

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 26—Our Effectual Calling, Q. 31

Introduction

So far we've learned that *the Spirit of God* is the sole agent of our salvation, *who makes us partakers* of the redemption purchased by Christ, *by uniting* us to Christ, *through* faith, *in our effectual calling*—which shows us the absolute importance of this call, by which Christ and His benefits become ours.

Today, we consider what this effectual calling is.

- I. Effectual calling is *one in effect* with *regeneration*. To be effectually called is to be born again/ regenerated (Jn 3), given a new heart and spirit (Ezk 36), raised from spiritual death (Rom 6), and brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ (Jn 6). All these descriptions of *coming to saving faith in Christ* capture what it is to be effectually called unto salvation in Christ by the Spirit of God.
 - A. It's clear from Scripture that the glory of man's effectual calling can neither be given to man or even shared with man, but must be given wholly to God's free *grace*, almighty *power*, and infinite *wisdom*.
- II. The Scriptures expressly teach that there are *two kinds of calls* to salvation: the one *outward* and by the Word only and the other *inward* by the Spirit, joined with the Word.
 - A. The *outward* call alone is *ineffectual* for salvation, not due to any weakness of the Word itself, but due entirely to the depravity of the hearer.
 1. This call is divinely appointed and, under all ordinary conditions, a necessary means of salvation because the order established by God (and therefore to which all men are bound) is this: salvation comes by faith, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, Rom 10.13-17; Mk 16.15-16
 2. This outward call essentially consists of: 1) a statement of the plan of salvation in Christ, 2) a command to repent of sin and believe on Christ, 3) motives to believe on Christ, 4) a promise of salvation to all who believe.
 3. All men within earshot of the gospel are called outwardly, Mt 22.14. It's a good faith offer of salvation in Christ to *all* who repent and believe. This call is to go forth to all men, in all the world, until the end of time, and is entrusted officially to the ministers of the gospel, Mt 28.19
 - B. The *inward*, Spiritual call is distinct from the Word and yet joined with it, and is in every case whatsoever *effectual* to salvation.
 1. The outward call is the call of the Word, and if it stands alone, it must fall like a song on deaf ears; but *the inward call* is the call of *the Spirit*, who comes irresistibly to the heart and brings with Him *life, light, and change*, because He brings with Him *Christ Himself*.
- III. None receive the inward call but the elect, Rom 8.30; Acts 13.48
 - A. They're called out of death into life, out of darkness into light, out of enmity into peace, out of discord into reconciliation, out of condemnation into justification, out of illegitimacy into adoption, out of sin into holiness, out of uncleanness into sanctification, out of prison into a palace, out of hell into heaven, out of an estate of sin and misery into an estate of salvation—*all because they're called out of Adam into Christ*. —And not a single part of this transfer from one to the other can fail because at the heart and root of it all is the sinner's being *united to Christ*.
- IV. What are the steps of the Spirit's effectual call and regeneration of the soul?
 - A. First, the Spirit *convinces us of our sin and that we're lost and undone*, Jn 16.8; Ps 51.1-4
 1. This is the Spirit's *law-work*, designed and necessary to convince us of our sin. By this the Spirit brings the elect soul prisoner to Mount Sinai. He takes away all ignorance by the truth, all blindness by sight, all darkness by light, and all denial by confrontation. He mercifully applies the Law of God to our conscience, calling us out as the *sinner*s we are in the words of the prophet, "*You are the man*" Rom 7.9; 2Sam 12.13

2. With this illumination comes the awareness of our guilt before God, our being under the deserved wrath of God, our utter inability to satisfy the Law of God with either payment for the sins we've committed or the obedience demanded.
 3. This conviction of sin overturns all self-confidence, destroys all self-righteousness, causes us to despair of deliverance in ourselves, and convinces us of our need for outside help, Acts 2.37; 16.27
 4. This work of convincing is the Spirit's way of conquering the mind and subduing it by reason and argument. By this work the Spirit brings the truth of our condition home to our mind and heart and leaves us without reply or excuse. This work of the Spirit is *irresistible*. When He comes in this way, *He comes to conquer and overcome*. He doesn't come to attempt; He comes in power to *regenerate*, Ps 110.3
 5. *Note*: in God's wisdom, the elect may be kept for a long time in this condition in which the redeeming Spirit stands with His indictment against us and shuts our mouths under a sense of guilt and shame and despair.
- B. Secondly, the Spirit *enlightens our eyes in the knowledge of Christ* as Saviour and Redeemer.
1. This is the Spirit's *gospel-work*. By this He brings the elect soul to Mount Zion, where Christ stands to receive him and where the soul sees the suitability of Christ as a Saviour.
 2. The Spirit turns the sinner's attention away from himself and toward Christ, opening the eyes of the soul to see two things: 1) Christ's *ability* to save him, Heb 7.25; and 2) Christ's *willingness* to save him, Jn 6.37
 3. By this step the sinner's *understanding* is savingly enlightened. He sees himself as a *sinner* and Christ as a *Saviour*. He sees his *need* for salvation and Christ's *sufficiency* to save him. He sees his *desperation* to be saved and Christ's *readiness* to save him. The truth of God, brought home to the heart and mind by the preached Word, has enlightened him with truth.
 4. The Spirit's method here is one of *almighty moral persuasion*, as He *sweetly and powerfully draws* the sinner to Christ in the preaching of the gospel. **This is the essence of gospel preaching.*
- C. Thirdly, the Spirit *renews our wills*.
1. With the *understanding* enlightened, the Spirit now works on the *will* of the sinner to bring him *actively* to Christ through the exercise of *faith: the empty hand of the perishing soul reaching out to Christ for saving grace and mercy*. Once a man is *convinced* of his sin and *enlightened* in Christ as a Saviour, let a thousand hells stand between him and the Saviour and he'll brave them all, Phil 3.7-9
 2. **As the Spirit comes into the dead soul, He infuses new life into it. And this new life works on the whole man and all his faculties. His understanding becomes a counselor to lead him to the truth as it is in Jesus, his affections become a magnet being drawn by the beauty and glory of Jesus, and his will becomes a commanding emperor and active power to stretch out the hand of faith and take hold of the Jesus before him.*
 3. **When the sinner's will is renewed to close with Christ, he who was passive in his regeneration (the infusion of new life) now begins to be active in his conversion (turning to Christ)—heartily and freely embracing Christ—and in his subsequent conversation as a disciple of Christ.*
 4. The work of the Spirit on the *will* is *an irresistible grace* by which He *wisely, powerfully, graciously, and sweetly moves it* to abandon the way of death and choose the way of life.
 5. **The work of the Spirit on the will of man is not the destroying of his natural liberty, but rather the preserving and perfecting of it. The Spirit corrects, helps, heals, and perfects the sinner's will so that in the face of his own need and of Christ's supply, he freely embraces Christ. The will is given both a willingness to do good and the ability to do good (Phil 2.13; Ps 110.3), and the chief good it wills and chooses at this juncture is the embrace of Christ as Saviour.*
- D. Fourthly, the Spirit *persuades and enables us to embrace the Christ freely offered to us in the Gospel Word*.

1. Here we see the *effectiveness* of the inward call of the Spirit. The sinner closes with Christ. The heart is won to Christ. The sinner is conquered, says “Amen” to the covenant of grace, and gives his consent to take Christ as He’s offered in the terms of the gospel. The sinner takes Christ for Prophet, Priest, and King, as Lord and Saviour, to be under His Word as truth, to be saved by His cross, and to be obedient to His Laws—all by the *power* of God, all by the *grace* of God, and all to the *glory* of God.

Reflections

1. See how every part of a man’s nature was ruined in the catastrophe of the Fall. These parts must all be worked on by the powerful and irresistible grace of God if ever a man is to be saved.
2. See the helpless, hopeless, miserable, imprisoned condition in which the *outward call* of the gospel finds every sinner and what great need there is for the *inward, effectual, regenerating call* of the Spirit of God.
3. See the beauty of the Trinity in our salvation and what great love is shown to us in the work of each of the divine Persons to save us. The *Father’s* election, the *Son’s* redemption, and the *Spirit’s* regeneration, are *all* absolutely necessary for our salvation.
4. See why all the elect of God *will be* infallibly saved, why the number of God’s elect *can never be* added to, why man cannot be saved *by his own will*, why no saved man can *ever* be lost, and why the very gates of hell *don’t stand a chance* against the divine work of redemption among the sons of Adam.
5. Give praise to God for effectually calling you out of darkness into light.
6. See that you have a due esteem for the preached Word, the *only* means by which the Spirit calls sinners to Christ and the *primary* means by which He continues His sanctifying work in them.
7. See that you walk worthy of the calling you’ve received, striving by His grace to be holy in all manner of life and conversation, Eph 4.1-3; Col 3.1-5; 1Pet 1.13-16; 2.1-3, 9-12