

The Spirit Working Through the Word

Q. What is effective calling?

A. Effective calling is the work of God's Spirit, Who convinces us that we are sinful and miserable, Who enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and Who renews our wills. This is how He persuades and makes us able to receive Jesus Christ, Who is freely offered to us in the gospel.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #31)

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

(John 6:44)

There are certain passages in God's Word that have been formative in my Christian life and growth throughout the years, and perhaps no such passage fascinates me more than the events that are recorded for us in Ezekiel chapter 37. It's in this chapter that we find one of the most interesting and theologically profound sections of sacred Scripture, and that is the account of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones.

Ezekiel chapter 37 begins with the prophet Ezekiel receiving a divine vision from the Lord. In verse 1 we read, *“The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry.”* (Ezekiel 37:1-2). The scene is set in these opening verses. The prophet Ezekiel, in his vision, is brought by the Lord to a valley, and strewn throughout the valley are a massive pile of bones. It is a valley filled with the skeletons of long-dead corpses. What a dark and grim picture to imagine! And as Ezekiel is looking out over this dismal valley, the Lord asks him if these bones can be brought back to life (v. 3). Ezekiel, not understanding exactly what the Lord is trying to reveal to him in this strange vision simply replies, *“O Lord God, You know”* (Ezekiel 37:3). And then something extraordinary occurs. In verse 4 we read, *“Again He said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord...”* (Ezekiel 37:4). And if you've ever read this passage before you know what happens next! Ezekiel speaks the Word of God to these dry bones and he witnesses a miracle occur right before his very eyes. This section of scripture ends by saying, *“So I prophesied as I was commanded; and...indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over...and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.”* (Ezekiel 37:7-10)

It is here in these verses that we find a perfect illustration of what occurs when the Holy Spirit effectively calls one of God's elect from spiritual death into spiritual life. The Bible teaches that every single human being on

this planet is born into this world spiritually dead, stained and corrupted with the curse of original sin (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:10-18; Genesis 6:5). Just as the dry bones in Ezekiel 37, in order to be saved we need to be brought back to spiritual life. We need God the Holy Spirit to effectively call lost sinners to spiritual life by saying, *“O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord”* (Ezekiel 37:4)! God the Holy Spirit effectively calls people to be born again through the proclamation of the Word of God. Just as the Apostle Paul writes, *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17). As our catechism tells us, the Holy Spirit, using God’s Word, *“...convinces us that we are sinful and miserable...enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and...renews our wills. This is how He persuades and makes us able to receive Jesus Christ”*.

How does the Holy Spirit draw sinners to Himself? It all begins with the Word of God. The Bible is used by the Holy Spirit to transform those who were nothing more than spiritually *“dry bones”* into those who have been born again. You and I have the responsibility to share God’s Word with the world around us and then to fervently pray that the Holy Spirit would use His Word to effectively call lost sinners to repentance. We need to remember the promise of the Lord in Isaiah 55:11 that says, *“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”* Who will you share God’s Word with today? Let us do our part (*sharing God’s Word*) and wait for the Holy Spirit to do His part (*causing sinners to be born again*).

Dig Even Deeper into God’s Word!

John 6:44-45
1 Corinthians 2:10,12
2 Corinthians 4:6
Ephesians 1:17-18