

Calling and Regeneration - Repentance and faith

We've been thinking of God's great salvation over recent weeks and in many ways we've simply been digging into the truths Paul lays out in Romans 8:28-30.

Read Romans 8:28-30

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

We've thought about how God in eternity past foreknew individuals He would set His love on and chose or predestined them to be saved in the future in time.

Then we saw last week that God **accomplished** their salvation in time through the penal substitutionary death of His Son, the Lord Jesus in their place.

And this morning we're going to think about how in time, in our lives, God calls to Himself those He's predestined and for whom Christ died.

And those whom he predestined he also called,

When the Bible speaks of the call in terms of salvation it does so in 2 ways.

i. First it talks of an **external call** or invitation that comes through both God's general revelation of Himself in creation, by which we all know of God yet resist Him. Then there's the external call of the preaching of the gospel, when a preacher addresses a crowd of people, which again can be resisted. (Matt 22:14 – *"Many called, but few are chosen."*)

ii. But secondly the Bible talks of the **internal call** from God that cannot be resisted and draws us into fellowship with the Lord Jesus. This call from God usually comes through the external call of someone preaching or sharing the gospel, but it's made effectual by God's Spirit's work in us.

And Romans 8:29-30 is helpful in laying out how God works out our salvation. The elect sinner was *"chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world,"* she was then in Christ when Christ died for her on the cross. And because of that, God then calls her to salvation, within her lifetime, in His good time.

Foreknown > Predestined > Called > Justified > Glorified

When God calls people to himself we're to think of it as a summons – God summoning individuals in time and space to be partakers of His salvation. And God's summons is powerful to achieve what He wants.

Think, of receiving a summons to a court of law, *"You must appear before judge Jones on 18th December at 10:30am."* That summons doesn't necessarily get you physically into the courtroom does it? Whether you turn up or not depends on your own strength and will and the size of the policeman they send around to hand you the summons!

But God's summons is different. It has built in effectiveness – it can't fail to achieve what He purposes. When God calls a person, that person comes to saving faith in Christ.

That ties in with what we've seen doesn't it? If we're dead in trespasses and sins, God's summons MUST be effective since the person being summoned is dead and can't do anything himself to advance his salvation. So listen to Isaiah 55:10-11

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.¹*

God's Word is effect to do what He intends. So think how this is illustrated in Lazarus' resurrection. Lazarus has been dead for 3 days, Jesus calls out with a loud voice, *"Lazarus, come out."* (Jn. 11.43), and dead Lazarus obeys Jesus' effective call – he can do no other than obey Jesus' powerful word.

And we're told that when God issues His irresistible salvation-call to people it does work – God calls people

1 Cor. 1:9 – *into fellowship with Christ*

1 Pet. 2:9 – *Out of darkness into His marvelous light*

1 Thes. 2:12, 2 Thes. 2:14, 1 Pet. 2:9 – *into His Kingdom and glory*

¹ Also Eph. 1:11, James 4:15, Ps. 33:14-15, Prov. 21:1

Rev. 19:9 – *to the final marriage supper of the Lamb*

1 Tim. 6:12 – *to eternal life*

God's gospel-summons has the power to do all that. And if God's called us in this way, it is certain that we will receive all these blessings – His call is **effectual** and unstoppable.

Rom 11:29 - *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*

(b) God is the author of the call ... not us

I guess that's obvious from the Bible texts we've looked at, but it's important to say. We can't **call** ourselves anymore than we can predestine, justify or adopt ourselves.

We are called by the work of our triune God – The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, So 1 Cor. 1:9, it's God the Father who

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

Paul says a similar thing in 2 Timothy 1:9, God calls us to himself in Christ, and through the work of the Holy Spirit. God calls us and we're completely passive, until God does something in us that enables us to respond to His call.

Does God's effective call override the human will?

But importantly it's not as though God forces us kicking and screaming against our will, as He calls us to His salvation. That's sometimes how it's characterized. If when God effectually calls someone to save him it's an irresistible summons, then does God just over-ride the human will – the bit of us that think's *"I like the look of that, I'll chose that"*?

But wonderfully God doesn't override our will and make us go against what we want. Rather in those God effectually calls, God in His grace **changes the will** of those who left to ourselves are bound as slaves to sin, so that we now want to choose Christ. That's His regenerating work, that's what it means to be born again.

The one "born-again", born of God will, is now able to answer God's call, to believe, able to see goodness in the gospel, to choose Christ and to repent and believe.

God's Holy Spirit works in ME to enable ME to willingly choose Christ and to keep on believing, trusting and following Christ.

Friends, this is why we can rightly call people to repent & believe. This is the way God's chosen to call people effectually to Himself.

So it's impossible for anyone to answer God's call left to themselves as those who are dead in sin, willing slaves of sin.

But it's not impossible for God who enables us to respond to His call. His call on those He's chosen is an **effectual call** – a call with power

It's **irresistible grace** – grace that we cannot refuse, but with it carries the power to do the work God intends it to do.

God gives us new hearts, he changes our wills – he makes us new creatures in Christ, so that our minds, wills, hearts can repent and believe the good news. So

2 Cor. 5:17 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*

When we become Christians we are radically different to our old selves, radically different from those in unbelief. We've actually been born again. Our **conversion** is a huge deal! Look at the following texts:

John 3:5 - *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

Jesus is picking up on words from Ezekiel 36:25-26

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

As Jesus spoke to Nicodemus He says we need to be *"born of water,"* which picks up on the cleansing language of Ezek. 36. It's not just enough to have a fresh start, we need to be cleansed of the past, which is provided for us in regeneration.

Jesus also says, we need to be *"born of the Spirit"* – we need to be re-created, by the Holy Spirit & of divine character. Like our first birth when we're born of our parents this new birth is something we don't choose – rather someone else chooses to give us life

Jesus says the Spirit's work is like the wind that blows wherever it wants. He's entirely Sovereign & gives new life where He wills

God's regenerating work in us to make us new creatures in Christ Jesus is the source of all of the things in salvation God enables us to do. Including things like repenting and believing, putting our trust in Christ.

Repentance and Faith

As new creatures in Christ, we are now able to live lives with the fruit of regeneration – of our new birth. In John’s first letter he repeatedly talks about regeneration and it’s effects.

1 Jn. 3:9 - *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; & he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God*

1 Jn. 2:29 - *If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.*

1 Jn. 4:7 - *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.*

1 Jn. 5:1 - *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, & everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him*

1 Jn. 5:4 - *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith*

1 Jn. 5:18 - *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.*

See the gospel fruit in the lives of believers, John lists (don’t practice sinning, practice righteousness, love other believers, believe Jesus is Christ, overcome world, don’t continue in sin, can’t be touched by Satan) and can you see that they all come BECAUSE the Christian has been “born of God”.

These fruit only come to those who have been born again, they are never found prior to regeneration (new birth). These fruit in salvation that God enables US to do – repenting of sin, believing – we can only do because God has regenerated us. So we want to say:

(a) Regeneration always produces repentance and faith.

Unless we have been born again it is impossible to repent and believe. But if we have been born again it is impossible NOT to repent and believe.

(b) We repent and believe – God does not

God’s the one who effectually calls us, He’s the one whose Spirit regenerates us so that we can answer that call. But with new hearts and minds WE repent and believe the gospel. It’s my responsibility with my renewed heart & mind to repent & believe

(c) Repentance and faith cannot be separated

Saving faith in the bible is repenting faith & biblical repentance is repentance that believes. That’s why Jesus says in Mk 1:15, “*The Kingdom of God is near. Repent & believe the good news!*”

(d) Repentance & faith are necessary, but don’t have any merit

My repentance & my faith don’t earn me any credit with God – I do them, but they’re God’s work in me (fruit produced by His new birth).

Faith, remember is the **instrument** by which we receive God’s salvation. The image is of an open empty hand that receives the new life in Christ that God offers. Strictly speaking it is not my faith that saves, Jesus Christ who saves through my faith.

And biblical, saving faith is active trusting faith. Yes saving faith needs to know about Jesus and the good news of His salvation. Yes saving faith assents to the truth of the gospel message about who Jesus is and why He came. But knowledge and assent aren’t the faith-fruit that regeneration brings. Remember James’ words in James 2:19

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder!

True God-given, saving faith is faith that not only knows and believes the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but trusts in Christ.

Listen to John Murray:

“Faith is knowledge passing into conviction, and it is conviction passing into confidence. Faith cannot stop short of self-commitment to Christ, a transference of reliance upon ourselves and all human resources to reliance upon Christ alone for salvation. It is a receiving and resting upon him. It is here that the most characteristic act of faith appears; it is engagement of person to person, the engagement of the sinner as lost to the person of the Saviour able and willing to save... Faith is trust in a person... The specific character of faith is that it looks away from itself and finds its whole interest & object in Christ. He is the absorbing preoccupation of faith.” John Murray,

Faith is our first and continuing action from God’s regenerating work in us. We don’t stop trusting. Paul says

Gal. 2:20 - *And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

But we said saving faith is always accompanied in those God has regenerated by repentance.

At heart repentance is a turning – turning from sin to wards Christ. It’s not just a change of mind in general but very particular and concrete. It’s a change of mind with reference to particular sins ... turning from my sins. So listen to how Paul describes the repentance the Thessalonians showed,

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

There can be no saving faith without repentance. The Bible emphasizes that we're saved by faith – simply by trusting rather than earning salvation by our works. But faith cannot be separated from repentance.

There's no room to think we can have some cheap trust in Jesus without a radical ongoing transformation in our lives. Just listen to how the Bible speaks of the gospel as good news of repentance

Luke 24:46-47 - *“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, & that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem*

Acts 5:31 - *God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*

Acts 2:37-38 - *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*

Acts 20:21 – *I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, & teaching you in public & from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews & to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

When we're sharing the gospel with unbelievers, we daren't think the important thing is to get come cheap and easy decision from them to become a Christian. “Yeah OK, I'll trust Jesus” without them knowing what that entails.

Saving faith is a repenting faith, a faith that continually turns from sin & commits every area of life to His Lordship. If in God's grace we're born again, we are no longer slaves to sin, no longer dead in sin and we CAN and we MUST turn from sin and turn to Christ.

Final word from J Murray, from whom much of this material is borrowed!

“Repentance reminds us that if the faith we profess is a faith that allows us to walk in the ways of this present evil world, in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, in the fellowship of the works of darkness, then our faith is but mockery and deception. True faith is suffused with penitence. And just as faith is not only a momentary act but an abiding attitude of trust and confidence directed to the Saviour, so repentance results in constant contrition.”

Questions & Comments

Prayer