

EFFECTUAL CALLING

INTRODUCTION

- The facets of salvation we have seen up to this point (foreknowledge, election, predestination) all deal with God's work in eternity past
- The actual application of redemption begins with God's effectual call to sinners
- We move from God's decree in the past to his drawing people to salvation in time, space, and history
- "[S]alvation in actual possession takes its start from an efficacious summons on the part of God and...this summons, since it is God's summons, carries in its bosom all of the operative efficacy by which it is made effective...the order in the application of redemption is found to be, calling, regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, glorification. When this order is carefully weighed we find that there is a logic which evinces and brings into clear focus the governing principle of salvation in all of its aspects, the grace of God in its sovereignty and efficacy. Salvation is of the Lord in its application as well as in its conception and accomplishment."¹



- "Among those who accept the pervasive teachings of Scripture on the doctrines of sovereign grace, there sometimes is a slight parting of ways when it comes to the questions of how effectual is the effectual call. Some theological interpreters discuss the strategic importance of this doctrine but stop seemingly inches short of its goal of bringing people *to* Christ. It is as if the effectual call is viewed as running an early lap in the relay race of salvation applied, but regeneration must somehow start out of the blocks seemingly on its own before salvation is historically initiated. But the biblical scenario seems to picture the effectual call as culminating its vital final lap with an actual passing of the baton to regeneration. At that very instant of the passing of the baton from the 'hand' of the effectual call to the 'hand' of regeneration new life begins. The biblical *ordo salutis* seems to be the climaxing of the effectual call in regeneration at which time there is also a concurrent response of faith."²

VIEWS OF CALLING

Pelagianism

- Man accepts God of his own free will, without the necessity of grace → "I came all by myself"

¹ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 86-87.

² George Zemek, *A Biblical Theology of the Doctrines of Sovereign Grace*, 159-160.

Semi-Pelagianism

- By availing himself of a small amount of divine grace man can accept God's call → "I started to come and God helped me"
- This is the position of the Roman-Catholic church and is based on the wrong view that the mind and the heart are not completely depraved, therefore partial grace is needed

Arminianism

- By means of a universal helping grace or other prevenient grace God coaxes man by giving him the possibility of a free choice → "God started me and I cooperated"
- Prevenient grace was won at the cross of Christ and helps to quicken or help the will

Calvinism

- Man comes to Christ by the effective, effectual working of God's grace → "God irresistibly brought me to Christ"
- The effectual call refers to God's irresistible grace that effectively draws elect men to Himself
- "Effective calling is an act of God the Father, speaking through the human proclamation of the gospel, in which he summons people to himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith."³
- Clearly, God is the author of this effectual calling
- "Calling is an act of God and of God alone. This fact should make us keenly aware how dependent we are upon the sovereign grace of God in the application of redemption. If calling is the initial step in our becoming actual partakers of salvation, the fact that God is its author forcefully reminds us that the pure sovereignty of God's work of salvation is not suspended at the point of application any more than at the point of design and objective accomplishment. We may not like this doctrine. But, if so, it is because we are averse to the grace of God and wish to arrogate to ourselves the prerogative that belongs to God... It is God the Father who is the specific agent in the effectual call. This aspect of Biblical teaching we are too liable to overlook. We think of the Father as the person of the trinity who planned salvation and as the specific agent in election. And we think properly when we do. But we fail to discern other emphases of Scripture and we do dishonour to the Father when we think of him simply as planning salvation and redemption. The Father is not far removed from the effectuation of that which he designed in his eternal counsel and accomplished in the death of his Son; he comes into the most intimate relation to his people in the application of redemption by being the specific and particular actor in the inception of such application."⁴

John 6:44 ~ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

- The word "draws" (*helkuo*) means to draw or drag...metaphorically to draw by inward power, compel
- The same word used in John 21:6, 11 ~ And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch." So they cast, and then they were not able to **haul** it in because of the great number of fish...Simon Peter went up and **drew** the net to land, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.
- Peter did not woo or invite the net to himself; rather, he hauled it in and actually brought the fish to himself

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 693.

⁴ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 89-90.

- This is what the Father does to sinners...he does not just woo them or invite them to come
- He actually draws them and causes them to come...he overcomes the rebellion and resistance in their hearts...he overcomes those spiritual, moral, and volitional inabilities and makes them willing to come
- This is irresistible grace in which he breaks through the resistance in their heart with life-changing grace
- The special or internal call is the efficacious call, which irresistibly brings all the elect to salvation
- This is the summons by which God not only invites a person externally in the hearing of the Gospel, but also internally enables him to respond to it

Romans 8:30 ~ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

- From Romans 8:29-30, we learn that before space and time, God committed himself to a certain group of people whom he would redeem in history...the doctrine of calling follows naturally from that
- Within the framework of time and space, God calls individuals through his efficacious grace

The General Call

Matthew 22:14 ~ For many are called, but few *are* chosen

- The general or external call is a call, which invites all men to come to God for salvation (all men without exception)
- The general call of God falls under the moral will of God which represents his moral desires for mankind

2 Peter 3:9 ~ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

- The word for “wishing” is the Greek word *boulemai* which is used of God’s will
- Yet many will perish! So how does this “wishing” come to pass if God is sovereign? How can a “wish” on God’s part not come to pass if in fact he is sovereign?
- There are two wills of God and this general call falls under his moral will...not everything that falls under God’s moral will will be accomplished
- This is different from his sovereign will which is his will of decree and cannot be thwarted whatsoever and will take place just as God has purposed (cf. Ps 115:3; Dan 4:35)

God Does Invite All People to Come to Him for Salvation

Isaiah 45:22 ~ Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.

Isaiah 55:1 ~ “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost.

Ezekiel 33:11 ~ “Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’

Matthew 11:28 ~ Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

John 7:37 ~ Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

Luke 14:16-24 ~ Parable of a Dinner: “For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.”

Revelation 22:17 ~ The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

- These passages do not evidence any specificity, but are universal calls to all mankind for salvation
- It is God’s moral desire for man to be saved and that none should perish; therefore, he extends a moral call to all mankind based upon this part of his will
- “The external call of the gospel is to be preached indiscriminately to elect and reprobate alike. Some desiring to exalt God’s absolute sovereignty contradict this teaching by insisting that since God intends to save only the elect, his preachers ought to proclaim the gospel to them alone. However, not only is that impossible (for we have no means by which to distinguish the elect from the rest of humanity), it is patently contrary to Scripture.”⁵

The General Call is Not Efficacious and Can be Resisted

Luke 14:16-24 ~ Parable of a Dinner: “For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.”

Matthew 23:37 ~ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

Acts 7:51 ~ You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

- The universal call of the gospel in and of itself is not effectual and is insufficient for salvation
- “The *gospel invitation extends a call* to salvation to every one who hears its message. It invites all men without distinction to drink freely of the water of life and live. It promises salvation to all who repent and believe. But this outward general call, extended to the elect and nonelect alike, will not bring sinners to Christ. Why? Because men are by nature dead in sin and under its power. They are of themselves unable and unwilling to forsake their evil ways and to turn to Christ for mercy. Consequently, the unregenerate will not respond to the gospel call to repentance and faith. No amount of external threatenings or promises will cause blind, deaf, dead, rebellious sinners to bow before Christ as Lord and to look to Him alone for salvation. Such an act of faith and submission is contrary to the lost man’s nature.”⁶

Those Who Resist the General Call Will be Judged

Hebrews 12:25 ~ See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will we escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven.

1 Peter 4:17 ~ For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

2 Thessalonians 1:8 ~ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

- The Scriptures are clear that man is ultimately responsible for his unbelief and his resistance to the general call, even though God is sovereign over those who are elect

Is the General Call a Legitimate Call Then?

- “Some object that because God intends only to save those to whom he has chosen to grant repentance and faith, the universal call of the gospel cannot be genuine on God’s part. This is nothing less than a blasphemous accusation from those who have exalted their own reasoning above God’s revelation.”⁷

⁵ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 574.

⁶ David Steele, Curtis Thomas, and Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 52-53.

⁷ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 575.

Objection #1: This call is incompatible with the inability of the sinner to obey

- **Reply 1** ~ It is no more unreasonable for God to extend an invitation to those that will not accept than for God to demand obedience to the law; or for Jesus to offer an earthly kingdom to those who will not accept
- **Reply 2** ~ God may will or desire all men to be saved and yet not will to exert special influences to save them (cf. Ezek 18:23; Rom 10:21; 1 Tim 2:4)
- **Reply 3** ~ The only obstacle to coming is the perversity of man's will. No one fails to come because he is helpless but because he feels that he can save himself (or doesn't need saving).
- "The offer of the salvation communicated in the external call of the gospel is conditioned on repentance and faith. For it to be a genuine, well-meant offer on God's part, he simply has to be sincerely disposed to provide the promised blessings upon the satisfaction of the offer's conditions. And this is precisely the case; if anyone repents and trusts in Christ, God will forgive and save him. However, such repentance and faith are impossible for the natural man (Rom. 8:7–8; 1 Cor. 2:14). Apart from regenerating grace, no man will ever repent and believe. Thus, in the case of the nonelect, the conditions of the offer will never be met. To suggest that God's offer is insincere—indeed, that he feigns sincerity!—because he does not provide the necessary grace to overcome man's depravity is to suppose that God is obligated to give grace to all. To such a notion the Lord himself responds, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" (Matt. 20:15). The potter has the right over the clay "to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use" (Rom. 9:21). God is not obligated to give grace to any man, let alone all men. The deficiency in the gospel call lies in man's depravity, not in any supposed parsimony in God's grace. To suggest such a thing approaches the highest strains of blasphemy."⁸

Objection #2: It is incompatible with God's design to save only the elect

- **Reply** ~ The Gospel offer is made to all, both elect and non-elect
- Thus, the universal call of God is given because in God's plan, he has called his people to proclaim the Gospel to the lost (cf. Acts 10; Rom 10:14)
- Within this plan, God did not say to preach to the elect only because there is no way for believers to know whom the elect are (cf. Acts 18:10)
- Therefore, the free offer of the gospel is freely proclaimed to all men knowing that whoever believes and repents will be saved because they were elected beforehand
- This would be like a farmer who does not know the extent of his harvest; therefore, he is unwilling to sow any seeds

The Special Call

- The special or internal call is the efficacious call, which irresistibly brings all the elect to salvation
- "With scarcely an exception the New Testament means by the words 'call,' 'called,' 'calling' nothing less than the call which is efficacious unto salvation."⁹
- "The *Holy Spirit*, in order to bring God's elect to salvation, extends to them a *special inward call* in addition to the outward call contained in the gospel message. Through this special call, the Holy Spirit performs a

⁸ Ibid., 575-576.

⁹ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 89.

work of grace within the sinner, which inevitably brings him to faith in Christ. The inward change wrought in the elect sinner enables him to understand and believe spiritual truth; in the spiritual realm, he is given the seeing eye and the hearing ear. The Spirit creates within him a new heart or a new nature. This is accomplished through regeneration or the new birth by which the sinner is made a child of God and is given spiritual life. His will is renewed through the process, so that the sinner spontaneously comes to Christ of his own free choice. Because he is given a new nature so that he loves righteousness, and because his mind is enlightened so that he understands and believes the biblical gospel, the renewed sinner freely and willingly turns to Christ as Lord and Savior.”¹⁰

This Call is Limited to the Elect

Luke 14:23 ~ And the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel *them* to come in, so that my house may be filled.

Romans 1:6-7 ~ among whom you also are the **called** of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, **called** as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:29-30 ~ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also **called**; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

1 Corinthians 1:2 ~ To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by **calling**, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 ~ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are **the called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Galatians 1:6 ~ I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who **called** you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;

Ephesians 1:18 ~ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His **calling**, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Ephesians 4:1 ~ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the **calling** with which you have been called,

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 ~ But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He **called** you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 1:9 ~ who has saved us and called us with a holy **calling**, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

Hebrews 9:15 ~ For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been **called** may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

1 Peter 1:15 ~ but like the Holy One who **called** you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior;

1 Peter 2:9 ~ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has **called** you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Revelation 17:14 ~ These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him *are the called* and chosen and faithful.

- These verses speak of the call that actually brings sinners to salvation...a call that is limited only to the elect

¹⁰ Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points*, 53.

- “These verses indicate that no powerless, merely human calling is in view. This calling is rather a kind of ‘summons’ from the King of the universe and it has such power that it brings about the response that it asks for in people’s hearts. It is an act of God that *guarantees* a response... This calling has the capacity to draw us out of the kingdom of darkness and bring us into God’s kingdom so we can join in full fellowship with him.”¹¹
- “We do not ordinarily associate with the word ‘summons’ the efficacy that is requisite for compliance with that summons. A summons issued by a court does not of itself empower us to appear in court. It gives us warrant to appear and it requires us to appear but it does not actually bring us into court. That depends on our strength and will. Or, perchance, it depends on the force applied by the executive officers if we are apprehended and compelled to appear. It is wholly otherwise with God’s summons. The summons is invested with the efficacy by which we are delivered to the destination intended – we are effectively ushered into the fellowship of Christ. There is something determinate about God’s call; by his sovereign power and grace it cannot fail of accomplishment.”¹²

The Necessity of the Call

- Men do not come unless God calls them with his irresistible call of salvation because original sin renders all human beings naturally dead (unresponsive) to God
- If men are dead in sin, helpless, and cannot believe in Christ, then the salvation of sinners of necessity involves much more than Christ dying for all men and then waiting to see who will accept His gift
- If unsaved men are unable to choose or to will any spiritual good, then apart from a divine summons, no one would choose Christ
- People don’t need a gentle push...they need a supernatural drawing

John 6:65 ~ And He was saying, ‘For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father’

- “no one can come” = a moral inability to come because of a corrupt will
- It is not as if there is a rope keeping a will that wants to come...they can’t come because of corrupt will
- These texts teach that God’s call is an effectual call...when God calls an individual, they will come
- He changes their dead hearts, renews their will, and effectually draws them to Christ so they respond in faith

The Operation of the Call

The place of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the effectual call

1 Corinthians 1:9 ~ God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

2 Timothy 1:8-9 ~ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling

Romans 1:6 ~ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ

John 6:65 ~ And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”

- God the Father calls the elect through the agency of the Holy Spirit into fellowship with His Son

¹¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 693.

¹² Murray, *Redemption Accomplished*, 91.

The role of the Word of God in the operation of the call

Romans 10:17 ~ for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” 14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? 15 How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!” 16 However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?” 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 ~ It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 16:14 ~ A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

James 1:18 ~ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

1 Peter 1:23, 25 ~ for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God...25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.” And this is the word which was preached to you.

- The Spirit illuminates and animates the Word of God such that as we listen to the Scripture, we come to the conviction that we hear the very Word of God itself
- God does not save us “automatically” without our mind, emotions, and will being affected by the gospel
- The gospel call is the means that God has appointed through which the elect are effectively drawn

The effectual call compels the human will to believe and be saved

- Men choose according to their own desires, yet God is the One who is at work in them
- “It is important that we not give the impression that people will be saved by the power of this call *apart from* their own willing response to the gospel...Although it is true that effective calling awakens and brings forth a response from us, we must always insist that this response still has to be a voluntary, willing response in which the individual person puts his or her trust in Christ.”¹³

The Results of the Call

It cannot be resisted

2 Timothy 1:9 ~ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

Romans 8:30 ~ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

- The call of God is based on predestination...and those whom God has called will be justified
- Therefore, the special calling of God cannot be resisted but will ultimately lead to the salvation of the elect
- In this sense, the Spirit’s call and God’s grace in saving sinners is efficacious, invincible, and irresistible in that it cannot be thwarted or refused...it never fails to bring the elect to faith in Christ

It is a call to glory

Romans 8:30 ~ foreknew → predestined → called → justified → glorified (aorist tense)

¹³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 693.

Hebrews 2:10 ~ For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory

John 17:22 ~ The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

- The ultimate end of God’s calling is the glorification of His saints for all of eternity

The various practical ends to which each believer is called

1 Corinthians 1:9 ~ God is faithful, through whom you were **called into fellowship** with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Galatians 5:13 ~ For you were **called to freedom**, brethren; only *do* not *turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Ephesians 1:18 ~ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is **the hope of His calling**, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Colossians 3:15 ~ Let **the peace of Christ** rule in your hearts, **to which indeed you were called** in one body; and be thankful.

1 Peter 2:20-21 ~ For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 **For you have been called for this purpose**, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

1 Timothy 6:12 ~ Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of **the eternal life to which you were called**, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

1 Peter 3:9 ~ for you were **called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing**

1 Thessalonians 4:7 ~ For **God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification**.

- “The call is also a high, holy, and heavenly calling...It is high, holy, and heavenly in its origin and in its destiny. But it is probably the character of the calling that is particularly stressed. The life into which the people of God are ushered is one that separates them from the fellowship of this present evil world and imparts to them a character consonant with that consecration. If we find ourselves at home in the ungodliness, lust, and filth of this present world, it is because we have not been called effectually by God’s grace...The called must exemplify in their conduct the calling by which they have been called and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.”

Ephesians 4:1 ~ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

SUMMARY

- Men do not come unless God calls them with his irresistible call of salvation...original sin renders all human beings naturally dead (unresponsive) to God, but in effectual calling God quickens the dead
- As the outward call of God to faith in Christ is communicated through the reading, preaching, and explaining of the contents of the Bible, the Holy Spirit enlightens and renews the heart of elect sinners so that they understand the gospel and embrace it as truth from God, and God in Christ becomes to them an object of desire and affection
- Those who are chosen by God receive this special call
- An unbeliever cannot thwart God’s effectual call in their hearts, but this does not mean that people come into the kingdom “kicking and screaming” against their will; rather, their choice is genuine, but it is brought to fruition by the Spirit