

Sermon 6: Irresistible Grace

OUTLINE

Why God calls

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine with me a set of twins, they have both grown up in a good home where parents have loved them, they have both grown up with Christian parents who have instructed them in God's word and taken them to church every Sunday. They are of equal sporting ability and both of average intelligence. However, when the Gospel is preached to them, one of them believes and the other does not, why? What has caused these two brothers to differ? The typical answers to this question would be, 'it was their upbringing', but they have both come from good homes. 'It was their personality types,' but there are believers amongst all the categories of personality types. 'One was cleverer than the other,' one might want to say, but there are very clever people who believe and people of simpler minds who believe as well. 'One was better than the other and obeyed the call to repent,' or; 'God looked into the future and saw that one would choose Him and the other wouldn't.' All of these explanation try to root the cause in nature, nurture or human will, but we will see that the Bible teaches that the only reason why someone believes is because God enables their faith and repentance.

Today in our message we will be looking at an important word in the central verses of Romans 8:28-30, the word 'called'. We are choosing to look at the doctrine of irresistible grace through the lens of effectual calling. Once again we are faced with a name for a doctrine we would not choose. The grace of God can be resisted and is resisted every day of our lives until the day the Lord has appointed that we should believe, so the name irresistible grace is misleading. Acts 13:48, 'And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.' It is the nature of sin to resist God's grace, truth, holiness and love. What is meant by this teaching is that God has appointed a day to save His elect, and on that day, by the means of the Spirit and the Word, they will be saved. The plan that God began in eternity, made provision for by the work of Christ will now be applied by the power of the Spirit. The Trinity works with one mind, what the Father plans, the Son executes and the Spirit applies.

Paul has been assuring the Romans by showing us the eternal scope of God's love how in eternity past He set His love upon us, and will now do all that is necessary to ensure that we will finally be glorified. Paul has spoken of the unbreakable chain of redemption with its 5 links. We have looked at God's plan from eternity, now we need to consider the beginning of our salvation in time when God moves to save us. Paul points to this alpha point of our salvation in time in the word 'called.' We are wanting to see how Paul explains how God brings His plan to glorify us to pass through calling us. God is the main subject of these verses, He is the one who plans and executes His plan. We are pointed away from self to God for assurance, to the fact that God foreknows, God predestines, God calls, God justifies and God glorifies. As we look at this teaching that God is the author of our salvation by calling us we will think on two points, why God has to be the caller, and how God calls.

Why God calls

As we begin let me just say a few words about the order of verse 30. There are those who have a prejudice against systematic theology and against the doctrine of sovereign election in particular who will look at v30 and claim that we are forcing a chronology upon it, and that Paul has no intention of giving us an order of our salvation. However, this is biased reading of Paul. He is an incredibly logical thinker and even a cursory examination of his writings reveals that he writes from a theology. Even as we look at this verse we can clearly see that Paul intends a chronological order. Can glorification precede justification? No, it can't! Can justification precede predestination? No, unless you are wanting to believe the antinomian and hyper-Calvinistic teaching eternal justification. Can we be justified before we are called? No, once again this would be a ludicrous denial of time. We must insist that the 5 links in the unbreakable chain of redemption are intended as an orderly accounting of how God works out our salvation.

That said let us focus on the central issue. In these verses we see that God is the one who calls, why is God said to be the caller, and why must He be the one who calls? In order to fully appreciate the reason why God is the one who calls, we need to see the state of our deadness in sin and our inability to come to Christ apart from the Father's enabling.

The Bible reveals to us that man is not a natural seeker of God, 'no one seeks God no not one.' He by nature takes the truth of God and suppresses it. Suppression of the truth of God can take many forms ranging from the religious to the irreligious. It can take the form of teaching it without believing it like the Pharisees. Twisting it to suite our own ideas like many cults. Or we can replace it for a form of idolatry or atheism. This is the universal tendency of the human heart, even when it comes to the Gospel. While Paul is speaking to the Corinthians about the cultured despisers of the Gospel, he reminds these Corinthians who are feeling a bit intimidated because they are being accused of intellectual suicide, that the gospel is folly to the those who do not have the Spirit, 1 Cor. 1:18, 'For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.' Later on he compares those who have the Spirit and those who do not saying about the unbeliever, 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.' In order for one to see the truth of the Gospel the Spirit is necessary to open the heart as God did with Lydia, Acts 16:14, 'One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. *The Lord opened her heart* to pay attention to what was said by Paul.' This natural inability on man's part is further discussed in Romans 8:7, 'For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.' Here Paul shows our default hostility which manifests itself in an unwillingness to submit to God's law, and Paul reveals more showing that we will not because we cannot submit to it. Jesus agreed with man's natural inability to believe when He said, John 6:44, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.'

So coming back to the twins we started with. If both were dead in trespasses and sins, how is it possible that one believed and not the other? Was it because the one was more religious, more moral, more intellectual, or happened to have the breakfast of champions that gave him the right amount of concentration? No, none can come to faith in Christ unless God draws them to faith in Christ. Can you see now why it says that God called us? Now I can hear many people say that this denies the teaching of man's free will. Lets say a few words about this.

Many have got the wrong conception that if God calls us, and this is the way in which we are saved that God drags people kicking and screaming into heaven. That God violates our wills, and forcing us to do something that we did not want to do. This however is far from the truth, God never violates the will of His creatures. This is how it works. Let me begin with a well known illustration, the illustration of the lion and the donkey. You have two cages, a lion and a donkey in them. You put hay in with the lion and a big steak in with the donkey, will they eat or starve to death? Is there anyone in the cage preventing them from eating? No! They freely choose not to eat and die, they are not coerced to not eat, it flows freely from the fact that they by nature are lions and donkeys. Likewise when a sinner rejects the gospel, it is like the donkey refusing to eat the meat. God does not force a seeker to reject the gospel, for man is not naturally a seeker but he is naturally one who is hostile to God and a suppressor of the truth. He cannot hate sin and love God and forsake all his pride in clinging to Christ alone for righteousness.

How then, without violating the wills of the lion and the donkey can we get them to eat the food they need in order to survive? We would need to change the herbivorous nature of the donkey into a carnivorous one, and the carnivorous one of the lion into a herbivorous one. If we could change their natures we would not need to force feed them but then they would run to the food and eat their fill again and again. This is how God draws us to Christ. According to the promise of Ezek. 36:26 God will give us a heart of flesh in the place of a heart of stone. This heart is not a heart that hates God but a heart that has the law written upon it and desires to walk in God's ways. This heart freely takes Christ as saviour and gladly casts off sin. God does not have to force feed us Christ nor wrench our sins from us for we run to Christ and throw off our sins in repentance.

This is not a new teaching, here is chapter 10 paragraphs 1-2 of the 1689:

'1. In God's appointed and acceptable time, he is pleased to call effectually,¹ by his Word and Spirit, those he has predestined to life. He calls them out of their natural state of sin and death to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ.² He enlightens their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God.³ He takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh.⁴ He renews their wills and by his almighty power turns them to good and effectually draws them to Jesus Christ.⁵ Yet he does all this in such a way that they come completely freely, since they are made willing by his grace.⁶

1Romans 8:30; Romans 11:7; Ephesians 1:10, 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14. 2Ephesians 2:1-6. 3Acts 26:18; Ephesians 1:17, 18. 4Ezekiel 36:26. 5Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:27; Ephesians 1:19. 6Psalm 110:3; Song of Solomon 1:4.

2. This effectual call flows from God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in those called. Neither does the call arise from any power or action on their part;⁷ they are totally passive in it. They are dead in sins and trespasses until they are made alive and renewed by the Holy Spirit.⁸ By this they are enabled to answer this call and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it. This response is enabled by a power that is no less than that which raised Christ from the dead.⁹

⁷2 Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 2:8. ⁸1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:5; John 5:25. ⁹Ephesians 1:19, 20.'

What we are saying is that regeneration, that is resurrection from the dead, precedes faith to enable faith. The order is not faith unto regeneration as if regeneration were a reward or gift to faith. We cannot believe apart from God's enabling, and this enabling includes regeneration so that we will then act in accordance with our new natures and freely

embrace Christ for justification. Now we can see that God calls us without violating our wills but by enabling them to love something new. We all act in accordance with our natures and until the nature that is dead in trespasses and sins, and is constantly subject as a puppet to sin is renewed we cannot turn from it to Christ. Let us establish this teaching from two portions of Scripture.

Ephesians 2:1-10: Verses 1-3 give us the truth of our condition in sin. Notice the fact that we are dead, like zombies. How does this death manifest itself? It is manifested in our being enslaved to the will of the devil as he tempts us, and he does this through our passions and desires. I always think of us as a donkey with the devil on our backs turning us to his will by putting a carrot on a stick in front of us. We were by nature children who provoked God's wrath.

Verse 4: if we had been left in this situation we would have been judged but the good news break into our captivity and darkness and we see the words 'But God' and on account of mercy not our deserving it and His free love not our wrangling it out of Him He acted to save.

Verses 5-7: Notice that God's action of saving begins with a resurrection from the dead, a participation in the resurrection of Christ as we are united to Him, mystically joined to Him and seated with Him in the heavens. This monergistic act of God where He breathes life into a corpse is how our salvation began. We were not donkeys looking for truth but for sin and then God came and resurrected us and gave us new hearts.

Verse 8-9: Here we see that God's work resulted in faith. A faith that freely flowed from a renewed heart. This was a work of grace we did not deserve it for our searching, the whole thing was a gift not a work on our part. God is the one who is get the glory not us. So if we consider the twins we began with we have to say that any answer we give must remember that God must get all the credit for the salvation, that it has to be consistent with the notions of grace, that is undeserved and not a wage, and a gift, in other words free not earned,

Verse 10: Here we see that we recreated to good works, sanctification is the goal of our salvation.

Some have sought to paint a picture of man as drowning and bobbing in the ocean, swallowing water and nearly dead. But then God throws in a life ring and all I have to do is something that lies within my ability is just take the life ring by faith. This picture does not portray our deadness, instead some have responded that we were dead at the bottom of the sea and God swam to the bottom, pulled me onto the beach and breathed new life into me by a miracle. When it says God called us it is describing this resurrection event.

John 3:1-8: Here Jesus is discussing salvation with a Pharisee. It is obvious from the first few verses that Nicodemus does not know who He is dealing with. He does not see Christ as the Messiah but merely as a teacher from God who can do signs. Jesus interrupts whatever he was going to say because He can see that Nicodemus does not yet have the Spirit for His cannot recognise the Saviour. In verse 3 Jesus reveals that the only way anyone can have the scales lifted from their eyes that they might recognise that the Kingdom of God is present in the person of King Jesus is if they are first born again, 'Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The word 'see' meaning recognise or perceive. Nicodemus confirms his ignorance by getting bogged down in the picture of birth, perhaps a little offended that Jesus would imply that he as a teacher and Pharisee is somehow lacking. Once again Jesus repeats Himself, this time stressing that entrance into the kingdom, that is becoming a follower of the King is dependent upon first being born again, v5, 'Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom

of God.' Verse 6 is a very important verse because it reminds us that we do not have the power in our fallenness to bring about the spiritual birth so that we can see and enter God's kingdom, 'flesh gives birth to flesh.' Instead we need God to interfere and sovereignly move upon us helping us to do that which we cannot do for ourselves. When we are born again it is not an act of cooperation whereby we and God give birth. It did not happen that way in your physical birth and it does not happen in your new birth either. Verse 8 confirms the necessity of the new birth before entering and verse 8 confirms that God is the one who is free to decide who will and when.

God not the twin gave the new birth and enabled faith.

How God calls

How does God call people to Himself? How does God resurrect the dead? Firstly, we need to emphasize that God calls people to Himself through the means of the preached word. In other words, the Spirit uses the Word as its vessel, its sword, its means of saving us. There are various verses which indicate this. James 1:18, 'Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.' Here we can see that birth is by the Word. 2 Thess. 2:13-14, 'But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Here we see that the Thessalonians were called savingly by the Gospel that the apostles had preached. Paul alludes to the Gospel message as the birth canal of God in Romans 10:17, 'So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.' Just as God spoke light into the darkness at creation, the new birth makes of us a new creation, Paul describes our new birth in the terms of God speaking us into creation by His word, that through Paul's ministry God spoke to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 4:6, 'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' 1 Peter 1:23, 'since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.' The Word is the sword of the Spirit, it is seed for the sower. As Martin Luther put it, the ear is the organ of new birth.

Now it must be stressed that not everyone who hears the Gospel is born again. We need to distinguish the external call of the Gospel and the evangelists voice, to the internal call of the Gospel and God's voice. Sitting here today you all hear my voice, sitting here today you all hear the words that you are sinners and Christ alone can be your saviour. However, God also works in the hearts of His sheep, they hear His voice and answer His summons. You will be familiar with this distinction from the verse, Matt. 22:14, 'For many are called, but few are chosen.' All in the room will hear the external call of the Gospel, but only God's sheep will hear and respond.

We must also make the point that God's call is an effective call. If I invite you to a birthday party that invitation does not guarantee that you will all be there. However, if I were a judge and I sent you a subpoena by the hand of two officers of the court to hand deliver and to pick you up and bring you to the court, that summons is effective. The bible tells us that God's call is not merely an open invitation but that God's power accompanies the word spoken. When Jesus stood at Lazarus' grave and called Him forth Jesus words had power, they gave the ability to do what He commanded Lazarus to do. And when the gospel is preached God enables all those who are His to come. Listen to how Jesus puts it in John 10:14-16, 'I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I

have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.' The sheep will hear God's voice and respond. And if this were not enough Jesus tells them also in v8 that the sheep recognise only the shepherds voice and do not follow the thieves and robbers saying, 'the sheep did not listen to them.'

This brings us back to where we started, Romans 8:30, 'And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.' We are thinking about the certainty of glorification, this certainty is reached by God ensuring that all the interim steps are taken as well, namely, calling. Paul believes in a call that secures God's will. It is a powerful word that brings us into fellowship with His Son, 1 Cor. 1:9, 'God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.' Peter speaks about the calling by God's divine power, 2 pet. 1:3, 'His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.' Even in Revelation we see Christians named as the called, chosen and faithful, all names of certainty, 17:14, 'They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.'" Jude :1, 'Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.' And so we are called to hope because of the certainty, Eph. 1:18, 'having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.' Romans 9:24, 'even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?' Here Paul is referring to those whom God has saved. Saved or called, these notions are used interchangeably.

How do we apply this? Here then is one of the most encouraging, have you ever felt insufficient to preach the gospel? If you are shy, or uneducated, or don't have great answers, or aren't cool enough to click with younger people. Have you ever despaired of a drug addict, criminal, cannibal, JW, Muslim, etc. ever believing? Those in days gone by believed that it is because God calls His people effectively that we can have confidence that the Gospel will have results. Whitfield believed that not believing in the effectiveness of God's call was a hindrance to evangelism for we would then look to ourselves and not God to save. Imagine someone else's salvation depending on your ability to be persuasive. Think how terrible a burden it would be to think that someone's soul depends on how well you present the gospel. Good news, God saves people through broken jars of clay. He uses us as weak as we are as messengers and He provides the power to change hearts and produce faith. He by His Spirit brings conviction and convinces the unbeliever of their need for Christ. All that we have to do is be faithful in proclaiming the true gospel and God does the rest. We do not have to resort to manipulation, we don't need to rest on man-made techniques like altar calls, we don't need to change the message to make it more palatable because God provides the power to save.

Some have worried that a message about God's powerful would hinder some from coming because they would become self-absorbed wondering if they were being called, for they did not feel like one of God's elect. If this is your concern let me say this to you. The bible does not ask you to feel whether you are one of God's elect; it does not ask you to try and discern whether God's invisible call is active in your soul. The Bible calls you to feel yourself a sinner and see in Christ your only hope for salvation. It then gives you these promises. If you come to Christ He will not reject you, if you believe upon Him you will receive eternal life, if you confess your sins He is faithful and just and will forgive you your sins. This is all you need to know, not your election, not whether God's effective call is working, but that

you are a sinner who can come to Christ to be fully and freely forgiven. If you do come and have come then know that God caused it.