

4. Effectual Calling

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This is the fourth in the series of studies on the doctrines of grace and we are going to consider Effectual Calling. Our text is Psalm one hundred and ten and the third verse, 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power'. This verse amply expresses the truth that I shall try to present in this study. Notice that it speaks of 'Thy people', 'Thy day', and 'Thy power'. We have already seen in this series that man is totally depraved, that God has elected a people according to His own sovereign pleasure, and that Christ died for the elect; now we shall see that salvation is applied to the heart of these chosen ones by the power of the Spirit.

WHAT IS MEANT BY EFFECTUAL CALLING?

What do we mean by the use of this term? First, we mean this is the call whereby God brings the elect to Himself through an experience of grace. This distinguishes it from all other calls spoken of in the Bible. I believe we have a call to duty, a call to separation, a call to service, and a gospel call; but the call we are considering is a very special one. It is the call which brings God's people to Him. We know that this special call differs from the gospel call for in 1 Corinthians one and the twenty-third verse we have the words, 'But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the of power of God, and the wisdom of God.' Therefore we learn that the effectual call must precede the gospel call; for one hearing the gospel only as an audible sound finds it to be foolishness and a stumblingblock, but when they have been called by the Spirit it is to them the power of God.

Furthermore, we mean that all who are thus called shall come to the Lord. The gospel of John chapter six and verse thirty-seven makes this very clear. Christ said, 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' Notice my friends, that every one given to the Son by the Father shall come to Him. I want you to note too the use of the words 'shall' and 'will' with reference to the calling of God. It is a sure thing; it is not founded upon man's willingness, because he would never come if he were left to himself, but on the sovereign will of God.

In the forty-fifth verse of the same chapter we read, 'It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me.' This is a special teaching that must be done in the heart and can be done only by the

Lord. Evangelists may persuade men to ‘make a decision’, songs may stir them, stories may move them, but only the Spirit can teach them.

The call of God is not frustrated by the will of man; for if this were true none would ever be saved. Since man’s will is bound, he would never choose Christ. Since he loves sin by nature, he would never desire to be delivered from it. Thus if any are brought to God it must be by the irresistible call of the Spirit. Look at the language of 1 Peter five, verse ten, ‘But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory ...’ He ‘hath called us’, this tells us that the Lord accomplished exactly what He determined to do. Wherever you read of this call—it is always ‘hath called’. He does not just beckon us, or invite us, but calls us, and those whom He calls always come.

Now again, in talking about the effectual call, we mean that the Spirit is active and man is passive in the initial work of grace upon the soul. In the book of Ephesians chapter two and the first verse it says, ‘And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins’. We see that man could have no part in this calling because he is spiritually dead. But it does say, ‘you hath he quickened’—He made us alive. The dead man could neither resist this work nor have any part in it. In the fifth verse of this chapter we read, ‘Even when we were dead in sins, he hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)’. We might yet state this position another way—man is passive in regeneration and active in obedience. Man is not able to ‘act’ until he has the ability and that ability is given him in regeneration, at which time he is acted upon but is not the actor. We come now to consider,

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THIS CALLING?

We have already tried to point out, and I again want to emphasize that the call is all of the Lord. In speaking of the covenant we generally say the Father elected a people, the Son redeemed them, and the Spirit calls them; and certainly this is true because it pictures each person of the triune Godhead in their particular office. However, we must remember that while there are three persons in the Godhead there is but one God. So when it comes to calling we can just as well say that it is of the Father or of the Son as to say that it is of the Holy Spirit. Let me show you what I mean by citing several scripture references. In John six and verse forty-four Christ said, ‘No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.’ Here the work of drawing men to Christ is attributed to the Father. Then in the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah the covenant of grace to which we have already referred is plainly described, ‘Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel... this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.’ Here again are the ‘shalls’ and ‘wills’ of the covenant of grace. ‘I will be their God, and they shall be my people,’ and in the next chapter it says, ‘And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me

forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.’ And in the book of Ezekiel it is stated that He would take away the heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. This is the work of the Father—to give His people this heart of flesh, taking away the heart of stone—the rebellious, obstinate, stubborn will that says ‘No’, and putting in the tender heart that is willing in the day of His power. You see the Lord has made all the arrangements that are necessary in this great salvation. I have had people ask me, ‘How can you be sure that God will have all that He wants? Maybe they won’t come to Him.’ Ah but my friends, the Lord has taken care of all that, for He makes them willing by His irresistible grace.

Now let us go back to the book of Ephesians just a moment and notice the first chapter and the nineteenth verse, ‘And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places.’ It says that the power which was wrought in Christ when He was raised from the dead is the same power that brings forth the dead sinner. How terrible then for someone to say that it can be done by any less power!

In the second chapter of Ephesians and verse ten it says, ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.’ Now who can create? Can man create himself a new heart? Can man produce within himself a new life? Can man make himself a new creature? Certainly not! We attribute the work of the first creation to God and we ought to attribute the work of the second creation to God. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, or a new creation and this creation must be of God the Creator.

Having seen that this calling, giving of life, or new creation is of the Father, let us now see that it is also of the Son. We read John five, verse twenty-five: ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.’ You could hear the voice of every preacher in the world, but if you never heard the voice of the Son of God you would never have life. But it is also true that every one who hears the voice of the Son of God shall live. Some would make it appear that the sinner hears the voice of the Son of God and then decides whether he will receive Christ as his Saviour and thus become a child of God. But my dear friends, the text plainly says that every single one who hears the voice lives. There is no deciding for the sinner to do, when he hears the voice he has life.

So we see that it is the work of Christ to give life to those who are spiritually dead and to bring His people to Him. I think this is illustrated very well in the raising of Lazarus. When Christ went out there to the tomb where Lazarus had been buried for four days, he commanded that men

should roll the stone away. I have heard this interpreted to mean that man must play some part in raising the dead sinner; but you will notice that when the stone was rolled away, Lazarus was still dead. All it did was just to let the odour out of the grave so that everybody knew he was dead. So, man in preaching the truth is not going to raise the dead sinner; but by describing him, just lets everyone know that he is dead. Then it was Christ who said, 'Lazarus, come forth', and when He spoke those life-giving words, Lazarus came forth! I think He had to say 'Lazarus', or everybody in the graveyard would have gotten up. He has all power, but the call was to one man and He brought him forth. Our Lord speaks very much the same way to the dead sinner—He speaks to a particular person, and they come forth from their spiritual grave. But even when Lazarus had come out of the grave, he was still bound up in the grave clothes; so Christ commanded those who stood by. 'Loose him and let him go'. There again is the work of the gospel minister. He doesn't raise the dead, but in proclaiming the truth God's children are set free from the bands of error which hold them and go forth to enjoy the liberty which belongs to His people.

In the third chapter of John and the third verse, 'Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Then verse five, 'Except a man be born of the water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' The work of the new birth is here attributed to the Holy Spirit. There are two distinct kingdoms mentioned, the kingdom of the flesh and the kingdom of the Spirit. One in the kingdom of the flesh cannot put himself into the kingdom of the Spirit, but must be lifted up by the power of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. It doesn't matter what you do to it, educate it, train it, make it cultured flesh or religious flesh, but it will still be flesh. 'That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' It must be God who gives this life. Man could not 'born' himself; he must 'be born' of God.

We have then seen that this calling is of the Father, it is of the Son, and it is of the Holy Spirit. All the glory and praise must go to the triune Godhead. But if some still want to put in the works of the creature, let us look at 2 Timothy chapter one and the ninth verse, 'Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.' We see that it was God who saved us and God who called us. The saving and calling did not take place before the foundation of the world, it took place here in time; but it was according to His purpose which was sure before the world began. We could say that it was done in His mind and purpose. We see too that it was a holy calling. He has not called His people that they might be free to sin, but free from sin. And please my friends, notice that this saving and calling was 'not according to our works'. Some start out so well talking about the covenant of grace, they say election is all of God and the choice was according to His own sovereign pleasure. They

will come on to redemption and say that Christ purchased His people and that He will have them all. But somehow when they get to the calling, they can't quit until they get man into the picture. They would have us believe that unless the preacher is there to aid the Spirit in the calling that it will all be in vain. But I want you to know that just as the Father was alone in election—none to advise Him before the foundation of the world; and the Son was alone in redemption—none stood with Him in that dark hour; so the Spirit is alone in calling. God is able to work and no man can hinder and we are sure that He will reach all of His people wherever they are. He will reach the little baby in its mother's arms, He will reach the heathen in the dark jungles or on the islands of the sea, He will reach all of His people whatever their circumstances in life. He will reach them all without the help of man.

Yes, I want to emphasize that this thing is sure and steadfast. It is founded on 'shalls' and 'wills'—the will of a sovereign God. There is an old hymn that expresses it so beautifully,

Amidst the wealth of Bible stores,
And gems the eye of faith explores,
None with such joy and comfort fill,
As Jesus' cov'nant SHALL and WILL.

Why are not feeble saints destroyed?
Why are not promises made void,
And sin my utter ruin proved?
His SHALLS and WILLS remain unmoved.

The weak become both strong and bold,
While on these words faith keeps her hold;
Mountains must melt and waves be still,
Obeying Jesus' SHALLS and WILLS.

These potent words subdued my heart,
And made the love of sin depart—
Christ said, 'My purpose I'll fulfill,
You SHALL submit, and reign I WILL.'

These words a sov'reign power conveyed,
Confirmed each promise He had made;
My IFS and BUTS I laid aside,
And now in SHALLS and WILLS confide.

WHO ARE THE OBJECTS OF THIS CALL?

We want now to think a little about the objects of this call. It will not be difficult to find the answer, for it is plainly stated in Romans chapter eight, 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' The called are

the ones who love God and the ones who love God are the ones included in this great scheme of grace described in verses twenty-nine and thirty. 'For whom he did foreknow, he did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 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.' So we see the called are the predestinated—they are the ones that love God; and just as surely as one is called they shall be glorified. There is no place in this great salvation for one of God's people to be lost. Then in one of the prophets the Lord, said, 'I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name.' The called ones are the redeemed ones, and the redeemed ones are the elect of God. Finally let us consider,

WHAT ARE THE EVIDENCES OF THIS CALL?

You may ask, 'Preacher, how can I feel that I am in this blessed number?' Let us look at the evidences of the call described in the word of God. The first evidence is a deep sense of sin. The Apostle Paul himself said that he was the chiefest of sinners. If you have been brought to see that you are guilty, corrupt, and vile in the sight of God, and that He would do justice to cast you into the very pit of Hell, this gives evidence that you have been made a partaker of the grace of which I write.

A second evidence is a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Matthew five and verse six says, 'Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.' The burden of sin is only a part of the evidence, but the desire for righteousness makes it complete. Christ invited the weary and heavy laden to come to Him for rest, and all the invitations of the Bible are those in this class. The hungry, the thirsty, the weary and the willing are all invited; but the hunger, the thirst and the willingness to come are all evidences of grace and not the conditions of it.

Another great evidence of this grace is the hearing ear and the believing heart. 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life ...'. He is not stating the conditions of eternal life, but the evidence of it. The man that hears and believes has life, and shall not come into condemnation because he is passed from death unto life. He is passed—that 'is' is now!

And finally, that great evidence of this grace is holiness of life. He says in 2 Peter chapter one and verse ten, 'Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.' And so may it be with every heart today, let us search ourselves to make sure our calling and election of God. Look a moment at 1 Peter 1:13-16. 'Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be

ye holy; for I am holy.’

Do you have the hope of this calling? Has irresistible grace been worked in your heart until you have been brought to rest in Christ? If so you have great cause to rejoice. How wonderful to know that the people of God are made willing in the day of His power.

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