

Vocation: Calling And Election

I. Introduction: Background To The Subject

(i) The Problem of Semantics

The subject we are discussing is probably the most difficult, and certainly the most controversial of all theological subjects. This is primarily because of the difficulty of keeping to it in Biblical terms and ideas. With the best intentions its antagonists and protagonists tend very quickly to move into philosophical reasoning, thus rationalising their approach to it. It is best - if the debate has to be - to keep within Biblical thinking, and not justify or oppose the doctrine in ways of thinking and reasoning which are extra-biblical. This, of course, is a most difficult matter, and few succeed. Hence the debate becomes extremely difficult and one impossible of solution.

When terms such as 'foreordination, foreknowledge, calling, predestination and election' are used they are used with the varied images they conjure up for the specific users, and since these images may vary greatly in a given number of persons, much difficulty in discussion naturally ensues. No matter how much we define our terms difficulties will still remain. It is best, therefore, to state the background of the understanding of the nature of God as the Scriptures present it. Even here the same Scriptures will for many conjure up varying ideas. Nevertheless we must try to evince a regular understanding of the nature, especially as it will condition our approach to the words (i.e. the subjects) nominated in this paragraph.

(ii) The Nature of God

We cannot of course build up the full picture of the nature of God as given in Scripture, but rather those which immediately relate to our subjects. Some are as follows:- 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (Gen. 18:25). This means that whatever in Scripture seems unintelligible about the things God is said to do, nevertheless what He does must be right. In Jeremiah 9:23-24 God says, '...let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practise steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord.' This passage means that even though some things may appear to be against 'love, justice, and righteousness' yet they are not, in the end. Hence Matt. 5:43-48 insists that God loves all men impartially, and totally, providing for them as they have need, whether they are just or unjust, good or bad. The words used in our first section must be understood in the light of this truth.

Again, Romans 9:18-21 shows that God will do whatever He thinks is best. He will harden some, and have mercy on some. The objection, 'Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?' has this answer, 'But who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, 'Why have you made me thus?' Has the Potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use.' In Isaiah 64:8 Israel had said to God, 'Yet, O Lord, Thou art our Father: we are the clay, and Thou art our Potter; we are all the work of Thy hand.' In other words, there is trust in the Potter.

Ephesians 1:11 speaks of '...him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will', and in Ephes. 3:11 Paul says, '...this was according to the eternal purpose which he has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord...' Paul sees God's will as true and faultless. Hence in Romans 11:33-36 he makes a great ascription to God which, when concurred with, gives us a high view of God: 'O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?' 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.'

From these few Scriptures alone we may conclude that God does only that which is right. From some points of view we can be fully convinced that all that He does is right, and that such things must not be judged by us as humans, or discerned merely from our own reasoning. God is entitled to do what He wills, even though we may not understand, and even disagree that He should do such. Some things must be beyond our understanding, but this should not mean they are beyond our acceptance, especially in faith. Hence two more Scriptures become relevant. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' Deut. 29:29 states knowledge which is available to us and that which is not. 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.' True knowledge is not merely intellectual. It is given with a view to action, i.e. with a view to obedience.

Linked with what we have said is another factor for consideration, namely unregenerate man's bias against the truth. Romans 1:20ff speaks of man's rejection of the nature of God. Such a man is called the 'natural man' in I Cor. 2:14 where it is said that he cannot understand spiritual things. John 3:3f shows that a man must be born again (or, begotten anew from above) before he can begin to understand spiritual things. Hard as it is for a man of faith to understand the 'deep things of God', it is impossible for the natural man to understand at all.

Keeping these matters in mind we approach with some humility and reverence a subject which has been of great blessing to some, and a stumbling block to others, namely God's calling and election, the great themes of foreordination and predestinating work of God. One thing we must realise is the limits our humanity place upon us in knowing God. We can know Him only as a man can know Him. That is all we need know. Beyond this limited knowledge is a vastness we cannot accomplish. Hence we acknowledge with Abraham that the Judge of all the earth can do nothing but right. We must rest in this. Indeed we must glory in God as He is, and so in what He does, albeit we do not fully understand.

2. The Nature of Grace

Further, in preparing ourselves to discuss the subjects of calling and election, we must understand the nature of grace. Questions are often asked which contain an inference that God has somehow (and somewhere) failed. This is especially so if He has not redeemed every person within mankind, even where there is stubborn and final impenitence. It is said that God is all-powerful and therefore He can (and must) sway the wills of man to respond to Him. If He cannot sway them He is not all-powerful, and if He does not sway them He is not all-loving. This is a sentiment clean contrary to the doctrine of creation, and the principle of use of will. If God forces the will then He does not act consistently with creating man as a free agent. He is the Free Agent, and man is in His likeness. However, the fact is that God, having made man with a free will, is under no obligation whatever to correct the evil which comes from a wrong use of that will.

We mean that the dignity of man is removed if (a) God does not punish him, and (b) If He forces man to ultimate obedience. The nature of morality is that if man becomes, or does, evil, then he must suffer its natural consequences. God is under no obligation whatever to redeem man. In fact God does redeem man, and at great cost. Nevertheless this redemption is a matter, entirely, of grace, and it must be understood this way. If it is not continually understood, then the debate concerning calling and election becomes foolish. We mean that God's calling and election is entirely His own prerogative. Man in no sense can have any say in its disposition and operations.

Grace, for its own part, is so incredible a thing as to never be fully understood by any man. It is not something that man can arrogate to himself. However, the man who does come under grace, and has the assurance of calling and election had better be aware that he may even come to think grace is his right, and that election itself is justification of him. The humble man may have assurance but never arrogance. Grace continually humbles him, as his sins continually humiliate him and place him in shame. Living in this dimension and seeing with this perspective the man-in-grace has no argument with God, and no problem with calling and election. He glories in the God of all grace.

3. The Sinfulness of Man: The Holiness of God

The nature of grace can only be seen when two things are seen, (i) The nature of the holiness of God, and so His consequent righteous wrath, and (ii) The total depravity of man which puts him away from God, under the righteous wrath of God and the irrevocable judgement of the moral law. These things are themselves difficult, if not impossible for sinful man to perceive, since he is said to be under (a) The deceit of Satan (Rev. 12:9), (b) The deceit of sin (Heb. 3:13), and (c) The deceit of lusts (Ephes. 4:22). The Scriptures, however, make it clear that fallen man has forfeited his right to fellowship with God (Isaiah 59:2). Hence the psalmist says, 'Blessed is he whom thou dost choose and bring near to dwell in thy courts!'

Many Scriptures speak of the utter sinfulness of man, e.g. Jer. 17:9, Prov. 25:26, Mark 7:20-23, Romans 3:23. Other Scriptures speak of the utter holiness of God (Isaiah 6, 57:15, Habakkuk 1:13). God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, i.e. He cannot look upon sin and not punish it. His wrath is righteous (Romans 2:4-5) because man deserves it.

The nature of sin is that man has rebelled against God and has refused to obey the creational mandate (Gen. 1:28ff). He has refused God's plan for this

world and its history. He has sought his own autonomy. Romans 1:21-32 (cf. Mark 7:20-23) shows his evil in all its horrible forms. For God to condone this, or to overlook it and forgive gratuitously would mean God Himself were some immoral deity, which of course He is not. His wrath is righteous, as also it is very personal. (Cf. Psalm 7:11f, 10:11-13, 38:1-8, Eccles. 8:11-13, Ezek. 7:8-9, Ephes. 5:6, Romans 1:18, I Thess. 1:10, II Thess. 1:7-9.)

We say again that since man is deserving of this judgement he has no right to calling or election. He has no right to redemption. If he has not had a revelation of God's holiness, man's sinfulness, and the righteous judgement of the law, and the truth of God's wrath then he will account the act of redemption in Christ as a mere Godly expedient to meet man's regrettable sinfulness. He will miss the full nature of pure grace.

4. The Matter of The Call or Calling of God

One of the classical passages from which to study calling is Romans 8:28-30. In this passage the words 'foreknew' (foreordination), 'predestined', and 'called' appear. Also with them such other words as 'justified' and 'glorified'. We will have to discuss these as they relate to one another, and also discover some of the order they have. Initially, however, we will examine the nature of calling as we see it in the Scriptures.

(i) The Nature of Calling

One thing is clear - the purpose and intention of God must be understood when we take up the subject of calling. In Isaiah 46:9-10, God says,

'I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' ... I have spoken and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed and I will do it.'

God calls in conformity with what He has planned. That is the One who extends the call determines the nature and purpose of the call. It gives vocation to that thing, person or people to whom God calls for that one has vocation in conformity within that call. The goal of God's calling represents the nature and mode of the calling for the one (or the thing) called. Within this call must be the enabling power of God as He effects what He will through the call. For this reason God's calling has often been called 'effectual calling', but as we shall see, God effects what He purposes, however He may go about it. Calling is not, so to speak, magically efficacious, but efficacious because God goes about what He does in certain ways. We refer of course to the modes He uses being consistent with His own nature. He uses His attributes and powers, not as a merely powerful deity but as the God who is Trinitarian, who is Father, Son, and Spirit, and who is the God of holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth and love. By these things He effects the calling He makes.

We may now adduce the nature of His calling from the way He calls, to what and whom He calls, and when He calls. The effects which we see indicate the nature of that calling.

(a) Creation

In Isaiah 40:26 the prophet says, 'Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name.' Likewise in Isaiah 48:13, 'My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens: (when) I call to -them, they stand forth together.'¹ In Isaiah 45:12 to call is to command. Amos 5:8 and 9:6 repeat this principle. The principle of creative utterance is seen in Isaiah 55:10f, and Psalms 145:5 and 33:9. Here, again, to call is to command and vice-versa. In regard to men God calls them in their times, and calls from the beginning to the end. Isaiah 41:4 asks, 'Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he.'

God's call with man is really God's encounter with man, and fallen man could have no such encounter (indeed any encounter) if God were not to take the initiative. God is known, by definition as 'He who calls' (Romans 9:11, Galatians 5:8, cf. I Thess. 5:24). His calling, as we have suggested, rises out of His own nature. Hence in II Timothy 1:9 we read 'He.. called us with a holy calling... in Christ Jesus from times eternal'. Paul includes, 'according to His own purpose'. Other passages (e.g. Ephes. 1:4-14) show us He purposed before time. Therefore He never intended to abandon man. This is why He takes the initiative with fallen man (Adam) and so, 'The Lord God called to man and said, 'Where are you?'' If we are to believe Psalm 19:1-4 God's voice goes out continually through creation.

Man's history is that of the call (or, calling) of God. Indeed there is nothing else to history. We might say that God has chosen to make history this way. If we keep in mind God's purpose; if we see it is in accordance with His nature and particularly "the grace which He gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago" then we can see that man, to act truly, must await the (powerful) call of God. Without it Adam is left to his guilt. No Proto-Evangel may be proclaimed (Gen. 3: 15). From Adam onwards if God does not continually call each man, then he is without call. To be called by his name is to give man purpose. To call on the name of the Lord is to receive from the Name, and to be called by that Name is virtually to be called by God. This makes the story of man as the Bible recounts it quite dazzling. We hear then of various 'calls', such as those to Abraham² (Isaiah 51:2, Hebrews 11:8, cf. Gen. 17:5), Isaac (Gen. 17:19), Jacob (Gen. 32:28). Such callings are in connection with God's covenant; hence the callings are purposive and (so) intelligible. After these there is a succession of callings which come quickly to mind such as those of Moses (Exodus 3:4, 19:20, 24:16), Samuel (I Sam. 3:4), Israel as a nation (Hosea 11:1, cf. 1:10), the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 49:1), Jesus (Luke 1:31, 35, Matt. 1:21, Hosea 11:1, cf. Matt. 2:14), the disciples (Matt. 4:21)³, Paul (Rom. 1:1), and so on. This is why Paul speaks so much of vocation or calling, of which we will see the nature as we examine it

¹ See Genesis 1:5, 8, 10 where God 'calls' things into being, and 2:19 where Adam, under God gives vocational function by calling the names of the living creatures.

² The call of Abraham is a rich example of calling. Isa. 51:2 says that '...for when he was one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many', i.e. it was a call from barrenness to fatherhood of a great family; calling is powerfully effective.

³ Notice Peter's call in particular as shown in John 1:41-42. The change of Peter's name from Simon to Cephas (Peter, i.e. 'a rock', cf. Matt. 16:18), is to change Peter as a person, i.e. in his character

particularly. In Hosea 1:10 Israel's people are to be called 'Sons of the living God' (cf. II Cor. 6:18). John in his first epistle echoes the prophet by saying, 'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God. He adds, 'And so we are,' meaning that such calling cannot be ineffective. As Paul has said of God, 'the One who calls', so John sees Him thus.

From the beginning (Adam) to the end (the Parousia) God deals with mankind by His calling.

(b) Elements of the Call or Calling

(1) Abraham, Israel and Covenant

We have seen that God calls persons to vocation, and events into being. It would seem clear in the O.T. that He calls people or peoples rather than merely individuals. When He calls Abraham into fatherhood (cf. Genesis 17:5-8) He is really calling a people - His people and peoples (cf. Genesis 12:3, 49:10) - into existence. This call is so effective that Paul says in Romans 4 that both Abraham and Sarah were as good as dead, but Abraham believed God could raise from the dead. This was his faith in (1) The Personal call, and (2) The corporate (or people) call.

Abraham is called into covenant vocation. This is particularised in Israel. Hence in Isaiah 48:12 God says, 'Hearken to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called!' This is repeated as choice in Isaiah 43:10 where God says to Israel, 'You are my witnesses, and my servant whom I have chosen'. In Isaiah 43:1 He says, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you: I have called you by my name. You are mine.' In spite of Israel's sin 'the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable' (Rom. 11:29) for in Isaiah 54:6 God says, 'For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in Spirit, like a wife when she is cast off...' Israel is told that God has called her in righteousness (Isaiah 42:6), whilst in Isaiah 49:1 Israel confesses, as the Suffering Servant, 'The Lord called me from the womb'. A study of these elements reveals the nature of Israel's certainty in the light of God's sovereignty. However, sovereignty is not merely impassivity on God's part, His dogged intention to fulfil His will, but that determination to effect that which is consistent with His entire nature (cf. Jer. 9:23-24, Exod. 34:6-7). Such must prove best for His creation.

If Abraham and Israel are called into covenant relationship with God, then the covenant-people are also called into filial relationship with God. Isaiah 43:6-7 speaks of bringing 'my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my Name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made'. If the covenant is not always included under the term 'calling' yet the Suffering Servant who is called, as we have seen, is himself the very covenant, and indeed the new covenant of God (Isa. 42:6, cf. 43:1, 10, 44:1ff, etc.). Nevertheless the call to covenant is the call to witness (Isaiah 43: 10), and this is shown in Exodus 19:5-6 where Israel is called to be a holy nation, a priest-people amongst all peoples of the earth. Light is thrown back on this idea from I Peter 2:9-10 where the priest-nation tells the works of Him who has called it out of darkness into His marvellous light. Calling then, is never merely an act of favouritism or rescue on God's part. Its important element is its aim, i.e. to effect in the called the will and purpose of the Caller.

(2) What We Are Called Into

Without doubt men are called 'according to His purpose' (Rom. 8:28). That purpose is enclosed within foreordination, forelove, and predestination. Many Scriptures concerning call indicate the wonderful things into which a man is called. Doubtless God will effect these, but the call itself precedes these. That is, whom He calls He also justifies and then glorifies. Call precedes justification and so is not justification itself. With this principle in mind we may now look at those things into which God calls us, always keeping in mind that He equally calls us out of other things, e.g. sin, darkness, bondage, death (etc.).

Called into Christ's Fellowship (I Cor. 1:9). The context of this call shows the assurance God gives by calling into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. The true believer lives in the context of the Son.

Called to be Saints (Rom. 1:7). This links with the call to sanctification which has been spoken of as being both a status given, and a process lived. Here 'saints' relates to Daniel 7:13ff, where the saints are given the Kingdom under the 'Son of Man'. It is not static status but a dynamic one. One is in the Kingdom.

Called into the Kingdom and Glory (I Thess. 2:12). Col. 1:13 speaks rather of us being transferred from the powers of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. Yet that is the call effected. God's call is effective for the elect, as we will see. II Thess. 1:5 speaks of another aspect of the Kingdom (cf. Acts 14:22), namely suffering for it, but in I Thess. 2:12 the thought is that man's position in the Kingdom is assured. With it is the promise (the call) of glory, i.e. glorification. II Thess. 2:14 emphasises the glory - 'so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ'. I Peter 5:10 says, 'the God of all grace who has called you to His eternal glory'. The Kingdom and the glory prove to be the one. Other related elements are shown in the next paragraph.

Called to Things Eternal. In I Tim. 6:12 Paul says, '...take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...' Hebrews 9:15 speaks of 'those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance' 1, whilst Revelation 19:9 speaks of the blessed ones as being called to 'the marriage supper of the Bride and the Lamb'. It is remarkable that the ultimate possession of the inheritance (cf. Ephes. 1:14, 18, Rev. 19:7) is contingent upon calling.

Called Unto Holiness (I Thess. 4:7, 5:23, 24, II Thess. 2:13, cf. I Peter 1:2, 2:9-10). This of course links with 'called to be saints' 1. Passages such as I Cor. 6:11, I Pet. 1:2, and II Thess. 2:13 indicate that sanctification is indeed consecration and that primarily it is being separated to God and set apart for God. That is why in the O.T. the altar sanctified the gift, i.e. the gift was truly set apart for God by being placed there. That is why those sanctified to God such as the believing husband or wife themselves sanctify their children (cf. I Cor. 7:13ff). However, the initial work of salvific cleansing is also essential (I Cor. 6:11) to sanctification. The blood of Christ cleanses. The cleansing effected, one is called into holiness. This is the thrust of I Thess. 4:7 - 'God has not called us for (or, to) uncleanness but in holiness'. I Thess. 5:23 prays for the saints to be sanctified by God in every part of their being. The next verse adds, 'He who calls you is faithful and He will do it,' meaning He has called generally to all His things, and in particular to holiness, and He will see all things to the end, including this particular sanctifying. This links with Phil. 1:6, 'He who has begun a good work in you will complete it right up until the day of Christ'. In Ephesians 1:4 the term 'chosen' is used, but the goal is the same, namely that 'we should be holy and blameless before him'. It is the nature of God and the character He determines for created man which demands

holiness and leads to it in and by the call (I Peter 2:9-10).

Called into Light. In John's first epistle 'light' and 'love' are almost synonymous. This is also the same in Ephesians 5. To 'walk in love' is to 'walk in light'. In I Peter 2:9-10 the contrast is light and darkness. We have been called 'out of darkness into His marvellous light'. This is equivalent to having been 'no people' and now to be the 'people of God'. This people is a holy nation. Thus the call to light parallels the call to holiness.

Called into Liberty (Gal. 5:13). This fact of liberty is a broad one in its scope. II Cor. 3 shows the contrast between the epochs (dispensations) of bondage and liberty. Liberty is from the enemies which dominate man - sin, Satan, the world, the world-powers, the flesh, wrath, the law, judgement, death. The effective call defeats the previous bondage. Again the call does not of itself effect freedom, but the call is into the freedom already (objectively) effected by Christ.

Called into Hope (Ephes. 1:18, 4:4). By saying 'the hope to which He has called you', and 'You were called to the one hope that belongs to your call', Paul shows that call not only relates to what God has effected but also to what He will effect, i.e. what He will have effected, for hope is the outcome of the work of God. It is effected in God's understanding, and so is assured to faith.

Called into Sonship (I John 3:1-3, Rom. 9:26, Hosea 1:10). '...that we should be called sons of God' means that we are called to be sons for we are called sons. The verse shows this. We must become what we already are, i.e. sons for such we have been called. To be named is to have the vocation consonant with the naming. What must be seen in all these cases is the plural 'we'. Calling is rarely designated individualistically. We experience all the elements (nominated above) corporately, and they take on their richest meaning and significance in that context.

Called into Peoplehood. We have already seen that calling is primarily corporate. Hence 'sons' means 'family'. In Romans 9:24-26 Paul takes up the call of Israel and the Gentiles. In this passage both Gentiles and Jews are called 'my people', where, previously, they were not so called. That means that both Jews and Gentiles have been called into being the true people of God, in the one body. So see Ephesians 2:11-21.

Called into Patient Endurance. If we look at the list above we will see that effective calling brings us into things which God has accomplished or effected. However, also He calls us to experience these things, and sometimes to be what is consonant with them. For example, to be called into holiness is to be holy. To be called into sonship is to be sons; and so on. In I Peter 2:19ff, Peter speaks of true and reasonable suffering. He says, '...if you do right, and suffering for it, take it patiently, you have God's approval, for to this you have been called...' Hence calling is also into a way of living. Without this calling such living would not be rational, purposeful, endurable.

Called into Service. In Mark 1:16-20 Jesus calls his disciples to follow him. The word 'called' is used in verse 20. In Mark 3:13-14 it is recorded, 'And he went up into the hills and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.' The call is with a view to service. In the case of Samuel as a boy, God calls to him in order to prepare him for a task. In Gal. 1:15 - 'But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, in order that I might preach him amongst the Gentiles'. This self-evident call to service is reinforced

by Paul in 'called to be an apostle' whilst Acts 13:2 has 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them' (cf. Acts 26:16ff). Many others are said to be called to service throughout Scripture, e.g. Jeremiah, Cyrus, and so on. Calling then is by the Father, by Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

(3) The Modes and Means of Calling

All that is calling (the call) depends upon the Caller and His agencies. The call cannot be genuine, effective, functional, fruitful unless the Caller and His agencies are true. The nature of the Caller affects the nature of the called. The action of the Caller affects the actions of the called. We may now look at the modes, means and media of calling.

God Calls. I Peter 1:15 says, 'He who has called you...' This is God. II Tim. 1:8-9 says, '...God who has saved us and called us...' Gal. 1:6 speaks of '...Him who called you...' This theme is stated many times. Hence the basis of calling is God and His choice. The call then must be viable, stable, effective.

God, Christ, and the Call. Rom. 1:6, I Cor. 1:9, Gal. 1:6, and I Peter 5:10 (cf. II Tim. 1:9) show that God calls us to Christ, to the fellowship of His Son, in and for grace. Some translate Rom. 1:6 'by Christ Jesus', making him the Agent of the Father.

God, the Gospel and the Call. II Thess. 2:14 says, 'He called you through our Gospel'. Here the Gospel is the means of making the call effective. Gal. 1:6 and context implies that one must therefore live consistently with the medium of the call, the Gospel.

God Calls in Holiness. I Peter 1:15 says, '...He who called you is holy', and implies the call is therefore holy, and holiness must obtain with the called. II Tim. 1:9 says God has '...called us with a holy calling

The Calling is Heavenly. Hebrews 3:1 speaks of sharing in a heavenly call. It suggests this was the call of Jesus, and that it has affinity with the calling of Moses. This relates then to both the origin and nature of the call. In Philippians 3:14 some translators have reckoned the call as 'from above', whilst others see it as 'to above' - hence the 'upward calling' of the R.S.V. This points to both origin and goal. It is a call from above to above.

All of these elements, then, show us the high nature, modes and goals of calling. They show us how God works, and in that working what He is about, and the end or goal to which calling leads.

(ii) Calling Is By The Father, and Effectual

(a) The Calling is By the Father

We have noted that calling involves the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, as in all works of creation, redemption and restoration the Father is the Initiator and the Son and the Spirit Mediator and Agent respectively, although this is rarely stated as such. We recognise that what the Father does so the Son also works with Him, and, of course the Spirit also who is at once the Spirit of the Father and of the Son.

Nevertheless it is important that we see the Father as the Initiator of

calling. This is especially so when some descriptions of calling seem to work on the basis of God's irresistible power, or what theologians call *potestas absoluta*, i.e. unlimited power. When God is understood in all His attributes (love, goodness, truth, holiness, righteousness), and when these attributes are seen as personal, then the power of God lies in its true nature, and it is in accordance with this nature that He acts. When, then, He calls, His call is congruous with His nature. All idolaters attribute great power to their god, but if God has **potestas absoluta** then it is that primarily of holy love, and not the unlimited power of which the philosopher speaks.

In order to understand this better let us look at some descriptions of calling:

'...God summoning men by His word, and laying hold of them by His power, to play a part in and enjoy the benefits of His gracious purposes'. (J. I. Packer, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, p.108.) He adds, '...an act of summoning which effectively evokes from those addressed the response which it invites.' '...the process by which God calls those whom He has already elected and appointed, out of their bondage to this world, so that He may justify and sanctify them (Rom. 8: 29f) and bring them into His service'. (L. Coenen, *Dictionary of N.T. Theology*, Vol. 1., p.275.) 'In a general sense, the call is God's way of encountering man. (Ed. Desires. *Allmen's 'vocabulary of the Bible'*, p.46.) 'Calling is the efficacious summons on the part of God the Father, in accordance with, and in pursuance of, His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, addressed to sinners dead in trespasses and sins, a call that ushers them into fellowship with Christ and into possession of the salvation of which he is the embodiment; a call immutable in its character by reason of the purpose from which it proceeds, and the bond it effects.' (John Murray, '*Collected Writings*', Vol. 2, p.165.)

These descriptions are very useful, and more so when we realise, as we have said, that they spring from the nature of God and should be understood accordingly. For example, God's calling is preceded by His foreordination and election, as is evident in Romans 8:28-30, '...those whom He predestined He also called...' Calling is more than the gesture God makes towards men to apprise them of His intentions. It also carries the promise that those whom He has called He will cause to come to the fulness of calling, i.e. its ends and goals, as well as its present experiences. Hence Paul says, 'God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son' (I Cor. 1:9). He has already promised, 'He will confirm you unto the end, blameless to the day of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Again, in I Thess. 5:24 Paul says, 'Faithful is He who calls you and He will do it,' i.e. sanctify His people wholly so that they will be blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The statement 'Faithful is He who calls you' means that God is true to what He purposes. His call is -sacrosanct. Paul says,the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable'. Hence to know the call is to know God, and to know God truly is to know the call. As faithful as He is as a Creator and will so see man brought to glory, so as faithful He is as Caller, and will see the call through to man's glorification.

Even further we have to see that it is as Father. Jesus spent time in showing that the Father calls to the Son, doubtless so that the Son may bring men to the Father (John 6:44-46, 65, Matt. 11:27, John 1:18, 14:6). We see that it is out of being Father that God calls men, and calls them to be His sons. This gives a warmer, richer slant to calling than if we see it as the cold and unbeatable intention of the omnipotent God and His **potestas absoluta**. This is the warm call of the loving - albeit holy - Father! This also makes sense both of the modes and methods of calling, as well as the purposes and goals of it.

(b) The Calling is Effectual

The Scriptures do not use the term 'effectual' for the call, because that, anyway, is presupposed. The supportive statements of Paul which we have just quoted are to encourage those called to believe that the call is God's assurance that they not only have come to Him but they will reach the destination God has set for them. At the same time, as we will see, they must not arrogate these promises and so become proud and presumptuous. Rather this call should continually humble them, even if only because of its wonderful promises.

Call, then, includes the thought 'effectual' so that the word itself does not have to be used. 'Ineffectual calling' would be a monstrous and empty term. It is God's holy love which assures the effective nature of calling. It is the plan God has as Creator for His creatures, as Father for His children, as King for His true subjects. We have seen in Isaiah that God's calling of Israel ensures their ultimate end, and in outlining this end (Romans chs. 9-11) Paul states strongly that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. The history of Israel is that of a nation continually chastised for its rebellion and idolatry, but the initial promises of God are nevertheless being fulfilled. Likewise the new call to Gentiles who come by Christ is equally irrevocable.

(c) Making the Call Effectual

It would not be difficult to see that the call is all of grace. This must be so if it follows foreordination (foreloving) and predestination. If it is of grace then it is not of man's striving. It is monergistic (one working) as against synergistic (two working). God works. Why then the many admonitions to work? Peter says (11 Peter 1:10), 'Therefore brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'

In Philippians 3:10-14 Paul speaks of an intense striving for a full resurrection. He concludes, 'I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus'. Doubtless Peter (11 Pet. 1:10) did not mean one could ensure calling by action, but rather that action sprang from, and was to be commensurate with, calling. Likewise in Phil. 3:10-14 Paul is seeking to 'fill out' his calling. In I John 3:3 John says that hope that one will be like Christ inspires one to seek to be so now. Similarly in Ephes. 4:1 Paul speaks of living worthy of one's calling, i.e. being congruous with it in action. II Thess. 1:11 prays that God (Himself) will make His people worthy of His call. To walk worthy results from being made to walk worthy.

Even so the work remains monergistic. It is God who is working (energising) within, although there seems to be an apparent synergism. When we lose sight of the fact that it is the holy Creator-Father who calls, then we miss the rich evocation of God, an evocation which is manifested in obedience springing from love and gratitude. If calling is merely moving puppet-man along the floodtide of potestas absoluta then calling loses its true and wonderful nature for man.

(d) 'Many Are Called But Few Are Chosen' (Matt. 22:14)

This passage has puzzled many. If calling is effectual then how does it happen that few are chosen, since calling and election seem to be virtually

synonymous? The answer must be that there are two uses of the term calling. The first is general to indicate that God calls to many, and that this call goes unheeded. The second and main meaning is that there is an effectual call of God. Those who are called and who do not respond are not the elect. The elect respond to the call. All of this is intelligible. God's call is not an empty call simply because men do not respond. He calls men to the joy of a wedding feast; such seem to be the very elect, i.e. of Israel. They do not respond. Again when all who are called should signify so by the wearing of the true (wedding) garment, and yet one despises the true robe, then he is not truly a called-one, an elect-one, and is cast out.

For the most part, in Scripture, the call refers to that action of calling by God which is effectual, the outcome of His electing purposes. In Matt. 22:14 God's call is an invitation to all, but responded to only by the truly chosen, the **eklekto**.

(iii) Calling Is Corporate And Personal

In the O.T. Israel is called as a corporate entity. Isaiah 51:2 shows Israel as a family, an entity in saga, 'Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you: for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many.' God encourages Israel, 'But now thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.' (Isa. 43:1) Also Isaiah 48:12, and 54:6 show God's love to Israel as a nation; hence they are called as a corporate entity. This is confirmed by Exodus 4:22 and Hosea 11:1. At the same time the Suffering Servant appears as a person, yet the person who epitomises all Israel: 'The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name' (Isa. 49:1). This indicates the incarnation of the Servant.

If Israel is seen as the family of God - and it is - then this presupposes God as Father of His people. Hence, again, the call relates to God's paternal nature.

In the N.T. calling is to persons, but at the same time to the people of God, the true 'Israel of God'. God is Father, but to His entire people. Hosea 11:1 which related to Israel is now applied to Jesus the Son (Matt. 2:14f). Hence the Suffering Servant is in the form of Jesus (Mark 10:45). At the same time the calling of God is to the fellowship of His Son which makes him the corporate entity. This is seen in the figure of the Body. In Galatians 3:26-29 believers are sons through faith in Christ Jesus and so they form the family. Likewise when they are baptised they put on Christ and are all one in him, hence their calling is both personal and corporate. This being a corporate entity does not cancel personal experience of the call but does exclude individualism as such. Whilst those called recognise they have to work at their calling as a family then the corporate experience of call enables each person to have success and to develop and mature within the calling.

(iv) A Summary Of Calling

Calling is based upon election or predestination (Romans 8:30). It is God's invitation to men to accept salvation in His Kingdom through Jesus Christ, and to come to glory, i.e. personal glorification. In the call also is the invitation to a new way of life, of service, and of suffering. Because it is the Father who calls it is an invitation to sonship. Because it is effected through the Gospel,

through the Son and the Spirit it is the call to life and liberty. This also makes it a call to the corporate family of God's people. Because of the purposes of God for His called ones the call has the certain hope of eternal life, inheritance, ultimate sharing in familyhood, and - as we have said - participation in the glorious liberty of the sons of God, i.e. personal glorification.

This call of God is at once an assurance to the called one, and a cause for great humility. It does not, rightly understood, breed arrogance or presumption. To be called makes the deepest demands of obedience, not in order to secure calling, but because calling when understood secures obedience.

Finally, calling is the means of revealing God in His roles of Creator, Father, and King. It also reveals the work of the Son and the Spirit to effect calling by the work of redemption and its internal application to the believer.

Calling, nevertheless, cannot be understood apart from the teaching of fore-ordination, predestination and election, so that we now naturally proceed to put it into this context.

5. Terms Relating To God's Purposes

(i) The Terms Themselves

We have seen that the term 'call' has two aspects - (a) A general call or offer, which may be rejected by some. (b) A specific call to certain which is effectual. Those in whom it is effectual are called 'the elect', and it is evident that their election is God's choice. God's choice itself has to do with two other elements, namely foreknowledge and predestination. Foreknowledge is mentioned before predestination (cf. Romans 8:28-30), but we do not need to think of the former being prior to the second in time. In any case both are prior to time, and both have to do with the goal of God's will. Ephes. 1:5 speaks of predestination to sonship being 'according to the purpose of His will', whilst Ephes. 1:11 informs us that He 'accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will', and further in Ephes. 3:11 we read, 'This was according to the eternal purpose which He has realised in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

Foreknowledge has been interpreted along two lines:- (a) God foresees what will happen in time and acts accordingly. (b) Foreknowledge is really foreordination, i.e. what happens is what God has caused to happen. The problem with the first interpretation is that it envisages an action which is to some extent apart from God, and which He then captures and works for His own goals. This really infers He is not sovereign. It appears that the latter interpretation is closest to Scripture. The use of the Greek verb **proginosko** in Romans 8:29 links up with the noun of foreknowledge (**prognosei**) in Acts 2:23, '...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God...', and makes it clear that to foreknow is to foreordain. A comparison of the verb 'to know' in Genesis 18:19, Amos 3:2, Hosea 13:5, I Cor. 8:3 and Gal. 4:9 shows that for God to 'know' is for Him to 'make to come to pass'. Predestination then is the goal of (a) Choice (election) and (b) Foreknowledge. It is literally 'setting the destination beforehand'. Only if we are alert will we see the difference between 'fate' and 'destiny'. The Judaic-Christian Scriptures do not preach fate but destiny. When we wrongly interpret them we may easily arrive at the idea of fate.

(ii) The History Behind the Terms

If we agree that Scripture is a unity, and that elements which come later depend on those which are former, but are more formulated, throwing light back upon those which are former, then we will understand that the doctrines of call, foreknowledge, election and predestination are distilled from the whole of Scripture. For example, it is no use asserting that such doctrines destroy the will of man, unless, in fact we see that is a fact in practical ways, in Scripture itself, which of course it is not.

Election or choice is strong in the O.T. God chose Abraham, and in Abraham, Israel. He chose Abraham with a view to blessing all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1ff). We have seen that this choice is also God's call. He calls what He has chosen. Israel was chosen, not because of merit or qualities of excellency but because God set His love upon Israel (Deut. 7:6-7, 23:5, etc.). It is clear that Abraham was justified by faith and not by any innate righteousness, as Romans 4 makes quite clear. Likewise Israel had nothing about it to impel God's choice. God's choice was a free one, happening out of grace and not merit. This choice is unchangeable. Psalm 33:11-12 says, 'The counsel of the Lord stands for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen as His heritage!'

The goal of such choice is shown in Isaiah 43:6-7, namely the glory of God. God protects His chosen people, and even when they disobey He does not abandon them. He chastises them, and sends them into exile, and again restores them. Because He has chosen them He will not leave them even if He punishes them for their evil. His election will be fulfilled according to Romans 9-11.

Foreknowledge or foreordination is seen in the Biblical prophetic thrust. From Genesis 3:15 onwards God tells what will happen. Amos 3:7 states the principle:- 'Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets.' God does not merely see what will happen. He says He is the One who makes it to happen. In Isaiah 43:13-14 He alerts His people to the 'new thing' He is doing. In Isaiah 48:5 God says He told things long before they happened so that they could not say they originated with the idols! He says He will say even newer things, right on the moment they happen. In this way call, election, and foreordination, constantly relate. Sometimes these elements refer to nations, sometimes to Israel, sometimes to persons within Israel, and even outside it. Israel under judgement would be shattered were it not for these elements of election and calling. These alone allow the nation to continue. They contain the dynamic of hope. God never finally rejected His people, although the prophets go close to saying that. The prophets look for a holy remnant, those who remain faithful. The faithless miss the promises, but the faithful will (ultimately) inherit them. God's election is a covenant matter, based upon His promises. We have seen that in Isaiah 63:16 Israel clings to the Paternal nature of God and His promises. In Romans 9-11 Paul insists there is no switch in God's sovereign purposes (or promises) for Israel.

In the New Testament the promises to Israel now extend beyond that people to the Gentiles - the nations of the world. A new people has grown up incorporating the responsive of Israel. I Peter 2:9-10 is the take-over of Exodus 19:5-6 from Israel. However, Romans chs. 9-11 warns us that the remnant of Israel is yet to be saved, for they are among the elect.

In the N.T. the Elect One is primarily Jesus. This is stated by the Father in Luke 9:35 (Gk. **eklelegmenos**). The conflation of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 ('My Son': 'My Elect') confirms this. However the elect son, Israel (Exodus 4: 22, Hosea 11:1)

is now the elect Son, Jesus (Cf. Hosea 11:1, Matt. 2:14f). Hence the elect people are in the Son. This is a powerful truth of the N.T. In Ephesians 1:3-7 the people of God are blessed in him, chosen in him, predestined in him, and grace is bestowed on them in him. As we have seen under 'Calling' this Suffering Servant has been called of God, appointed and chosen by Him, and so election has come to its completeness in him. The Pauline teaching of 'in Christ' substantiates this principle, e.g. Gal. 3:26-29.

As in the O.T. so in the N.T. election is of (a) Grace, and (b) Sovereignty. Both these elements are seen in Ephesians 1 and amplified elsewhere. What becomes clear from the N.T. is the eternal choice or nature of election. In passages such as Ephes. 1:4, II Thess. 2:13, and II Tim. 1:9 election and grace are 'from before the ages'. Here the choice and goal intermingle so that election and predestination are the one.

Predestination in the O.T. is strongly put. Proverbs 16:4 says, 'The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.' This is a hard saying. Isaiah 46: 9-10 has it, '...I am God and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established and I will accomplish my pleasure''. This principle is repeated in one way or another elsewhere in Isaiah, 14:27, 22:11, 37:26, 43:13, 44:6-8. Psalm 33:11 says His counsels will come to pass (cf. Proverbs 19:21, 21:30). God tells what He will do. The idols are dumb on this score. As we have seen in election, God handles His history in a way which will fulfil His electing promises. None of this predestinating work must be seen as merely the brutal application of unlimited power to the affairs of men and nations, overriding them as defenceless and useless ants - so to speak - but must be seen in the light of His nature, His covenant love, His transcendent holiness, His eternal goodness, and His unfailing righteousness towards men and nations; otherwise we will end up with a grim and powerful idol, and not the living God who determines the best for His people.

In the N.T. predestination simply builds on the theme of the O.T. In fact it is what was predicted as predestinated in the O.T. that the N.T. builds upon. The church teaches nothing but what the prophets have spoken. All that Christ has done is the fulfilment of the prophets. God's purposes are being fulfilled, and the prophecies as yet not completed are on the way to being fulfilled. These prophecies though given in time relate to matters determined before time. We have seen that Ephesians 1:5 says God predestinated (in love) men and women to be His sons. In I Peter 1:20 a Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world (cf. Rev. 13:8). In Acts 2:23 we see he was predetermined to be slain by the hands of wicked men. In II Tim. 1:9 God's grace had planned salvation from before time. In Matt. 25:34 the entrance of the elect into the Kingdom is planned from before time. In John 17 Christ speaks of the glory he had before time, and it is evident God had given him - the true Shepherd - his flock before time began. Christ himself in Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33 tells his disciples that it is ordained that he go to the Cross, be slain and rise again. It also becomes evident very quickly that he is thinking in terms of certain persons, of the ones immediately given to him, and then of others beyond their circle who are also given. (See John 10 for the whole matter of the given flock, as also the Father's care for them.) They must be brought to one fold. Only those taught of the Father will come to him. None can come except the Father draw them (John 6:44-46, 65).

The N.T. in fact cannot be known unless the note of unfailing certainty is recognised. God's plan will come to pass (Ephes. 1:3-14). God's calling, unfailing as we saw above, is effectual. Sanctification is a matter of prior determination as is salvation (II Thess. 2:13, I Peter 1:2). Glorification has also been planned (I Cor 2:6ff). Indeed the dynamic of hope would be missing without predestination.

If God has not set men's destination beforehand, then how can they possibly arrive? Passages such as I Cor. 15:24-28 (spelling the judgement of evil), Acts 3:21 (the restoration of all things), and Revelation 10:1-7 (the fulfilment of all things) assure men of faith that God will triumph in His universe. We have already seen from Ephesians 1 and 3 that God accomplishes all things according to the purpose of His will, and has indeed done this in Christ. The mopping-up operations' alone remain to be done, and they are being done. Jesus is Lord: he reigns and works from the throne, at the right hand of the Father.

6. How Shall We Understand These Things?

The Appendix gives a fair testimony to the fact that calling, election and predestination trouble many. Endless debate has taken place, and with little satisfaction to most. The primary problem, the question of man's free-will, is what troubles so many. To raise some of these objections is simply to recommence the debate, which we seek to avoid doing. However, some matters must at least be considered.

(i) God's Work: Monergistic or Synergistic?

Monergism simply means 'one working', i.e. God working. Synergism is two working and working together. In election, calling, and predestination, indeed in the work of salvation does God work and not man, or does God work with man, and man with God? That is the question.

An obvious Scripture is 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is working in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure' (Phil. 2:12-13). This verse may mean no more than the salvation of a difficult situation at Philippi just as Paul had his own difficult one in prison (Phil. 1: 19). If it means salvation itself, then the verse seems to indicate synergism. However the verb 'to energise' suggests that God is energising so that each can work out his salvation. It is, then, really God who works, and man who co-operates with Him. However, such a verse should be seen in the light of other Scriptures. The work man seems to do is (a) Have faith, (b) Repent, (c) Receive forgiveness. Yet faith is a gift (Ephes. 2:8-10, Phil. 1:29), repentance is a gift (Acts 5:31- 32, 11:18), and forgiveness is a gift (Acts 5:31-32). It is by grace man is saved, through faith (Ephes. 2:8-10, II Tim. 1:89).⁴

Not only is salvation by faith, as we have seen, but sanctification also. This is seen in Acts 15:9 'cleansed their hearts by faith', and 26:18 'them who are sanctified by faith in me'. I Cor. 6:9-11 speaks of washing, sanctification and justification being accomplished by the name of Christ and the Spirit of God.

II Thess. 2:13 speaks of 'God who chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth'. It can be seen then that man's salvation is wholly from God, wholly from grace, and monergistic. Ephes. 2: 1-5 makes it clear that man was dead until God quickened him. The objective death

⁴ Notice also in Acts 3:19 Peter commands his audience, 'Repent and be converted,' i.e. 'convert', i.e. 'turn around'. This would seem to be a work also. Yet we are reminded of Jeremiah's 'Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned!' (Lam. 5: 21, Jer. 31:18). Here again the will has been gripped by God, but the power to accomplish that will is not present. Hence when one converts one has been converted. Grace then is truly verified as grace.

of the Cross was the means by which this happened. The N.T. speaks much of the interior work of the Spirit to effect regeneration (I Cor. 6:11, Titus 3:5, etc.). Romans 7:13-25 teaches the principle that man's will may be changed, and delight in the law of God, but he is impotent of himself to effect victory over sin. It is God who energises him to do good. Only in this sense does he work out his salvation, but in no sense does he (a) Work for his salvation, or (b) Work his salvation. It continues to be of grace as Titus 2:11f amply demonstrates. Of course it may well be true to say that man works from his salvation or because of his salvation, but he does not work salvation.⁵

(ii) The Real Problem: The Will of God and the Will of Man

If man were to read the Scriptures on their own merit, rather than subject them to his own criteria of what truth must be, then he would find little or no difficulty with the will of God. His chief difficulty with the will of God is that he does not wish to conform with it. This goes for God's will for obedience to His laws, as for His plans for salvation history and the glorification of the universe. Man's main objection is against God doing His will. Man never objects to doing his own will. He takes it that man should be free at least to will his will, even if he cannot carry it through. Why God, the Creator, Owner, and Redeemer of the universe should not be able to carry out His own will must remain a mystery. It is simply that man's will opposes that of God, that is man has his own plans and wishes to exercise his own will in regard to them.

The many Scriptures which state that God will fulfil His will and has planned to do so from before time can be of immense comfort since 'shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Does not this One work in all things for the good of His elect? Is He not true Creator, true King, and true Father to His people? What then has anyone (but the impenitent sinner) to fear from Him? He has planned the action of grace and love from before time. What then can there be of deadly fatalism in this? What kind of a universe would it be if God were to leave to the arbitrary movements of men, demons, and fallen angels, let alone the perfectionist pretensions of high-minded utopians, would-be messiahs, and the like?

We conclude then that the work God effects is monergistic. When we say this we are confronted by the whole fact of the bondage or freedom of man's will. Is man, then, a puppet? Is he simply manipulated by God? Is his choice of will free or only seemingly free?

(iii) The Freedom and Bondage of the Will

Man as created, prior to the Fall is represented as free. He works with God. He tends the garden. He relates as man to wife, wife to man. He relates to God in freedom, fellowship with Him. Provision is made for every need. Yet man must obey the will of God. This obedience is at once mandatory and voluntary. Where there is obedience - a natural enough matter! - there is life. Disobedience will bring death.

When man rebels, seeking his own autonomy, he does not find a further freedom which the serpent has suggested is available. Instead he discovers fear and

⁵ Even so, the 'energy' required for moral action is supplied by God. Man is impotent to effect moral action from his own resources. 'In me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing' (Rom. 7:18).

death, and his will is captured. Jesus' statement, 'He who commits sin is the bondsman of sin' is now discovered to be the ruling principle. The question is whether man-under-sin has freedom of will. Some have stated that he is free to do sin, but not to do actual good. Freedom to do sin is no real freedom as it militates against the created functional nature of man, and so further entraps him. Romans 1:20-32 is a description of such bondage. All the attributes of God are reflected by true man, but man-in-bondage is in conflict and suffering because of his inability and refusal to fully reflect these.

The ability of man to respond to God out of his own resources has caused the historic Pelagian-Arminian-Calvinist-Lutheran controversy. The Pelagian believes in the inalienable, unassisted power of the human will. There can be no original sin; man is not morally weakened by Adam's sin. The Semi-Pelagian believes man be morally sick but insists that man must make the first move towards God, so that no matter how weak he is God will give him grace to move and be saved. The Arminian agrees that man is dead in sin and can do nothing, but that God gives grace to all men to have life. It is simply that one person co-operates with this grace and so renders it effectual, whereas another refuses (or fails) to co-operate and renders such grace ineffectual. The Lutheran is not Arminian, in that he recognises man is unable to co-operate. God must move him. Yet those who do not have the power to co-operate have the power to resist, that is every man has the power, and is free to resist grace. The Calvinist believes that man cannot resist grace when God comes to him, any more than he can co-operate with it. God chooses him, gives grace, and man must respond, hence he sees 'as many as were ordained to eternal life believed' to be the essence of God's work, not man'⁶ in any way. 'Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned' is along with 'working in us to will of His good pleasure' and 'Your people will offer themselves freely on the day You lead Your host', and, 'For from Him, and to Him, and through Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever. Amen' (Lam. 5:21, Phil. 2:13, Psa. 110:3, Rom. 11:36). Doubtless those who are not Calvinists will also see these Scriptures in the light of their own particular understanding.

In order to fully understand the above views a whole history of the theology of predestination needs to be studied. Augustine was the first theologian to amplify the matter of election. His thesis on predestination was opposed by Pelagius, a monk resident in Rome who was distressed at the thought that such views of God's grace would take away from man his accountability before God for his actions. Pelagius insisted that man must do good since God has given him this capability of doing good. Calvin for his part saw himself as following in the thought of Augustine. Augustine did not see a double decree of God, i.e. predestination of some to election, and some to reprobation. He saw predestination to be to eternal life whereas reprobation was the natural outcome of man's free will in sinning. Some see Calvin as insisting upon the double decree, whereas others say Calvin's use of this thought is qualified and does not constitute - as in High-Calvinism - such a statement. In 'The Institutes' (iii.21.5) Calvin says, 'eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others'. However, Calvin has to be read both generally and particularly to understand what he means by this.

The subject is not simple since predestination covers a number of areas. It speaks of predestination in a corporate sense, the election of God's people both in Israel, and in Christ. It speaks of predestination of nations, but then also

⁶ Some theologians insist that there was no basic divergence in Luther from Calvin, but that it was Melancthon, the systematiser of Lutheran doctrine who amended Luther's view. It is claimed that Luther's 'Bondage of the Will' shows no variance with Calvin's view.

of persons. The goals of predestination, both in this world and in eternity are also parts of the doctrine. All given in, the problem which Calvinism confronts us with is why God should choose some for life and not others who He allows to be lost. The choice seems arbitrary, and even wrong. It will always seem so

- (a) If we do not trust God to make His own choices, and oppose our values to His, and
- (b) If we insist that God is under obligation to save anyone, let alone the elect.

Nevertheless to many God's choice seems unfair. For those who seek to defend it there are many problems. The Judge of all the earth does right, and needs no defence. Our rationalisations in defence may be grossly deficient and obscure the true issue, and may even be a sign of our own uneasiness with God's decree.

(iv) Modern Approaches

The truth of history, especially in the West is the enormous fruitfulness of those who accept predestination. Nevertheless, in this age, the doctrine receives shallow consideration.⁷ Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Pelagius, Arminius and others receive superficial consideration apart from certain dedicated theologians. An attempt to effect a revival in Calvinism (or Arminianism) may blind us to fresh research or new insights on the problem. Many claim that Karl Barth has shown a whole new approach to the subject.⁸ In his 'Church Dogmatics' (vol. II, 'The Doctrine of God') Barth has a chapter entitled 'The Election of God', and it is divided into four sections, 'The Problem of a Correct Doctrine of the Election of Grace', 'The Election of Jesus Christ', 'The Election of the Community', and 'The Election of the Individual'. In the first section he voices the thought that the method of Augustine and the Reformers lacked much. The rest of his argument is Christological, that is Christ is God for us, as against the evil powers, releasing us from them. Christ himself is the elect. Hence we are chosen in him, and not merely through him. Roughly speaking, all that Christ is as the elect is what corporately the elect people are, and personally each one elected is. The question of reprobation does not, then, come to the fore, but rather the positive fact of God for His people, and His elect as persons. At first sight Barth seems to be saying - if in other words - what has often been said concerning election, but his method or treatment is wholly new and different, and warrants examination.

(v) The Biblical Approach

All schools of thought regarding predestination of course regard their approach as Biblical. The question we have to ask is whether in practice God must be sovereign in His universe, and is so depicted in Scripture. The answer must be, 'Yes.' The second question is, 'Did man have free will?' and the answer again must be, 'Yes.' Given in that man-in-sin has lost the essential freeness of his will, does he have apparent, if not actual freeness of that will? - the answer must again be, 'Yes.' Biblically, then, is God wrong and tyrannous in electing some to eternal life, and initiating His grace in their lives? The answer must be, 'No.' What then of those who are not wrought upon effectively by grace? The answer must surely remain in the mystery of (a) The will of God, and (b) The will (or 'won't') of man. Of course to understand the mystery of God is to truly

⁷ There is, of course, a great deal of research being undertaken in Calvinism, and its implications for the State, government, politics, ways of living, etc.

⁸ There is a comprehensive treatment of Barth's position in 'A Dictionary of Christian Theology' (ed. Alan Richardson, S.C.M. Press, 1969), pp.264-272.

understand the mystery of these elements. We cannot demand total knowledge now, and we have every revelation needed to know the nature of God is love, and nowhere arbitrary favouritism, cruelty, or tyranny. That should be sufficient for us. Such sufficiency does not forbid inquiry, discussion, and as far as possible Biblical rationalisation. The bringing to the Bible of extra-biblical presuppositions is no help. Biblical concepts only derive from long and faithful acquaintance with the Scripture itself. What must be said is that no student of Scripture is bound to see the subject of calling and election in the precise terms of any theologian, although he may be well-advised to receive all available and worthwhile insights from the fruits of research which are available.

7. Our Present Calling and Its Practice

With the simple knowledge that God is sovereign, and that His sovereignty is that of Creator, King and Father, we are able to proceed to the practice of our present vocation. I Cor. 1:26-31 tells us that as regards God's call, not many of us were mighty, noble or wise, according to worldly standards. However, the weak, the foolish, the despised, the nonentities were chosen in order to confound their (worldly) opposites.

The glory of calling and election is the grace which brought us into life, otherwise we surely would not have come. This grace has brought the response of love and gratitude (I John 4:19). Far from grace inducing laziness, or assurance of salvation producing presumption, forgiveness brings fear with love (Psa. 130:4) and election to holiness makes the full demand of holiness in life. If there is no assurance that we will be holy, then we will not now seek to be holy (cf. I John 3:1-3). Hence the New Testament makes high demands in regard to calling. Ephesians chapter 4 amplifies its initial statement, 'Walk worthy of your calling'. It shows the basis for such calling, and then demands living consistent with that calling. We have seen that we have been called in holiness, and to holiness. We have been called as sons, and to sonship. We have been called into the Kingdom and to glory. We have been called to endure pain, and to suffer patiently. We have been called into the fellowship of His Son. We have been called to work, serve, and proclaim the Gospel. We have seen all these things, and yet the most important is that we have been called and chosen in Christ, and predestined to sonship and glorification.

It is the knowledge of these things which provides us with motivation for obedience, holiness of life, and service. The power to accomplish them is the ever-present grace. Motivation is not power. Grace is God's action for us, and in us. It is God who energises both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Any refusal, then, to walk worthily of the vocation must be attended with shame and even sensings of guilt. Fulfilment of that vocation must bring serenity and joy. Paul's famous passage of Romans 7:13-25 is simply an exposition of the helplessness of himself of the believer. The presence of Christ, His Spirit, and God's grace all enable the believer to fulfil his calling here. This fact of calling is undergirded with the knowledge of God's election. The goal of election is presently experienced as hope, and hope, as we have said, is the present motivation to work consistently in current calling with what one will be in that day, the day of completion, the day of Jesus Christ.

It is imperative that we understand that neither calling nor election are to be thought of primarily in the singular. Ephesians 1:3ff makes it clear that calling is a corporate event, no matter how personal it may be to each believer. In calling we share the vocation, and in walking we walk together. None is called to do a lone and unaided pilgrimage. 'Together with all the saints' is the true

thought. 'Walking in the Spirit' is also a corporate matter. We encourage, remind, strengthen and sustain one another in the True Elect, the Son himself. We are the Elect People, called to be saints, and called, together, into the Kingdom of God.

Doubtless there is a personal calling, and this calling is often made clear by the gifts and offices to which we are called. Each has a gift, and this must be used in the combined ministry and service of the people of God, the community of Christ. Nevertheless there is also calling within the whole stream of earth's humanity. I Corinthians 7:20-24 - a puzzling passage to many - nevertheless makes the point that no matter what the state of each one when called, each must be the slave of Christ, and not the slave of men. With this attitude towards God and man he will fulfil the calling of God.

It is fitting, then, to close on this note, that calling is 'the upward call of God in Christ Jesus'. That is it is a call upward, and an election upward. It is of God. It is in Christ Jesus. It is never downward. It is never a low call. It is never other than of God, and is never out of Christ. Given all the problems of the mind which attach to these great themes, the practical is never in doubt. We must press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

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- APPENDIX - I

Elements Relating To Calling and Election

1. THE FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM

We might as well understand that all Calvinists by no means agree in their understanding of calling and election. Often they differ only on small points, but sometimes their differences are significant. Whilst most would accept the headings given under for the five points, they might differ somewhat in their understanding of them. For those interested in Calvin as a theologian, rather than primarily in Scripture, it is not easy to discover what is truly Calvin's view as against his disciples of a later time, and especially disciples who claim to be his interpreters. There are ultra- or high- Calvinists, as there are law Calvinists, and just Calvinists.

The Five Points

1. **The Total Inability of Man**, that is to either will to do good, or to do it, especially accompanying salvation. The fall is said to have deprived man of this and brought him to a state of death. Man is totally depraved, that is every area of his being is affected although he still has some sense of right and wrong. He is free to come to God but only as a bird with a broken wing is free to come, but cannot. Being in flesh he is not subject to the law of God, and cannot be. Certainly he is unable to initiate faith in God and a response to Him.
2. **Unconditional Election**. God is sovereign. He plans the future and goal of His world. High prophecies are made concerning His ultimate, e.g. the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord, the redeemed will be as a countless multitude, i.e. of vast dimensions both qualitatively and quantitatively. This election is not based on foreseen faith, but faith results from that which is foreordained. In the N.T. the words relating to election and choice are eklektos, ekloga, and eklego and are found forty-seven times. Some Scriptures are II Thess. 2:13, Matt. 24:24, 31, Mark 13:20, I Thess. 1:4, Rom. 11:7, I Tim. 5:21, Rom. 8:33, 11:5, II Tim. 2:10, Titus 1:1, I Peter 1:1f, 5:13, 2:9, I Thess. 5:9, Acts 13:48, John 6:37, 6:65, 13:18, 17:9. The principle of election is seen in Rom. 9:11-12. 'The children being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth, it was said to her, 'The elder shall serve the younger,' even as it is written, Jacob I have loved but Esau I have hated.' Just as there is predestination to salvation so there is predestination to reprobation.
3. **Limited Atonement**. Some prefer the term 'Limited Redemption'. The doctrine follows on naturally from the previous one, i.e. redemption is limited to the elect. Arguments are put forward against this on the ground that quantitatively Christ must have died for the sins of the world. It is argued against this that Christ's suffering was whole anyway. The limits on the atonement are those of purpose and application; its purpose was for the elect, and its application is to them.
4. **Efficacious Grace**. Some use the term 'irresistible', meaning that when God works in grace it cannot be resisted. However, the term efficacious means God's act is effectual. Man, left to his own sinfulness, would make no more and take no initiative towards salvation. Hence God moves in grace towards His elect. He works an inner change in them by His grace, the Word, and the Spirit.
5. **The Perseverance of the Saints**. Some prefer the term, 'The Preservation of the Saints' because it shows God's care for His elect. At the same time the fact of election is a power and motivation to do good works, and to live in obedience. Even should one of the elect backslide that does not make a difference, for the backsliding is temporary, whatever length of time it may endure. No one can pluck them from the hand of God. Warnings against apostasy are not beside the point: it is good to keep these red lights flashing and to warn against danger. The elect will heed them.

2. VARIOUS VIEWS ON PREDESTINATION

In the text of our notes we have briefly included the Augustinian-Calvinist, the Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, and Arminian views. Text-books on doctrine should

be consulted for a wider treatment. An excellent text is G. C. Berkouwer's *Divine Election*, (Eerdmans, Michigan, 1977). However one or two elements need to be included here for reference. According to Loraine Boettner in his *Reformed Doctrine of predestination* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Philadelphia 1977), pp.126-27 Infralapsarianism is as follows:- 'God proposed (1) To create; (2) to permit the Fall; (3) to elect to eternal life and blessedness a great multitude out of this mass of fallen men, and to leave others, as He left the Devil and the fallen angels, to suffer the punishment for their sins; (4) to give His Son, Jesus Christ, for the redemption of the elect; and (6) to send the Holy Spirit to apply to the elect the redemption that was purchased by Christ.' He then describes the Supralapsarian point of view. 'According to the supralapsarian view the order of events was: (1) To elect some creatable men (that is, men who were to be created) to life and to condemn others to destruction; (2) to create; (3) to permit the Fall; (4) to send Christ to redeem the elect; and (5) to send the Holy Spirit to apply this redemption to the elect.' He adds, 'The question then is as to whether election precedes or follows the Fall.' For the most part the Reformed Synods and Councils adopted the infralapsarian point of view.

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