

Chapter X.

Of Effectual Calling

SECTION I.—All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted 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.

SECTION 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.

Exposition

There is an eternal call of the gospel, whereby all who hear it are called to the fellowship of Christ, and to receive a full salvation in him, without money and without price.—Isa. Iv. 1. This call is not confined to the elect, nor restricted to those who are sensible of their sins, and feel their need of a saviour, or who possess some good qualifications to distinguish them from others, but it is addressed to mankind sinners as such, without distinction, and without exception. All who come under the general denomination of men, whatever be their character and state, have this call directed to them: “To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men.”—Prov. viii. 4. “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth”—sinners of every nation, of every rank, and condition.—Isa. xiv. 22. To reconcile the unlimited call of the gospel with the doctrines of particular election and a definite atonement, seems to exceed the efforts of the human mind. But though we cannot discover the principle which reconciles them, the doctrines themselves are clearly taught in the Word of God; and are, therefore, to be received with unhesitating confidence. That the call of the gospel is indefinite and universal, that God is sincere in addressing this call to all to whom the gospel comes, and that none who comply with the call shall be disappointed; these are unquestionable truths. But the outward call by the Word is of itself ineffectual. Though all without exception are thus called, yet multitudes refuse to hearken, and in this respect “many are called, but few are chosen;” that is, few are determined effectually to embrace the call. But there is also an internal call, in

which the Holy Spirit accompanies the external call with power and efficacy upon the soul; and this call is always effectual. This effectual work of the Spirit is termed a calling, because men are naturally at a distance from Christ, and are hereby brought into fellowship with him. They are called “out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ”—out of darkness into marvellous light—out of the world that lies in wickedness into the family of God—from a state of bondage into a state of glorious liberty—from a state of sin unto holiness and from a state of wrath unto the hope of eternal glory. Concerning this calling we are here taught,—

1. That the elect alone are partakers of it: “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased effectually to call.” The subjects of this work are said to be “called according to God’s purpose,” and “whom he did predestinate, them he also called.”—Rom. viii. 28, 30, 2 Tim. i. 9. Those who dispense the Word know not who are included in “the election of grace,” and must, therefore, address the calls and invitations of the gospel to men indiscriminately. They draw the bow at a venture, but the Lord, who “knoweth them that are his,” directs the arrow, so as to cause it to strike home to the hearts of those whom he “hath chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.”

2. That this calling is under the direction of the sovereign will and pleasure of God as to the time of it. He is pleased to call his elect “in his appointed and accepted time.” Some are called into the vineyard at the third hour, some at the sixth, some at the ninth, and some even at the eleventh hour of the day. Some, like good Obadiah, have feared the Lord from their youth; others, like Saul of Tarsus, have been born, as it were, out of due time. There is also a diversity with respect to the manner of this calling. Some, like Lydia, have been secretly and sweetly allured to the Saviour, and could hardly declare the time or manner in which the happy change began; others, like the Philippian jailer, have for a season suffered the terrors of the Lord, and been made to cry out, trembling and astonished, “What shall I do to be saved!”—Acts xvi.

3. That this calling is effected by the Word and Spirit. The Word is usually the outward means employed, and the Holy Spirit is always the efficient agent, in calling men into the kingdom of grace. If, in any instance, the call of the gospel proves successful, it is not owing to the piety or persuasive eloquence of those who dispense the gospel (1 Cor. iii. 7); neither is it on account of one making a better use than another of his own free will (Rom. ix. 16); it is solely to be ascribed to the power of the Divine Spirit accompanying the outward call of the Word.—1 Thess. i. 5. By means of the law, the Spirit convinces them of their sinfulness, shows them the danger to which they are exposed, and discovers to them the utter insufficiency of their own works of righteousness as the ground of their hope and trust for acceptance before God. By means of the gospel, he enlightens their minds in the knowledge of Christ—discovered to them the glory of his person, the perfection of his righteousness, the suitableness of his offices, and the fullness of his grace; shows them his ability to save to the uttermost, his suitableness to their condition, and his willingness to receive all that come to him. He also takes away their heart of stone, and gives unto them an heart of flesh—

renews their wills, and effectually determines and enables them to embrace Christ as their own Saviour.

4. That in this calling no violence is offered to the will. While the Spirit effectually draws sinners to Christ, he deals with them in a way agreeable to their rational nature, “so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.” 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: “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.”—Ps. cx. 3.

5. That in this calling the operations of the Holy Spirit are invincible. As Arminians and others maintain that God gives sufficient grace to all men, upon the due improvement of which they may be saved, if it is not their own fault, so they also hold that there are no operations of the Spirit in conversion which do not leave the sinner in such a state as that he may either comply with them or not. It is obvious that this opinion makes the success of the Spirit’s work to depend on the sinner’s free will, so that those who do actually obey the call of the gospel are not more indebted to God than those who reject it, but may take praise to themselves for having made a better use of their power, in direct opposition to Scripture, which declares that “it is not of him that willeth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” We admit that there are common operations of the Spirit which do not issue in the conversion of the sinner; but we maintain that the special operations of the Spirit overcome all opposition, and effectually determine the sinner to embrace Jesus Christ as he is offered in the gospel. If the special operations of the Spirit not invincible, but might be effectually resisted, then it would be uncertain whether any would believe or not, and consequently possible that all which Christ had done and suffered in the work of redemption might have been done and suffered in vain.

6. That this calling proceeds from the free grace of God. The term grace is sometimes used to denote the influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart, and sometimes to denote the free favour of God, as opposed to all merit on the part of his creatures. It is to be understood in the latter sense when this effectual call is said to be “of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man.” Previous to their vocation, men can perform no work that is spiritually good; and, after their conversion, their best works are imperfect, and cannot entitle them to any reward. God is not, therefore, influenced to call them on account of any good works which they have already done, nor from the foresight of anything to be afterwards done by them.—2 Tim. i. 9; Tit. iii. 5. To manifest that this call is entirely owing to the free grace of God, and to display the exceeding riches of his grace, God is sometimes pleased to call the very chief of sinners.

7. That in this calling the sinner is altogether passive, until he is quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Here it is proper to distinguish between regeneration and conversion; in the former the sinner is passive—in the latter he is active, or co-operates with the grace of God. In regeneration a principle of grace is implanted in the soul, and previous to this the sinner is incapable of moral

activity; for, in the language of inspiration, he is “dead in trespasses and sins.” In conversion the soul turns to God, which imports activity; but still the sinner only acts as he is acted upon by God, who “worketh in him both to will and to do.”

SECTION III.—Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.

Exposition

The Holy Spirit usually works by means; and the Word, read or preached, is the ordinary means which he renders effectual to the salvation of sinners. But he has immediate access to the hearts of men, and can produce a saving change in them without the use of ordinary means. “As infants are not fit subjects of instruction, 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. It would be harsh and unwarrantable to suppose that they are, on this account, excluded from salvation; and to such of them as God has chosen, it may be applied in the same man her as to infants.”

SECTION IV.—Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested.

Exposition

The doctrines stated in this section are the following:—

1. That though those who are not elected have the external call of the gospel addressed to them, in common with those who are elected, yet “they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved.”
2. That there are “common operations of the Spirit,” which produce convictions of sin, by means of the law in the conscience; and joyous emotions, by means of the gospel, in the affections of men in their natural state; which do not issue in conversion.
3. That those cannot be saved who are totally destitute of revelation. “Though the invitation which nature gives to seek God be sufficient to render them without excuse who do not comply with it (Rom. i. 20), yet it is not sufficient, even objectively, for salvation; for it does not afford that lively hope which maketh not

ashamed, for this is only revealed by the gospel; whence the Gentiles are said to have been without hope in the world.—Eph. ii. 12. It does not show the true way to the enjoyment of God, which is no other than faith in Christ. It does not sufficiently instruct us about the manner in which we ought to worship and please God, and do what is acceptable to him. In short, this call by nature never did, nor is it even possible that it ever can, bring any to the saving knowledge of God; the gospel alone is the ‘power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth.’—Rom. i. 16. We are persuaded there is no salvation without Christ (Acts iv. 12); no communion of adult persons with Christ, but by faith in him (Eph. iii. 17); no faith in Christ without the knowledge of him (John xvii. 3;) no knowledge but by the preaching of the gospel (Rom. x. 14); no preaching of the gospel in the works of nature; for it is that mystery which was kept secret since the world began.”—Rom. xvi. 25.

Let us be thankful that we are favoured 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 hath called us unto his kingdom and glory.”