

Essentials of the Faith Lesson 5

God's Effectual Calling: "Can We Resist God's Decree?"

I. INTRODUCTION

a. Effectual/Divine Calling (defined—Demarest and Augustine):

- i. The act of God on depraved sinners which renders them willing and able to trust in Christ for salvation.
- ii. The Holy Spirit's working which makes unwilling and incapable hearts capable of repenting and believing on Christ unto reconciliation with God.
- iii. That act of divine power, mediated through the word of God, by which the Holy Spirit illumines darkened minds, softens stubborn wills, and inclines contrary affections towards the living God, thus leading the unregenerate to trust Christ in a saving relationship.

b. Scripture presents 2 callings of God:

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

i. The universal call

1. God, through the external preaching of the word, invites all men alike, even those for whom he designs the call to be a savor of death, and the ground of a severer condemnation. (John Calvin)
2. In other words, the universal command for all everywhere to repent and trust in Christ.

ii. The effectual call

1. Besides this there is a special call which, for the most part, God bestows on believers only, when by the internal illumination of the Spirit he causes the word preached to take deep root in their hearts. (John Calvin)
2. In other words, the moment in time when an elect individual is made spiritually alive by the Spirit's new birth, thereby trusting in the Person and finished work of Jesus Christ unto salvation.

c. Effectual Calling must be understood in terms of:

- i. The sovereignty of God over all things (Lesson 1) and election of the church to salvation prior to creation (Lesson 3).
- ii. The congenital depravity of humanity (Lesson 2). The condition reviewed, necessitating effectual calling:

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1. The natural human condition is "congenitally depraved." Depraved: the condition of humanity which is inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. With no ability to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly condemned.
2. 1 Corinthians 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.
3. Romans 8:7 the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so
4. God's gospel call to the unconverted could be likened to a radio frequency put out loud and clear. Depraved humanity are like radios which are broken, with no power, willfully inflicting damage to one's own equipment so as to refuse hearing the frequency being put out.

d. Therefore, the issue of effectual calling answers the following questions:

- i. If there are "none who seek for God" (Rom 3:11), and therefore, since humanity is totally depraved, how can any person respond to God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?
 - ii. If none seek God, if we are in a constant and willful state of rebellion against God, how will humanity begin seeking God in salvation?
 - iii. If we are persistently running away from God, how will we run towards him?
 - iv. How does a dead person respond to something?
- e. Since some of depraved humanity are saved and turned towards Christ, we know that there is a solution to problem.

II. BIBLICAL TEACHING

a. Preliminary considerations:

- i. Scripture speaks of a sinner's salvation in terms of: "creation," "birth," "resurrection," and "made alive from the dead."
- ii. Birth: salvation is a spiritual birth

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1. John 1:12-13 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
2. John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.
3. John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of ... the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."
4. Consider: In what way does an individual cooperate in its creation? How did the earth, stars, and you, contribute to God's effort in their and our creation? So it is with one's spiritual creation (salvation).

iii. Creation: salvation is a spiritual creation

1. 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.
2. Ephesians 2:8-10 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."
3. In what way does an individual cooperate in its creation? How did the earth, stars, and you, contribute to God's effort in our creation? So it is with one's spiritual creation (salvation).

iv. Resurrection: salvation is spiritual resurrection

1. Romans 6:4, 8 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life...Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him
2. Ephesians 2:1-6 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"

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3. In what way does a dead person contribute to bringing himself back to life? So it is with one's spiritual resurrection (salvation).
- b. How, then, does a depraved sinner's spiritual "birth," "creation," and "resurrection," and therefore, salvation, come about? Answer: The effectual call of God on the elect
 - i. John 6:37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.
 - ii. John 6:39 This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.
 - iii. 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.
 - iv. 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.
 - v. John 10:3-5 "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴"When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵"A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."
 1. No amount of probability exists here. Christ is not saying, in effect, "Those who are elect may *possibly* come to faith," but, "Those who are elect will *certainly* come to faith."
 2. This effectual call "infallibly accomplishes its purpose of leading the sinner to the acceptance of salvation." (A.H. Strong)
 3. "There is a fountain filled with blood, but there may be none who will ever wash in it unless divine purpose and power shall constrain them to come." (Charles Spurgeon)
 - vi. Acts 9:1-9 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, ² and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ⁴ and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He *said*, "I am Jesus whom you are

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persecuting, ⁶ but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.” ⁷ The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank... ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

1. The miracle of this scene is not so much in the light and the voice as it is in the turning of a rebellious sinner; the altering of his will.
 2. The most dramatic phenomena in the conversion of Paul is not the physical signs, but the spectacular turn of his will from against Christ to in Christ.
 3. Therefore, the salvation of any sinner is as objectively “dramatic” as Paul’s: the will of humanity is rebellious against God yet is effectually acted upon such that it is turned to Christ.
- vii. Acts 11:18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.
- a. Repentance and belief unto salvation are gifts. Though they are actions we perform, but require the prior gift of life through effectual calling by the Holy Spirit (Douglas Wilson).
- viii. 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.
- ix. Acts 18:27-28 And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.
- a. Grace effectually resulted in their belief unto salvation.
- x. Romans 8:28-30 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 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.
- a. “Call” – “God’s work of evoking or drawing into saving relation.”

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- b. The fact that God is the *καλῶν* and that Christians are the *κεκλημένοι*, with no qualifying addition, makes it clear that in the NT *καλεῖν* is a technical term for the process of salvation. (TDNT, 3:489)
- xi. 2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.
- xii. 1 Peter 2:9-10 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; ¹⁰ for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.
- xiii. 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.
- xiv. The Holy Spirit is the agent of one's effectual call unto salvation
 - a. John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.
 - b. 2 Corinthians 3:6 who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
- xv. 1 Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
- xvi. Ephesians 4:1-2 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love
- xvii. 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
- xviii. Furthermore, "the called" is a common term used for the church. For example, the Greek word for "church," has the idea of "the called-out ones." Why? They are the elect whom God has effectually called out of depravity and into right relationship with him through Christ.

III. MISCONCEPTIONS AND OBJECTIONS

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- a. People come kicking and screaming to faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Those experiencing salvation did so willfully and joyfully.
- b. People are drawn against their will to faith in Christ.
 - 1. God's grace overcomes our natural resistance to him. He acts upon our will such that we willfully come to faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Similar to (i), since God acted upon their will, they exhibited a sincere desire to believe in the gospel.
- c. People are, therefore, made puppets that are forced to love God.
 - 1. Not one example of the elect coming to faith in Christ shows such an idea. God calls the elect, acting on his/her individual will, resulting in a willful embracing of and love for Christ.
- d. The universal offer of salvation through faith in Christ is fake. Since only the elect are saved, it is a big deception.
 - 1. A deception occurs when what is promised is not given once the terms of the agreement have been properly satisfied (Demarest). However, when any individual responds in genuine faith (the "terms of the agreement"), the fullness of what was promised (forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and eternal life) are granted.
 - 2. Those who do not respond to the free gift of eternal life are settled in their willful opposition to Christ. They genuinely have no desire to surrender to Christ.

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- a. "What is effectual calling?"

"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." (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 31, 1647).
- b. Scripture describes Christians as:
 - i. The elect: those whom the Father has chosen for salvation before creation.
 - ii. The redeemed: the elect for whom Christ propitiated the wrath of God at the cross.

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- iii. The called: the elect whom God has effectually, in time, drawn and granted faith in Christ through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.
- c. God acts, we respond, and not the other way around:
 - i. An individual's act of seeking God is not what God cooperatively kick-starts to bring the lost to salvation. Rather, God's effectual call on the lost unto salvation results in the act of seeking God for the first time.
- d. Effectual calling could be imperfectly likened to:
 - i. A son and heir of a wealthy nobleman. Solely by the kindness of the nobleman, a great inheritance has been set aside for the son. Nothing can stop the son from receiving the inheritance. However, the nobleman has appointed the time when the son will be given the inheritance: his 20th birthday. Therefore, the inheritance has always been set aside for the son, though he does not effectually receive it until his 20th birthday. On his 20th birthday, the son receives in full all that the father has graciously stored up for him since before birth. The son did nothing to receive the inheritance. It was purely a gracious act of the nobleman.
 - ii. So it is with the elect upon coming to faith in Jesus Christ through God's sovereign and effectual call.
- e. Effectual calling is a work of the Trinity:
 - i. God the Father has sovereignly chosen the elect for salvation before creation (Lesson 3): sovereign grace.
 - ii. God the Son has sacrificially died for the elect on the cross, enduring the divine wrath of the Father (Lesson 4): redeeming grace.
 - iii. God the Spirit has effectually called the elect to repentance and faith in Christ at the appointed time of salvation: effectual grace.
- f. "Timing" of salvation:
 - i. God the Father chose the elect at one "time" in eternity past.
 - ii. God the Son redeemed the elect at one time at the cross.
 - iii. God the Spirit regenerates the elect as they are called at different times whereby they repent and believe the gospel.

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1. "God's grace was given to us in his counsel before the world was fashion, but we were summoned into fellowship with him—when the time was right—by his effectual, efficacious, irresistible, and holy call." (Douglas Wilson)
- iv. Therefore, it is not possible for an elect individual to die prior to their effectual calling (salvation). Granted, they may experience a death-bed conversion, however, since they are elect, they will, prior to death, repent and trust in the Person and work of Christ for salvation.
- g. Without fail, when God calls an elect soul for salvation, they will repent and believe the gospel.
 - i. John 6:39 This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.
 - ii. When God calls an elect individual to salvation, though they be "dead in sin," he gives them the divine "equipment" to hear and respond resulting in faith and repentance.
- h. In terms of one's will, the grace of effectual calling is God's act whereby it (our will) is freed from depravity (unable and unwilling to please God). Salvation then becomes the moment where, for the first time, an individual is willing and able to please God.
 - i. "The human will does not attain grace through freedom, but rather freedom through grace." (Augustine, ca. 400 A.D.)
 - ii. "This grace, which is secretly imparted to the hearts of men, is not received by any hard heart; for the reason for which it is given is, that the hardness of the heart may first be taken away. Hence, when the Father is heard within, he takes away the stony heart, and gives a heart of flesh." (Augustine, ca. 400 A.D.)
- i. By what means does God effectually call the elect by the Holy Spirit?
 - i. 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.
 - ii. Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.
 - iii. Ephesians 1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise
 - iv. 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.

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- v. 1 Peter 1:23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.
- vi. Scripture is God's means of calling the elect to repentance and faith in Christ. For this reason we are called to disciple-making, speaking the word to all who might be called.
- j. Those in time effectually called to a relation with Christ are identical to the number of elect believers—i.e., those in eternity past chosen by grace. (Demarest)
- k. Why does God not effectually call more sinners to salvation?
 - i. God is not obligated to offer amnesty to rebellious humanity.
 - ii. Mercy and grace are precisely that: mercy (withholding deserved punishment) and grace (giving blessing when the opposite is deserved).
 - iii. Like the predestination of the saved, why does he even call one sinner to salvation?
- l. The effectual calling of a sinner to salvation is an act of God's immeasurable grace.
- m. Applications:
 - i. Praise God for his infinite grace upon us.
 - ii. Depend only on the gospel and the word of God as the means to save and sanctify.
 - iii. Trust God to bring about salvation and sanctification.

V. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

VI. SOURCES

- a. "The Cross and Salvation" (Bruce Demarest)
- b. "After Darkness, Light" (Ed. R.C. Sproul Jr.)
- c. "Institutes of the Christian Religion" (John Calvin)