

# The Call and Conversion

Written by John Meyer

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Translated by Aaron Winkelman

## The Call and Conversion

1. In Scripture, conversion is called the great change in the whole life of the soul, especially in the will of man, by which he proceeds out of a state of corruption into a state of grace.

Not counting the state of innocence (paradise) the Scriptures know of two states in which a man on earth may be found. Before the fall into sin, the image of God occupied man. Complete righteousness and holiness was inborn by God to him. He had, so far as it is possible with the ability of a human spirit, a complete understanding of God and his will. He loved God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his strength, and with all his mind. His will was directed toward God and at harmony with God's will.

With the Fall into sin, that lovely picture changed all at once. Complete blindness and darkness in regard to spiritual things seized man. Such a blindness that man understood nothing about spiritual things but considered them as foolish even though the spiritual things were rightly made known to him. Despite his blindness he considered himself as being able to see (John 9:40, 41) and set himself up as a blind guide (Matthew 15:40). He loved the darkness but hated the light (John 3:19).

The original love of man for his Creator had changed into just the opposite. Hostility toward God is the natural disposition of fallen man (Romans 8:7). "Let us break their chains and throw off their fetters (Psalm 2:3)," is his slogan. That wish becomes the father of thought for him. "The fool says in his heart there is no God (Psalm 14:1)." His character corresponds with his conduct. One should not consider it as possible, that he, who bears the image of God, can find pleasure in such sins as they are enumerated in Romans 1:24-32 and Galatians 5:19-21. It is a sad fact. Consequently, fallen man is given over to sin by God's righteous decree.

Not apart from his own will. That is the saddest thing, that he does not recognize the sadness of his condition in the least, that he stubbornly goes his own way. He stands firmly upon the evil way (Psalm 36:5). He goes on his own dark path and is happy to do evil and is glad in his evil, perverted essence (Proverbs 2:13-14). So completely enamoured is natural man in this perverted way that he considers the right way as pure foolishness, yes as tiresome, as deadly even though it is preached to him (1 Corinthians 1:23). He breathed threats and murders against the right way (Acts 9:1).

That was the consequence of that sad decision of Adam to carry out his will in opposition to the will of God. It will always remain a puzzle to us how Adam could come to this conclusion. The desire to set his own will up in opposition to the will of God is inexplicable and irrational. "The absurdity of sin becomes evident chiefly with the fall into sin. For example, Eve agrees with the serpent to the point of suspecting that God would be jealous. What foolishness to think about a jealous God who indeed created man free and, in addition to this, man still is not like something set forth for God against his will. What senselessness to hope for something good which is contrary to the proclamation of the Creator himself. Evil threatens by departing from God's command!" (Hoenecke, Dogmatics Volume II pg. 380) Therefore with good reason it bears the name חֲסִידָה meaning folly, craziness, irrationality. However this inconceivability is a fact of the matter. Adam was disobedient. And through the disobedience of the one man many became sinners (Romans 5:19) and are subject to the wrath of God, to death and have fallen to damnation because of their sins.

Yet God immediately made arrangements for salvation. Yes, with his foreknowledge of the fall he already made these arrangements before the foundation of the world was laid. The seed of the woman would trample the head of the serpent. (Genesis 3:15)

And he has had success. There are now people who are God's dear children (Galatians 4:6 among others); who love him and take comfort in him; who now say, "If I only have you...(Psalm 73:25-26). They do not desire sin but the law of the Lord (Psalm 1:2) and they walk on the path of his commands (Psalm 119:32). Certainly they are far from perfect and are painfully aware of that (Philippians 3:12). They still have their flesh (Romans 7:14), but they do not allow sin to dominate them (Romans 6:12), they strive against it and crucify their flesh together with its wants and desires (Galatians 5:24).

It is because of the merits of Christ that there are such people. Whoever adopts Christ's work in faith, he is a dear child of God (Galatians 3:26)

Both these states exist after the fall into sin. Is the number of states in which a person may be found exhausted with these two? Is there not perhaps a third, which somehow takes the middle between the

two, constitute by some sort of blending of the one and the other? According to Scripture there are these two states and only these two.

Romans 6 discusses both these states with different illustrations. In verse 13, the recipients of the letter are addressed as people “who are now brought from death to life.” Formerly they were dead. Now they are alive. Death and life exclude one another in such a way that it does not allow a third state along with these two, a state which is neither death nor life. In verses 20 and 22, both these states are described as “slavery to sin” and “service to God” respectively as “freedom from righteousness” and “freedom from sin” and placed in opposition to one another in such a way that we clearly recognize how they exclude a third state which would be neither slavery to sin nor service to God, neither freedom from righteousness nor freedom from sin. According to verse 18 he, who has become free from sin, becomes a servant of righteousness in the same moment. In verse 14, both states are characterized as “being under the law” and “being under grace”. Romans 11:6 explains with the plain words, “But it is by grace” and so on, how the law with its works, and grace exclude one another in such a way that there is only an “either”-“or” comparison, without “ifs and buts”.

It is essential that we have complete certainty on this point. In the previously examined passages the discussion was about both states under such terms that it was chiefly a question of context, how it deals with polar opposites. For an example of polar opposites in the words themselves take a look at 1 Peter 2. In this passage, both these states are described as those of faith and unbelief (πιστεύουσιν--ἀπιστεουσιν) not only in verse 7, but in verse 10 also as “being a people” and “not being a people”, “being in grace” and “not being in grace” (λαός--οὐ λαός, ἐλεηθέντες--οὐκ ἐλεηθέντες).

2. The Scriptures call the change from the state of corruption to the state of grace conversion.

Before we involve ourselves here with an analysis concerning the essence of conversion, which happens in the next point, we first must become clear for ourselves concerning the literal sense of the expression. In the spiritual domain, conversion is the solemn term for an event, whose counterpart in common life we refer to as a turning around, or a returning or a turning back. It is based on the picture of a way, a route. Whoever is converted, he walks on a different path, follows a new route, hastens now towards that as his goal from which he had previously departed; however, he now turns away from the goal which he was striving towards. With conversion it is a question of terminus a quo, from which one turns away, and a terminus ad quem, toward which one turns. If we consider for ourselves now both those states dealt with above as a terminus a and terminus ad, then conversion is a very concrete term for the change from the state of corruption to the state of grace.

In a certain sense, the change from a state of grace to a state of corruption could also be called a conversion. And as a matter of fact, שׁוּב is also used for such a falling away, which Luther then has translated several times appropriately with “verkehren” in direct opposition to “Bekehrung” in a good sense, for example 1 Kings 13:33; Nehemiah 9:28. (Compare also 2 Kings 21:3; Proverbs 2:13-15; 2 Timothy 2:14, 18; Titus 1:11 and others.) He also frequently uses Abweichen, Job 23:11; Psalm 14:3; Psalm 125:5; or Abtreten Deuteronomy 11:16, 28; 1 Timothy 4:1 (in a good sense 2 Timothy 2:19) or Abwenden, Numbers 31:16; 2 Kings 17:21; Titus 1:14 (here ἀποστρέφω, which is also used once for conversion in a good sense).

The terminus a of conversion is described for us in Scripture clearly enough. He uses the analogy of an evil way as a picture in 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 25:5; Jeremiah 26:3; also the error of their way James 5:20 (compare 1 Peter 2:25 “straying sheep”, Isaiah 53:6 “wander in error”). In addition it is called the evil nature in Nehemiah 9:35; Jeremiah 23:22, or the godless nature in Ezekiel 3:19 or simply the nature in Jeremiah 15:7; Ezekiel 33:9 (whereby indeed the context leaves no doubt about it, what is meant by a nature; compare Jeremiah 15:6 “ ‘You have rejected me,’ says the Lord, ‘and you keep on falling away from me’”, and Ezekiel 33:8, 9 where the expressions godless, godless nature, sin speak plainly enough). Also, evil life is used in Jeremiah 23:22 (next to evil nature) and wickedness in Jeremiah 18:8; Jeremiah 23:14; Acts 3:26. Repeatedly sin is indicated as terminus a in 1 Kings 8:35; Isaiah 59:20; Ezekiel 33:14; Daniel 9:13.

In the numerous places in which the terminus ad is spoken of, apart from the places in which both termini stand together, only God and Christ are appointed as goal. Acts 26:20 uses only God. 1 Samuel 7:3 and 2 Chronicles 30:9 use the Lord. In Deuteronomy 4:30 and Deuteronomy 30:2 the combination of both names is found, the Lord your God. Job 22:23 uses the Almighty. And in the well-known passage 1 Peter 2:25, a conversion to the Shepherd and Overseer of souls is spoken of. That Luke 1:17 only seemingly sets down terminus ad as a state will be handled later on.

In addition, a number of passages are also found in which both termini are spoken of, for example God and idols 1Thessalonians 1:9; false gods and the living God Acts 14:15; the Gentiles and God Acts 15:19; the power of Satan and the power of God Acts 26:18; and in the same passage darkness and light.

It must be striking that when terminus a is spoken of it is constantly a condition, an evil way, evil nature, sin, and only several times in comparisons is it called a person, false gods, idols. And even in such comparisons of both termini it is only once a state which is set in opposition to God as terminus a, namely the power of Satan. On the contrary, when terminus ad is spoken of it is constantly God in person and only once in a comparison is it a state, the light.

As these latter passages (Acts 26:18) indicate, the critical step of a sinner who goes from the state of sin to the state of grace is to be understood as conversion in the strict sense. This strict understanding must be sufficient in all the passages in which only the terminus a is indicated, just as in the vast majority of passages in which God is the terminus ad; although one has the impression in several places as if the conversion comprises the state of grace which begins with conversion in the strict sense for example in Deuteronomy 4:30; Psalm 51:15; Isaiah 55:7 and others.

3. Conversion means a complete transformation in the whole life of the soul, especially in the will of man.

Conversion is described for us in several passages of Holy Scripture very clearly. If we look at the Old Testament, then we find such a description in the prayer of Solomon at the consecration of the temple (1 Kings 8:46-50). Solomon says first, that the Israelites who were chastised for their sins "change in their heart." Where they had previously lived carelessly and thanklessly in their sins, now they should begin to consider their life and to compare it to the commands of God. Where they previously had delighted in their lives of sin, now they began to become uneasy because of their sins. Where should they find help? They turned with their wretchedness to the Lord in fervent prayer. They made a sincere, unreserved confession of their sins to him. They sought help in him, they had sinned against him and because of this they had to expect anger and punishment. How then did they turn to the LORD? They indicated that through the land which was given to them. They prayed in the land of their enemies with their face turned toward the land of their fathers, especially to the temple at Jerusalem. Their hope was based on the promises of the LORD and on his divine name, which is designated in that passage as "the LORD who is our righteousness."

There are essentially two parts which confront us here as the main points of conversion: contrite recognition of committed sins bound with a sincere confession and trust in the promised grace of God which is expressed in fervent prayer.

Solomon in his consecration prayer speaks repeatedly about conversion. We draw upon verses 33 and 35 from the cited chapter for a comparison. Both verses talk about the same activity of a person in their conversion, namely conversion, prayer, and confession. The varying sequences of these expressions are instructive. Verse 33 has the sequence: conversion, confession, prayer, while verse 35 has the exact opposite sequence: prayer, confession, conversion. There the order is not accidental, but it is done intentionally by the Holy Spirit, so we may also expect to learn something from the sequence of the expressions about the term of conversion.

If verse 33 is taken that the people of Israel have sinned against their God, however are turned back to him by the punishment. Here conversion stands in opposition to sin. Then we observe that sin is clearly not spoken of as terminus a but as the opposite of conversion. Conversion is the turning back to God, to the one man had turned his back on by sin. In this sense, then, the confession of his name and praying and supplication necessarily follows upon conversion. Verse 35 praying stands directly as the opposite of sin. Thus conversion, in the sense of verse 33, is presupposed, and prayer is simultaneously understood. Conversion, which even now must not be taken in the same sense as verse 33 because of its sequence in this passage, and which is explained through the assertion of the terminus a as a leaving of sin, follows only subsequently.

Where indeed does this change in the meaning of the word "conversion" come from in such a short section? There must be some sort of reason why the pure turning back to God should be stressed in verse 33, while it is silently presupposed in verse 35, and why the leaving of sin, the bettering of life should be stressed in verse 35, about which verse 33 mentions nothing? In verse 33 (and immediately following in verse 34) Israel is called "your people." It is the covenant people of the LORD, to whom the promises of the fathers apply (vs. 34), that was disowned by the LORD on account of their sins. Verse 35 lacks every description of the people of Israel. In verse 36 however, we distinctly learn what the Israelites were regarded as. They are called servants. There is the change. With the covenant people the great main point was that they kept the covenant, which God had made with them and their fathers, and if they forsook him,

that they turn back to the covenant. However, with servants the main issue is their obedience. Servants cannot in a legal sense leave their lord by their own ability whereas one of the two parties reaching a covenant can break that agreement. Even if slaves run away, they still remain the property of their lord. Servants can be disobedient. So a comparison of both these verses proves the turning back to obedience as the new impetus which is often coupled with the term conversion.

In Joel 2:12-14, we have a clear description of conversion from the mouth of the LORD himself by a vivid picture of the impetus of repentance and, a strong basis, as well as a designated expression, for faith which is often very timid at first (“Who knows?” compare Jonah 3,9). In Acts 11:21, we have a passage in which faith is described as the impetus truly constituting conversion and the beginning of conversion is described as coincidental with the occurrence of faith, as the Greek πιστεύσας ἐπέστρεψεν shows.

These descriptions of conversion clearly show that a change of the entire life of the soul, especially the will of the converted, proceeds with this great transformation. That is also clearly expressed in isolated passages of Holy Scripture. Once again the numerous passages which speak about a conversion from the whole heart or from the whole soul belong here. In 2 Chronicles 6:37 it is said about sinful Israel that they were converted in their hearts (לִבָּם statement of the point to which conversion must be stretched: until in their heart); while in Jeremiah 24:7 the Lord sets down the chief part of conversion, as that thing which constitutes a true essence of conversion, namely, that he would give a new heart to the people who were converted, a heart, “that they may know me, that I am the LORD”. The passages cited above from the prophet Joel have already pointed out that a conversion that does not have the heart as its residence is worth nothing whatsoever. Joel 2:13, “Rend your hearts, and not your garments.”

Thus conversion means a complete change of the heart, of the entire life of the soul of a man. In a special sense, however, this change refers to the will. For while Jeremiah 24:7 makes it clear that true recognition is an essential part of conversion, it is also clearly shown in 1 Kings 18:37 that a purely modest understanding which gains knowledge of conversion in the strictest sense through an extraordinary revelation of God which is proceeding. Although the knowledge about conversion does not need to be excluded, yet conversion still really denotes a complete change of the will of a man.

4. Although a process of a shorter or longer period can prepare conversion, even this still happens instantaneously.

As shown above, many passages give the impression that in this conversion, the act of conversion is not understood solely but includes the new state which begins with the conversion. One gets this impression from the only passage in which the noun, conversion, ἐπιστροφή, is used (Acts 15:3). Luther also has indicated this through his translation “Wandel” meaning a change. This expression, that conversion includes the new state, is further reinforced by a passage in which the new state is apparently spoken of as the terminus ad of conversion. In Luke 1:17 the angel prophesies about John that he would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah “to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous.” Two more times a terminus ad is spoken of with these words in the immediate context, in vs. 16 it says, “to God, your Lord,” and in vs. 17 it says, “to the children.” Here the evidence of a goal is clear by the use of ἐπί with the accusative. The phrase “to the wisdom”, however, is the translation of ἐν φρονήσει. It is certainly noteworthy in itself when a preposition is used for the evidence of a goal, so the change of the preposition here must be even more noteworthy. The goal is stated directly in vs. 16, ἐπὶ κύριον τὸν θεὸν αὐτῶν; therefore it complements vs. 17 without difficulty. Here the scope, in which conversion lies, or which makes up the essence of conversion, is stated by ἐν φρονήσει δικαίων as a further impetus. Accordingly, the mere act of conversion is disregarded even more and the new state, which begins with the conversion, is stressed. As we have already seen above, and will hear in more subsequent passages, conversion is also used for the bettering of life. So it is clear that the Holy Scriptures recognizes conversion as a state, or if one desires, also as a progressing process.

However this process does not come to a conclusion according to Scripture, when faith is kindled in a man, but the kindling of faith stands at the beginning of this process, so that the discussion is not about conversion before faith.

In Acts 1:21, the phrase πιστεύσας ἐπέστρεψεν instructs as to the role of faith in conversion. One notices with the ingressive aorist, πιστεύσας, that the kindling of faith proceeds at the beginning of every conversion. Since then, Scriptures reject a process of conversion which culminates exclusively in the kindling of faith thus it also teaches that conversion in the strict sense happens instantaneously. One does

not instantaneously comprehend it but it is realized bit by bit. Also, one is not to disregard that Scripture rejects such a process and therefore one wants to avoid it.

That the conversion is an instant act proceeds also from this that it still is a question of polar opposites. *Tertium non datur*. But with a process of conversion one would be forced to except a third state between God and idols, between faith and unbelief between being God's people and not being God's people.

Thereby it should not be contested that the conversion proceeds a process of a shorter or longer period which from God's point of view is intended for the conversion of man but may not be called conversion from man's point of view. The man is still unconverted despite this process and in the whole course of this process.

In Acts 26:28, King Agrippa can serve as an example for this. The Holy Spirit worked powerfully in his heart through the word of Paul and the prophets. He did not remain callous so that Paul even had great hope to win him. However, if now anything at all was lacking, he was not a Christian. He would not be converted. He had become a Christian in the instant when he declared in such a short time that Paul persuaded him, a complete unbeliever in whom nothing spiritually good was to be found (provided that he had honestly believed that and not in jest). Compare Mark 12:34.

"To that end we shortly summarize our commentary concerning the *modus conversionis*. Conversion happens in an instant as a gift with faith and a transfer from the status *miseriae* into the status *gratiae*. This moment, which is intended for the conversion, precedes the results. Belonging to these results are: 1.) That God opens the eyes of man through his law and places before him his corruption and damnability also fills him with fear before God's judgment and with a certain distress over his soul. 2.) That God also makes it well known with the gospel and even creates a certain natural pleasure which is brought about through the impression which the love of Christ bears on the natural soul. About all these results it is to be said: 1.) God still does not actually convert the man in and by these things because he does that first through the reward of true faith with the sanctifying trust in Christ. However God thereby does something as a result of conversion. Thus one strictly speaking about man, who is terrified over his sins which have become evident, can not say, he is in the act of converting, but to be sure, he is one whom God wants to convert. 2.) Everything which precedes the actual conversion, that is the grant of faith, is truly good in itself, so long as the Spirit does it, however, the still unconverted subject is nothing spiritually good" (Hoenecke, Dogmatics, paragraph 65. Dictated 1895-96.)

II. The conversion is God's work which he accomplished through the Gospel without the cooperation of the man who is being converted.

1. The word "conversion" is sometimes used in Scripture in a transitive sense, sometimes it is used in a reflexive sense.

When it says in Malachi 2:6 about Levi, "he turned many from sin," thereby conversion is talked about as his work. However, as the text clearly shows, it is not Levi who had taken the critical step out of a state of corruption into a state of grace for his own person, but he had prompted others to take this step. About these others then it can be said, they have been converted. Thus it also says in 1 Peter 2:25, "Now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Thus the word convert is used in a transitive sense in a whole number of passages

In the vast majority of passages, however, it is reflexive. Someone is converted.

In the Greek testament *ἐπιστρέφειν* is used for converting both in a transitive sense as well as a reflexive sense. (*ἀποστρέφειν* is also used once in Acts 3:26 with a special emphasis of the terminus a. This is in the reflexive sense.)

It is noteworthy that the transitive *ἐπιστρέφειν* should also be used along with the reflexive especially since the Greek language has the middle voice. A middle voice of *ἐπιστρέφειν* does occur several times in the New Testament, for example in Matthew 10:13; Matthew 24:18; Mark 13:16; Luke 17:31. Still the talk in these passages is about turning around in the physical sense. The second aorist passive is used repeatedly for the physical turning around in a reflexive sense, for example Matthew 9:22; Mark 8:33; John 21:20 (in a spiritual sense John 12:40). Also the active voice is used for the physical turning around in a reflexive sense, for example Matthew 12:44; Acts 9:40; Revelation 1:12. The active voice is always used for conversion in a spiritual sense, apart from John 12:40 (in 1 Peter 2:25 no reason is submitted to put aside the passive meaning). It might be useful for an understanding of this change from the transitive and reflexive meaning to draw a parallel from the common use of the language. The transitive verbs *εἰσβάλλειν* and *ἐξιέναι* are often used reflexively. If, for example, a river is the subject, then they say literally, it flows itself. This change is explained through an ellipsis in which the self-evident

object, τὸ ὕδωρ, is simply omitted. Conversion means a complete turning around in the entire life of the soul, especially in the will of a man. The reflexive meaning of ἐπιστρέφειν is then explained simply by the omission of the self-evident object, namely the heart.

2. Repentance is the core of conversion in the reflexive sense.

That repentance is essentially the same thing as conversion, hence it follows, that both have the same terminus a and terminus ad with the same subject. As the terminus a of repentance Hebrews 6:1 speaks of the dead works, Acts 8:22 speaks about wickedness, Revelation 2:21-22 speaks about the spiritual immorality, Revelation 9:20-21 and Revelation 16:11 speak about all kinds of sins. As the terminus ad Acts 20:21 speaks about God, and 2 Timothy 2:25 speaks about the knowledge of the truth.

Furthermore, the story of the Ninevites shows the close connection of both concepts. In the prophet Jonah it is reported to us that they were converted. The king of Nineveh proclaimed, "each one turn from his evil ways" (Jonah 3:10). The Lord Jesus however explains in his reference to this story, that the people of Nineveh had repented (Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:32). So it does not follow that both these concepts are completely identical but truly that they describe essentially the same case.

The same thing is established from Jeremiah 31:19. There Ephraim declares, "After I strayed, I repented.." So we do not need to understand these words, repentance and conversion, as identical, but this that repentance includes conversion as a broader concept. Repentance is an essential part of conversion.

The concept of conversion has different spheres. As the preposition in the most used Greek word, ἐπιστρέφειν (ἀποστρέφειν is used only once) already shows, in addition what is seen particularly in the terminus ad, the adoption of the merits of Christ, would be made impossible without regard for the terminus a, the repentance for sins.

So also the concept of repentance has different spheres. Thus the whole content of the Gospel is summarized as repentance preaching. The Lord Jesus sent his disciples out two by two. The sweet Gospel should be their message, as Matthew 10:7-15 describes. According to Luke 9:6 the disciples had also preached the Gospel exactly according to instruction. Mark however reports that they had fulfilled their commission to preach the Gospel by preaching one should repent (Mark 6:12). That still with repentance more is seen in the negative impulse, remorse, the well known actions, which are sitting down in dust and ashes (Job 42:6) and in sackcloth and ashes (Matthew 11:21; Luke 10:13).

It is therefore entirely natural that repentance is spoken of as preceding conversion Acts 3:19. In a similar way in Mark 1:15 repentance is spoken of as preceding faith.

Yet the passages in no way force repentance to be understood everywhere in its most narrow of all scope; it is to be understood in most passages in opposition to the positive impetus, namely faith in Christ. Thus in every passage where the talk is about a repentance to forgiveness of sins, for example Luke 24:47; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3. Repentance must also be understood in every passage as including faith in which it speaks of new obedience as righteous fruits of repentance. Such and similar passages establish as a definition entirely according to nature: "And the true, right repentance is actually contrition and sorrow or having fears about sins, and yet in addition it is believing in the Gospel and absolution, that sins are forgiven and grace is obtained through Christ, which faith comforts the heart anew and makes glad" (Müller, pg. 41, XII, 3-5).

However, just the same constitutes the core in the definition of conversion as we have found it above.

In a way however conversion surpasses repentance. By repentance the bettering of life is always strictly distinguished as fruit (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20). Even though Luther has translated μετανοεῖν once with bessern in Luke 13:3,5 still nothing is located in these passages which compels us to depart from the common wording of repentance. Conversion however often includes as we have seen above the bettering of life. Here would be the place to point to 2 Kings 23:24-25. In verse 25 it is said about the good works of King Josiah, which are enumerated in vs. 24, that his conversion to the LORD had been in accordance to all the laws of Moses. Jeremiah 13:14-15 shows something similar. Indeed, Acts 26:20, it is said about repentance and conversion, that conversion consists in the distinction from repentance actually in the fruits of repentance: μετανοεῖν καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, ἅξια τῆς μετανοίας ἔργα πράσσοντας.

3. Although the subject of conversion is man in the reflexive sense, it still in no way is thereby ascribed to him as his own work, for the subject of conversion in the transitive sense is God alone or a man who is acting in God's commission.

Acts 9:35 it is said about the people in Lydia and Sharon, "they turned to the Lord." Completely the same in all the passages in which "to convert" is used in the reflexive sense, the man himself is the

subject, about whom it is said, he converted. Should it be said then that the man himself contributed something to his own conversion? This passage only establishes the facts that with any man the great change has happened by itself, by which he comes out of the state of corruption into the state of grace; however, in no way does this say something about the manner how this change has occurred, nor concerning the person who has accomplished it. As the testimonies of these passages offer, the man may have accomplished his conversion himself, or another person may have accomplished this in him, or finally, also the converted person may have accomplished it together with another person.

Yet, such passages show something more, in which God issues the invitation to man to be converted, nevertheless they sharpen the question. One wants to deduce from them chiefly something or other about the person who has to work the conversion, hence it follows that the man must accomplish it himself. Every cooperation between man and God is impossible. Man is not invited in these passages to cooperate with his conversion; he is not invited to prepare himself for the conversion, nor even is he invited to abandon the hindrances standing in the way of conversion, so that God may be able to convert him, but he is invited point blank to be converted, the entire work to be carried out, everything, which belongs to it, to be prepared, and it to be performed. For this reason, whoever wants to conclude from such invitations to conversion, that the man himself must contribute something to his conversion, whoever quotes these invitations to conversion for proof of his statement that man can at least leave the malicious oppositions which hinder conversion, thereby he will obviously prove to many nothing about it. For in these passages so understood, the talk is clearly not about a division of work. The whole work is demanded from man alone. However, one does not want to draw the conclusion that the man has to be converted by his own power, so one must grant that in these invitations to conversion nothing is said about the person accomplishing the conversion. If these invitations are Law or Gospel is not the question here.

Since it says in 1 Peter 2:25, "Now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" ἐστράφητε-- and no reason is set forth not to take the second aorist passive in a passive sense here—then the converted man is made out to be passive. Thus it is prohibited to make him in any way the author of his own conversion. He is merely passive. He undergoes the conversion. And how completely passive the man is in his conversion, the picture clearly shows, with which not converting is depicted as the opposite state, "You were like sheep going astray." That was the situation of man before his conversion. There is no talk about some kind of active participation of man in his own conversion. Not once is the leaving of the malicious opposition his own doing. As Peter has already repeatedly referred to Isaiah 53, he does so again with the expression, straying sheep. There also the malicious opposition gives light to something, namely that the straying man obstinately holds firmly to his straying. "Each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

Thereby, that one believes to be able to explain the accomplishment of conversion by the differences between natural and malicious opposition, has already caused much harm. If one says the natural man however still has a certain freedom of choice in evil, so that he truly can choose between something evil and something more evil, yet he is still incapable of choosing between good and evil, he is correct. Furthermore, it is true that natural and malicious oppositions are only slightly differing evils. However, in conversion it is not a question of a choice between different degrees of evil, but, as we saw above, it is a question of polar opposites. Or simply stated, as soon as the Holy Spirit begins to work in a man, in order to convert him, then the question does not arise for the Old Adam, if you want to intensify your natural opposition to malicious opposition or if you want to leave it as it naturally is. But the question is, if you want to maliciously oppose or if you want to let yourself be mortified. He is placed matter-of-factly before the choice between something good and something evil. And there he has no choice. He can only decide for the malicious opposition. Such passages in which it speaks about conversion in a passive sense, show that the man is not the one who converts himself or contributes something to his conversion. He is passive, he acts merely passively.

We learn who works conversion in 1 Kings 18:37 for example from the prayer of the prophet Elijah, "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again," or from the groan of Ephraim in Jeremiah 31:18, "Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God."

At the same time, God certainly uses different intermediaries. Thus the Messiah explains in Isaiah 49:5 that he was instructed by God to bring back Jacob. Also, the forerunner of the Messiah, John, was sent to turn the children of Israel back to the Lord their God and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous (Luke 1:16-17). About Levi, the family of priests, it is reported to us in Malachi 2:6, "He turned



many from sin." And finally, according to James 5:19-20, anyone among the brothers can be useful for this, namely to turn an erring brother.

Repentance describes essentially the same thing as conversion. And what the Scripture says about the accomplishment of repentance, is in complete agreement with that which it said about the accomplishment of conversion. God commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30) however, not in the sense that the men should accomplish repentance as their own work, but God who commands repentance, even gives it (Acts 5:31; Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25).

4. The means by which God accomplishes conversion is his word, especially the Gospel.

In Jeremiah 23:22 the LORD explains, if the prophets had preached his word to his people, then they would have turned the same people from their evil ways and their evil life. Thereby, he recognizes his word as the true means to work conversion. And in the same chapter, in verse 29, he also explains the reason why one ought to expect such an accomplishment by his word. His word is powerful, like a fire and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces.

It is especially the Gospel to which the power for conversion is ascribed. When the priest of Jupiter at Lystra wanted to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas because in his opinion they were Mercury and Jupiter, Paul said, the he even had come to them for the purpose of converting them from these false gods to the true God. By this he also speaks about the means that he used for this purpose, "We preach the Gospel to you, so that you are converted."

Often times to a casual reader the passages sound as if neither the word nor other means should be talking about conversion, especially the tribulations. Thus for example is Deuteronomy 4:30, "When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in the later days you will return to the LORD your God." Yet tribulation is in no way a means of conversion in itself, but because it was foretold to the people about their downfall of their turning away, so it was proof of the truthfulness of God and his word, whose remembrance became refreshed through the tribulation. And certainly it was thereby also considered, not chiefly in the word of the law, but in the Gospel, as the indicated passages also show beautifully, even if one would only hear the following, "For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers which he confirmed to them by oath" (Deuteronomy 4:31).

In Acts 11:21, when the kindling of faith is described as the instance with which conversion begins, so here all such passages naturally have their place, which name the word of God as the means for kindling faith. It is only indicated in the well-known passage, namely Romans 10:17.

5. If a man is not converted, thus his evil desires are to blame for it.

That all conversion efforts are seriously meant on the part of God, sufficiently establishes the truthfulness of God and the truth of his word. Disclaimer: That God ever seriously intends anyone for a fall, slanders his speech as shadow boxing and even calls him one who speaks out of both sides of his mouth. That any man is not converted, the cause for this does not lie on God. We are not left in doubt concerning this, who is guilty in hindering the conversion. Thus it is certainly God, who works conversion, and it is certainly man who hinders it.

Conversion happens in the sphere of the will. It is the evil will which does not let conversion happen. The converted will should change and be directed to the right path, yet the sinner loves the darkness more than the light and does not want to permit his perverted will to change.

Many passages, in which God laments over man, show this, that they do not want to be converted (compare Hosea 11:5; Psalm 7:13; Jeremiah 15:7; Jeremiah 25:7; Jeremiah 35:15; and others).

In addition it is still illustrated in manifold ways how the conversion that does not happen is attributed solely to the unwillingness to be converted on the part of man. Thus in 2 Chronicles 24:19, the people of Judah and Jerusalem are described for us. They simply did not listen to the preaching of the prophets whom the LORD sent for their conversion. And two verses later we learn that they made a covenant against the prophet Zechariah and stoned him in order to prevent further efforts at conversion. How could it be shown to us more clearly that their unwillingness thwarted their conversion!

In 2 Chronicles 30:8, Hezekiah warns the children of Israel by his couriers, that they should not thwart this attempt at conversion by obstinance, as their fathers had done (vs. 7). What could be more clear! To be sure this warning was also wasted. They did exactly that about which they were warned, and did it even in the most irresponsible of manners. They laughed at and mocked the messengers with their admonition to turn back (vs. 10). Furthermore, this passage also shows the opposite as clearly as possible. That if conversion is hindered, it is man's own fault, is shown in the stubbornness of the children of Israel. That however, if conversion happens, it is God's work. That is shown by Judah. For, "The hand of God

was on the people to give them unity of mind” (vs. 12). In 2 Chronicles 36:13, in addition to the stubbornness, the hardening of the heart is also named as the cause that hinders conversion.

Jeremiah 5:3-5 clearly describes the cause of not converting correctly. They do not feel it when the LORD strikes them. That is not the fault of the blows of the Lord, but of the people who are being struck. They have a harder disposition than a rock. That is not innate to them in that way from God, but it is their own choice. They do not want to be converted. Such malice can not be excused with ignorance as one might expect. Even the powerful, with whom it was presumed, that they knew about the way of the Lord and the law of their God, have shattered the yoke and torn apart souls, that is they declared against better knowledge, “We do not want to submit to God” (Jeremiah 2:20).

A man certainly can even be strengthened in his own wickedness by false prophets (Jeremiah 23:14; Isaiah 13:22). Thus they become an accessory, never again are the unconverted pardoned by it, and least of all any who attribute the guilt to God.

Likewise it is said about the men who are converted, they are humble (2 Chronicles 30:11), so in Nehemiah 9:29, pride is spoken of as a hindrance that thwarts conversion. Here also it is the man who makes conversion impossible.

Finally it is also to be pointed out that many times true conversion is hindered by a hypocritical conversion. So also with this case no one other than the man himself bears the guilt. It lies on his own hand. Hosea 7:16 speaks about the hypocritical conversion as a hindrance of the true conversion, “They do not turn to the Most High. They are like a faulty bow.”

III. Scripture also calls the activity of God, which is intended for the conversion of a man, calling.

1. Repentance is the immediate goal of the call.

Καλεῖν (aside from the meaning “to name” which is καλεῖν with a predicate) means to call. Thus it is used in a common sense in many passages in the Gospels and Acts, for example in Matthew 2:7, “Herod called the Magi secretly,” and also John 2:2, “Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding,” and others.

That καλεῖν has an everyday sense in such passages does not lie somehow in the verb itself or in the respective form of the verb, but it lies in the entirely common, everyday conditions and circumstances in which it is used. If, on the other hand, the verb is used in special circumstances, then it immediately receives a sense appropriate to the conditions. So, for example, is the case when the goal of conversion is not a place but a state. In Romans 1:1, Paul is introduced as “a called apostle.” Here it was not into some person’s proximity or into a place that Paul was called, it was an office, that he was entrusted to fill by this calling. Such an office, or state, to which everyone is called, therefore is even called his calling. It appears at first glance at this passage that there is an entirely different meaning of καλεῖν than the previously mentioned passages (Matthew 2:7; John 2:2). However, it becomes apparent with a closer analysis, that this distinction in reality lies in the circumstances. If one disregards this, then he keeps essentially the same meaning for καλεῖν in both passages, namely to call. It receives the characteristics that belong to the different passages from the context.

The Lord Jesus himself names repentance as an immediate goal of his calling activity in Luke 5:32. Repentance is the core of conversion in the reflexive sense. The Lord Jesus has come into the world to work repentance and conversion, and his activity which is intended for this he names “calling.” Conversion in the transitive sense has conversion in the reflexive sense as its goal. Therefore, the calling is at the very least an essential part of conversion in the transitive sense. For this reason it should not surprise us that the calling is used in a pregnant sense for the converting. The immediate goal of the calling is to work conversion. Moreover, that which we possess as converted people is also named as the goal of the calling, namely that which we enjoy, do or suffer. Thus 1 Corinthians 1:9 speaks of fellowship with the son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ; Colossians 3:15 speaks of the peace of God; 1 Thessalonians 2:12 the kingdom of God and his glory; 1 Timothy 6:12 eternal life; 1 Peter 2:9 the wonderful light of him who has called us; 1 Peter 2:21 to suffer for the sake of doing good; 1 Peter 3:9 to bless.

When the goal of the calling is conversion, it is understood that nothing whatsoever, which conversion brings at first by itself can be the basis of the calling, for example, not our works. The grace of the one who calls is the only basis. This is truly expressed most acutely in 2 Timothy 1:9, “God has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”

2. The means of the calling is the preaching of the Gospel.

Calling as a description of God’s converting activity is, as shown above, a metaphorical expression. The means of the calling may have give rise to this picture. This means is the Gospel.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 explains that with the plain words, "God has called you through our Gospel. This is drawn out of Isaiah 41:8-14 in a wonderfully beautiful way. In the first place, in vs. 8, we have the address, in the most sincere of tones, which shows us who is being called and what has already happened. After that comes the explanation in vs. 9, that God had called Israel upon which the longer discourse of the calling begins immediately. The calling which was issued to Israel, the same Israel who was subjugated by the powerful, sounds short: You should be my servant. And the reason for this calling is God's choice out of pure grace. He did not reject Israel as they had truly deserved. And the glorious good which is promised by the calling is on the one hand, deliverance from fear, strengthening, help and preservation for Israel (vs. 10) and on the other hand, the complete destruction of Israel's enemies by Israel themselves with God's help (vs. 11-13). Thereupon, the calling concludes in vs. 14 with a summary: " 'Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you,' declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." Sweet Gospel. A precious means of calling. *Quem non blanda Dei potuissent verba movere?*

The Gospel is also spoken of as the means of conversion in the narrowest sense, as the kindling of faith. However, in the wider sense, the entire word of God, Law and Gospel, is the means of conversion, for according to the account in 1 Kings 8:46-50, fear and anxiety over sin also belongs to conversion. But the means of the call is only the Gospel. God does not call through the Law, and not by fear and anxiety over sin. Moreover, God crushes man with his law with its demands, threats, and curses. That is *contritio passiva*. The Gospel, however, is the sweet voice with which he so lovingly calls the terrified sinner to himself.

Since the Gospel is the means of calling, so it follows that the objects of the calling are only terrified sinners. The Savior himself explains this in Matthew 9:13, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

### 3. The call is always seriously meant.

A call that is seriously meant is actually a tautology and a call that is not seriously meant is a contradiction in terms. This brings up the case that a call is seriously meant. If a call is not seriously meant, then it is indeed not a call, but a fraud. The means which are normally used for a call are misused for a hoax by a call that is not seriously meant under the guise of a true call.

When Herod secretly called the wisemen, it was his serious will, that they should come to him for a secret conference. And when God called Paul to be an apostle, it was his serious will that Paul should become an apostle. Even as it is still the serious will of every congregation today that the pastor or teacher who is called by them would become their pastor or teacher. They express their serious wills by the call. And when Jesus called terrified sinners to repentance, should that not be serious to him? The word "call" shows that it is seriously meant.

If God's call to poor sinners was not seriously meant, then in this it may have its basis that God is not truthful. If God was pleased with lies, and it was his method to dupe people, then the hypothesis of a call that is not seriously meant would be correct. However, as long as it is impossible for God to lie, so long is it a blasphemy of God to babble about a call that is not seriously meant. But now God teaches that he is truthful not only for the most part, but he also stresses this attribute in connection with the call. If God calls anyone, he truly means it. St. Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 1:9, "God, who has called you, is faithful," and again in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, "The one who calls you is faithful."

Even if it would be conceivable that God called someone thoughtlessly in haste, it still would certainly be a question, whether he seriously meant his call. God does not draw back from the call which once took place. Both the passages which were cited are used in such a context. In 1 Corinthians 1:4, the apostle thanks God for this, that he has made the Corinthians rich in all ways, and lists the different parts of their wealth. Finally in vs. 8 he says that God, "will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this, that God has called them, at the same time they have the guarantee that everything which is needed for their ultimate achievement of salvation happens on God's part. The train of thought is very similar in 1 Thessalonians 5: 23-24, "May God himself, the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." And Romans 11:29 is still added, "For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."

However, it is not valid at all that God would thoughtlessly entice with his call. It says in 2 Timothy 1:9 that God has called us according to his purpose. God has called us because he has resolved to do it. In Romans 8:31, the call is set in a similar relation to the purpose of God, "And those he predestined, he also called." The call flows from the choice. That we, who do not fit in with those who are wise according to the flesh, nor with the powerful, nor with the nobles, that we are called, accordingly explains

that God has chosen the foolish things of the world in order to shame the wise; that God has chosen the weak things of the world in order to shame the strong; that God has chosen the ignoble, the despised, and the things that are nothing in the world in order to make the things that are something to nothing (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). However, that the call flows out of the choice, what else shows this, than that God has seriously meant the conversion?

What is said here according to 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, Romans 8:30, and 2 Timothy 1:9 about the relation of the call with the choice, seems to contradict Matthew 22:14, where those who are called and those who are chosen are set in opposition, "Many are called, but few are chosen." (We omit Matthew 20:16 because the words in this passage are missing in both the oldest witnesses, the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus, both from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore they are also missing in the Dublin manuscript from the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the Paris manuscript from the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Also the testimony of Origen is against it.)

The fact that God is completely serious about the call, the Lord Jesus teaches especially through both parables, namely the ones about the royal wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14) and the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24). One may consider the repeated invitation accompanied by the detailed explanation that everything is prepared. One may further consider the specific expression which the one who was giving the banquet used for the calling of those who were on the streets and corners, "Urge (ἀνάγκασον) them to come in, when previously he had already said with respect to the poor, crippled, lame, and blind, "Bring them in (εἰσάγαγε). Finally one may consider the fearful seriousness with which those who despised the invitation are punished. It is only conceivable because the invitation was also seriously meant.

4. The call is powerful but not irresistible.

The word "call" (καλεῖν) is almost always used for such cases when the call is obeyed on the part of the one who is being called. Should we draw the conclusion from this that καλεῖν used in the pregnant Christian sense is equal to a successful calling? Is καλεῖν equal to the accomplishing of that to which one was called?

As an example of καλεῖν in the common meaning we examine the passage which was already cited above, Matthew 2:7, "Then Herod called the Magi secretly." The question which we have to examine now is, have the wisemen been brought to Herod by his call? In a certain sense we can answer, yes, if we consider the circumstances. The wisemen awaited the information from Herod where they could find the newborn king of the Jews. From the start they were prepared to go in. The call was the sign for them that they were now welcome. Herod wanted to entertain the wisemen. His call was the expression of his willingness, even his desire, to receive them. Without Herod's call, the wisemen had not been able to come. Thus the call had brought them to Herod. However, only in a certain sense, namely, that it made the wills of Herod known to the wisemen and gave them the right to come to him. Only in a strict sense had it brought them, not in a physical sense. The wisemen were willing from the very beginning to go to Herod. They were only waiting for his call. But we can consider for ourselves the chance that they actually had not intended to go to Herod but had been induced by his call to change their mind and do what they originally had not wanted to do, namely to go to Herod. In this instance it could be said with even greater accuracy that Herod's call had brought the wisemen to him, again not in a physical sense, but merely in the way of persuasion. The call of Herod was successful. From the beginning, Herod had expected nothing else than that he would have success.

Now we will look at a passage (Romans 1:1) in which καλεῖν is used for the call to a special office. Paul is referred to here as a "called apostle". From this, we learn that God is the one who called him. What is Paul saying with this, that he is referred to as a "called apostle"? Does he want to say what Bengel says, "*Paulus per vocationem apostolus factus est.*" In a certain sense, yes. Before his call, Paul was not an apostle, now subsequently he is an apostle. And his call was intended for this, that he should become an apostle. At this point, we touch very closely upon the use of καλεῖν with the meaning "to name." Acts 14:12 serves as an example of this usage. The people of Lystra named (ἐκάλουον) Barnabas, Jupiter and they named Paul, Mercury. The people were of the firm opinion that they truly were hitting on something with this designation (consider their preparations for an offering in verse 13 and the difficulty of quieting them in vs. 18). However, in no way by this naming did they accomplish it that Barnabas and Paul became that which the people had named them, nor had they actually kept the names the people intended for them. The people had not considered a possible failure of their designation. Paul was called and appointed by God to be an apostle. God, from the beginning, had not taken into consideration the possibility of a failure of his designation. And Paul also had not been able to decline the call without doing wrong. Paul is made an apostle by his call, but only in a literal sense. He received the knowledge of the

Gospel and the ability to preach the proper articles with the proper words by inspiration (compare the apostle's own remark about this in 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 and 1 Corinthians 2:10-13). But he points to his call for this reason, that he may state his right as an apostle to write to the Romans. When a congregation calls anyone to be their pastor, then, as far as they are able, they make him their pastor. They also do not consider it at all that the one who is called may decline it. Yet at the same time, the possibility of not being accepted is left open. So also Paul (compare the story of Jonah) had not been able to decline it without sinning, because the call came from God.

Parallel to the calling to a special office (κλητός ἀπόστολος) are the Christians in Rome who are called, "those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (κλητοὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) and those "called to be saints" (κλητοὶ ἅγιοι). They were belonging to Jesus, they were saints, and the fact that they were these things they owed to their calling.

We look at the passage in Acts 2:38-39 from Peter's Pentecost sermon as especially instructive. Here for the time being we do not take into account again that God is the one who calls. Rather the talk is about such people who had been struck in their hearts by the fact that Peter had called them Christ's murderers and who asked in their anxiety, "What should we do?" Peter comforts them with the proof of the forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ Jesus. Peter points to this, that the promises in Joel 3:5 (sic, NIV is Joel 2:32) were indeed valid for them according to the word of the prophet. The promise was not given to them first because they believed in Jesus Christ or for that matter, because they accepted the faith. The promise stood before and independent of their faith. For this reason, even they should take hold of the promise so much more confidently in faith. However, this promise did not only belong to them, but also πᾶσιν τοῖς εἰς μακρὰν, ὅσους ἂν προσκαλέσῃται κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν. He did not say, "It will belong to them when God calls them, but it already belongs to them now; the only thing still missing is that they be called. In this case is προσκαλεῖσθαι equal to "bringing forth"? That does not rest on the πρὸς. The direction of the one who is called is simply indicated by that. Whether or not he takes this direction, it does not say. For the promise is given before and independent of the acceptance; only the beginning of the current possession actually happens with the acceptance of the call. Certainly in this place again it confronts one again that the one who calls does not reckon with failure. It is suitable to translate προσκαλεῖσθαι with "call" at this point.

Similarly, many passages, in which those who are converted are simply designated as those who are called, can create the impression at first glance as if the word καλεῖν automatically includes the result of the call so that the call becomes a technical expression for conversion (compare Cremer). Where the talk is about a successful conversion, other expressions, such as convert, saved, and believer, can obviously be used in place of κλητοί. However, that is not contained in the word καλεῖν. This rather stresses the impetus that we Christians in no way owe our Christianity to ourselves, but entirely to the fact that we are called to it, as the contrasts οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος in Romans 9:12 clearly show. Certainly the very first beginnings proceed from God without our cooperation. It would seem to be similar to the call (κλητοί), when we describe Christians as the baptized. Baptism makes one Christian, however it does not rule out that it could be understood in a hypocritical manner.

What we to this point have heard about the power of the call has continually shown us a power only in the literal sense, namely that the call confers the claim to that for which everyone is called. The result of this is that the call is seriously meant and to some extent coincides with it. This anticipation has linked the conferring power of the call with a certain psychological persuasion.

But because the call is always seriously meant and because the one who calls only considers the success of his calling, only those who have been truly called, those with whom the call had success, are actually meant by it. This is done most clearly in 1 Corinthians 1:24, where αὐτοὶ οἱ κλητοί describes those to whom Christ is preached as divine power and divine wisdom in opposition to the Jews who demand signs and the Greeks who ask for wisdom, to whom Christ is proclaimed as a stumbling block and foolishness. (Compare also Romans 8:28; Revelation 17:14; Revelation 19:9).

It has already been proven that in Matthew 22:14 the κλητοί are named in opposition to the ἐκλεκτοί. Here the κλητοί obviously does not describe such people whose call was accompanied by success. The wicked imprudence of those who in any way reject the call of grace which was issued to them, are pictured for us throughout the whole parable. Here also the one who calls does not consider a failure from the beginning. Accordingly, his eagerness is emphasized both with the call and with the punishment which is due the despiser. Here the whole scope of the parable can not allow the acceptance to be understood with the plans (κλητός), but such can only be understood according to the context among the κλητοί to whom the call of grace was once issued, regardless of the result. That would be the case except

that κλητοί is set in such sharp opposition to ἐκλεκτοί. A completely unnatural position is revealed, in which two predicates that naturally belong together, are, in sad reality, frequently presented separately. According to all this, the call includes a certain moral power, a persuasion, and it grants a certain legal claim to the one who is called.

Since the to which we are called are exceedingly precious, so the call itself is a great good. That is expressed in Hebrews 3:1 that the Christians are called sharers of the heavenly calling, κλήσεως ἐπουρανίου μέτοχοι. Ephesians 1:18 speaks about the hope of the call. The call gives the guarantee of still greater goods which should be passed on to those who are called in the future. 2 Thessalonians 1:11 is a prayer of the apostle for his congregation that God would make them worthy of their call, ἵνα ὑμᾶς ἀξιώσῃ τῆς κλήσεως ὁ θεός. Peter shows that the call is a real good just like the election by prompting his readers to make both certain for themselves, βεβαίαν ὑμῶν τὴν κλήσιν καὶ ἐκλογὴν ποιεῖσθαι (2 Peter 1:10). The fact that the call, to which he was called, is good because of God's kindness Paul recalls by this, that he speaks about the prize and reward of the heavenly calling, βραβεῖον τῆς ἀνω κλήσεως (Philippians 3:14).

Latter passages show the call as a real good in the way it teaches that certain obligations are bound to the call and are laid upon those who are called. In Galatians 5:13 the apostle indicates freedom as the foundation for the call, as the stipulation under which, as the goal to which, with which a man is granted ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ ἐκλήθητε. However, immediately attached to this is the fact that a freedom is not to be understood through which space is given to the flesh, but one which serves others in love. As in Gal 5, where freedom is spoken of as the goal of the call, so in 1 Thessalonians 4:7 sanctification is spoken of in direct opposition to impurity, οὐ γὰρ ἐκάλεσιν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ ἀλλ' ἐν ἀγιασμῷ. In Ephesians 4:1-4, the apostle elaborates that we are bound to unity in spirit with all humility, gentleness, patience and peaceful disposition. Certainly a call must be a real good if such obligations can be bound to it. And certainly, such a call can not be an inferior, powerless thing.

The question is not settled by this though. The question about the power of the call is truly understood as, "Does anything at all lie in the call itself which brings the one who is called to acceptance?" The call does have a certain psychologically effecting power which originates with any man. However, such a power does not contribute in the least bit to the acceptance of the call, since the object being called is a spiritually dead man, who is still to some degree in possession of his reason in the natural domain, but understands nothing about spiritual matters, but on the contrary esteems them as foolishness. The acceptance of the call signifies the death of the old man so that natural man never again agrees to a merely psychologically effecting cause. If on account of this the call does not have a power greater than a moral power, it has no power at all and we must search for a different power which moves people to accept the call and that happens with the call

If we remember that the Gospel is the means of the call, then we have attributed all power, which is contained in the Gospel, to the call (Romans 1:16).

Up to this point we have intentionally not considered the fact that God is the one who calls. God's call differs in essence from the call of man. Bengel correctly asserts about God's call, "*Dum vocat Christus, facit quod vocat,*" as the Scriptures themselves teach. The Lord declares in Isaiah 48:13, "When I summon them they all stand up together." In Romans 4:17, it is said about God that he makes the dead alive and after that adds a generalization, "He calls things that are not as though they were" (καλοῦντος τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα). Also compare Isaiah 41:4, where God calls men into existence. In this passage creating power is attributed to God's call.

Do we now need to understand that God, by his calling, imparts to man the power to follow the call? That would be a strange exegesis. This passage is talking about a power which is contained in God's call, not about a power to cooperate in the one who is being called. This amounts to simple nonsense in the physical realm. On the first day of creation, God called the light, that is, God gave the light, which still did not exist, the power to come into existence. The fact that this nonsense is not immediately evident, must rest on the fact that one confuses a intellectual life with a spiritual life, and that one forgets that it is not actually a question of a call to non-existence.

The creative power which is contained in God's call always has differed in regards to its realm. In the physical realm it is simply his omnipotence. On the contrary, in the spiritual realm where the will of man is taken into consideration, it is God's grace as the means of the call, namely the Gospel, show.

Although God's call is powerful, it is not irresistible. The parables about the royal banquet and about the great banquet show that with a scary seriousness. Moreover, the Lord laments the fact that his

call remains unsuccessful, for example in Hosea 11:2, "But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me." (Compare also Isaiah 65:12; Isaiah 66:4; Jeremiah 7:13; Jeremiah 35:17 and others).

The reason why so many oppose the gracious call is always because they don't want to hear it. And the reason why others accept the call is the fact that they are called. God's power of grace which is contained in the call has won them. The chasm which lies between both these statements is bridged nowhere in the Holy Scriptures. We do not know uniform reason for the success of the call in one case and the failure in another.

May God grant that we never succumb to the temptation to want to erect a bridge where God's Word has not erected one. Rather we want to thank God at all times in humility that he has called us to faith.