



# The Doctrines of Grace

Effectual Calling and Regeneration

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## Effectual Calling and Regeneration

### 10.4

“Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet not being effectually drawn by the Father, they neither will nor can truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men that do not receive the Christian religion be saved; be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess.”

- The reality of an external call (cf. Matt. 11:28; Jn. 3:16; Acts 28:23-24—both Matt. 22:1-14)
  - Believers receive both the external call and the internal, effectual draw toward that call.
- Regeneration (Ez. 36:26-27; Jn 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Acts 5:31; 16:14; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:25; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3)
  - A unilateral act of God upon the hearts of those who are those dead in sin and blinded to spiritual truth resulting in the impartation of spiritual life and the capacity to desire and rightly discern the things of God.

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C.S. Lewis: “I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo, I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion.”

### Objections

- “Because of prevenient grace, an effectual calling is not necessary for people to repent and believe the Gospel. They can do so of their own choice.”
  - Prevenient grace (Jn. 1:9; 12:32; Rom. 2:4; Tit. 2:11)
    - Prevenient grace (on the dominant view) is 1) necessary, not sufficient 2) enabling 3) transformative 4) universal

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- The upshot of prevenient grace is that there is no one who *actually* experiences total inability/depravity—all such descriptions of inability describe man without God’s grace, but because *everyone has received God’s grace*, despite still being sinful, everyone has been restored to a point where they at least have the ability to choose to repent and believe the Gospel without a “further” work of God.
- Problems with Prevenient Grace
  - Prevenient grace presents a NT category that doesn’t exist—someone who is neither a light-hater, unable to please God who is dead in sin nor someone who his alive to God, united to Christ with sins forgiven. It presents a Princess Bride version of depravity—“mostly dead.”
  - If God’s grace is insufficient to save us (i.e., prevenient grace), it is difficult to understand how our exercise of faith does not provide us a legitimate boast before God and man.

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- Most importantly, the passages purported to demonstrate prevenient grace do not obviously refer to anything like what the doctrine suggests. As such, there is no biblical evidence for such a doctrine—instead, it is a logical construction motivated by avoiding the objection below.
- “If all people *actually experience total inability* to repent apart from an effectual calling that God does not extend to everyone, then God couldn’t genuinely call *all people* to repent and hold those who did not do so responsible for their choice given that they were unable to do otherwise owing to God’s own selectivity in extending the effectual call. But all Christians agree that God does call people everywhere to repent and holds people responsible for not doing so, and thus, despite being disposed toward sin, we can know that people do not *actually experience total inability*. Instead, they have been “touched” by prevenient grace.”

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## Recall...Solutions to the *Philosophical Problem* of Free Ability and Moral Responsibility

- **Deny 2** | Compatibilism/Soft Determinism—free choice, understood as the ability to do otherwise, is compatible with determinism
  - “If we had chosen otherwise, we would have done otherwise.”
  - “If we had desired otherwise, we would have chosen otherwise”
- **Deny 3** | Soft Incompatibilism/Libertarian Free Will—free choice is incompatible with determinism, but 1) determinism is false and 2) lacking a sufficient explanation does not necessarily render an action arbitrary or random.
  - Alternatively, 1) determinism is false, but 2) free choice does not require the ability to do otherwise so long as one is the source of their action.
- **Deny 7** | Semi-Compatibilism—free choice, understood as the ability to do otherwise, is incompatible with determinism but moral responsibility is consistent with our actions being determined in the appropriate manner.

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- “Matt. 23:37 and Acts 7:51 shows that God’s calling/drawing is not always effective.”
- “Effectual calling amounts to coercion and to coerced love.”

### Summary and Reflections

- “Effectual calling” and “regeneration” answer the question that arose at the end of the last module— if because of the pervasive effects of sin no one can desire things that please God—like the desire to repent of sin and follow Jesus—how does anyone ever become a Christian?
- God effectively calls, draws and regenerates by the Spirit and his word those who are dead in sin such they are imparted with spiritual life and are able to desire and rightly discern the things of God.

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## Effectual Calling and Regeneration

- While the external call of God through the Gospel precedes the internal, effective call—after all, one must be called to something—the effective call and regeneration are functionally simultaneous with one another and can really be understood as different aspects of the same phenomenon. We might combine the two concepts by talking of “directed regeneration.”
  - Both precede, at least logically, but often temporally, repentance and belief.
- The question that now arises is: “If people must be effectually called and regenerated in order to (inevitably) repent and believe the Gospel, what explains why certain people are called and regenerated leading to repentance and belief while others remain their sin?”

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