

CHAPTER 10

OF EFFECTUAL CALLING

Effectual calling includes regeneration

“1. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.”

The general call of the gospel goes out to everybody who hears the gospel; this call can be resisted. But the special call of the Holy Spirit is irresistible, and comes only to the elect (Rom 8:30). This special call, which changes the person’s nature so that he wills to accept Christ, is called the effectual call of God. This special call from God comes in his own time, and has many wonderful results:

- It enlightens the mind (Acts 26:18)
- It gives a new nature or heart (regeneration; Ezek 36:26)
- It gives therefore a new will (Ezek 36:27; Deut 30:6)

Normally this call works through the ordinary reading or preaching of the Word of God, accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:13-14; 2 Thess 2:13-14; 2 Cor 3:2-6).

Even though all the power of Almighty God draws us in this effectual call, we still come freely, without compulsion, since our wills respond to our new nature (John 6:37, 44-45; Rom 6:16-18).

At first, man is passive in this call

“2. This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.”

Our salvation does not begin in our wills and reach up to God; rather, God begins to work on us when we are utterly passive, with no desire to seek God (Eph 2:5; John 6:37).

Special cases

While most people are saved through the preaching of the Word, many never hear this message of the gospel. The next two sections deal with these people.

Elect infants and others incapacitated

“3. Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.”

No one can be saved if he is not regenerated, not even babies (1 John 5:12; compare Rom 8:9; John 3:8).

Therefore, if a baby or an incapacitated person is saved, he must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, just as any other Christian. We believe that this work is possible, and the Bible indicates that the Holy Spirit does work in the hearts of infants, even before they are born (Jer 1:5; Luke 1:15, 41, 44).

Our Confession says that all “elect infants, dying in infancy” are saved. It wisely does not say how many infants are elect—whether all of them, some of them, or none of them. Only God knows these things, and we must rest content trusting God. As Abraham said, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25).

Our Synod has left the question open, specifically allowing, but not asserting, that all such infants may be saved. The first BP Synod in 1938 adopted the following Declaratory Statement regarding this matter:

“With regard to the salvation of those dying in infancy we do not regard our Confession as teaching or implying that any who die in infancy are lost.”

Personally, I believe that Christian parents who would have reared their children in the Lord, can rest assured that their child, dying in infancy, as a child of the covenant, would be saved. Such seems to be the spirit of passages such as Exod 20:5-6 and 1 Cor 7:14. However, I do not think the Bible gives such comfort to parents who are ungodly; the children seem to be judged along with their parents (for example, Josh 6:21; 7:24; 8:26; Judg 21:10; Ps 137:9; also the plagues in Egypt and the plagues in Revelation). But it is best not to be dogmatic in these areas, and to leave these matters to the infinite wisdom, justice, and mercy of God.

Non-elect persons

“4. Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved; much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may is very pernicious, and to be detested.”

Non-elect people are not able in their own strength to accept the Lord and be saved, even though the Holy Spirit may influence them to do good things, even to “come close” to salvation. Sometimes Christians are fooled by some unsaved person who gives a convincing profession of true piety (Matt 7:22; 13:20-21; Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31).

No one is saved who openly rejects the gospel message, unless he repents and changes his ways (Matt 22:14).

Some people believe that heathen in distant lands who have never heard the gospel can be saved anyway. The Bible clearly contradicts this idea (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 1:18-25; 3:19; 10:14-15; Eph 2:12). Those who say otherwise are dangerous heretics (Gal 1:6-8). The result of this belief can be seen in the World Council of Churches, which accepts all religions as paths to God and which disparages the work of true Christian missions.