

EFFECTUAL CALLING

GOD DRAWS HIS PEOPLE to HIMSELF

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

...from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The effectual or effective call of God has been defined as *the summons of God which produces its desired effect.*

Wayne Grudem puts it this way: *Effective calling is an act of God the Father, speaking through the human proclamation of the gospel, in which he summons people to himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith.*

When discussing the call of God, it is important to remember that what we are called to is God himself. So perhaps it's best that we say "Who" we are called to.

Effectual calling is a sixteenth-century English phrase that became the title of chapter X of the 1647 Westminster Confession. The chapter begins thus:

I. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

II. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

Yes...they come most freely after being made willing by His grace. Prior to "being made willing" people do have a will and do make lots of choices (even good choices)...but being dead spiritually, they cannot choose God nor submit to his rule. Such a will is not truly free.

What is being spoken of in the above excerpt is the many-sided reality of Christian conversion, involving illumination, regeneration, faith, and repentance. It is being analyzed as a sovereign work of God, "effectually" (or effectively) performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The concept corresponds to Paul's use of the verb *call* (meaning "bring to faith") and *called* (meaning "converted").

Romans 8:28

²⁸ *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called **(converted)** according to his purpose.*

Romans 8:30

³⁰ *And those he predestined, he also called **(converted)**; those he called **(converted)**, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Effective calling is an act of God. In fact, it is specifically an act of God the Father, for he is the one who predestines people "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29).

1 Corinthians 1:26-27

²⁶ *Brothers, think of what you were when you were called **(converted)**. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*

Galatians 1:15

¹⁵ *But when God, who set me apart from birth and called **(converted)** me by his grace, was pleased...*

When God calls people in this powerful way, he calls them "out of darkness into his wonderful light."

1 Peter 2:9

⁹ *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

People who receive this calling are changed.

Ephesians 5:8

⁸ *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light*

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

¹³ *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work*

of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called (**converted**) you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:39

³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call (**bring to faith**)."

This "calling" contrasts with the idea of a merely external and ineffective invitation, as found in **Matthew 22:14**...

¹⁴ "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

In fact, theologians differentiate between God's effective call and his general or gospel call. Many hear the general call of the gospel message and do not respond. But in some cases the gospel call is made so effective by the working of the Holy Spirit in people's hearts that they do respond; we can say that they have received "effective calling."

Effective calling is an act of God that guarantees a response and it is distinguished from the general gospel invitation that goes out to all people and which some people reject.

In Paul's interaction with Lydia in Philippi, we can see the general gospel call working effectively:

Acts 16:14

¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

Or how about this passage we considered last week?

Acts 13:48

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

Heard what? They heard the general call of the gospel message. Does this verse say that all of the Gentiles believed? No, it says all who were appointed for eternal life believed. Who had appointed them? What did they receive?

When we proclaim the gospel, should we tell people that it calls for a response? Does it? What role does prayer play in this?

Unless God works in people's hearts to make the proclamation of the gospel effective, there will be no genuine saving response. For those who receive this effective call, their response will be a voluntary, willing response in which the individual person puts his or her trust in Christ.

Again, the effective call of God is the summons of God which produces its desired effect. It is an act of God that guarantees a positive response. Consider the following verse:

John 6:44

⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."

What is depicted here is not a wooing. It is a drawing. People draw water from a well. They don't woo it. *"Please water, won't you come up out of that well? I long to enjoy your company, won't you arise and come to me that you might fulfill your purpose?"* No, the water is taken hold of and lifted out of the well. Otherwise, it's not coming out.

Original (inherited) sin renders all human beings naturally dead (unresponsive) to God, but in effectual calling God quickens the dead. As the outward (general) call of God to faith in Christ is communicated through the reading, preaching, and explaining of the contents of the Bible, the Holy Spirit enlightens and renews the heart of elect sinners so that they understand the gospel and embrace it as truth from God, and God in Christ becomes to them an object of desire and affection. Being now regenerate and able by the use of their freed will to choose God and the good, they turn away from their former pattern of living to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to start a new life with him.

Effective Calling

Entirely an act of God

Received by some

Internal calling

Always effective

General/Gospel Calling

Comes through human speech

Offered to many

External calling

Often rejected

*Most of the foregoing material was taken from "Concise Theology" by J.I. Packer and "Systematic Theology" by Wayne Grudem.