

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 68.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #68. *Are the elect only effectually called?*

A. All the elect, and they only, are effectually called:¹ although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by the ministry of the word,² and have some common operations of the Spirit;³ who, for their willful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.⁴

Question 1—*What is the general nature of the Gospel call?*

Answer—The call is that whereby sinners are invited, commanded, encouraged and enabled to come to Christ, in order to be made partakers of his benefits, Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1. In this Gospel call, we are called out of darkness and unto the eternal glory of God by Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. 2:9; 5:10. A call supposes a person to be separate, or at a distance from him who calls, Prov. 8:4; and it contains an intimation of permission to come into his presence, Matt. 11:28. Thus, in effectual calling, he who had departed from God, is nigh him, Eph. 2:13, 17. God, as it were, says to him, as he did to Adam, when fleeing from him, dreading nothing so much as his presence, and apprehending himself exposed to the stroke of vindictive justice, where art thou, Gen. 3:9. God, as a kind friend, calls unto sinners to return from the wrong way and be set in the right way, Isa. 30:21.

Question 2—*What is the outward call of the Gospel?*

Answer—This outward call of the Gospel is that ministry of the Word whereby Christ is set forth in his person and offices, and sinners are called to come to him, and, in so doing, to be made partakers of the blessings which he has purchased, Matt. 22:1-13. The servants are Gospel ministers whose duty it is to call, or invite, persons using persuasive arguments to urge them to come to it, v. 3. The conclusion of the matter demonstrates that our Saviour meant here no other than the common or ineffectual call, for there are those who refuse to comply, Matt. 22:14. Likewise, in the parable of the householder hiring laborers into his vineyard, which speaks of the Gospel call which the Jewish church had under the ceremonial law, Matt. 20:1-15. Those hired at the eleventh hour denote those who were called by the ministry of Christ and his disciples, v. 9. That this was only a common and external call is evident from its conclusion, Matt. 20:16. So, too, Paul intends this common call, when he speaks of some who had been called into the grace of Christ, and thereby entreated to embrace the doctrine of the grace of Christ, who were yet soon removed unto another gospel, Gal. 1:6. Again, he speaks of those who begin well but afterwards did not yield the obedience of faith to that truth which they seemed at first to receive with readiness, Gal. 5:7, 8.

¹ Acts 13:48.

² Matt. 22:14.

³ Matt. 7:22; 13:20, 21; Heb. 6:4-6.

⁴ John 12:38-40; Acts 28:25-27; John 6:64, 65; Ps. 81:11, 12.

Those who express some regard to this external call, are generally said to have the common operations of the Spirit, showing the results of the Spirit's common work of conviction, John 16:8. These are called operations because they include something more than God's sending ministers to address themselves to sinners, for the Spirit is the agent working internally in the mind and conscience, and even the will to a degree, Gen. 6:3; yet, always remaining ineffectual so that these internal motions may be resisted and quenched, Acts 7:51. Of these, it is said, they have no root in them but only endure for a fleeting time, Matt. 13:20, 21. Nonetheless, though they afterward do fall away, this does not mean that they have no experience with the Spirit of God working, though only by way of common operations, yet ever so sweetly, Heb. 6:4-6. These are not united to Christ by his Spirit or by faith; and the grace which they possess is generally styled *common* grace, Matt. 7:21, 22; their end is often worse than their beginning, 2 Pet. 2:20.

It must be considered that there are some things presented to us in an objective way, which contain the subject of the Gospel, or that call given to sinners to pursue those means which, by divine appointment, lead to salvation, Rom. 10:17. Offers of grace, and invitations to come to Christ, are the presenting of an object to the understanding and will, cf. 2 Sam. 24:12. Of which there are numerous places in Scripture wherein these objective invitations to Christ are held forth as offers of grace, John 7:37; Rev. 22:17.

This common call is given to an indefinite number of hearers and not directed to the elect only, or those with respect to whom God designs to make it effectual to their salvation, Col. 1:23, 28. Thus, the commission which Jesus gave to the apostles was to preach the Gospel to all nations and to every creature, Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15. Though the counsel of God concerning election is secret, and not to be confused as the rule of human conduct, Deut. 29:29; yet, it is certain that only the elect will believe effectually, Acts 13:48.

This Gospel call, without the superadded assistance of special grace, may be improved by men to gain some advantage of it, though it be short of salvation, Heb. 6:4-6. This influence, being exerted over those things which men might do that are materially good, though they flow not from regenerating grace, are still of good use to those so moved, 1 Kings 21:29; Jonah 3:5. Even Herod, though a vile man and unregenerate, was subject to such common operations, Mark 6:20. Those who keep some things contained in the law do so through the influence of the same, abstaining from grosser sins, Rom. 2:14.

The object and design of this common Gospel call is not the salvation of all who are thus called, Ps. 106:24, 25; though it is clearly appointed for the elect, 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; Rom. 11:7. By the preaching of the Gospel, there is a setting forth of the glorious work of redemption by Jesus Christ, which is a wonder to the angels, 1 Pet. 1:12; and they are convicted who shut their eyes against the glorious light which shines so brightly in it, John 3:19. Though God knows the sinner cannot convert himself, yet he commands him to do it, not because he is able but to demonstrate to the sinner his inability, John 5:40. Christ clearly teaches that the tree must first be made good, Matt. 12:33; and, that it is impossible to gather good things from a bad source, Matt. 7:16.

This call, for those who are not elect, those for whom it is not made effectual, are justly left in their unbelief, John 6:64, 65; and that, for their willful neglect and contempt of the Gospel, John 12:38-40; Acts 28:25-27. These never do come to Jesus Christ but are abandoned to their own sins and left to their own counsels as they would have none of God in Christ, Ps. 81:11, 12. The rejection of the Gospel call and its teaching is not merely a rejection of men but of God, 1 Thess. 4:8.

Question 3—*What makes the call effectual to some?*

Answer—What makes this call effectual to some may be considered negatively and positively:

First, negatively. It is neither the piety, parts, nor seriousness of those who are employed to carry the Gospel call to sinners, 1 Cor. 3:7. Indeed, if moral suasion were sufficient to bring sinners to God, men that have the art of persuading and can speak movingly and seriously could not fail to have vast numbers of converts, Luke 16:31. Consider the preaching and teaching of Christ, who spake like no other man to this effect, John 7:46; yet, it is certain that this persuasion, coupled with many miracles, did not accomplish the conversion of many by such art, John 12:37, 38.

Nor it is due to one using his free-will better than another does, Rom. 9:16. Every man will be unwilling to come to Christ until power from another quarter makes him willing, John 6:44. If this were not so, then one man could make himself to differ from another man in this great matter of salvation, contrary to that of the apostle, 1 Cor. 4:7. However, men are dead in their trespasses and sins, and cannot so difference themselves, Eph. 2:1.

Second, positively. It is the Spirit of the Lord, accompanying the Word, that makes it effectual, John 6:63. So, it is not by the exertions of men but by the Spirit of God that this calling is made effectual, Zech. 4:6. Thus, days of the plentiful effusion of the Spirit are good days for the taking in of souls, and contrariwise, when the Spirit is restrained, Ps. 110:3. Though the report reach our ears, yet it requires the arm of the Lord to open the heart, if the report is to be believed, Acts 16:14.