

Doctrine of Salvation

The Gospel Call¹

Explanation & Scriptural Basis

- **What is the Gospel Call?**
 - When Paul talks about the way that God brings salvation into our lives, he says, “Those whom he *predestined* he also **called**; and those whom he called he also *justified*; and those whom he justified he also *glorified*” (Rom 8:30).
 - Although long ago, before the world was made, God “predestined” us to be his children and to be conformed to the image of his Son, Paul points to the fact that in the actual outworking of his purpose in our lives God “called” us.
- **Effective Calling**
 - When Paul says, “Those whom he predestined *he* also called; and those whom *he* called he also justified” (Rom 8:30), he indicates that calling is an act of God.
 - In fact, it is specifically an act of God the Father, for he is the one who predestines people “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29).
 - Other verses describe more fully what this calling is.
 - When God calls people in this powerful way, he calls them “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).
 - He calls them “into the fellowship of his Son” (1 Cor 1:9; cf. Acts 2:39) and “into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12; cf. 1 Pet 5:10; 2 Pet 1:3).
 - People who have been called by God “belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:6). They are called to “be saints” (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2), and have come into a realm of peace (1 Cor 7:15), freedom (Gal 5:13), hope (Eph 1:18; 4:4), holiness (1 Thess 4:7), patient endurance of suffering (1 Pet 2:20–21; 3:9), and eternal life (1 Tim 6:12).

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999). This lesson outline contains content directly quoted or adapted from chapter 19 of Grudem. Due to copyright and fair use restrictions, this document should not be copied or disseminated.

- These verses indicate that no powerless, merely human calling is in view. This calling is rather a kind of “summons” from the King of the universe, and it has such power that it brings about the response that it asks for in people’s hearts.
 - It is an act of God that *guarantees* a response, because Paul specifies in Rom 8:30 that all who were “called” were also “justified.”
 - This calling has the capacity to draw us out of the kingdom of darkness and bring us into God’s kingdom and join in full fellowship with him. See 1 Cor 1:9.
- This powerful act of God is often referred to as *effective calling*, to distinguish it from the general gospel invitation that goes to all people, in which some people reject.
 - This is not to say that human gospel proclamation is not involved. In fact, God’s effective calling comes *through* the human preaching of the gospel. See 2 Thess 2:14.
 - Of course, there are many who hear the general call of the gospel message and do not respond. But in some cases the gospel call is made so effectively by the working of the Holy Spirit in people’s hearts that they do respond; we can say that they have received “effective calling.”
- **Definition of Effective Calling:** *Effective calling is an act of God the Father, speaking through the human proclamation of the gospel, in which he summons people to himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith.*
 - **John 10:27-28** ²⁷ My sheep **hear** my voice, and **I know them**, and **they follow me**. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
 - **Important:** We don’t mean to give the impression that people will be saved by the power of this call *apart from* their own willing response to the gospel.
 - Although it is true that effective calling awakens and brings forth a response from us, we must always insist that this response still has to be a voluntary, willing response in which the individual puts his or her trust in Christ.
 - This is why prayer is so important to effective evangelism. Unless God works in people’s hearts to make the proclamation of the gospel effective, there will be no genuine saving response. See John 6:44. Also Acts 16:14.
 - In distinction from effective calling, which is entirely an act of God, we may talk about the *gospel call* in general, which comes through human speech.
 - This gospel call is referred to as **external calling** or **general calling**.

- By contrast, the effective calling of God that actually brings about a willing response from the person who hears it is sometimes called *internal calling*.
- The gospel call is general and external and often rejected, while the effective call is particular, internal, and *always* effective. However, this is not to diminish the importance of the gospel call—it is the means God has appointed through which effective calling will come. See Rom 10:4. Therefore, it is important to understand exactly what the gospel call is.

- **Elements of the Gospel Call**

- Three important elements must be included in human preaching of the gospel (evangelism).
 - **Explanation of the facts concerning salvation.**
 - Anyone who comes to Christ for salvation must have at least a basic understanding of who Christ is and how he meets our needs for salvation. Therefore, an explanation of the facts concerning salvation must include:
 - All people have sinned (Rom 3:23).
 - The penalty for sin is death (Rom 6:23).
 - Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins (Rom 5:8).
 - But understanding those facts and even agreeing that they are true is not enough for a person to be saved. There must be an invitation for a personal response on the part of the individual who will repent of his or her sins and trust personally in Christ.
 - **Invitation to respond to Christ personally in repentance and faith.**
 - When the NT talks about people coming to salvation, it speaks in terms of a personal response to an invitation from Christ himself. See Matt 11:28–30.
 - It is important to make clear that these words of Christ (“Come to me”) are not just words spoken by a religious leader in the past.
 - Every non-Christian hearing these words should be encouraged to think of them as words that Jesus Christ is *even now*, at *this very moment*, speaking to him or to her individually.
 - Jesus Christ is a Savior who is now alive in heaven, and each non-Christian should think of Jesus as speaking

directly to him or to her, saying, “*Come to me ... and I will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28).

- This is a genuine *personal* invitation that seeks a response from each one who hears it.
- John also talks about the need for personal response when he says, “He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God*” (John 1:11–12). See also Rev 3:20.
- But what is involved in coming to Christ? Although this will be explained more fully in a few weeks, it is sufficient to note here that if we come to Christ and trust him to save us from our sin, we cannot any longer cling to sin but must willingly renounce it in genuine repentance.
 - In some cases in Scripture both repentance and faith are mentioned together when referring to someone’s initial conversion (Paul said that he spent his time “testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of *repentance* to God and of *faith* in our Lord Jesus Christ,” Acts 20:21).
 - At other times, only repentance of sins is named and saving faith is assumed as an accompanying factor (see Luke 24:47; cf. Acts 2:37–38; 3:19; Rom 2:4; et al.).
 - Therefore, any genuine gospel proclamation must include an invitation to make a conscious decision to forsake one’s sins and come to Christ in faith, asking Christ for forgiveness of sins.
 - If either the need to repent of sins or the need to trust in Christ for forgiveness is neglected, there is not a full and true proclamation of the gospel.
- **A promise of forgiveness and eternal life.**
 - Although Christ’s words of personal invitation do have promises of rest, power to become children of God, and access to the water of life, it is helpful to make explicit just what Christ promises to those who come to him in repentance and faith.
 - The primary thing that is promised in the gospel message is the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God. See John 3:16; Acts 3:19; cf. 2:38.

- Coupled with the promise of forgiveness and eternal life should be an assurance that Christ will accept all who come to him in sincere repentance and faith seeking salvation. See John 6:37.

- **The Importance of the Gospel Call**

- The doctrine of the gospel call is important, because if there were no gospel call, we could not be saved.
 - **Romans 10:14** ¹⁴ *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*
- The gospel call is important because through it God addresses us in the fullness of our humanity.
 - He does not simply save us “automatically” without seeking for a response from us as whole persons.
 - Rather, he addresses the gospel call to our intellects, our emotions, and our wills.
 - He speaks to our **intellects** by explaining the facts of salvation to us in his Word.
 - He speaks to our **emotions** by issuing a heartfelt personal invitation to us to respond.
 - He speaks to our **will**s by asking us to hear his invitation and respond willing in repentance and faith—to decide to turn from our sins and receive Christ as Savior and rest our hearts in him for salvation.

- **Questions for Personal Application**

- Can you remember the first time you heard the gospel and responded to it? Can you describe what it felt like in your heart? Do you think the Holy Spirit was working to make that gospel call effective in your life? Did you resist it at the time?
- In your explanation of the gospel call to other people, have some elements (facts, an invitation to respond, promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who do respond) been missing?
- Have you thought of Jesus speaking the words of the gospel invitation personally to people even today? If non-Christians began to think of Jesus speaking in this way, how might that affect their response?
- Do you understand the elements of the gospel call clearly enough to present them to others? Could you easily turn in the Bible to find four or five appropriate verses that would explain the gospel call to people?