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# Effectual Calling

by the Rev. Thomas White, LL.B.

*“To them who are the called according to his purpose.”—Romans 8:28.*

**T**he sacred scriptures are a Paradise, or “garden of delights.” This Epistle to the Romans is a most interesting and artful knot in that garden. This chapter is the richest division in that knot, furnished with sweetest flowers of consolation, antidoting the remnants of corruption that there are in our hearts, and the various afflictions that we meet with in the world. This verse that I have read unto you, is the fairest flower in that division: for, what can sooner revive a drooping soul, than to be assured that “all things shall work together for good?” “We,” saith the great apostle, “do not think, imagine, conjecture, but *know*, partly by divine revelation, partly by our own experience, *that all things*,—not only gifts, graces, ordinances; but all creatures, all providences, all changes, events, occurrences; even those things that appear most formidable; *homo oppugnans, diabolus insidians*, ‘the persecutions of men, the temptations of the devil,’—*shall work*, not singly and apart, it may be, but *together, for good.*”

*For good!* Yes; but it is unto those that be good. Hands off, wicked and profane wretches! You have no part nor lot in these heavenly consolations. Away, base swine, to your sties, to your muck and mire! These pearls are not for you. Out, ye dogs, to the garbage that lieth upon the dunghill! the children’s bread is not for you. “We know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God.” Why so? Because they are “the called according to his purpose.” So Pareus expoundeth the place; and with him I perfectly agree.

That which God hath purposed, shall not be frustrated: “The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:27.) What man will suffer his purposes, those purposes that he taketh up with best advice and most mature deliberation, to be disappointed, if he have power to accomplish them? The holy purposes of *God*,—as they are ordered and directed by infinite wisdom, so they have infinite power to bring them to pass: so that if I can say, “God hath a purpose to save me,” I may securely smile at all the attempts of men and devils against me; and if I can say,

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“God hath effectually called me,” I may be sure God hath chosen me, and hath a purpose to save me. For all the links in the golden chain of salvation are even-wrought, not one of them wider or narrower than another: if God have chosen, he will call; if God call, he hath chosen. Once more: if I can say, “I love God,” I may be sure I am called; for I cannot love God, except I have some acquaintance with him, some sense and experience of his love toward me. So, then, all our consolations are ultimately resolved into the “purpose” of God: this is the basis and foundation of them all. That purpose appeareth by our effectual calling; and that calling appeareth to be effectual by our love to God. Hence the conclusion is certain,—that “all things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose.”

But I forget myself. You have heard in former discourses, under what a sad, soul-killing disease poor man laboureth in his natural condition. You heard likewise of a sovereign remedy provided in the blood of Christ. I am now engaged to speak to the application of that remedy in our effectual calling.

This effectual calling, according to St. Augustine, is *ingressus ad salutem*, our “entrance into a state of salvation;” the first step whereby God’s predestination descendeth to us, and we again ascend to the glory predestinated.

The DOCTRINE I present from my text maybe this:—

#### DOCTRINE

*There are some persons in the world that are effectually called; or, which is all one, who are “called according to the purpose of God.”*

There is a call of the gospel that is not effectual: of this our Saviour speaketh, when he saith, “Many are called, but few chosen.” (Matt. 20:16.) How many of the poor ministers of the gospel may complain of multitudes in this generation, saying, with the children that sat in the market-place “We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not lamented!” (Luke 7:32.) “Neither the delightful airs of mercy, nor the doleful ditties of judgment, have moved you.” But the election will certainly obtain; and the call that is “according to God’s purpose,” reacheth not ears only, but hearts also: “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God.” (John 5:25.)

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This work of grace is presented to our view in a various dress of words. In the scriptures it is sometimes a “teaching,” sometimes a “drawing,” sometimes a “conversion,” sometimes a “regeneration” and all these in divers respects which I cannot stand to unfold. In the schools it is *gratia prima*, “the first grace,” *praeveniens*, “preceding grace,” *operans*, “operating grace.” Among Divines of the Reformed way, it is “an internal and effectual call,” *vocatio alta et efficax*, after the mind of St. Augustine.

When it is offered to our consideration under this notion, it presupposeth two things:—

1. *That natural men stand at a distance from God.*—We do not usually call those that stand close by us. This was once the condition of the Ephesians: “Ye sometimes were afar off.” (Eph. 2:13.) “Sometimes;” when? Surely in the time of their unregeneracy. “Far off” from whom? From Christ, from the church, from God, and consequently from themselves. But how could they be “far off” from God? Not in spaces of place; for God “filleth all places with his presence” as to his essence and providential works, he is “not far from every one of us; for in him we live and move” (Acts 17:27, 28): but as to their hearts and affections, all natural men are far from God: “God is not in all their thoughts” (Psalm 10:4): they do not know him, fear, love, and delight in him; they do not breathe after communion with him. Even when they “draw nigh unto him with their lips, their hearts are far from him.” (Isaiah 29:13.)

If it sometimes happens that we call those that are at hand, then usually they are such as are asleep. Sin is a deep sleep of the soul; and as sleep bindeth all the senses of the outward man, so sin all the powers of the inward. A man under the dominion of sin can do nothing for God, neither can he enjoy any thing from God. It may be, he dreams of great satisfaction [that] he receiveth from the world’s dainties; but when “he awaketh, his soul is empty.” (Isaiah 29:8.) Or, further: if they be not asleep, they are such as mind something else than He would have them. All natural men mind something else than God would have them: they “mind earthly things.” (Phil. 3:19.) Herod mindeth the dancing of a lewd strumpet more than the preaching of the holy Baptist: the young man mindeth his great possessions; the epicure, his belly; the farmer, his barn; Judas, his bag; the silversmith, his shrines; the Gadarenes, their swine; Pilate, the favour and applause of the people. Let the best men speak ingenuously, and they must needs confess that there were many things (if I may call them “things,” rather “nothings”) which they minded more than God or Christ or heaven, more than the highest concernments of their immortal souls, the weightiest business of eternal salvation. They were all Gallios in respect of these things, they “cared for none of

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them,” till they were roused out of their waking dreams by the effectual call of the most gracious God. This is the condition of every natural man.

2. It presupposeth, *that it is an easy thing with God to bring us home to himself, though we be never so far distant from him.*—To awaken us to his service, though in a dead sleep of sin; to raise our minds to higher objects, though they be never so deeply immersed in the things of this present world. Is any thing hard to the Almighty? With a word he made us, with a word he can renew us. When “darkness covered the face of the deep,” he did but say, “Let there be light: and there was light”(Gen. 1:2,3): with the like facility can he “shine in our hearts, giving us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” (2 Cor. 4:6.) “He uttereth his voice,” saith David, “and the earth melteth.” (Psalm 46:6.) Let but God utter his voice, and the rocks and mountains of our corruptions will melt away like wax.

Come we now closer to the point: toward the opening of which, I shall entreat your attention to the resolution of Sundry QUESTIONS.

QUESTION I. What is this “calling?”

ANSWER. It is the real separation of the soul unto God; and a clothing it with such gracious abilities, whereby it may be enabled to repent of its sins, and to believe in his Son. It is our translation from the state of nature—which is a state of sin, wrath, death, and damnation—to a state of grace, which is a state of holiness, life, peace, and eternal salvation. This translation is wrought,

1. By strong *convictions of the mind,*

(1.) *Of the guilt and filth of sin, of the danger and defilement of sin, of the malignity of sin, and the misery that attends it.*—“Once,” saith the soul that is under this dispensation of God’s grace, “Once I looked upon sin as my wisdom: now it is madness and folly. Once I accounted it my meat and drink to ‘fulfil’ τὰ θελήματα, all the wills of the flesh (Eph. 2:3); sin was a sweet morsel; I drank iniquity like water: now it is a cup of trembling to me, and I fear it may prove a cup of condemnation. Once I hugged, embraced, and delighted in sin as the wife of my bosom: now I clearly see that the fruit and issue of the impure copulation of my soul with her is nothing else but the shame of my face, the stain of my reputation, the rack and horror of my conscience, and (which is more than all these) the provocation of the Almighty; and therefore I begin to think within myself of an eternal divorce from her. I slept securely in the lap of this Delilah; she robbed me of my strength; she delivered me up to the Philistines, that dealt unworthily with me, that put me upon base and low employments: what now

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should I think of, but (if it please the Lord to give new strength) the death and destruction of them all?”

(2.) *Of the vanity and emptiness of the creature which we have idolized.*—Confiding in it, as the staff of our hopes; breathing and pursuing after it, as the perfection of our happiness.

(3.) *Of the absolute need of Christ.*—That if he does not save us, we must perish.

(4.) *Of the absolute “fulness” of Christ, and that “in him we may be complete”* (Col. 2:10.)—If we be guilty, he can justify us; if we be filthy, he can purge us; if we be weak, he can strengthen us; if we be poor, he can enrich us; if we be base, he can ennoble us; if we be deformed and ugly, he can make us beautiful and lovely; if we be miserable, he can bless us, and that “with all blessings in heavenly places.” (Eph. 1:3.)

(5.) *Of the clemency, goodness, meekness, sweetness, graciousness of his disposition; that if any man come to him, he will in no wise reject him.* (John 6:37.)—These things the mind is strongly convinced of: yet if there be not a farther work, a man may carry these convictions to hell with him. Therefore,

2. In the second place, this translation is wrought *by a powerful inclination and conversion of the will to close with Christ upon his own terms.*—To embrace him as Sovereign, as well as Saviour; to take him, as men use to do their wives, “for better for worse, for richer for poorer;” to stick to him on Mount Calvary, as well as Mount Tabor; to welcome him into thy bosom by bidding an everlasting farewell to thy sins: in a word, to make a voluntary tender and resignation of thyself unto him; solemnly avouching that, from this time forward, thou wilt count thyself more his, than thou art thine own; and the more thy own, because thou art his. This work is carried on with a most efficacious sweetness; so that the liberty of the will is not infringed, whilst the obstinacy of the will is mastered and over-ruled.

If you ask me “How can these things be?” I never studied to satisfy curiosity; but if you can tell me “how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child,” (Eccles. 11:5,) I also will tell you how the parts of the new man are formed in the heart.<sup>1</sup> But, I suppose, silence and humble admiration will be best on both sides: if there be so great a mystery in our natural generation, surely there is a far greater in our spiritual regeneration: if David could say of the former, “I

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<sup>1</sup> It may be noted that recent advances in biochemistry and neonatology in no way detract from his argument.

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am fearfully and wonderfully made;” (Psalm 139:14;) much more might he say of the latter, “I am fearfully and wonderfully renewed.”

QUESTION II. Who are “*the called?*”

ANSWER 1. Among creatures, *none but men are of the number of the called.*—“The angels that kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation,” are never recalled, but “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” (Jude 6.) Lord, “what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou so regardest him?” (Psalm 8:4.)

2. Among men, none but the elect are capable of this grace.—The call is limited by the “purpose:” “Whom he hath predestinated, them he also called.” (Rom. 8:30.) Touching these elect persons, divers things fall under our observation; as,

(1.) *In regard of their internal condition.*—Before this call, they are dead in sins and trespasses, blind in their minds, stony in their hearts, corrupt in their ways, even as others.

(2.) *In regard of their outward condition.*—Both before and after this call, they are, for the most part, poor and vile and contemptible in the eye of the world. God puts not the greater value upon any man for a gold ring for “goodly apparel,” though the world doth: he hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him.” (James 2:2, 5.) “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:” (1 Cor. 1:26): *some*, it may be; but *not many*. God so orders his call, as that it may appear, “there is no respect of persons with him,” (Rom. 2:11.)

(3.) Whatever the outward condition of these men be, there are but *very few* that are effectually called.—Few, I say, in comparison of those that are left under the power and dominion of their lusts: “One of a city, and two of a tribe.” (Jer. 3:14.) I tremble to speak it, but a truth it is, and must out:—Satan hath the harvest, God the gleanings, of mankind. Which, by the way, may serve to convince *them* of their vanity and folly, *that* make the multitude of actors an argument to prove the rectitude of actions; as if *they* could not do amiss, *that* do as the most: whereas a very Heathen could say, *Argumentum pessimi turba*, “The beaten tract is most deceitful;” sheep go the broad way to the shambles, when a more uncouth path might lead them to fresh pastures.

QUESTION III. *Who is he that calleth?*

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ANSWER. Who but God, that “callesh things that are not as if they were?” (Rom. 4:17.) All heart-work is God’s particular work—the restraining and ordering [of] the heart. He withheld Abimelech, “not suffering him to touch” Sarah, Abraham’s wife (Gen. 20:6): and the heart of Pharaoh, while it was least conformable unto the rule of his law, was absolutely subject unto the rule of his providence. And well it is for us, that it belongs to God to restrain and order hearts: otherwise, sad would be the condition of this nation, of the whole world. But now if it be God’s particular work to restrain and order hearts, much more, surely, to turn, change, break, melt, and new-mould hearts. It is his sovereign grace which we adore as the only *Verticordia*, as the real “Turn-heart.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore we may observe that,

1. *God doth especially challenge this unto himself.*—You know whose expressions those are: “I will give you a new heart;” and again: “I will take away the heart of stone.” (Ezek. 36:26.) Are they not God’s? Who dares make any challenges against the Almighty? Hath not he a sceptre strong enough to secure his crown? Those that will be plucking jewels out of his royal diadem, and ascribe that to themselves or any creature which is his prerogative, shall find him jealous enough of his honour, and that jealousy stirring up indignation enough to consume them. But,

2. As God may justly challenge this work to himself, so *it is altogether impossible [that] it should be accomplished by any other.*—For,

(1.) This effectual vocation is *a spiritual resurrection of the soul.*—While we are in a state of nature, we are dead; not sick or languishing, not slumbering or sleeping, but quite “dead in trespasses and sins.” When we are called into a state of grace, then are our souls raised to walk with God here, as our bodies at the last day shall be raised to walk with the Son of God unto all eternity. Now, if it be not in the power of any creature to raise the body from the grave of death, (upon which account it is used as an argument of the Divinity of Christ, that he raised himself,) much less is it in the power of any creature to raise the soul from the grave of sin. And therefore do all true believers prove the power of God, even that “exceeding greatness of his power,” that “might of his power,” as the Greek hath it, το κρατος της ισχυος αυτου, whereby “he raised up Christ from the dead.” (Eph. 1:19, 20.)

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<sup>2</sup> Coluerunt ethnici Venerem Verticordiam.--vide Valerium Maximum, lib. viii. cap. 15; Lilius Giraldum, synt. 13. "The heathens worshipped Venus the Heart-turner."--Edit.

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(2.) This effectual vocation is *a new creation of the soul*.—Whence we are said to be “created in Christ Jesus,” when we are called unto an experimental knowledge of him, and unfeigned faith in him. Upon which account it must needs be “God’s workmanship;” (Eph. 2:10;) for power of creating is not, cannot be, communicated to any creature. Though the “angels excel in strength,” (Psalm 103:20,) and wonderful things have been performed by them, when they have as ministers executed God’s pleasure in the punishment of the wicked and protection of the righteous; yet the mightiest angel cannot create the lowest worm: that is the product only of infinite power. And let me tell you, if infinite power be manifested in the creation of the world, it is more gloriously manifested in the conversion of a sinner. There is a worse chaos, a worse confusion, upon the heart of man, when God undertaketh his new creation, than there was upon the face of the earth in the old creation. In the earth, when it was “without form and void,” (Gen. 1:2,) there was only indisposition; but in the heart of man, there is both indisposition and opposition.

Well, then, I peremptorily conclude that the work is God’s; God’s by the way of a principal efficiency, and not only by way of motion or persuasion, as some would have it; wherein I fear a piece of cursed bargaining for their own glory. For, were it so, they would be but very shabby acknowledgments that does belong to God for the change of a most miserable and unhappy estate. Suppose I should go to some wealthy citizen, and present him an object of charity, using the most cogent considerations which my art and wit could invent to enforce a liberal contribution; thereupon he freely parts with his money for the relief of that indigent person: tell me now, To which of us is he mainly engaged to return thanks? To me, the mover; or to him, the bestower? I make no question but your judicious thoughts have made an award of the chief acknowledgment to the latter. The case would plainly be the same betwixt God and us, if his only were the motion, ours the act, of conversion; his the persuasion, ours the performance: and if we go to heaven, we should have more cause to thank ourselves, than to thank God, for all the happiness we meet with there.

Beloved, I beseech you, take heed of such an opinion as this: it hath blasphemy written over it. If it be rooted in your minds, it will breed in your hearts a confidence of your own power and abilities; and that is no better than a fine-spun idolatry, and shall find little better response from God than if you worshipped stocks and stones.

QUESTION IV. *Upon what account doth God call? What moves the Divine Majesty thus to busy himself about a lump of sin and misery?*

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ANSWER. What but mere mercy? What but rich and abundant mercy?

1. It is *mere mercy*.—"When by our own merits we were begotten to death, by his mercy he begat us again unto life."<sup>3</sup> "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he hath saved us." (Titus 3:5.) Indeed we cannot do any works of righteousness before our calling. That righteousness which natural men are subject to glory in, is rather seeming than real; and that which shineth so bright in our own eyes, and perhaps in the eyes of other men, is an "abomination in the sight of God." (Luke 16:15.) God and men do not measure our righteousness by the same standard. Men account them righteous that conform to customs, laws, and constitutions of men; if, at least, they be likewise conformable to the letter of the law of God. But God reckons none righteous beside those that have a singular regard to the spirit of the law, (if I may so call it,) which layeth an obligation upon the inward man as well as the outward, which binds the heart as well as the hand; and commands, not only that which is good, but that good be done upon a good principle, in a good manner, to a good end:—a pitch of obedience that no natural man can possibly arise to; so that, in the sight of God, "there is none righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10.) "We are all by nature children of wrath, even as others." (Eph. 2:3.) "Children of wrath" we are by our own desert; if ever we become children of grace, it must be by His mercy.

2. As by mere mercy, so by rich *and abundant mercy* in God, it is that we are called.—There is a greatness of love in the "quickening of those that are dead in sins together with Christ." (Eph. 2:4, 5.) There is mercy, in that we have our lives for a prey; mercy in the comforts and accommodations of life; mercy in the influences of the sun; mercy in the dropping of the clouds; mercy in the fruitfulness of seasons; mercy in the fulness of barns: "The year" is "crowned with the goodness" of the Lord. (Psalm 65:11.) But this is a mercy above all mercies, —that we are "called from darkness into marvellous light," (1 Peter 2:9,) and from the power of Satan to the service of, and fellowship with, the only living and true God. (Acts 26:18.) Other benefits are extended to the worst of men; nay, the very devils have some tastes of mercy: but this of an effectual calling is (as I said before) communicated to none but those that God hath chosen. Other blessings and benefits, though they be good in themselves yet they cannot make us good: they are but as trappings to a horse, which, if he be a jade, make him not go the better, but the worse. But here God works a marvellous change for the better. Once the man ran away from God and himself; but now he instantly returns. Once he was a hater, a fighter against God; but now the weapons of his hostility are laid

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<sup>3</sup> Cum nostris meritis generati essemus ad mortem, sua misericordia nos regeneravit ad vitam.--Beda.

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down, and he thinks he can never do enough to express his love. Once he was darkness; but now he is “light in the Lord.” Once [he was] dead; but, behold, he lives. Finally: other blessings and benefits can never make us happy; but, as they find us miserable, so they leave us: we may, and are too apt to, bless ourselves in them; yet God never intended to bless us in the sole enjoyment of them. But, O how happy is that man that God hath effectually called to himself! His bosom shall be his refuge in all storms; his grace, his sufficiency in all temptations; his power, his shield in all oppositions. But let the text speak: “All things shall work together for” his spiritual and eternal good.

Before I part with this point, I shall acquaint you with an exposition of my text utterly inconsistent with the doctrine I have delivered and the truth itself, and very unworthy of the authors of it. This it is,—that here we are said to be called, not “according to God’s purpose,” but “according to our own purpose” to hear and obey his call.<sup>4</sup> And perhaps upon this the Papists have grounded their merit of congruity. But this must needs fall, if we consider but this one thing among many,—that those that have been farthest off the kingdom, have been fetched into it; and those that have not been far from the kingdom of God, have never come nearer it. God doth not always take the smoothest, but the most knotty, pieces of timber, to make pillars in his house. He goes not always to places of severest and strictest discipline, to pick out some few there to plant in his house: but he goes to the custom-house, and calls one thence; to the brothel-house, and calls another thence. And if yet you insist upon the purpose of man, as an inducement to the call of God, pray tell me, What was Saul’s purpose, when God met with him in the way to Damascus? Had he any other purpose than to persecute the disciples of the Lord?—Enough of that.

QUESTION V: *By what means are we called?*

ANSWER. *Sometimes without means.*—As in persons not capable of the use of them. There is highest caution amongst the people of God to avoid that sin—nay, the very appearance—of limiting the Holy One of Israel.

*Sometimes by contrary means.*—The greatness of a sin being ordered by God to set on the conversion of a sinner: as when a man is wounded with the sting, and healed with the flesh, of a scorpion; or as when we make treacle of a viper, a most poisonous creature, to expel poison.

*Sometimes by very unlikely means.*—As when by *some great affliction* we are brought home to God, which in its own nature, one would think, should drive

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<sup>4</sup> Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Theodoret.

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us farther from God; as there is no question but it doth the reprobates, who are ready to tell all the world what king William Rufus told the bishop, if the partial monk doe not belie him: “God shall never make me good by the evil I suffer from him.”<sup>5</sup> Or, which is yet more unlikely, when we are brought home by prosperity; God overcoming our evil with his good; heaping, as it were, coals of fire upon our heads, and so melting us into kindly contrition. Gerson, in a sermon of his,<sup>6</sup> tells us of a most wicked priest, that, when he was preferred to a bishopric, became exemplarily holy; but such a convert is *rara avis*, “seldom to be found.”

*Always this work is carried on by weak means.*—Thus, I have heard it credibly reported, that a sentence, written in a window, and accidentally read by an inveterate sinner, pierced his heart, and let out the corruption thence. The sentence was that of Austin: “He that hath promised pardon to the penitent, hath not promised repentance to the presumptuous, sinner.” Thus Austin was converted with a *Tolle, lege*: “Take up the book, and read.” The book was the New Testament; the place he opened was the Epistle to the Romans, where he first cast his eye upon the thirteenth chapter; the words, these: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.” (Verse 13.) This struck him home.

*But the most ordinary means of our effectual calling is the preaching of the word.*—Which, though the world account [it] “foolishness,” is “the power of God” unto salvation. (1 Cor. 1:18.) And though by other means men *may be* called, yet seldom or never any *are* called that neglect and contemn this. God delights to honour his own ordinances, and to credit and encourage his ministers: and because he is pleased to make use of the word they preach as seed, therefore it is his will and pleasure that his people should own and reverence them as their fathers: “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” (1 Cor. 4:15.) And therefore I am confident, they can have no good evidences of their Christian calling, that secretly despise, openly revile, secretly undermine, openly oppose, the ministerial calling.<sup>7</sup> Christ will not own *them* as his children, who refuse to honour his ministers as their fathers. “He that despiseth you despiseth me.” (Luke 10:16.)

So much for answer to the fifth question.

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<sup>5</sup> *Deus bonum habebit pro malo quod mihi intulerit.*--Edmerus in *Historia*.

<sup>6</sup> *Serm. 2 De Spiritu Sancto, tom. iv.*

<sup>7</sup> *An esse sibi cum Christo videtur, qui adversus sacerdotes Christi facit?*--Cyprianus *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, sect. 15. Edit. Goulart. "Can he suppose himself to be on Christ's side, who acts in opposition to the ministers of Christ?"--Edit.

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QUESTION VI. *What is the end of this call?*

ANSWER. What but that which is the end of all things,—the glory of God? what but that which should be the end that all men should aim at,—the salvation of their souls? Here we may see the glory of God’s free grace and mercy; the immutability of his purposes; the holiness of his nature, in that he makes us fit for communion with himself, before he admits us to it; (Col. 1:12;) the wisdom of his counsels; and, last of all, the exceeding greatness of his power. For though the effectual calling of a soul be no miracle, yet there is as much power manifested in it as in any miracle that Christ wrought; yea, as in all the miracles which he wrought, if they be put together. For here the blind eyes and deaf ears are opened, the withered hands and lame legs are restored, the bloody issue stanchd, the leper cleansed, legions of devils cast out, the dead soul raised to walk before God in the land of the living: in a word, the water is turned into wine,—the water of contrition into the wine of sweetest spiritual consolation.

QUESTION VII. *When is the time that God calls?*

ANSWER. As the persons are chosen, so the time is appointed called therefore “the acceptable year of the Lord,” “the accepted time,” “the day of visitation,” “the day of salvation.” What hour of the day God will please to call any person in, is to us uncertain. This only is certain,—that we must be called within the compass of this present life, or else we shall never be called. There is no preaching to souls in the prison of hell, no constituting of churches there. If the Spirit of God be not our purgatory fire here, in vain shall we look for any other hereafter. Thus briefly of the seventh question.

QUESTION VIII. *What are the properties of this call?*

ANSWER 1. It is a *holy* calling. (2 Tim. 1:9.)—Holy is the Author of it, holy are the means of it, holy are the ends of it, holy are the subjects of it. God is the Author, the word is the means, holiness itself the end, none but holy men the subjects.

I cannot but wonder at the impudence of profane men, that they should call themselves “Christians,” that they should call God “Father,” that they should call Christ “Saviour.” If they be Christians, where is the savour of those precious ointments, those special graces, that run down from the Head unto all his members, and give the only just reason why we should be denominated “Christians?”

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I wonder the mere civil person can sleep so securely with his short covering. He boasts of a *righteousness*, and is a mere stranger to *holiness*: he separates those things which God hath perfectly and inseparably united. Holiness and righteousness God hath so knit and coupled together, that he reckons no service performed to him where either of these is wanting: “To serve him in holiness and righteousness.” (Luke 1:74, 75.) It is a part of our righteousness to be holy in our converse with God: it is a part of our holiness to be righteous in our converse with men. Therefore I shall add the deceitful hypocrite unto the deceived equalist; the one drawing as near to God with his external righteousness, as the other doth with his pretended holiness: both stand at a distance from him; he “beholds them afar off;” and though he hath “called them to be saints.” (1 Cor. 1:2,) yet they are not saints by an *effectual* calling.

2. It is a *high and heavenly* calling. (Phil. 3:14; Heb. 3:1.)—A learned critic supposeth that the apostle, in bestowing this epithet, “high,” upon our calling, alludeth unto the Olympic Games; an allusion which, indeed, he much delighteth in throughout all his epistles. There the master or ruler of the game, who was also the keeper and bestower of the prize, (βραζευτης,) stood upon the higher ground, [and] called to those that were engaged to that noble exercise to begin the race. Proportionably unto this, Christians having a “race set before” them, which they must “run with patience,” at the call of their great Director, (Heb. 12:1,) who utters his voice from heaven unto their hearts, they first start: so that the calling is high, because *we are called from on high*.

But this is not all: for, beside that, *it is a high way*, though it be no common way, *that we are called to run in*.—All the exercises and employments that a Christian is called to, they are exceeding high; such as are the service of God, the mortification of lusts, the fighting against principalities and powers of darkness, the trampling upon all the gilded, glistening vanities of this world. Such are the denial of a man’s self, the taking up the cross daily, the following of Christ, and the showing forth all *his* virtues, *that* hath called us. Such are warm devotions, spiritual meditations, fervent supplications, holy breathings and aspirings after communion with the ever-blessed God, in a conscientious use of his ordinances. All these are employments too high for those that are skilled in nothing else but Satan’s and the world’s drudgery; too high for any but those that are endued with grace and power from on high to perform them.

Yet farther: this calling is high, not only in regard of the Director and the race, but *in regard of the prize, as [to] the reward that we shall receive from the righteous Judge*.—What is “the end of our faith,” but, the salvation of our souls? “(1 Peter 1:9.) When we come to the goal, here we find no tripods, shields, or

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caps; but crowns; and no ordinary crowns, but glorious ones; no fading crowns, but everlasting ones. Who would not, with the apostle, but “press toward the mark?”

Lastly. That we may have greater comfort and assurance that we shall not “wax weary and faint” in our course, and consequently not miss of those glorious rewards; *there is no calling that hath so high and heavenly assistances as this hath.*—God, that calls to the race, engages his power to carry us through it: the Son of God intercedes for us: the Spirit of God is ready to comfort us. The angels of God have the charge of us, to keep us, so that we shall not dash our feet against a stone. “The spirits of just men made perfect,”—though they be not acquainted with our particular wants, yet in general they tender our conditions, and help us by their prayers. All the people of God are constant solicitors for us at the throne of grace; beside those helps [which] they afford us by their watching over us, by their counsels, instructions, admonitions, rebukes, examples; the cheerfulness and alacrity of some in the ways of God having a great and happy tendency to prevent the weariness and discouragements of others. Thus it is a “high calling.”

3. It is a call *without a sound.*—Or, if it have any, it is heard by none but them to whom it is directed. A good divine calls it “an invisible call.”<sup>8</sup> *Occultis itineribus sapor nobis vitalis infunditur*, as Ennodius speaks: “By hidden paths and passages the vital savour is infused into us.” The seed grows up we know not how. (Mark 4:27.) The Spirit secretly winds himself into the soul. Christ comes into our hearts, as he did into the house where his disciples were met, “the doors being shut.” (John 20:26.) Thus it is ordinarily; though I will not deny but that sometimes it may be otherwise. The Spirit may come with a “mighty rushing,” (Acts 2:2,) and Christ with holy violence break open the doors of our hearts. Saul could well tell the time and other circumstances of his conversion: but it is likely, the holy Baptist could not; in whom, the father saith, there was a Spirit of grace as soon as a spirit of life.<sup>9</sup> The corruptions of some will out, as it were, by insensible breathings: but so obstinate and inveterate are the spiritual distempers of others, that they must have strong vomits, violent purges; and all little enough to clear them. For a man of a good nature, (as they call it,) liberal education, much restraining grace, to take and give notice punctually when his state is changed, is very difficult: whereas this is no hard matter for a gross and scandalous piece of debauchery, becoming afterwards an example of piety. We must not expect the

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<sup>8</sup> *Vocatio invisibilis.*--Altingius.

<sup>9</sup> *Divina gratia adhuc in utero matris impletus.*--Cyprianus in *Epistola ad Jubaianum*. "Filled with divine grace, even while yet in his mother's womb." Edit.

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same account from Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of our Lord in point of conversion: yet they both rejoiced in Christ as their Saviour.

This I have the rather spoken, that I might enter a *caveat* against those rigid and severe triers of men's spiritual estates, whom (as I have heard) nothing will satisfy but the precise time of conversion. I acknowledge these men great artists and good workmen; but it is in framing new racks for men's consciences, since the old Popish ones are broken. I make no question but a weak Christian's soul may be as sadly strained to give an account of his graces, as it would have been to give an account of his sins, had he lived in the days of auricular confession. Beware, my friends, of the devil's sophistry.

4. And lastly. It is an *immutable* call.—Immutable as God himself as his electing love, the living fountain from whence it springs. Not as the world loves, doth God love. They love to-day, and hate to-morrow; wearing their friends like flowers, which we may behold in their bosoms whilst they are fresh and sweet, but soon they wither, and soon they are laid aside. Whereas the love of God to his people is everlasting, and he wears them as a signet upon his right hand, which he will never part with. Not as the world gives, doth God give. Men give liberally, and repent suddenly; but “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” (Rom. 11:29.)

So much for the properties of this call; and so much for the opening of the point. Shall I speak a word or two of APPLICATION?

#### APPLICATION

Beloved in the Lord, I have answered you many questions: I beseech you, answer me a few. “Me,” said I? Nay, answer them to God and your own consciences.

1. *Are you of the number of the called?*—Called by the gospel I know you are; but that may be your misery. Are you “called according to the purpose?” That only can be your happiness. Is your calling inward and effectual? “We hope it is.” Why? “We have some convictions, some inclinations to good.” So had Herod, so had Agrippa; so may a reprobate [have] by the common work of the Spirit. I would be loath [that] you should be but almost Christians, lest you be but almost saved. Tell me, then, Is the whole frame of your hearts altered? Is sin odious? Is Christ precious? Doth the price of heavenly commodities rise in your hearts, and the price of earthly trumpery fall? Do you love God and his Son Jesus Christ in

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sincerity? Then I can assure you,—not in the word of a mortal man, which is as good as nothing; but in the word of God that cannot lie, even in the words of my text,—you are “called according to his purpose.”

2. *If you be effectually called*, why do you not answer that call, in receiving Christ in all his offices, in obeying Christ in all his commands, in meeting Christ in all his ordinances? Why do you not “give all diligence to make your calling and election sure?” (2 Peter 1:10.) Shall the “children of this world” still be wiser in their generation than the “children of light?” They rest not till they have assured (as they suppose) their earthly tenements: why do not we bestir ourselves as much to assure a heavenly inheritance?

Why are you not more thankful for this grace? Why are you not more joyful in it? How did the wise men of the East rejoice, when they found Christ horn in Bethlehem! Is it not matter of greater joy to find Christ born in your hearts? Tell me, Is it nothing to have your names written in the book of life? to have God for your Father, Christ for your Husband and Brother, the Spirit of Christ for your Comforter, the angels for your servitors, all the creatures at your beck? These are the noble privileges of those that are “called according to the purpose of God.” How can they but rejoice in them, and “sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever?” (Psalm 89:1.)

Why are you not more careful to “walk worthy of” this grace? (Eph. 4:1.) There is a decorum, a seemliness, that appertains to every calling. This made Scipio that he would not accept the offer of a harlot, because he was general of the army: and when Antigonus was invited to a place where there was none of the best company, he was well advised by one to remember [that] he was a king’s son. When you suffer yourselves to be drawn away by your lusts, to be ensnared by the world, to be captivated by the devil, you forget the decorum that should attend your Christian calling: remember, I beseech you,

(1.) That it is a *holy calling*.—And therefore be ye also holy in all manner of conversation.” (1 Peter 1:15.) Methinks, it should sound as harshly in our ears to hear of a wicked Christian as of a dark sun.

(2.) It is a *high calling*.—Do live high. Scorn baseness: blush to appear in your old rags; to be seen catering for your lusts as you used to do. Crown yourselves with the stars; clothe yourselves with the sun; tread the moon under your feet. Let the gospel be your crown; let Christ be your clothing; let the world be your footstool; let hidden manna be your constant diet. Keep open house to all comers: set your spiritual dainties before them; bid them feed heartily, and

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welcome: and, for discourse, tell them what great things God hath done for your souls. (Psalm 66:16.)

(3.) It is a *heavenly call*.—Let your “conversation be in heaven” (Phil. 3:20): you have a good Correspondent there. Maintain a constant trade and traffic thither: expect returns thence. “Lay up your treasure” there, “where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.” (Matt. 6:20.) Be always preparing for your passage thither.

(4.) It is an *immutable call*.—Do not droop and hang your heads for the changes and mutations [which] there are in the world. “The foundation of God standeth sure,” (though the foundation of states be overturned, overturned, overturned,) “having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his,” (2 Tim. 2:19,) and will cause “all things to work together for their good.”

3. But what, if now there be many amongst you that are *not effectually called*?—In the third and last place I address myself to them:—

Men and brethren, if you have any sense of the excellency of your immortal souls; any love to them, suitable to that excellency; any care and solicitousness, suitable to that love; do not “resist the Holy Ghost.” Make the best use you can of the means of grace. “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” (Heb. 3:15.) If he now knock at the door of your hearts, and you will not open, you know not how soon you may come to knock at the door of his house, and he will not open.

It is reported that Thales, one of the Grecian sages, being urged by his mother to marry, told her at first [that] it was too soon; and afterward, when she urged him again, he told her [that] it was too late. Effectual vocation is our espousal unto Christ: all the time of our life God is urging this match upon our souls; his ministers are still wooing for Christ. If now we say, “It is too soon,” for aught we know, the very next moment our sun may set; and then God will say, “It is too late.” They that are not contracted to Christ on earth, shall never be married to him in heaven.

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