

## XXVIII.

## The Coming of the Called.

“That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth.”—*Rom. ix. 11.*

The question is, whether the elect cooperate in the call.

We say, Yes; for the call is no call, in the fullest sense of the word, unless the called one can hear and hears so distinctly that it impresses him, causes him to rise and to obey God. For this reason our fathers, for the sake of clearness, used to distinguish between the *ordinary* call and the *effectual* call.

God’s call does not go forth to the elect alone. The Lord Jesus said: “Many are called, few are chosen.” (*Matt. xxii. 14*) And the issue shows that masses of men die unconverted, altho called by the outward, ordinary call.

Nor should this outward call be slighted or esteemed unimportant; for by it the judgment of many shall be made the heavier in the day of judgment: “If the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Therefore it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you” (*Matt. xi. 21, 22*); “And the servant which knew the Lord’s will and did not according to His will shall be beaten with many stripes.” (*Luke xii. 47*) Moreover, the effect of this outward call reaches sometimes much deeper than is generally supposed, and brings one sometimes to the very point of real *conversion*.

The unregenerate are not so insensible to the truth as never to be touched by it. The decisive words of *Heb. vi.*, concerning the apparently converted who have even tasted of the heavenly gift, prove the contrary. St. Peter speaks of sows which were washed and then returned to the wallowing in the mire. One can be persuaded to be *almost* a Christian. But for the selling of his goods the rich young ruler would have been won for Christ. Wherefore the effect of the ordinary call is by no means as weak and meager as is commonly believed. In the parable of the sower the fourth class of hearers alone belong to the elect, for they alone bear fruit. Still there is among two of the remaining classes a considerable amount of growth. One of them even produces high stalks and ears; only there is *no fruit*.

And for this reason the men that company with the people of God should earnestly examine their own hearts, whether their following of the Word is the result of having the seed sown in “good ground.” Oh, there is so much of illumination and of delight even; and yet only to be choked, because it does not contain the *genuine* germ of life.

All these unregenerate persons lack *saving grace*. They hear only with the carnal understanding. They receive the Word, but only in the field of their unsanctified imagination. They let it work upon their natural conscience. It plays merely upon the waves of their nat-

ural emotions. Thus they may be moved to tears, and they ardently love whatever so affects them. Yea, they often perform many good works which are truly praiseworthy; they may even give their goods to the poor, and their bodies to be burned. Their salvation is therefore considered to be a matter of fact. But the holy apostle completely destroys their hope, saying: “Tho you speak with the tongues of men and of angels, that you understand all mystery, tho you give all your goods to feed the poor, and tho you give your body to be burned, and have not *love*, it profiteth you nothing.”

Hence to be God’s child and not a sounding brass, deep, insight, into the divine mysteries, an excited imagination, a troubled conscience, and waves of feeling are not required, for all these may be experienced without any real covenant grace; but what is needed is true, deep love operating in the heart, illuminating and vitalizing all these things.

Adam’s sin consisted in this, that he banished all the love of God from his heart. Now it is impossible to be neutral or indifferent toward God. When Adam ceased to love God, he began to *hate* Him. And it is this hatred of God which now lies at the bottom of the heart of every child of Adam. Hence conversion means this, that a man get rid of that *hatred* and receive *love* in its place. He who says from the heart, “I love the Lord;” is all right. What more can he desire!

But as long as there is no love for God, there is *nothing*. For mere willingness to do something for God, even to bear great sacrifices, and to be very pious and benevolent, except it spring from the right motive, is in its deepest ground nothing but a despising of God. However beautiful the veneering, all these apparently good works are inwardly cankered, sin-eaten, and decayed. Love alone imparts the real flavor to the sacrifice. Wherefore the holy apostle declares so sternly and sharply: “Tho you give your body to be burned, and have not *love*, it profiteth you *nothing*.”

To perform good works in order to be saved, or to oblige God, or to make one’s own piety lofty and conspicuous, is a growth from the old root and at the most but a *semblance* of love. To cherish true love for God is to be constrained by love to yield one’s ego with all that it is and has, and to let God be God again. And the ordinary, the general, the outward call never has such effect; it is incapable of producing it.

Wherefore we leave the ordinary call and return to the call which is particular, wonderful, inward, and effectual; which addresses itself *not to all*, but exclusively to the *elect*.

This call, which is spoken of as “*heavenly*” (Heb. iii. 1), as “*holy*” (2 Tim. i. 9), as “*being without repentance*” (Rom. xi. 29), is “*according to God’s purpose*” (Rom. viii. 28), is “*from above in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Phil. iii. 14), and does not have its starting-point in the preaching. He that calls by it is *God*, not the minister. And this call goes forth by the means of two agencies, one coming to man from without and the other from within. Both these agencies are effectual, and the call has accomplished its purpose and the sinner has come to repentance as soon as their workings meet and unite in the center of his being.

Hence we deny that the regenerate, hearing the preached Word, will come of *himself*. We do not thus understand their cooperation. If the inward call is sufficient, how is it that the regenerate can sometimes hear the preaching without arising, unrepentant, refusing to let Christ give him light? But we confess that the call of the regenerate is twofold: from without by the preached Word, and from within by the exhortation and conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Hence the work of the Holy Spirit in the calling is *twofold*:

The *first work* is, as He comes with the Word: the Word which is inspired, prepared, committed to writing, and preserved by Himself, who is God the Holy Ghost. And He brings that Word to the sinners by preachers whom He Himself has endowed with talents, animation, and spiritual insight. And so wonderfully does He conduct that preaching through the channel of the office and of the historical development of the confession, that at last it comes to him in the form and character required to affect and win him.

We see in this a very mysterious leading of the Holy Spirit. Afterward a preacher will learn that, under his preaching in such a church and at such an hour, a regenerate person was converted. And yet he had not specially prepared himself for it. Frequently he did not even know that person; much less his spiritual condition. And yet, without knowing it, his thoughts were guided and his word was prepared in such a way by the Holy Ghost; perhaps he looked at the man in such a manner that his word, in connection with the Spirit's inward operation, became to him the real and concrete Word of God. We hear it often said: "That was directly preached at me." And so it was. It should be understood, however, that it was not the minister who preached at you, for he did not even think of you; but it was the Holy Spirit Himself. It was He who thought of you. It was He who had it all prepared for you. It was He Himself who wrought in you.

The ministers of the Word should therefore be exceedingly careful not in the least to boast of the conversions that occur under their ministry. When after days of failure the fisherman draws his net full of fishes, is this cause for the net to boast itself? Did it not come up empty again and again; and then was it not nearly torn asunder by the multitude of fishes?

To say that this proves the efficiency of the preacher is against the Scripture. There may be two ministers, the one well grounded in doctrine, the other but lightly furnished; and yet the former has no conversions in his church, while the latter is being richly blessed. In this the Lord God is and remains the Sovereign Lord. He passes by the heavily armed champions in Saul's army, and David, with scarcely any weapons at all, slays the giant Goliath. All that a preacher has to do is to consider how, in obedience to his Lord, he may minister the Word, leaving results with the Lord. And when the Lord God gives him conversions, and Satan whispers, "What an excellent preacher you are, that it was given you to convert so many

men!” then he is to say, “Get thee behind, me, Satan,” giving the glory to the *Holy Spirit alone*.

However, it is not the Holy Spirit’s only care in such a way and focus of life to cause the Word to come to a regenerate person, but He adds also a *second work*, viz., that by which the preached Word effectively enters the very center of his heart and life.

By this *second* care He so illuminates his natural understanding and strengthens his natural ability and imagination that he receives the general tenor of the preached Word and thoroughly understands its contents.

But this is not all, for even pretended believers may have this. The seed of the Word attains this growth also in those who have received the seed into a rocky ground and among thorns. Hence to this is added the *illumination* of his understanding, which wonderful gift enables him not only to apprehend the general sense of the preached Word, but also to perceive and realize that this Word comes to him directly *from God*; that it affects and condemns his very *being*, thus causing him to penetrate into its hidden essence and feel the sharp sting which effects *conviction*.

*Lastly*, the Holy Spirit plies this conviction—which otherwise would quickly vanish—so long and so severely, that finally the sting, like the keen edge of a lancet, pierces the thick skin and lays open the festering sore. This is in the called a very wonderful operation. The general *understanding* puts the matter before him; the *illumination* reveals to him what it contains; and the *conviction* puts the sharp two-edged sword directly upon his heart. Then, however, he is inclined to shrink from that sword; not to let it pierce through, but to let it glance harmlessly from the soul. But then the Holy Spirit, in full activity, continues to press that sword of conviction, driving it so forcibly into the soul that at last it cuts through and takes effect.

But this does not end the *calling*. For after the Holy Spirit has done all this, He begins to operate upon the *will*; not by forcibly bending it, as an iron rod in the strong hand of the blacksmith, but by making it, tho stiff and unyielding, pliant and tender *from within*. He could not do this in the unregenerate. But having laid in regeneration the foundation of all these subsequent operations in the soul, He proceeds to build upon it; or, to take another figure, He draws the sprouts from the germ planted in the ground. They do not start of themselves, but He draws them out of the germ. A grain of wheat deposited in a desk remains what it is; but warmed by the sun in the soil, the heat causes it to sprout. And so it is here. The vital germ can do nothing of itself; it remains what it is. But when the Holy Spirit causes the fostering rays of the Sun of Righteousness to play upon it, then it germinates, and thus He draws from it the blade and the ear and the corn in the ear.

Hence the yielding of the will is the result of a tenderness and emotion and affection which sprang from the implanted germ of life, by which the will, which was at first inflexible,



became pliant; by which that which was inclined to the left was drawn to the right. And so, by this last act, conviction, with all that it contains, was brought into the will; and this resulted in the yielding of self, giving glory to God.

And in this way love entered the soul—love tender, genuine, and mysterious, the ecstasy of which vibrates in our hearts during all our after-life.

And this finishes the exposition of the divine work of calling. It belongs to the elect alone. It is irresistible, and no man can hinder it. Without it no sinner ever passed from the bitterness of *hatred* to the sweetness of *love*. When the call and regeneration coincide, they seem to be one; and so they are to our consciousness; but actually they are distinct. They differ in this respect, that *regeneration* takes place independently of the *will* and *understanding*; that it is wrought in us without our aid or cooperation; while in *calling*, the will and understanding begin to act, so that we *hear* with both the outward and inward ear, and with the inclined will are *willing* to go out to the light.

## XXIX.

## Conversion of All That Come.

“Turn Thou me and I shall be turned.” —*Jer. xxxi. 18.*

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The elect, born again and effectually called, *converts himself*. To remain unconverted is impossible; but he inclines his ear, he turns his face to the blessed God, he is converted in the fullest sense of the word.

In conversion the fact of cooperation on the part of the saved sinner assumes a clearly defined and perceptible character. In regeneration there was none; in the calling there was a beginning of it; in conversion proper it became a fact. When the Holy Spirit *regenerates* a man, it is an “Effatha,” *i.e.*, He opens the ear. When He effectually *calls* him, He speaks into that opened ear, which cooperates by receiving the sound, that is, by harkening. But when the Holy Spirit actually *converts* the man, then the act of man coalesces with the act of the Holy Spirit, and it is said: “Let the wicked forsake his way, *and let him return* unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him” (*Isa. lv. 7*); and in another place: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” (*Psalm xix. 7*)

It is a remarkable fact that the Sacred Scripture refers to conversion almost *one hundred and forty times* as being an act of man, and only six *times* as an act of the Holy Ghost. It is repeated again and again: “Repent and turn to the Lord your God” (*Acts xxvi. 20*); “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord” (*Jer. iii. 22*); “Sinners shall return unto Thee” (*Psalm li. 13*, Dutch Version); “Repent and do thy first works” (*Rev. ii. 5*). But conversion as an act of the Holy Spirit is spoken of only in *Psalm xix. 8*, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul”; in *Jer. xxxi. 18*, “Turn Thou me and I shall be turned”; in *Acts xi. 18*, “That God also to the Gentiles *granted* repentance unto life”; *Rom. ii. 4*, “That the goodness of God *leadeth* thee to repentance”; in *2 Tim. ii. 25*, “If God peradventure will *give* them repentance”; in *Heb. vi. 6*, “That it is impossible to *renew* such (as fall away) to repentance.”

This fact should be carefully considered. When Scripture presents conversion as the Spirit’s act but six times, and as man’s act one hundred and forty times, in preaching the same proportion should be observed. And, therefore, the preachers who, when preaching on conversion, treat it almost invariably in its passive aspect and in the abstract; who apparently lack the courage and boldness to declare to their hearers that it is *their* duty to convert *themselves* unto God, seriously err. It has a very pious look, but it is against the Scripture. And yet it is perfectly natural that one should hesitate to say, “*You* must convert *yourself*,” so long as regeneration and conversion are still confounded. For then the declaration, “*You* must convert yourself,” ignores the sovereignty of God, and implies that a dead sinner is still able to do something of himself. And this is the reason why the preachers who will not surrender the sovereignty of God, and who will not deduct anything from the deadness of

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