

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 16: Conversion: Effectual Calling

Last time: *Christ's active and passive obedience merited our salvation. His death paid the penalty for our sin. He is the one mediator between God and man, and, therefore, the only savior for the world.*

Our Starting Point: Total Depravity

Previously we noted that sin has affected our will to the point where we are incapable of choosing God.

Westminster affirms:

WCF 6.4 *"From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions."*

WCF 9.3 *"Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto."*

What does scripture teach about the extent of sin?

- **Romans 8:7–8** *"For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. [8] Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."*
- **John 6:44** *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."*
- **Romans 3:12** *"All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*
- **1 Corinthians 2:14** *"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."*

Our situation is not as a neutral bystander, deciding between accepting God or rejecting him. We will always choose to reject him. How can anyone be saved?

God's Effectual Call

WCF 10.1. *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 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.*

The Call

- **Romans 8:30** *"And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."*
- **1 Corinthians 1:9** *"God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful"*
- **Galatians 1:15** *"But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace..."*

A. External Call (summons)—the call (audible/written) to receive the gospel through God's word:

1. This does not come to everyone
2. This is not accepted by everyone to whom it comes Matt. 22:14 "many are called, but few are chosen"

B. Internal Call—the Spirit's call on the heart/will

1. This does not come to everyone, but it does come to everyone who is a believer
2. This is always accepted by everyone to whom it comes
3. In almost every instance in the Bible this is the meaning of call (effectual, predestination).

What does the Holy Spirit do to us?

1. To the mind? (enlightening spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God)-new lenses
2. To the heart? (taking away heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh)
3. To the will? (renewing, determining them to that which is good, not against our wills, freely and made willing)

WCF 10.2. *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.*

"The Holy Spirit, in the act of effectual calling, causes the soul to become regenerate by implanting a new governing principle or habit of spiritual affection and action. The soul itself, in conversion, immediately acts under the guidance of this new principle in turning from sin unto God through Christ." A.A. Hodge

This is what Christians mean by "born again" or "regeneration." We were dead, and God gave us new life.

Ordo Salutis: (The Order in which a Christian Experiences the Acts of Salvation)

1. Faith must come after regeneration
2. Effectual Call must come first (Romans 8:28-30)
[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.
3. Order: Calling, regeneration, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, glorification

Augustine's Fourfold State of Human Nature (God Changes Our Will):

We covered WCF 9 "On Free Will" but it helps frame God's work on us in conversion.

1. Man's original capacities included both the power not to sin and the power to sin (***posse non peccare et posse peccare***).

WCF 9.2 "Man, in his state of *innocency*, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it."

2. In Adam's original sin, not able not to sin (***non posse non peccare***);

WCF 9.3 "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto."

3. After Conversion, Man is able not to sin (***posse non peccare***)

WCF 9.4 "When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by his grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil."

4. In Heaven, man will have the ability to sin taken away and receive the highest of all, the power not to be able to sin (***non posse peccare***).

WCF 9.5 "The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone, in the state of glory only."

Exceptions to God's Ordinary Way of Conversion?

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

If we are saved by faith in Christ...

- What about the person living in a distant country who has never heard the gospel?
- What about the person who seems to be living a good moral life, but doesn't believe what Christians believe?
- What about the person who sincerely believes in a different religion?
- What about the person who believes, but then falls away?
- What about infants who die before they even have a chance to believe?
- What about those who do not have the ability to understand the gospel?

A. Those who cannot understand or have not heard the call

Regeneration takes place in connection with the means of grace which God himself has appointed.

Primary way: Salvation only takes place in connection with the **means of grace**

WCF X.1 "he is pleased...to call by his Word and Spirit..."

Romans 10.14 "...how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard."

1. Those who cannot hear: Infants and those incapable of understanding

- Age of accountability (problems?) Different plans of God: Is there such a thing as an age of accountability?
- If we all stand guilty of sin, and accepting Christ is the only way to salvation, what does that mean for babies and infants that are not old enough to make that decision?

- Many Christians say that children under the age of 13 are automatically saved (some are not so dogmatic about the particular age).
2. Any Evidence: WCF X.3
"Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth..."
 3. Scripture
"But Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" Luke 18:16
 4. Good and necessary: Scant evidence, but good and necessary inferences which may be drawn from Scripture: WCF wording "elect infants dying in infancy" could be few, could be all-Scripture doesn't say, so we shouldn't speculate.
 - *"We may legitimately hope, but we may not demand."* G.I. Williamson
 5. Incapable: similar conclusion
 WCF X.3 *"...so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word."*

B. Have not heard

1. Question of God's justice: men are condemned for their sin, not for rejecting the gospel.
2. External call goes to those whom God wants it to: Act 16:6
"Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia."
3. Yet God does desire all men to repent and have eternal life
Ezekiel 33:11 "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."

C. Those who hear and never believe or believe and fall away

WCF 10.4 *"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 come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved:"*

1. Some are used by the Spirit and have appearance of faith
 - a. Parable of the seed
 - b. Truly saved will never fall away, but no one can know the mind of God "make your calling and election sure" 2 Peter
2. Some never believe, but live according to a moral standard
 - a. Their chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever; first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God
 - b. What is the danger of believing that some can be saved apart from Christ?
 WCF calls it "pernicious"

WCF 10.4 *"... 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 laws of that religion they do profess. And, to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested."*

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: Conversion must begin with God's effectual calling in our lives. Our sinful nature means that he must change our hearts. Confusing the order of salvation can lead to misunderstanding the gospel.