

SOTERIOLOGY: The Glorious Doctrine of God's Great Salvation

Lesson 4: Calling

I. A quick recap on Election

A theological framework to build our understanding of Election in Scripture:

1. Election is a recurring THEME of Old and New Testaments alike.
2. Election is rooted in GOD'S LOVE.
3. Election is about God's GLORY.
4. Election is the expression of God's GRACE; it is not a matter of justice, it is pure mercy.
5. Election is a work of God determined before TIME.
6. Election is entirely of God without CONDITIONS.
7. Election is God's work to REDEEM lost man; not God's work to CONDEMN lost man.
8. Election connects the MEANS and the ENDS, and therefore includes PRAYER and PROCLAMATION.
9. Election affirms God's SOVEREIGNTY without denying man's RESPONSIBILITY.
10. We are not saved because we are elect. We are saved because we responded to the good news of Jesus Christ with FAITH.

The God-glorifying doctrine of election is a cause for joy and celebration, not consternation. Rightly understood, it should produce good fruit in us, like ...

Humility – 1 Cor 1:26-29

Gratitude – 2 Thess 2:13-17

Assurance – Titus 1:1-2

Perseverance – 2 Tim 1:8-9; 2:10

Obedience – 1 Peter 1:1-2

Confidence – Acts 18:1, 4-11

II. Some Important Questions As We Consider "Calling"

What is the Gospel Message?

How does it become effective?

How does God call people to himself?

What role do Christians play in the Gospel call?

Can people resist God's call?

Is there more than one type of call?

III. What do we mean by “Calling”?

Calling is the means by which a gracious God invites sinners to himself.

It includes the *universal, general* or *gospel* call wherein the facts of salvation are given, an invitation to respond to Christ personally is issued, and a promise of forgiveness and eternal life is made.

It also includes the *specific* or *effective* call of God, who in working through the proclamation of the gospel, summons people to himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith.

This **effective call** plays out in Scripture as follows:

The Bible teaches that believers are **elected** in eternity (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:9), but **called** in time (Rom. 10:14–17), through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit enables the believer to respond to the gospel in faith and repentance (John 3:6–8; 6:63; Acts 13:48; 1 Cor. 1:23–24; Rom 8:30). The Spirit convicts them of their sinful condition, illuminates their minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renews their wills to receive Christ. They are thereby enabled to enjoy the blessings of forgiveness of sins and eternal life offered freely in the gospel (Ezek. 36:26–27; 2 Tim. 1:9; Acts 2:37–39; 26:18; 1 Cor. 2:12–14; John 6:44–45).

*²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also **called**, and those whom he called he also **justified**, and those whom he justified he also **glorified**. (Rom 8:28-30)*

IV. The Gospel Call

Let's consider a few foundational truths to begin with. The first is this: **God does not take _____ in the judgment of lost people.**

²³ Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (Ezek 18:23)

As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezek 33:11)

That is why in the Old Testament we see God's desire to save sinners and His call to them to repent.

²² “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. (Isa 45:22)

John was called to bring this message to Nineveh, but he did not want to go. His loathing for the Assyrians conflicted with what he knew about God's heart.

“... O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster ...” (Jonah 4:2)

Peter expressed the same essential message in the New Testament:

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Pet 3:9)

So, **we are instructed by our Lord to _____ people to faith in Him.**

Jesus and the Apostles proclaimed the gospel in the New Testament. It is the sincere desire on the part of God, and those who speak of him, that sinners repent, believe, and be saved.

The gospel call necessarily includes these things¹:

Explanation of the facts concerning salvation.

Anyone who comes to Christ for salvation must have at least a basic understanding of who Christ is and how he meets our needs for salvation. Therefore, an explanation of the facts concerning salvation must include at least the following:

1. All people have sinned (Rom. 3:23).
2. The penalty for our sin is death (Rom. 6:23).
3. Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins (Rom. 5:8).

But understanding those facts and even agreeing that they are true is not enough for a person to be saved. There must also be an invitation for a personal response on the part of the individual who will repent of his or her sins and trust personally in Christ.

Invitation to Respond to Christ Personally in Repentance and Faith.

When the New Testament talks about people coming to salvation it speaks in terms of a personal response to an invitation from Christ himself. That invitation is beautifully expressed, for example, in the words of Jesus:

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28–30 NIV)

John also talks about the need for personal response when he says, “He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:11–12). In emphasizing the need to “receive” Christ, John, too, points to the necessity of an individual response.

If either the need to repent of sins or the need to trust in Christ for forgiveness is neglected, there is not a full and true proclamation of the gospel.

But what is promised for those who come to Christ? This is the third element of the gospel call.

A Promise of Forgiveness and Eternal Life.

The primary thing that is promised in the gospel message is the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). And in Peter’s preaching of the gospel he says, “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19; cf. 2:38).

Coupled with the promise of forgiveness and eternal life should be an assurance that Christ will accept all who come to him in sincere repentance and faith seeking salvation: “Him who comes to me I will not cast out” (John 6:37).

God intends the gospel call to be _____ and to go to all without discrimination.

¹ *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine*, Wayne Grudem, pp. 694-695

³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now **he commands all people everywhere to repent**,
³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30)

God not only commands sinners to repent, but he also pleads with them to do so. He does this through his apostles and through all believers come, including us.

“... we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. **We implore you** on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:20)

And although not all who hear the gospel believe and are saved by it, the gospel call is absolutely necessary for salvation:

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Rom 10:8-17)

The only way to salvation is through hearing the message about the crucified and risen Christ (v. 17) and confessing His Lordship (v. 9). Paul also stresses, “I’m not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.” (Rom 1:16)

This is the free offer of the gospel call to whoever will come.²

V. The Effective Call of God

In addition to the general call, the word calling is used another way in Scripture: As **a performative summons**. In the *effective* call, God works internally and mysteriously by His Spirit in the lives of many hear the Gospel to draw them to saving faith in His Son. The Holy Spirit powerfully uses the Gospel to _____ faith.

When Peter preached his sermon on the day of Pentecost, he admonishes those hearing to repent be baptized, to be forgiven of their sins, and to receive the Spirit. (Acts 2:38). Peter then says, “For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (v. 39)

This calling is more than a mere _____. It is an effective summons.

Later in Acts, we see *both* the general and the effect of Call of God at work in Acts 13:48-49:

² *Salvation, Theology for the People of God*, Morgan and Schreiner, pp. 106-107

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. (Acts 13:48-49)

Inextricably woven together are:

- 1) The Apostles _____ of the Gospel,
- 2) God's _____, and
- 3) _____ on the hearer's part.

In Paul's preaching, it is clear that it is God who calls people to salvation. Paul preaches to everyone, Jews and Greeks, but Jews stumble over the notion that the Messiah was crucified, while Gentiles think the idea ridiculous that God saved the world through a crucified man. But look at what the text says:

"... we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor 1:23-29)

What is the decisive difference between those who reject and those who respond?

And who is decisive in salvation?

And what is the eternal purpose of God's sovereignty in salvation?

All those who were chosen for salvation, who were elected before the world began, are called to that salvation through the gospel. Since the calling only comes through the preaching of the gospel, it necessarily takes place in history as people hear the gospel.

¹³ we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 2:13-14)

So, all to whom the good news is proclaimed *hear* the gospel, but only some are effectively *called* through the gospel.³

So why do all people not respond?

The universal of gospel is not a sham or a deception. Everyone who responds affirmatively will receive what God has promised. With the Scripture teaches that the fault of those not being saved does not lie with God. Just as Israel often heard but rejected the message of God, so in the New Testament do we see a constant theme of rejection.

Some reject the message for _____ reasons. (Rom 3:11a; 1 Cor 2:14)

Others reject the gospel for _____ reasons. (Rom 3:11b; 8:7)

Many others reject the gospel for moral or _____ reasons. (Rom 3:12)

³ *Salvation*, Morgan and Schreiner, pp. 107-108

Paul sums up our problem apart from the sovereign work of God: We are _____ in our trespasses and sins. (Eph 2:1-2, 4-5).

This is why Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:44) And, “No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (6:65)

“The reason why some sinners do not respond to the verbal call of the gospel is not their failure to use an alleged equal ability supplied to all in prevenient grace. Rather the reason is that apart from the working of the Spirit in grace, depraved sinners are incapable and disinclined to respond to the general offer of the gospel. Without a superior power from above, spiritual eyes remain sightless and spiritual ears death to divine truth.”⁴

A summary of Jesus’ teaching on “calling”:

The Spirit effectively calls or draws those persons the Father has given to the Son.

³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (John 6:37-39)

²since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. (John 17:2)

Also, John 17:6,9,12,24

These alone believe and receive eternal life.

⁴⁰For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:40)

To these Christ reveals the Father.

⁶“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. (John 17:6)

²⁶I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them ... (John 17:26)

For these Christ prays.

⁹I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. (John 17:9)

These will be raised up on the last day.

³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (John 6:39)

And these will be with Jesus forever in glory.

²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

⁴ *The Cross and Salvation*, Bruce Demarest, pp. 220.

VI. Important Implications for Us

We must remember _____ and for _____ God called us.

1) To give us a new _____:

"... you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints ..." (Rom 1:6-7)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are ... Beloved, we are God's children now ... (1 John 3:1a, 2a)

2) To bring us into _____ and _____ with God:

¹²remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:12-13)

⁹God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor 1:9)

3) To _____ us from both _____ and Law:

¹³For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Gal 5:13-14)

4) To live in _____:

¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. (Col 3:15)

5) To _____, even in suffering:

²⁰Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. (John 15:20a)

²¹For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21)

6) To live _____ lives:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called ... (Eph 4:1)

⁷For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. (1 Thess 4:7)

... God, ⁹who saved us and called us to a holy calling ... (2 Tim 1:9)

7) To finish well, receive the _____, and enjoy God's glory _____!

¹³Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:13-14)

¹²we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. (1 Thess 2:12)

¹²Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Tim 6:12)

¹⁰And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 5:10-11)