

CHAPTER TEN: EFFECTUAL CALLING

The Nature of Effectual Calling

1. *At a time appointed and acceptable to God, those whom God has predestinated to life are effectually called by His Word and Spirit out of a state of death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. Their minds are given spiritual enlightenment and, as those who are being saved, they begin to understand the things of God. God takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh. He renews their will, and by His almighty power He sets them to seek and follow that which is good, at the same time effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ. And to all these changes they come most freely, for they are made willing by divine grace.*

(a) **Who** are called? “Those whom God has predestinated to life” (Romans 8:30). This calling is the first thing God does in the life of any individual He has purposed to save. Only those whom He has predestinated are called – this is part of God’s eternal purpose in their lives (so Romans 8:28). See Chapter 3 on God’s Decree.

(b) **When** are they called? “At a time appointed by and acceptable to God”. We have already seen that salvation depends on the will of God, not the will of man (Chapter 9). So God calls His chosen ones when He wants to do so (so Paul, Galatians 1:15).

(c) **How** are they called? “Effectually ... by His Word and Spirit”. ‘Calling’ is a common word in the New Testament to describe what God does in salvation. There is a General Call which can be and is refused (Matthew 20:16, 22:14). There is also a special or Effectual Call which is always received. It is like a summons to appear in court, which is obeyed because of the serious consequences of not doing so. God calls “by His Word” whether it is preached or read or just called to mind (2 Thessalonians 2:14). But the Word only has power “by ... (the) Spirit”. As an illustration, think of Lazarus whom Jesus called to come out of the tomb; it was only effectual because he was given life-giving power to obey. The Spirit gives life to enable a dead sinner heed the call.

(d) **What is involved** in calling? Note the following things that are part of the life that the Spirit gives, what we usually refer to as regeneration or the new birth.

1. The *mind* is enlightened so that the things of God are begun to be understood (1 Corinthians 2:11-16, Ephesians 1:17-19, 4:17-21, 1 John 2:20-27). When you became a Christian you began to really appreciate the Scriptures, because they began to be meaningful to you.
2. The *heart* is changed from “stone” to “flesh” so that there is now a new desire for the things of God. This involves the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the guarantee that the life will now be totally changed (see Ezekiel 36:25-27, John 3:5-6). Stone is hard and cold; flesh is pliable and warm, a symbol of a heart that is now responsive to the things of God.
3. The *will* is renewed so that it makes a deliberate choice of the things of God. Therefore, the very first thing that the sinner does, when he is effectually called, is to come to Jesus Christ = to believe. If the mind understands and the heart delights in what is understood, the will most certainly chooses to follow. In this sense there is no such thing as ‘free-will’, as the will carries out the thoughts of the mind and the desires of the heart, and is not independent. It is therefore sure that all who are truly born again will seek to lead godly lives (Ezekiel 36:27, 1 John 3:9)

God Alone is Active in Effectual Calling

2. *God's effectual call is the outcome of His free and special grace alone. Until a man is given life, and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is dead in sins and trespasses, so is entirely passive in this work of salvation, a work that does not proceed from anything good foreseen in him, nor from any power or agency resident in him. The power that enables him to answer God's call and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it, is no less than that which effected the resurrection of Christ from the dead.*

(a) God's "free and special **grace**" is the only reason why anyone is effectually called (Galatians 1:15, 2 Timothy 1:9). This is because all men are "dead in sins and trespasses" and are totally unworthy of any blessing from God.

(b) It is only by God's **power** that any sinner can respond to God's call. Like Lazarus, we are dead and so unable to respond. We must first be made alive. God uses the same power by which He raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20).

(c) The sinner is "entirely **passive**", because we have neither done anything good to deserve God's blessing, nor do we have any power to hear or respond to God's call. It is so important to understand that the sinner has no hope in himself. While he must be called upon to believe he is unable to believe. We must point the sinner to Christ and to Him alone (John 6:41-44).

Problems Concerning Effectual Calling

3. *Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when and where and how He pleases. The same is true of all elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called through the preaching of the gospel.*

4. *Men who are not elected, even though they may be called upon to embrace salvation by the preachers of the gospel, and may be subjects of some common operations of the Spirit, cannot be saved, because they are not effectually drawn to Christ by the Father, for which reason they neither can, nor will, truly come to Him. Much less can men who do not receive the Christian religion be saved, no matter how diligent they are to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the teachings of the religion they follow.*

(a) Those who **die in infancy**. The Confession states that if there are those who are "elect" they will be saved even though they cannot be called through the Word. This is a subject about which there is no clear revelation in the Bible. It is just as false to say that no infants will be saved, as to say that all infants will be saved. The Lord knows and He will do what is right. There is no example in the Bible of a dead infant of whom it was declared that it was saved. 2 Samuel 12:23 only refers to the state of the dead and not to salvation.

(b) Those who are **incapable of understanding the Word**, especially the mentally ill. If they must be called through the Word in order to be saved, then there is no hope for such. The Confession again states that if there are those who are elect they will be "regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit" directly.

(c) Those who hear the Word but **are not elect**. Multitudes throughout the world hear the gospel but are never saved, and die as unbelievers. This is because they were never elect and so never experienced the powerful call of God in their lives through the Word, without which no one can come to Christ. This is hard teaching but it must be true if sinners have no power in themselves to respond to the call.

(d) Those who **never hear the Word**. There are also multitudes who never hear of Christ, and so who can never be called through the Word. Because Christ is the only way of salvation they cannot be saved (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). This is why Christ commanded us to take the gospel to all men (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15) for without such evangelism there is no hope for the lost. What they learn about God through creation can never save them (see Romans 1:19-20, and Chapter 1).