

## —A Study of the Westminster Confession of Faith— *Free Will & Effectual Calling, WCF 9 & 10*

- Chapter 9 on man's free will seems to be misplaced. Chapters 7-8 relate the *accomplishment* of redemption by the work of Christ and Chapters 10-18 relate the various aspects of the *application* of redemption by the work of the Holy Spirit. How is it, then, that a chapter on *man's free will* appears between them?
  - The answer is *both* because the work of Christ includes the renewal and liberation of man's will *and* because the renewal and liberation of man's will is essential to the application of redemption. In no part of man's redemption is his will forced or coerced, but rather he always acts freely and according to his strongest desire.
  - The Westminster assembly therefore purposely placed Chapter 9 between Chapters 7-8 and 10-18 in order to communicate this fundamental truth that the redemption and renewal of man's natural liberty is a necessary part of Christ's saving work.
- In § 1 the fact of man's natural liberty is plainly stated. In §§ 2-5 it is explained how that liberty works itself out in the fourfold state of a man's experience in redemptive history: in the estate of innocency § 2, in the estate of sin § 3, in the estate of grace § 4, and in the estate of glory § 5.
- Jonathan Edwards observed that the decision in most of the points in controversy between Calvinists and Arminians depends on the determination of the question: *wherein consists that freedom of will which is required for moral agency in order for an act of volition to be considered praiseworthy or blameworthy and meritorious of either reward or punishment?*
  - According to Arminians, three things belong to the freedom of the will:
    - A *self-determining power*, or a certain sovereignty over itself and its own acts whereby it determines its own volitions.
    - A state of *indifference* or *equilibrium* whereby the will is without all antecedent bias and left entirely free from any prepossessing inclination.
    - The acts of the will are *contingent* and *free from necessity* by any fixed and certain connection with some previous ground or reason for their existence.
  - According to Calvinists, the liberty of a moral agent consists in the power of acting *according to his choice*; so that those actions are *free* which are performed without any external compulsion or restraint, but in consequence of the determination of his own mind.
- Thus while Arminians think to defend moral agency by ascribing to man a sovereign capacity of indifferent, contingent, self-determination without any regard to the entire state of a man's soul (his understanding, his affections, his nature), they actually promulgate an absurdity and impossibility that neither God Himself nor Christ possesses.
  - In contrast, Calvinists, as evidenced in this Chapter, hold that man's freedom consists in his acting *consciously*, choosing or refusing without any external compulsion or constraint, but according to the inward principles of rational apprehension (his understanding) and natural disposition (his own desires). Man is free to do as he pleases.

### Of Free Will

- I. Man is endowed by God with a natural liberty § 1
  - A. This opening paragraph affirms something that is true of man, not in any particular stage of his existence over another, but in every stage over his entire existence. God created man with the freedom to act as he chooses. Man, says **Hodge**, "is endowed with an inalienable faculty of self-determination." Our consciousness reveals this to us (Rom 8.32), God's revelation in Scripture reveals this to us (Dt 6.5), and God's moral government over us assumes it (Ezk 18.1-4; Ecc 11.9).

- B. According to **Hodge**, this section teaches that “the *human soul*—including all its instincts, ideas, judgments, affections, and tendencies—has the power of self-decision; that is, the soul decides in every case *as*, upon the whole, *it pleases*.” Man is not moved by a power from the outside (as are material objects) but rather moves himself by a power from within himself.
1. Nothing from without him forces him to decide in a particular way and neither are there any laws of nature which necessitate his choosing either good or evil in a given situation.
  2. In other words, he is neither an inanimate object being moved by another nor a robot with a fixed disposition of causation predetermining his actions. Instead, man is a free moral agent and acts as he chooses to act in every circumstance.
- C. This is self-evident in that man knows that he consciously chooses his actions; and he knows that at the very moment of choice he could have chosen differently if he had wanted to. Moreover, since he knows that he ultimately does as he chooses, he also knows, as a moral creature, that he is responsible for his own actions to God (Rom 8.32; compare Mt 26.24 and Jn 17.12 with Mt 27.3-4).
- D. *Thus*, in *whatever* state a man finds himself (cf. the fourfold state in §§ 2-5) man remains a free, responsible agent who chooses and refuses as he pleases. His choices are *always* according to his desires and his desires are *always* according to the tastes, tendencies, and habits of his character or nature in that state (whether of innocence, sin, grace, or glory).
1. This is why man is morally responsible for his actions (which spring from his desires)—because they are shaped by his *own* nature; they are the fruit of the free and rational desires of his *own* soul. He did as he pleased and is accountable for both what pleased him and what he did.
- E. Where there are differences in a man’s desires between one state and another—as say, between the state of sin and the state of grace—there has *necessarily* been, at the root of it, a difference made in his character or nature since his desires are always according to his nature (Mt 7.16-20; 12.33-35).
1. Therefore immoral actions reveal the immoral desires of an immoral soul while holy actions reveal the holy desires of a holy soul. The nature of the root determines the nature of the fruit.
  2. And the point made in this section is that a man has been created by God with a natural freedom to bear fruit according to the nature of his heart’s desires. He may do as he pleases, Ecc 11.9.
- F. **\*\*The Christian’s experience in redemptive history runs through four different stages or states:**
1. the state of innocency, the state of sin, the state of grace, and the state of glory; *or*, as he was before the fall into sin, as he was after his fall into sin, as he is now in the state of salvation, and as he will be in the state of glory in heaven.
  2. In each of these states man’s natural liberty remains intact. Yet, because each state involves a change in his character or nature, what he pleases to do in in each state also changes. He is always free to do as he pleases, but what he pleases to do reveals what state he’s in. His affections and desires reveal his nature.
  3. Let’s consider man in these four different states and how each state affected his liberty:

## II. Man’s natural liberty considered in the state of innocence § 2

- A. In the state of innocence man was created by God with a holy nature and holy desires and the freedom to act according to his nature out of obedience to God (Ecc 7.29). This is to say, man was created in a capacity fully able to render the obedience the covenant of works demanded of him.
- B. *Yet*, in a way that we cannot explain, but must still affirm, in this state of innocence man’s nature was mutable and ordained by God to be proven by temptation for its continuance. Therefore, while in full possession of the freedom and ability to act holily, according to his nature, man also possessed the freedom and ability to act sinfully, contrary to his nature, if he so desired.

## III. Man’s natural liberty considered in the state of sin § 3

- A. God warned man of his mutability and the probation he faced in order to secure its immutability (Gen 2.17). And when tested by temptation man chose to rebel and act sinfully, thereby plunging himself and his posterity into bondage to sin.

1. The state of innocence was thereby forever forfeited for mankind. None has ever experienced it again and none ever will. Man is now universally born in the state of sin and misery which he freely chose for himself in Adam, Ps 51.5; 58.3; Rom 5.18; Eph 2.1-3.
- B. By his fall into this state of sin, man did not lose his freedom to do as he pleases (which is essential to his moral agency) *but*, having lost the holiness of his nature *and instead corrupting his nature with sin* (Gen 3.6-7), he became fixed in a state of sinfulness with a sin nature and has no ability to act in any way contrary to his corruption and therefore no ability to act holily. In the state of sin man cannot please God because man cannot but sin, according to his fallen nature, Rom 8.7.
  1. By his rebellion man bound himself over into a state of sin and misery, a state in which his nature is no longer characterized by holiness but rather by depravity. And with the depraved nature came depraved desires, which always leads him to depraved actions, Eph 4.18; Col 2.13; Jer 17.9
  2. Man is still free to do as he chooses but his depraved nature ever renders depraved choices and he is neither able to do other than he desires nor able to make his corrupt nature desire other than it does, Jer 13.23. \*\*He freely chooses to sin and sins freely because he is a sinner by nature.
  3. In this state man willingly walks in a way that leads to death (Gen 2.17; Rom 6.23) because his character is twisted by his fall and he desires sin.
  4. And despite that his state is one of self-destruction, he is unable by his own strength to convert himself or even to prepare himself for conversion by God, Rom 3.10-12. He is without strength (Rom 5.6), cannot please God (Rom 8.7), and helpless and hopeless as regards salvation because he is without God, i.e. without God's favor (Eph 2.12).
  5. His nature is corrupt and therefore his desires are corrupt. He cannot please God because he would rather please himself. He cannot honor God because he would rather honor himself. He cannot come to God in faith because he would rather trust in himself. His actions are the fruit of his desires and his desires are the fruit of his nature.
- C. In this state of sin, man freely chooses evil without any compulsion or constraint on his will. It is his desire to do evil and he cannot do otherwise because he is under the bondage of sin, Rom 6.16, 20; 2Tim 2.26. His *understanding* is spiritually blind, his *affections* are perverted by sin, and therefore his *actions* are "indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil" (WCF 6.4).
  1. Yet, we must remember that man's incapacity of doing good is a moral inability and therefore not inconsistent with his responsibility. In other words, his bondage to sin is the result of his own doing and for which he is entirely responsible.
- D. If man is ever to be recovered from his state in sin it must be by God's free, unmerited favor (i.e. grace), Jn 6.44, 65, and by the work of God's Son (Rom 5.1-2, 6, 8). He stands in desperate need of God's mercy, grace, and converting power, Tit 3.3-7; Jn 3.7; Ezk 36.26; Eph 1.18-20.
  1. Thus we see that in this state of sin in which man's freedom is bound by his sinful nature, man is utterly unable to believe upon Christ and repent of sin.
  2. For him to turn to Christ in faith it would be necessary for him to first desire Christ as his Lord and Saviour. But this he cannot do because in his nature he is at enmity with God, Rom 5.10; Js 4.4. And for him to repent and turn from sin it would be necessary for him to break his bondage to sin and essentially save himself. If he could do this, he wouldn't need Christ in the first place!
  3. Therefore man in the state of sin is entirely dependent upon the grace and power of God to save him, Rom 5.10; Eph 2.12-16; Jn 6.44, 65; Ps 110.3. The conversion of a sinner is God's work, Ezk 36.26-27; Acts 16.14.

#### IV. Man's natural liberty considered in the state of grace § 4

- A. The conversion of a man out of the state of sin and misery and into the state of salvation is purely an act of grace (Tit 2.11) and entirely the work of God (Eph 2.1-5, 12-13; Col 1.13-14).

- B. It is occasioned by his sovereign regeneration—what Jesus calls being born again (Jn 3.3-5), made a new creature in Christ (2Cor 5.17), and united to Christ by faith in His death to sin and resurrection to righteousness (Rom 6.1-4, 10-11).
  - C. In this conversion, God does not remove the principle of sin in man (indwelling sin) but He effectively breaks man's bondage to sin (Col 1.13; Jn 8.34, 36) and gives him a new nature, a holy nature, by indwelling him with His Holy Spirit, who enables him both to desire and to do that which is good and pleasing to God (Phil 2.13; Rom 6.18, 22; 8.9-15, 26).
  - D. In this state of grace, with his will no longer in bondage to sin, and with a new holy nature, man freely chooses to do good and please God, Rom 6.12-14.
  - E. Yet, since indwelling sin is not eradicated, man in the state of grace is unable to entirely and perfectly will and do that which is good, but also at times wills and does that which is evil, Gal 5.17; Rom 7.15-23. Notwithstanding, since man's conversion is an irrevocable and sovereign work of God and a work which serves a greater work, namely the soul's complete salvation and eternal glorification in heaven, man in the state of grace increasingly wills and does that which is good, thereby growing in his sanctification, and decreasingly wills and does that which is evil, Phil 1.6.
- V. Man's natural liberty considered in the state of glory § 5
- A. In the state of glory man's will is made perfectly and immutably free to do good alone, Eph 4.13; Heb 12.23; 1Jn 3.2; Jude 24.
  - B. In glory all the vestiges and remains of sin will be entirely eradicated and man will be free to do only and all good. That which God began in regeneration with the implanting of the principle of life and holiness by His Spirit, and continued in progressive sanctification, will be finally perfected in heaven forever.
  - C. **Hodge**, "Adam was holy but unstable (liable to fall into sin). Unregenerate men are unholy and stable (i.e. fixed in unholiness). Regenerate men have two opposite moral tendencies contesting for empire in their hearts. They are cast about between them, yet the tendency graciously implanted gradually in the end perfectly prevails. Glorified men are holy and stable. But all are free and therefore responsible moral agents."
- VI. Augustine expressed man's natural liberty in each of these four states in this way:
- A. In the state of innocence man was *posse non peccare et posse peccare* (able to not sin and able to sin).
  - B. In the state of sin man is *non posse non peccare* (not able to not sin).
  - C. In the state of grace man is *posse non peccare et posse peccare* (able to not sin and able to sin).
  - D. In the state of glory man will be *non posse peccare* (not able to sin).
  - E. In each of these states man's will is *free* in that he ever does as he pleases and is not under any compulsion or coercion in his choices and actions; and yet in each state his will is *bound* in that its freedom is directly related to and arises out of his nature. He is free to do as he pleases but his pleasures are determined by his nature.
- Chapter 10 begins its discussion of effectual calling by reminding us of God's predestination. This puts the emphasis in this Chapter on God: His choice of a people and His work in their redemption, a work which begins, in their experience at least, with their effectual calling, Rom 8.30
  - There are many calls which men hear to come to God.
    - There is the call of creation, which calls all men to praise and obey God as their good Creator, Ps 19.1-4; Rom 1.18-20
    - There is the call of man's conscience, which calls him to repentance, Rom 1.32
    - And there is the call of the Word of God through the preacher, Rom 10.15

- ° Each of these is significant and has its place, but there is another call which is louder, more clear, and more efficacious than all the rest, namely the internal call of the Holy Spirit. It's this effectual call of which the opening section speaks.
- ° And remember, this Chapter follows the Chapter on Free Will because it's by God's effectual calling that man's will is liberated and renewed to participate and cooperate in the application of the redemption purchased for him by Christ.

## Of Effectual Calling

- I. There is an internal and efficacious call of God that is necessary to salvation § 1
  - A. The conversion of man from the state of sin to the state of grace requires an efficacious call of God to transfer him out of the one and into the other; Rom 1.7; 1Cor 1.9; 1Pet 2.9; 2Pet 1.3
    1. **Dick**, "The purchase of redemption by Christ in the character of our Priest secures the salvation of His people. But as they are by nature children of wrath even as others, they must undergo a change both relative and real; relative in respect of the law, by being acquitted from its charges, and real in respect of their views and dispositions. In the language of Scripture, "their blind eyes must be opened, and they must be turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ" (Acts 26.18)."
  - B. This call is directly tied to God's eternal election and therefore is only made by God to those whom He elected, Rom 8.30; Eph 1.11. None can be called in time whom God did not elect before time, Eph 1.4-6; Rom 13.48.
    1. Since His elect are known only to God, preachers are directed to preach the gospel to all men and to invite all men to believe unto salvation, Acts 17.30-31. **Shaw**, "They draw the bow at a venture, but the Lord, who knows them that are His, directs the arrow, so as to cause it to strike home to the hearts of those whom He has chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world."
    2. **\*\*Dick**, "The [external] call of the gospel does not show what God has purposed to do, but what He wills men to do."
  - C. Because this effectual call is of God, the fruit of His eternal decree of election, and the beginning of a work that ends in the glorification of the elect, this call is efficacious and irrevocable, 2Th 2.13-14; 1Pet 5.10; 2Pet 1.3; Rom 8.30; Phil 1.6.
  - D. The sole agent of this call is the Holy Spirit, who uses the Word of God as His sole instrument to effect it, 2Th 2.13-14. **Dick**, "God externally calls men by His Word, which is addressed to persons of every nation, of every condition, and of every character."
    1. Notice it's not the Word alone which saves, as any preacher can testify, but the Word when used by the Spirit of God with the intent to save, Ezk 37.1-10.
    2. This work of the Spirit is referred to as a *calling* because men are naturally at a distance from Christ and are hereby brought into fellowship with Him.
    3. If a person hears the Word and believes, it's not owing to the eloquence or persuasive powers of the preacher, nor to the person's good use of their will, but solely to the Spirit's work which brought the Word savingly home to the heart.
      - a) **Dick**, "We affirm that the Word of God is the ordinary instrument, but we deny that it is the efficient cause of conversion.... The cause of the difference which we observe in the hearers of the gospel, of whom some believe and others reject it, is not free-will, but divine grace, which works effectually in the former, to will and to do."
  - E. This call effectually and permanently brings a man out of the estate of sin and death into which he was born and into an estate of salvation by Jesus Christ, Rom 8.2; Eph 2.1-5; 2Tim 1.9-10; Col 1.12-13.
  - F. This effectual calling of God by His Holy Spirit works on man as a man and upon the whole of man according to his natural faculties. That is to say, man is not treated as a stone without a mind, heart, or will, but is approached through his natural faculties and called according to his natural faculties.

1. First of all, God's internal calling enlightens man's spiritually blind understanding with the truth that he might spiritually and savingly understand the gospel of God, Acts 26.18; 1Cor 2.10-12; Eph 1.17-18.
  2. Further, God's calling takes away the heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh, Ezk 36.26. This refers to the change God makes in the affections. By nature, a person hates God is at enmity with God and loves sin; but when God effectually calls a person, He removes the love of sin, kills the enmity, and puts a love/fear for Him in the heart. The affections, formerly perverted by sin, are awakened to the beauty and loveliness of Christ and desires Him with all the heart.
  3. Also, God's effectual calling liberates man's will from its bondage to sin and renews it with a desire and determination to that which is good, Ezk 11.19; Phil 2.13; Dt 30.6; Ezk 36.27—and the very first good which the man freely desires and does is cling to Christ alone for salvation, Eph 1.19; Jn 6.44-45.
  4. Thus we see that effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit by which He regenerates a lost soul. Which is to say that regeneration is the effect produced by the Spirit in effectual calling. For none is the subject of effectual calling whom the Spirit does not effectually regenerate and none is regenerated without being the subject of the Spirit's effectual calling.
- G. Yet, while this saving work of God's Spirit in the soul of man is a most sovereign work done upon a soul dead in sin, it is a work done in such a way that no man is forced or compelled to come to Christ but rather comes most freely, Ps 110.3; Song 1.4.
1. The subject upon whom the Spirit works is a spiritually dead man, destitute of all good and disposed to all evil. The work of the Spirit is a regenerating work, a making alive. Being made alive by the Spirit and in the Spirit, once alive, the man is not only able to embrace Christ, but does so freely and without fail. His life is a life in the Spirit and his actions are according to that new nature. In other words, being supernaturally converted unto God, the soul immediately acts under the guidance of its new Spirit-ual principle in turning from sin unto God through Christ.
    - a) His regeneration is solely the act of God, while his consequent embracing of Christ by faith and repenting of sin for Christ's sake is his own free act, worked in him efficiently by the Spirit of God, Phil 2.13; Jn 15.5.
  2. \*\*He is therefore passive in his regeneration and concurrently active in his conversion to Christ, which is by external means and through personal faith. Regeneration is the effect of grace preceding our endeavors while conversion is the effect of our regenerated soul cooperating with the grace and Spirit of God. Mind you, the soul in no way aids grace or renders it effectual by the contribution of his own will, but yields to its almighty power, goes freely along with it, and works under its influence in the turning of the soul unto God. The sinner's province consists solely in concurrence. He acts because he has been acted upon, 1Jn 4.19; Jer 31.18; Ps 119.32.
    - a) **Shaw**, "The liberty of the will is not invaded, for that would destroy its very nature; but its obstinacy is overcome, its perverseness taken away, and the whole soul powerfully, yet sweetly, attracted to the Saviour. The compliance of the soul is voluntary, while the energy of the Spirit is efficient and almighty, Ps 110.3."
  3. Thus, by God's effectual calling, man is brought to understand his lost estate and his need for Christ as Saviour, to love and desire Christ for his Saviour, and finally, to embrace Christ as his personal Saviour.
    - a) **Dick**, "The great objection against the invincibility of divine grace is that it is subversive of the liberty of the will...but the objection proceeds upon a misapprehension of the mode of operation. The idea occurs of external force, by which a man is compelled to do something to which he is averse. It is not considered that the power of grace is not compulsive; that it puts no force upon our minds; that, instead of disturbing our mental constitution, it goes along with it; and that, in a manner at once natural and supernatural, it secures the concurrence of the will. True liberty consists in doing what we do, with knowledge and from choice; and such liberty is not only consistent with conversion, but essential to it; for if a man turn to God

at all, he must turn with his heart. God does not lead us to salvation without consciousness, like stones transported from one place to another; nor without our consent, like slaves who are driven to their task by the terror of punishment. He conducts us in a manner suitable to our rational and moral nature. He so illuminates our minds that we most cordially concur with His design. While He commands, He persuades; while He draws, the sinner comes without reluctance; and never in his life is there a freer act of volition than when he believes in Christ and accepts of His salvation.”

- II. God’s effectual call is entirely of grace and infallibly effective to save § 2
- A. Before God calls a man he is dead in sin and can perform no work that is spiritually good; and after a man is converted his best works are imperfect because he is still plagued by indwelling sin and the body of death. Neither before his conversion nor after his conversion is there anything good and meritorious to be found in man.
1. There is surely nothing good in him before conversion and any good that is found in him afterwards is entirely the Lord’s doing.
  2. Therefore his effectual calling proceeds entirely from God’s free grace, Eph 2.4-5, 8-9.
- B. Of course the Lord clearly foresees before creation what the man will be and do after his conversion, since the Lord Himself decrees all things. But nothing foreseen in a man can be the cause of a man’s conversion since all the good the Lord foresees in a man is what He Himself decrees to work in him.
1. Thus the Lord foresees that a man will believe unto salvation because He has decreed and foreordained to grant him the faith to believe in Christ, Phil 1.29; Acts 13.48
  2. Also, the Lord foresees that a man will repent of sin and turn to unto Him because He has decreed and foreordained to grant him the repentance to repent of sin, 2Tim 2.24-26.
  3. In other words, the Lord only foresees what the Lord Himself has foreordained and decreed will be. His foreknowledge is the fruit of His eternal decree and foreordination, Eph 1.11; Acts 2.23.
- C. This is why the sinner is altogether passive in his regeneration, because he is a spiritually dead man. He can do no more towards his own regeneration than Lazarus could do towards his resurrection.
1. The sinner is dead in sin, Eph 2.1 and must be born again, Jn 3.3-5. And he can do no more to contribute to his spiritual birth than he did to contribute to his physical birth, Eph 2.1-5; 1Cor 2.14.
  2. **Dick**, “In opposition to all the modifications of error upon this subject, we affirm that conversion is effected by the almighty grace of God; that, although man does not concur in it, he is in the first instance passive, and his concurrence [by faith, love, and repentance] is the *consequence* of supernatural power communicated to him [in his effectual calling]; and that he does not come to God till he is effectually called by the [saving] operations of the Holy Spirit in his soul.”
  3. **Dick**, “It is not sufficient to tell the slave that his condition is wretched and degraded, and to awaken his natural desire for liberty; you must break his fetters, and rescue him from the power of his oppressor. The situation of a sinner is more hopeless than that of this man; for he is a willing slave, he hugs his chains, he thinks himself already free, and despises the liberty which the gospel offers, as the most grievous bondage. Hence, although commanded and exhorted and addressed by every argument to return to the service of God, he refuses, till he is roused and persuaded by something of greater efficacy than the clearest demonstration and the most impressive oratory which men can employ—we must conclude that a mighty, sovereign, and invincible power is displayed in the regeneration of the soul.”
- D. Since effectual calling *effects* a man’s regeneration—thereby making him spiritually alive, both in his understanding, his affections, and his will—once internally regenerated by the power of God and enabled to answer the external call of the gospel, he freely embraces the grace offered to him in the external call and conveyed by it to all who believe.
1. Thus we can see how the internal call and the external call work together. When the time for love has come and God intends to save an elect soul, the external call of the preacher reaches the ears and is joined with the internal, effectual call of the Spirit, who brings the preached Word

effectively unto the heart and by it regenerates the soul, enlightens the understanding, renews the will, and directs the affections, so that the now living soul answers the preacher's call with faith in Christ and repentance of sin, resulting in the love, peace, and joy of God rushing upon the soul as assurance that God has saved him and he is now a child of God in Christ, Acts 16.14.

2. **Dick**, "Men [preachers] propose objects of faith, and endeavor to fix the attention upon them, and to awaken activity by arguments and persuasives; but God alone moves and changes the heart.... All things are of God in redemption, as well as in creation. Every good thought, every devout emotion, every holy action, is the effect of His grace, Eph 2.10."
3. **Dick**, "We shall not be surprised at the attempts which have been made to bring man forward, in whole or in part as the author of his salvation, if we reflect upon the pride of his heart, which prompts him, like our first parents, to aspire to be God, possessing not only the knowledge of good and evil, but also the power to do the one as well as the other."

### III. The Holy Spirit usually works by means but is free to work without them as He pleases § 3

- A. **Van Dixhoorn**, "The whole point of this chapter on effectual calling is to remind us that it is God who summons us to salvation. His call is all of grace; we do not deserve it, and without his help we cannot even hear it and respond to it. God's sovereignty in saving his people should always be good news as we pray for a sinner's salvation, but it is most obviously so when we think of how God helps those who cannot lift a finger to help themselves."
- B. In this section the Confession draws attention to how God saves the most helpless of people, namely the elect who die in infancy and the mentally retarded. Several points are made that we need to understand.
  1. The section says nothing about *all* who die in infancy, but only about the elect who die in infancy. It's not a blanket statement about the unborn who die before the ability to use their mental and volitional faculties in response to the gospel call, but rather a statement about the elect who die before they have the ability to use their mental and volitional faculties in response to the gospel call.
    - a) The point made is that should, in the providence of God, one of God's eternally elect die before being able to place personal faith in Christ, they will be regenerated by the Spirit—in their infancy, and saved by Christ's person and work—just as all the rest of the elect, since the Spirit is able to sovereignly able to work upon the soul without the means of the external call of the gospel where and when he pleases, Jn 3.8.
    - b) This reveals that while God is pleased to ordinarily save by means of the preached gospel and by means of a conscious and volitional believing upon Christ, He is not so tied to the means that He cannot, if it pleases Him, regenerate a soul without means.
      - (1) **Dick**, "As infants are not fit subjects of instruction [about Christ], their regeneration must be effected without means, by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit on their souls. There are adult persons, too, to whom the use of reason has been denied... and to such of them as God has chosen, it may be applied in the same manner as to infants."
    - c) This also reveals the innate guilt of every soul at conception, Ps 51.5. An infant in the womb is not an innocent soul but stands before God guilty and condemned in Adam, Ps 58.3; Eph 2.3. Infants in—and out of—the womb need their sin atoned for by Christ. They are not yet guilty of any actual sin, but are guilty of original sin, which is imputed to them by God as a child of Adam and under the curse of the covenant of works.
    - d) Thus if any infant dies and goes to heaven, it is upon the same ground of Christ's mediation and sovereign regeneration as it is for any believing adult, Acts 4.12; Jn 14.6; 6.37. Their sins were laid upon Christ on the cross and now—in their infancy—His righteousness was imputed to them.
    - e) It's understood that this regeneration without means does not apply to young children or adults who have the ability to use their mental and volitional faculties in response to the gospel call. If we are able to use the means appointed by God then we are bound to use them



and would be foolishly presumptuous to imagine that we can neglect or despise the means and still be saved.

2. Likewise, the section says nothing about *all* the mentally retarded, but only about the elect who, in the Lord's providence, are born mentally retarded and incapable to employ their mental and volitional faculties in response to the gospel call.
    - a) All the elect who are born in such a condition will be sovereignly saved by God, who is ever free to work by, above, or without means as He chooses.
    - b) **Van Dixhoorn**, "The nonnegotiable for salvation is not faith, but the Spirit, by whom we have Christ, by whom, in turn, we have the Father (1Jn 5.12; Rom 8.9)."
  3. This section is not saying that infants and the mentally retarded are saved because they are infants and mentally retarded—for while this may be their condition, they are essentially nothing more than guilty sinners in Adam and deserving of hell like all the rest. Rather, it is saying that they are saved because they are elect, chosen just like any other person that is elect. The reason they were effectually called by God has not changed (it's by free grace alone); but the manner of their being called is extra-ordinary, according to God's good pleasure.
- IV. There is an external call of God to salvation, but it cannot save without the internal call adjoining it § 4
- A. This section teaches that all the non-elect will, to a man, never be saved—not because they were not elect but rather because they will never be effectually called by the Spirit but will judicially be left in their blindness and aversion to God.
    1. They may be externally called by the gospel and even may experience some "common, non-saving operations" of the Spirit—like conviction of sin and the desire for deliverance from sin, and even knowledge of Christ and an affinity for the things of God, but they never truly come to Christ in faith and love and therefore cannot be saved, Mt 22.14; 7.22; 13.20-21; Jn 6.64-66; 8.24; Heb 6.4-6.
    2. This teaches us that there are some who appear to come to Christ who do not really come to Him at all. They may walk down the aisle of a church in confession of their desire to receive Christ, say "the sinner's prayer", take membership vows, teach Sunday School, and even preach excellent and effective sermons used by God to save sinners, and yet never be saved themselves, Mt 7.22.
    3. Conversion is a work of God, but it includes one's own hearty embracing of Christ in faith and love and one's diligent following of Christ in sincerity and gratitude. That's why we must never rely on our outward works to convince us of our salvation, but look first for genuine faith and love and then for works which appear as the fruits of that faith and love. Moreover, we must never believe our own heart's witness that we are saved, but rather rest upon the Spirit's witness with our spirits that we are children of God, Rom 8.16.
  - B. We know from Scripture that God has not decreed to save all men. We also know that He offers salvation to all in the gospel. This has led some to suppose that God is insincere in the external call of the gospel. But to think so is to deny him to be God.
    1. God is under no obligation to save any and mercifully saves the elect, who are as guilty as the rest. The fact that He leaves some under the just penalty of their sin is no injustice; and the fact that He mercifully elected and saves some by the substitutionary work of Christ as their Mediator is no injustice to the rest. The condemned are justly condemned and the saved are mercifully saved.
    2. But how to reconcile the intention to save only some and the call offered sincerely to all is beyond our ability. But let it be remembered that we are not ignorant of the two truths themselves, but only of the connection between them. We are therefore to believe both, even if we cannot reconcile them, upon the authority of God who reveals both as true. **Dick**, "In the study of theology, we are admonished at every step to be humble, and feel the necessity of faith, or an implicit dependence upon the testimony of Him who alone perfectly knows Himself, and will not deceive us."

- C. If the non-elect sitting under the call of the gospel will never be saved without the Spirit's sovereign effectual calling, then in no way will the non-elect destitute of the gospel be saved without it, no matter how diligently and faithfully they may live their lives according to the light of nature and another religion, Rom 3.23. And to assert that one may be saved by any other revelation than that of the gospel of God or that one may be saved without the effectual call and regeneration of the Spirit by the gospel of God is pernicious to the truth of God revealed in the Scriptures, 2Cor 4.4; Acts 4.12; Jn 14.6; Gal 1.6-8.
1. We must never welcome as brothers those who teach that all roads lead to heaven, 2Jn 9-11; Eph 2.12. An atonement of one's sins is absolutely necessary to salvation and therefore a saving interest in the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary, Rom 3.23-25. To say that men may be saved any other way than by Christ is virtually to deny Christ and His work.
  2. **Hodge**, "God has certainly revealed no purpose to save any except those who, hearing the gospel, obey; and he requires that his people, as custodians of the gospel, should be diligent in disseminating it as the appointed means of saving souls. Whatever lies beyond this circle of sanctified means is unrevealed, unpromised, uncovenanted."
  3. **Hodge**, "The heathen in mass...are evidently strangers to God, and going down to death in an unsaved condition."
- D. **Shaw**, "Let us be thankful that we are favored with the revelation and free offer of Christ in the gospel. Let us give all diligence to make sure our election by making sure our calling; and if we have, indeed, been made partakers of the heavenly calling, let us walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called and worthy of God, who has called us into his kingdom and glory."

#### Bibliography:

An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Robert Shaw  
 The Confession of Faith, A. A. Hodge  
 Confessing the Faith, Chad Van Dixhoorn  
 Lectures on Theology Vol. 3, John Dick  
 Westminster Standards class at WTS 2001, Sinclair Ferguson

#### Assignments:

\*Read Chapters Nine and Ten in Hodge  
 \*Read Chapters Nine and Ten in the WCF  
 \*Memorize Shorter Catechism questions 12-20, 29-31 and Ecc 7.29; Rom 8.7-8; Col 1.13; Rom 6.6-7; Phil 2.13; Jude 24; 1Jn 3.2; and Rom 8.30; 2Tim 1.9; 1Cor 1.9; 2.12; Ezk 36.26; Acts 26.18; Jn 6.44-45

—The next class will meet, DV, at 8AM on 10 Oct for a study of WCF 11