

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: The Benefits of Salvation

Effectual Calling, the Divine Act of God, Part Two

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Effectual calling is the initial act in our order of salvation. Under normal circumstances it occurs in conjunction with the external or outward proclamation or presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:14). There are persons, such as elect infants dying in infancy or by abortion and those mentally unable or incapable of being called by outward preaching of the Word. It is election, the electing love of the True God, that gives more hope of salvation to more people since those who cannot “reason” and those who don’t live long enough, etc. are not excluded by virtue of age, mental condition, some lack, etc.

Matthew 22:14 uses the word “call” to describe the general invitation to sinners to enter the kingdom of heaven. Many are called, few are chosen. Thus it is appropriate to speak of a general, universal, and outward call. By it both the Spirit and the church, the Spirit and the Bride say to sinners everywhere, “Come.” (Revelation 22:17)

**And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.
Revelation 22:17 KJV**

The church alone is not the only source or the source of the external or outward invitation to salvation. It is God’s Word which the church and individual Christians proclaim. It is God Himself, in the proclamation of God’s Word, who outwardly summons all kinds of people to repentance unto life and to faith in Christ, to living waters that satisfy the thirsty. (Isaiah 45:22. 55:1; Matt. 11:27; Acts 17:30, 31; Rev. 22:17).

Effectual calling is not the summons of the church alone; it is the summons of God. In other words, we are proclaiming to any who will hear, the summons of God. We are heralds. We are just the messengers.

The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. We need to make it clear to our hearers that it is the summons of God that we are proclaiming. We insist not only that the church or “called out ones” summon people, but also that God Himself summons people in the proclamation of the Gospel, for three reasons:

1. The Bible ascribes to God the summons to repentance and faith;
2. God’s claim upon the sinner as the sinner’s sovereign Lord is thereby maintained and asserted; and
3. God’s holiness and righteousness and His goodness and compassion toward sinners are revealed. God hates their sin and self-destructive manner of life and will judge them if they persist in them, and yet He calls sinful men to turn from their love of sinning and to seek His forgiveness in Christ.

Now, the people to whom God issues His general summons by and through the church are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). All of them are corrupt, none of them is good. (Ps 14:1-3, Romans 3:9-18) Their hearts are “deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jere. 17:9), whose “righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” (Isa 64:6), whose collective mind “does not submit to God’s law [depravity], nor can it do so [inability]” (Romans 8:7), and for whom spiritual things are foolishness (1 Cor. 2:14). Spiritually dead ones most often conclude that they are listening only to the voices of foolish people. Sometimes, though, the person hears the Voice of God summoning him into fellowship with His Son, and he responds to Christ in faith and repentance, having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. When that happens, God has “effectually called” an elect sinner to Himself.

All those whom God calls He also justifies (Romans 8:29). This is not the general call given by people which someone might resist and reject. This summons is God’s call. The grace here is irresistible, and the person responds to the call in repentance and faith. In conjunction with His external call to all kinds of people everywhere, God’s “irrevocable” (Romans 11:29) effectual call also goes forth, in His appointed and accepted time, to those whom He had foreknown and predestinated unto life.

²⁹ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

³⁰ Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. Romans 8:29, 30 KJV

Who in the Godhead does this effectual summoning to faith? Mostly, it is God the Father. (Romans 8:30, 1 Cor. 1:9, Gal. 1:15, Eph. 1:17, 18; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Peter 5:10, 1 John 3:1). In two instances Christ is said to issue the call (1 Cor. 7:22; 2 Peter 1:3; Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). The Holy Spirit applies the will of God.

Again, in light of a person’s spiritual deadness, a person is completely passive with respect to God’s effectual call. We don’t define effectual calling in terms of the responses which the called give to this act of God’s grace. It is an activity in which the pure sovereignty of God’s grace is at work at the inception of the salvation process and it is His sovereignty which is alone operative in the accomplishment of the atonement.

Calling is an act of God, and of God alone. We need to be awestruck at the divine energy active in this initiation of salvation. We become partakers of redemption by an act of God that brings out of the place and state of darkness into the place and state of light. We are called-out ones. We are called out from among the dead. We are called into God’s marvelous light.

When God calls and gives the command, “Repent and believe” to an elect sinner, that person is mysteriously and powerfully enabled to do what he could not and was not able to do before. (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18) The Holy Spirit works immediately by and with the proclaimed Word in the heart of the elect sinner. There is no other mediator.

It is because the elect sinner was “chosen in Christ before the creation of the world” and because he was in Christ when Christ died for him that God effectually calls him. Romans 6:2-11; Ephesians 1:7 It is not that the elect sinner is for the first time by

God's effectual summons brought into the "in Christ" relationship. It is because the people of God were in Christ when Christ gave His life a ransom and redeemed by His blood that salvation has been secured for them.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. ⁷ In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Ephesians 1:3-7 KJV

We do not become actual partakers of Christ until redemption is effectually applied and we do not become actual partakers of Christ until we have repented of our sins and have placed our trust in Him. But these are effects of regeneration. Being in the "in Christ" relationship and becoming an actual partaker of Christ are two different things. The elect sinner has always been "in Christ," but he does not actually become a partaker of Christ until he trusts Christ with a hearty reliance. It is because the elect sinner is in Christ that God summons him to faith in Christ and to repentance. Becoming a partaker of Christ is the effect of the "in Christ" relationship and regeneration.

The Father's effectual summons does not usher the sinner into actual union with Christ apart from the Holy Spirit's regenerating activity. This effectual calling is only the first of a number of applied redemptive benefits purchased by Christ's cross work for those who are already "in Him." Effectual calling is made effectual through the powerful, creative, regenerating work of the Spirit of God which He executes by and with God's summons in the hearts of the elect. So we see, then, that the Father is pleased effectually to call, by His Word and by His Spirit.

In fact, the effectual call of the elect is an activity in which all three Persons of the Godhead are engaged, and that the Spirit who regenerates is not only the Father's Spirit, He is Christ's Spirit as well. (Romans 8:9, 10) It is from Christ that the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit descends upon the elect (Mt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). It is this that we call the baptismal work of the Spirit. It was Christ who poured out His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (John 15.26; Acts 2.33). Christ effectually persuades all those for whom He has purchased redemption by His Spirit to believe and obey. He governs their hearts by His Word and by His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead. He overcomes all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom. Summarizing,

"Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel." (*Shorter Catechism, Ques 31*)

To paraphrase Dr. Reymond in his *Systematic Theology* page 718, through the regenerating work of His Spirit, God the Father irresistibly summons the elect sinner into fellowship with, and into the kingdom of His Son Jesus Christ, normally in conjunction with the church's proclamation of the gospel. His call is rendered effectual by the

quicken work of the Spirit of God (and of Christ) in the hearts of the elect. By the Spirit's working the spiritually dead elect sinner

(1) is made spiritually alive, opening and favorably disposing him thereby to the things of the Spirit,

(2) is convinced of his sin,

(3) is enlightened to the all-sufficiency of the Savior Jesus Christ as He is offered in the gospel, and

(4) is renewed in his will, rendering him thereby willing (no sinner is brought against his will!) and able to embrace Jesus Christ as his Sovereign and Lord.

In other words, the Spirit's work makes the sinner willing and able to repent and to believe, but his repenting and believing *per se* are not aspects of the effectual call itself. They are his divine-effect responses to God's effectual call which, taken together, are indicative of his conversion. (Reymond, page 718)

God changes the heart and renews the will so that the elect one is delighted in coming to Christ. We are not, however, to confuse the believer's response in repentance and faith with the summons itself. We will get into that response in later messages.

Bibliography:

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Reymond, Robert L. A New systematic Theology of the Christian Faith. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998.

Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Q31

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Pray: Holy Father, we come before You today thanking You for saving us. We were in the dark, but by Your act alone, because of Your amazing love and irresistible grace, You turned our hearts, opened our blind eyes, and opened our hearts to desire and to receive Jesus Christ. What kind of love is this that forgives sin when we were yet enemies, when we justly deserved Your wrath, the agony of rejected love. Yes, we rejected Your love, and yet Christ died for us. Jesus the Just One died for us, the unjust ones. Forgive us and reveal the glory of the Gospel to us. May we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and this great love. May we walk worthy of our calling. 1 Thessalonians 5:24 says, **Faithful is the One who calls you, who also will do it.** May the Holy Spirit preserve us that we might persevere and be faithful until that Day. In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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