

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Soteriology– Study of Salvation–
Calling, Regeneration, and Conversion

Introduction

- We are continuing *soteriology*; from σωτηρια (*sōteria*) = salvation.
- Last time we covered human depravity, common grace, special grace, election, reprobation, and lapsarianism.
- Now we get to move on to the beginning of our salvation from our earthly perspective.
 - It truly began in eternity past with election. But it began to be applied to our lives at some point in our lives.
- The doctrines we are about to cover are called the subjective aspects of faith by theologians .
 - They are subjective in the sense that it is something that each believer goes through experientially as God does something inside of the believer. These are the doctrines of calling, regeneration, and conversion.

Doctrine of Calling

- As we leave predestination (election and reprobation), which is outside of time, we now move to the point where God intervenes in time to rescue those whom He has chosen.
- The first of these mighty acts is effective calling.
- Definition: effective calling is “an act of God the Father, speaking through the human proclamation of the Gospel, in which he summons people to himself in such a way that they respond in saving faith” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 693)



Calling as it Relates to Regeneration

- One must distinguish between two kinds of “calling.”
- The general or universal call is the act by God where all persons are invited to accept by faith the salvation offered by Jesus Christ.
- The special or effective call was defined on the last slide.
- The call of God (both universal and effective) must occur prior to conversion. But they do not occur prior to regeneration.
 - Evangelicals: calling, regeneration, and conversion all happen simultaneously.
 - Arminians: calling happens first, then conversion, then regeneration.
 - Reformed: calling and regeneration are simultaneous and occur prior to conversion.



External or General Call

- This is the call generally given to everyone who hears the gospel. It is extended to everyone.
 - Mat 11:28 “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
 - Act 17:30 “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent,
- This general call can be resisted and is resisted by most people.
 - Act 7:51 “You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit. As your ancestors did, you do also.



External or General Call

- It's resistibility (cont.)
 - Mat 22:1-6 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to summon those invited to the banquet, but they didn't want to come. ⁴ Again, he sent out other servants and said, ‘Tell those who are invited: See, I've prepared my dinner; my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet. ‘But they paid no attention and went away, one to his own farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them.”
 - Mat 22:14 For many are invited, but few are chosen.”
- The general calling is meant to go out to all people and is usually done through Christians going forth to preach the gospel.
- A universal general call does not necessitate a universal atonement (refer back to atonement lessons on particular redemption or limited atonement).
- Just because God calls everyone to repent does not mean everyone has the ability to repent. Israel was called to keep the law, but they lacked the ability.

Nature of the General Call



- It is universal in that it is intended for everyone.
- It can be rejected. It will be rejected by the non-elect. It can be rejected by the elect prior to regeneration.
- It's rejection results in eternal punishment.
 - 2 Thess 1:7-9 This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels, when he takes vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength.

The Special/Effective/Internal Call

- The New Testament talks about a special call extended to those who are the special objects of God's saving grace.
 - In other words, it is given to the elect.
- This call always results in salvation as its outcome is certain.
- The special call cannot be resisted.
- Rom 8:29-30 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.
 - Pay attention to each link in this golden chain. It is the same "those" in each link. Thus, everyone called here is saved. This is very different from the general call.



The Special/Effective/Internal Call

- A word study on “called” reveals that the general call is found nowhere in any of the Epistles. It only appears in the narratives.
- Every time calling is mentioned in the Letters of the New Testament, it refers to the special call given to those who are saved.
 - A close look at the epistle passages that use the word “called” serve to prove there is indeed an effective call only for the elect.
- 2Ti 1:9 He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.



The Special/Effective/Internal Call

- It is a summoning of God the Father of sinners to Himself, and it ensures they will come.
 - 1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful; you were called by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
 - 1 Cor 1:23-24 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.
 - 1 Thess 2:12 we encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to live worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.
 - 2 Thess 2: 14 He called you to this through our gospel, so that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nature of the Effective Call

- The outcome of the special call is certain. Therefore not all men receive it, since not all are saved. So it is exclusive to the elect.
- Both its exclusivity and certainty are captured in the following passages.
 - Joh 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. (draws = drags).
 - Joh 6:37 Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out.
- What this means is at the same time the gospel call goes out to people indiscriminately, there is also an effective or internal call that resonates in the hearts of the elect.
 - God does not elect, call, and save us automatically without mediating events.
 - The elect hear this summons, and respond with the human decision of repentance and faith.
 - It comes through the gospel message, always.(2 Thess 2:14). When we proclaim the gospel, we don't know who the elect are. We cannot see the special call.

Nature of the Effective Call

- It is effective and always results in salvation (a positive response will come from the recipient).
 - Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and honored the word of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed.
 - 1 Cor 1:23-24 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- The call demands a free response of faith and repentance to the gospel.
- The agent who makes this call effective is the Holy Spirit (via regeneration).
 - This is where the power of evangelism comes from.
 - As we proclaim the general call, the Father performs the special call in the hearts of His elect while the Spirit regenerates.



Conclusions about Calling

- Many Arminians have difficulty in distinguishing between the general and effective call.
- Romans 8:29-30 forces a distinction.
 - If there is only a general call, and everyone receives it, then this passage teaches everyone gets justified since all who are called are also justified. But not everyone is justified, thus not everyone receives the “call” mentioned in this passage. Therefore, it is a special call.
- John 6:44 says people CANNOT come unless they are first drawn by the Father, and 6:37 says Jesus loses NONE of those given to Him by the Father.
 - If God drew all people, then all would be saved. Since not all are saved, not all were given and drawn by the Father.
- This doctrine of the effective call is half of the doctrine of Irresistible Grace.
 - Fallen man resists the general call, but the elect cannot resist the effective, internal call.