

Fundamentals, Study 10: Effectual Calling (Eph 1:3-14)

by BS Poh

o In effectual calling, the Holy Spirit applies the gospel to the elect by transforming his nature so as to be convinced, convicted, and converted, from a life of sin to faith in Jesus Christ.

1. Those who have been chosen by God to be saved (i.e. the *elect*) will be spiritually united to Christ in His appointed time.¹ This is achieved by the Holy Spirit who works directly upon them when they hear or read the word of God. The Holy Spirit works upon all their faculties: (a) He enlightens their minds to understand the things of God; (b) He makes their hearts tender and responsive to the truth; (c) He renews their wills and causes them to desire and pursue the things that are good.² The Holy Spirit draws them to trust in Jesus Christ in such a way that they come absolutely freely, being made willing by God's grace.³ This work of the Triune God in bringing sinners out of darkness to light, and giving them eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, is known as *effectual calling*. (1. Rom 8:30; 2. Eph 1:17-18; Ezek 36:26, 27; Eph 1:19; 3. Psalm 110:3; John 10:27)

2. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not on account of anything foreseen by God in man. Man is totally passive in the matter.⁴ He is spiritually dead until made alive by the Holy Spirit. This change in the soul, accomplished by the Holy Spirit, is known as *regeneration*.⁵ By this he is enabled to respond to the call of the gospel. The certainty of the elect coming to faith in Christ by the drawing of the Holy Spirit has been called *Irresistible Grace*. (Looked at from the point of cause-and-effect, *effectual calling* is the effect, while *Irresistible Grace* is the cause.) The response of the elect may be instantaneous but, more often, it is protracted (i.e. drawn out over time). The response is the effect of regeneration, not the cause, or contribution, to it. This enabling power is like the power which raised up Christ from death. It is wholly the work of God.⁶ (4. 2 Tim 1:9; Eph 2:8; 5. John 3:8; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:5; 6. Eph 1:19-20)

3. The effectual call is different from the *external call*, which is the word of God preached to all men regardless of who they may be. It is the duty of the Christian to preach the gospel to all since that is the command of God.⁷ We may know who are chosen by God only after they are effectually called. Those who are not chosen by God may experience a degree of understanding and conviction by the hearing or reading of the word of God, but they will not and cannot truly come to Christ and therefore cannot be saved.⁸ It is important not to assume that a person is saved simply because he shows some signs of conviction.⁹ (7. Matt 28:18-20; 22:14; 8. Heb 6:4-5; John 6:44-45, 65; 9. 2 Cor 7:10; 13:5)

4. Since faith in Christ is alone the way to be saved, those who have never heard the gospel and those who follow other religions cannot be saved, however diligently they frame their lives according to their understanding and the requirements of their religions.¹⁰ This is a hard truth to accept, but we must submit to it and work hard at sending the gospel to those who are perishing in their sin. (10. Acts 4:12; John 4:22)

5. What about infants who die and those who are mentally handicapped? Will they perish in their sin? What we can say for certain is that the elect among them are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works powerfully when, where, and how He pleases.¹¹ God is all-wise, and He will do right.¹² (11. John 3:3-6, 8; 12. Gen 18:25)

= Plead with God to save you! Turn to Christ in faith!

Review Questions

1. What is *effectual calling*?
2. How does the Holy Spirit work in a person who is effectually called?
3. What is *regeneration*?
4. What does *regeneration* accomplish for the man?
5. What is the *external call*?
6. When may we know who are chosen by God?
7. Why is it important not to assume that a person is saved simply because he shows signs of conviction?
8. Why can't those who have never heard the gospel and those who follow other religions be saved?
9. Are all infants who die and the mentally handicapped saved?
10. How are elect infants saved?

Assignment/Discussion

Discuss the merits and demerits of believing that all infants who die in infancy are elect and, therefore, saved, taking into consideration passages such as 2 Sam. 12:23; 1 Kings 14:13; Luke 18:15-17.

Memory Passage (Rom 9:16)

16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

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