

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE 6

Irresistible Grace or Effectual Calling

WHO CHOOSES TO BE SAVED ?

Definition

God's call is a summons in grace by the preaching of the Gospel to believe in Christ. It is a sovereign act of God to impart power by the Holy Spirit to draw those who are elect and enable them to believe and repent effectually. It actuates in time that which is part of his plan and purpose for us from eternity to be in Christ (Rm 8:28-9; 2 Tim 1:9).

God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago.
(2 Tim 1:9)

The origin of this call is God the Father: Rm 8:28-30; Gal 1:15; Eph 1:17-18; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Tim 1:8-9. There are two calls or two aspects to the calling of God.

1. External and General Call

- This is the call of the Gospel to everyone to repent and believe.
- Comes from the Holy Spirit via ministers of the Gospel.
- Is resisted by men:
 - I will destine you for the sword ... because when I called you did not answer, when I spoke you did not listen but you did what was evil.* (Isa 65:12)
 - You always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did.* (Acts 7:51)
 - I have called and you refused to listen.* (Prov 1:24)
 - Many are called but few are chosen.* (Mt 22:14)
- Example of external call:
 - Come to me, all who labour.* (Mt 11:28)
 - Preach the Gospel to the whole creation.* (Mk 16:15)

N.B.

Even some Reformed preachers, like many others, suggest that this call is *well meant*, or a *sincere offer*. They base this on scriptures like Ezek 18:23, 33:11; Mt 23:37 etc). More consistent scholars (including Calvin) explain that:

- first the Gospel is not an offer, the apostles issued commands to believe or repent.
- Secondly, God cannot possibly offer life to someone whom he has decreed is reprobated. It would be callous, not to mention lying, to promise life to someone God knows can never obtain it.
- The Gospel must be proclaimed in Biblical terms only. We looked at this in the previous study.

2. Internal and Effectual Call

- The Holy Spirit powerfully applies the external call as an inward call.
- This is an internal grace which renders the call effective.
- It always produces repentance and faith by opening the heart and giving ability.
- It is a powerful operation of the Holy Spirit to apply the word to the heart and involves moral persuasion. He gives insight to the understanding and influences the will so that the sinner turns to God.
- The Holy Spirit convinces of sin, enlightens about Christ, renews our wills and persuades us to accept Jesus.
- God does not provide a work of salvation for us to take for ourselves (i.e. Arminianism), he applies it to our souls (i.e. Calvinism): '*Salvation is of the Lord*', (Jonah 2:9). We do make a choice, we are responsible, but the ability and the motivation to make that choice derives solely from God's grace.
- Compare Gen 1 (Creation): a word of divine power whereby God calls into being things that do not exist (cf Rm 4:17 God gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.) The act of creation is a picture of the new creation (regeneration) in salvation.

Scriptures

- *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and him who comes to me I will not cast out.* (Jn 6:37)
- *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.* (Jn 6:44)
- *No one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father.* (Jn 6:65)
- *The sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name.* (Jn 10:3)
- *For the promise is to ... everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.* (Acts 2:39)
- *As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.* (Acts 13:48; note that this follows the external call in v47.)
- *The Lord opened her (Lydia) heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.* (Acts 16:14)
- *The gifts and call of God are irrevocable.* (Rm 11:29)
- *Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.* (Rm 8:30 also v28) See Rm 9:14-18
- *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son.* (1 Cor 1:9)
- *We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called ... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* (1 Cor 1:23-24, see also 2:14)
- *(God) who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose.* (2 Tim 1:9)
- *But you are a chosen race a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. That you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.* (1 Pt 2:9, see 2 Pt 1:10)

The Plan of Salvation

We have noted before that different persons in the Godhead have different responsibilities in salvation. Effectual calling is the action of the Holy Spirit ie it is accomplished in time by him, the origin is the Father because he elected the people to be called.

FATHER (*Election*) ꝓ **SON** (*Redemption*) ꝓ **HOLY SPIRIT** (*Effectual Calling*)

The order of salvation (*Ordo Salutis*)

There are differing opinions on this and always have been. The benefits of this study can be pressed too far and certainly should not be a cause of division. However, it does help us to grasp the plan of salvation if we can identify the components and put them into some order just as a doctor examines the physiology and operations of a human body, even though he doesn't understand them all. His knowledge of how it fits together helps him to treat people.

Example 1

- 1 Effectual Call
 - 2 Regeneration
 - 3 Conversion (ie faith & repentance) based upon Rm 8:29-30
- Held by John Murray, AA Hodge

Example 2

- 1 External Call
 - 2 Regeneration
 - 3 Effectual Call
 - 4 Conversion
- Held by J.L Dagg, Louis Berkhof

Example 3

- 1 Regeneration
 - 2 Calling
 - 3 Faith
 - 4 Conversion
 - 5 Justification
 - 6 Sanctification
 - 7 Preservation
 - 8 Glorification
- Held by Herman Hoeksema

In practical terms, regeneration, effectual call and conversion all coincide. In children, the seed of regeneration can be received before the age of reason, ie before they hear the external call in their consciousness.

Words used in the Bible

Kaleo - call

Klesis - call, invitation

Kletos - called, invited

Epikaleomai - call, appeal to

Proskaleomai - summon

Paul uses *Kaleo* 29x, *Klesis* 8x, *Kletos* 7x, almost always with the sense of divine calling. He does not use *Proskaleomai* (except in the pastorals; it is also in Hebrews and 1 & 2 Peter).

Note that the church is *Ekklesia*, a body of people called out, called together.

Effectual Calling results in

- Fellowship with Christ 1 Cor 1:9 (Union with Christ)
- Blessing 1 Pt 3:9
- Liberty Gal 5:13
- Peace 1 Cor 7:15
- Eternal life 1 Tim 6:12
- Participation in God's kingdom and glory 1 Thess 2:12
- Following Christ in suffering 1 Pt 2:21
- Winning the prize Phil 3:14
- Holiness 1 Thess 4:17

ie a distinctive NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Objections

1. Is it not unjust for God to pick some to be saved and call them only?

This really is a question about election which we have already covered, however:

- On the basis of justice we all deserve hell
- Mercy is the province of God, since it is mercy - it must be based upon his sovereign choice. We have no prior claim on God's mercy.
- Hell is for people who refuse to repent (Rm 3:10-20)
- People are saved by grace but condemned by justice, Election is gracious.
- Man is responsible to God but is not capable of pleasing him, just as a bankrupt can't pay his debts but is still responsible.
- Rejection of the Gospel is always ascribed to human refusal to believe.

2. Is God's general call sincere since the sinner is unable to obey?

- Inability is moral, the call itself is a motive to obey but sinners refuse to obey.
- It is no more insincere than God's command to love him with all your heart.
- If it is proper to publish the commands of the law, it is also the same for the Gospel.
- You can still give an invitation sincerely even if you know that it will be refused. Some

theologians split the offer of the Gospel into God's desire for all men to be saved as his revealed will, but his purpose to save some only as his secret will. This is inconsistent. To start with it is not a secret that God only purposes some to be saved. The Bible makes this clear for all to see. A better analysis is that God commands all men to believe and repent which is his prescriptive will, his will of command; but elects only some to salvation which is his decretive will, his will of decree, purpose.

- Preachers must not proclaim the Gospel in a way that makes God insincere, ie by stating that God loves everyone or that Jesus has died for everyone (see last study).
- God is true. Scripture shows God commanding Pharaoh to let his people go despite knowing that he will not obey (Ex 5:1 with 7:3-4). God sends the good things of providence (rain and sun) on the unjust as well as the just (Acts 14:17).

3. Is this call really irresistible?

- It is better to say that it is effectual, ie it accomplishes its purpose, it is not compulsion.
- The elect can resist for a while (cf Paul).
- Note Ps 110:3: *Your people will offer themselves freely.*
- Note Phil 2:12-13.
- The Holy Spirit gives new dispositions by which the sinner accepts Christ. God changes the will (Jn 1:12-13).

Quotes

A H Strong

'God's saving grace and effectual calling are irresistible, not in the sense that they can never be resisted, but in the sense that they are never successfully resisted' (Syst. Theol. p 436)

J Calvin

No one will dedicate himself to God till he be drawn by his goodness and embrace him with all his heart. He must therefore call us to him before we call upon him. (Inst 2.74)

This calling of Abraham is a signal example of the gratuitous mercy of God. (Comm. Gen 1. 343)

Abraham was justified many years after he had been called by God. (Comm. Gen 1.408)

Only when God shines in us by the light of his Spirit is there any profit from the word. Thus the inward calling, which alone is effectual and peculiar to the elect, is distinguished from the outward voice of men. (Comm. Rm 10:16)

Westminster Confession

All those whom God has predestined to life and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his word and Spirit. (10.1)

Views on the call of God

| PELAGIAN | SEMI-PELAGIAN | ARMINIAN | REFORMED |
|---|---|--|--|
| Man has the full ability of free will to cease from sin. The HS does not change man morally. | Grace is necessary for man to turn to God but he must first desire to be free from sin and choose God. Man has natural ability to accept the Gospel. | Christ died for every man, and man can respond to the external call on the basis of sufficient grace granted to all. As man works with God this grace becomes efficient. | <i>Man is dead in sins, depraved totally and unable to respond. (Eph 2).</i> |
| Man is morally neutral. | Morally sick but can respond. | Depraved but grace given to co-operate with God by exercising free will. | <i>Man is spiritually dead. His will is bound from doing spiritual good.</i> |
| God is not in control, does not determine outcome of the external call, but man does. | | | God is sovereign |

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