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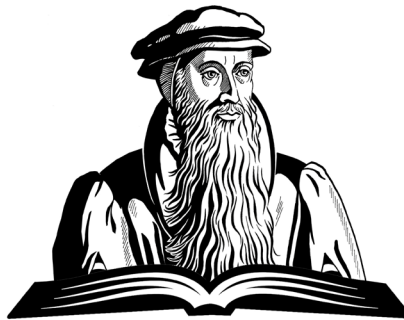
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #23

Effectual Calling

Catechism Questions 31 and 32



The John Knox Institute
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Lecture #23

Effectual Calling

Question 31: *What is effectual calling?*

Answer: *Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.*

Question 32: *What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?*

Answer: *They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.*

Our previous lesson introduced us to the Biblical truth of God's Spirit applying the saving work of Christ to sinners. In this lesson, we get to continue our study with the help of two other Questions from our Catechism. In these Questions, we focus on the important Biblical teaching of effectual calling. This truth also introduces us to the beautiful display of grace in all the blessings of salvation that come to us through Christ. It prepares us to deal with the glorious truths of justification, of adoption, and sanctification, all of which are following in the coming lessons. Today we look at Questions #31 and #32 from the *Shorter Catechism*. So we'll consider these Questions now and make sure that we understand a few key terms, before we go into the main part of our lesson.

Question #31 asks, "What is effectual calling?" The Answer, "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel." The second Question for our lesson is Question #32. This Question asks, "What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?" The Answer, "They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them."

Well, several of these words have already been discussed in previous lessons. One key word that appears here is the word "effectual" and, as an adverb, "effectually." Remember that this word

means that something takes effect—that is, it works—it accomplishes its purpose. If we we're thirsty, we'd drink water, and this is because water effectually satisfies our thirst.

Another word to notice in the answer to Question #31 is the word “persuade.” To persuade someone is to convince them of your argument, your position, or your point. Your argument may be very true, and right, and good, and sound, but it may not persuade the person. It only persuades the person when they come to embrace your argument. Well, here it's the Spirit that persuades sinners to embrace Jesus Christ.

And a related word is “enable.” This word means to provide someone the ability to do something. For instance, I may persuade someone that he should learn to read, however, he must be enabled, that is, given the ability to read, before he actually does.

Well, let's move into the main part of our lesson. In this lesson, we'll look at two main points. First, the gospel offered; and second, the effectual call.

Well, first then, the gospel offered. Pay attention to what is mentioned at the end of our first Question. It says, “Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.” Well, the word “gospel” is an important word. The word itself means “good news.” But notice the Catechism says, “*the* good news.” It's referring to a particular message that's good. Of course, this is that ultimate message of good news—the good news of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, all of which announce to us Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners. In Luke 2, an angel brought good tidings, that is, good news, a good message of great joy for all people. Well, what was it? Well notice Luke 2, verse 11: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” This is the good news. Jesus Christ is the Savior. Now let's look at three parts of this gospel offered. First, what is offered; second, to whom it is offered; and third, how it is offered.

Well, first then, what is offered in the gospel offer? Our Catechism simply says “Jesus Christ,” and that's a good statement. Because the gospel, the good news, is about Jesus Christ. He's the Savior of sinners. You can see this in Romans 10, verses 13 through 17. Notice two things in the passage as it's read. First, notice the good news that saves; and second, notice how this good news is made know. Here's the passage: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and 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! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Well, what is the good news that saves?—it is, as Paul says, “the gospel of peace,” which tells them that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” This is the good news! The Savior has come and done everything that's needed, and he is held forth to the world, and all who believe on him are saved. How is this good news made known?—it's made known by preachers who preach the gospel, as Paul writes, who report, as he says, what the Lord has given them to preach. So preachers are those who carry forth the good news of Jesus Christ for sinners. They proclaim him, they announce him, they offer him, they hold him forth. This is the good news. Jesus Christ is the Savior for sinners. It's the person of Christ who is the Savior of sinners, and it's Jesus who is offered to sinners. The offer is this: Take Jesus Christ the Savior, and you shall be saved.

Second then, to whom is Jesus Christ offered?—our Catechism indicates simply, “to us in the gospel.” This, of course, borrows from what we just said. It reminds us that the thing God uses to

make people know about Jesus Christ is this message. In Mark 16, verse 15, Christ instructed his disciples. He said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” To whom is the gospel preached?—to everyone everywhere! Go into all the world, and preach to every creature, what?—the gospel!

Well, in an earlier lesson, we learned that God has chosen a people, a specific people, whom he most certainly will save. These are known as “the elect” or “the chosen.” However, notice that Christ does not say that his minister should only preach the gospel to the elect. Rather, his ministers are to preach the gospel to everyone, to hold forth Christ to every man, every woman, every child. And what is it they were to preach?—the good news of Jesus Christ. They were to announce the good news that there is a Savior for sinners. He has done all that is needed to be saved. They were to proclaim the good news that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Well notice, though the ministers were to do that—apostles, and today preachers of course—it is ultimately God who is calling everyone to look to him. This is specifically noted in Isaiah 45, and verse 22. It’s God who says, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” He doesn’t just say, “Look to me, those of you who are my chosen,” but “all the ends of the earth, look to me. I am the only God, and I am the only Savior.” Notice as well Christ’s words, in Matthew 11, and verse 28, he says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Ultimately, it’s God who holds Christ forth to sinners throughout the world, and says, “He is held forth to you that you might be saved by him.”

Notice, the apostles never say that you must believe that Jesus first died for you specifically, and paid for your sins specifically. That can create all sorts of curiosity. How do I know that he died for me, if he died only for the elect. Instead, God, and his appointed ministers, direct sinners to the Savior, that is, the person of the Savior himself. They call, they invite, and they command sinners to receive Christ Jesus, to believe upon him. Because it’s Christ who is offered to sinners. And it’s as a sinner trusts Christ to save him that they are then assured that all that he’s done has been done for that person. And so it’s first come to Christ, because Christ has been held forth. And so the gospel goes to all men, holding forth Christ to them as the Savior.

Well thirdly then, for this main point, How is Jesus Christ offered? Notice that one word—“freely.” God does not say to sinners, “First, make yourself worthy. First, clean up your life. First, make yourself accepted and acceptable.” No, instead, we’re reminded, as Paul says, in 1 Timothy 1, and verse 15, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” In Mark 2, and verse 17, Jesus himself said, “They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Christ calls us freely. We don’t come with works in our hand to bargain with God. We don’t, as were, come to him to say, “This is what I’ll do if you do this for me.” We come to Christ, who is freely held forth to us. He’s offered to us freely.

Well now, let’s look at our second main point for our lesson, the effectual call. We could think of the gospel offer as that *general call* that goes forth to everyone who hears it. But now we look at the *effectual call*. We’ve already noted this, and it’s good for us to remember that “effectual” means something that accomplishes its intended purpose. The effectual call is that work of the Spirit of God that actually converts sinners, that actually brings them to Christ. Many are called to Christ by the preaching of the gospel, but only the elect, the chosen ones, are effectually called. In this point, we want to look at three clarifying truths. First, *the worker* of effectual calling; second, *the work* of effectual calling; and third, *the effect* of effectual calling.

Well, first, *the worker* of effectual calling. This is a simple truth, but it’s very important. The

one who does the work of effectual calling is the Holy Spirit. The difference between those who hear the gospel and refuse it, and those who hear the gospel and embrace it, has everything to do with the Holy Spirit's gracious work. It's true that both the one who refuses and the one who receives it hear the same gospel offer. But what's different is that the one who receives it, receives it because the Spirit has worked within them, giving them life to embrace what is offered to them.

When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, in John 3, he spoke of the need for the new birth. He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (verse 3). This, of course, puzzled Nicodemus, and he was confused. And so Christ went on to say, in verses 5 through 8, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

When you see the effect of the wind in the trees, the wind blows, and some leaves shake and other don't, you see the effect of the wind. You don't actually see the wind. The wind is blowing, and you see what it does. Well, the same is true in the effectual call. You don't see the Spirit, but you see what the Spirit does. And what is it the Spirit does?—he gives life, so that a sinner comes and embraces Christ. So the effectual is the Spirit's work to bring one unto the Lord Jesus. It's the Spirit who does it. And this is not based on something that's foreseen in the person he calls. It's simply and solely by the Lord's grace.

Well, second to this point, the *work* of effectual calling. It's the Spirit who works, but what is it the Spirit does when he calls a sinner effectually? The Catechism summarizes this in the following words. We read in the Catechism, "*convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ.*" Well, we can break this part into three main ideas.

First, in effectual calling, the Holy Spirit convinces the sinner of his sin and misery. That is, he makes the sinner understand, not only what sin is, but that he has sinned, and his sins are wicked in the sight of God. The effect of this is illustrated in David's confession recorded in Psalm 51, verses 3 and 4. David says, "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." He not only realizes what sin is, he is brought to see that he is guilty and condemned. Remember the parable that Christ tells of the Pharisee and the publican, a tax collector, in the temple. And it's the tax collector who says, not able to lift up his eyes to heaven, as he smote his chest, he said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). He had been brought to see his own sin and misery.

Well second, in effectual calling, the Spirit enlightens the sinner's mind in the knowledge of Christ. This certainly means that the Spirit teaches the sinner about Christ. The sinner must know that Jesus is the Son of God, that he's fully God, fully man, that he was crucified, that he rose from the dead, and all of these things. But with this teaching, the sinner is made to see that this is the Savior he needs. He's brought to see clearly that it's not just a bunch of facts and doctrines, but this person is the one that I need.

Well third, in effectual calling, the Spirit renews the sinner's will, so that he is persuaded and enabled to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. To "renew" means to make something new. The sinner has a will, but it's dead and defiled, it's corrupt. It never chooses what is pleasing to God, because it is bound to choose what is sinful, because it's sinful itself. The will is that activity of our soul,

whereby we choose things. We want things, and so we pursue it. Well, a sinner chooses many things, but the problem is he never chooses what is pleasing to God. This is because he's dead in his sin. Because of this, he will never choose Christ. Though the truth is held forth to him, though it's clearly articulated, though it's explained over, and over, and over again, if he's left to himself, he'll never embrace the truth. But, praise God, what we can't do, God does. The Spirit of God gives life to the sinner. The Spirit gives life to his soul, so that he is persuaded and enabled to take hold of Christ who is offered to him. The Spirit is not the one who believes. The Spirit enlivens the soul of the sinner so that he is able to believe and embrace Jesus Christ.

Well, this brings us to our third point here, *the effect* of effectual calling. What happens when one is effectually called? We've already mentioned this, but when a sinner is effectually called, he or she embraces Jesus Christ by faith. He doesn't just say, "This is true, I get it, I understand. Yep, that's orthodox. That's right. I understand that these things are Biblical." Instead, when one is effectually called, he is brought to trust Jesus Christ. This was mentioned earlier, in the Answer to Question #30, when it's stated that the Spirit works faith in us, and thereby unites us to Christ in our effectual calling. In our Question in this lesson, it says that the Spirit "doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel." The main idea is that the Spirit draws us and unites us to Christ. By his grace, he gives us faith. And by faith, we are united to Christ. This means that all that he is, is now for us. Once a person is united to Christ, there are a number of blessings which come to him.

Question #32 identifies these as "justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them." Well, we get to look at these in more detail in the next several lessons. And I hope that, in some sense, you are already familiar, at least with the terms. But just in case you aren't, here's a basic meaning of some of these blessings:

"Justification" refers to that gracious act of God whereby he pardons a sinner and receives him as righteous because of the righteousness of Christ given to him.

"Adoption" refers to that gracious act of God, whereby he receives one into his family, and gives that one all the privileges that belong to his household.

"Sanctification" refers to that gracious work of God, whereby he purifies his people unto increasing holiness, so that they resemble him more and more in this life, all of their days.

Well, we'll look at all of these in greater depth in coming lessons, but simply for now, note this—that each of these is one aspect of the salvation which is given to us in Christ. Additionally notice that as they are in Christ, there is no enjoyment of any of these privileges, so long as we are apart from Christ. And so, when God works within us by his Spirit to give us faith that we embrace Jesus Christ, he gives us all of the treasury of salvation in Christ Jesus. So that, if we have Christ, by grace, through faith, we have all that is found in salvation.

Well, we must close. But as we do, notice how good it is that God comes to us and offers us the good news of Christ. We are most unworthy of so great a privilege. We've sinned against God. And oh, what wickedness it would be for us to refuse so kind and generous an offer. See how kind God is to come to us and hold forth Christ the Savior to us, we who have sinned. Well, let me saying it more clearly. God offers to you salvation. He calls you to embrace his Son. He holds forth Christ, and everlasting life, and all salvation to you. And he says, "Take Christ." To be clear, let us see how desperately we need the Spirit to work within us. Without the Spirit's work, we shall never embrace Christ. We will refuse him. Oh, the foolishness of sin! Such is our wicked and sinful nature. Well, this should lead us to cry out to God for mercy. Remember that publican we mentioned earlier. He stood there in the temple courtyard with his eyes down and his chest being

pounded by his own fist. And he cried out, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” So it is that we cry out to God, “Be merciful and save us.”

Finally, if you have trusted in Christ, here is a fresh reminder to thank him. You did not trust Christ because you were better than others, because you were smarter than others. You trusted Christ because God sovereignly was gracious to you. The Holy Spirit convinced you of your sin and misery. He enlightened you in the knowledge of Christ, and he renewed your will, persuading and enabling you to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to you in the gospel. It is God’s grace that has worked in your life. Never stop praising him.