

# The Order of Salvation - Calling

## Introduction

- 'Redemption accomplished & applied'
- The 'Order of Salvation' = *calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, preservation & glorification*. It's not 'inspired' & occasionally arbitrary but a useful teaching tool!

## 1. God CALLS all people everywhere to repent, but some refuse

### i) The 'external' call of *general revelation*

#### a. Creation

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. <sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. <sup>3</sup> They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. <sup>4</sup> Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*

Psalm 19:1-4, NIV

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

Romans 1:18-21

#### b. Conscience

*For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. <sup>15</sup> They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them <sup>16</sup> on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.*

Romans 2:14-16

**Implication:** 'What about those who have never heard? How can a just God judge them?'

### ii) The 'external' call of the *gospel*

*<sup>2</sup> "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, <sup>3</sup> and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come... <sup>14</sup> For many are **called**, but few are chosen."*

Matthew 22:2-3, 14

- NB: This *call*, like the *call of general revelation* often falls on stony ground - it can be resisted.

**Implication:** Proclamation & prayer - God '*desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth*' (1 Timothy 2:4). But they cannot repent & believe unless *they* hear & *God* opens their eyes.

## 2. Gods CALLS some people to salvation in Christ, and all come

### i) The Definition of the 'Effectual' / 'Irresistible' Call

- *'God's inward & ultimately persuasive summons to repent of sin & turn to Christ for salvation.'*  
Bruce Ware, *'Effectual Calling & Grace' in Still Sovereign*, p211
- *'Calling is the efficacious summons on the part of God the Father, in accordance with & in pursuance of his eternal purposes in Christ Jesus, addressed to sinners dead in trespasses & sins, a call that ushers them into fellowship with Christ & into the possession of the salvation of which he is the embodiment.'*  
John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2:165
- Notice the emphasis on the *effect* of the call. This call *never* falls on deaf ears; rather it describes how God the Father works powerfully to bring people to salvation.

<sup>29</sup> For those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also **called**, and those whom he **called** he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 8:28-30

### ii) The nature of the call

God's call is *high* (Philippians 3:14), *holy* (2 Timothy 1:9) & *heavenly* (Hebrews 3:1) in its origin, its destiny and its character.

#### a. Into the blessings of salvation

We are **called** into the *kingdom* (1 Thessalonians 2:12), *peace* (1 Corinthians 7:15), *freedom* (Galatians 5:13), *hope* (Ephesians 1:18), *God's marvellous light* (1 Peter 2:9), *glory* (1 Peter 5:10), *eternal life* (1 Timothy 6:12), and *the marriage supper of the Lamb* (Revelation 19:9).

#### b. Into union with Christ

*God is faithful, by whom you were **called** into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 Corinthians 1:9

### iii) The power / efficacy of the call

Two key passages lead to the unavoidable conclusion that **God's call to salvation is always effective.**

#### a. 1 Corinthians 1:23-24

*'Jews demand signs & Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews & folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews & Greeks, Christ the power of God & the wisdom of God.'*

1 Corinthians 1:22-24

What differentiates those who stumble over Christ from those who are saved by him? Paul says that it is **those who are called** who respond rightly to Christ. It is impossible to be called by God and not respond rightly to Christ (cf. John 6:37, 39, 45); & it is impossible to respond rightly without being called (cf. John 6:44, 65).

**b. Romans 8:28-30**

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

Romans 8:28-30

There is an exact correspondence between the group of people who are called by God, and those who are ultimately glorified with the Lord Jesus in his new creation. This confirms that the 'call' of Romans 8 is not a general gospel call that can be resisted but an effective or powerful call which leads inevitably to the eternal salvation of all those who are called.

**Implication**

This is very significant pastorally. The 'golden chain' of verses 29-30 is the theological basis for the promise of verse 28. It is precisely *because* God glorifies *all* those whom he calls that we can be sure that he will not permit anything to hinder his ultimate and good purposes. If it is possible to be called but not ultimately saved, the assurance of verse 28 is meaningless.

**Summary**

We do not often speak about being 'called' by God in this specific sense of being 'called to salvation' but that is the primary way that the bible uses this language, and we would do well to use bible words in bible ways. When we do so, it emphasises one of the central truths of the Scriptures: '*Salvation belongs to the Lord.*' (Jonah 2:9).

**3. God CALLS his children to a life of patient holiness**

- God not only calls us into *blessing*, but also into *obligation*. Calling is a gracious act of God but it inevitably produces good works in the believer.

**a. Called to holiness**

*... through [Christ] whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the **obedience of faith** for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup> including you who are **called to belong** to Jesus Christ, <sup>7</sup> To all those in Rome who are loved by God and **called to be saints**...*

Romans 1:5-7

- When Paul says that the Romans are called to 'belong' to Jesus Christ and to be 'saints', he is not merely thinking of the *state* of belonging to Christ but its *outworking*. God **calls** us to live out the salvation we have been given as we '*present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship*' (Romans 12:1).

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the **calling** to which you have been **called**, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Ephesians 4:1-3

*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called** to be saints...*

1 Corinthians 1:2

*God has not **called** us for impurity, but in holiness...*

1 Thessalonians 4:7

*God has **called** you to peace...*

1 Corinthians 7:15

### b. Called to patient endurance

*... For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. <sup>21</sup> For to this you have been **called**, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*

1 Peter 2:20-21

*Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were **called**, that you may obtain a blessing.*

1 Peter 3:8-9

- This world is not our true home and therefore the typical Christian experience is to suffer, cf. 1 Peter 1:6; 2:19-20; 4:3-4). How are we to respond? By following the example / template of Jesus. Significantly for our purposes, this patient, gracious endurance in the face of trials is thought of as God's **calling** on their life.

### c. Called to a particular 'vocation' / career?

- Some Christians have used the language of 'calling' or 'vocation' to speak of their career: '*God has called me to be an accountant / lawyer / teacher / minister.*' But this language is wholly absent from the Bible. (Paul's *call* to Apostleship (e.g. Romans 1:1) is the exception - probably because New Testament Apostles are on a par with Old Testament prophets like Samuel (1 Samuel 3:4). It is of course right that our work matters greatly to God - we are to '*work at all things as though working for the Lord*' (Colossians 3:23). But that is not the same as investing our own career choices with divine authority.
- In a Church context, the idea of relying on someone's own 'inner sense' of how they can best serve God is also unhelpful. In the New Testament, although it is a '*noble thing*' to desire to be an overseer (1 Timothy 3:1), Elders are neither self-selecting nor self-appointing. It is the job of Church leaders to identify & appoint to Eldership those who are already living godly lives, managing their household well & demonstrating an ability to teach the word (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-9).
- In summary therefore, we should think of our Christian calling as relating to the pattern and godliness of our life rather than to a career choice.

## Concluding Implications

### • Call

We must ensure that any discussion of calling (or indeed, of election) does not obscure the magnitude of God's grace. The invitation of the gospel is wide open to anyone and everyone. Jesus says, *'I am the bread of life; **whoever** comes to me shall not hunger, and **whoever** believes in me shall never thirst... **Whoever** comes to me I will never cast out... For this is the will of my Father, that **everyone** who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day'* (John 6:35, 37, 40). If therefore we want to be saved, we must come to Jesus and believe in him. *'Everyone who **calls** on the name of the Lord will be saved.'* (Romans 10:13).

### • Praise

At the same time, we know that the only reason that we were able to come to Jesus and call on his name was because God enabled us to do so. Jesus also said, *'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,'* and, *'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father'* (John 6:44, 65). Intuitively, Christians know this - that is why we thank and praise God for saving us rather than congratulating ourselves. Indeed, God chose to save us by grace alone with the specific aim that any boasting would be excluded (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:27).

*'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.'*  
Psalm 103:1-5

### • Strive

God has not finished with us yet. His glorious purpose is to conform us to the image of his Son. He does that work in us by the power of his Spirit, but we are not passive in the process. Peter says, *'Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, & virtue with knowledge, & knowledge with self-control, & self-control with steadfastness, & steadfastness with godliness, & godliness with brotherly affection, & brotherly affection with love'* (2 Peter 1:5-7). Why? *'For if these qualities are yours & are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ'* (2 Peter 1:8). So what? *'Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall'* (2 Peter 1:10; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

### • Pray

*'Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, & may your whole spirit & soul & body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who **calls** you is faithful; he will surely do it.'*

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24