

9, WCF Chapter 10
Effectual Calling
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CHAPTER 10
Of Effectual Calling

1. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by his almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.
2. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.
3. Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.
4. Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the laws of that religion they do profess. And, to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested.

Notice how chapter 6 described the human condition? How does this point to the present chapter? Why not, say chapter 11?

C9,s3: Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

Ephesians 2:1-6 is the source of the Assembly's description concerning our condition as one of "dead in sin." Where, specifically, in Ephesians 2, is this affirmed? Related this to 1 Cor. 2:7-16

What then does this imply about the "order of Salvation" (E.g. Where does Salvation begin for us? When does our "will" come into play in order to be saved? What must happen to us for our will to "will" salvation?) Notice then the order of chapters in the WCF.

See Romans 8:28. (note also 2 Tim.1:9; 2 Thess. 2:13-14, Rom. 11:7)

The "problem" and "solution" historically illustrated:

Historically, great contention has centered upon several particular elements of the "order of salvation." One element we will reserve for a later discussion pertaining to sanctification in relation to justification, a Rome vs. Protestant controversy. Another element of contention has centered upon "regeneration and conversion" (repentance and faith). The two viewpoints have been historically labeled in 19th century America as "new school vs. old school theology" but is more generally known as the Armenian vs. Reformed positions. The 19th century "new school" theology was also characterized as "Yale theology" over against "Princeton theology" in the early 19th century. (Yale "new school" men included Albert Barnes, Nathaniel William Taylor, George Duffield, Lyman Beecher and Joseph Bellamy. and Princeton "old school" men included Samuel. Miller, Charles. Hodge, J.A. Alexander, James Wood, Ashbel Green, and most of the Southern Presbyterian leaders such as Robert Lewis Dabney, James Thornwell, etc) However, the most popular advocate of "New school" theology was Charles

Finney.

The Problem Historically Illustrated:

What it is NOT:

Charles Finney:

"All sin consists in voluntary acts, no innate, inherent or derived corruption in human nature... Here are two systems, the one maintains that infants have no moral character at all, until they have committed actual transgression; that their first moral actions are universally sinful, but that previous to moral action, they are neither sinful nor holy... the other system maintains that infants have a sinful nature which they have inherited from Adam." (Brown, p.296-7)

"Children universally adopt the principle of selfishness, because they possess human nature, but not because human nature is itself sinful." (Sermons quoted by Isaac Brown, p.295)

"All depravity is voluntary-- consisting in voluntary transgression... O! the darkness of that view of depravity which exhibits it, as something lying back, and the cause of all actual transgression." (Sermons of Important Subjects, p. 139)

What is IS:

John Henley Thornwell:

"Adam was our federal head or representative of his race. He was on probation for them, as well as for himself, in the Covenant of Works. He was not a private individual-- he was the type of universal humanity... If Adam were the agent of us all, his act was legally and morally ours....

Hence, the Scriptures teach explicitly that we are first charged with the guilt of Adam's sin, and then, as the legal consequence, are born with natures totally corrupt. (Writings Vol. I, p.344-5)

The Solution Historically Illustrated:

What it is NOT:

Charles Finney:

The Spirit pours the exhortation home with such power that the sinner turns... the Spirit turned him, just as you would say of a man who had persuaded another to change his mind on the subject of politics, that he had converted him and brought him over... He does not act by direct physical contact upon the mind, but he uses the truth as his sword to pierce the sinner; and the motives presented in the gospel are the instruments he uses to change the sinner's heart... Did not the serpent change Adam's heart by motives? and cannot the Spirit of God with infinitely higher motives exert as great power over mind as he can?... The power which God exerts in the conversion of a soul is moral power; it is that kind of power by which a statesman sways the mind of a senate; or by which an advocate moves and bows the heart of a jury."

A change of heart, then, consists in changing the controlling preference of the mind in regard to the end of pursuit. The selfish heart is a preference of self-interest... A new heart consists in a preference of the glory of God and the interests of His Kingdom... It is a change in the choice of a Supreme Ruler." (Woods, p.163-4 from Finney's Sermons on Important Subjects)

What it IS:

Jonathan Edwards:

The scriptural representations of conversion strongly imply and signify a change of nature; such as being "born again", becoming "new creatures"; "rising from the dead"... He (God) gives his Spirit to be united to the faculties of the soul and to dwell there as a principle of spiritual life and activity. He not only actuates the soul, but he abides in it. The mind thus undued with grace is possessed on a new nature. (Edwards on *Religious Affections*)

A.A. Hodge

The infusion of such a disposition must therefore precede any act of true spiritual obedience... The Holy Spirit, in the act of effectual calling, causes the soul to become regenerate by implanting a new governing principle or habit of spiritual affection and action. The soul itself, in conversion, immediately acts under the guidance of this new principle in turning from sin unto God through Christ.

Now read Section 1-2, chapter 10 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.
In general, describe the *Confession's* understanding of "effectual calling."

The word "regeneration" is not used in the confession. But where is it described in this section? What passages would you turn to in scripture regarding regeneration?

John 3:8, 1 Cor.2:14; Rom.8:7, Eph.2:5

Read Section 3. What hope do infants who die have in the Reformed view? How does this relate to our view of infant baptism?

What are the "means" or "instruments" that God uses to "call" a person into saving faith? What might this have to do with our use of these instruments?

Read Acts 2:37-47

- What do we learn about "conversion" from this passage?
- What was the context? What was required? How was faith born? What was the result?
- Concerning conversion in the early church, one theologian describes the journey to faith this way:
Pagan converts to the [Christian] mainstream did not, for the most part, first understand the faith and then decide to become Christians; rather, the process was reversed: they first decided and then they understood. More precisely, they were first attracted by the Christian community and form of life... they submitted themselves to prolonged catechetical instruction in which they practiced new modes of behavior and learned the stories of Israel and their fulfillment in Christ. Only after they had acquired proficiency in the alien Christian language and form of life were they deemed able intelligently and responsibly to profess the faith, to be baptized.

George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 132.

Observation:

There was a time not so long ago, and even still with us to varying degrees, when people believed that in order to know something we must take the posture of the "unencumbered self" and seek after universal truths independent of any particular communal narrative or influence. True "belief," it was asserted, is something we must attain to by ourselves, and is based on a blind optimism about the power of individualism and human reason to bring us to absolute certainty in knowledge. Religious faith, as such, was abstracted from the "text" of communal life, rituals and teaching—the very context wherein faith was ordinarily born throughout human history!

Another epistemology will emphasize the "communal self" in search of truth based on a method of participation and human experience. The knowledge of God is a communal kind of knowledge that we must discover by means of participation with God vs. merely thinking about God. As we will see, this is not to "check our brain" at the door of faith. Rather, it is to recognize that while faith in God is reasonable, it can't be attained by reason alone! And given the modernist context, isn't it an intriguing reversal of the way we tend to think—that the way to belief in God and the Christian faith in the NT was to *first* decide to believe and to participate in the life of God in, with and through God's presence in the midst of his special community wherein that belief was more and more understood such as to eventually justify believing! But if there is a God, and if He has made himself known, in so far as God is personal, wouldn't it make sense that He would expose himself not by some impersonal media, but within the warm and personal context of communal life?

And so the question has been raised, "how can I believe in God?" My answer is by "faith seeking understanding." By "faith" I mean that kind of knowledge that is gained by participating in it such as to then seek after the moral and intellectual justification in order to "believe" it (seeking understanding). Faith, like all communal knowledge, is a product of our will as much as our mind. We "will" to know God by participating with Him, even as the knowledge of God is found more and more reasonable on the basis of our experience and the reality of life as we know it with God.

What are the implications for Baptism for instance? (Read WCF 28.6)

Titus 3:5he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

1Pet. 3:21And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (c.f. 1Cor. 12:13 , Mark 16:10 , Acts 22:16 , Rom. 6:3)

There is clearly an “association” between baptism and effectual calling in these passages. The question then is what exactly is the relationship between the two. As those who hold in a sacramental view of the ordinance of baptism (like the Lord’s supper), we believe that the relationship is real, albeit conditioned upon God’s sovereign grace. So then, our confession basically teaches (WCF 28:5-6) that regeneration and salvation is not “inseparably annexed unto” the baptism rite (section 5), and yet, “the grace promises is not only offered but really exhibited and conferred,” albeit not necessarily tied to the moment of administration or such as to be a necessary consequence of the administration. In short, regeneration/effectual calling is tied to the sovereign will of God acting through election (see above and order of salvation). And yet, we administer baptism as a “means of grace” not merely as a sign of grace. The proper recipients being all those who are rightly qualified to be members of the household of God—as noted in Acts 2:38—both you (believers), your children even those of every nation who are “far off.” The point being that we believe in effectual calling acting through the means of grace, no less baptism as preaching, etc.

WCF 14 & 15
Conversion

CHAPTER 14
Of Saving Faith

1. The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.
2. By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.
3. This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed, and weakened, but gets the victory: growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance, through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.

CHAPTER 15
Of Repentance unto Life

1. Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.
2. By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of his mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments.
3. Although repentance be not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ; yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it.
4. As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.
5. Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly.
6. As every man is bound to make private confession of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof; upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy; so, he that scandalizeth his brother, or the church of Christ, ought to be willing, by a private or public confession, and sorrow for his sin, to declare his repentance to those that are offended, who are thereupon to be reconciled to him, and in love to receive him.

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Chapter 15: Saving Faith

2. Is it possible NOT to have “faith”? Saving Faith? Notice then the title of Chapter 14. What are we talking about? What aren’t we talking about?
3. Notice WCF 14:1 What are the three ordinary means by which God works saving faith in people?
4. According to Chapter 14:2, What is Saving Faith? Notice also WLC #72, and discern three characteristics of saving (or justifying) Faith.

Question 72

Q *What is justifying faith?*

A *Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ*

and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

5. Notice especially “assent” to the truth? What “truth” must we assent to in order to be saved? (c.f., What is a Christian, Preston Graham Jr)
 - a. (Acts 17:24-25, Gen.3:16-17)
 - b. (1 John 1:8-9, Rom.2:23)
 - c. (1 John 1:7, 2:1b-2,)
 - d. (Eph. 2:8ff, Rom.5:1)
5. Notice also that “assent” to the truth is not itself faith. What must be added to assent, and what isn’t added? (Note then, the three components of saving faith—the intellectual component, the will/affection component, and the joining/communal component.)
6. How then do we strengthen faith? How don’t we?

Chapter 15: Repentance Unto Life

1. Notice how the WCF refers to repentance as an “evangelical grace.” What do you think this means? (note the Acts 2 Commentary, in the context of Pentecost, it is said, “and the Lord added to their number day by day” vs. 47)
2. Some have mistaken “repentance” with “good works”—what is two separate chapters in the WCF as related to two separate ends theologically is conflated. It is important therefore to understand this description of “repentance unto Life” in a way that doesn’t refute WCF 11 and then 14.

Note for instance the important qualification in WCF 11:

1: not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone... they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith: which faith they have not of themselves it is the gift of God.

2: Faith... is the alone instrument of justification, yet is not alone.. but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but walketh by love.

Note again the important language of WCF 14: 2

The principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone for...

Given the above qualifications concerning saving faith, how should we understand “repentance” as per the meaning of “as to turning from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments.” Notice 15:3

3. What does paragraph 4 mean? Again, notice that the context is not civil codes or even church discipline, but in the greater scheme within our human covenant with God—we are saved either by our own keeping of the terms of the covenant at creation, or by Christ’s keeping the terms on behalf of us. This is the point of James 2:10-11 (e.g. on the context of the overarching law “love your neighbor as yourself” vs. 8) C.f. WLC # 150
 - Q Are all transgressions of the law of God equally heinous in themselves, and in the sight of God?
 - A All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

Observation: Isn’t it interesting that one of the sure signs that people have NOT repented unto life is that they justify themselves by distinguishing their sins from the really “heinous” sins of others... thus not understanding their own culpability in failing the whole of the law in their failure to love wholly!

4. We know of course that there is the possibility of “false conversions” (Mt.7:21, 19:11, 1Cor.8⁷) What might some types of false conversions?
5. How does the question of conversion engage the transition from non-communicant (baptized) covenant children membership and then full- communicant (adult) membership (c.f. “Covenant Child Membership)