

Chapter XIX: Calling and Regeneration

1. Calling

Calling in general may be defined as that gracious act of God whereby He invites sinners to accept the salvation that is offered in Christ Jesus.

It may be either external or internal.

a. External calling. The Bible speaks of this or refers to it in several passages, Matt. 28:19; 22:14; Luke 14:16-24; Acts 13:46; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 John 5:10. It consists in the presentation and offering of salvation in Christ to sinners, together with an earnest exhortation to accept Christ by faith in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. From the definition it already appears that it contains three elements, namely, (1) A presentation of the gospel facts and ideas; (2) an invitation to repent and believe in Jesus Christ, and (3) a promise of forgiveness and salvation. The promise is always conditional; its fulfillment can be expected only in the way of true faith and repentance. The external call is universal in the sense that it comes to all men to whom the gospel is preached. It is not limited to any age or nation or class of men, and comes to the reprobate as well as to the elect, Isa. 45:22; 55:1; Ezek. 3:19; Joel 2:32; Matt. 22:2-8, 14; Rev. 22:17. Naturally this call, as coming from God, is seriously meant. He calls sinners in good faith, earnestly desires that they accept the invitation, and in all sincerity promises eternal life to those who repent and believe. Num. 23:19; Ps. 81:13-16; Prov. 1:24; Isa. 1:18-20; Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11; Matt. 23:37; 2 Tim. 2:18. In the external call God maintains His claim on the sinner. If man does not accept the call, he slights the claim of God and thus increases his guilt. It is also the appointed means by which God gathers the elect out of all the nations of the world, Rom. 10:14-17, and should be regarded as a blessing for sinners, though they may turn it into a curse, Isa. 1:18-20; Ezek. 3:18, 19; Amos 8:11; Matt. 11:20-24; 23:37. Finally, it also serves to justify God in the condemnation of sinners. If they despise the offer of salvation, their guilt stands out in the clearest light, John 5:39, 40; Rom. 3:5, 6, 19.

b. Internal calling. While we distinguish two aspects of the calling of God, this calling is really one. The internal call is really the external call made effective by the operation of

the Holy Spirit. It always comes to the sinner through the Word of God, savingly applied by the operation of the Holy Spirit, 1 Cor. 1:23, 24. In distinction from the external call, it is a powerful calling that is effectual unto salvation, Acts 13:48; 1 Cor. 1:23, 24. Moreover, it is a calling without repentance, one that is not subject to change, and is never withdrawn, Rom. 11:29. The person called will surely be saved. The Spirit operates through the preaching of the Word by making its persuasions effective, so that man listens to the voice of His God. It addresses itself to the understanding enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so that man is conscious of it. And it is always directed to a certain end. It is a calling to the fellowship of Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 1:9, to inherit blessing, 1 Pet. 8:9, to liberty, Gal. 6:18, to peace, 1 Cor. 7:15; to holiness, 1 Thess. 4:7; to one hope, Eph. 4:4, to eternal life, 1 Tim. 6:12, and to God's kingdom and glory, 1 Thess. 2:12.

2. Regeneration

Divine calling and regeneration stand in the closest possible relation to each other. With respect to regeneration several points deserve consideration:

a. Its nature. The word 'regeneration' is not always used in the same sense. Our Confession uses it in a broad sense, as including even conversion. At present it has a more restricted meaning. In the most restricted sense it denotes that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. In a slightly more comprehensive sense it designates, in addition to the preceding, the new birth or the first manifestation of the new life. It is a fundamental change in the principle of life and the governing disposition of the soul, and therefore affects the whole man, 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:6; Phil. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:8. It is completed in a moment of time, and is not a gradual process like sanctification. Through it we pass from death into life, 1 John 3:14. It is a secret and inscrutable work of God that is never directly perceived by man, but can be known only by its effects.

b. Its author. God is the author of regeneration. Scripture represents it as the work of the Holy Spirit, John 1:13; Acts 16:14; John 3:5, 8. Over against the Arminians we maintain that it is exclusively the work of the Spirit of God, and not in part the work of man. There is no co-operation of God and man in the work of regeneration, as there is in the work of conversion. Moreover, it should be said that regeneration in the most restricted

sense of the word, that is, as the implanting of the new life, is a direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit. It is a creative work in which for that very reason the word of the gospel cannot very well be used as an instrument. It may be said that Jas. 1:18 and 1 Pet. 1:23 prove that the word of preaching is used as an instrument in regeneration, but these passages refer to regeneration in a broader sense, as including the new birth. In that more inclusive sense regeneration is undoubtedly wrought through the instrumentality of the Word.

c. Its necessity and place in the order of salvation. Scripture leaves no doubt as to the absolute necessity of regeneration, but asserts this in the clearest terms, John 3:3, 5, 7; 1 Cor. 2:14; Gal. 6:15. This follows from the fact that we are by nature dead in trespasses and sin, and must be endowed with new spiritual life, in order to enjoy the divine favor and communion with God. The question is often raised which of the two is first, calling or regeneration. In answer to this it may be said that in the case of adults external calling usually precedes or coincides with regeneration in the restricted sense. Regeneration, as the implanting of the new life, precedes internal calling, and internal calling precedes regeneration in the broader sense, or the new birth. We find the greater part of this order indicated in the record of the conversion of Lydia, Acts 16:14, "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us (external call): whose heart the Lord opened (regeneration in the restricted sense) to give heed to the things which were spoken by Paul (internal call)."

To memorize. Passages proving:

a External calling:

Mark 16:15, 16. "And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation ("every creature," Auth. Ver.). He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be condemned."

Matt. 22:14. "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Acts 13:46. "And Paul and Barnabas spake out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

b. Calling of the reprobate:

Prov. 1:24-26. "Because I have called, and ye have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man hath regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh in the day of your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."

1 Pet. 3:19, 20a. "In which also He (Christ) went and preached unto the spirits in prison, that previously were disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah."

Confer also the parables in Matt. 22:1-8, 14; Luke 14:16-24.

c. Seriousness of this calling:

Prov. 1:24-26, cf. above under b.

Ezek. 18:23, 32. "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? said the Lord Jehovah; and not rather that he should return from his way and, live?... For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dies, saith the Lord Jehovah: wherefore turn yourselves, and live." Cf. also 33:11.

Matt. 23:37. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that kills the prophets, and stones them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

d. The necessity of regeneration:

Jer. 13:23. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

John 3:3, 7. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

e. Regeneration and the Word:

Jas. 1:18. "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures."

1 Pet. 1:23. "Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and abides."

For Further Study:

a. Is calling a work of one Person of the Trinity or of all three? 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Thess. 2:12; Matt. 11:28; Luke 5:32; Matt. 10:20; Acts 5:31, 32.

b. Is the word 'regeneration' used in the Bible? Titus 3:5. What other terms does it use to express this idea? John 3:3, 5, 7, 8; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23.

c. Does Titus 3:5 prove that we are regenerated by baptism? If not, how would you explain it?

Questions for Review:

1. What do we mean by calling?
2. How do external and internal calling differ?
3. What elements are included in external calling?
4. In what sense is it universal?
5. What purpose does it serve?
6. How is the internal related to the external calling?

7. Are we conscious of it?
8. To what end is it directed?
9. What different meanings has the word 'regeneration'?
10. What is it in the most restricted sense?
11. What is the nature of the change wrought in regeneration?
12. Is regeneration a work of God alone or of God and man?
13. Is the Word used as an instrument in regeneration?
14. Is regeneration absolutely necessary? Proof.
15. What is the order of calling and regeneration?