

Effectual Calling

BY THOMAS WATSON

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28



The second qualification of the people to whom this privilege in the text belongs, is—*they are the called by God*. "All things work for good to those who are **called**." Though this word called is placed in order after loving of God—yet in reality, it goes before it. Love is first named—but not first wrought; we must be called of God, before we can love God. Calling is made (Romans 8:30) the middle link of the golden chain of salvation. It is placed between predestination and glorification; and if we have this middle link fast, we are sure of the two other ends of the chain. For the clearer illustration of this, there are six things observable.

1. A DISTINCTION about calling. There is a two-fold call.

(1.) There is an OUTWARD call, which is nothing else but God's blessed offer of grace in the gospel, His parleying with sinners, when He invites them to come in and accept of mercy. Of this our Savior speaks: "Many are called—but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16). This external call is insufficient to salvation—yet sufficient to leave men without excuse.

(2.) There is an inward call, when God wonderfully overpowers the *heart*, and draws the *will* to embrace Christ. This is an **effectual** call.

God, by the outward call, blows a trumpet in the ear; by the inward call, He opens the heart, as He did the heart of Lydia (Acts 16:14). The outward call may bring men to a *profession* of Christ—the inward call brings them to a *possession* of Christ. The outward call *curbs* a sinner—the inward call *changes* him.

2. Our deplorable CONDITION before we are called.

(1.) We are in a state of BONDAGE. Before God calls a man, he is the devil's slave. If he says, "Go!" —the man goes. The deluded sinner is like the slave who digs in the mine, hews in the quarry, or tugs at the oar. He is at the command of Satan, as the donkey is at the command of the driver.

(2.) We are in a state of DARKNESS. "You were once darkness" (Ephes. 5:8). Darkness is very disconsolate. A man in the dark is full of fear, he trembles every step he takes. Darkness is dangerous. He who is in the dark may quickly go out of the right way, and fall into rivers or whirlpools. Just so, in the darkness of ignorance, we may quickly fall into the whirlpool of hell.

(3.) We are in a state of IMPOTENCY. "When we were without strength" (Romans 5:6). We had no strength to resist a temptation, or grapple with a corruption. Sin cut the lock where our strength lay (Judg. 16:20). Nay, there is not only *impotency*—but *obstinacy*, "You do always *resist* the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:51). Besides *indisposition* to holiness, there is *opposition* to holiness.

(4.) We are in a state of POLLUTION. "I saw you polluted in your blood" (Ezek. 16:6). The mind coins only earthly thoughts; the heart is the devil's forge, where the sparks of lust fly.

(5.) We are in a state of DAMNATION. We are born under a curse. The wrath of God abides on us (John 3:36). This is our condition before God is pleased by a merciful call to bring us near to Himself, and free us from that misery in which we were before engulfed.

3. The MEANS of our effectual call. The ordinary means which the Lord uses in calling us, is not by raptures and revelations—but is,

(1.) By His WORD, which is "the rod of his strength" (Psalm 105:2). The voice of the Word is God's call to us; therefore He is said to speak to us from heaven (Heb. 12:25). That is, in the ministry of the Word. When the Word calls from sin, it is as if we heard a voice from heaven.

(2.) By His SPIRIT. This is the loud call. The Word is the *instrumental* cause of our conversion, the Spirit is the *efficient* cause of our conversion. The ministers of God are only the pipes and organs; it is the Spirit blowing in them, which effectually changes the heart. "While Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word" (Acts 10:44). It is not the farmer's industry in ploughing and sowing, which will make the ground fruitful, without the early and latter rain. Just so, it is not the seed of the Word that will effectually convert, unless the Spirit puts forth His sweet influence, and drops as rain upon the heart. Therefore the aid of God's Spirit is to be implored, that He would put forth His powerful voice, and awaken us out of the grave of unbelief. If a man knocks at a gate of brass, it will not open; but if he comes with a key in his hand, it will open. Just so, when God, who has the key of David in His hand (Rev. 3:7) comes, He opens the heart, though it be ever so fast locked against Him.

4. The METHOD God uses in calling of sinners.

The Lord does not tie Himself to a particular way, or use the same order with all. He comes sometimes in a still small voice. Such as have had godly parents, and have sat under the warm sunshine of religious

education, often do not know how or when they were called. The Lord did *secretly* and *gradually* instill grace into their hearts, as the *dew* falls unnoticed. They know by the heavenly **effects** that they are called—but the *time* or *manner* they know not. The hand moves on the clock—but they do not perceive when it moves.

Thus God deals with some. Others are more stubborn and knotty sinners, and God comes to them in a rough wind. He uses more wedges of the law to break their hearts; He deeply humbles them, and shows them they are damned without Christ. Then having ploughed up the fallow ground of their hearts by humiliation, He sows the seed of consolation. He presents Christ and mercy to them, and draws their wills, not only to accept Christ—but passionately to desire, and faithfully to rest upon Him. Thus He wrought upon Paul, and called him from a persecutor—to a preacher. This call, though it is more visible than the other—yet is not more real. God's *method* in calling sinners may vary—but the *effect* is still the same.

5. The PROPERTIES of this effectual calling.

(1.) This call is a SWEET call. God so calls—as He allures. He does not *force*—but *draw*. The freedom of the will is not taken away—but the stubbornness of it is conquered. "Your people shall be willing in the day of your power" (Psalm 110:3). After this call there are no more disputes, the soul readily obeys God's call—as when Christ called Zacchaeus, he joyfully welcomed Him into his heart and house.

(2.) This call is a HOLY call. "Who has called us with a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9). This call of God calls men out of their sins—by it they are consecrated, and set apart for God. The vessels of the tabernacle were taken from common use, and set apart to a holy use. Just so, those who are effectually called are separated from sin, and consecrated to God's service. The *God* whom we worship is holy, the *work* we are employed

in is holy, the *place* we hope to arrive at is holy; all this calls for holiness. A Christian's heart is to be the presence chamber of the blessed Trinity; and shall not holiness to the Lord be written upon it? Believers are children of God the Father, members of God the Son, and temples of God the Holy Spirit; and shall they not be holy? Holiness is the badge and livery of God's people. "The people of your holiness" (Isaiah 63:18). As chastity distinguishes a virtuous woman from a harlot, so holiness distinguishes the godly from the wicked. It is a holy calling, "God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives" (1 Thess. 4:7). Let not any man say he is called by God—who lives in sin. Has God called you to be a swearer, to be a drunkard? Nay, let not the merely moral person say he is effectually called. What is civility without sanctity? It is but a dead carcass strewed with flowers. The king's picture stamped upon *brass*, will not go current for *gold*. The merely moral man looks as if he had the King of heaven's image stamped upon him—but he is no better than counterfeit metal, which will not pass for current with God.

(3.) This call is an IRRESISTIBLE call. When God calls a man by His grace, he cannot but come. You may resist the minister's call—but you cannot the Spirit's call. The finger of the blessed Spirit can write upon a heart of stone, as once He wrote His laws upon tables of stone. God's words are creating words; when He said "Let there be light, there was light"; and when He says, "Let there be faith", it shall be so. When God called Paul, he answered to the call. "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). God rides forth conquering in the chariot of His gospel; He makes the *blind eyes* see, and the *stony heart* bleed. If God will call a man, nothing shall lie in the way to hinder; difficulties shall be untied, the powers of hell shall disband. "Who has resisted his will?" (Romans 9:19). God bends the iron sinew, and cuts asunder the gates of brass (Psalm 107:16). When the Lord touches a man's heart by His Spirit, all proud imaginations are brought down, and the fort-royal of the *will* yields to God. The man that before was as a raging sea of sin,

foaming forth wickedness; now he suddenly flies back and trembles, he falls down as the jailer, "What shall I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). What has happened this man? The Lord has effectually called him. God has been working powerfully by grace, and now his stubborn heart is *conquered by a sweet violence*.

(4.) This call is a HIGH calling. "I press toward the mark, for the prize of the *high calling* of God" (Phil. 3:14). It is a high calling, because we are called to high exercises of piety—to die to sin, to be crucified to the world, to live by faith, to have fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:3). This is a high calling: here is a work too high for men in a state of nature to perform. It is a high calling, because we are called to high privileges—to justification and adoption, to be made co-heirs with Christ. He who is effectually called, is higher than any of the kings of the earth.

(5.) This call is a GRACIOUS call. It is the fruit and product of free grace. That God should call some, and not others; that some should be taken, and others left; that one should be called who is of a more wicked disposition, while another of a sweeter temper, is rejected; here is free grace! That the *poor* should be rich in faith, heirs of a kingdom (James 2:5), and the *nobles* and great ones of the world for the most part rejected, "*Not many noble are called*" (1 Cor. 1:26); this is free and rich grace! "*Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight*" (Matt. 11:26). That under the same sermon one should be effectually wrought upon—while another is no more moved than a dead man with the sound of music; that one should hear the Spirit's voice in the Word—while another does not hear it; that one should be softened and moistened with the influence of heaven—while another, like Gideon's dry fleece, has no dew upon him; behold here distinguishing, sovereign grace! The same affliction which converts one—hardens another. Affliction to one is as the bruising of spices, which cast forth a fragrant smell; to the other it is as the crushing of weeds in a mortar, which are

more unsavory. What is the cause of this—but the free grace of God! It is a gracious calling; it is all enameled and interwoven with free grace! *"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 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. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him."* 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

(6.) This call is a GLORIOUS call. *"In his kindness God called you to his eternal glory."* (1 Peter 5:10). We are called to the enjoyment of the ever blessed God. It is as if a man were called out of a prison to sit upon a throne. Curtius writes of one, who while digging in his garden was called to be king. Thus God calls us to *glory* and *virtue* (2 Pet. 1:3). First to virtue, then to glory. At Athens there were two temples, the temple of Virtue, and the temple of Honor; and no man could go to the temple of honor—but through the temple of virtue. Just so, God calls us first to virtue, and then to glory.

What is the glory among men, which most so hunt after—but a feather blown in the air? What is it, compared to the weight of eternal glory? Is there not great reason we should follow God's call? He calls to eternal glory; can there be any loss or harm in this? God would have us part with nothing for Him—but that which will damn us if we keep it. He has no design upon us—but to make us happy. He calls us to salvation, He calls us to a heavenly kingdom! Oh, how should we then, with Bartimeus, throw off our ragged coat of sin, and follow Christ when He calls!

(7.) This call is a RARE call. But few are savingly called. "Few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). Few, not collectively—but comparatively. The word 'to call' signifies to choose out some from among others. Many have the *light* brought to them—but few have their eyes anointed to

see that light. "You have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments" (Rev. 3:4). How many millions sit in the region of darkness! And in those climates where the Sun of righteousness does shine, there are many who receive the *light* of the truth, without the *love* of it. There are many formalists—but few believers. There is something that looks like faith, which is not. The *Cyprian diamond* sparkles like the true diamond—but it is not of the right kind, it will break with the hammer. Just so, the hypocrite's faith will break with the hammer of persecution. But few are truly called. The number of precious stones is few, compared to the number of pebble stones. Most men shape their religion according to the fashion of the times; they are for the music and the idol (Dan. 3:7). The serious thought of this, should make us work out our salvation with fear, and labor to be in the number of those few whom God has translated into a state of grace.

(8.) This call is an UNCHANGEABLE call. "God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). That is, as a learned writer says, those gifts which flow from election. When God calls a man, He does not repent of it. God does not, as many friends do, love one day, and hate another; or as princes, who make their subjects favorites, and afterwards throw them into prison. This is the blessedness of a saint—his condition admits of no alteration. God's call is founded upon His decree—and His decree is immutable. Acts of grace cannot be reversed. God blots out His people's sins—but not their names. Let the world ring changes every hour, a believer's condition is unchangeable and unalterable.

6. The END of our effectual calling is the honor of God. "That we should be to the praise of his glory" (Ephes. 1:12). He who is in the state of nature, is no more fit to honor God, than a brute beast can put forth acts of reason. A man before conversion continually reflects dishonor upon God. As black vapors which arise out of moorish grounds, cloud and darken the sun, so out of the natural man's heart arise black vapors

of sin, which cast a cloud upon God's glory. The sinner is versed in treason—but understands nothing of loyalty to the King of heaven. But there are some whom the lot of free grace falls upon, and these shall be taken as jewels from among the rubbish and be effectually called, that they may lift up God's name in the world. The Lord will have some in all ages who shall oppose the corruptions of the times, bear witness to His truths, and convert sinners from the error of their ways. He will have His *worthies*, as king David had. Those who have been monuments of God's mercies, will be trumpets of His praise.

These considerations show us the necessity of effectual calling. Without it there is no going to heaven. We must be "made fit for the inheritance" (Col. 1:12). As God makes heaven fit for us, so He makes us fit for heaven; and what gives this fitness—but effectual calling? A man remaining in the filth and rubbish of nature, is no more fit for heaven, than a dead man is fit to inherit an estate. The high calling is not a thing arbitrary or indifferent—but as needful as salvation; yet alas, how is this one thing needful neglected! Most men, like the people of Israel, wander up and down to gather straw—but do not mind the evidences of their effectual calling.

Take notice what a mighty power God puts forth in calling of sinners! God does so call, as to draw (John 6:44). Conversion is styled a resurrection. "Blessed is he who has part in the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:6). That is, a rising from sin to grace. A man can no more convert himself than a dead man can raise himself. It is called a creation (Col. 3:10). To create is above the power of nature.

Objection. "But," say some, "the will is not *dead*, but *asleep*; and God, by a moral persuasion, does only awaken us—and then the will can obey God's call, and move of itself to its own conversion."

Answer. To this I answer, Every man is by sin bound in fetters. "I perceive that you are in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 7:23). A man that is

in fetters, if you use arguments, and persuade him to go, is that sufficient? There must be a *breaking* of his fetters, and setting him free, before he can walk. So it is with every natural man; he is fettered with corruption; now the Lord by converting grace must file off his fetters, nay, give him *legs* to run too—or he can never obtain salvation!

Use. An exhortation to make your calling sure.

"Give diligence to make your calling sure" (2 Peter 1:10). This is the great business of our lives—to get sound evidences of our effectual calling. Do not acquiesce in *outward* privileges, do not cry as the Jews, "The temple of the Lord!" (Jer. 7:4). Do not rest in *baptism*; what is it to have the *water*—and lack the *Spirit*? Do not be content that Christ has been preached to you. Do not satisfy yourselves with an empty profession; all this may be, and yet you are no better than empty professors. But labor to evidence to your souls that you are called of God. Give diligence to make your calling sure—it is both feasible and probable. God is not lacking to those that seek Him. Let not this great business hang in hand any longer. If there were a controversy about your land, you would use all means to clear your title; and is salvation nothing? Will you not clear your title here? Consider how sad your case is, if you are not effectually called.

If you are not effectually called, you are **strangers** to God. The prodigal went into a far country (Luke 14:13), which implies that every sinner, before conversion, is afar off from God. "At that time you were without Christ, strangers to the covenants of promise" (Ephes. 2:12). Men dying in their sins have no more right to promises, than strangers have to the privilege of free-born citizens. If you are strangers, what language can you expect from God—but this, "I know you not!"

If you are not effectually called, you are **enemies** to God. "Alienated and enemies" (Col. 1:21). There is nothing in the Bible you can lay claim

to—but the *threatenings*! You are heirs to all the *plagues* written in the book of God! Though you may resist the *commands* of the law, you cannot flee from the *curses* of the law. Such as are enemies to God, let them read their doom. "Bring here these *enemies* of mine, who did not want me to rule over them, and slaughter them in my presence!" (Luke 19:27). Oh, how it should concern you therefore to make your calling sure! How miserable and damnable will your condition be, if death calls you before the Spirit calls you!

Question. But is there any hope of my being effectually called? I have been a great sinner.

Answer. Great sinners have been called. Paul was a violent persecutor—yet he was called. Some of the Jews who had a hand in crucifying Christ, were called. God loves to display His free grace to sinners. Therefore be not discouraged. You see a golden cord let down from heaven for poor trembling souls to lay hold upon!

Question. But how shall I know I am effectually called?

1. He who is savingly called is called out of himself, not only out of *sinful self*—but out of *righteous self*. "Not having my own righteousness" (Phil. 3:9). He whose heart God has touched by His Spirit, lays down the *idol of self-righteousness* at Christ's feet, for Him to tread upon. The true Christian denies not only *sinful self*—but *righteous self*. He becomes moral and pious—but he does not trust to his morality or piety. Noah's dove made use of her *wings* to fly—but trusted to the *ark* for safety. This is to be effectually called—when a man is called out of himself. Self-renunciation is the first step to saving faith.

2. He who is effectually called—has a great change wrought. Not a change of the *faculties*—but of the *qualities*. He is altered from what he

was before. His *body* is the same—but not his *mind*; he has another spirit. Paul was so changed after his conversion that people did not know him (Acts 9:21). Oh what a metamorphosis does grace make! "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. *And that is what some of you were!* But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Grace changes the heart!

In effectual calling there is a three-fold change wrought:

(1). There is a change wrought in the UNDERSTANDING. Before, there was ignorance—but now there is light, "Now you are light in the Lord" (Ephes. 5:8). The first work of God in the creation of the world was light: so it is in the new creation. He who is savingly called says with that man in the gospel: "I once was blind—but now I see!" (John 9:25). He sees such evil in sin, and excellency in the ways of God, as he never saw before. Indeed, this light which the blessed Spirit brings, may well be called a marvelous light. "That you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). It is a marvelous light in six respects.

- (1.) Because it is supernaturally conveyed. It does not come from the celestial orbs where the planets are—but from the Sun of righteousness.
- (2.) It is marvelous in the effect. This light does that which no other light can. It makes a man perceive himself to be blind.
- (3.) It is a marvelous light, because it is more penetrating. Other light may shine upon the face—but this light shines into the heart, and enlightens the conscience (2 Cor. 4:6).

- (4.) It is a marvelous light, because it sets those who have it a marveling. They marvel at themselves, how they could be contented to be so long without it. They marvel that their eyes should be opened, and not others. They marvel that notwithstanding their previous hatred and opposition this light—yet it should shine in their souls. This is what the saints will stand wondering at to all eternity.
- (5.) It is a marvelous light, because it is more vital than any others. It not only *enlightens*—but *quicken*s! It makes alive those who "were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephes. 2:1). Therefore it is called the "light of life" (John 7:12).
- (6.) It is a marvelous light, because it is the beginning of everlasting light. The light of grace is the morning star which ushers in the sunlight of glory.

Now then, reader, can you say that this marvelous light of the Spirit has dawned upon you? When you were enveloped in ignorance, and neither knew God nor yourself—did suddenly a light from heaven shine in your mind? This is one part of that blessed change which is wrought in the effectual calling.

(2). There is a change wrought in the WILL. "To will is present with me" (Romans 8:18). The will, which before opposed Christ, now embraces Him. The will, which was an iron sinew against Christ, is now like melting wax—it readily receives the stamp and impression of the Holy Spirit. The will moves heavenward, and carries all the orbs of the affections along with it. The regenerate will answers to every call of God, as the echo answers to the voice, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). The will now becomes a volunteer, it enlists itself under the Captain of salvation (Heb. 2:10). Oh what a happy change is wrought here! Before, the will kept *Christ* out; now, it keeps *sin* out!

(3). There is a change in the CONDUCT. He who is called of God, walks directly contrary to what he did before. He walked before in envy and

malice—now he walks in love! Before he walked in pride—now he walks in humility. The current is carried quite another way. As in the heart there is a new birth, so in the life a new conduct. Thus we see what a mighty change is wrought, in all who are called by God. How far are they from this effectual call, who never had any change! They are the same as they were forty or fifty years ago—as proud and carnal as ever! They have seen many changes in their times—but they have had no change in their heart. Let not men think to leap out of the harlot's lap (the world) into Abraham's bosom! They must either have a *gracious change* while they live—or a *cursed change* when they die! "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

3. He who is called of God—esteems this call as the highest blessing. A king whom God has called by His grace, esteems it more that he is called to be a *saint*, than that he is called to be a *king*. He values his high *calling* more than his high *birth*. Theodosius thought it a greater honor to be a Christian, than to be an emperor. A carnal person can no more value spiritual blessings than an infant can value a diamond necklace. He prefers his worldly grandeur, his ease, plenty, and titles of honor, before conversion. He had rather be called duke than saint—this is a sign he is a stranger to effectual calling. He who is enlightened by the Spirit, counts holiness his best heraldry, and looks upon his effectual calling as his choicest blessing. When he has taken this degree, he is a candidate for heaven.

4. He who is effectually called—is called out of the world. It is a "heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1). He who is called of God, minds the things of a heavenly aspect. He is *in* the world—but not *of* the world. Naturalists say of precious stones, though they have their matter from the earth—yet their sparkling luster is from the influence of the heavens. So it is with a godly man—though his body is from the earth—yet the sparkling of his affections is from heaven; his heart is drawn into

the upper region, as high as Christ. He not only casts off every *wicked work*—but every *earthly weight*. He is not a *worm*—but an *eagle!*

5. Another sign of our effectual calling—is diligence in our ordinary calling.

Some boast of their high calling—but they lie idly at anchor.

True religion does not give warrant to idleness. Christians must not be slothful. Idleness is the devil's bath; a slothful person becomes a prey to every temptation. Grace, while it cures the *heart*, does not make the hand *lame*. He who is called of God, as he works for heaven, so he works in his trade.