

The Effectual Call

By Elder David Pyles

Numerous Baptist ministers of these modern times assert there is no calling in the Bible apart from the general call of the gospel to all men. Baptists of the past would have been disappointed that men of their own stripe would endorse such ideas. The old Baptist position was that the Bible presents not only a general gospel call but also a personal “effectual call” of the Holy Spirit wherein He changes the heart, making it receptive to spiritual things. This calling is effectual in the sense that the Holy Spirit does this work irresistibly (Jn 3:8). It could also be called “effectual” in the sense that the subsequent gospel call cannot be effective without it.

To see the necessity of distinguishing the effectual and gospel calls, consider:

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. – 1Cor 1:21-25

Observe how this text describes a general gospel call that was to both Jew and Greek. Of those under this call, many rejected what they heard, but there was a special subset, described here as the “called,” who were powerfully persuaded by it. Now these “called” clearly cannot be those who merely came under the sound of the preached word. Of all that heard the preached word, these were distinguished by the fact they had been “called.” This interpretation will be confirmed a few verses later with the statement:

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called... – 1Cor 1:26-27

Now the gospel call is a general calling that excludes neither mighty nor noble, but not many of that class have obeyed it in comparison to common men, and Paul here said this was on account of the fact that not many of the former class are called. As another example:

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. – Rom 8:28-29

Here the “called” are one and the same with those who love God and for whom all things work together for good. The gospel call is to be preached to all men, but the above words cannot apply to all men, nor even apply to all men who have heard the gospel preached. This is confirmed by the next verse where the “called” are also said to be the ones who will surely be glorified in the end. Again, Paul said of God:

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. – 2Tim 1:9-11

This text says that, according to God’s eternal purpose, men were being saved to heaven and “called” even in the Old Testament era before the gospel was preached, but it then explains that the effect of the gospel was to bring these things to light. A positive response to the gospel call serves to confirm the effectual call and the eternal salvation that accompanies it.

Finally, consider the words of the Apostle Peter:

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. – 2Peter 1:10

This was written to Christians who obviously had already experienced the gospel call, and who could do nothing to make that fact any more or less certain. The statement must therefore refer to the effectual call, and was an exhortation to obedience in faith, whereby men could have confidence and peace in their hope to have been the recipients of this call.

That the scriptures speak of a general gospel call is not to be denied (e.g. Mt 20:16), but one will never make sense of the Bible without recognizing that it also teaches a calling of another kind. Evidence of this is so replete that I think none dare deny it except those who are bent on supporting preconceived theories.