

# THE FOUR CALLS

## A SERMON

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“For you see your calling.” 1 Corinthians 1:26

THE divisions and disorder in the church of Corinth clearly show that this was true not of all the members of that church; nor did some that saw their calling see it in all respects; for if they had, there would not have been those divisions and disorders among them; for the more clearly a people see the truth, the more sincerely they will love the truth, and the more clearly they see the truth the more oneness of mind there will be among them in relation to the same. Hence it is that no want of harmony can ever exist in heaven because everyone there knows even as he is known; everyone there sees even as he is seen. Now we see through a glass darkly, then face to face; now we know only in part, but then that which is in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect shall come; then we shall know even as we are known. Nevertheless, the apostle was very glad, as every minister is, to give all the credit, possible to them for what they had, through the grace of God, attained, unto; and among the rest of the things, then, this is one, to see their calling; “For you see your calling.” Now there are four callings in the word of God, and those four callings will be our theme this morning. First, there is *the legal, or law calling*; second, there is *the first covenant calling*; third, *the letter calling*; and fourth, and last, there is *the salvation, or saving calling*.

First, then, there is *the legal, or law calling*. And the law calling of the Bible is this; it calls upon every son and every daughter of Adam to love their Creator, to love the Lord God their Creator with all their heart and with all their mind, with all their might and with all their strength, and their neighbor as themselves. If this were the state of the world, what a happy state the world would be in. And yet this will be the state of heaven, for they will all there stand in entire accordance with this law calling; they shall there on higher grounds love the Lord their God with all their heart and mind, and each his neighbor as himself, and so shall they be perfect in love. But then, so far from man having done this, the reverse is the case; that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and that there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that does good, no, not one. And yet the word of God declares that “cursed is everyone that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them;” and “he that offends in one point is guilty of the whole.” This is the calling under which all men are. And it is also written of that law by which men are thus called upon to be holy, and righteous, and decided for God in that love of which the law speaks, it is declared that the heavens' and the earth may pass away, but not one jot or one tittle of the law can fail. This is one calling; and some of us know something of this calling. Saul of Tarsus did not see this calling of the law until God quickened his dead soul, and the law entered into his heart, and brought to light

the concupiscence's there; and then the apostle died; he found that he could not endure that which was commanded; he felt that he had nothing wherewith to appear before the high God. So that we may say of every man and woman dead in sin: You see not your calling. For when this calling, the calling of God's law, as set forth at Sinai, and explained to us in many parts of the word of God, when this calling is seen and understood, oh! how gladly such an one falls in then with a substitute. What am I to do? I am called upon to pay a mighty debt, not one mite towards which can I produce. I am called upon to do a work which it is literally impossible for me to do, for the law is spiritual, and I am carnal, sold under sin. What is to be done? Ah. when such hear, then, that the Lord Jesus Christ was made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons, and that he has magnified the law, and that he is the end of the law; and then by faith in him you get rid of this calling, and get to the end of the law, and the law is dead to you, and you become dead to that. Now it is said, "By the law is the knowledge of sin;" and the man that knows that this is his calling before God as his Creator and his Judge, the man that sees this and knows this, and is constrained by the power of God to associate this solemn truth with a dying hour, and with the judgment day, and with the second death, such an one trembles then at the word of God. And then, when the tidings of mercy come in by Jesus Christ, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Ah! happy is the man that is made acquainted with his law calling; for the man that is made acquainted with this law calling, oh, how will he prize, I say, the interposition of the dear Mediator of the covenant; he will lay hold of that, that is, he will believe in it, he will plead it before God, he will pray in Jesu's name, and long to realize the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; the blessedness of the man unto whom the Lord will not impute sin. "You see your calling." Now to how many of us does this apply? Are we made acquainted thus with that law calling under which we were; that calling which we could not endure; that calling that shall call the ungodly dead from their graves at the last day to judgment; that calling that shall call them to answer for all their ungodly deeds and hard speeches they have spoken; that calling that shall call upon them to give an account of every idle word that they have spoken; that willing that shall call them into the endurance of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power? I trust we see this, have been led to see this and constrained to flee for refuge to the hope set before us, Christ Jesus the Lord.

Secondly, *there is a first covenant calling also.* The Lord took the Jews to himself as a nation, and he called upon them to conform to the things that were rational, and that reason was capable of understanding, and that man as a rational being was capable of conforming to. And so, the Lord from time to time called them. And he said unto those Israelites that apostatized from it, he said unto them, "O you simple, how long will you love simplicity." Now the simple is the man that says, Well, I don't see that the golden calf may not do just as well as the ark, or the mercy-seat, or the altar. I don't see that it matters; it does not matter to me; I go quietly on, and I think one thing will do as well as the other. And thus, it mattered not at all to them whether it was a false god or a true God; they wished to be agreeable, and wished to be comfortable, and wished not to disturb anybody, and as quiet as possible. Now the Lord says unto such, "You simple," he said to such Israelites, "You simple, how long will you love simplicity?" And then there was another class among them that scorned the name of the Lord in some respects, that scorned his sovereignty, in setting up just what priesthood he pleased; and so, the Lord said to such, "And you scorers, how long will you delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you;" that is, to guide them, not to save them, for the Lord is not there

speaking of spiritual things at all; he is only speaking in the language of the first covenant: "I will make known my words unto you." Not but the Lord does sometimes take such solemn scriptures as these and apply them to those in whose minds he intends to work that conviction that shall terminate in the salvation of their souls. Nor can I let the words that I have quoted pass without just reminding you of them again. See the solemn form in which they stand, look at the three questions, and you will see how they answer themselves. "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?" Not long, for you will soon be in hell, if you die in that ignorant state you are in now. "And how long will the scorers delight in their scorning?" Not long, not long, not long; your life will soon end, and there will end your scorning. You will not be able to scorn when you are in hell. "And you fools, hate knowledge?" How long will you hate it? Not long, for when you lift up your eyes in hell, you will know then, that those things that you have scorned and hated are solemn and eternal realities. And then the Lord goes on, and says, "Because I have called, and you refused; I have stretched out my hand", I proposed to guide you, I proposed to supply you, and on the ground of your listening to me I promised to be with you, "and no man regarded; but you have set at nothing all my counsel." You have despised my prophets; if I send a Jeremiah, or an Ezekiel, or a Micaiah, or an Elijah, or whatever prophet I send, they are despised. "You have shed the blood of the prophets," says the Savior, "from the blood of righteous Abel down to the present day." "You have set at nothing all my counsel and would have none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear comes; when your fear comes as desolation, and your destruction comes as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then shall they call upon me", which the Jews did, under the dreadful pressure of the Roman arms, "but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." Now, all this came to pass in the destruction of Jerusalem. We enter but very little, for want, perhaps, of thought, into their misery. If this metropolis were invaded by an army against which we had no force, and we were reduced to famine and pestilence, and every time the invading army were quiet then set to and kill each other and driven to such a pitch as to eat each other, and the most loving mothers to devour even their own infants, all of which took place in that dreadful siege. This was the reward that they had for despising the Almighty. Well may it be said, "Behold, you despisers, and wonder and perish; for I will work a work in your day which you shall not believe, though a man declare it unto you." Thus, then, there is a law calling; and second, there was the first covenant calling; but that, of course, and that saving calling spoken of in our text, are two distinct things. Nevertheless, the scriptures I have mentioned are very solemn. You see the dreadful consequences of their thus being ignorant of God, scorning his truth, would none of his counsels. Therefore, he says, he will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear comes. Oh, if God laughs at us in calamity, who is to help us? If God mocks when our fear comes, who can help us? What an infinite mercy to be delivered, then, not only from the law, but from a broken covenant; that broken covenant which the dear Redeemer has taken out of the way, blotted out the handwriting thereof, nailed it to his cross. And by precious faith in his atoning blood, the Jew, that had hitherto been a simple one, a scorner, a hater of knowledge, on the day of Pentecost thousands of this very stamp heard the Savior's name with power, were called by the calling spoken of in our text and were brought into precious faith in him that brought them to the end of the law, delivered them from all the penalties of a broken covenant. And so when the Savior gave the mission, he said, "Beginning at Jerusalem." We will have the greatest sinners first, as John Bunyan says, and John Bunyan is right in that. I entirely agree with him in that, that one reason why the Lord began at Jerusalem was that the greatest sinners might be first saved; that while the great sinner, the Jew, was thus saved, no Gentile sinner need despair; that God was determined, at the very outset of the gospel, to show the

exceeding riches of his grace, and to honor Immanuel's name, by showing the ability of the blood of an incarnate God to save sinners of deepest dye. Thus, there was the law call, the old covenant call; neither of these is that calling spoken of in our text.

Third, there is a *letter calling* that belongs to all professors. The first calling, the law calling, belongs to every son and daughter of Adam, it is universal; the second calling, the first covenant calling, belonged exclusively to the Jews; and so, the third, or letter calling, belongs to Christians, professed Christians. And we have it set forth in the New Testament: "Go work in my vineyard; why stand you idle all day long?" We want work. You want work; then you are out of work? Yes. What work do you want? Well, we want religious work; we want to be religious. Well, go and work in my vineyard. Well, they went to work as well as they could; and by-and-bye more were called. And these men that were called by a mere letter call, a mere conscience call, came into profession; they set such a high estimation upon their own doings as to make the goodness of the Lord of the house offensive to them; they set such a high estimation upon their own supposed merit as to render the sovereignty of the Master offensive to them. "Is your eye evil because I am good?" I give to these others as I please; they need a penny, and so I give it because they need it; and your eye is evil because I am good. The Master did not say, Your eye is evil because you are good; no. They put such a high estimation upon their own doings, that his goodness in giving the same was quite offensive. "May I not do what I will with my own?" No; they were offended at it. Ah, how many who now are professors go back when they are put to the test of the freeness of God's grace in reality; not in the mere duty-faith, sham sense of the word; a duty-faith gospel is a poor free-grace gospel; there is no reality in it; it is the leaven of the Pharisees; it is hypocrisy; it is grace in name, but works in reality, that is what it is. And when such professors are put to the test of really free grace from first to last, it is offensive to them; they murmur, and away they go; when they are put to the test, truly so, of the sovereignty of God, they murmur, and away they go. Well then, say you, Why are such called? Why, to put them to the test, and see what they are. "To the law and to the testimony", that is, the testimony of Christ", "if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." This is not the calling, then, spoken of in our text. Thus, then, many are called with this letter call, called to test their religion, called to prove the reality of their religion, and when put to the test they fail. "Many are called, but few are chosen." Now says our text, "You see your calling." You see, then, some degree of analogy here between the calling, because both are called to prove the reality of their religion; the one proves that it will not bear God's order of things, they are offended with it; and the other proves that it will bear God's order of things. The poor and the needy, the houseless, the penniless, the outcast, and the wanderer, those who were cast out thus, and were poor and destitute, these are they that were delighted with the very things the others were offended with.

Thus, then, there are three calls; the law call, which no man can endure; the first covenant call, which the Jews refused and despised, and upon the ground of such conduct they were dealt with as the word of God declared they should be; third, that there is the letter call or test call; that all who make a profession are on the ground of that profession called, and being called on the ground of the profession they make, to make that profession good what numbers fail; how few will bear the test of God's truth. I dare not enlarge more here upon this part, or else it is a very important part. You will perceive that vain janglers, that know not what they say, nor understand whereof they affirm, but who preach out of the fulness of human acquirement, and not from any personal experience, these men jumble up all these callings together; they make a mixed medley of it. There

is no rightly dividing the word of truth; there is no pointing out the law calling to make way for the coming in of Christ; there is no pointing out the first covenant calling in distinction from the saving work of grace; there is no pointing out this letter call from that regenerating call by which the soul is saved, but all is jumbled up together: and they bring in plenty of scriptures, the people are confused, and the devil carries on his work, souls are deceived, the people of God despised, and the truth universally hated by mere professors. I don't know who it is among you, but there are two or three of you, I am told, have expressed a wish that I would be a little more charitable. Now, I really think there is a hypocrisy at the bottom of your religion somewhere, those of you who have said so. I tell you this, I delight in the scriptures. I would live peaceably with all men as much as lies in me; I would not hurt a straight hair or a crooked hair of the head of any man or woman under heaven. But when I come to spiritual things, I must draw the sword; I must not stand to any repairs. As soon as ever you cease to feel a hatred of every false way, you are on your way towards friendship with that false way. As soon as ever you begin to feel that there is something rather disreputable, rather self-degrading, in testifying against those systems that shut up the kingdom of God; as soon as ever you get into that spirit, there you are on the highway to apostacy. The Lord keep me just as I have been, or else stop my breath, one or the other of it. God forbid I should ever live to see the day when I should not draw the two-edged sword, cut right and left; for if gospel liberty, be not worth contending for, I don't know what is; if it be not worth living for, I don't know what is; if it be not worth dying for, I don't know what is. Why, Jesus Christ died to set us free, and yet we are not to appreciate the liberty. Jesus Christ died to make us kings and priests to God, and yet we are to be afraid to maintain our own dignity. Jesus Christ died to spoil principalities and powers, overturn the power of darkness, cast out error, and establish the truth as it is in Jesus; and yet we ourselves are afraid to be soldiers of Christ's cross. We are to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. I am on to you. Why, how are you up to rue, then? Why, you have been getting a little worldly advantage from enemies to the truth, and I don't blame you for that. Providence has so placed you; and they have been a little bit loving to you in their manners, and you have got on pretty well by them; and they said, I wish you didn't hear that fellow; I wish you were not quite so uncharitable; you are a man of good sense. And so, in order that you should maintain your good standing with these people, and get on in your worldly advantages, you wish your minister would be just like you, a little more loving. That's the bottom of it. I am on to you; I am not ignorant of this device of the devil. But mind, while you are thus reasoning, where is your faith in God? How different your spirit from that of your father Abraham. I will not cut you off for your faults, mind that; I am only telling you of them, that is all, to show them up to you. Your minister is not so blind as you think he is. Your father Abraham, when a king of this world, a free-will, duty-faith king, wanted to compromise with him. No, said Abraham, "I have lifted up my hand to the most high God that I will not take from a thread to a shoe-latchet." I will deal with you as a worldly man, a commercial man; but touch me in my religion, and I draw the sword that instant, and would rather lose everything I have, mortal life and all, than give up one inch of that gospel ground dearer to me than mortal existence. So then, my hearer, let us still stand fast, and rightly divide the word of God. Let us point out law calling, but don't let us call it gospel calling; let us point out first covenant calling, but don't let us call it second covenant calling; let us point out the letter calling, that professors are called upon to make their profession good, and to be put to the test; but don't let us call that saving calling.

Now I have left but very little time to speak of the other part. "You see your calling;" calling that differs from all others. First, you see that your calling, I speak now to the real Christian, was a life-

giving calling. How do I know that the calling wherewith I was called was a life-giving calling? You may know it by the same sign that the Lord pointed out in Saul of Tarsus to Ananias; "Behold, he prays." And the winner that is called by grace, he begins to sigh; not say prayers, mind, not merely say prayers, he begins to feel that he is a sinner in a way he never did before; he begins to feel that he is in a lost condition in a way he never felt it before; he begins to sigh and to long for deliverance. And if it should be his lot to be under a false ministry, he may be confused for a time, and say, oh, if I could but be as good as that dear minister says I ought to be! I will try to be. And he goes on, and tries, and tries, and tries, and his trying comes to nothing, and he wonders how it is; till by-and-bye he finds out some minister everywhere spoken against, and they say, For heaven's sake don't go to hear him. Well, says the man, I can't be worse than I am. They say, He will do you a deal of harm. That's impossible, says the man. I don't know that one didn't say so before our church meeting, or something like it. He will do you harm. He can't do me harm, for he can't make me worse than I am; so, I will go and hear him. And he goes and hears this man. Ah, he says, the secret is out. I have been trying to be holy; why, this man shows that Jesus Christ, by faith in him, he is to be my sanctification, that he is to be my righteousness, that he is to be all in all. Ah, this is it; now I see the way in which I can get rid of all my sins and condemnation, the way in which God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. Besides, this man describes all the hardness, and all the besetments, and evil thoughts, and passions, and doubts, and fears, and points out just what a poor creature I am, and at the same time points out the remedy in Christ Jesus the Lord, in a way in which I have never heard before. And this man tells us, after he has told us the remedy, he tells us we can't get at it. Other men told me I could when I liked, this man says I can't, and that's just what I feel. Other men told me I could go to God, and to Christ, and get heaven, and get pardon, and get everything, when I pleased; but this man tells us that our times are in the Lord's hands, that there is a set time to favor Zion, and he proves it by the word of God. My experience says Amen to it. I will work no longer; I will begin to wait. And so, he begins to wait, and to look, and to pray, and the vision is for an appointed time. By-and-by mercy breaks in, the clouds part, the sun rises, and the winter passes off; the rain is gone, flowers appear on the earth; the soul leaps out of its wintry state into paradisiacal blessedness. Ah, says that man, now I can see my calling. It was indeed a life-giving calling, that made me feel my need of the provisions of eternal mercy. Ah, but the man dead in sin, over whose head is sounding the law calling, though he perceives it not; and the Israelite, under the first covenant calling, and the mere professor, in the letter calling, knows nothing of this. He knows nothing of this life-giving calling, knows nothing of this down-ward experience; he knows nothing of this helplessness, personally so. He may have heard talk of it, but he knows nothing about it personally. But the man that is thus called by grace does know. You see, then, that your calling was a life-giving calling. Second, you see that your calling was by grace; satisfied of that. Very important that, because all the time you think that there was a duty for you to perform, and that if you had not performed that duty you would not have come; all the time you are thinking that you are thinking a lie; you have got a lie in your right hand. But if you see your calling really, you will see that God who is rich in mercy, and for his great love wherewith he loved you, even when dead in sin, that he quickened you, and you will join with the Apostle Paul and say, "He called me by his grace." Ah, you will say, I can truly say that he remembered me in my low estate on the ground of foreordained mercy, for he is good, and his mercy endures forever. Thus, you will see it was a life-giving call, and you will see it was of grace, and, therefore, to grace how great a debtor. Third, you will also see your calling, not only as a life-giving call, and a gracious call, but also as an effectual call. You're going back again is impossible. Can you get back again into that ignorance of your sinner-ship which you once

had? You cannot. Can you get back again into that ignorance of God's truth in which you once were? You cannot. Can you get back again into that enmity against the truth in which you once were? You cannot. Can you get back and feel at home in opposition to God and his truth, which you once were? You cannot. We can do nothing against it. No; you might have plenty of opportunity to do so, as far as circumstances are concerned, and as far as evils in your nature, with the devil to back them, are concerned; but then he that is for you is greater than all that can be against you. "They might have had opportunity to have returned, but now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." It is, therefore, an effectual call. It has made you something that you were not before; just as the call will at the last great day, when the body is raised up, as it will be, in the twinkling of an eye. Can that immortal go back to mortality? Can that incorruptible go back to corruption? Can that heavenly image go back to the earthly image? Can that mighty body, which it shall be, go back to its deathly mortal clay? No, there is no going back there.

But your time is gone already. I had two more points, that is all; one concerning the gospel, the other concerning the collection. Perhaps some of you thought I ought to have preached a sermon today about Lancashire distress<sup>1</sup>. If we had no newspapers I would have done so if I could have obtained all the needful information. But I have no doubt all of you read the newspapers, perhaps almost as much as you do the Bible, some of you. I have found some Christians better versed in the newspapers than in the Bible. Now I am not so dishonest as to say I don't read the newspaper, but still I do read the newspaper very much as some people read the Bible. How is that? say you. Why, rather carelessly, and I don't believe much above half of what I read. Now, I read the Bible the other way. I read it, I trust, carefully, believe every sentence, and rejoice in every promise that God is pleased to make dear to my heart. Now I say, if you needed information, and I had it in my power to give that information relative to the actual facts, the distress, the cause of the distress, the extent of the distress, the probability of its continuing some months longer, or if you needed flogging, and driving, and coaxing, and I had almost said swearing at, though that I ought not to say, if you needed all that, I might give you all the details; but as this is not the case, and you do not need any information upon those subjects, I will not occupy your time upon them. I thought a gospel sermon was the best thing, and then as good a collection at the end as God, in his providence, shall enable you to give.

But one more word upon calling. This calling is a final calling. How beautifully the apostle handles this. "Whom he called, them he also justified." And that righteousness in which they are justified is eternal. Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Final calling! If you were called to a righteousness that would keep good as long as you kept it good, like the Israelites; if you were called to justification that rose and fell according to what you are, then I could say nothing about this call being final. But as you are called to a righteousness that frees you from all things, the call must be final; and so, it is a call to everlasting glory. "Whom he justified, them he also glorified." Now, then, you see the origin of your calling, God's foreknowledge, and decree; and you see the nature of your calling, life giving, gracious, effectual, and final. It is the highest of all callings, the holiest of all callings, the most wonderful of all callings. But time does not allow me to enter further into this matter; just to say it is no small mercy, then, to see our calling. This is where the Christian is very often in difficulty.

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<sup>1</sup> Wells is referring here to the great and terrible Lancashire Cotton Famine of 1861-1865. The bottom fell out of the cotton market and caused mass distress.

Ah, says the Christian, if I could but clearly see I was called by grace, that would be comfortable. And the Apostle Peter's exhortation is quite in order; "Make your calling sure;" that is the first thing. Just see that your religion began with a conviction of your state; that you have hungered and thirsted, for those are signs of life, after these things. Second, see that you know enough of yourself to acknowledge it is of grace. Third, see that it is effectual; that you have got that love of the truth that you could not despise it nor make light of it. And then, fourth, see that you understand that it is final: called by the eternal righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal glory.