

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 10.2 – God’s Sovereignty in Effectual Calling

*“Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature’s night
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light
 My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”*

– Charles Wesley, “And Can It Be”

I. Review: The Subject and Nature of Effectual Calling

“The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.” (WSC 30)

“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 ... effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.” (WCF 10.1)

- A. **1 Cor 1:9** – “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”
- B. The need for effectual calling and its great power
1. **Is 1:3** – “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”
 2. **Rom 3:10–11** – “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.”
 3. **Eph 2:16–20** – “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers ... that you may know ... what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.”

II. The Call is Unconditional and a Work of the Holy Spirit (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. (WCF 10.2)

- A. What does the confession mean by describing God’s effectual call as driven by God’s “free and special grace alone”? What do the words “free” and “special” mean in this context?
- B. Does God look down the “tunnel of time” to see who would respond to His gospel offer and then issue his inner call on that basis?
1. **2 Tim 1:8–9** – “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began ...”

- C. Read the following passages from Jacob Arminius (1559–1609) and John Wesley (1703–1791). According to them, what is the function of “primary grace” (sometimes called “prevenient grace,” i.e., grace that “comes before” salvation)?

“To him who does what he can by the primary grace already conferred upon him, God will bestow further grace upon him who profitably uses that which is primary.” –Jacob Arminius

“We ... steadily assert that the will of man is by nature free only to evil. Yet we both believe that every man has a measure of free-will restored to him by grace.” – John Wesley

- D. According to the doctrine of prevenient grace, who is ultimately responsible for whether someone is saved? What about for the WCF 10.2?

“Those who embrace the gospel would be deserving of some credit for finding within themselves what others do not find within themselves. Arminians object. They are quick to point out that if anyone does believe in the gospel it is only because of prevenient grace, something that they didn’t deserve. Yes, but whereas it is only because of prevenient grace that they believe it is ultimately because of what they, as over against others, choose to do with the power God has thereby restored to them. Prevenient grace only makes saving faith possible. The individual himself makes saving faith actual. So we must still ask, ‘Who ultimately accounts for why one comes to faith and another does not?’ In the Arminian system, the answer is the person himself, not God.” – Sam Storms (quoted in Barrett, *Salvation by Grace*, 278–79).

1. **John 6:44, 45** – “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day ... Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me ...”

- E. How then should we understand those passages that show sinners “resisting” the grace of God in the gospel (e.g., Acts 7:51)?

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted. The fault lies in themselves; some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the Word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression on their heart; therefore, their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes, and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the Word by perplexing cares and the pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13).
(Canons of Dordt, III-IV, Art. 9)

But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, He not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit He pervades the inmost recesses of man; He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised; infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.
(Canons of Dordt, III-IV, Art. 11)