

Preaching the Grace of the Spirit's Calling

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LECTURE III

Introduction. One of the memorable things uttered by Abraham Booth (1734-1806) in his useful book, *The Reign of Grace*, is this one, "The indelible motto inscribed by the hand of Jehovah on all the blessings of the unchangeable covenant, is, *to the praise of the glory of His grace.*"¹ The question that is before us in this lecture is, "Preaching the Grace of the Spirit's Calling," and it, too, has the indelible motto of *to the praise of the glory of His grace* inscribed upon it. It has its origin in the absolutely free favour of God.

In simple terms the question is, "How and why do we come to Christ?" There are two sides to the matter, but in this lecture we are concerned only with one. From the human side it is plain to evangelical readers of God's Word that we come to the Son of God by the instrumentality of faith (cf. Rom. 3:21–26; Eph. 2:8–10).

From the divine side of the matter many and different answers have been given. Pelagians have said, "I came by *myself*," denying grace altogether. Semi-Pelagians have said, "*I wanted to come, and God helped me,*" denying prevenient grace, but admitting cooperative grace, if man *first* chooses to come. Arminians of evangelical stripe have said, "God gave me *sufficient grace* to come, because Christ died, and *I cooperated*, admitting total inability, but claiming sufficient grace becomes efficient when we cooperate." Lutherans have answered, "God brought me, and I *did not resist*," reserving for man only the power of resisting grace. Calvinists, those who believe in sovereign grace, have answered simply, "God brought me to Christ" (cf. Gal. 4:9, "are known").

It is difficult to understand why the Arminians are attracted to sufficient grace. Sufficient grace of itself enables a sinner, not to believe, but to be morally responsible to believe. Without sufficient grace Arminians believe the sinner, dead in sins, is not responsible for a condition in which he does not have the ability to extricate himself. To free man from his natural inability of will and make him responsible is the reason for the invention of the doctrine. It is, of course, not taught by any text of the Bible.

However, since it does not have the power to save without the exercise of man's free will, how does this help matters? The individual with sufficient grace is now responsible by the Arminian doctrine, but in himself he is still without the power to turn to God, for evangelical Arminians believe in man's total inability as Wesley did. If, however, the man who was totally unable to turn to God is not responsible without sufficient grace, but now with sufficient is responsible, although still totally unable of Himself to turn to God, how is this bestowal of sufficient grace an act of divine grace? Would it not be better to not have sufficient grace, for then men would not be responsible and, thus, assured to God's salvation? God, to be most gracious, ought to give no grace!

To illustrate, let us suppose a convicted murderer awaiting execution in jail contracts tuberculosis. His constant coughing convinces his prison doctor that he will cough himself to death before the day of his execution. The doctor comes to him and says, "I am pained that you are suffering so. I am giving you some medicine to take. It will not cure you, but it will strengthen you and keep you alive until you can be hanged"! Sufficient grace is similar. It gives men strength of will sufficient to make them responsible and thus to justify God in sending them to perdition. I fail to see the grace that the doctrine conveys. In fact, it seems clearly to underline the fact that by this system man is only saved by his own free will act. In other words, God can do nothing for a man until that man does something for himself. The ground of God's salvation is shared by man with God. Is that New Testament teaching?

The teaching of both John and Paul makes distinct contributions to the debate over calling (cf. John 6:37, 43–45, 65; Rom. 8:30; I Cor. 12:3; 2 Thess. 2:13–15), and we turn now to the Scriptures.

I. THE THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF EFFICACIOUS GRACE

External calling and internal calling. External calling, also called General Calling, is the declaration of the plan of salvation, with its command to repent, its appeal to motivations (such as fear, hope, gratitude), and its promise of acceptance through faith.

Internal calling is the effectual work of the Spirit, by which men are savingly influenced to salvation. *Grace is* the initiation of the work; *calling is* the result of the action of grace. The calling comes from the Spirit, as distinguished from the Word (cf. John 3:27; 6:37, 45, 64–65; I Thess. 1:5–6). The Bible teaches the two calls. Of the objects of the one it is said, "Many are called, but few are chosen," but of the other it is said, "*whom* he called, *them* he also justified " (cf. Prov. 1:24 [1st]; John 6:45 [2nd]; Rom. 8:29–30).

The description of efficacious grace. Efficacious grace, which secures the saving internal call, is a divine influence on the human spirit. The Apostle Peter refers to efficacious grace when he writes of the scattered saints, describing them as "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood" (I Pet. 1:1–2). The sanctifying work of the Spirit that *precedes* the obedience and sprinkling of the blood, as the order of the words indicates, is the work of the Spirit that sets apart the elect to faith and salvation. Our Lord speaks of this work as the drawing of the Father, who does the work through the Spirit (cf. John 6:44).

The term "draw" in John 6:44 is a key-word in the doctrine, being, in fact, the biblical word for the work of efficacious grace. Bernard's comments are excellent. "elknein is used in the LXX of Jer. 31:3 of the Divine attraction: 'With lovingkindness have I drawn thee.' It is used of the attractive power of Christ Crucified in Jn. 12:32, occurring elsewhere in the N. T. only at Jn. 18:10 (of drawing a sword), Jn. 21:6, 11 (of dragging a net ashore), and Acts 16:19 (of dragging Paul and Silas to the magistrates). It seems generally to connote a certain resistance on the part of that which is 'dragged' or 'drawn,' and this may be involved in its use in the present verse (but cf. Cant. 1:4).²

Astoundingly, William Barclay, after giving all of this data from Bernard, comments, "Always there is this idea of resistance. God can and does draw men, but man's resistance can defeat the pull of God."³ Not one of the uses of the verb suggests this.⁴ Calvin's comment is clarifying, "As far as the manner of the hearing goes, it is not violent so as to compel men by an external force; but yet it is an effectual movement of the Holy Spirit, *turning men from being unwilling and reluctant into willing.*"⁵

As Donald Grey Barnhouse used to say, "If you have made a decision of the will that is according to God's will, it is because God has first jiggled your willer! "

The words, "the Father who sent me," in verse forty-four should be noted. "The correlation between the subject: *He who sent me*, and the verb draw should be observed," Godet says, "the same God who sends Jesus for souls, draws each soul to Jesus."⁶ Should He have waited until asked to come? The final clause, "and I will raise him up on the last day," refers to the consummation of the process that the Father's drawing began. Between the two events lies the growth and development of the believer's spiritual experience.

Efficacious grace operates immediately upon the human spirit, although usually in the context of the consideration of the Word of God (cf. I Cor. 2:12–15). It is supernatural, an overcoming of man's deadness, blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart.

Some years ago when I was giving a series of lectures in Believers Chapel in Dallas, Texas, on soteriology, one of the members of the class, a young woman, came to me after the meeting and asked a number of questions that indicated that she did not understand very well the lesson that evening, which happened to be on efficacious grace. She spoke of "a very good man" she knew, a Roman Catholic, who "had everything going for him." She went on to tell me how difficult she was finding it to reach him for the Lord. And then she said, "The only thing that will move him is a bolt from the blue." I replied, "Kris, that is efficacious grace!" I tried to encourage her to wait for God's necessary "jiggling" of his will.⁷

The infallibility of efficacious grace. The elect is subject to moral and mediate influences upon the will, common to him and to the unconverted, which he may and does resist because of sin. He is also subject to a special influence from the Spirit *within the will*, which is *neither resistible nor irresistible*, according to Hodge, because it acts from

within and carries the will spontaneously with it. For this reason Hodge prefers the term, "effectual grace."⁸

II THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON EFFICACIOUS GRACE

The Johannine teaching. One of the important sources of the Johannine teaching, to which we have already made reference in discussing the use of the word *draw, is* found in John six. The Jews were murmuring over the great revelation concerning the Bread of Life who had come down from heaven (cf. John 6:38, 42). The Lord does not answer their objection, based upon His known parentage, but goes right to the heart of the matter. They must be "taught of God" to respond to His teaching on His heavenly origin.⁹ Whispering will not help; teaching from God will.

The forty-fifth verse spells it all out, it is repeated in verse sixty-five. "Here is a fundamental doctrine of the Fourth Gospel," Bernard points out, "viz. that the approach of the soul to God or Christ is not initiated by the man himself, but by a movement of Divine grace."¹⁰ The truth is adumbrated in 4:23, where the Father is said to *seek* His true worshippers (cf. 12:39: the dark side of predestination). The impossibility of anyone coming to Christ without the Father's drawing was implied in the statement of verse thirty-seven, but it is stated in the forty-fourth verse. We will not go over again the plain statement of the necessity of the Father's drawing for salvation, except to reiterate that the drawing is an effectual drawing in which the Father turns men from unwillingness to willingness.

The significance of the forty-fifth verse is sometimes overlooked. There a citation from Isaiah 54:13 is found, and it serves to explain that the drawing is scriptural teaching. In context the text refers to the messianic covenant community of Israel, the recipients of the covenantal blessings. They who belong to the Messiah need no instruction from men; they carry within themselves the effects of the divine instruction. The "all" must be understood in the context of the prophet. It is the "all" of the messianic community. The following "everyone who has heard" simply individualizes the specific "all." Our Lord, then, makes an application of a timeless principle in the divine dealing with men. To be taught of God is to be drawn by God (cf. I Cor. 2:13; Phil. 3:15).

The Father's drawing involves three steps, the next sentence affirms: (a) hearing; (2) learning; (3) coming. The Father takes the initiative and teaches. Everyone who listens and learns will come. The hymn, "O Happy Day," has at least one stanza that I like,

"Tis done: the great transactions's done,
I am my Lord's, and He is mine;
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess *the voice divine*"

It is Calvin's contention that verse forty-five overthrows free will, for he comments, "The whole faculty of free will which the Papists (and Arminians, we might add) dream about is utterly overthrown by these two clauses. For if we begin to come to Christ only when the Father has drawn us, neither the beginning of faith, nor any preparation for it, lies in us. On the other hand, if all come whom the Father has taught, He gives them not only the freedom to believe but faith itself. When therefore we willingly obey the Spirit's guiding, it is a part, as it were, sealing, of grace. For God would not draw us if He only stretched out His hand and left our will in a state of suspense. But He is properly said to draw us when He extends the power of His Spirit to the full completing of faith. They are said to hear God who willingly submit to God when He speaks within them, because the Spirit reigns in their hearts."¹

The Pauline teaching. In Romans 8:30 two points may be made that apply to the matter in hand. First of all, in the order of the steps in the divine continuing providential purpose it is important to notice that calling is given a place *before* justification, effectively indicating its place in time as a *pre-salvation* work.

And second, it should be remembered that the root, *kaleo*, meaning to call, in the epistles of Paul always refers to an effectual call (cf. I Cor. 1:1, 2, 26; Gal. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:9–10). The aorist tenses look at the actions as complete and, thus certain, without reference to time.

An important passage for the subject of efficacious grace is 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14, concerning which James Denney has said, "The thirteenth and fourteenth verses of this chapter are a system of theology in miniature."² In the main that is correct. The thanksgiving is meant to encourage the Thessalonians, especially those agitated by the reports mentioned in 2:1–2.³ The verb *heilato* (NASB, "has chosen") is used nowhere else in the New Testament of the doctrine of election, although it is so used in the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 6:18; 7:6–7; 10:15; cf. Phil. 1:22). Normally in its New Testament uses it refers to man's choosing, not God's (cf. Phil. 1:22; Heb. 11:25). If the reading *ap'arches* is genuine (NASB, "from the beginning"), then it refers clearly to eternal election here.⁴ The tense and voice of the verb lay stress on the choice as an event (in the past here) in which God has a personal interest. He chose *us for Himself*.⁵

The choice is from eternity, not from the time the gospel was preached in Thessalonica, as some would have it. Cf. I John 2:13; Matt. 19:4; Eph. 1:4.

The *soterian*, the purpose of the choice, is in this context final salvation, inclusive, of course, of the initial salvation from the penalty of sin. The method of accomplishment is important for the subject of efficacious grace, or effectual calling, and here Paul says that the salvation is "through (lit., in) sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (NASB). The sanctification is pre-salvation sanctification, or effectual calling, as the order of words suggests. The same order we have seen in I Peter 1:2. The "Spirit" is the

Holy Spirit. Paul, then, as John insists on a pre-salvation gracious work of the Spirit before salvation. One does not come to our Lord or to salvation apart from it.

Two passages from I Corinthians complete our brief survey of Pauline teaching. The first is I Corinthians 8:3, where we read, "But if any one loves God, he is known by Him." The construction of the original text is such that God's knowing of the one who loves Him precedes the believer's love of Him.¹⁶

The second passage is I Corinthians 12:3, and the important clause for our purposes is the final one, "except by the Holy Spirit." Lenski comments, "Whoever confesses Jesus as 'Lord' has the Holy Spirit in his heart."¹⁷ Calvin follows along the same line, saying that all things pertaining to the knowledge of God are gifts of the Holy Spirit, and then, "Hence, too we perceive how great our weakness is, as we cannot so much as move our tongue for the celebration of God's praise, unless it be governed by his Spirit."¹⁸ Unless He opens our mouths, we are not fit to be the heralds of His praise (cf. Isa. 6:5, "man of unclean lips"). Cf. Jer. 20:7.

Commenting on John 6:45, Berkouwer says, "This absoluteness of giving, drawing, and learning we meet not only in John, but also in the radical and exclusive testimony of Paul when he says, for instance, that 'no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit'" (I Cor. 12:3). The message of Scripture repeatedly accentuates that human inability. The impotence of man is not something pessimism has discovered; it is most literally described in Scripture (cf. John 3:27, I Cor. 2:14, Rom. 8:5, 6, 7, 8).¹⁹

There are many illustrations in Scripture of the working of efficacious grace, but two stand out, one in the Gospel of Luke (14:16–23) and the other in the Acts of the Apostles (16:11–15), the latter incident in which the Lord "opened" Lydia's heart to the things spoken by Paul being an almost perfect illustration of the truth. We do not have space in this paper to expound the texts.

III THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF EFFICACIOUS GRACE

The magnification of the divine purpose. Salvation is the work of God. It, therefore, is not hurried along, or effectuated, by stronger appeals, mightier arguments, more sparkling personalities, more telling illustrations, longer invitations, keener psychological insight, better eye-catching pedagogical helps or methods, and we must not forget it. On the other hand, we do not contend that it is helped by insipid thinking, windowless sermons, shunning of aids in teaching that the Spirit lays before our eyes. Salvation is the work of God, and His purpose shall be accomplished in His time (cf. John 6:39–40).

The senselessness of discouragement. The sense of discouragement, so frequently felt when the response is slight, is often a form of self-centeredness ultimately. Our need is faithfulness in our faith in His Word. May the Lord enable us to persevere in it.

Endnotes

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William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1955), I, 226.

Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 371.

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A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972 [orig. enlarged ed., 1879]), pp. 449–53.

Bernard, I, 203.

Ibid., I 204.

Calvin, I, 165.

James Denney, "The Epistles to the Thessalonians," *The Expositor's Bible*, p. 342.

James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p. 276.

George Milligan, *St Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1908), p. 106. Other recent commentators, such as Marshall and Morris favor "from the beginning," arguing that, in spite of several things that may be said for "as a firstfruits," it is difficult to make good sense of it here. The *ap arxhs* is probably the correct reading (AV: NASB, "from the beginning"), since Paul never uses it elsewhere, and it has good manuscript support. WH accepts it, but the Aland text has *aparxhn*, largely because *ap arxhs* occurs nowhere else in the Pauline corpus and, when *arxh* does, it usually has a different sense, and *aparxh* occurs six other times in Paul. Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p-p. 636–67. The decision in this instance is not an easy one.

One would expect the middle voice of the verb to be prominent from the verbal idea of election itself. Cf. Eph. 1:4 (also a verb in the middle voice).

The tense of the verb "loves" is a present tense, while that of the verb "is known" is a perfect passive, clearly showing that the knowing by God precedes our loving of Him. "The sense rather is, If a man loves God, *this is a sign that* God has taken the initiative," Barrett says (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968], p. 190).

C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1946), p. 494.

John Calvin, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), "As in 2:10–13, only one who has the Spirit can truly make such a confession because only the Spirit can reveal its reality" (p. 582).

C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, trans. by Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), p. 49.

