

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 67

Halifax, 1 February 2009

Q. 67 What is effectual calling?

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of His free and especial love to His elect, and from nothing in them moving Him thereunto) He doth, in His accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by His Word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer His call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

Introduction:

Last week, we looked at the first of the benefits we have as members of the invisible church.

- Now you will remember that all who are elect are members of the invisible church.
 - Even before you have been converted—
 - indeed, even before you are born,
 - yes, even before Adam was created—
 - you were already chosen in Jesus Christ to receive every spiritual blessing.
 - If you are chosen in Him, then God will, in time, unite you to Him by grace through faith...
 - so that all of His benefits will become yours...
 - His death will benefit you by bringing pardon to your sin...
 - And His life will benefit you by fulfilling all that God requires...
 - And His resurrection will benefit you in that you will be given life from the dead, both spiritually and at the last day.
- We saw that this union is so wonderful that in an effort to explain it to us so that we can understand something of it,
 - the Lord has given us all sorts of different analogies and descriptions...
 - Our union with Him is described as a federal union...in which we are represented by Him before the Father.
 - Our union with Christ is presented to us as that of living stones upon Him as the foundation—so that we are established upon Him and His saving work...
 - Our union with Christ is presented as an organic union like that of a vine with its branches that receive life from the vine.
 - Our union with Him is compared to the connection of the various parts of a body to the head, which Christ is...

- Our union with Christ is compared to marriage in which we are made one flesh with our spouse—Christ is our husband and we are His bride.
- And most gloriously of all, our union with Christ is compared to that glorious union that the Son has had with the Father in glory for all eternity—we are said to be brought into that very circle of love.

TRANS> That is what we looked at last week.

- But now, this week, we want to look at how we are brought into this marvellous union with Jesus Christ.
- The question here is not,
 - “What must we do to enter into this union?”
 - but rather,
 - “What does **He** do to bring sinners into this union?”
 - “What does He do to establish this union with those He has chosen?”
 - In the future we will see what we are called to do,
 - but in this lesson,
 - we get to consider what He does to join us to Christ.
 - It is called **effectual calling**.

Effectual calling is really quite an amazing thing.

- God calls us when we are dead in our trespasses and sins...
 - It is like calling a stone to come and dance...
 - Unless you change the very nature of the stone, it won't respond to you...it cannot respond to you.
 - Romans 8:7 says:
 - **Ro 8:7: the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.**
 - When God calls us, we are living in opposition to Him and we are perfectly content with it.
 - We love the kingdom of darkness.
 - Our nature is not the least bit disposed to leave it to come to the kingdom of light.
 - But this is where the effectual call takes over...
 - God not only calls us, but He also comes with power to change us so that we who are by nature contrary and opposed to Him...
 - are inclined to Him—we want to come to Him.

- The effectually call does not happen suddenly, but is a work that God does at different rates of speed in different people...
 - Some are suddenly turned—the light suddenly dawns on them and they see everything and are disposed to come immediately to Christ...
 - But for others it is a much more gradual thing...
 - They begin to see the benefits of Christ and their need of repentance...
 - They begin to be drawn to Him and attracted to Him...
 - And at last, they come.
- But in either—whether God changes them suddenly or gradually, it is His work to bring them to Christ—
 - something they would have never chosen if left in their fallen nature.
 - It is an effectual call because it is a call that effects or brings about a positive response.

Effectual calling as the way God unites us to Christ was actually introduced to us in the previous question—in Question 66 where the answer is...

- A. 66. The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.
 - You see how we are told at the end that our union is brought about by effectual calling.
 - This sets up for Q. 67 (our question for today) which asks,
 - Q. 67: What is effectual calling?
 - A. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and especial love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in His accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by His word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer His call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

Now you see the overall thrust of what this is saying...

- It presents God not only as inviting us to come Christ,
 - but also as coming to us with power and grace so that we would come...

- We were so hardened and corrupt that we could neither see our need of Christ nor have any desire for His salvation if God did not radically change us.
 - It is not that He forces us to come against our will,
 - but rather that He cleans up our corruption so that we most gladly come.
 - Before, there was something badly wrong with us because anyone in his right mind would yearn for salvation, and as soon as God’s salvation was presented to him,
 - he would immediately recognise it and rush forward to receive it with tremendous joy!
 - The fact that people don’t is proof of how deeply sin has affected us...
 - How greatly it has ruined us.
 - God has to add to His invitation to come to Christ and be saved,
 - this powerful transforming work of grace to make us want to come.
 - Without it, we would never come even though the gospel were presented to us in a most powerful, convicting, convincing, enticing, clear way.
- This afternoon, I want to follow the answer to Q. 67 rather closely—
 - showing you how what is taught here is the doctrine contained in Ezekiel 36.
 - Ezekiel 36 is, perhaps, the fullest passage we have in the whole Bible about effectual calling.
 - Listen now as I read to you from Ezekiel 36:16-38
 - READ Ezekiel 36:16-38.

I. First, I want you to see in this text that effectual calling is the work of God’s almighty power and grace.

A. Throughout the passage, His power is demonstrated.

- The picture is one of God exerting His power to unite His people back to Himself as His own people.
 - Everything is His initiative.
 - It is not their initiative, but His.
- 1. In verse 24, He promises to physically take them out of the nations He had delivered them over to, and restore them to the land.
 - He says,
 - **Ezek 36:24: “For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land.”**

- By His powerful working,
 - He will cause their enemies to release them so that they might come together once again in the land where He purposed to reveal Christ to them.
 - These enemies would be no more disposed to let them go than Egypt was—
 - but God, by His providential working, is the one who raises up Cyrus whose nation overthrows Babylon the invincible and then releases Israel.
 - So it is that Satan, to whom all are in bondage by the fall—he is the prince of this world...
 - is no more willing for sinners go into Christ’s kingdom than Pharaoh was to let Israel leave Egypt...
 - But the Lord breaks the power of the hold he has on us.
2. You see also in our text that besides exerting His power to gather us,
- He also exerts His power to accomplish a radical transformation in His chosen people.
 - He is going to actually give them a responsive heart to His call.
 - Verse 26 and 27 show this to be His action—
 - **Ezek 36:26-27: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”**
 - We will look at more about what this change involves later...
 - but you see here that it is done by His power acting upon the stony, sinful heart that is in each one of us before we come to Christ.
 - As verse 29 puts it, He will actually deliver them from all their uncleanness.
 - He will change their corrupt nature—turn their hearts to delight in His ways and to walk in them.
 - By His power, He makes us so that we are no longer addicted to sin.
 - You know what a stranglehold addiction can have...
 - but God breaks that hold and sets sinners free.
3. In chapter 37 of Ezekiel, the Lord really drives home to point that it is by His power that we respond to His call.

- Israel is pictured there as dry, scattered bones...
 - And Ezekiel is instructed to call them to live.
 - When he does, they get up and they live...
 - The Lord by His mighty power breathes life into dead sinners and they live.

B. But not only is it by His power and might, it is also by His **grace** that this will be.

- as the catechism puts it,
 - “out of His free and especial love to His elect, and from nothing in them moving Him thereunto.”

1. That is what is meant by grace.

- It is not based on any good that is in them or that is done by them...
 - God does not effectually call you because He sees good in you that moves Him or inclines Him to bless you.
 - There is no reason in you at all.

2. You see how He stresses this in Ezekiel 36...

- He describes them as being unclean in His eyes—loathsome as a woman during her period...(v. 17)
 - **Ezek 36:17** “Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own ways and deeds; to Me their way was like the uncleanness of a woman in her customary impurity.”
 - He is so displeased with them, that He pours out His fury on them and scatters them—delivers them to the nations...
 - He drives us away and turns us over to Satan...
- He exposes two major problems with them in verse 18...
 - that they have shed blood...
 - that they have worshipped idols.
- That summarises what is wrong with all of God’s elect—with every human being with the exception of Christ...
 - **Shedding of blood** has to do with murder—it speaks of the way we treat one another.
 - God calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves, but we are full of cursing and bitterness, covetousness and envy, malice and deceit.
 - God is holy.
 - He sees our heart.
 - He is not at all impressed with us.

- **Worshipping idols** has to do with the way we approach God.
 - Instead of approaching Him on His terms as God—in the way He has appointed—we approach Him on our own terms.
 - Instead receiving the truth about God and worshipping Him as God,
 - we make up lies about Him to make Him what we want Him to be to us.
 - We don't like it that He is such a holy God that we cannot even approach Him without the shedding of blood...
 - that even the very blood of Christ and that alone is able to atone for our sins!
 - We want to approach Him by methods that we devise...
 - We want to have a say in the matter.
 - We do not want Him to be God...
 - We want to negotiate with Him instead of accepting His terms and His revelation...
 - That is idolatry—
 - It is pretending that God is not what He is revealed to be and making Him to be what we want Him to be.
 - This is highly offensive to God!
 - Instead of loving Him for what He is,
 - We try to change the truth about Him!
- Now God is very displeased with us all both for shedding of blood and for idolatry,
 - and He makes it very clear that He is not calling Israel because of any virtue He finds in them...
 - As verse 18 & 19 say,
 - He is furious with them, and scatters them away from His presence.
 - And in verse 22, He tells Ezekiel to pass this message along to them:
 - **Ezek 36:22: “Say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the LORD God: I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name’s sake.’ ”**
 - He told them that when He first called them in the days of Moses, and now He is telling them it again!

- This is always true of His gathering of His people...
 - It is all an action of free love and grace...
 - It is not a response to their goodness, but it is rather an expression of His bountiful grace and love to the undeserving.
- It is very hard for us to understand such love.
 - We do not operate this way.
 - We always tend to think of love as what one has toward what one is attracted to...
 - But the Lord makes it clear that His elect are not at all attractive to Him in themselves.
 - He is showing pure mercy to them for His own glory...
 - not because they deserve it.
- This is what is so very marvellous about God's love to sinners when He calls them.
 - It does not originate on account of, but in spite of them...
 - It originates out of His own delight in being merciful and gracious and in revealing that mercy and grace by calling and saving the undeserving.
 - Thus Paul says, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.
 - This makes us secure because it is not based on us, but on God.

TRANS> So you see then that the effectual call is all of God's power and grace and from no power or merit in those who are called.

- Romans 5 summarises it quite nicely when it says:
 - **Rom 5:6-8: For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

II. Next, I want you to see that the Lord invites and draws us to Jesus Christ by His Word and Spirit in His accepted time.

A. In Ezekiel, it is clear that there is a set time when the Lord intends to gather His people.

1. It is not presented as their decision, but as His decision.
 - a. They are seen to come to Him when He gathers them...

- Now we know that His gathering of them involves His calling of them to Himself.
 - And this call comes in the form of an invitation to come to Him and be saved.
 - He called them out Egypt to be His people...
 - He will call them out of captivity to be His people...
 - He will call them to Jesus Christ to be His people...
- b. But they are in no condition to answer His call because they are dead in their sins...
- We have already seen how they are obstinate and rebellious...
 - We have already seen the bones lying by the graves in chapter 37.
 - And now I want you to see in verses 26 & 27 that God not only invites them, but also gives them His Spirit to enable them to respond...
 - **Ezek 36: 26-27: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”**
 - And you see the result of this giving of the Spirit in verse 28
 - **28 “Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.”**
 - It causes them to come to Him to be His people.
2. Now I want you to understand that his restoring them to the land is a restoring of them to Jesus Christ as He was then revealed...
- a. You see, the land was the place where God put His name...
- It was the place where His temple was established...
 - It was the place where He showed that it was only through the blood of the covenant that His people could come near.
 - Almost everything in the temple worship was designed to point Israel to rest in Christ who was then promised to them.
 - Whenever they were in the land, following God’s ordinances of appointed worship from the heart,
 - they were trusting in Jesus Christ as He was presented to them.
- b. And so when the LORD says that He will give them a new heart that will cause them to keep His ways...
- and that He will cause them to gather into His land to have Him as their God and to be His people...

- He is talking about gathering them to Jesus Christ.
- Ezekiel is a tremendous book in that it presents many typological portraits of Christ...
 - There is the great temple that Ezekiel sees in a vision—
 - a building so large that it won't even fit on the hill of Zion...
 - a building with a surrounding territory so great that it exceeds the boundaries of Israel...
 - a building with a great river that flows from the front of it that brings life to the nations.
 - This is not a building made with men's hands, but a glorious picture of Jesus Christ.
- And you see that God was going to shortly restore them from the actual physical captivity to which He had delivered them...
 - And that in doing so, He would be cleansing them and giving them a new heart to love Him and live in His ways...
 - But it is obvious from the language here that Ezekiel is talking about much more than a physical restoration to the land...
 - He is talking about gathering His elect to Christ.
 - He is talking about effectually calling them to Himself through the Saviour.
 - He is talking about changing their hearts toward Him.

B. Look, you can see that there is an appointed time that is spoken of...

1. It is a time when he is going to gather them and then sprinkle clean water upon them...
 - This is the baptism of repentance, for He says,
 - **Ezek 36:25: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols..."**
 - Baptism with water is a visible connecting of those who are called to the Lord.
 - This not just a baptism that gets them wet—
 - it is a baptism of repentance that turns them from idols...
 - It is a baptism that cleanses them, bringing them forgiveness.
 - It is described by the verses that follow as a baptism of the Spirit.
2. Now this was, in a measure, given to the people when they came from captivity,

- but it points much more to the coming of John the Baptist...
 - He met Israel in the wilderness—cut off from God!
 - And there he baptised them with a baptism of repentance,
 - calling them to prepare for the coming kingdom...
 - calling them to prepare to come to God to be His people...
 - telling them that God was going to bless them and restore them through the coming one who would baptise with the Spirit...
 - John's baptism initiated the time of God's calling of Israel to Christ.
 - It was followed by the pouring out of God's Spirit at Pentecost after Jesus rose from the dead...
 - and by the gathering of many in Israel to Christ for salvation...
 - to be God's people and to have Him as our God...
 - to live with Him forever in the land...
 - to have Him dwell in us as His temple through Jesus Christ.
3. And even as this baptism—this sprinkling of clean water upon them—is presented as a corporate event with John the Baptist heralding the coming of Christ and the Spirit being poured out by Christ at Pentecost,
- These great events are themselves large pictures of what happens in the individual hearts of God's elect in God's appointed time.
 - They are drawn in grand and bold pictures...
 - They come to God's people collectively as a collective baptism and a collective gathering...
 - But they come to each elect individual in God's timing for that individual.
 - What is shown corporately comes to us individually and particularly in God's appointed time.

TRANS> So now let us look more closely at what God does in each individual heart when He gathers us to Christ—to Himself through Christ...

- This is presented like this in the catechism...

III. Savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer His call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

- They are able to do what they would have never been able to do on their own.
 - They are able to do it because God makes them willing and desirous to do it.

- A. We have already seen how Ezekiel shows in verse 26 & 27 that God gathers us by giving us His Spirit to turn our hearts to Him...
- but consider a little more detail about this...
1. The catechism says He savingly enlightens our minds...
- a. We are in the darkness, and He turns the lights on for us.
 - He causes us to see things as they are...
 - He opens our eyes to see our own sinful condition—to see that we are vile and in desperate need of a Saviour
 - As it says in verse 31,
 - We come to loathe ourselves...
 - **Ezek 36:31: Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations.**
 - We become gripped with the horror of what we really are—we see our sin in its true colors.
 - b. Now when you see that, you would surely fall into complete despair if you supposed that your call was based on your own merit.
 - If you were enlightened to see your sin and your guilt before God,
 - but you were not enlightened to see that God’s salvation is by grace and not at all for anything in you...
 - you would despair of ever being saved at all...
 - But you see what the Lord says in verse 32...
 - **Ezek 36:32 “Not for your sake do I do this,” says the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!”**
 - This is a very puzzling thing to those who are not effectually called...
 - They do not understand how we can speak so frankly of our sinful condition and yet have hope in God...
 - The two just don’t go together in their minds.
 - The Lord is advising you here, if you have been effectually called, to go ahead and be ashamed and confounded for your ways...
 - You need not pretend that you deserve anything...
 - God is not saving you on the basis of your merit, but for His own name’s sake...

- It is for the honour of Jesus Christ the redeemer and on account of what He did for you—not on account of anything that you have done...
 - For yourself, there is only shame...
 - But for Christ, there is honour.
 - You come to boast not in yourself or in what you have done, but to glory in the cross of Christ alone...
 - “God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of Christ.”
 - And so you see, by enlightening your mind to see your sin,
 - God prepares you to be able to give proper honour to Christ your Saviour.
2. And that leads us to the second thing that He enables us to see when He opens our eyes...
- a. Namely, the glory and the sufficiency of Christ as our Saviour!
- The Lord describes the blessing of rebuilding the city and blessing them with fruitfulness in the land.
 - You can see that in verse 33-35:
 - **Ezek 36:33-35: “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, “This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.” ’ ”**
 - As I showed you before, the land is the place where God revealed Christ to them.
 - The restoration of them in the land is their restoration to Christ...
 - The restoration of the temple is their restoration to Christ.
- b. And God opens your eyes to see the beauty of His ways...
- By His Spirit, He causes you to walk in His statutes and to keep His judgements.
 - And His statutes appoint that we should look to Jesus Christ and rest in Him for our salvation...
 - His command is that we believe on the Lord Jesus.
 - And God’s Spirit enables us to do this by showing us the sufficiency of Christ our redeemer to reconcile us to God.
 - We see Him as we could not see Him when our hearts were stony and corrupt.

- You were just too stubborn to come to Him.

B. This is nothing else than a description of our coming to Jesus Christ...

1. It is a new heart and a new spirit given to us to walk in God's ways.

- And the way appointed for us is Jesus Christ.
- We come to Him because we are given a new heart that delights in Him.

2. And so you see that effectual calling does not mean that the Lord forces Christ upon you...

- or forces you to follow...
- Not at all—
 - you are sweetly drawn to Him because you see how much you need Him and because you delight in Him.
 - You see that there is no other way for your sin to be dealt with...
 - That as your Saviour, He has done all that is required to make you righteous—and now you want to be righteous by God's grace.
 - He is to you most desirable as a Saviour...
 - He is the fairest of ten thousand and you know it now that your heart has been renewed by God's Spirit.
- You are given a new heart that sees things as they truly are...
 - The corrupt heart held on to lies and fantasies...
 - But the new heart clings to God's appointed way in Christ.
 - It comes with gladness and joy to Him as a perfect Saviour and Redeemer who gathers you to God and His blessing...
 - You gladly leave behind your filthiness and your idols and come to Him.
 - You do this because God has given you a new heart—a right heart!
 - That is why the catechism says that you willingly and freely answer His call and accept and embrace the grace offered to you in Christ.
 - You can do no other...
 - God has powerfully and graciously transformed you to be ashamed of your corruption and to delight in His way...
 - His Son who is the way, the truth and the life and nothing can keep you away from Him.