

## **The Application of Salvation: Calling, II**

I have got a note here to talk about the Holy Spirit. Since Christian theology coheres, I have despaired of trying to form a perfect theology. We are not given enough information. You cannot do it. You are going to have some gaps and the Bible itself tells us that some things are mysteries and other things we will never understand. So that is the case.

Alternately, the Christian faith does fit together, it coheres, and in that regard it is encouraging to say that at this point we could do a whole section on the Holy Spirit as the prime worker in applying salvation to us. But, since we cannot repeat whole topics in our classes, the topic of the Holy Spirit is especially addressed as the first topic in the course, *Spirit, Church, and Last Things*. There is a definite overlap between the content in that course and this one. For example, in the notes under the heading, “The Ministries of the Holy Spirit,” the first thing says, “The Holy Spirit applies salvation.” That is the application of salvation, what we are talking about now. He unites us to Christ. He regenerates us. This is just extra information showing you how the course is dovetailed. He converts us; conversion is theological shorthand for repentance and faith. So the Holy Spirit applies salvation. That is the first thing I saw under “The Ministries of the Holy Spirit.” The most important ministry of the Holy Spirit is to apply salvation unto the people of God. He joins us with Christ to regenerate us and give us new life. He converts us. He assures us of our adoption. He applies justification to us. He sanctifies us and preserves us. So we can study the exact same topics we will in this lesson, for the most part, under the heading of “The Ministries of the Holy Spirit.” We do not duplicate so we will go on to calling. Ironically, calling is not one that I just listed. I do not know if there is any one place where it says the Holy Spirit calls us. It is rather the Father, but the Holy Spirit is certainly the chief applier of salvation.

So for calling, we will refer to Hoekema’s *Saved by Grace*. There is a distinction made between effectual call and Gospel call. I understand I need to even demonstrate that that distinction is biblical. I need to begin somewhere and this is where we start, so it is not neat and tidy. First of all, do you understand the concept of Gospel call/effectual call? The traditional terminology has been external/internal call. Hoekema was right—that is not the best terminology. For one thing the internal/external call is the Gospel calling on people’s ears, and some believe and some do not. Some do not believe at one time, but they believe another time. Hoekema is right. External/internal is not quite right, because the internal call is the Lord working in the heart and the Gospel not only falling on the ears, but God giving “ears to hear and eyes to see” and bringing about a change of heart so the Gospel takes, if you will. An internal call is really external/internal because the internal is not apart from the external. So the older distinction is really merely external from external/internal, but that whole business is kind of confusing. I do regard it as a point of improvement to talk like this: Gospel call and effective or effectual call. Gospel call is the summons of the Gospel to whosoever will. The effectual call is the mysterious inner-working of God so that many who hear the Gospel call respond to it. The Gospel call involves facts, invitation, and promise. For those who like to use acronyms, that spells FIP. It is a presentation of the facts of the Gospel—an invitation to come to Christ and the promise of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This is what the Gospel call is. The facts are basic, but there is a need for more than the facts. We need to invite people to trust Christ. The Gospel call invites all, it really does. There is no doubt in my mind, biblically, about when we read in the book of Acts that God has commanded people everywhere to repent. Also, when He told the apostles in the great commission to take the Gospel to all the nations, there is not only the intention of God for us to take the Gospel call to everyone, but this is a well meant offer of the Gospel. Who would not say the Gospel call is not a well meant offer? Hyper-Calvinists. And here we get into some history with the Protestant Reformed Church breaking with the Christian Reformed Church, because it was not considered to be reformed enough. One of the issues was that God does not sincerely offer the Gospel to the reprobate.

In brief, I agree with Hoekema that the Gospel offer is well intentioned, not only on the part of the less-than-omniscient preacher or witness, but on the part of Almighty God Himself. How can you put together God's sovereignty in salvation and this "whosoever will" offer? We cannot perfectly put it together, but it sounds like a subset of this business of trying to put together divine sovereignty and human responsibility that runs across Christian theology. I agree completely with Hoekema that there are simple solutions on two sides that are both rationalistic. Francis Schaeffer distinguishes between being rational in our beliefs and rationalism. That is a good distinction. Of course we use our minds. We use our minds under God's Word, but we certainly think. The person that says, "I do not think, I just get the straight story from the Holy Spirit and have no human contamination in my theology" are forgetting that they are human, they are thinking, and they are not the Holy Spirit. That is, if you avoid all other human contamination, you have still got your own. I have read some of that stuff and I would not blame it on the Holy Spirit, frankly. In any case, rationalism is exalting our minds above the Scripture or going beyond the Scripture. Hoekema cautions that we avoid rationalism in this matter and others in two directions: Arminianism and Hyper-Calvinism. Both have some significant areas of truth. Arminianism correctly begins with an emphasis on the responsibility of human beings and it affirms that what we do matters. It matters whether we accept Christ or not. It matters whether we pray or not as God's people. It matters whether we witness or not. From there it goes further and espouses a doctrine of the freedom of the human will. The term itself maybe would not be so bad, but the notion is understood as "absolute power of the contrary," which means that the creature can ultimately frustrate the Creator's will. This seems to Hoekema and others, and I agree, to be a less-than-accurate presentation of the Bible's teaching on God's sovereignty. So Arminianism begins with biblical data and lots of it that affirms human responsibility, even freedom. It then (it seems to me) qualifies the biblical data concerning God's sovereign affairs in the world, especially in salvation, to make it fit that understanding of human freedom. That is where the rationalism comes in. Not in the acceptance of many passages at face value—that is a good thing—but even going beyond that and qualifying many other passages that affirm the sovereignty of God and salvation. So election is defined as a God-ratifying human decision. Yes, the free offer of the Gospel is affirmed. With that I agree with Arminianism, of course, but from that it is concluded that God has not chosen people for salvation over and against others, and that there is not an efficacious work of the Holy Spirit in opening some hearts and not others. That seems to me to be rationalistic, because it flies in the face of passages that teach the very thing. Hyper-Calvinism reverses the process. It begins with sovereignty of God passages, and there are plenty of those, and it correctly affirms God's absolute sovereign sway in human affairs. But it becomes hyper when it feels threatened with affirming genuine human responsibility alongside of sovereignty. So human freedom is squelched, and among other things, the well meant offer of the Gospel is denied.

You cannot do that; there are many biblical passages that affirm the well intentioned offer of the Gospel. I believe to avoid rationalism we must hold these two things in tension: God is truly and absolutely sovereign with human beings who are genuinely free, at least in a sense of being responsible and answerable to God, and what they do does matter along the lines of what we call philosophical compatibilism. A chapter-length treatment of this that is a very helpful chapter can be found in D.L. Carson's book, *How Long, O Lord?* entitled "The Mystery of Providence." It is short, only encompassing 20 to 25 pages. It bombards you with biblical passages that teach both things, sometimes in the same breath. For instance, Luke 22:22 says, "The Son of man must go as it has been decreed." That is God's sovereignty over the cross of Christ and the life of Christ. "But woe to that man," Luke says in the next breath, "through whom He is betrayed," speaking of Judas. That is human responsibility and even culpability. How can God be in control and human beings be culpable? I am not altogether sure, but I am sure that both of these things are true. For a book-length treatment, if you are ready to be academically challenged, find *Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* also by Carson. It is not an easy

read, but it is an outstanding book. In any case, without using the word “compatibilism,” it is exactly what Hoekema affirms. He rejects incompatibilism along two lines. Hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism both hold incompatible absolute divine sovereignty and genuine human responsibility. Each one cancels out a different element. But they are alike in starting with a large amount of biblical data, affirming it, and then reaching conclusions that cancel out, or at least greatly modify, another large portion of biblical data.

We are talking about the doctrine of calling. It is one of the aspects of the application of salvation. We are distinguishing between Gospel call and effectual call. In traditional terminology, we would call this external call, defined as the Gospel falling on the ears—resulting in some who believe and some who do not. In traditional terminology, we would call this internal call. If you are going to use that terminology, it would be better to call it “external/internal” call. Because at least, ordinarily—anything else would be extremely extraordinary—God calls inwardly as He calls outwardly.

Briefly, the effectual call, which is B5 on your outline, is the Gospel call made effective to salvation in the hearts and lives of God's people. The Gospel call was described previously, but unless God supernaturally changes the heart of the hearer, he or she will not respond in faith. This changing of the heart occurs in effectual calling. A more complete definition of effectual calling, therefore, might be that sovereign action of God through His Holy Spirit whereby He enables the hearer of the Gospel call to respond to His summons with repentance, faith and obedience. It is based upon a study of other matters including the plight of human beings, and in fact it assumes their inability to make any motions toward God and salvation. We ought to check our teachings based upon God's Word. Does the Bible teach an effectual call? I have got two passages that lead me to affirm, at least, a special call. Romans 8:29-30 is the first. So we have done some defining and distinguishing of these things, so it is a fair question to ask. We are not just merely to assume our theology. Let me show you from the Scriptures that there is this inward, mysterious, effective call. Romans 8:28 said, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Verses 29 and 30, in some sense, explain verse 28. They show, it seems to me, how “in all things God works for the good of his people.”—The preceding context indicates it to mean even in present suffering, because He has worked over all for their good in planning their salvation and in saving them from beginning to end.—“For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers, and those he predestined he also called. Those he called, he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified.” As we studied the doctrine of election in our last course, *Spirit, Church, and Last Things*, we evaluate this passage and say there are five active verbs: foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. There is the same subject, God, for each of the five active verbs. God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. They all have the same direct object. It is the people of God. It is the saints. God foreknew His people. He predestined, called, justified, and glorified His people. This has great ramifications; for example, it makes difficult the claim that foreknowledge is God's knowing people's response beforehand. He does know beforehand, but this does not tell us it is the basis of His predestination because the object of foreknew is the same as all the other verbs. It is people, not information. In any case, one more thing to see is the literary device. The technical name is climax, which describes that, when there is another member in the chain, it links back into the preceding and then goes forward. That is, the five are linked together like this: “Those God foreknew, he also predestined. Those he predestined”—goes back—“He also called. Those he called”—like it forms links in a chain. In fact, the Puritans called it “The Golden Chain.”—“Those he called, he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified.” It is an emphatic way of showing that it is the same people who come in the front end who come out in the back end. John Wesley tried to deny that, but it will not work. This is an example passage in the chief scholarly grammar of the New Testament for that very thing: climax. I am referring to Blass, Debrunner and Funk's big Greek grammar. In any case, this

calling is not the mere Gospel call unless you say everybody who receives the Gospel call gets justified, and everyone who receives the Gospel call and is justified is glorified. It is not the case. The Bible portrays people hearing the Gospel but rejecting it and dying in their sins. So at the very least, this call is a special call. It is not universal. I do not know whether I can prove or not that it is effective from this passage. I think it is implied in God doing all these things for His people. As a matter of fact, it is like saying in five different ways, “God saves His people.” They are different nuances to the salvation, but they are each active and God calls His people, but I will not press that. I will just say that this is surely not a general or universal calling, but it is a subset of that. It is a special call. Romans 9:24 helps us see the same thing. It is as if Paul took two of the elements out of the chain, predestination and calling, and linked them in verse 30. He links them here again in Romans 9 with the potter image. God is the potter. We have no right to talk back to Him. We are that which is formed. We have no right to talk back to our Maker. Romans 9:21 says, “Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay, some pottery for noble uses and some for common use?”

Some would say, “Well, this is just theory or hypothesis. Yes, God has that right. But He has not done that in the affairs of human beings.” I am sorry, but that is wrong. He did. Verse 22 says, “What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore, with great patience, the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction.” “No,” you say, “it is merely a question. It is not saying God did it; it is saying what if God did it.” Look at verse 23. “What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy who he prepared in advance for glory?” You say, “That is the same thing. It is a question. It is asking for information or maybe it is just written hypothesis. What if God did it? It does not say He did it.” Well, it is a question in form, but it is what we call a rhetorical question—a common teaching device of Paul. It is not a true question. He is not soliciting an answer and he is not really talking about possibilities or hypotheses. I know this because of verse 24. “Even us,” he says, that is to identify first-century human beings as “vessels of mercy.” We are not really interested in the vessels of wrath right now; that belongs to the doctrine of election and the topic of double predestination. But for now, we are interested in verse 23, which in light of the potter imagery teaches positive predestination, that God chose many human beings for glory and calls them “vessels of mercy.” The fact that this is not merely hypothetical or that it is not merely Jews and Gentiles, vessels of wrath and mercy, respectively, is plainly taught in verse 24 when Paul says, “even us.” Grammatically, we call it an appositive, which is a noun, actually here a pronoun, that further describes a previously given noun. In this case it is “objects of his mercy, even us.” How did he know those people God has chosen? Consistently in the Bible it is this way: “even us, whom he also called” is referring to the point at which people believed. Spoken in terms of human responsibility, it is when we believe the Gospel that we know God is saving us. In terms of the divine sovereignty, it is when God calls us or when He effectively summons us to faith that we know He has chosen us. We might not know it right then, but when we read the Bible we learn the only reason we did believe was because His grace preceded our response. In fact, He granted us grace before eternal ages as Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:9. What I am trying to say is, in Romans 9, calling is the proof of election. It is election being brought to bear in time and space. Furthermore, there is a partitive construction again. Even us, whom He also called “vessels of mercy”—even us, whom He also called not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles. We have got two big circles here: a circle of Jews and a circle of Gentiles—with subsets within those circles, indicated by the preposition “from”—are those who have been called. This does not deny that there could be more elected in the circles who have not yet been called. They are not denying that, but it does affirm that some of the first-century Jews and Gentiles have been called, and are, in fact, the people of God. In that way, calling is the proof in time and space of election; this is not the general Gospel call. It is a special call—even an effectual call of those people whom the Divine Potter prepared in advance for glory. It goes something like this: since God is God, His plan comes to pass. In this case, His plan to claim a people for Himself is effectuated. It is actuated in history because when these people hear the

Gospel, God effectively summons them to Himself. He gives them a heart of flesh. He gives them ears to hear. He gives them the ability to believe the Gospel.

A very fair question to be raised at this point is what is the relation of the Gospel call to the effectual call? How do we put these things together? Hoekema has thought this through and he says it well on pages 88-89. These two callings are not the same. Not all those who are summoned by the Gospel call respond to it in repentance and faith. "For many are called, but few are chosen," as stated in Matthew 22:14. Conversely, all those who have been called effectually do turn to God in faith and repentance. It is important to keep these two types of callings together. There are two aspects or signs of one calling. Ordinarily—theologians leave space for special things of God—God calls effectually where the Word is being preached or taught. If God wants to call retarded persons or infants, who do not have the ability, God can do it. But ordinarily, God calls effectually where the Word is being preached or taught. The powerful working of the Spirit then unites itself to the presentation of the Word by the preacher or the teacher. How does the Spirit then work? First, by opening the hearts and thus enabling the hearer to respond, as in Acts 16. "The Lord opened Lydia's heart that she might respond to Paul's teaching." The Spirit also works by enlightening the mind so that the hearer can understand the Gospel message, as in 1 Corinthians 2, and by bestowing spiritual life so the hearers can turn to God in faith. I would not insist on any order or exactly those elements. One could say that he is actually bringing together elements of other aspects of the application of salvation. But this much I would agree with plainly: one can say that the Word which is heard in the Gospel call is made effective in the effectual call. Some think that this doctrine takes away every incentive for evangelism and missions. For if only those who are effectually called can respond, why should we preach to people? Why do we not wait for God to bring His effectual call in His own way? Well, He does and that way is through us sharing the Gospel. The preaching and teaching of the Gospel are the divinely ordained means whereby people are brought to faith. I am not interested in the speculation aspect. Could God have done it differently? I guess He could have if He had wanted to, but He did not want to. Let us not speculate. We witness because God has told us to witness and, as in other spheres, God uses means to bring about His ends. Another way of saying this is that God is God. It is His job to elect. It is His job to die on the cross and rise again. It is His job to perform open heart surgery on sinners. We do not do any of that business. Now we read in the Word that God has done that, especially the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that God keeps saving with the Spirit opening up hearts. We cannot do that and we do not know who the people of God are. As Spurgeon said, "We cannot go around pulling out shirttails and finding the word 'E' on the back of the shirts of the elect." It does not work that way. You do not know who they are. God knows who these people are and consequently, instead of cursing our evangelism, we ought to be made more bold with the confidence that God will bring His own to salvation through the preaching and teaching of His Word. We work under God. We have no more ability to save another person than we do to create life, but God has a lot of ability. And God is in the business of saving people and He will use us. So let us prayerfully, winsomely, tactfully, and graciously love sinners and give the Gospel calls. Believing God's sovereignty in the salvation context takes the sting out of it. We do not have to try to get so many souls. We really cannot. We do need to be involved—it is God's command—and God regularly uses means. We accept this in other areas of our lives. If I ask you where your confidence in your family's ultimate welfare is, I have no doubt, if you are Christian, you would say that it is in the Lord God. It is not in your ability to work, your skills, experience, or your high-paying job (if you have one). You can be unemployed tomorrow or you could pass away tonight. Now somehow your confidence is in God to provide for your family and yet you work hard every day following the apostolic dictum in 2 Thessalonians 3: "If they do not work, neither let them eat." If their super spirituality will be revealed to them by their gastric juices, then they will get busy quickly. So we find these two things perfectly compatible: God's sovereignty in meeting our family's needs, and our working hard to meet those needs. Our ultimate trust is not in our hands or head, but in God's. Likewise, if I ask you where your trust is for your own individual health and

welfare—your physical health—you would say, “in God.” If you believe in Christ, that is the right place to put it. If I asked you, “Did you eat recently? Are you planning to sleep tonight? Do you ever exercise and take care of yourself? Do you walk out in front of cars and test God?” You would say, “Yes, yes, yes, no” to those questions, because you find it compatible for God to be your sustainer and for God to use means: your taking care of yourself, not walking in front of trains, and so forth. If you find that works together, then why can we not equally see in the spiritual realm? Why can we not accept the fact that God is the Savior and He uses means? We are His instruments. He uses man; He even uses us.

The second objection is does not the doctrine of effectual calling put into the hands of unbelievers a tool whereby they can excuse themselves for not accepting the Gospel? The Bible clearly teaches that a person who rejects the Gospel call has only himself or herself to blame. I applaud Hoekema’s compatibilism. If you ask the question, “Who is to blame for rejection of the Gospel?” the Bible explains. Believe me, I know. I have spent a lot of time studying what the Bible has to say about hell. I have read those judgment passages. People are judged for what they have done, consistently. There are hints within the judgment passages of grace, but normally judgment is based upon thoughts, words, and deeds. That is what justice is. The wicked get the justice they desire and they get damned because of that justice, because of their sins. The Bible consistently blames sinners for their sin and for their rejection of the Gospel. It never gives them an out. Never in the judgment passages does somebody shake his fist against God and say, “God, You did not give me a chance; You did not choose me, Your Son did not die for me,” or even, “I never heard about your Son; You are not fair.” You will never find any of those kinds of protests because judgment is based upon what people have done. People are shown what they did and they are judged for it. They have no recourse. There is not a piece of protest. The last judgment is all about justice. Sinners get justice.

The final objection is that this doctrine violates the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. To the contrary, it exactly upholds the paradox, although it does matter how you sketch these things out. But if you have a robust biblical doctrine of God’s sovereignty and a biblical doctrine of human sin that involves the fact that we cannot rescue ourselves, then indeed either God effectually calls us, or we are forever lost. So from the greater biblical systematic perspective, this effectual calling is a testimony to the grace of God in rescuing sinners.

We know from within the Scriptures that some people believe right away while others are much slower to believe. But if you ask me about the effectual call, I would say it is the time when we, as a matter of fact, could put on a chart our own actual coming to faith. We could describe the very point of salvation as the time when we believe. I will try to put together some of these doctrines that we are talking about as we move along. It is when we are initially sanctified. Justification is by means of faith, so when we believe, we are justified. Adoption is by means of faith, so when we believe, we are adopted. Regeneration is at the same time. Now people disagree as to cause and effect, which is the cause of the other, but it is when we are given new life that we believe. It is when we are effectually called that we believe. So what I am saying is on a time line of our lives, there is one point in time that we really actually begin to believe the Gospel. We could take that point and blow it up into a circle, and within that circle we could put calling. So at one point in time, God does all these things for us. He initially sanctifies us. He calls us. He regenerates us. We believe. We repent. Said on the side of sovereignty, God converts us. We are justified. We are adopted. We even then begin to persevere and also progressive sanctification begins. God deals with us in His providence. Some believe the first time they hear the Gospel while others take years and years. I know a man who was converted as an adult. Then one of his three brothers came to the Lord and these two brothers have not stopped praying for their other two brothers. Forty years after they started, near the end of his life, the third brother believed. What a joyous time! The last time I had heard, and this is when the third was beginning to believe, the

fourth brother still had not believed. They were not giving up on him, but he still had not believed in Christ. I would say that the third brother was effectually called when he believed in God, and even better said, he believed because he was effectually called. It looks to me like calling, initial sanctification, and regeneration are three different pictures that portray God as making the first move. I am going to insist a dot is a dot and all at once these things happen. But we can talk about cause and effect relations as in flipping the switch and turning the lights on in the room. If anybody is an electrician (and there is a nanosecond of difference, but forget that right now, please). Perhaps everything is simultaneous, but the equipment sitting in the switch is the cause of the illumination. Likewise, God flipped the switch. The turning of the key starts the engine. We distinguish between events that, for all intents and purposes, are simultaneous and one being the cause of another. We turn the faucet on and, hopefully, the water flows. That is the cause of the other happening. It all happens at once. I despair of trying to put these three in an order of cause and effect: initial sanctification, calling, and regeneration. I cannot do it. The older reformed theologians had to put these things in a neat order: One through eight or whatever, depending on how you count them. The more recent theologians have said, "That is all wrong; we cannot do any of that." I think the truth is in between. I have a three-tier order, but within the tiers I cannot tell you whether faith or repentance causes the other. I cannot tell you whether justification or adoption causes the other, because they are both by means of faith. And I cannot tell you that there is an order between calling, sanctification, and regeneration, but there are three different pictures that show that God makes the first move. He turns the key. He turns on the faucet. He flips the switch. The pictures begin with us being spiritually dead. Regeneration means God gave us life. We did not have ears to hear by nature. If we went our own way, we would end up in death. We were spiritually deaf, but God gave us ears to hear. He effectively summoned us to Himself. The third one is sanctification. We were spiritual lepers. We were unclean, and God by His Spirit mightily set us apart unto Himself and constituted us as His saints, as His holy ones. Does God override our will with this effectual calling? Did we come kicking and screaming? Every time I say this, I chuckle because one student said that he did come kicking and screaming. When he heard me say that most people do not come kicking and screaming this student said, "Well, maybe most of them do not, but I did. God started putting strong Christians in my face wherever I went and I finally said, 'Lord, I give up. I believe.'" But for the most part, we do not. What happens is the Holy Spirit works in our lives and we freely believe the Gospel. We want to believe the Gospel, I would say, as a consequence of the Spirit's simultaneous work. Although He may have been working on us for years, when He works effectively we believe at the same moment, but He gets the glory. He gets the credit. Because of His work, we believe. And then we think, "I was a fool for so long. It is the most reasonable thing to believe in Jesus. Why was I so foolish all those years? I was so stupid. It makes so much sense. Jesus is so precious." All of that is the result of the work of the Spirit in our lives.