

BAHRAIN REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH
Irresistible Grace / Effectual Calling

November 15, 2024

Preliminary

Theological Terminology

- In Classical Greek: an invitation; official summons (to military or to an assembly); to designate...
- Theological significance in the OT: Israel is God's nation by a special call from God... Hos 11:1; Isa 43:1; 48:12, 13; 51:2
- Theological significance in the NT: Call to salvation – this is the most important, and most prominent use of this term.

Reformed Definition: [1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, X.1] – “Those whom God hath predestined unto life, 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 a 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”

1. Controversy Concerning Free-will

Arminian Concept: External invitation; or inwardly, the Spirit's suasion (doing His part to convince the sinner but the key remains in the sinner's will)

Point: Man's will is free from the ultimate effects of the Fall and therefore he can accept or reject God's offer of grace

Objection 1: This view reduced God to a concerned by-stander and placed man in the position of sovereignty... cf. Rev 3:20

- After the Fall, man become dead spiritually and therefore incapable to save himself... [Review: *Dead Man Theory*] [R. C. Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* 184] – “Monergistic regeneration is exclusively a divine act. Man does not have the creative power, God has. To quicken a person who is spiritually dead is something only God can do. A corpse cannot revive itself. It cannot even assist in the effort. It can only respond after receiving new life. Not only can it respond then, it most certainly will respond.”

Objection 2: Called and calling (to salvation) is a peculiar title applied only to believers... Rom. 8:29f; 1 Cor 1:27f

- If this calling is up to man, then believers cannot be the *called ones* in any distinct and special sense
- If this calling includes those who perish, it destroys the chain of redemption in Romans 8:29f.

2. The Author of the Call

Negative: Not the preacher/human witness... the human recipient does not contribute anything to the call

- Not (primarily) the Son, or the Holy Spirit
 - The Son is the focus of response – faith and repentance
 - In regeneration, the Holy Spirit quickens the spiritual abilities to enable the called sinner to respond.

Affirmative: The Father is the One who calls... Rom 8:28-30; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 1:15; Eph 1:17f

Point: The Father is actively involved in the execution of His own plan... He initiates both the plan (decree), and the application of salvation... Rom 9:19 = “*For who has resisted His will?*”

[John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2: 166] – “The fact that the calling is the act of God the Father apprizes us that God the Father is the specific agent in the initiatory act of application, and when this is not perceived or sufficiently appreciated, we rob our faith of an all-important element in the economy of salvation.”

[Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2100.4/3909] – “When Paul says, “Those whom he predestined *he* also called; and those whom *he* called he also justified” (Rom. 8:30), he indicates that 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” (Rom. 8:29). Other verses describe more fully what this calling is. When God calls people in this powerful way, he calls them “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9); he calls them “into the fellowship of his Son” (1 Cor. 1:9; cf. Acts 2:39) and “into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12; cf. 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 1:3). People who have been called by God “belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:6). They are called to “be saints” (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2), and have come into a realm of peace (1 Cor. 7:15; Col. 3:15), freedom (Gal. 5:13), hope (Eph. 1:18; 4:4), holiness (1 Thess. 4:7), patient endurance of suffering (1 Peter 2:20–21; 3:9), and eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12).”

Application: <i>We must be Trinitarian in our teaching of Salvation – and the presentation of the Gospel – (NAE)</i>
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3. The Nature of the Call

(a) For sinners to be quickened, there must be the teaching/preaching of the gospel, no less... Rom 1:16, 17; 10:14

Note: God does the opening of the heart so that it may respond to the gospel... Ac 16:14; Mt 9:9; Act 9:4ff

- The Characterization of the call is belong to God's divine attributes

Text: Phil 3:14 = *high calling*; 2 Tim 1:9 = *holy calling*; Heb 3:1 = *heavenly calling*

Point: It is not a mere persuasion left for the sinners to complete... ct. concept of ‘it's all up to you!’

[Joe Morecraft III, *Amazing Grace*, 171 – “The very moment that God regenerated you and raised you from the dead spiritually and gave you new life, changed your heart, that split second you began believing in the Lord Jesus Christ; loving Him, seeking to serve Him and repenting of your sins. But it is that initial act of God in Irresistible Grace.”

(b) It is the Holy Spirit that quickens the elect.

Note: The Holy Spirit regenerates the person who is dead spiritually to “see the Kingdom of God”... Jn 3:3, 6; 6:63

John 3:8 = *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit*

- Once the Spirit regenerates, the formerly dead sinner is now alive and comes to faith in Christ.

[John Gill, *Vol. 7*, 769] – “This grace of the Spirit in regeneration, like the wind, is powerful and irresistible; it carries all before it; there is no withstanding it; it throws down Satan's strongholds, demolishes the fortifications of sin; the whole posse of hell, and the corruptions of a man's heart, are not a match for it; when the Spirit works, who can let?”

Outward Call: Comes through our lips as we proclaim the Gospel (always invariably ineffective and ineffectual).

Inward Call: Effective when the outward call of the Gospel is accompanied by the inward call of the Holy Spirit

[Grudem, 2101.8/3909] – “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.”

[*Reformation Study Bible*, 10804.7/12726] – “The preaching of the gospel represents the outward call of God. This call is heard audibly by both the elect and the nonelect. Human beings have the ability to resist and refuse the outward call. He will not respond to the outward call in faith unless or until the outward call is accompanied by the effectual inward call of the Holy Spirit. Effectual calling is irresistible in the sense that God sovereignly brings about its desired result. This sovereign work of grace is resistible in the sense that we can and do resist it in our fallen nature, but irresistible in the sense that God's grace prevails over our natural resistance to it.”

[Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God's Heirs: Exposition of Bible Doctrines, Romans*, 171-172] – “If men heed no more than the outward call, they become members of the visible church. If the inward call is heard in our hearts, we become members of the invisible church. The first call unites us merely to a group of professing members; but the inward call unites us to Christ himself, and to all that have been born again. The outward call may bring with it a certain intellectual knowledge of the truth; the inward call brings us the faith of the heart, the hope which anchors us forever to Christ and the love which must ever draw us back to him who first loved us. The one can end in formalism, the other in true life. The outward call may curb the tendencies of the old nature and keep a soul in outward morality; the inward call will cure the plague that is in us and bring us on to triumph in Christ”

4. External Call as an Invitation

Note: The gospel-invitation is not addressed only to the elect... Mt 11:28ff; Col 1:28

Ezekiel 3:18-19 = “*If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. ¹⁹ But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.*”

- Acts 17:30 = Everyone is commanded to repent

- Col 1:23 = The gospel is to be preached to every creature

- Mat 22:2ff = Representing the various responses to the invitation to the Wedding banquet; including rejection

Point: The sinner is to blame for not accepting the invitation of the gospel

[Michael Horton, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace*, 161] – “The universal invitation makes sure that when unbelievers stand before God on judgment day, they are without excuse. Nobody will be in heaven who did not choose to be, and nobody will be in hell who did not choose estrangement from God. Everybody will get whatever he or she chose. It is not as if people want to come to God but can't. They do not want to. The problem is not God's failure to speak, but rather our failure to hear and respond.”

5. Biblical Presentation

John 1:12-13 = “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*”

Point: It is God who first initiates the call for us to become His children

Revelation 3:20 = “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me*”

Note: This is not an invitation for the readers to be converted, but to renew themselves in a relationship with Christ that had already begun, as apparent from v.19 (“*those whom I love, I reprove...be zealous and repent*”)

Point: The idea is that Christ is calling the churches to follow Him and not to fall into apostasy or idolatry.

John 6:44 = “*No one can come to me unless the Father draws him*”

Implication: The concept of effectual calling of God to salvation militates against sacramentalism – the necessity of the intermediary of some spiritual rituals or office.

Make your calling and election sure!

2 Peter 1:10