

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Efficacious Grace

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*But God who is rich in compassion and love,
Not leaving my soul to the grave,
Has given me life; born again from above,
By God's sov'reign grace I've been saved.*

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Unconditional election is the work of God the Father. Particular redemption is the work of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. In this chapter we come to the work of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, whose efficaciously gracious work it is to apply the benefits of Christ's work to those elect persons whom Jesus has redeemed.

If we are following the TULIP acronym, this is the doctrine called "irresistible grace," which refers to the way God calls us to Jesus Christ. But again the words themselves are somewhat misleading, for they do not mean (as they seem to imply) that God will drag us kicking and screaming into his kingdom. Nor do they mean that grace is never resisted by us. Obviously it is. What they mean is that we do not resist effectively. Or, to put it the other way around, they mean that when God calls us to faith in Jesus Christ he calls effectively, succeeding in his purpose to save us. The grace of God's calling is overwhelmingly efficacious. A good way of expressing this is to say that the Holy Spirit regenerates us, giving us a new nature, as a result of which we naturally do what the new nature does: that is, we believe the gospel, repent of our sin, and trust in Christ unto salvation.

This puts the determining factor in a person's salvation in God's hands, where it clearly belongs. When the Jewish authorities opposed Jesus Christ they were allowed to do so to the very last (Acts 7:51). But although the apostle Paul also resisted, he was allowed to do so only to a point, after which God brought his resistance to an end (Acts 9:5-6).

The Westminster Confession of Faith expresses the doctrine of efficacious grace in particularly effective language:

All those whom God has predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh; renewing

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their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace (Chap. 10, Sec. 1).

Martin Luther was saying the same thing when he wrote, “When God works in us, the will is changed under the sweet influence of the Spirit of God. Once more it desires and acts, not of compulsion, but of its own desire and spontaneous inclination.”¹ Or again, consider this definition from John Murray: “God’s call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel.”²

It is this doctrine that we need to examine in this chapter, answering the question why, if the gospel is freely offered to all men (as it is), some respond to it and are saved while others reject it and are lost. The Arminian says that this is because of something in the individual, so that the individual ultimately is responsible for his own destiny. The Calvinist says that it is God who makes the difference, and that this is due entirely to his grace.

TWO KINDS OF CALLS

A husband and his wife are walking down the street. Someone calls so that they can hear the voice but cannot quite distinguish the words. The woman assumes that the person is calling her and turns around. Her husband assumes that the person is calling someone else and keeps on going. The man ignores the call; it must be for someone else. His wife thinks someone is trying to get her attention. What this illustrates is the word that we need to look at first. The word is “called,” and it occurs in the statement, “those he [that is, God] predestined, he also called ...” (Rom. 8:30). The point of this word is that—like the woman in the story—those whom God calls effectively not only hear his call but actually respond to it by turning around and by believing on or committing their lives to Christ.

1. *A general call.* There are two kinds of calls in Scripture. The first is external, general, and universal. It is an invitation to all persons to repent of sin, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved. It is the call that Jesus gave when he cried, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

¹ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. and ed. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1957), 103.

² John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), 96.

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Or again, when he said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

The latter invitation was spoken in Jerusalem on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, when people from many lands and nationalities were assembled. There were Jews from every part of Palestine as well as from many regions of the Roman Empire. There were also Gentiles, some who had become Jewish proselytes but also some who, no doubt, were merely interested bystanders. We get a feeling of what this audience must have been like by remembering the composition of the crowd that assembled at Pentecost when Peter preached the first sermon of the Christian era, likewise extending a general call to believe on Jesus. We are told that on that occasion Jerusalem was filled with "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11). When Jesus (and later Peter) issued that call, the call was universal. It was for everyone. Anyone who wanted to respond could come to Jesus Christ and be saved. Today that same call flows from every true Christian pulpit and from all who bear witness to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in every land.

The difficulty with this external, universal, and (in itself) ineffectual call is that if people are left to themselves, no one ever actually responds to it. People hear the gospel and may even understand it up to a point, but the God who issues the call is undesirable to them, and so they turn away.

Jesus told a story about a man who prepared a great banquet and invited many guests. When the feast was prepared, he sent servants with the invitation, "Come, for everything is now ready." But the guests began to make excuses:

"I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it," said one.

"I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out," said another.

A third replied, "I just got married, so I can't come" (Luke 14:15-24).

Jesus was not making this story up out of thin air. That was the way the people of his day actually responded to his call. They would not receive the invitation. They rejected it, preferring to go their own way.

The Howard newspaper organization has as its logo a lighthouse beneath which are the words: "Give the people the light, and they will find their way." The idea is that people make foolish mistakes and bad decisions because they do not know the right way. Show

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it to them and they will follow it. However, that is not the way the Bible describes our condition spiritually. When Jesus was in the world, he was the world's light. The light was shining. But the people of his day did not respond to Jesus by walking in the right path. Instead, they hated the light and tried to put it out. They crucified the lighthouse. John was there. He saw what happened, and he had this damning observation: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

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2. *The specific call.* The second kind of call is internal, specific, and effectual. It not only issues the invitation but also provides the will-iness or ability to respond. It is a case of God bringing to spiritual life those who without that call would remain spiritually dead forever.

Probably the greatest illustration of God's grace in calling a dead sinner to life is the raising of Lazarus, recorded in John 11. When Jesus reached Bethany, at the request of the dead man's sisters, he was told that Lazarus had been dead for three days and that he was already putrefying: "But Lord," said Martha, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days" (v. 39). What a graphic description of the state of our moral and spiritual decay because of sin! There was no hope that anything could be done for Lazarus in his helpless condition. His case was not serious or grim; it was altogether hopeless. Using this as an illustration, the great eighteenth-century evangelist George Whitefield used to say that the sinner's condition is worse than hopeless. In our decaying spiritual state we stink; we are offensive to God's nostrils. Hopeless? Yes, but only to man, not to God, with whom all things are possible (Matt. 19:26). Having prayed, Jesus called, "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43), and the call of God brought the dead man to life.

That is what the Holy Spirit does today. The Holy Spirit operates through the preaching and teaching of the Word to call to faith those whom God previously has elected to salvation and for whom Jesus specifically died. Apart from those three actions—the act of God in electing, the work of Christ in atoning, and the power of the Holy Spirit in calling—there would be no hope for anyone. No one could be saved. But because of those actions—because of God's sovereign grace—even the worst of blaspheming rebels may be turned from his or her folly to the Savior.

Perhaps the best discussion of the effectual call is in John Murray's book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Murray begins by making the distinction just made, showing that there is such a thing as a general or universal call and that there are examples of it in the Bible. But then he points out that "in the New Testament the terms for calling, when used with reference to salvation, are almost uniformly applied, not to the universal call of the gospel, but to the call that ushers men into a state of salvation and is therefore

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effectual. There is scarcely an instance where the terms are used to designate the indiscriminate overture of grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ."³

Here are some examples:

- *Romans 1:6-7*. "You also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ ...called to be saints."
- *Romans 11:29*. "God's gift and his call are irrevocable."
- *1 Corinthians 1:9*. "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."
- *Ephesians 4:1*. "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."
- *2 Timothy 1:8-9*. "Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life."
- *2 Peter 1:10*. "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure."

In each of these texts (and many others), the call of God effectively saves those to whom it is addressed. Putting the above texts together, it is a call that unites us to Jesus Christ, bringing us into fellowship with him and setting before us a holy life in which we will be sure to walk if we truly have been called. Anticipating subjects to be introduced later in this chapter, effectual calling is the point at which the eternal foreknowledge and predestination of God pass over into time and start the process by which the individual is drawn from sin to faith in Jesus Christ, is justified through that faith, and is then kept in Christ until his or her final glorification.

Why is this internal or specific call so effective? The answer is not difficult. The reason the call is so effective is that it is God's call. It issues from his mouth, and everything that issues from the mouth of God accomplishes that for which it is sent:

As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,

³ Ibid., 88.

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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,
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 (Isa. 55:10-11).

THREE IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS

There are, however, a number of serious misunderstandings of what “calling” means. So let me add here three significant clarifications of what has been said so far about the two calls.

1. *Two responses.* The trouble with the general call is that men and women do not naturally respond to it. But although they do not respond to the general call to salvation, they can respond by such out-ward actions as coming forward at a religious meeting, making a profession of faith, or even joining a church. Not only can they respond in these ways, but many do. That is why Peter told apparent believers, “make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). He meant that we must be sure that we really have been called by God and are truly born again, and that we have not merely been called by the preacher.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, who served as minister of Tenth Presbyterian Church from 1927 to 1960, wrote:

If men heed no more than the outward call, they become members of the visible church. If the inward call is heard in our hearts, we become members of the invisible church. The first call unites us merely to a group of professing members; but the inward call unites us to Christ himself, and to all that have been born again. The outward call may bring with it a certain intellectual knowledge of the truth; the inward call brings us the faith of the heart, the hope which anchors us forever to Christ and the love which must ever draw us back to him who first loved us. The one can end in formalism, the other in true life. The outward call may curb the

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tendencies of the old nature and keep a soul in outward morality; the inward call will cure the plague that is in us and bring us on to triumph in Christ.⁴

2. *The importance of the general call.* Everything said thus far has stressed the necessity of the special or internal call of the individual to salvation by God. No one naturally responds to God on the basis of the general call alone. Although that is true, nevertheless it is also true that the general call is necessary, since it is through the general or universal call that God calls specifically.

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The effectual or specific call comes through the general call. In other words, it is through the preaching of God's Word by evangelists and ministers, and through the telling of the good news of the gospel by Christians everywhere, that God calls sinners. He does not call everyone we call. We sow the seed broadly; some of it falls on stony or shallow soil, just as some of it also falls on good soil. But when the seed falls on the soil God previously has prepared and when God, the giver of life, blesses the work of sowing so that the seed takes root in the good soil and grows, the result is a spiritual harvest. People are saved and enter the golden chain of God's saving acts—including fore-knowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification—that is outlined in Romans 8.

To put it still another way, if God calls effectively through the general call, then if some are to be saved, the general call is as necessary as the specific and effectual call. The call we give does not regenerate. God alone is the author of the new birth. All must be born "from above." Nevertheless, the way God does that is through the sowing of the seed of his Word, which is entrusted to us.

Nobody but God could invent this way of saving human beings. If it were left to us, we would say that either: 1) God has to do it; we can do nothing; or 2) we have to do it; God can do nothing. As it is, the work of effectively calling people to Christ is God's work, although he uses human beings to do it.

3. *Am I elect?* Sometimes people get bogged down by the mistaken thought, "If God is going to elect me to salvation, he will just have to do it. There is nothing I can do." Or they get hung up on knowing whether or not they are among the elect. They say, "How can I know I am elect? If I am not, there is no hope for me." This question bothered John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, and caused extraordinary anxiety for him. But there is no reason for either such passivity or

⁴ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God's Heirs: Exposition of Bible Doctrines, Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 7, *Romans 8:1-39* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1963), 171-172.

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such despair. How do you know whether or not you are elect? The answer is, Have you responded to the gospel? Have you answered God's call?

Consider some of the biblical examples. How do we know that Noah was chosen by God for salvation? It is because, when God told him of the destruction that was to come upon the world by the great flood, Noah believed God and built an ark to save his family. The Bible says, "By faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" (Heb. 11:7).

How do we know that the patriarch Abraham was an elect man? It is because, when God called to him to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and go to a land that he would afterward inherit, Abraham "obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Heb. 11:8), and because he persevered in that obedience to the end of his life. "He was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (v. 10).

How do we know that Moses was predestined to be saved? It is because, though raised in the lap of Egyptian luxury, when he had grown up he "refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter," choosing "to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time" (Heb. 11:24-25). He sided with God's people.

How do we know that Paul was elected to salvation? It is because, though breathing hatred against God's people and though trying to kill some of them, when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, calling, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4) the future apostle to the Gentiles was transformed. He saw his sin for what it was and turned from it. He saw the righteousness of Christ and believed on Jesus. He obeyed and served God from that time on.

How do you know if you are among the elect?

There is only one way to know this, and it is not by trying to peer into the eternal counsels of God, stripping the cover from the book of his divine foreknowledge and predestination. The only way you will ever know if you are among the elect is if you respond to the gospel. The Bible says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). When you believe in Christ, you can know that God has set his electing love upon you and that, having loved you, he will continue to love you and keep you to the end. It is in Christ that you have been chosen (Eph. 1:4), and it is to Christ that you must look for the assurance of your salvation.

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THE ORDER OF SALVATION (ORDO SALUTIS)

We must not think, however, that the specific or effective call, as decisive as it is, is all that is involved in God's efficacious grace. The effective call is only one point in a long chain of actions (and responses) by which God saves an individual sinner. Some of these actions were mentioned a moment ago. In theology this chain is called the *ordo salutis*, meaning the "order of salvation." It is a long chain beginning with God's eternal purpose to save and ending with the glorification of the justified sinner.

What are the links in this chain? As we saw back in chapter 4, one link is the electing choice of God, which precedes the new birth. Verses like John 1:13 point to this. It says that those who become children of God are "born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." This means that God is the cause of our spiritual birth, just as a father is responsible for the conception of a child. Similarly, James 1:18 says that God "chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

Other acts and processes follow the new birth. John 3:3 tells us that "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again"; and John 3:5 adds, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." In other words, we must be born again before we are able to believe in Christ and be saved.

Another helpful verse is 1 John 3:9: "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God." John is not talking about perfection in this verse, for earlier he has insisted that Christians do sin. If they claim differently, they are either deceived or deceitful—"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Rather, he is talking about sanctification, which follows regeneration and is the progressive growth in holiness of one who has become God's child.

Romans 8:28-30 adds justification and glorification: "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. 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." In these verses foreknowledge and pre-destination deal with the prior determination of God; calling, justification, and glorification deal with the application of redemption to us. We know from Paul's teaching elsewhere that justification presupposes faith (Rom. 5:1), so we can insert faith before justification, but after regeneration. Adoption must follow justification, because only justified people are admitted to God's spiritual family. Sanctification is the process that follows justification. It also comes before glorification.

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Therefore, in the final list of these acts or responses we have: fore-knowledge, predestination, the effectual call, regeneration, repentance and faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.⁵

1. *Foreknowledge.* Of the many terms in this list, foreknowledge is probably the most frequently misunderstood. It has two parts: “fore,” which means beforehand, and “knowledge.” It has been taken to mean that, since God knows all things, God knows beforehand who will believe on him and who will not, and as a result he has predestined those whom he foresees will believe on him for salvation. What he foreknows or foresees is their faith.

However, the matter is not as simple as that. For one thing, Romans 8:29 does not say that God foreknew what certain of his creatures would do. It is not talking about human actions at all. Rather it is speaking entirely of what God does. Each of the terms in Romans 8:29-30 is like that: *God* foreknew, *God* predestined, *God* called, *God* justified, *God* glorified. Besides, the object of divine foreknowledge is not the actions of certain people but the people themselves. In this sense foreknowledge can only mean that God has fixed a special attention upon certain people or has loved them in a saving way. As we learned back in chapter 4, this is the way the word generally is used in the Old Testament.

And there is this problem, too. If all the word *foreknowledge* means is that God knows beforehand what people will do in response to him or to the preaching of the gospel, and then determines their destiny on that basis, what could God possibly foresee or foreknow except opposition to him? If the hearts of all men and women are as depraved as Paul has been teaching they are, if in fact “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God” (Rom. 3:10-11), then what could God possibly foresee in any human heart but unbelief?

Murray puts it in a slightly different way:

Even if it were granted that “foreknew” means the foresight of faith, the biblical doctrine of sovereign election is not thereby eliminated or disproven. For it is certainly true that God fore-sees faith; he foresees all that comes to pass. The question would then simply be: whence proceeds this faith, which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith which God foresees is the faith he himself creates (cf. John 3:3-8; 6:44, 45, 65; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:2). Hence his

⁵ For a fuller discussion of the order of these steps see Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 79-87. A more popular version of the *ordo salutis* is presented in Philip Graham Ryken, *The Message of Salvation*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 2001).

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eternal foresight of faith is preconditioned by his decree to generate this faith in those whom he foresees as believing.⁶

Foreknowledge means that salvation has its origin in the mind of God, not man. To know, in the biblical sense, is to love; to foreknow is to “forelove.” Foreknowledge thus focuses our attention on the everlasting love of God, according to which some persons are graciously chosen to be conformed to the character of Jesus Christ.

2. *Predestination.* A common objection to this understanding of foreknowledge is that, if it is correct, then foreknowledge and pre-destination (the term that follows) mean exactly the same thing, and therefore that Paul is redundant. But the terms are not synonymous. In reality, predestination carries us an important step further.

Like foreknowledge, predestination is composed of two parts: “pre,” meaning “beforehand,” and “destiny” or “destination.” It means to determine a person’s destiny beforehand, and this is the sense in which it differs from foreknowledge. Foreknowledge means to fix one’s love upon or to elect, but this “does not inform us of the destination to which those thus chosen are appointed.”⁷ Predestination supplies this element. It tells us that, having fixed his distinguishing love upon us, God next appointed us “to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29). He does this, as the next terms show, by calling, justifying, and glorifying those whom he has chosen.

3. *Effectual calling.* The next step in this chain is what was discussed in the first part of this chapter. As we explained there, one kind of calling is external, general, and universal. It is an open invitation to all persons to repent of sin, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved. It is what Jesus was speaking of when he said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). The problem with this type of call is that, left to ourselves, none of us would ever respond positively. We hear the call, but we turn away, preferring our own ways to God. That is why Jesus also said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44).

The other kind of call is internal, specific, and effectual. That is, it not only issues the invitation but also provides the ability or will-iness to respond. It is God drawing to himself or bringing to spiritual life the one who without that call would remain spiritually dead and far from him. This is the way Jesus called Lazarus from the tomb. Lazarus was

⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1968), 316.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 318.

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dead, but the call of God created in the dead man life and the ability to respond. This is also how God calls those whom he has foreknown and predestined to salvation.

4. *Regeneration.* When we say that God's call brings forth life in the one who is called, what we mean is that the call of God regenerates or brings about the new birth. This is the next critical step. Regeneration is a work of God by which a spiritually dead man or woman is brought to life in Christ (John 5:24), having been given a new nature in which what was once a heart of stone now becomes a heart of flesh (Ezek. 11:19), and the individual is brought out of darkness into God's wonderful light (1 Pet. 2:9). It involves a change of one's character so that he or she becomes "a new creation" in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Bible speaks of the new birth often. For example:

- *Deuteronomy 32:18.* "You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth."
- *John 1:13.* "... children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."
- *John 3:3.* "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."
- *1 Peter 1:3.* "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."
- *1 Peter 1:23.* "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

Those are important verses, and when we put them together we have an analogy of what happens when a person becomes a Christian. No one is responsible for his or her physical birth. It is only as a human egg and sperm join, grow, and finally enter this world that birth occurs. The process is initiated and nurtured by the parents. Likewise spiritual rebirth is initiated and nurtured by our heavenly Father and is not our own doing. John develops the analogy in precisely this way in a verse cited earlier: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13). These verses have three important negatives: not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will.

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The first negative teaches that regeneration is not by physical birth or merit. Some people are very proud of their bloodline, like the Jews of Jesus' day. There were thousands who thought that they were right with God simply because physically they were descended from Abraham (John 8:33). They were like Paul, who boasted that he was "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). They thought they had it made because they were descended from Abraham physically. Jesus pointed out that God is interested in a spiritual relationship and that their actions indicated that they were actually children of the devil (John 8:44). In the same way, many people today think that they are right with God simply because they have been born of Christian parents or live in a so-called Christian country. But this saves no one.

The second and third negatives deny the role of the human will in salvation by the analogy of a husband's role in the conception of a child, the point being that no one can become a child of God by mere volition. A person can accomplish much by sheer willpower and hard work, pushing himself to get ahead. He can become successful in the world's terms. But no one conceives or gives birth to himself. Nor can any amount of willpower make someone a son or daughter of one set of parents if he or she has been born to another set of parents. Similarly, nothing will make a person a child of God unless God him-self engenders spiritual life and brings about a new birth. Becoming a child of God is a matter of God's grace. It is true that we must believe on Jesus Christ to be saved. This is what we will come to next. But we believe only because God has already taken the initiative to plant his divine life within us. People only believe because God has quickened them. If they fail to believe, it is because God has withheld that special, efficacious grace that he was under no obligation to bestow. In other words, new life comes before saving faith; it is never the other way around.

5. *Repentance and faith.* The immediate effect of the divine regeneration of the soul is that the sinner now abhors the sin that he once cherished, and trusts in Christ for his salvation. This involves two actions: 1) turning from sin, which is repentance; and 2) turning to Christ, which is faith. These are both things that we do. That is, God does not repent for us, nor does he believe for us. We must repent. We must believe. Nevertheless, both repentance and faith occur in us because of God's prior work of regeneration.

Which comes first, repentance or faith? In some systems of the-ology, faith is placed before repentance on the grounds that it is only when we see Christ in his holiness, and come to desire and trust him, that we perceive sin for what it is and reject it. This was John Calvin's point of view. He said, "Repentance not only immediately follows faith but is produced by it," though he added, "When we speak of faith as the origin of repentance,

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we dream not of any space of time which it employs in producing it; but we intend to signify that a man cannot truly devote himself to repentance unless he knows himself to be of God.”⁸ In other systems of theology, repentance is placed first on the grounds that we cannot come to Christ unless we have turned from sin. Robert L. Dabney was adopting this position when he wrote, “The very first acting of faith implies some repentance as the prompter thereof.” But, like Calvin, Dabney also insisted that there is “no gap of duration between the birth of the one or the other.”⁹ Since the proponents of neither view want to preserve a time gap between faith and repentance or repentance and faith, we seem to be dealing with an unnecessary distinction.

Actually, repentance and faith are two parts of the single experience that we call conversion. Conversion means to turn around. Before God’s regenerating work in our hearts, we were going in a wrong direction. But when God gave us a new nature to desire him and what he desires for us, we turned a full 180 degrees to go in the opposite direction: 90 degrees is repentance, a turning from sin, and 90 degrees is faith, turning to Christ. There is no salvation without both turnings.

6. *Justification.* The next step in God’s chain of saving actions is his gracious justification of the sinner. So here we are back to what God himself does. Justification is his act, not ours. It is the judicial function by which God declares sinful men and women to be in a right standing before him, not on the basis of their own merit—for they have none—but on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done by dying in their place on the Cross. Jesus bore their punishment, taking the penalty of their sins upon himself. Those sins have been punished, and God now imputes the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ to their account.

What needs to be discussed here is the relationship of the effectual call to justification. Or to put it in the form of a question: Why does Paul place calling where he does in Romans 8? Why does calling come *after* foreknowledge and predestination, and *before* justification and glorification?

There are two reasons. First, calling is the point at which the things determined beforehand in the mind and counsel of God pass over into time. We speak of “fore” knowledge and “pre” destination. But these two time references only have meaning for us. Strictly speaking, there is no time in God, for whom the end is as the beginning and the beginning as the end. “Fore” and “pre” are meaning-less from his perspective. God simply “knows” and “determines,” and that eternally. But what he thus decrees in

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics, 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.iii.2.

⁹ Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1972).

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eternity becomes actual in time, and calling is the point where his eternal foreknowledge and predestination find concrete manifestation. We are creatures in time. So it is by God's specific calling of us to faith in time that we are saved.

Second, justification, which comes after calling in Paul's list of divine actions, is always connected with faith or belief, and it is through God's call of the individual that faith is brought into being. God's call creates or quickens faith. Or, as we could perhaps more accurately say, it is the call of God that brings forth spiritual life, of which faith is the first true evidence or proof. The Bible never says that we are saved *because* of our faith. That would make faith something good in us that we somehow contribute to the process. But the Bible does say that we are saved *by* or *through* faith, meaning that God must create faith in us before we can be justified.

7. *Adoption.* Adoption, like justification, is a judicial act. However, it differs from justification in that justification concerns our standing before the bar of God's justice, while adoption has to do with our being brought into God's spiritual family, with all the blessings that entails. Adoption brings us all the benefits of sonship, including the right to approach God in prayer. It assures us of God's love and protection. It contributes to our assurance that we have been saved. Paul refers to some of these blessings in Galatians 4:6-7, where he writes, "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."
8. *Sanctification.* Foreknowledge, predestination, calling, regeneration, justification, and adoption are exclusively God's work. But sanctification is a process in which, having been given a new nature by God, the redeemed sinner now can and must cooperate. To put it in other language, justification is monergistic; it is the work of God. By contrast, sanctification is synergistic; it is a joint work of both God and man.

Murray argues that no verse shows this more clearly than Philippians 2:12-13, which says, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." He goes on to argue: "God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours. ... The relation is that because God works we work. ... What the apostle is urging is the necessity of working out our own salvation, and the encouragement he supplies is the assurance that it is God him-self who works in us. The more persistently

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active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God.”¹⁰

9. *Glorification*. Glorification is our ultimate spiritual destiny. It means to become like Jesus Christ, as fully and as gloriously as possible. When Paul mentions glorification in Romans 8:30 he refers to it in the past tense (“glorified”) rather than in the future (“will glorify”) or even a future passive tense (“will be glorified”), which is what we might have expected him to do. Why is this? The obvious reason is that he is thinking of this final step in our salvation as being so certain that it is possible to refer to it as already having happened. And, of course, he does this deliberately to assure us that this is exactly what *will* happen. He wrote to the Christians at Philippi, “I always pray with joy, ...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:4, 6). That is shorthand for what Paul wrote in Romans 8. God began the process of salvation by foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and adoption. And because God never goes back on anything he has said or ever changes his mind, we can know that he will carry it on until the day when we will be made like Jesus Christ.

ALL THIS IS FROM GOD

The bottom line of this discussion of the *ordo salutis* is that the decisive acts in this sequence are God’s, and even the matters for which we are responsible—repentance and faith, sanctification—are possible only because of God’s prior working. It is the acts of God that matter. Without them, not one of us would be saved.

Do we have to believe? Of course, we do. But even faith is of God or, as it is better to say, it is the result of his working in us. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” When we are first saved, we think quite naturally that we have had a great deal to do with it, perhaps because of wrong or shallow teaching, but more likely because at that stage of our Christian lives we know more about our own thoughts and feelings than we do about God. However, the longer we are Christians the further we move from any feeling that we are responsible for our salvation or even any part of it, and the closer we come to the conviction that it is all of God.

Harry A. Ironside, a great Bible teacher, told a story about an older Christian who was asked to give his testimony. He told how God had sought him out and found him, how God had loved him, called him, saved him, delivered him, cleansed him, and healed

¹⁰ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 148-149.

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him—a great witness to the grace, power, and glory of God. But after the meeting a rather legalistic Christian took him aside and criticized his testimony, as some Christians like to do. He said, “I appreciated all you said about what God did for you. But you didn’t mention anything about your part in it. Salvation is really part us and part God. You should have mentioned something about your part.”

“Oh yes,” the older Christian said. “I apologize for that. I really should have said something about my part. My part was running away, and his part was running after me until he caught me.”¹¹

If we understand the truth of that, we understand a great deal about the true gospel. All of us have run away. But God has set his gracious love upon us, predestined us to become like Jesus Christ, called us to faith and repentance, justified us, adopted us as his spiritual sons and daughters, begun a work of sanctification within us that will continue until the day of Jesus Christ, and has even glorified us, so certain of completion is his plan.¹²

¹¹ The story is told by Ray C. Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory*, vol. 1, *Hope for the Helpless* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1978), 302.

¹² Boice, J. M., Ryken, P. G., & Sproul, R. C. (2002). *The doctrines of grace: rediscovering the evangelical gospel*. Crossway Books, chapter six.