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THE INVINCIBLE CALL OF GOD

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Romans 8:28, *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

My subject may be new to some of my readers, but I trust that the Lord may so bless this message as to cause you to search the Scriptures to see whether or not the things I preach are true. I am dealing with one of the most neglected truths of the Bible and neglected truths are the most needful truths for the times in which we live. He who reads this sermon of the Puritan period and of men like Spurgeon of a later period will find much said about the invincible and effectual call of God in the conversion of sinners. But in this our day it appears to be different. The achievements of men have such a large place in our thinking and speaking, that we have little time to talk and think about the great and marvelous works of God; the works of Him, Psalm 136:4, *“To him who alone doeth great wonders...”* and of whom it is written, Job 23:13, *“...and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth.”*

It is a self-evident truth that men tend to become like the God they worship. This is why the worship of idols; the worship of false and filthy gods, is accompanied with such gross immoralities. This is also the secret of martyrdom; the martyrs had a great God by whose might they overcame, being faithful unto death. He who has a little God, however much he may boast of his strength, will fail in the crises of life. No man is stronger than is his conception of the God he worships. The believer in the great and true God has no strength in himself, but he can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him. This explains that

paradox of Paul: II Corinthians 12:10, *“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, than am I strong.”*

Our text declares that all things work together (cooperate) for good to lovers of God, to them who are called according to His purpose. This message is to help you to understand the meaning of the word “called” in our text. There are two calls from God to men taught in the Scriptures, and we must be careful to distinguish between them. The one is general, the other is special and particular. The one is outward or objective, the other is inward or subjective. The one is resisted by the sinner and is, therefore, ineffectual for conversion; the other is invincible and effectual for conversion. The general or outward is in the nature of an invitation or command to believe on Christ; the special and inward call is accompanied by the power of God, overcoming resistance to, and causing acceptance of, the invitation and command to believe on Christ.

E. H. Bancroft, Professor of Theology in the Baptist Bible Seminary, Johnson City, New York, gives a concise and adequate definition of the effectual call of God:

“By the effectual invitation or call is meant that exercise of divine power upon the soul, immediate, spiritual and supernatural, which communicated a new spiritual life, and thus makes a new mode of spiri-

tual activity possible. Repentance, faith, trust, hope, love, are purely and simply the sinner’s own acts; but as such are possible to him only in virtue of the change wrought in the moral condition of his faculties by the recreative power of God.”

Spurgeon, in a sermon on making our calling and election sure, has this to say:

“By the word ‘calling’ in Scripture, we understand two things; one, the general call, which in the preaching of the gospel is given to every creature under heaven; the second call (that which is here intended) is the special call; which we call the effectual call, whereby God secretly, in the use of means, by the irresistible power of His Holy Spirit, calls out of mankind a certain number, whom He Himself before elected, calling them from their sins to become

righteous, from their death in trespasses and sins to become living spiritual men, and from their worldly pursuits to become the lovers of Jesus Christ.”

*In the effectual call
divine power is brought
to bear upon human nature.*

Now, before we proceed too far, we must bring out some Scriptures which will show beyond room for controversy, that we must distinguish between a call of God that is resisted and the call that is invincible and effectual for the conversion of sinners. I will first give two verses where the general call is intended: Proverbs 1:24, *“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded.”* Now here is a call to men that was ignored and rejected. God stretched out His hand and no man regarded. Nobody was blessed by

this call, and sentence was pronounced because it was refused. Matthew 22:14, **“For many are called, but few are chosen.”** This refers to a call that came to a greater number than had been chosen or elected. This was the call given in the preaching of the gospel, but all to whom the gospel is preached were not chosen and are not saved.

We will now consider some verses that speak of the effectual call; the call that brings the blessing of salvation; the call that converts the dead sinner:

Romans 8:30, **“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified...”** From this we see that all the called are justified, but all to whom the gospel is preached are not justified; therefore, the calling here intended is something more than the invitation to accept Christ.

Romans 8:28, **“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”** Here it is declared that all things work together for good to all who are called, but all things do not cooperate for good to all who have the gospel preached to them; therefore, the call here intended is a special and effectual call.

I Thessalonians 2:12, **“...walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.”** That this refers to more than the general call through the gospel is evident, for many who had heard the gospel were not in the kingdom of God.

We may further distinguish between the subjects of the two calls. The general call is to be made to all men everywhere. There is to be no discrimination between class or color. The gospel is to be preached to every creature. This is the task of the church and every member should have a part in it. God’s commanding will, and not His secret and determining will, is to regulate our conduct. He has commanded us to call all men, without exception, through the gospel. This is our duty, and we have the promise of His presence in the doing of it. But the special and inward call is restricted to the foreknown and predestinated; to those whom God has a secret purpose to deliver from their sins. Romans 8:30, **“...whom he did predestinate, them he also called...”** The predestinated are called with the special and effectual call and no others. Our text gives a twofold description of those for whom all things cooperate for good. They are described as the lovers of God, and the called of God. And since all men, without exception, do not love God, it follows that all men, without exception, are not called of God.

The effectual call of God corresponds to the new birth, and marks the beginning of God’s dealings experimentally with His people. As said of the Lord Jesus Christ, John 10:3, **“...he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.”** John 10:16 **“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”**

THE NATURE OF THE EFFECTUAL CALL

In discussing this point we will try to discover from the Scriptures what God does in this call and why He does it.

It is a supernatural and miraculous call. It is a call to the dead and a call for the dead. It is a call that makes the dead to live. It accomplishes a spiritual resurrection. John 5:25, **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”** This is a life-giving call, and finds an illustration in the call of Lazarus from the dead. Our Lord stood before the grave of Lazarus, John 11:43-44, **“And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth...”** The power to respond to this call was not in Lazarus, but in Christ who called him. And there is no more power in a spiritual corpse to hear and respond to spiritual things than there is in a physical corpse to respond physically.

It is a subjective or inward call. It is a call made to the heart; a call that circumcises the heart; a call made in the sinner; a call that changes the inside of a man. It is a light-giving call. I Peter 2:9, **“...who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”** This call gives a spiritual understanding. I Corinthians 2:14, **“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”**

In the effectual call divine power is brought to bear upon human nature. Human nature is bad and before it will or can believe on Christ or love God, there must be a change wrought. In the general or outward call, God is speaking to the sinner; in the effectual call, He is also working in the sinner. In conversion the mighty Spirit of God comes to grips with depraved human nature, creating new thoughts, new desires, and new affections. It is the impact of divine Spirit upon the human spirit.

To illustrate: here is a spiritual corpse; a man dead in his sins. He is much alive and active physically, but he is dead and

inactive in a spiritual sense. He cannot please God, Romans 8:8, **“So then they that are in the flesh [those born of the flesh only] cannot please God.”** I preach the gospel to this dead sinner and urge him to believe it. This is the general and outward call, and he rejects it and remains in unbelief. This is a fact of observation to all of us. We see men hearing the gospel with the outward ear, and they remain in their sins. At another time I may preach the gospel to this same sinner and something happens. He understands it and sees Christ and Him crucified as the only hope of his soul. He takes the place of a sinner and commits his soul to Christ as his Saviour. Now what made the difference in the two occasions? There was no difference in the gospel I preached. And I was just as earnest the first time as the second. What made the difference in the sinner’s attitude? Why did he understand it the second time, and fail to understand it the first time? Why did he trust Christ the second time and refuse to trust Him the first time? Here is what made the difference. The first time he was giving expression to his sinful nature, and exhibiting a mind that was at enmity against God, an understanding that was darkened and alienated from the life of God. He was simply manifesting his natural and true self. The second time he was wrought upon by the Spirit of God who imparted life and light. II Corinthians 4:6, **“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”** II Corinthians 4:3, **“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.”** The first time the gospel was hid; the second time the Holy Spirit gave understanding, and opened the heart to attend unto what was spoken.

It is an irresistible or invincible call. It has the power of God in it and behind it. It is the mighty Spirit of God working in grace to deliver the sinner from his sins. To resist this call would be for the sinner to overcome the Creator. This call overcomes the natural resistance to the outward call of the gospel. There was everything in Lazarus to keep him from responding to the command of Christ to come forth, but there was a power from God that overcame all natural obstacles. There is much in the sinner to resist the call of God in the gospel, but in the effectual call all resistance is overcome, and the sinner becomes willing through the power of God. The outward call of the gospel is like the grand jury indicting the criminal and calling him to trial; the special call is the sheriff coming in per-

sonal contact with the criminal, arresting him and bringing him into court. His refusal to come when indicted did not prove his superiority to the government, but to successfully resist arrest would prove that he was greater than the government that sought to punish him. The general call is like the father calling the boys to get up early in the morning. They say "okay-doke" and turn over and pull the cover tighter and go back to sleep. The special call is like the father coming in thirty minutes later. He pulls off the cover and puts on the cowhide. This is effectual and brings them out. The effectual call accomplishes the purpose of God. Take another quotation from Spurgeon - the man often praised but seldom quoted on the doctrine of grace. He says:

"I received a note this week asking me to explain the word called; because in one passage it says, '*Many are called, but few are chosen,*' while in another it appears that all who are called must be chosen. Now let me observe that there are two calls. As my old friend, John Bunyan, says, the hen has two calls, the common cluck, which she gives daily and hourly, and the special one, which she means for her little chickens. So there is a general call, a call made to every man; every man hears it. Many are called by it; all of you are called this morning in that sense, but very few are chosen. The other is the special call, the children's call. You know how the bell sounds over the workshop, to call men to work; that is the general call. A father goes to the door and calls out, 'John, it is dinner time' - that is the special call. While I stand here and call men nobody comes; while I preach to sinners universally, no good is done; it is like the sheet lightning you sometimes see on the summer's evening, beautiful, grand; but who ever heard of anything being struck by it? But the special call is the forked flash from heaven; it strikes somewhere; it is the arrow sent in between the joints of the harness. There is no resisting it. When God calls with His special call there is no standing out. Ah! I know I laughed at religion; I despised, I abhorred it; but that call! Oh, I would not come. But God said, '*Thou shalt come! All that the Father giveth to me shall come.*'"

Oh, for a Spurgeon today to smite Arminianism hip and thigh. Oh, for a voice to thunder as his did: "Salvation is of the Lord,"—of the Lord in its planning, of the Lord in its execution, of the Lord in its application, and of the Lord in its consummation.

The Scriptures tell us that sinners can

and do resist the Holy Spirit. And they tell us how the sinner resists the Spirit. Please turn to the only passage that deals with the matter: Acts 7:51, 52, "*Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.*" Here Stephen says to his hearers: "*Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.*" Stephen had preached and these Jews were angered at his message and persecuted him. He was preaching the word of the Spirit, and in rejecting his message, they were resisting the Holy Spirit. Resisting the Holy Spirit is not something the sinner does a few times in a lifetime. He resists the Holy Spirit every time he rejects the word of God. Stephen said, "*Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.*" They were acting like their father's did, who persecuted the prophets of old.

Sinners resist the objective call of the Spirit in the gospel, but this does not mean that the sinner successfully resists the immediate and personal impact of the Spirit. The sinner does not resist his spiritual birth, for in this birth or call of the Spirit, the sinner's nature is wrought upon, and he does not want to resist.

The effectual call is a sovereign call. It is the call of Christ by the Spirit, who works when and where and how He pleases. John 5:21, "*For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.*" Christ consults His own pleasure about whom He calls. Paul exhibits the church roll to the Corinthians: I Corinthians 1:26-29, "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.*"

It is a gracious call. This means that the sinner does nothing to merit this work of grace in his soul. Paul, speaking about persecuting the church, I Corinthians 15:10, "*But by the grace of God I am what I am...*" In Galatians 1:13-16 he speaks of his conduct while a self-righteous pharisee

and Jewish zealot, and then adds: "*But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen...*"

The special and effectual call is made by the gospel. While the effectual call is more than the call of the gospel, it is not without the gospel. Paul tells the Thessalonian saints that God had called them unto salvation by his gospel. II Thessalonians 2:14, "*Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Paul preached the gospel and God did the calling, thus making the gospel effective in their salvation. This is ever the way. Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but God must give the increase. Salvation is of the Lord, even though He may and does use human instrumentality. All the merit in salvation is in the imputed righteousness of Christ; all the power in conversion is in the Spirit of God; and the only means of salvation is the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.

The gospel in the hands of the preacher only will convert nobody; it must be accompanied by the power of God. The cross is not attractive to the natural man; his pride and self-sufficiency leads him to reject it, while he rests in his own character and conduct for salvation. The Christ who was lifted up must also draw sinners to Himself, for they will not come of themselves.

Paul tells the Thessalonians that he knew their election of God, I Thessalonians 1:5, "*for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance...*" The elect are not saved without the gospel, but until they are called, it will be to the Jews among them a scandal, and to the Greeks among them it will be foolishness. I Corinthians 1:21-24, "*For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*"

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF THIS DOCTRINE

Some of my readers may think that this doctrine is of little or no value. But there is nothing unprofitable in the word of

God, and it is a sin to shun any part of it. If the preacher cannot understand some parts of it, and cannot explain it to the profit of his hearers, then let him be content to read it or quote it. Paul speaking in Acts 20:26-27, *“Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”* Talking to Timothy, II Timothy 3:16, *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, [teaching] for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”* I will now point out some of the values of this doctrine:

It honors the Holy Spirit by ascribing to Him a part in our salvation. He took of the things of Christ and showed them unto us, else we would have remained forever blind to them. Without the new birth, effected by His power, we could not see the kingdom of God. Without the birth of the Spirit we would never have entered the kingdom.

The Holy Spirit gets little honor from the average Christian. He thinks the Holy Spirit regenerated him in response to his faith. He thinks the Holy Spirit did something for him because he had already done his part. Might as well talk about doing our part to get Christ to redeem us as to talk about doing our part to get the Holy Spirit to regenerate us. Ephesians 2:1-10 gives us the truth on this point: *“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

It humbles us by showing us that we have not made ourselves to differ from the lost about us. We had the same nature they now have, and once acted as they now act. Our repentance and love and faith and hope are all graces wrought in us by the Holy spirit. All the good in us is the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22, 23, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance...”* He is called the Holy Spirit, not to distinguish Him from the Father and the Son, as though they are not also holy, but because He is the author of all holiness in us. This doctrine robs us of any room to glory and boast. We cannot boast of our repentance and faith because they are gifts of the Spirit. Nor are they natural gifts like physical sight and hearing. Let us praise the Holy Spirit for opening the eyes of our understanding and for opening our hearts to attend to the gospel call.

If there are lost people reading this now, my prayer for you is, that the Holy Spirit may use the truth to dash out your brains of self-righteousness; that He may convict you of sin, and make you sick of self; that He may enable you to believe that there is nothing that can keep you from the eternal burnings save Christ and Him crucified.

“How helpless guilty nature lies,
Unconscious of its load.
The heart, unchanged, can never rise
To happiness and God.

“Can aught beneath a power divine
The stubborn will subdue?
‘Tis thine, eternal Spirit, thine
To form the heart anew.

“‘Tis thine the passions to recall,
And upward bid them rise,
And make the scales of error fall
From reason’s darkened eyes.

“To chase the shades of death away,
And bid the sinner live;
A beam of heaven, a vital ray,
‘Tis thine alone to give.”