

Doctrine #2- Effectual Calling, Part 2

Written by Calvin Fox

Monday, 29 September 2008 20:50 -

What are the means God uses to do His effectual calling? The Law and the Gospel. Visiting an impoverished town in Haiti or rural village in Mexico or a squalid slum in an American city may well bring about revulsion and determination to “do something” about poverty, but the emotions and conviction to do something about sin requires visiting the Ten Commandments, all of them, not just the second Tablet. We hear about people using “bad judgment” and inappropriate behavior. We hear about graft, corruption and white-color crime, racial discrimination and illicit drugs and illegal immigration and all kinds of sexual immorality; we almost never hear about the real problem: sin, meaning trespass of God’s Law. In fact, these very acts that are so upsetting, and many more that are perfectly acceptable to most people, may very well be sins, but they will not be properly understood or effectively dealt with until they are seen to be sin.

I realize to use the word “sin” is taboo in many circles.

That is because sin is a religious concept and involves God. Exactly! And so does the real solution.

Otherwise, we just continue to try unsuccessfully to fix problems with money and programs.

It is sinning that leads to condemnation and Hell, not some politically incorrect behavior of the month. Society’s norms for behavior change constantly, as some kind of fad or fashion. God’s norms have been inscripturated for millennia. It is that written Law, contained in the first five Books of the Bible, by which God judges people. God uses the hearing of His Law to reveal that certain behavior actually is sin and to bring those who do it to the conviction of the sinfulness of their sin. Through hearing the Law, God convicts sinners, not only that they are sinners, but that their condition is hopeless.

(If I had my way, the Decalogue- both Tablets- would, indeed, be posted on the walls in every court room, read in classrooms and recited every week in church.)

But we must be clear, teaching the Law is not enough; conviction of sin and feeling guilt and hopeless is not enough to save and is usually only temporary. Sinners must also hear the Gospel. To preach the Law without the Gospel is actually counter productive.

It can harden the sinner’s heart even more. The Gospel is about the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and how all of that relates to Creation, the Fall and Redemption. It is indeed

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a mega-narrative, a grand and wonderful story.

Faith comes from hearing this old, old Story!

To repeat: Effective Calling happens in the context of hearing the Law and the Gospel. But, it does not happen for everyone who hears. Many hear the Word with no response. God works the miracle of regeneration in those whom He chooses. If He did not, no one would respond to the Gospel. All may listen, but only a few will hear. The Word often fall on stony soil.

Some critics of Calvinist fear it undermines evangelism and missions. If only those respond whom God has called, why bother to preach and spread the Law and the Gospel? For two good reasons: How can anyone, including the one chosen, hear, if no one preaches? Secondly, since we do not know which sinners hearing will respond, we preach to all of them.

Calvinism actually motivates evangelism and missions, because it guarantees results. Those whom God calls will respond and come to Christ. Our work spreading the Law and the Gospel, taking it everyone we can, will reap a harvest, over time.

Technically, Regeneration is not conversion or salvation. Regeneration sets the will free to chose Christ, in other words, to the exercise of saving faith. This, in turn, leads to repentance. (The usual Evangelical approach has these steps out of order.

It says first comes hearing, then repentance followed by faith which leads to regeneration.)

Faith and repentance together are the two sides of Conversion- a person turns (converts) from practicing sin to trust in Christ as Lord and Savior. In the New Testament, conversion and Baptism were concurrent. The result of faith-repentance (Conversion)-Baptism is union with Christ. Christ's Spirit enters into us at this

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moment.

Being

in Christ and Christ in us is our standing, our position.

It precedes and makes possible our experience of Christ and of God who is in Him.

This is the once and forever moment of Justification, which is the forgiveness of our sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us.

We put on Christ.

We are adopted as children of God at this moment.

Thus begins the process of Sanctification (growth in Christ-likeness or holiness) and that culminates in Glorification. Re-formation of the sinner into the person God created him or her to be begins at this time, in this union. This is all clearly laid out by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. I will unpack these steps below.