

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 68

Halifax, 8 February 2009

Q. 68 Are the elect only effectually called?

A. All the elect, and they only, are effectually called; although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by the ministry of the word, and have some common operations of the Spirit; who, for their wilful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in the unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.

Introduction:

Over the last couple of weeks,

- we have been looking at how God unites the members of the invisible church, though they be sinners, to Jesus Christ.

Now if you are a Christian, you know that sinners are united to Jesus Christ by faith.

- If you are in Christ (united to Him for salvation),
 - you know that you came to see that you are a sinner before God, justly under His wrath and judgement...
 - you came to understand that there was no way for you or any other creature to save you...
 - you came to understand that God sent His Son to redeem sinners, and that whoever believes in Him will be saved...
 - you saw that God calls all sinners to look to Christ to be saved.
 - And you answered God's call—
 - you repented of your sin and you believed on Jesus Christ, and from that moment you were fully forgiven and granted eternal life in God's favour.
 - You heard God's call, and you responded in obedience.
 - His call to you was an effectual call...
 - If you had heard the call, but had refused to come to Christ, the call would have been ineffectual.
- And last week, we saw what it is that God does to make His call effectual—
 - God, by His almighty power and grace, changes our nature...
 - He changes us from stubborn, rebellious, blind sinners who want nothing to do with His salvation...
 - to humble, obedient, enlightened sinners who come cheerfully and sincerely to receive His salvation in Christ.

- And now this week, I want to show you that it is only the elect who are effectually called...
- Any person who is effectually called is one God has chosen beforehand for salvation and worked transformation within them to repent and believe in Christ.
- No one else but the elect come because no one else comes to Christ—only those in whom God does the gracious, mighty work of effectual calling upon.
 - We are so stubborn that not one of us will come to God unless He does the work of effectual calling in us by His Spirit.

For our Scripture reading, I want to go to 1 Kings 19.

- In this chapter, we have the record of Elijah's discouragement after he had contended with the prophets of Baal.
 - It was a great victory.
 - He had called fire down from heaven while the prophets of Baal were powerless.
 - He had afterward executed the prophets of Baal.
 - But then to his great dismay,
 - the people did not repent
 - And not only that, Queen Jezebel was not the least bit intimidated by all this.
 - In fact she took a solemn vow that she would kill Elijah because of what he had done!
 - This was too much for even the rugged Elijah to take.
 - So look at what he did and at how God responded to him in 1 Kings 19.
- READ 1 Kings 19:1-18.

Now there is a lot I could say about this passage...

- about the brazen hardness of Queen Jezebel,
- about the discouragement of Elijah and how God essentially tells him to get up and get on with the work He has given him to do,
- about the way God shows that at this time He is not speaking through a mighty wind, an earthquake, or a fire, but through a small voice...
 - but for our purposes I only want to focus on this one thing...
 - That in verse 18, the LORD tells Elijah that He has reserved 7000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal.
 - In other words (to use the language of the catechism),
 - He has 7000 whom He has effectually called!
 - A remnant of 7000.

I. Here we are taught that the reason some are saved is because God Himself has reserved them.

A. God might have said this in a different way...

- Instead of focusing on what He had done in reserving these...
 - He might have focused on what they had done—in choosing Him when everyone seemed to be following Baal.
 - He might have put the emphasis on their action in coming to Him rather than on His action in gathering them.

1. To say that these 7000 had freely chosen to follow Him would have been a perfectly true statement.

a. There were 7000 that were still following Him...

- And these 7000 were following Him of their own free will—most willingly and most gladly.
 - They had no interest in following Baal, for they knew that salvation was of the Lord.
 - They had resisted the terrible apostasy that had swept through Israel and taken almost everything with it...
 - They continued to worship Jehovah in these difficult times and to trust in Him.

b. It is always true that those who are effectually called most willingly follow the Lord.

- If you are following the Lord today,
 - it is because you want to follow Him...
 - It is because you have chosen to follow Him...
- Paul teaches this in Romans when he says to believers,
 - **Rom 6:17-18: But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.**

TRANS> There would be nothing untrue if the Lord had focused on their choosing of Him instead of His choosing of them.

2. What's more, there would have been nothing inconsistent about it either...

- For the Lord often does focus on His people's choosing of Him...
 - a. There are many examples of this...
 - 1) For example, there is Job...

- In Job 1:8, the Lord says to Satan:
 - **Job 1:8: Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?*”**
 - You see that instead of saying that He had reserved Job,
 - He focuses on the fact that Job had chosen Him.
- 2) And then in Hebrews 11—there is example after example of God’s speaking of the faithful in terms of what they did...
- We read of Noah and Abraham in this way...
 - And we read of Moses when it says:
 - **Heb 11:24-27: By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.**
- 3) A couple of weeks ago, we looked at Mark 10 about the rich young ruler.
- And I don’t know if you noticed it, but when Peter spoke about when he and the other disciples came to Christ,
 - He did not emphasise it as God’s action, but as their own action:
 - In Mark 10:28 he says to Jesus,
 - “We have left all and followed you.”
 - He does not say,
 - “the Lord worked in us so that we followed,”
 - but simply “We have left all and followed you.”
 - And Jesus responds by saying that all who have done this will have great reward in this time and eternal life in the age to come.
 - He does not rebuke Peter for not having mentioned that it was all of God’s doing that he had come...
 - because there is no need for a rebuke...
 - You don’t have to mention both aspects of it every time you speak of it.
- b. Some people are overzealous when they first come to understand election.
- They are so delighted when they come to understand that the only reason any sinner come to Christ is because God opens His eyes and renews His will,

- that they completely ignore the fact that when God does this, the sinner comes freely and glorifies God by choosing Him.
- They consider that anyone who does not speak about God's part is compromising something...
 - But this is not true.

TRANS> So you see that in 1 Kings 19,

- There would have been nothing either erroneous or inconsistent about it if the Lord had said to Elijah,
 - "There are still 7000 who have chosen to follow me."
 - But in this case, He does not speak this way...
 - Instead He says,
 - "I have **reserved** seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

B. The Lord speaks this way because He wants to show the **reason** that these 7000 had chosen a different path...

1. He wanted to show what lay back of their decision...

- He wanted to show that it was His sovereign grace that had kept them...
 - a. He wanted to show that they had chosen Him because He had effectually called them.
 - It was His action, His reserving of these that had caused them to differ.
 - This was designed to be an encouragement to Elijah...
 - If these disciples are disciples because the Lord has reserved them,
 - that means that He can always have disciples.
 - If the true church is the result of His electing grace, then He can always have a true church.

b. By saying that He has reserved these,

- We also learn that the only reason *anyone ever* obeys the gospel is because He has reserved them according to His election.
- If He had not reserved these 7000, they would have forsaken Him along with all the rest...
 - and so would every other disciple who has ever lived.

2. And if anyone wants to dispute with this, you will have to take up your dispute with the Apostle Paul...

- Because in Romans 11, he interprets these words to Elijah in exactly this way I have just explained them.
 - He is speaking about his own day when many of his fellow Israelites have rejected the Lord...
 - But then he points out that there is a remnant according to election...
 - a people that God has reserved for Himself according to election of which the apostle himself is a part.
 - In Romans 11:1-5, he says:
 - **Rom 11:1-5: I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, “LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life”? But what does the divine response say to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.**
3. The whole point here is that if left to ourselves, nobody would come to the Lord.
- As I showed you last week, we are blind, obstinate, and dead in trespasses and sins...
 - The Lord must make us alive by His grace—He must give us His Spirit to change our hearts else we will never choose Him.

TRANS> Now perhaps someone will look at this and say,

II. How do you know that in every case when a sinner comes to God, it is on account of His electing grace?

- Maybe this is just what he does at those times of crisis when things are quite desperate—when no one is coming on their own...
 - In other words, maybe election kicks in only when it is needed,
 - when nobody is following...
 - but most of the time, there are enough willing people that it is not needed.
- For this I would remind you of the words of our Lord Jesus in John 6.
 - I say “remind you” because we looked at this not too long ago...
 - In John 6, Jesus shows us three things...
 - First, that all who come to Him will be saved (there is never a person who comes freely and is turned away because he is not one of the elect)
 - Second, that no one will come to Him unless he is drawn (effectually called by God’s grace)

- Third, that all who are elect will come to Him (they cannot resist the effectual call)
- All three of these statements are presented to us by Jesus in John 6.
 - Let's look at each of these three points again.

A. First, that all who come to Christ will be saved.

1. This is the clear teaching of John 6:40
 - **John 6:40: And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.**
 - There is nothing ambiguous about this at all.
 - Everyone who believes in Christ is given everlasting life.
2. Jesus mentions this several times in this passage...
 - In John 6:35, He says,
 - **John 6:35: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."**
 - At the end of John 6:37, He says:
 - **John 6:37: the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.**
 - Again, in John 6:47, He says:
 - **John 6:47: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."**
3. There are not many that would dispute with this statement either...
 - The gospel is to be freely offered to all...
 - And if anyone hears and believes, if they come to Jesus Christ, they will be saved.
 - There has never been, and never will be, a person who came to Jesus for salvation who did not receive it...
 - All who come to Him will be saved.
 - The Lord Himself assures us that it is so.
 - This is a wonderful encouragement for us.
 - That is the first fact.

B. But secondly, Jesus tells us that no one **will** come to Him (or even **can** come to Him) unless he is drawn.

1. This is expressly stated in John 6:44...

- **John 6:44: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.”**
 - The word “**draws**” that is used here means much more than to invite or even to encourage.
 - This is the word that is used for horses drawing a carriage...
 - or for drawing water from a well...
 - It is an action that moves something that would not have moved at all if left to itself.
 - It is moved by another.
 - It refers to effectual calling...
 - It refers to the promise of God in Ezekiel 36 that we looked at last week...
 - Where He promises that He will gather sinners to Himself who never would have come if left to themselves...
 - Where He promises that He will take away their stony hearts that reject His call and give them a hearts of flesh that will respond.
 - Where He promises to put a new spirit within them that delights in His way and that keeps His way.
 - In John 6, Jesus is saying that unless the Father does that,
 - we cannot come to Him for salvation.
 - Without this radical change within, nobody would come to Him.
2. Jesus goes on to quote from Jeremiah in John 6:45 where effectually calling is also spoken of.
- Here, let me read verse 44 and 45 together:
 - **John 6:44-45: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.”**
 - When the Lord gave the promise in Jeremiah that all would be taught of God, He was speaking about effectual calling.
 - You see what the result of being taught of God is according to Jesus...
 - “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father (been taught of God) comes to Me...”
 - They are effectually called—they are called so that they come.

TRANS> So you see that no one can come to Jesus apart from the effectual call of God...

- No one will come because no one can come...

3. Jesus essentially repeats it in John 6:64-65 to explain why so many who had heard the gospel and had seen His miracles did not believe...
 - He says,
 - **John 6:64-65: “But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”**
 - They were truly invited to come, but they were too obstinate to come...
 - too obstinate in the same way that we all are until the Father effectual calls us.
 - No one will come unless the Father does this radical work within them to draw them.

TRANS> But now the question may be asked,

- Are there those that God has chosen and attempts to draw to Himself that are so stubborn that they refuse to come?
- Are there persons God has chosen for salvation who are able to resist the effectual call and be lost?

C. Here in John 6, Jesus shows with certainty that all who are elect will come to Him—the effectual call will always be effectual...

- The Lord will always get His man.
- Those He reserves by election will always come and will always continue in Him.

1. This is taught in John 6:37 where Jesus says:

- **John 6:37: “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,”**
- Those that the Father gives to Jesus are, of course, those the Father has chosen from before the foundation of the world.
 - Jesus is saying that every one of them will come.

a. But it is at this point that some who reject the doctrine of election will rise up and say,

- But wait!
 - It describes the ones whom the Father has chosen in verse 39 and 40...
 - It says that He has chosen that all who see the Son and believe in Him will have eternal life.
 - So doesn't this show that the Lord looked into the future and saw who would believe and elected them for salvation?
 - In other words, can't we just say that God chose the ones He knew would come?

- b. But if you accept what we have already seen—
 - That nobody comes unless he is drawn—that no one can come unless it is given to him by the Father,
 - then it becomes clear that the reason anyone believes is only because the Father effectually calls him—
 - he must be drawn to Christ by the Father...
 - he must be taught of God...
 - not just shown about Christ, but given a new heart that responds to Him with faith.
 - c. And besides, what does Jesus actually say in John 6:37...
 - Does He say,
 - “The Father gives to me all that will come to Me?”
 - No,
 - He says,
 - “All that the Father gives to me will come to Me.”
 - They come **because** the Father has given them to Him.
 - He does not give them to Christ because they have come.
2. When anyone is “taught of God” in the way that Jesus is speaking about it, they always end up coming to Christ—every single one of them.
- a. This is clearly what Jesus says in John 6:45 where He speaks about being taught of God...
 - **John 6:45: “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.”**
 - b. Again, to hear and learn from the Father is to be taught of God...
 - And **everyone** who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Christ.
 - Once He has taught them in this way, they always come...
 - When He effectually calls them, they cannot refuse.
 - They come willingly because He has radically transformed them.
 - He is has given them a new spirit and a new heart to keep His way.

TRANS> So I hope this is all very clear...

- God reserves a people for Himself by election...
 - The reason Christ has true followers is because the Father has effectually called them.

- But now we need to look at another matter raised by the Catechism.
- That even though no one comes unless they are effectually called, and that all who are effectually called come...

III. There are, nevertheless, many who are outwardly called who do not come...

A. In Elijah's day, there was only this remnant of 7000 that God reserved!

1. But there were a lot more people in Israel, and they had all been called, in various degrees, but they did not come.

- They were not effectually called, but they were called.
- As Paul states it in Romans 10:21:
 - **Rom 10:21: But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people."**
- And in Proverbs 1:24:
 - **Pr 1:24 Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,**

2. Clearly, there are many who are called who do not come.

- As Jesus said,
 - "Many are called but few are chosen."
- In John 6, there was this multitude of 5000 that wanted to make Jesus king,
 - but Jesus tells them that they do not believe in Him...
 - They are not looking to Him for the salvation of their souls...
 - They are not seeking Him for eternal life...
 - But clearly, all 5000 of them were called...
 - Jesus called them to come to Him that they might have life, but they refused because they were not taught of God...
 - They were not among the elect whom God had purposed to reserve to salvation, so they did not believe.

TRANS> And I want you understand that these ones who are ineffectually called very often have more than a bare outward call—

B. Not only do they hear the word, but God's Spirit actually works in them to give to a certain extent—

- not leading to salvation, but enlightening them and even reforming them to a certain extent.
 - He brings them very close to salvation, but not all the way.

1. In doing this, the Lord shows even more the obstinacy and desperate hardness of the human heart...
 - a. It is absolutely amazing that our condition is such that we could sit in a sound church week after week, and year after year...
 - could hear the word of God faithfully preached,
 - could understand what is being said,
 - could have a godly example of others around us,
 - could even have our lives reformed by the general influence of God's Spirit and Word,
 - and could even be used by God's Spirit in the church to minister to others,
 - and yet, not ever actually come to Jesus Christ.

TRANS> It is amazing,

- b. but the truth is, we are all capable of this.
 - There is such a pride, such a bitterness, such a stubbornness, such a rebellion in the heart of every sinner
 - that unless the Lord effectual calls us,
 - we can be brought so near and have all these influences of His ecclesiastical grace and still refuse to come.
 - If you have indeed trusted in Christ,
 - it certainly seemed to you the only reasonable thing to do—and it is...
 - but the only reason you came is because God drew you.
 - He radically transformed you.
 - He gave you a new birth, put a new spirit within you, wrote His law in your heart, took away your stony heart and gave you a heart of flesh...
 - It is because of all that that you came to Him.
 - Otherwise, you would never have come.

TRANS> But perhaps you are not convinced that God's Spirit actually does work in those who are not effectually called...

- Well then, let's take a passages where this is clearly taught.
2. In Hebrews 6, we shown the maximum influence a person can have from God's Spirit without being saved.
 - Look with me at Hebrews 6:4-6.
 - **Heb 6:4-6: "For *it is impossible* for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if**

they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.”

- a. Look at all that was done for these ones by God’s Spirit!
 - 1) He enlightened them so that they had a supernatural understanding of the truth...
 - To say that they were enlightened means that they were actually shown the truth so that they understood things that they could not have understood on their own.
 - God’s Spirit showed them their need of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ for salvation...
 - They had a spiritual, though not a saving, understanding of these things...
 - 2) They tasted of the heavenly gift and became partakers of the Holy Spirit...
 - The heavenly gift is the Holy Spirit who is poured out on the church.
 - This was the gift that was promised by the Father and then by Jesus.
 - The Spirit did not come to dwell in them, but He did exert an influence upon them so that they are said to be partakers of Him.
 - They were not born again, but they were influenced by His working upon them.
 - 3) Then it says that they tasted the good word of God...
 - They felt its convicting power and even received some of the promises.
 - Perhaps they also understood some of God’s commands.
 - 4) They also are said to have tasted of the power of the age to come...
 - Within the church there is that power of God at work to help people change, and they themselves experienced this to a certain extent...
 - They may have even given up vile habits—drunkenness or cursing perhaps...
 - In 2 Peter 2:20, persons who never came to true faith are described as
 - “escaping the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - They may have known God’s power to enable them to serve.
 - Like Judas who preached and wrought miracles along with the other disciples.

- They may have been able to overcome their drinking or their temper with the help of God's Spirit...
- b. All this! But there is something terribly wrong with them?
- They had all this, but they never actually embraced Christ as their Saviour.
- 1) This is why in verse 7-8, they are referred to as a bad piece of ground that receives rain just like the good ground,
- but instead of bringing forth herbs, brings forth thorns and briars...
 - They are in the church and hear the same gospel and in that church the same Spirit is at work,
 - and the Spirit even works in them to a certain extent...
 - but because they are not effectually called to salvation,
 - they only bring forth thorns and briars and are fit only to be cursed at last.
- 2) Now my friends, some of you with tender consciences may be troubled by this teaching, but you do not need to be!
- In verse 9, you who have been effectually called are addressed with these words:
 - "But beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner..."
 - In other words, for those who are effectually called, it is entirely different...
 - They have come to Christ...
 - They are saved and so have what accompanies salvation...
 - Do not suppose that because the apostates in this passage were able to come so close to Christ and still miss Him that coming to Him is some deep, esoteric thing that no one can ever be sure of.
 - It is not...
 - It is the simplest thing in the world...
 - You see that you are sinner who is vile and condemned and who cannot save yourself...
 - You see that Christ crucified is God's provision for sinners and that whoever believes in Him shall be saved...
 - And you simply give up on yourself and trust in Him!
 - There is nothing deep or esoteric about it.
 - It is simply a matter of looking to the One God has provided to save you!

- When once the Lord has changed your heart,
 - it is the only thing you can do!
 - You simply don't have any where else to go!
 - You can't imagine trusting in yourself or trusting in anything other than Christ...
 - There is nothing else to do and so with gladness you come to Him and He will never cast you out.
- 3) The problem with those who are not effectually called is that they can never get to the place where they simply look to Christ...
- They can't because they don't really want to...
 - They have no will for it...
 - They don't really want to be reconciled to God—at least not by this crucified Saviour!
 - So even though God's call comes to them and He stretches out His hand to them all day long,
 - and even though His Spirit may enlighten them and change their behaviour to conform more to God's word...
 - there is this obstinacy, this rebellion, this stubbornness that keeps them from ever coming to Him.
 - It is a terrible thing...
 - and it is in all of us until God effectually calls us.
 - But then it is so simple—it is the only thing to do!
 - When others depart who had been called and had followed for a while,
 - and the Lord turns to you and says,
 - “Do you also want to go away?”
 - You can only say with Peter,
 - “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
 - As far as you are concerned, there is no other option...
 - God has united you to His Son by effectual calling.