

What is the “effectual call”? The effectual call is the Holy Spirit’s direct, effective action upon the hearts of individual sinners, in which He convicts them of their sin and convinces them to come to Christ in repentant faith.

To say that the call is effectual is to say that it gets the job done. The Holy Spirit doesn’t just convict sinners; He convinces them. He doesn’t just influence their hearts; He changes their hearts. In other words, the Spirit converts sinners. His effectual call breaks their enslavement to self-willed living and brings them to faith in Christ. That’s why no Christian would ever say, “I birthed myself again.” We gladly confess, “I’ve been born again by the Spirit of God!” He did it, not we.

The effectual call is why we instinctively thank God that we found Jesus. We wouldn’t dream of taking credit for the fact that we repented and believed. Although that was a real choice we had to make, it was not a choice we ever would have made, if it had not been for the work of the Holy Spirit. In the effectual call, the Holy Spirit does not make the choice for us; rather, He so moves in us that we want to choose Jesus, and in fact do choose Jesus.

Below are some of the passages in the Bible which teach about this “effectual call.” When all has been said and done, to have been called is to have been saved. You can see that clearly in the following passages. In several of them, “called” is virtually a synonym for “converted.” These are not all the references to the effectual call in the New Testament, by a long shot. But of those that include some form of the word “call,” these are some of the clearest and most unmistakable.

Romans 1:5-6 “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;”

Romans 8:28-30 “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Romans 9:22 -24 “What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”

1 Corinthians 1:18-29 “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’

“Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God

and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise . . . that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

1 Corinthians 7:17-24 “But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.”

Ephesians 4:1-6 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Hebrews 3:1 “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,”

Hebrews 9:15 “And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

1 Peter 1:15-16 “. . . but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

2 Peter 1:2-11 “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and

abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Jude 1 “Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ:”

Revelation 17:14 “. . . for [the Lamb] is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”

Who are the called? They are the saved. God effectually, marvelously calls sinners to salvation — and every single one that He calls is saved.

Another very important word, used twice by the Lord Jesus to speak of the effectual call, is the word “draw.” Here are the verses in which He uses the word.

John 6:44 “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at he last day.”

John 12:32-33 “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.’ This He said, signifying by what death He would die.”

Some people read these verses and interpret them to mean that the Spirit of the Father must “exert a pulling influence” on a person in order for that person to come to Christ, and that that “pulling influence” is something that comes to all people everywhere at some point or another in their lives. Of course, both of those statements are true in some sense; but they do not capture precisely the truth these two verses are intended to communicate.

First of all, in John 6:44, Jesus was explaining why His hearers were refusing to come to Him in faith: they had not been drawn by the Father, and so could not come (6:44); they had not been taught by the Father, since, if they had been, they most certainly would have come (6:45); and the understanding and desire necessary for coming to Him had not been granted them by the Father, and so they naturally refused to come (6:65). So the context of Jesus' words shows us that He is referring to an effectual drawing, a pulling influence that actually gets the job done, and produces genuine faith — every time.

Second, when Jesus says in John 12:32 that He will draw all to Himself, many people understand Him to mean that every person everywhere will be influenced toward Jesus by the Holy Spirit in some way at some time in his life. The implication is that it is then up to the individual to determine how he will respond to that “pulling influence.” While each of those statements is true in a certain sense, neither statement expresses what Jesus was saying in this particular verse. You see, the Greek word which Jesus used does not mean merely “to exert a pulling influence on” something; it means “to drag” something; that is, to pull it from where it presently is to where one wants it to be. You could quite properly translate Jesus' words, “I will bring all to Myself.” In other words, He'll get the job done; He'll actually convert them.

That's not "all men without exception," because there will be many who never come to Jesus; rather, it's "all men without distinction," since there are no racial or class barriers in the Kingdom of God. The fact that He was responding to a request by some Greeks for an audience with Him explains why He made this statement the way He did. He was letting His Jewish hearers know that the reason He refused to meet with the Greeks was not simply because they were Gentiles, but because He had not yet been "lifted up" on the cross. The grain of wheat had not yet fallen to the ground and died. (See John 12:20-27) After His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension would be the time for drawing people to Himself from every nation under heaven. That is why the NKJV translates it, "I will draw all peoples to Myself."

Of course, it's likely that Jesus had more than human beings in mind when He made the statement. The Greek literally reads, "I will draw all things to myself." Very possibly Jesus was hinting at the promises we find in Colossians 1:12-20 and Ephesians 1:9-10.

Colossians 1:15-20 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Ephesians 1:7-10 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him.

Jesus will do exactly what He said, now that He has gone up onto the cross, down into the grave, and up, up, up to the heights of all existence: He will "draw all" to Himself. In fact, He's been doing it for about 2000 years now.

Does the word translated "draw" (ἐλκω) really mean "to drag," to pull something from where it is to where you want it to be? Does it really refer to an effectual drawing? Judge for yourself whether it does. The word appears only eight times in the New Testament. Here are the other six.

John 18:10 "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus." Did Peter merely pull on the sword, or did he actually pull it out of its sheath

John 21:6 "And He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish." Were the disciples unable to pull on the net? Of course not. They were pulling on it with all their might! What they were unable to do was pull it all the way into the boat.

John 21:11 "Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish . . ." Did Peter just tug on the net, without making sure it got to shore? Hardly! He brought it all the way to the beach, where the disciples emptied it and counted their catch.

Acts 16:19 “But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities.” Was it left up to Paul and Silas whether they would appear before the magistrate? Of course not. The girl’s owners made sure they got the missionaries before the judgment seat.

Acts 21:30 “. . . and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple” Were these folks merely attempting to convince Paul to leave the building, leaving the all-important choice up to him, to make on his own? Scarcely. They drew him out of the building effectually; they got the job done.

James 2:6 “Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?” Same song, sixth verse. Clearly, the word ἐλκω describes an effectual drawing.

Make no mistake, the drawing Jesus is talking about in *John 6:44* and *12:32* is an effectual drawing, a pulling influence that actually pulls sinners all the way to the Savior. It’s not that He pulls them in spite of their own

will, but that He so transforms their will that they want to come to Christ, and in fact do come to Him. They are not coerced (usually), but they are convinced — surely, completely, transformingly, permanently, and savingly. How can the Spirit of God do that? Simple! He’s God. He can do anything.

Some other passages which can help us understand the effectual call are *John 1:11-13*; *3:1-21*; *8:39-47*; and *Acts 16:14*. And give some careful thought to the fact that the Greek word which we translate “church” (ἐκκλησία) literally means “a called-out assembly.”

As we said before, we say again: to have been called is to have been saved. The Holy Spirit’s effectual call breaks hard hearts, opens blind eyes, bends stiff necks, melts frozen souls, makes the unrepentant repentant, turns unbelievers into believers, and gets them to Jesus. If you’ve found new life in Christ, praise God! He deserves your praise, your obedience, your everlasting loyalty and love, because, dear friend, He called you.

— Christopher Gudmundsson, 1998

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible.