

Of Effectual Calling (Part 1)

2 Cor 3:1-18; WCF 10.1

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 4 August 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

I agree with those who have said that WCF 10.1 is the clearest and most succinct description ever of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit on our hearts and minds – a work by which we are brought savingly to Jesus Christ.²

Well, our sermon has four points. Here's the first one...

Predestination & Divine Call

My brother & sister, the Bible is clear: there *is* such a thing as predestination – i.e., before the creation of the world, God, out of love, chose out of all mankind, those whom He would save!³

But God did not only *predestine* these people for salvation – no, when the time is ready, He also *calls* them (Rm 8:30)!

What is this calling like?

Well, before we talk about this *specific* powerful *inner* calling, we have to say that there are altogether four kinds of calling – all four of them calling human beings to reverence and obedience of God. And all people hear at least *two* of the four calls. Some are even privileged to hear the *third* call. But what they *do* with these calls – well, that's another thing!

- Here's the *first* call to obey God – the call that comes to *all* human beings through their God-given consciences. After all, God *has* given all people a conscience, as Rm 2:14-15 says, ***Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵ since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also***

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 2: *Salvation and the Christian Life* (Chapters 9-22 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² Cf. Sproul (ibid:14-15).

³ Cf. e.g. Acts 13:48, ***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.***

Also cf. Rm 8:29-30, ***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.***

Also Eph 1:5, 11, ***In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...*** (Emphasis mine).

*bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.*⁴

But the creature refuses to honour God – nor is he grateful. Because of this, God’s wrath is revealed (Rm 1:18-19)!⁵

- Here’s the *second* call – i.e. creation! You see, every human being receives a calling from God’s awe-inspiring creation – a calling to praise our good God! So, we’ve seen two callings: conscience and creation! But, as for these two callings, it seems most people suppress them. The result is that they don’t love/fear/obey God.
- But then there’s still a *third* call – the call of the preached Word of God – let’s call it the *external* call of the Word/Gospel as the preacher preaches! This external call of the Word knocks on the door of our heart! Sadly, many hear this external call of the preached Word. It reaches their ears, all right – but never their hearts! As RC Sproul says: “I have preached the Gospel for over forty years, and there are many people who have heard it and, to my knowledge, never responded.”⁶ My brother & sister, the preacher might think it was all fruitless! However, God’s Word tells us that God’s Word does not return to Him empty,⁷ for, you see, there’s still a fourth calling!
- Yes, here is calling number four: the inner call of God, which not only *knocks* at the human heart, but also *unlocks* and *opens* it! And we will hear more about this calling under point 3.

But first we have to hear point 2...

By Word & Spirit

My brother & sister, in making that fourth and inner call on our hearts, God uses His Spirit *and* His Word.

Yes, by His *Spirit*, and at the God-appointed time, God takes His Word (whether it is preached or read), and sends it straight to our hearts!

How do we know that God uses both His Spirit and the Word?

Well, because not only does common sense reveal this to us, but also His Word says it, e.g. in 2 Thess. 2:13-14, “...*from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.* ¹⁴ *He called you to this through our gospel* (i.e. the Word).”⁸

⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 2:14–15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ Rm 1:18-20, *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,* ¹⁹ *since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* ²⁰ *For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

⁶ Sproul (ibid:16)

⁷ Cf. Isa 55:10-11, *As the rain and the snow*

come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it* (NIV1984).

⁸ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (2 Th 2:13–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

So, here is an important thing: In making this inner call on our heart, God does not use the Spirit alone, neither does He use the Word alone.

Why not the Spirit alone?

Well, because we are not saved without any *knowledge*! Yes, we are not saved unless the teaching of Scripture has impacted our minds, and has gone from our minds to our hearts. So, not the *Spirit* alone!

And why not the *Word* alone?

Well, because many people have heard the Word of God for a thousand times in their lifetime, but they never received it in awe and in a saving way!

So, indeed, *no amount of exposure to the Word of God will prove useful unless God writes this Word on our hearts by His Holy Spirit!*⁹

So? What do we see?

We see that what the Bible says is true: God uses His Word and Spirit *together* to make that effective calling on our minds & hearts!

Now, regarding the Word, please think with me: How does the Word of God come to you & me?

Well, is it not true that the Word of God can come directly or indirectly to us?

Directly means: The Word comes to us as someone reads it to us or when we read it ourselves!

And what does *indirectly* mean?

Well, that the Word of God comes to us indirectly through the witness and testimony of others – as it often does!

I will never forget one of my high-school teachers – a man by the name of Hendrik Prins. Once a week, after school, he would train our cadet band of drummers, trumpeters and bugle players! He taught and inspired us so well that, in one of those years, we won the national competition as best high-school cadet band! But that was not all he taught us, for, often he would spend several minutes calling us to praise God for who He is and what He has done for us!

So, indeed, Hendrik Prins was one human witness through whom God's Word had a great impact on my life – and on the lives of many of the other twenty five young men, several of whom later on studied for the ministry!

And look, also the Bible mentions this truth, that some godly men & women, through their words and exemplary lives, become a word from God for others to read!?

I mean, is that not what our NT passage says? Please hear again 2 Cor 3:2-3...

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. ³ **You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**¹⁰

Dear Wainui member, are you (am I) letters from Christ – letters that others can read?

Well here's something beautiful: Do you know what the early church used to write their letters on?

They used parchment – yes, animal skin which the skin-tanner had soften and cleaned.

But quite often, the early Christians didn't have a clean piece of parchment to write on.

So, then they had to reuse their parchment – parchment which already had a message on it. So, what did they do? Well, they scraped off the previous message and cleaned up the

⁹ Well-phrased words of Van Dixhoorn (ibid:146)

¹⁰ NIV1984 (Emphasis mine)

old parchment before they used it again! It's like someone who cleans the blackboard or whiteboard before he/she can write a clear new message on it!

Well, here's the beauty! Do you (do I) want to be letters for Christ to be read by others? Then, only when God has first cleansed us into something that He can write on – yes, only when you & I surrender to Him daily, and have a personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, that's when we are ready to become letters of God that God could use in working that effectual call on someone else's heart!

Well, so far re point 2, "By Word & Spirit."

Here is point 3...

Effectual Call (From Death to Salvation)

My brother & sister, for you & me to be right with God, we need a call so powerful that it transforms heart & life!

And those ministers who wrote the Westminster Confession clearly understood, that, without this calling, our ears would forever remain blocked, and our hearts would forever remain obstinately opposed to God; yes, unless Someone greater than us helps us. As Rm 8:2 says, we need "the Spirit of life" that sets us "free from the law of sin and death."¹¹

To state it plainly: *No man, woman or child will ever live in heaven without the effectual calling of God on earth.*¹²

What is an effectual calling?

Well, it's not the first three callings that we mentioned under point 1 – it's not our conscience calling us to obey God's law; it's not creation calling us to praise God; it's not even the external hearing of God's Word! No, it's that fourth calling called, "Effectual Calling" (or "Inner Calling")!

I love how RC Sproul explains the difference between *effectual* and *effective*.¹³

You see, *effectual* describes the act of *doing things right*. But *effective* describes the act of *doing the right things*!

And there's a difference between *doing things right* and *doing the right things*.

After all, the more efficiently you do the wrong things, the worse off you end up. It would be better to do the right thing *inefficiently* than to do the wrong thing *efficiently*.

Of course, everyone's goal should be to do the right thing right; yes, to be *efficiently effective*!

Well, think with me: Is there anyone more *efficiently effective* than God the Holy Spirit?

No!

You see, "when the Holy Spirit comes to perform spiritual surgery on your soul, to bring it to faith, He is not only *effective*, but *efficient*!"¹⁴

Indeed, the power and efficiency by which God's inner calling of our hearts is made can be compared with the power by which God Triune created the universe. God gave an imperative: "Let there be light!" And there was light! Indeed, when God *called* the world into being, it *came* into being!

The same happened when our Lord Jesus, with one command from His lips, called dead Lazarus back to life!

After having been dead for four days, Lazarus had no brainwaves, no heartbeat, and no blood circulation. His body was already decaying! But, at Jesus' command, the

¹¹ Rm 8:1-2, "**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.**"

¹² Well-said words of Van Dixhoorn (ibid:147)

¹³ Sproul (ibid:15-16)

¹⁴ Sproul (ibid:16)

brainwaves started; Lazarus' heart began to beat, and blood began to flow through every cell in his body!

See the effectual call of the Holy Spirit!?

Dear children (young people), have you yet experienced this heart-and-life-changing calling of God's Holy Spirit!?

If you have not, I pray that the Lord will work that in you – which brings us to the last point...

Mind, Heart, and Will

Perhaps someone might ask, "But, Pastor, in its previous chapter (chapter 9), the WCF made it quite clear that God never forces any human being against his will to receive Him; to reverence Him and to obey Him." "So, how exactly does God effectually call us without forcing us against our will to follow Him?"

Well, let's begin answering this question by looking at Eph 1:17-18. You see, in this passage, Paul tells the Ephesians that he prays for them. Says Paul, "I pray for you *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you...*"¹⁵

See? Paul explains that it is when the Holy Spirit gives us wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God – it is then that the eyes of our hearts are so enlightened that we will know exactly what the hope is to which He has called us!

So, what do we see?

Well, we see that the effectual call of God not only reaches our *mind*, but also our *heart* – our heart, which, by our sinful nature, is stone-hard.

But what is a heart of stone against the power of God!? As God's Word says (in Ezek 11), He will remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh!¹⁶

Again, what do we see?

Well we see that, if God, through His life-giving Spirit, has revealed wisdom and knowledge about Himself to our *minds* impacting our *hearts*, then what is next? Well, is it not our *will* that comes next!? You see, after God has enlightened 1) our mind, and 2) changed the disposition of our heart, then 3) our will follows; yes, then we *will want* to follow God on His terms. Indeed, once God has changed the disposition of our heart, we will *freely* (not at all forced) want to follow Him on His terms and for His glory!

My brother & sister, it's John 6:44 & 65 all over again, where our Lord Jesus says, "***No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.***" "...*no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.*"¹⁷

Again, what do we see? Does God force human beings against their will to follow Him? Does He carry them kicking and screaming, and against their will, into heaven?

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Eph 1:17–18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. (Emphasis mine).

¹⁶ Cf. Ezek 11:19-20, ***And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.***

Also Ezek 36:26-27, ***And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.***

¹⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 6:65). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. (Emphasis mine).

Not at all!

You see, by the time the Father (through Word & Spirit) has drawn us to Christ, we come to Christ “*most freely, having been made willing by God’s grace.*”¹⁸

It’s like man & woman in love. When one pulls, the other one comes willingly, Song of Solomon 1:4 where she exhorts him, “*Take me away with you—let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers.*” So, she pulls and he comes. And he pulls and she comes! And this could not have happened before the dispositions of their hearts were changed, for where have you ever seen a woman who would follow a man before he has won her heart!?

Well, in the same way – just so much more powerfully – does the Father draw us to Christ (does the Father change the disposition of our heart). As one nineteenth-century theologian has said, “When God calls us, our will is not destroyed; rather, *its obstinacy is overcome, its perverseness taken away, and the whole soul powerfully, yet sweetly, attracted to the Saviour.*”¹⁹

Indeed, the Holy Spirit makes us see how lovely the Gospel is, and then we freely crave for it!²⁰

My brother & sister, how comforting for the pastor and for every parent to know that, be someone’s heart (be my child’s heart) ever so stone-hard, God is powerful enough to, in His time, work an effectual call – and irresistibly so – on that stubborn heart!

AMEN (2460 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁸ Cf. the last sentence of WCF 10.1 (MESV), “*Yet he does this in such a way that they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.*”

¹⁹ Robert Shaw (apud Van Dixhoorn, *ibid*:149)

²⁰ Van Dixhoorn (*ibid*:149)