

SERIES ON THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE
Text: 1 Peter 2:1-10

April 8, 1984

Sermon #12

THE EFFECTUAL CALL
or, THE DOCTRINE OF IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

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If you have been following these studies in the doctrines of grace, which together, of course, make up the doctrine of salvation, I trust that you have noticed in them that wonderful unity which is characteristic of all of the teaching of Scripture.

I want to review briefly the ground that we have been covering so that these truths can be fresh in our minds, and so you can see where we are when we come to the doctrine of the irresistible grace of God--or, as we can think of it also, the effectual call.

We learned to begin with that man has been hopelessly ruined by sin. Through Adam's sin the human race has been morally corrupted and is under the judgment of God. All people, regardless of what generation it may be or what nation they live in, are born in sin, and are dead in trespasses and sins. It is because of sin that man is in rebellion against God. He not only will not seek God, but he cannot seek God. He is in bondage to his sin, and in bondage to Satan. Even though he knows many of the present consequences of his sin and experiences those consequences, he still will not seek God. Christ could have died a thousand times, but there is not a man who would ever turn to Christ if he were left to himself. I hope that that is clear to all of us. If not, I trust that you will go back over those passages of Scripture which deal with these important truths. Now, because of this, if we entertain the hope that we, by our persuasive powers, or by our diligence in preaching the Gospel, will be able to turn people to Christ, then we are entertaining a false hope. Humanly speaking, there is no more hopeless job in all the world than for us to try to turn people to God and to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope that this is clear to all of us.

But what else do the doctrines of the grace of God in the Word of God teach us?

Well, they teach us that God, by His grace, before creation, chose certain people to be saved. This is the Biblical doctrine of election. I would like for you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Thessalonians 2, and I want to read again those two verses which we have had before, two verses which give us the Gospel in a very compact statement. I think I know them by heart, but I am not going to trust myself this morning. I would like for you to learn them if you do not know them: 2Thessa-

lonians 2:13 and 14, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, Page 2
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brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through

sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now the statement that I want you to notice for now is that He has "from the beginning chosen you to salvation." This pre-dates time. This goes back before creation. The Apostle Paul said also in Ephesians 1, verse 4, that God has "chosen in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world." God did not have to do this. God did not have to choose us for salvation. But of His own will He did it. It was His eternal plan that a vast number of human beings would be saved from hell and be taken to heaven.

Having established this, for the past three Sundays we have seen that it was for these chosen ones that the Lord Jesus Christ came and suffered and died on the Cross, and rose again from the dead. It was for these that Christ accomplished the work of salvation. It was for these chosen ones that Christ purchased redemption. It was for these that Christ has completely satisfied God concerning their sin. These are the people who are being saved in every generation--the chosen ones of God, the elect of God.

But now we face a problem. Our Scripture reading this morning said of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that "in time past" they "were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet. 2:10). In other words, God's chosen ones (which includes us here this morning) used to be spiritually and morally just like those people who are in the world today who have not been saved--rebels, self-satisfied, self-sufficient, not interested in God, both unwilling and unable to seek God. Now the question is this: How did we ever become the children of God? How did we ever become the people of God? Something very unusual must have happened to us because, when we relate this to the doctrine of the depravity of man, we know that man is in bondage. We also were in bondage. Man is unable to seek God. We were unable to seek God. Man is unwilling to seek God. We were unwilling to seek God. Our minds are blinded to the truth. How was it that we were ever saved?

In 1 Peter 2:9 Peter told us what this special thing was that has taken place in the lives of all who are presently the people of God. Peter said, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; (that is, a people for His own possession); that ye should shew forth the praises of him (now here is the expression that we are concerned about today) who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Now the people of God, are a called out people. He has "called us out of darkness into His marvellous light." In Romans 8:28 the Apostle Paul described the people of God as those who are "the called according to his purpose."

In Scripture we can identify two kinds of calls from God which have to do with salvation. There are other calls. There are calls to service, and so on. But when it comes to salvation there are two calls. One is referred to by theologians and Bible teachers as a general call. This is the call that is extended to all men. This is a call that we issue when we say, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." The Apostle John issued that call in the last chapter of the book of The Revelation, in Revelation 22:17. That is the general call.

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But salvation is not the result of the general call that is issued to all men; it is the result of what we call the effectual call. What is the effectual call?

The effectual call is the call of God which is effective in turning people to the Lord Jesus Christ. You will see from the passages of Scripture that we are going to consider that salvation is not the result of what an individual person does for himself, but salvation is the result of what God does in the heart and life of that person. Now listen to these verses. I have read them to you before, but I want to read them to you again.

In John 6:44 the Lord Jesus Christ is reported to have said this: "No man can come to me . . ." He did not simply say that no man would come to Him, but He said that "no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

Earlier in the sixth chapter of John, verse 37, the Lord also said this: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." So, while no man on his own can ever come to God and express faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father has given some people to His Son. And the Lord Jesus Christ said that all of them, without exception, will come.

In John 10, verses 27 and 28, we have these words of the Lord Jesus: "My sheep" (and the passage indicates that His sheep are His chosen ones) "hear my voice." Not everybody hears the voice of God. Not everybody hears the Word of God. But here the Lord said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Notice the positive nature of these statements. The sheep shall hear, and the sheep shall come, and the sheep shall have eternal life. You see, there is no guess work about the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord knows what He is doing. He knows the people He intends to save, and He is saving them. This is very, very clear from the Word of God.

Long ago the Lord said through Jeremiah, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). Now this is the key to evangelism. You do not hear evangelists talking this way very often. I do not know that I have ever heard an evangelist talk this way. But this is what evangelism is: God drawing people to Himself--God drawing the people that He has chosen. This is the key to missions. We send our missionaries out to the four corners of the earth, and they are to preach the Gospel to every creature. But, as they do so, they need to understand that the results will show that God is drawing to Himself those whom He intends to save. The Lord said in Isaiah 55:11, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Paul said in 1 Cor. 1:9, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." This is the key to all effective Gospel preaching: God is effectually (which means, effectively) calling sinners to Himself.

Now let me ask and answer some questions from the Word in the hope that the Spirit of God will make this truth about the call of God even clearer to us.

I. WHO DOES THE CALLING?

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Although I have answered this question, the first question that I want to ask is: Who does the calling? God does! He usually uses human instruments, but, whenever the people of God are effective in bringing someone to Christ, it is always God who is at work. Sometimes He calls directly through His Word. I know of at least one person who is here this morning who was saved through simply reading the Word of God. But God does the calling. He called you, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. He called you effectually. He called you effectively. You may not have come the first time, but eventually you came. You were called by God.

II. WHOM DOES GOD CALL?

Now, secondly. This is to nail down something that I have already indicated as well. Whom does God call? The answer to that is this: He calls His chosen ones. Romans 8:30 is a passage of Scripture which makes this very clear. "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called . . ."

It is always the Scriptures that prove or establish any doctrine that we are concerned about, but it is encouraging to read the writings of men who have come to an understanding of a doctrine such as this. I want to give you a statement from Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer who was the Founder and first President of the Dallas Theological Seminary when he wrote on this particular subject. You will find this in his Systematic Theology, Volume 7, page 136, if you are interested in looking for it. This is what Dr. Chafer said: "An efficacious call to salvation . . . is a call which none ever finally resists . . . There could not be failure in one instance among the millions who are called. . . none will ever come apart from this divine call, and . . . the call is extended only to His elect." That is what Dr. Chafer said. So the call that is issued, this effectual call which results in people coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, is a call which God issues to His chosen ones.

III. HOW DOES GOD CALL?

The third question is: How does God call? There are several parts to the answer to this question. We need all of the parts to have a complete understanding, so, although I am dealing with this very briefly this morning, let me give you the parts that will help us to understand it.

The Bible makes it very clear that the elect, the chosen ones, are called to God through the preaching of the Gospel. Just a few moments ago I asked you to read with me from 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 14. You will find in that verse this statement: God "called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is the Word of God that is going to bring people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through the preaching of the Gospel that God is calling people to Himself.

A short time ago we went through the book of Romans. Right in the first chapter of the book of Romans we came to those familiar verses written by the Apostle Paul when he said this: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." You see, it is the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation. When the Gospel is preached, then God is going to use the Gospel to call people to Himself. And of course, the verse that I quoted to you from Isaiah 55, verse 11, Doctrines of Grace
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would also apply. The Word accomplishes that which pleases God and prospers in the thing whereto He hath sent it. Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word is "quick (living), and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword." So if you want to see people saved, use the Word of God. Explain to people the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If God is going to call people to Himself, this is the message that He will use.

But we all know that it is possible to preach the Gospel, it is possible to bear witness concerning the Gospel, without seeing people effectually, effectively, drawn to Christ. So there is another factor that enters into this ministry. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential in the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore, we pray that the Holy Spirit will bless the Word. We pray that the Holy Spirit will use the Word. The Lord Jesus said a great deal about this when He was with His disciples in the Upper Room just before He went out and suffered on the Cross. You will find in John chapter 16, for example, verses 7 and 8, that He said this: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove (or convict or convince--any of those words are a good translation of that word "reprove") the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." I do not reprove the world and you do not reprove the world. You and I cannot convince people of their need of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can give them the message that the Holy Spirit will use, but it is the Holy Spirit Who convinces them. It is the Holy Spirit Who convicts them. This is a truth that we need to keep in mind.

Go back to what the Lord told Peter after his great confession of Christ: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). He said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." That is, whoever told Peter this the first time, or whoever was used to get this message through to him, this was not something that he had figured out for himself. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). In other words, the Father was the One Who, from all eternity, had designed to draw Peter to Himself. And, by the work of the Holy Spirit, Peter's heart was opened to understand the message of the Gospel. Peter was drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ when he came to realize that the Lord Jesus was the Son of the Living God.

So none of us can take any credit as far as our salvation is concerned. Paul said, in writing to the church at Corinth, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). And then he went on to say, "But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). If you understand the Gospel this morning, and most of you do, it is not because you are smarter than other people who do not understand it. It is because God had a divine purpose and revealed to you an understanding of this truth, and through the preaching of the Gospel He has drawn you to Himself. This is what salvation is.

People are saved through the preaching of the Gospel by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This means that we cannot do as some say who supposedly have come to understand the doctrine of election. They say, "Well, God has chosen certain ones to be saved and it is certain that they are going to be saved. God is going to do Page 6
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it, and so there is nothing for us to do. That is just as wrong as anything could possibly be! The Bible makes it clear that God has ordained that the elect shall be saved through the preaching of the Gospel. That Gospel is not being preached by angels. It is being preached by those of us who have already been drawn to God and saved. The message must be proclaimed. "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" (1 Cor. 1:21).

IV. WHY ARE WE CALLED?

Now my last question: Why are we called?

Well, the most obvious answer is that we are called because it was God's intent and purpose to save us. We are called so that we can be forgiven of our sins and someday be in heaven with the Lord. But let me break it down just a little more specifically so that you can see some of the statements that are made in Scripture.

In our Scripture reading for today we read the statement that the elect are "called out of darkness into His marvelous light." That is in the ninth verse of 1 Peter, chapter 2. This means that we are called to salvation. Darkness represents sin. Darkness represents judgment. Darkness represents that place of alienation from God and rebellion against God. God has called us out of that, and He has called us into His marvelous light.

There is a very similar statement in the book of Colossians, the first chapter and the thirteenth verse. Paul said that God the Father "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." You can see from this why we insist upon the fact that, if a person is truly saved, you can expect to see a great difference in that person's life. He has been taken out of darkness and he is brought into the light. He has been taken from the power and dominion of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. So the elect are called for salvation.

Then, in the second place, when we are answering this question, Why is it that we have been called?, we read in 1 Corinthians 1:9 that we are "called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Here is evidence of a real change that takes place in the hearts of people when they enter into the fellowship of God's Son. This means that we are not only called into a most intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, but we are called to participate in what the Lord Jesus Christ is. All that He is becomes ours as a result of our salvation. God never looks at us unless He looks at us through His Son. Anything that is good about me or anything that is good about you is in our lives because of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder John said in 1 John 1:3, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us . . ." But the wonderful thing about "fellowship with us" is that "our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." You see, the thing that makes a Christian a wonderful person is his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, the elect are called, not only to salvation, and not only to participate in what Jesus Christ is, but the elect are called to belong to Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of Paul's statement in Romans 1, verse 6, where he said, "Among whom Doctrines of Grace -- #12

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are ye also the called of Jesus Christ." The statement actually means that you are the ones who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. A Christian is not his own. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 20 that he has been "bought with a price." This is a truth that we do not pay enough attention to. We have such a meager comprehension of what it means that we belong to Jesus Christ. He has purchased us with His blood by His death upon the Cross. Is it not amazing, when you think back now to what the Scriptures teach about our depravity, that God would ever want us? Yet this is a part of this wonderful truth concerning salvation. For reasons unknown to us, God chose us before the foundation of the world, sent His son to die for us, by His infinite grace has drawn us to Himself, and we have become His peculiar possession for all eternity.

Not only does the Word teach us this, but it teaches us that we are called to be holy. The elect are called to be holy. Now it angers some people to say that it is impossible for a person to come to Jesus Christ and yet for them to remain the same. But it is impossible! You pass from death unto life. You cannot remain the same. You were dead in trespasses and sins. You now are alive through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But God has given us this life that we might eventually become like Him. My last two points this morning have to do with this: We are called to be holy, and we are called to His glory. This is why you find statements like you do in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 2, "called to be saints," to be holy ones. In the first epistle of Peter, the first chapter, the Apostle Peter said, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (vv. 15, 16). In 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul said that God "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." So, if you are not truly regenerated, then you are not going to be interested in holiness. The world is not interested in holiness. The world has its own standard of morality. But the true child of God is going to delight in holiness, and he will desire to be like His Lord.

But we are not only called to be holy now, but holiness is going to issue ultimately in glorification. Now glory is not just a place, heaven, but glory is a condition: our transformation into the very likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ! Romans 8:30, again, says we are called, we are justified, we are glorified. In 1 Peter 5:10 Peter said, "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus." Ephesians 4:4 says that we "are called in one hope of your calling." Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:18 that the Ephesians would know "what is the hope of his calling." Now, our hope as believers is that we are going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ--not an uncertain hope, but a guaranteed hope. John said in 1 John 3:2 and 3, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for

we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." We are not only called to be holy now, but we are called ultimately to be perfectly holy--which means the glory that is to be ours when we stand in the presence of the Lord. We are called to glory!

Let me say this in conclusion.

When we talk about the irresistible grace of God, do we mean by this that when God calls men to Himself that He, as someone sometime has expressed it, drags people into heaven against their will? I will answer this by asking you to turn to one Page 8 Doctrines of Grace -- #12

passage of Scripture and then I am through: Acts 16:14. I want you to notice here how the message that I have given you this morning is illustrated in the case of Lydia, the seller of purple. She originally came from the city of Thyatira. This is what it says about the way she came to Christ: "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." Now what had Paul been speaking about? He was preaching the Gospel. What happened as he was preaching the Gospel? She heard it. What else happened? The Lord opened her heart. And then what? The message got through to her so that she attended unto the things which were spoken. What was Paul encouraging them to do? He was encouraging them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. She was just as rebellious and just as helpless and just as satisfied to remain in her sins as anyone else, but the Lord opened her heart. This is why she listened to the Gospel. This is why she understood the Gospel. And this is why she ultimately believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. God worked in her both to will and to do of His good pleasure because she was one of those who was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

How wonderful it would be if God would use the Gospel message the same way this morning! If there is even one here today who has not trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, would it not be wonderful if that person would be able to go from this place saying, "This morning I heard the Gospel, it got through to my heart, and I have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ." May God grant that it may be so.