

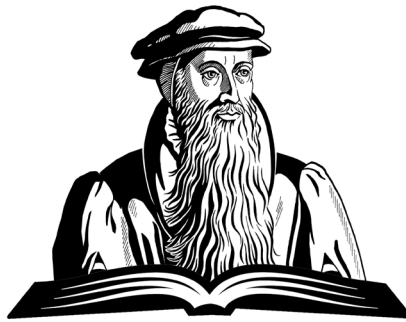
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

The Application of Redemption

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture 3

Effectual Calling



**The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education**

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

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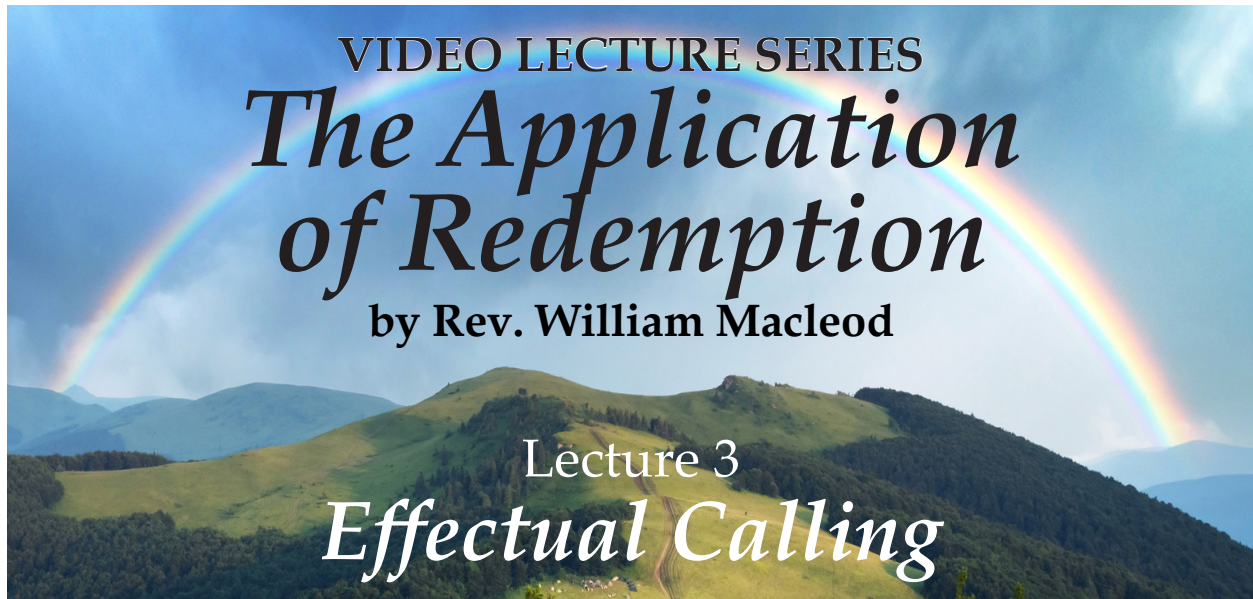
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

The Application of Redemption

by Rev. William Macleod

12 Lectures

1. The Order of Salvation
2. Total Depravity
3. Effectual Calling
4. Regeneration
5. Repentance
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10. Union with Christ
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We come today to our third lecture, and our subject is *Effectual Calling*. The saving work of God in the soul of man begins with the Effectual Calling. Reference is made to this call in the words of the famous promise of Romans 8:28. Too often, only the first part of this verse is quoted: “All things work together for good.” The promise is taken as if it refers to everyone; that is a mistake. There is no promise at all in the Scripture for unbelievers, but rather the wrath and curse of God will surely come upon them unless they repent. For whom then do all things work together for good? It is clearly stated in the rest of the verse: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” It is for those, and only those, who love God, and no one loves God but “those who are the called according to his purpose.” Three truths are stated concerning these happy people. Firstly, God has a purpose for them. They are the elect of God. Secondly, they are called in time, that is, effectually called. This calling flows from the purpose or plan. Thirdly, they love God. This is the evidence of the transformation effected by the effectual call, and indeed is the only proof of their election.

Usually theologians refer to two calls: a general call, and an effectual call. The general call is the gospel call. It is found in words such as those in Proverbs: “Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart” (Proverbs 8, verses 4 and 5). Isaiah utters that general call, when he says, “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55, verse 1). It is a call to repent and believe the gospel, and it is addressed to everyone in the world. The disciples were sent out with this call, and so are ministers, evangelists, and missionaries today. “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5, verse 20). It is a call from God; it calls for sinners to repent and believe the gospel; and it is a sincere call from the Lord. It is addressed to all, and everyone who responds by believing in Christ will be saved. Our Lord Jesus is recorded as saying, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22, verse 14). Thousands and millions are called with the gospel call, but sadly, relatively few respond. Those who do respond show by their response that they are the

chosen ones and belong to the elect. Only the elect will obey the call. This verse actually is the only one in the New Testament where the word “call” is used for the general gospel invitation. In every other reference, the term “call” refers, in the New Testament, to the effectual call. The word “effectual” is not used in the Scriptures to define the call, but it is implied. Effectual call is the all-powerful call of God that is effective and must be answered in submission and obedience. It is the same call as the general call, but comes with irresistible power. The elect can hear the general call for years, but at a special point in time, it is made effectual to them.

So thinking, then, of the *Characteristics of the Effectual Call. The one who calls*. Scripture speaks specifically of the Father as the author of the call. This is plain in Romans 8, for it is stated, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8, verses 29 to 30). The one who predestinated us to be conformed to his Son can only be the Father. And then he is also said to call us. Another verse states, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1, verse 9). There is, however, another passage which speaks of the call as being uttered by the Son. Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5, verses 25 and 26). The dead who hear the voice of the Son of God are the spiritually dead, and they are spiritually resurrected by it.

Interestingly, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Shorter Catechism* speak of the call as a work of the Holy Spirit. The Westminster fathers defined effectual calling more broadly, so as to include conviction of sin, regeneration, and conversion. They used the term for the application of redemption to the soul. The Father plans redemption, the Son accomplishes it on the cross, and the Spirit applies it. Yet, we must not think of the Father as distant and uninvolved. He specifically calls, and he does so through his Son who is the Word of God and the revealer of his Father. The Son speaks forth the call from heaven, and the Spirit—the Holy Spirit—accompanies that call and applies it to the heart of the elect sinner when the Lord’s appointed time has come. God works on the soul through his Spirit.

Although the general call of the gospel is addressed to all, only those who are elected are effectually called. They are “the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8, verse 28); “Them he did foreknow, he also did predestinate” (verse 29). Everything starts with God’s loving certain people before time began. “To know,” as we said in an earlier lecture, is used here intransitively, that is, without an object—always in the Scriptures, “to know,” in this sense, means “to love.” He chose them in love. “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1, verse 2). “He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1, verse 4). Those whom he loved in eternity, he always loved, because eternity does not have a beginning. God’s love is like himself—infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Them, he purposed or planned to save. Eventually, God’s time came, and they were powerfully called by the Spirit.

Redemption and the Call. Those whom God fore-loved, he gave to his Son. In his great high-priestly prayer, Christ, on the night before his crucifixion makes constant reference to this. He says, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me” (John 17, verse 9). A certain number were given to Christ to redeem them. Earlier, he said, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10, verse 11). He died for his sheep, making atonement for their sins on the cross. Christ offered himself for the elect and only

for them. Scripture makes reference to “the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20, verse 28). The church is distinguished from the world by the fact that Christ died specifically for them, and not the rest of mankind. All for whom Christ died will be effectually called, and only them.

Thinking next of *the Condition of Those Called*. At the point which men and women are effectually called, they are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2, verse 1). Being dead, they are totally unable to respond to the call of the gospel, or indeed, even to hear it. They are totally depraved, and suffering from total inability. They are dead and cannot hear, blind and cannot see, paralyzed and cannot take a step. They have hearts of stone which need to be replaced before they can receive the love of God and the Lord Jesus Christ himself. It is only after the new birth takes place that you can “shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2, verse 9). We had no hand in this call. It is all of God, and all of grace. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain” (John 15, verse 16).

We Are Called Through the Word. God works our salvation through the message of the Bible being communicated to us. The Word must be preached to us, or read to us, or told to us before we can be saved. Unless the gospel is communicated to us in some way, either in books, or tracts, or remembered by us from what we’ve heard many years before, we will not be called. Elect infants who die in infancy, or those with severe learning difficulties are, of course, exceptions to the rule, as they are unable intellectually to receive the Word. This truth that we are called through the Word is made clear by the Apostle, when he wrote, “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Corinthians 1, verse 21). In another place, Paul stated, “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10, verses 14 and 15). He adds (verse 17), “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Thus, we must send out missionaries and evangelists. Every Christian has a duty to witness and to communicate the truth to others. God calls his people through his own Word.

The Spirit accompanies the Word. The Word in and of itself will make no impact—it must be accompanied by the regenerating, resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit. There is a wonderful Trinitarian involvement in our salvation. The Word comes from the Father, through the Son who is the Redeemer, and is applied by the Spirit. A preacher/theologian of my youth, the late Reverend John MacSween, used to say, “The Word is dead without the Spirit, and the Spirit is dumb without the Word.” Paul noted this special work of the Spirit when he preached in Thessalonica and asserted, “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1 Thessalonians 1, verses 4 to 6). The general call of the gospel becomes the effectual call when it is accompanied by the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit.

The Call is a Summons. The common or gospel call comes as a summons from heaven to repent and believe in Jesus Christ, the Savior. It comes with all the authority of heaven behind it. It is a sin to reject it, and every time you reject the call of the gospel, you sin again, and with increasing sin each time. When, however, it is accompanied by the almighty power of the Spirit of God, it must

be obeyed. A summons to an earthly court can, depending upon the power of the military or police, be resisted with difficulty. But this summons comes with irresistible force. We are persuaded and enabled to embrace Jesus Christ as Savior.

The Call is an Act. The call takes place in a moment. We could have heard the common gospel call many times, but now, on a certain day, at a specific moment, it becomes effectual and irresistible. For example, we are told of Lydia: “A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us” (Acts 16, verses 14 and 15). She had attended the meeting by the river’s bank outside the city many times, but at that day, at that minute, at that second, her heart was opened, and she was born again. The Westminster divines talk of effectual calling as a work, but that is, as is noted above, because they defined effectual calling more broadly, as conversion, rather than simply the call. The effectual call is an act, like regeneration, justification, and adoption. But it’s different from sanctification, which is a work which takes place over a period of time.

It is a High and Holy Calling. Effectual call is described by Paul as a high call: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3, verse 14). It is a call upwards, to live above fleshly values. Elsewhere, he refers to it as a holy call: “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace” (2 Timothy 1, verse 9). It is a call to be separated unto God, sanctified, and devoted to him.

It is Also a Heavenly Call. “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of profession, Christ Jesus” (Hebrews 3, verse 1). It is a heavenly call because of its origin—it’s a call from above; but especially because of the destiny to which we are called—we are called to heaven. It is a call upward, away from our low, sensual, earthly life, to a holy and heavenly life.

It is Followed Immediately by Regeneration. The order of salvation is electing love, predestination, calling, regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification. The moment effectual call is issued from heaven, the Holy Spirit enters the dead sinner, regenerating him and bringing him to life. His ears and eyes are opened spiritually; the heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh. The closed door of the heart is opened, and the sinner receives and embraces Jesus Christ who is freely offered in the gospel.

So then, a word of application—*Make Sure You Have Been Effectually Called.* Peter wrote, “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1, verse 10). He mentions calling before election. The only way you can know that you are the elect of God is by discerning your effectual call. A person knows that they have been effectually called because they have been converted. They have repented of their sins, and believed in Jesus as their Savior. And this is a matter too important to be taken for granted. ‘Tis not enough to say, “I hope I have been called.” Beware of being deceived. If you have not been effectually called, you are under the wrath and curse of God, and on the road that leads to hell. Any moment you can die, and once you have died, there is no second chance. In the condition in which you die, you will spend eternity. If you die rejecting the gospel call, you will spend eternity tormented in the lake of fire. Effectual calling, then, is the evidence that you have been elected from all eternity. If you are at home in a life of worldliness, carelessness, and unbelief, it’s obvious that you were never called.

You are effectually called, and by that, you show that you are one whom God loves. Effectual

calling proves that you are one of God's elect, whom he loved from all eternity, and one of those for whom Christ died, making atonement for their sins. So effectual calling then, is showing that you are special to God.

Rejoice in this effectual calling. Rejoice in God's infinite and eternal and unchangeable love for you. God really does care for you. All that is in your cup has been placed there by your Father who loves you, and "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Everything that happens is for your good. More than that, it works together, blending in a great unified pattern for your good.

Another application—*Walk as Those Who Are Called.* Paul, a prisoner, wrote to the Ephesian church: "I beseech you that you walk worthy of your vocation wherewith you are called" (Ephesians 4, verse 1). Live as one who has been called of God—one who has been effectually called. You are to be completely different from the world around you. You are a person with a vocation. Do not disgrace the one who called you.

Praise the One Who Called You. Peter encourages us to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2, verse 9). What a wonderful blessing we enjoy as those who have been effectually called! We have not simply been called as others with a general call, which would leave us without excuse, but with a powerful, effectual call of God, who, in this way, came by his Spirit into our lives. We are saved! Praise him now, and praise him forever!