



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 154

Calling – Flowing from divine foreknowledge and predestination is the first element in the order of salvation, which is the element of calling. In order for God to accomplish His purposes established in eternity, He first calls us in time and history. Theologically speaking, the call of God consists of two main components, the external call and the internal call, which must be correctly distinguished.

External call – Before we look at the internal call, it is important to first discuss the nature and extent of the external call. This call of God is not referred to as the “external” call in the Bible, but is so designated in theology as it is not an efficacious call. The external call of God can be divided into three main categories. It comes to man through creation, that is, through nature (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19-20). The created order testifies to all human beings, in all places, and at all times, pointing to its Creator, declaring His glorious attributes, such as His wisdom, power, goodness, eternity and so on.

The call of God also comes to man through conscience (Romans 2:14-15). God has implanted an innate knowledge of Him and His basic moral requirements in every person’s conscience. The revelations of the physical world and the conscience are general in nature and extend to each and every human being. Even though these do not reveal anything about Christ or the way of salvation, they clearly provide enough information about God, by which God calls all human beings everywhere to acknowledge, worship, honor and obey Him as their Maker (Acts 17:26-27). But human beings, in their sinful and depraved condition, deny what they know to be true, namely, that there is a God, that He is holy, and that they are sinners, and that they are answerable to Him (Romans 1:21, 25; 3:20).

The call of God also comes to man through the Word of God, which provides a great amount of information about the nature and activities of God (Psalm 19:7-11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-2). This revelation is special and reaches only to those who have read or heard the Word of God. It proclaims the corrupt state of fallen man, God’s plan of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ, and God’s promises of forgiveness and salvation. God calls all those who hear the gospel, to repent and believe in His Son in order to be saved (Mark 1:15; John 5:24; Acts 2:38; 16:31; 17:30; 19:4; 26:19-20; Romans 10:13). This external call of God is not limited to any particular nation or tongue or class of people, rather it goes out to all who hear it (Isaiah 45:22). God’s people are to proclaim the external call to all people indiscriminately. We do not know who are the elect and who are not, and thus we have no right to exclude anyone (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:20).

But even this gospel call is rejected by the majority (Psalm 81:10-12; Proverbs 1:22-26; John 5:39-40; Act 13:46; Romans 2:4-5; 10:18-21). Though many may hear this call, only those whom God has chosen will respond (Matthew 22:14). In reality the external call in itself is not effectual. As a result of the Fall, all men come into this world fallen, spiritually dead, unable and unwilling to seek God and the things of God (Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Romans 3:9-12, 18; 5:10; 8:5-7; 1 Corinthians 2:14). Apart from the grace of God mankind suppresses the truth, and rejects God’s external call. Something outside of man is needed to make the call efficacious, and that something is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Some hearing that only the elect will respond to God’s external call, they argue that this makes the call disingenuous. But as we saw in previous studies, God desires all people to repent and be saved. This is God’s holy and benevolent disposition toward mankind (Psalm 81:13; Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; Romans 2:4; 1 Timothy 2:4). This represents God’s revealed will, that which is good for man and delightful to God. And though this is distinct from God’s secret will, it nevertheless is God’s earnest desire. The non-elect do not respond to God’s call not because God prevents them, but because they are by nature unable and unwilling to come to Him (John 3:19). This condition of sinful man does not annul God’s right to demand righteousness from man; neither does it release him from his moral responsibility (Micah 6:8).