

# Calling and Repentance

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## The Calling of the Regenerate

*Whom He did predestinate, them He also called.*—Rom. 8:30.

In order to hear, the sinner, deaf by nature, must receive hearing ears. "He that hath ears let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

But by nature the sinner does not belong to these favored ones. This is a daily experience. Of two clerks in the same office, one obeys the call and the other rejects it; not because he despises it, but because he does not hear God's call in it. Hence God's quickening act antedates the sinner's hearing, and thus he becomes able to hear the Word.

The quickening, the implanting of the faith-faculty, and the uniting of the soul to Christ, apparently three acts, are in reality but one act, together constituting (objectively) the so-called *first grace*. In the operation of this grace the sinner is *perfectly passive* and indifferent; the subject of an action which does not involve the slightest operation, yielding, or even non-resistance on his part.

In fact, the sinner, being dead in trespasses and sins, is under this first grace like *a soulless, motionless* body, with all the passive properties belonging to a corpse. This fact can not be stated with sufficient force and emphasis. It is an *absolute* passivity. And every effort or inclination to claim for the sinner the minutest cooperation in this first grace destroys the Gospel, severs the artery of the Christian confession, and is not only heretical, but anti-Scriptural in the highest sense.

This is the point where the sign-post is erected, where the roads divide, where the men of the purified, that is, the Reformed Confession, part company with their opponents.

Having stated this fact forcibly and definitely, it is of the utmost importance to state with equal emphasis that, in all the subsequent operations of grace (so-called *second grace*), this absolute passivity is made to cease by the wonderful act of the first grace. Hence in all subsequent grace the sinner to some extent cooperates.

In the first grace the sinner is absolutely like a corpse. But the sinner's first passivity and his subsequent cooperation must not be confounded. There is a passivity, after the Scripture, which can not be exaggerated, which must be left intact; but there is also a passivity which is pretended, anti-Scriptural, and sinful. The difference between the two is not that the former is partially cooperating, and the latter without any cooperation whatever. Surely by such temporizing the churches and the souls in them are not inspired with energy and enthusiasm. No; the difference between the sound and the sickly passivity consists herein, that the former, which is absolute and unlimited, belongs to the *first grace, to which it is indispensable*; while the latter clings to the *second grace, where it does not belong*.

Let there be clear insight into this truth, which is after all very simple. The elect but

unregenerate sinner can do nothing, and the work that is to be wrought in him must be wrought by another. This is the first grace. But after this is accomplished he is no longer passive, for something was brought into him which in the second work of grace will cooperate with God.

But it is not implied that the elect and regenerate sinner is now able to do anything without God; or that if God should cease working in him, conversion and sanctification would follow of themselves. Both these representations are thoroughly untrue, un-Reformed, and unchristian, because they detract from the work of the Holy Spirit in the elect. No; all spiritual good is of grace to the end: grace not only in regeneration, but at every step of the way of life. From the beginning to the end and throughout eternity the Holy Spirit is the Worker, of regeneration and conversion, of justification and every part of sanctification, of glorification, and of all the bliss of the redeemed Nothing may be subtracted from this.

But while the Holy Spirit is the only Worker in the first grace, in all subsequent operations of grace the regenerate *always* cooperates with Him. Hence it is not true, as some say, that the regenerate is just as passive as the unregenerate; this only detracts from the work of the Holy Spirit in the *first grace*. Neither is it true that henceforth the regenerate is the principal worker, only *assisted* by the Holy Spirit; for this is equally derogatory to the Spirit's work in the *second grace*.

Both these errors should be opposed and rejected. For altho, on the one hand, it is said that the regenerate, considered out of Christ, still lies in the midst of death; yet, tho he be *considered a thousand times out of Christ*, he remains in Him, for once in His hand no one can pluck him out of it. And altho, on the other hand, the regenerate is constantly admonished to be active and diligent, yet, tho the horse does the pulling, it is not the horse but the driver *who drives the carriage*.

Reserving this last point until we consider sanctification, we now consider the *calling*, for this sheds more light upon the confession of the Reformed churches concerning the *second grace* than any other part of the work of grace.

After the elect sinner is born again, i.e., quickened, endowed with the faculty of faith, and united with Jesus, the next work of grace in him is *calling*, of which Scripture speaks with such emphasis and so often. "But as He which has *called you* is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation"; "Who hath *called you* out of darkness into His marvelous light"; "The God of all grace who hath *called us* unto His eternal glory"; "Whereunto He *called you* by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ;" "Who hath *called you* unto His Kingdom and Glory"; "I beseech you to walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye were called;" and not to mention more: "Give diligence to make your *calling* and election sure; for if ye do these things ye shall never fall."

In the Sacred Scripture *calling* has, like *regeneration*, a wider sense and a more limited.

In the former sense, it means to be called to the *eternal glory*; hence this includes all that *precedes*, i.e., calling to repentance, to faith, to sanctification, to the performance of duty, to glory, to the eternal kingdom, etc.

Of this, however, we do not speak now. It is now our intention to consider the calling in its limited sense, which signifies exclusively the calling whereby we are called from darkness into light, i.e., the call unto *repentance*.

This call unto *repentance* is by many placed upon the same level with the "drawing," of which, e.g., Jesus speaks: "No man can come unto Me except the Father *draw* him." This we find also in some of St. Paul's words: "Who hath *delivered* [Dutch translation, *drawn*] us from the power of darkness"; "That He might deliver [*draw*] us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father." However, this seems to me less correct. He that must be *drawn* seems to be *unwilling*. He that is *called* must be *able* to come. The first implies that the sinner is still passive, and therefore refers to the operation of the *first grace*; the second addresses the sinner himself, and counts him able to come, and hence belongs to the *second grace*.

This "calling" is a summons. It is not merely the calling of one to tell him something, but a call implying the command to come; or a beseeching call, as when St. Paul prays: "As tho God did beseech you, be ye reconciled to God"; or as in the Proverbs: "My son, give Me thine heart."

God sends this call forth by the preachers of the Word: not by the independent preaching of irresponsible men, but by those whom He Himself sends forth; men especially endowed, hence whose calling is not their own, but His. They are the ministers of the Word, royal ambassadors, in the name of the King of Kings demanding our heart, life, and person; yet whose value and honor depend exclusively upon their divine mission and commission. As the value of an echo depends upon the correct returning of the word received, so does their value, honor, and significance depend solely upon the correctness wherewith they call, as an echo of the Word of God. He who calls correctly fills the highest conceivable office on earth; for he calls kings and emperors, standing above them. But he who calls incorrectly or not at all is like a sounding brass; as a minister of the Word he is worthless and without honor, True to the pure Word, he is *all*; without it, he is *nothing*. Such is the responsibility of the preacher.

This should be noticed lest Arminianism creep into the holy office. The preacher must be but the instrument of the Holy Spirit; even the sermon must be the product of the Holy Ghost. To suppose that a preacher can have the least authority, honor, or official significance outside of the Word, is to make the office Arminian; not the Holy Spirit, but the dominie, is the worker; he works with all his might, and the Holy Spirit may be the minister's *assistant*. To avoid such mistake, our Reformed churches have always purged themselves of the leaven of clericalism.

And through this office the call goes forth from the pulpit, in the catechetical class, in the family, in writing, and by personal exhortation. However, not always to every sinner directly through the office. On a ship at sea God may use a godly commander to call sinners to repentance. In a hospital without spiritual supervision the Lord may use a pious man or woman, both to nurse the sick and call their souls to repentance. In a village where the quasi-minister neglects his duty, the Lord God may be pleased to draw souls to life by printed sermons and books, by a newspaper even, or by individual exhortation.

And yet in all these the authority to call reposes in the divine embassy of the ministry of the Word. For the instruments of the call, whether they were persons or printed books, proceeded from the office. The persons were themselves called through the office, and they only transmitted the divine message; and the printed books offered on paper what otherwise is heard in the sanctuary.

This calling of the Holy Spirit proceeds in and through the preaching of the Word, and calls upon the *regenerated* sinner to arise from death, and to let Christ give him light. It is not a calling of persons still unregenerate, simply because such have *no hearing ear*.

It is true that the preaching of missionary or minister of the Word addresses itself also to others, but this is not at all in conflict with what we have just said. In the first place, because there is also an outward call to the unregenerate, in order to deprive them of an excuse, and to show that they have *no hearing ears*. And second, because the minister of the Word does not know whether a man is born again or not, wherefore he *may make no difference*.

As a rule, every baptized person should be reckoned as belonging to the regenerated (but not always converted); wherefore the preacher must call every baptized person to repentance, as tho he were born again. But let no one commit the mistake of applying this rule, which applies only to the *Church as a whole*, to *every person* in the Church. This would be either the climax of thoughtlessness or a complete misunderstanding of the reality of the grace of God.

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### The Coming of the Called

*That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth.—Rom. 9:11.*

THE question is, whether the elect cooperate in the call.

We say, Yes; for the call is no call, in the fullest sense of the word, unless the called one can hear and hears so distinctly that it impresses him, causes him to rise and to obey God. For this reason our fathers, for the sake of clearness, used to distinguish between the *ordinary* call and the *effectual* call.

God's call does not go forth to the elect alone. The Lord Jesus said: "Many are called, few are chosen." And the issue shows that masses of men die unconverted, altho called by the outward, ordinary call.

Nor should this outward call be slighted or esteemed unimportant; for by it the judgment of many shall be made the heavier in the day of judgment: "If the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Therefore it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you"; "And the servant which knew the Lord's will and did not according to His will shall be beaten with many stripes." Moreover, the effect of this outward call reaches sometimes much deeper than is generally supposed, and brings one sometimes to the very point of real conversion.

The unregenerate are not so insensible to the truth as never to be touched by it. The decisive words of Heb. 6, concerning the apparently converted who have even tasted of the heavenly gift, prove the contrary. St. Peter speaks of sows which were washed and then returned to the wallowing in the mire. One can be persuaded to be *almost* a Christian. But for the selling of his goods the rich young ruler would have been won for Christ. Wherefore the effect of the ordinary call is by no means as weak and meager as is commonly believed. In the parable of the sower the fourth class of hearers alone belong to the elect, for they alone bear fruit. Still there is among two of the remaining classes a considerable amount of growth. One of them even produces high stalks and ears; only there is *no fruit*.

And for this reason the men that company with the people of God should earnestly examine their own hearts, whether their following of the Word is the result of having the seed

sown in "good ground." Oh, there is so much of illumination and of delight even; and yet only to be choked, because it does not contain the *genuine* germ of life.

All these unregenerate persons lack *saving grace*. They hear only with the carnal understanding. They receive the Word, but only in the field of their unsanctified imagination. They let it work upon their natural conscience. It plays merely upon the waves of their natural emotions. Thus they may be moved to tears, and they ardently love whatever so affects them. Yea, they often perform many good works which are truly praiseworthy; they may even give their goods to the poor, and their bodies to be burned. Their salvation is therefore considered to be a matter of fact. But the holy apostle completely destroys their hope, saying: "Tho you speak with the tongues of men and of angels, tho you understand all mystery, tho you give all your goods to feed the poor, and tho you *give* your body to be burned, and have not *love*, it profiteth you nothing."

Hence to be God's child and not a sounding brass, deep insight into the divine mysteries, an excited imagination, a troubled conscience, and waves of feeling are not required, for all these may be experienced without any real covenant grace; but what is needed is true, deep love operating in the heart, illuminating and vitalizing all these things.

Adam's sin consisted in this, that he banished all the love of God from his heart. Now it is impossible to be neutral or indifferent toward God. When Adam ceased to love God, he began *to hate* Him. And it is this hatred of God which now lies at the bottom of the heart of every child of Adam. Hence conversion means this that a man get rid of that *hatred* and receive *love* in its place. He who says from the heart, "I love the Lord," is all right. What more can he desire!

But as long as there is no love for God, there is *nothing*. For mere willingness to do something for God, even to bear great sacrifices, and to be very pious and benevolent, except it spring from the right motive, is in its deepest ground nothing but a despising of God. However beautiful the veneering, all these apparently good works are inwardly cankered, sin-eaten, and decayed. Love alone imparts the real flavor to the sacrifice. Wherefore the holy apostle declares so sternly and sharply: "Tho you give your body to be burned, and have not *love*, it profiteth you *nothing*."

To perform good works in order to be saved, or to oblige God, or to make one's own piety lofty and conspicuous, is a growth from the old root and at the most but *a semblance* of love. To cherish true love for God is to be constrained by love to yield one's ego with all that it is and has, and to let God be God again. And the ordinary, the general, the outward call never has such effect; it is incapable of producing it.

Wherefore we leave the ordinary call and return to the call which is particular, wonderful, inward, and effectual; which addresses itself *not to all*, but exclusively to the *elect*.

This call, which is spoken of as "*heavenly*" (Heb. 3:1), as "*holy*" (2 Tim. 1:9), as "*being without repentance*" (Rom. 11:29), is "*according to God's purpose*" (Rom. 8:28), is "*from above in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Phil. 3:14), and does not have its starting-point in the preaching. He that calls by it is *God*, not the minister. And this call goes forth by the means of two agencies, one coming to man from without and the other from within. Both these agencies are effectual, and the call has accomplished its purpose and the sinner has come to repentance as soon as their workings meet and unite in the center of his being.

Hence we deny that the regenerate, hearing the preached Word, will come of *himself*. We do not thus understand their cooperation. If the inward call is sufficient, how is it that the regenerate can sometimes hear the preaching without arising, unrepentant, refusing to let Christ give him light? But we confess that the call of the regenerate is twofold: from without by the preached Word, and from within by the exhortation and conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Hence the work of the Holy Spirit in the calling is *twofold*: The *first work* is, as He comes with the Word: the Word which is inspired, prepared, committed to writing, and preserved by Himself, who is God the Holy Ghost. And He brings that Word to the sinners by preachers whom He Himself has endowed with talents, animation, and spiritual insight. And so wonderfully does He conduct that preaching through the channel of the office and of the historical development of the confession, that at last it comes to him in the form and character required to affect and win him.

We see in this a very mysterious leading of the Holy Spirit. Afterward a preacher will learn that, under his preaching in such a church and at such an hour, a regenerate person was converted. And yet he had not specially prepared himself for it. Frequently he did not even know that person; much less his spiritual condition. And yet, without knowing it, his thoughts were guided and his word was prepared in such a way by the Holy Ghost; perhaps he looked at the man in such a manner that his word, in connection with the Spirit's inward operation, became to him the real and concrete Word of God. We hear it often said: "That was directly preached at me." And so it was. It should be understood, however, that it was not the minister who preached at you, for he did not even think of you; but it was the Holy Spirit Himself. It was He who thought of you. It was He who had it all prepared for you. It was He Himself who wrought in you.

The ministers of the Word should therefore be exceedingly careful not in the least to boast of the conversions that occur under their ministry. When after days of failure the fisherman draws his net full of fishes, is this cause for the net to boast itself? Did it not come up empty again and again; and then was it not nearly torn asunder by the multitude of fishes?

To say that this proves the efficiency of the preacher is against the Scripture. There may be two ministers, the one well grounded in doctrine, the other but lightly furnished; and yet the former has no conversions in his church, while the latter is being richly blessed. In this the Lord God is and remains the Sovereign Lord. He passes by the heavily armed champions in Saul's army, and David, with scarcely any weapons at all, slays the giant Goliath. All that a preacher has to do is to consider how, in obedience to his Lord, he may minister the Word, leaving results with the Lord. And when the Lord God gives him conversions, and Satan whispers, "What an excellent preacher you are, that it was given you to convert so many men!" then he is to say. "Get thee behind me, Satan," giving the glory to the *Holy Spirit alone*.

However, it is not the Holy Spirit's only care in such a way and focus of life to cause the Word to come to a regenerate person, but He adds also *a second work*, *viz.*, that by which the preached Word effectively enters the very center of his heart and life.

By this *second* care He so illuminates his natural understanding and strengthens his natural ability and imagination that he receives the general tenor of the preached Word and thoroughly understands its contents.

But this is not all, for even pretended believers may have this. The seed of the Word

attains this growth also in those who have received the seed into a rocky ground and among thorns. Hence to this is added the *illumination* of his understanding, which wonderful gift enables him not only to apprehend the general sense of the preached Word, but also to perceive and realize that this Word comes to him directly *from God*; that it affects and condemns his very *being*, thus causing him to penetrate into its hidden essence and feel the sharp sting which effects *conviction*.

Lastly, the Holy Spirit plies this conviction—which otherwise would quickly vanish—so long and so severely, that finally the sting, like the keen edge of a lancet, pierces the thick skin and lays open the festering sore. This is in the called a very wonderful operation. The general *understanding* puts the matter before him; the *illumination* reveals to him what it contains; and the *conviction* puts the sharp two-edged sword directly upon his heart. Then, however, he is inclined to shrink from that sword; not to let it pierce through, but to let it glance harmlessly from the soul. But then the Holy Spirit, in full activity, continues to press that sword of conviction, driving it so forcibly into the soul that at last it cuts through and takes effect.

But this does not end the *calling*. For after the Holy Spirit has done all this, He begins to operate upon the *will*; not by forcibly bending it, as an iron rod in the strong hand of the blacksmith, but by making it, tho stiff and unyielding, pliant and tender *from within*. He could not do this in the unregenerate. But having laid in regeneration the foundation of all these subsequent operations in the soul, He proceeds to build upon it; or, to take another figure, He draws the sprouts from the germ planted in the ground. They do not start of themselves, but He draws them out of the germ. A grain of wheat deposited in a desk remains what it is; but warmed by the sun in the soil, the heat causes it to sprout. And so it is here. The vital germ can do nothing of itself; it remains what it is. But when the Holy Spirit causes the fostering rays of the Sun of Righteousness to play upon it, then it germinates, and thus He draws from it the blade and the ear and the corn in the ear.

Hence the yielding of the will is the result of a tenderness and emotion and affection which sprang from the implanted germ of life, by which the will, which was at first inflexible, became pliant, by which that which was inclined to the left was drawn to the right. And so, by this last act, conviction, with all that it contains, was brought into the will; and this resulted in the yielding of self, giving glory to God.

And in this way love entered the soul—love tender, genuine, and mysterious, the ecstasy of which vibrates in our hearts during all our after-life.

And this finishes the exposition of the divine work of calling. It belongs to the elect alone. It is irresistible, and no man can hinder it. Without it no sinner ever passed from the bitterness of *hatred* to the sweetness of *love*. When the call and regeneration coincide, they seem to be one; and so they are to our consciousness; but actually they are distinct. They differ in this respect, that *regeneration* takes place independently of the *will* and *understanding*; that it is wrought in us without our aid or cooperation; while in *calling*, the will and understanding begin to act, so that we *hear* with both the outward and inward ear, and with the inclined will are *willing* to go out to the light.