

Objections to Calvinism - 5. Effectual Calling

by Randolph S. Foster

The doctrine of effectual calling teaches that God's almighty power and grace invite and draw the elect unto Jesus Christ, savingly enlightening their minds and renewing their wills.

Scripture: John 6:44, Acts 17:30, Romans 8:30, Romans 9:16, Romans 10:17, Ephesians 1:4, Ephesians 2:8, 2 Timothy 1:9, James 4:8, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Calvinism", "Predestination"

Description

Randolph S. Foster preaches about the Calvinist doctrine of effectual calling, emphasizing that only the predestined elect are called by God's grace to salvation, with their wills being renewed and irresistibly drawn to Jesus Christ. The doctrine asserts that regeneration is an invincible work of God, infallibly securing salvation for the elect. However, the sermon raises objections to this doctrine, arguing that it is anti-scriptural, removes accountability, and undermines the necessity of repentance and faith. It challenges the idea that man is entirely passive in salvation and questions the implications of a belief system that renders individuals blameless for their actions and choices.

Transcript

IN HARMONY WITH THE doctrine of election and reprobation, and limited atonement, and the unconditional salvation of all those for whom the atonement was made, is the doctrine of effectual calling and its cognates, which we shall now proceed to notice. Upon this point Calvinist deliver themselves with unusual freedom and plenitude. A selection from them will set the matter in a proper light.

All those whom God hath 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 sin and 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 unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by his almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by this grace. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

What is effectual calling?

Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby, out of his free and especial love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto, he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them unto Jesus Christ by his Word and Spirit, savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they, although in themselves dead in sin, are hereby made willing and able freely to answer this call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

Are the elect only effectually called?

All the elect and they only, are effectually called, although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by the ministry of the Word, and have common operations of the Spirit, who, for their willful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.

The expositor of the Confession, in his comments upon the sections above, remarks, "That in this calling the operations of the Holy Spirit are irrevocable." We admit that there are common operations of the Spirit, which do not issue in the conversion of the sinner; but we maintain that the special operations of the Spirit overcome all opposition and effectually determine the sinner to embrace Jesus Christ as he is offered in the Gospel. If the special operations of the Spirit were not invincible, but might be effectually resisted, then it would be uncertain whether any would believe or not, and consequently possible, that all which Christ had done and suffered in the work of redemption might have been done and suffered in vain.

That in this calling the sinner is altogether passive, until he is quickened and renewed by the Holy Ghost.

We are made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured, by the application of them to us, which is the work especially of God the Holy Ghost.

Redemption is certainly applied, and effectually communicated, to all those for whom Christ hath purchased it.

In regeneration we are passive, and receive from God: it is an irresistible, rather. an invincible work?

The power of God, exerted in regeneration and conversion of sinners is invincible. Those who speak of irresistible grace, mean that it cannot finally be resisted; that it will overcome all the efforts of corrupt nature to counteract its design; and that it will ultimately render sinners obedient to the faith. must submit in the end to the power of God; and this will be more evident if we consider that his power is not only sufficient to compel the most refractory to yield, although with the greatest reluctance, but that it can take away the spirit of opposition, and so influence the hearts of men, that this submission shall be voluntary. Were we to say that the grace of God is not invincible, we should be under the necessity of adopting the opinion which we have already proved to be unscriptural, that there is in man a power to comply or not to comply with the call of the Gospel. We should take the work of conversion out of the hand of God, and commit it to man himself. After God had done all that he could do for our salvation, it would depend upon ourselves whether the intended effect should follow.

According to the Scriptures, regeneration is a change, effected by divine grace, in the state of the soul--the supernatural renovation of its faculties--the infusion of a principle of spiritual life. It is evident that if this is a just definition, the sinner is passive.

In opposition to all the mystifications of error upon this point, we affirm that conversion is effected by the almighty grace of God; that, although man does not concur in it, he is, in the first instance passive, and his

concurrence is the consequence of supernatural power communicated to him; and that he does not come to God till he is effectually called, by the operation of the Holy Spirit in his soul.

The first immediate fruit of eternal election, and the principal act of God, by which appointed salvation is applied, is effectual calling. And this calling is that act by which those who are chosen by God, and redeemed by Christ, are sweetly invited and effectually brought from a state of sin to a state of communion with God in Christ, both externally and internally.

But this call is given partly externally, by a persuasive power called moral suasion; partly internally, by a real, supernatural efficacy, which changes the heart. The external call is, in some measure, published by the word of nature; but more fully by that of supernatural revelation, without which every word of nature would be insufficient and ineffectual. The internal comes from the power of the Holy Spirit, working inwardly on the heart; and without this, every external, revealed Word, though objectively very sufficient, as it clearly discovers everything to be known, believed, and done, yet is subjectively ineffectual, nor will ever bring any person to the communion of Christ.

By that same Word, whereby the elect are called to communion with God and his Christ, they are also regenerated to a far more excellent life.

Regeneration is that supernatural act of God whereby a new and divine life is infused into the elect person spiritually dead, and that from the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, made fruitful by the infinite power of the Spirit.

If we consider this first principle of life, there is not the least doubt but regeneration is accomplished in a moment; for there is no delay in the transition from death to life. No person can be regenerated so long as he is in the state of spiritual death; but in the instant he is, he begins to live--he is born again. Wherefore, no intermediate state between the regenerate and unregenerate can be imagined, so much as in thought.

Hence, it appears, there are no preparations antecedent to the first beginning of regeneration; because, previous to that, nothing but mere death, in the highest degree, is to be found in the person to be regenerated. And, indeed, the Scripture represents man's conversion by such similitudes as show that all preparations are entirely excluded.

You will say, then, are there no preparatory dispositions to the first regeneration? I confessedly answer, there are none--agree with Fulgentius.

With respect to the birth of a child, the work of God is previous to any will the person that comes into the world; so in the spiritual birth, whereby we begin to put off the old man.

And this is that regeneration which is so much declared in the Scriptures--a new creation--a resurrection from the dead--a giving of life, which God, without us, worketh in us. And this is by no means effected by the doctrine alone sounding without, by moral suasion, or by such a mode of working, that, after the operation of God, it should remain in the power of man to be regenerated or not regenerated, converted or not converted, but is manifestly an operation supernatural, at the same time most powerful, and most sweet, wonderful, secret, and infallible in its power, according to the Scriptures, not less than or inferior to creation or the resurrection of the dead; so that all those, in whose hearts God works in this admirable manner, are certainly, infallibly, and efficaciously regenerated, and, in fact, believe. And thus their will, being now renewed, is not only influenced and moved by God, but, being acted on by God, itself acts and

moves.

The power of God exerted in regeneration is invincible. We do not deny that the grace of God may be resisted, not only by the finally impenitent, but by those who ultimately yield to it; but, in the end, man must yield to the power of divine grace; because his power is sufficient to subdue the most stubborn will, to remove all opposition, and to influence the hearts of men, that they, at last, yield voluntary submission, without compulsion or force exerted upon their minds. In regeneration, in the moment of the act, the soul is passive.

As the child is passive in generation, so is the child of God in regeneration. Regeneration is an irresistible, or, rather, an invincible work of grace.

In regeneration we are passive, and receive from God.

Without multiplying authorities, for the above are sufficient for all our purposes, we shall now proceed to deduce a statement of doctrine, and then set forth our objections.

And from the above, we derive as the faith of Calvinists upon the subjects of effectual calling, irresistible grace, and regeneration (These subjects were blended because in the Calvinian system they constitute essentially but one branch of doctrine, as the above quotations abundantly show. Whatever may be their shades of difference and divers ramifications, they spring from one identical principle and its cognates--to all intents and purposes they are the same.)

1. That up to the moment of effectual calling--regeneration--a man cannot cease from sin; he has not the power to do so.
2. None but the elect ever are effectually called--regenerated.
3. When the elect are effectually called, they cannot help but yield; they have no power to resist.
4. This effectual call is sent upon the elect without any conditions or preparation on their part.

Now to the doctrine thus summed up--and no Calvinist dare dispute any point included in it--I shall proceed to allege a number of objections; and it will be with the good sense and candor of my readers, to decide whether they constitute sufficient reasons for discarding the doctrine.

1. I object to this doctrine that it is anti-scriptural, nowhere taught in the Word of God, and contradictory to much that is therein taught: as that salvation is conditional--that all may seek and find--that they are criminal who do not seek--that many are lost who might have been saved--that the Spirit may be resisted--that repentance and faith precede regeneration--indeed, the doctrine is in palpable conflict with the whole tenor of revelation. This is one objection.

2. But, further, I object, that if regeneration is the work of irresistible grace, wrought without previous conditions, then they who are not regenerated, are not to be condemned for remaining unregenerate. It is attributable to no fault in them, and so cannot render them blameworthy, because it is a matter with which they have nothing whatever to do. It is God's work, and not theirs in any sense; they are passive entirely, from beginning to end; and so, if there be any wrong in their remaining unregenerate, the wrong is not in them, because it is not by their consent.

But if it be said the wrong is not in their remaining unregenerate, but in their being so in the first instance, then, I reply, neither are they to blame for this, because it, also, was entirely, without their consent. They were born corrupt, and so cannot be guilty for this; they cannot escape from corruption, and so are not guilty for remaining in it; and, therefore, they have no guilt whatever because of their corruption. From this reasoning there is no escape, but an assumption that men are absolutely and damnably guilty for that over which they have not now, and never did have, any control. Believe this who can! But let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth before I can so calumniate the adorable Jehovah!

3. If the doctrine be true, men are not to be condemned for actual sin unless they are condemnable for not avoiding that which they never had power to avoid. For they were brought into the world with a corrupt nature, without any consent of theirs, unless they consented before they had an existence; and being thus born, they never could cease from sin without regeneration; and they never had power to promote or secure regeneration, and so are not to be condemned for the sins they commit prior to regeneration, unless they are to be condemned for an absolute impossibility.

4. If this doctrine be true, then they who are not regenerate not only are not to be condemned for not being regenerate, and for actual sins committed prior to regeneration, but, also, they cannot be required to be holy in heart or in life, unless it is assumed that men may justly be required to do what they never had, and have not, the power to do. If they do not do right, they violate no requirement, but a requirement to perform an impossibility, which is the requirement of an abhorrent, despot, and not of the glorious Jehovah.

5. If this doctrine be true, there can be no punishment for either depravity or sin, unless men are punishable for not performing impossibilities. If men are finally punished with eternal torments, then they are punished without any cause on their part, but simply that they did not do what it was eternally impossible for them to do. They are punished for impenitence and unbelief; but impenitence and unbelief are the unavoidable fruit of a corrupt nature; from this corruption there is no deliverance but by regeneration; man has no power to regenerate himself, and he can do nothing to induce God to regenerate him: he is, therefore, damned in hell forever, for that over which he had no more control than the angel Gabriel. Think of hell! Then think of such a fate! Can God be chargeable with such a government and conduct as this?

6. If the doctrine be true, then men cannot be required to do anything to promote their salvation; for their salvation is not susceptible of being promoted, as it is unconditional. In salvation man is not a co-agent, but a mere passive subject. Until the work is commenced by irresistible regeneration, he can do nothing but sin. When regeneration takes place, all the rest follows as a necessary effect or unavoidable fruit.

7. They cannot with any propriety, be invited or exhorted to repent and seek God; for the thing is impossible; and to invite or exhort men to perform an impossibility, is trifling--is nonsense. A Calvinistic minister who believes that up to the moment of regeneration a man cannot repent and turn to God--and who also believes that regeneration is a gift of God without conditions, and, also, that when regeneration is given, men must repent--and yet urges, and invites, and implores men to repent and turn to God, must be accounted guilty of the strangest inconsistency, to say the least of it.

8. They cannot with any propriety be required to do one thing rather than another, before regeneration, only as one sin is preferable to another; for whatever they do must be sinful. Nothing that a man can do before regeneration is good; it is all sin. If he prays for the forgiveness of his sins, it only increases them. If he observes the Sabbath, if he reads the Scriptures, if he goes to the house of God, if he fasts, and

mourns, and humbles himself before God, it is all sin. But, it is said, a man cannot do these things until regenerated: but that is precisely my proposition; he can do nothing but sin, and cannot turn away from it any more than he can create a universe--cannot even try. Why, then, ask him or labor with him upon the subject?

9. If this be true, then it must be that God prefers that the elect should commit a great deal of sin before they are regenerated. For their regeneration is his work; he can do it one time as well as another; for it is by irresistible grace, and against the sinner's disposition, whenever it is done; and that he leaves them unregenerate a long term of years, must be because, on the whole, he prefers that during this period they should be unregenerate and sinful, rather than regenerate and holy.

10. Yea, more: if this doctrine be true, God must prefer all the impenitence, and unbelief, and sin, that is in the world. For if regeneration is his work alone, independent of all conditions and if regeneration would produce holiness, then the reason why the world remains unregenerate and unholy must be, that, on the whole, God prefers it. He prefers that it should be as it is, or he would make it otherwise. There is no other reason but his preference; for a sufficient atonement has been made to remove all impediments out of the way, so far as divine justice is concerned; and in the creature there is nothing but what might be overcome by irresistible grace. That such grace is not exerted, is of the good pleasure of God alone; and this good pleasure must arise from the fact, that, in view of all things, God prefers the final impenitence and unholiness of some persons to their holiness, and their eternal destruction to their everlasting salvation.

11. If this doctrine be true, man is not a free agent in consenting to salvation, or yet in refusing to consent; because in the former case the will is irresistibly coerced to its choice; in the latter it has no ability to make a contrary election. In both cases it acts under an irresistible agency. For if the soul, under the influence of the effectual call, retains its freedom, it has power to resist; but then the call would not be irresistible; but if it has no power to resist, but must necessarily choose, then it is not free. And if without the effectual call it might choose life, then without the effectual call it might be saved; but if it has not the power, then it is not free.

12. I object to this doctrine because it antagonizes the doctrine of salvation by faith, and makes faith an involuntary exercise--these both. Is not regeneration salvation from depravity? and is it not the work of salvation commenced in the soul? If so, and if regeneration precedes faith, is it not inevitable that faith is not a condition to salvation to this extent? And if faith is a necessary effect of regeneration, can it be a voluntary exercise? And if it is not a voluntary exercise, can it, with any propriety, be called a condition of anything which follows after it? And, particularly, can men be exhorted to its exercise, as though it were a condition to which they are competent?

Can a regenerate person be lost? If not, regeneration itself infallibly secures salvation, with all that is included therein. And if it does secure salvation, how can anything which comes after it be called a condition of salvation. Must not everything following after rather be said to be included in salvation

13. I object to this doctrine, further, that it not only makes salvation an involuntary and unconditional work, but it also does away with repentance entirely. Look at it soberly and see if it is not a shocking misrepresentation, not only of the particular teachings and general tone of the Bible, but, also, of all experience. There is a man who, up to this moment, is a sinner; and now, without any conviction or turning of heart to God, or any use of means, while his heart is proud, and stubborn, and sinful as ever, he is in one instant, by irresistible grace, born of God; in the same instant he is justified; but preceding his

justification and succeeding his regeneration, he exercises faith and repentance! Now, I ask, in the name of reason and religion is this so? Will the world furnish one solitary witness to an experience of this kind?

14. According to this doctrine, a Christian is no more to be esteemed for his virtues, than a sinner for his sins; and the latter is no more to be censured than the former; because they are both passive, and only passive, with respect alike to their sins and virtues: the only difference between them is produced by irresistible fate. Indeed the whole system of Calvinism, in its peculiar tenets, inevitably destroys both the accountability of man and the distinctions between vice and virtue. If one man is irresistible. and invincibly drawn to a holy life, and another man is equally irresistibly drawn to an unholy and sinful conduct, and this without anything under their control, it must be manifest, that, though there is a difference, it may be both in the character and conduct of the individuals: yet they are neither commendable nor censurable, or, indeed, in any sense responsible for the difference.

Yea, further, does not Calvinism also teach, not only that men are entirely passive in their sites and actions, but that in their sins as much as in their most holy exercises they actually perform the will of God. The will of God, according to their teaching, cannot in anything be frustrated. Nothing comes to pass but that he willed it. The devil does his will as much as the archangel. Where is the difference? In what is the one more approvable or censurable than the other? Is this one to be damned? Why? Did he not do the will of God? Did he do anything more or less than in the will of God was purposed before the foundation of the world? Is he damned for doing the will of God? He is damned for sinning; but that very sin was the will of God? God willed him to do it--he but complied, accomplished what his Maker wished him to do, what it was not only impossible he should avoid, but what, if he had avoided, would have been a breach of his Maker's will--the damnable sin!

O sir, what dreadful work this kind of stuff makes with the character and reputation of God! Do you find no difficulties upon these points? Then must you be blind indeed! Consult your own experience--interrogate your consciousness; it will teach you better. You will find beyond any power to convince you to the contrary that you believe that a change in your character and life was not wrought without your consent--that your consent was not produced by irresistible power. You will find that your recollection of repentance is that you repented long and deeply with tears and sorrow before you found forgiveness--that this repentance was attended with a distressing sense of both unpurged corruption and unremoved condemnation. If any man had asked you then whether your vile nature was changed--regenerated--or not, what would have been your answer? That you were not only unpardoned, but vile! A change indeed had been wrought--but not the change of nature--making you a child of God.

Such is the testimony of your experience: every step is fresh in your memory; you can never forget it. By some instrument, it matters not what, where, or when, your mind was arrested: truth flashed upon your guilty conscience; you saw and admitted it. A simple conviction of your utter sinfulness was the result. You pondered what to do. A struggle, and you determined to seek for life. What next? You now began seriously to reflect--you betook yourself to the Bible, or to some religious friend--you prayed. Your sense of guilt and wretchedness increased. How bitter now was the mingled cup of your sorrow! You repented before God, did you not? You struggled on, through doubts and fears, now ready to lay hold by faith, then sinking into deep despair! At last, in the utmost extremity, forgetting all, by a mighty exertion, you embraced the atoning sacrifice--you believed. Do you not recollect it? Was it not so? Then came rest! You saw it--you felt it--you realized it; no earthly power could convince you to the contrary; believing you were a new man in Christ Jesus, and had now no condemnation. I appeal to every Christian, was it not so? Your experience, then, as well as God's Word, and the voice of reason, are against the dogma we here

oppose.

Much more might be said, to show the danger of the error under examination--how it destroys all sense of obligation--how it contents the sinner in his sins--how it neutralizes all effort--how it shields the conscience from all appeals and exhortations; but all this must be present to the reflecting and considerate reader. In view of them, let him hesitate; nay, let him promptly throw from him an unsupported dogma, fraught with such deadly influences. Let no cherished prejudices--no long attachments, cause him to deal compassionately with the dangerous delusion. It deserves no mercy; let it find none. Let the mind always contemplate it naked; its deformities will make it sufficiently detestable. It is only when it is cloaked and masked that it has attractions; when seen in its native and real character, with its consorts and relatives, it will be sufficiently hideous; no mind will admit it. It will stand, without, with its kindred errors, equally execrated by reason and religion, by the voice of God, and the instinct of mankind. Dear reader, may we be guided by the infinite Spirit into all truth!

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