

Responding to the Call of Salvation

Written by K B Napier

Monday, 13 September 2010 18:08

In this short article I will not give you a formula for salvation, but what scripture says about our response to the call of God. The 'call' will be defined, as well as our response. All from scripture. It will be seen that this relates to election and predestination (see Article 149, for example) and is alien to the idea that we may choose God and choose salvation of our own free will, or that our response is entirely of our own making.

The Call

The call of God to salvation is given generally, yet salvation itself is restricted to those who are elect (see other BTM articles on this subject). On the surface, this seems to be a very odd arrangement indeed. What is the point of giving a general call, when only a small number (the 'remnant') will actually be saved? Is this not a bit 'hit-and-miss'? Does it mean that God has failed to 'encourage' one to salvation, or that He has wasted His time calling those who will never be saved anyway?

Though such questions may be asked, we must say straight away that the *Christian* who asks them should cast them aside, for they are not relevant. They are not relevant because in scripture we are told that God does not make mistakes, nor does He waste His time and effort.

Everything

He does is perfect and with purpose. So, whatever else the general call is, it is not invalid or useless.

We must differentiate between the preaching of the word, and the call made by God. Though a preacher may preach to a million souls at any one time, it does not mean that God has elected them all. Though many more heard the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost, only about 3000 were actually saved. Yet, all heard the general 'call'. Why is this? ***We do not know and God does not tell us.***

We only know that it is His will to elect some to heaven and some (the majority) to damnation. We cannot question either His motives or His outworkings – and to argue over what is not made plain in scripture is futile, getting us no further forward.

In Hebrews 10:32, we see that to have salvation is to be 'illuminated', *photizo*. That is, *given*, or *bro*

ught

to

, the light;

made

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to see; to be

given

saving knowledge. Obviously, this tells us that 'someone' had to be the Giver of that light. It does not simply arise of its own accord to be plucked out of the air.

In 2 Timothy 2:22 we read that we can call to God 'out of a pure heart'. This refers only to the saved, whose hearts are 'pure'; the hearts of the unsaved are not pure. In Romans 10:14 we read the questions posed above, in a nutshell: *"How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?"* The answer is in the text: they are called through preachers. These preachers are 'sent': they do not make a habit of just turning up in a place to start preaching (as many do today)! Nor do they take up every invitation in order to speak. All of this is the result of God's grace and mercy; it has nothing to do with our choice or wishes. Therefore, we can expect that the response to the call will, likewise, be solely of God's free grace.

"not all obeyed the Gospel" (verse 16) but *"faith (cometh) by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (verse 17). As yet we do not have the answer to the vexed question: 'How do we respond?' From the above we know we reach 'faith' (or, trust in God, to salvation) by hearing preaching from God's ordained preachers. We know, then, how we reach the point of faith that leads to salvation. Even this faith is given by God, as we read elsewhere. Once again, it is 'all of grace' and not of our own choosing. Yet, in verse 13 we are told: *"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Surely this refers to our own free choice? No, it does not. Before these texts comes verse 9: *"... if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart... thou shalt be saved."*

Salvation, then, follows confession of faith, drawn from belief in the heart. Even with that knowledge, we have still to discover where this confession comes from – is it from one's own thoughts and desires? Or, from God alone? The whole tenor of election tells us that it must be from God alone. But, where do we find such proof?

Working yet farther backwards in the book of Romans, verse 25, we find that *"As he saith also in Osee (another name for Hosea), I will call them my people, which were not my people..."*

This is an exact parallel with what happens in salvation through Jesus Christ: God has firstly to call His people, before they can respond.

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Our Response

How is this response possible, when we are said to be 'dead' in our sins? In 1 Peter 3:18, we are told we are "*quickened by the Spirit.*" This means, to be given life; to bring back to life what was once dead (Colossians 2:13). That is why salvation is impossible unless God first makes us alive, spiritually. Once we are alive, we can respond to His calling to our hearts and minds, but only because He has given us His free gift:

"Even

when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"
(Ephesians 2:5). By grace! His free gift!

"... repent ye, and believe the Gospel." (Mark 1:15). *"... except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*
(Luke 13:5). *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..."*

(Acts 3:19). Repentance, then, is a part of our response to His calling, together with a turning away from sin and a deliberate turning toward Him and His ways...

"... repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

(Acts 20:21). This is only possible if God will

"... open their eyes, (and) to turn (them) from darkness to light, and (from) the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins..."

(Acts 26:18).

Once again, we see that God must firstly open our eyes (quicken us) and turn us from Satan to Himself, from darkness to light. *Every part of salvation is a free gift of God: "Therefore (it is) of faith, that (it might be) by grace..."*

(Romans 4:16). Thus, faith is a function of grace, the free gift of God. It is this free gift that justifies us (Romans 5:1). And this same faith, which is itself a free gift, gives us access to the rest of God's free blessings (Romans 5:2). The level of faith is also given by God (Romans 12:3, 6). Faith has nothing to do with men's ideas and will (1 Corinthians 2:5).

To make matters even more complicated, for those who think we can believe and be saved of our own accord, we find that the very faith that saves us is not ours at all, but is that of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16)! Thus, the 'faith' or trust we have in God to salvation is not faith we manage to build up ourselves: it is given to us from that great and unlimited trust Jesus has in His Father; *"... I live by the faith of the Son of God..."* (Galatians 2:20). You will note that the faith spoken of in the latter two texts is

"of

Christ"

and
"of the son of God",
and not merely faith

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“in”

Him as so many think! The word

“of”

means that ‘our’ faith is actually Christ’s faith, imparted to us as a gift. If we only lived in that knowledge we would be spared much doubt.

If we draw together the strands of evidence above (which is but an introduction to the subject), we can depict the ‘process’ of calling and response, thus:

Elected before the world was made ® Called by God in our lifetime ®

Quickened by the Spirit ® Repentance ® Saved from the punishment for our sin ®

Given a measure of faith *belonging to Christ*, as a free gift ®

Turn from our sinful life and toward God ® Continue in the same faith

At no stage, then, can we respond of our own volition or will. God gives us every part of our salvation, including the responses to His grace and calling. Only sin can prevent such a response, for a season. We can see from all this, that election and predestination are very real and active elements in our calling.

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