the liberty of the will not by leaving the will in a state of indifference but through accomplishing His intended purpose. Questions about liberty and the irresistibility of grace are important, but the more important question presses such considerations through the lens of divine power instead of human ability—Is God powerful enough to overcome depravity?¹⁶² For Charnock and the Reformed tradition in which he stands, the answer is yes.¹⁶³ God's impress on the will "is not a faint and languishing impression, but a reviving, sprightly, and victorious touch."¹⁶⁴ If God were the author of faith by placing the will in a state of indifference, why is He not also called the author of unbelief, since either belief or unbelief result from this state of indifference? But God's motion in carrying us into belief does not leave us in indifference, nor does it destroy liberty.

I would like to make an observation before unpacking the last section of this paper. Charnock defends an order to regeneration that begins in the mind and then transforms the will before finally reorienting the affections. He suspects that any spiritual work that seems to begin with the affections without first enlightening the mind is likely to be transient at best.¹⁶⁵ This dovetails nicely into the section that follows on the role of Scripture in regeneration but sits at odds with contemporary methods of spirituality that hyperfocus on experiences, feelings, and practices to the exclusion of a mind transformed by right beliefs. If Christian spirituality is the confluence of beliefs, experiences, and practices that make for a fully realized Christian life—as I think it is—then the degree to which one or more of these

159. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:287; cf. Hosea 2:14; John 16:13.

160. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:288.

161. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:524.

162. Turretin calls God's regenerating grace "powerful that it may not be frustrated; sweet that it may not be forced. Its power is supreme and inexpugnable, that the corruption of nature may be conquered." *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:525.

163. "By the spiritual life instantaneously produced, all inclinations or desire of resisting are suppressed or taken away." Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 29.

164. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:288.

165. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:288–89.

elements is ignored or overly emphasized will be the degree to which some expression of spirituality is deficient. If, as argued above, the mind is where the work begins, then Christian spirituality ought to first focus on having right beliefs before looking at the experiences and practices of the faith.

The Instrument of Regeneration

In this final section, I will look at how Charnock articulates the gospel's role in begetting new life in the soul. The burden is to explain the mechanism behind the Spirit's work in regeneration.¹⁶⁶ This section thus pairs with what has been discussed by explaining how God works in concert with human faculties. Charnock appeals to James 1:18 as the basis for his doctrine, "that the gospel is the instrument whereby God brings the soul forth in a new birth."¹⁶⁷ This verse states that "of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." While Charnock observes that God is the efficient cause of regeneration, the Word is the instrumental cause. This distinction between the efficient cause and the instrumental cause is embedded, for Charnock, in the Greek prepositions that distinguish being born *of* the Spirit (ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος, John 3:5) or *of* God (ἐκ θεοῦ, John 1:13) and being born *through* or *by* the Word (διὰ λόγου, 1 Peter 1:23).¹⁶⁸

The Instrument of the Spirit

Charnock offers several propositions to further clarify the gospel's instrumentality. The first proposition denies that the law represented in the Old Covenant is this kind of instrument.¹⁶⁹ While in one sense the Law of God as it pertains to Scripture most generally revives the soul (Ps. 19:7), Charnock has in mind the more narrow conception of law as representative of the covenant of works.¹⁷⁰ The law forms the basis of works righteousness demanded by God and as such cannot renew the soul but only incites the

166. Swinnoek, too, coordinates the Spirit's work in regeneration by the means of the Word. *By the Key of Regeneration*, 21.

167. Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:309.

168. Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:309. Charnock is exegetically nuanced on this point for good reason. See Murray Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Resource for Exegesis*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 70–71, 105.

169. Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:309–10.

170. Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:310.

flesh.¹⁷¹ The law may be useful for breaking open a hard heart but lacks the power to mend the subsequent spiritual brokenness.¹⁷²

The second proposition affirms the power of the gospel to do what the law cannot—bring life to the soul. Charnock contends, “[The gospel] is the instrument to unlock the prison doors and take them off the hinges; strike off the fetters, and draw out the soul to a glorious liberty.”¹⁷³ Importantly, the gospel’s effectiveness is not natural to it, as if it contained inherent power absent the Spirit of God. The gospel’s working is supernatural and dependent upon the Spirit; otherwise, people would be converted simply by hearing the message, essentially reducing the gospel to intellectualism.¹⁷⁴ The smartest and brightest would see the truth of the gospel and believe. Of course, God could simply regenerate people by the exercise of sheer power, but the gospel is the normal means by which God brings life. Romans 1:16 states that the gospel is God’s power to save, and this saving power works through the rational faculties of the soul when a person believes. Hearing the words of the gospel precedes believing and is thus the ordinary means whereby the Spirit glides into the heart of the lost.¹⁷⁵

Charnock next pivots to explaining in anthropological terms why the gospel is the instrument of new life. That is, human creatures possess the faculties of understanding, will, and affections so that the work God does in the soul passes through these same channels.¹⁷⁶ God engages means and secondary causes because this is the divine structure of creation. More specifically, all rational action, spiritual or otherwise, proceeds from some work in the mind as objects are proposed via the senses. Every person possesses these faculties, and so this is how God reaches through our misery to accomplish salvation. While the work of the Spirit and the Word is

171. Romans 6–7; Galatians 3.

172. He writes, “I might have preached...the works of the law till my lungs had been worn out, and the renewing Spirit would have never entered you by that fire, but it descended upon you in the sweet gospel dew.” Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:310.

173. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:310.

174. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:311. This is the Pelagian/Socinian/Remonstrance error, that by merely presenting the contents of the gospel to dead sinners, this will in some way effect regenerating change.

175. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:310.

176. He writes, “According to the method God hath set of men’s actions, it is necessary that this regeneration should be by some word as an instrument, for God hath given understanding and will to man.” Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:312.

supernatural and unique, that a person must have an object proposed to their mind in order to understand, believe, or love is common to all.

Now we believe things as we conceive them true, or not believe them as we conceive them false. We love, desire, delight in things, as we conceive them honest or profitable; we hate, we refuse, or grieve, as we conceive them dishonest, or troublesome, or hurtful to us; whatever we are changed by in our understandings, wills, and affections, is represented to us under some of these considerations.¹⁷⁷

Charnock rightly notices that regeneration absent the faculties of the soul would provide a man or woman with little explanation for the reorientation and transformation perceived in the understanding, will, and affections. But since the gospel pours through the mind into the affections and will with content aimed at knowing Christ, the revelation by necessity attaches the heart and mind to the Lord. Thus, stress is laid on the intellectual content of the gospel even if the form that content takes may vary. Put differently, whether read directly from the Scriptures or simply relayed through personal testimony, the gospel's content is embedded in the message and so pierces the hearts of depraved sinners to bring new life.

But the necessity of the Word is not limited to new birth alone. The whole of the Christian life unfolds by the ever-present ministration of the Spirit through the Word.¹⁷⁸ When God shows forth His glory for a change in the human soul, this passes through the "glass of the gospel."¹⁷⁹ The Holy Spirit quickens to faith, comforts with promises, and startles out of complacency and sin, all through the proclamation of the Word. The Word gives strength to continue living by faith, and empowers the faith given by grace.

Importantly, Charnock describes this life in grace by the Word in deeply Trinitarian language. God pours forth grace by the mediation of His Son, who directs and perfects this grace by the efficiency of the Spirit instrumentally through the Word.¹⁸⁰ This is a supernatural work of God in the soul, one that Charnock anchors in the centrality of the cross. That is, the Word is effective on account of the "bleeding wounds and dying groans of Christ."¹⁸¹ What stands out, then, is that the doctrine of regeneration is not tertiary to considerations of the Trinity, Holy Scripture, or the doctrine

177. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:313.

178. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:315.

179. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:315; see 2 Cor. 3:18.

180. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:315.

181. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:317.

of the atonement. Charnock points out that the entire body of doctrine overlaps in our beliefs, experiences, and practices.

Touching the Soul

The question naturally arising at this point is, “*How doth the Word work?*”¹⁸² That is, how does the Spirit enact such changes in the soul by His Word? As outlined earlier, the Word works objectively in the soul by the soul’s faculties, first in the understanding. Charnock refers to this as the objective presentation of the Word. The Word is an object external to the soul that proposes what the Spirit empowers the soul to see. Here the tandem work of the Spirit and Word becomes clearer.¹⁸³ The Spirit opens the eyes of those spiritually blind, and the Word is the object that newly-restored eyes perceive. In the order of logic, regeneration comes first, even if temporally the new birth is contemporaneous with faith and conversion. The same Word that brings life to the soul is the Word the soul perceives on account of new life. This Word transforms the soul via the faculties, in harmony with the function of those faculties. Charnock identifies the work of the Word unique to each aspect of the soul: “The word is proposed under various notions: as *true*, and so it is the object of the speculative understanding; as *good*, so it is the object of the practical understanding the will; as *profitable*, so it is the object of the appetite and the affections.”¹⁸⁴

The Spirit touches the soul, as it were, and draws the heart into believing through the Word of God, first by exposing the filth of sin and second by declaring the only remedy.¹⁸⁵ Charnock writes, “When the Word like fire and the heart like tinder come close together, the heart catcheth the spark and burns.”¹⁸⁶ If in the first place the Word works objectively via the understanding, Charnock also sees the Word working internally upon the will. Admittedly, it is hard to conceive how this Word works upon the will, but Charnock offers several biblical images to assist in understanding. The Word is a seed that contains within it all the powers of substantial change. The Word is a sword that cuts to the core of a person’s soul. The Word is a

182. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:317.

183. Turretin sees in physical generation an analogy that helpfully explains the duality of Word and Spirit in regeneration. Just as the seed must enter a womb that is suited to carry life, so, too, the Word must enter a heart prepared by the Spirit. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:533.

184. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:317–18.

185. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:318.

186. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:318.

“glass” by which the image of God is reflected and causes change.¹⁸⁷ These various biblical images point out an internal working of the Word in the soul. Charnock explains,

The word is the glory of God in a glass, and imprints the image of the glory of God in the heart. It is a softening word, and produceth a molified heart; an enlightening word, and causes an enlightened soul; a divine word, and engenders a divine nature; it is a spiritual word, and produceth a spiritual frame; as it is God’s will, it subdues our will; it is a sanctifying truth, and so makes a sink of sin to become a habitation of Christ.¹⁸⁸

Practically speaking, the Word thus takes a central role in regeneration, from preaching to teaching to personal Bible reading, because this is the external means whereby God effectuates spiritual transformation.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to explore Stephen Charnock’s doctrine of regeneration for the sake of Christian spirituality. Given that I have defined Christian spirituality as the conjunction of beliefs, experiences, and practices that together make a fully realized Christian life, regeneration contributes to spirituality in at least the following ways. First, as Charnock consistently emphasizes, the most important aspect of Christian spirituality is not *what we do* but *who we are*. That is, the spiritual life begins by being born of the Spirit. Spirituality that ignores or deemphasizes this reality is little more than moral formation mixed with religious traditions. Second, this fundamental truth experientially funds the affective dimension of Charnock’s practical uses. Our inner states witness either for or against the reality of infused life. From Augustine to Luther, Wesley, and many others, the work of regeneration has a deeply experiential character. But the inner reality has an external dimension as well. No less is the holiness that God implants inside the heart evident in the practice of life. Admittedly, external religious actions determine nothing and contribute nothing to the Spirit’s work in rebirth. And a life of holiness is more accurately discerned by examining progress rather than any particular moment. That said, while Christ invites us to come as we are, He also requires that we go and sin no more. If regeneration really is the infusion of divine life, as Charnock argues, it is hard

187. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:319.

188. Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:319.

to see how that life could not help being expressed in daily living. Finally, the most publicly available dimension of regeneration revolves around the Word of God, which is to say, God works in the hearts of His people, transforms them from death to life, and causes them to grow in a life of grace all through the Word of God. From preaching to personal Bible intake, God's Word is central to the spiritual life, and any serious attempt at maximizing that life must focus on the Word.