

God's "Call" to Salvation

Many mainstream denominations believe that all human beings have complete control over their salvation. Basically, the belief is as follows: Every single human being can just *decide* to follow Jesus – and can therefore be saved – *without* God getting involved at all.

In other words, the idea is that God is not part of the salvation process *at all*. That is, the belief is that every single human being can just “decide” to be saved – all on his own.

Is the above idea true? Is it true that *everyone* can just decide to follow Jesus – and be saved – *without* God being involved in the salvation process at all? This document will explore that topic, with a series of “questions” and “answers”.

Question 1: Is salvation completely under our control; or does God have at least some control over our salvation? In other words, does God need to *do* anything, *before* people can follow Jesus and be saved?

That question has a rather straightforward answer:

John 6:44 (ESV):

⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:65 (ESV):

⁶⁵And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

So, it certainly appears that in order for any given person to follow Jesus, God needs to “draw” that person first. In other words, a person *cannot* make the decision to follow Jesus – and be saved – *unless* God “calls” him to Jesus ahead of time!

Answer 1: It appears that salvation is *not* completely under our control. An individual *cannot* be saved, unless God explicitly calls that individual first.

Question 2: Is God calling everyone to salvation? Or is God only calling a subset of people?

Some mainstream denominations recognize the fact that God needs to “call” people, before people can be saved – but they maintain that God is calling *everyone*. Is that actually true? Or is God only calling certain people?

To answer that question, first let's take a look at a number of passages, which refer to God's call:

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 (ESV):

¹³But we ought always to give thanks to God for **you**, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God **chose you** as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

¹⁴To this he **called you** through our gospel, so that **you** may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 (ESV):

²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but **to those who are called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Romans 1:6-7 (NIV):

⁶And **you** also are among those who **are called** to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷To all in Rome **who are loved by God and called to be saints**:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:1-2 (ESV):

¹Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James,

To **those who are called**, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

²May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

1 Peter 2:9 (ESV):

⁹But **you** are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that **you** may proclaim the excellencies of him who **called you** out of darkness into his marvelous light.

2 Timothy 1:8-9 (ESV):

⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved **us** and **called us** to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

All of the above passages indicate that God is only calling certain, *specific* people – i.e., that he is not calling everyone!

In addition, it appears that in order for us to be saved, we need to *understand certain concepts*. In other words, there are certain facts that we need to know, in order for us to be saved at all. In particular, it appears that we need to know about God, Jesus, and the Kingdom:

John 17:3 (ESV):

³Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Matthew 13:18-19 (ESV):

¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

Luke 8:12 (ESV):

¹²Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

From the above verses, apparently it is necessary for people to *understand* about God, Jesus, and the Kingdom, in order for them to be saved. As a result, if God is calling everyone, then presumably He would ensure that everyone can understand those concepts – so that everyone would have the ability to be saved.

So, let's see if God is ensuring that *everyone* understands about God, Jesus and the Kingdom:

Matthew 11:27 (ESV):

²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Matthew 16:15-17 (ESV):

¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

(Note that God did *not* reveal information about Jesus to the Pharisees!)

Matthew 13:10-11 (ESV):

¹⁰Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹And he answered them, "**To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.**

Luke 8:9-10 (ESV):

⁹And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, ¹⁰he said, "**To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'**

All of the above verses indicate that God is not revealing the information necessary to be saved to *everyone*. Instead, He is only revealing that information to a subset of people. That certainly indicates to me that God is *not* calling everyone to salvation!

Answer 2: God is not calling *everyone* to be saved – He is only calling *certain* people. We know this for two reasons. First, because over and over again, Scripture uses phrases like “those who are called”, and “God has called you”, which indicates that only a subset of people are being called. Also, Scripture strongly indicates that God is only revealing the *information* necessary to be saved to *certain* people – not to everyone.

Question 3: Why is God only calling certain people? In other words, why doesn't God just call everyone, so that everyone has the opportunity to be saved?

As mentioned above, people *cannot* be saved, unless God explicitly calls them. Also, God is not calling *everyone*. As a result, the people who have *not* been called by God cannot be saved. So, that raises an obvious question – why isn't God calling everyone? Why doesn't He just call everyone – so that everyone can be saved?

John 4:23-24 (ESV):

²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

In the above verses, Jesus tells us that God is actively searching for people who want to worship Him in spirit and truth. In other words, God is looking for people who have a *sincere* desire to know the *truth* about Him, so that they can worship Him properly.

As a result, the only people that God will “call” are the people who have a sincere desire to know the truth about Him. Of course, not everyone has such a desire – and as a result, God is not calling everyone.

2 Corinthians 4:5-6 (ESV):

⁵For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," **has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

In the above verses, Paul tells us that God has “shone a light” in the apostles’ hearts, in order to give them knowledge about God and Jesus. I think that means that when God “calls” a person, He *enables* that person to learn the truth about Him – i.e., He enables that person to be saved.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 (ESV):

⁹The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹**Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,** ¹²in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In the above verses, Paul tells us that if a person does not want to worship God in spirit and truth, then God will actively prevent that person from knowing the truth! In other words, God will prevent that person from being saved!

Answer 3: God is only calling people who have a *sincere* desire to learn the truth about Him. Not everyone has that desire; and therefore, God is not calling everyone.

Question 4: If God calls a person, is that person guaranteed to be saved? Or, does a called person need to “respond” to God’s call, in order to be saved?

Some denominations believe in the concept of “effectual calling”. Basically, that concept means that if God calls a person, then that person is *guaranteed* to be saved – because people *cannot* resist God’s call. Is that concept true? Or, does a “called” person need to make a conscious decision to follow Jesus, in order to be saved?

Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV):

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

In the above verses, Jesus is primarily addressing his disciples. Of course, his disciples *were* called. So, if *everyone* who is called will *automatically* be saved, then there would be no reason for Jesus to warn his disciples about the threat of destruction.

2 Peter 1:10 (ESV):

¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

In the above verse, Peter is encouraging people who have been “called” to actively *try* to follow Jesus – in order to ensure they will be saved (or elected). If everyone who is called is *guaranteed*

to be saved, then it would not have made *any sense* for Peter to make that statement. Instead, Peter would have said, “You have been called, and therefore you are *guaranteed* to be elected.”

Matthew 22:11-14 (ESV) – The end of the “Wedding Feast” parable:

¹¹“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴**For many are called, but few are chosen.**”

In the above verses, Jesus explicitly tells us that not everyone who is “called” will be “chosen” (or “elected”). In other words, only a subset of the people who are called will be chosen. The people who will be chosen are the ones who *sincerely tried* to follow Jesus, *after* God called them. **Note:** I suspect that many of the people who are called *do* try to follow Jesus, but they only try “half-heartedly” – and I doubt that those people will be chosen.

Answer 4: If a person has been called by God, then that person needs to actively “respond” to the call, in order to be “chosen”. If a person does not respond to God’s call, then he will not be saved.

Question 5: After a person has been “chosen”, can he ever turn away?

Another question that arises is: if a person has been “chosen”, then is it ever possible for that person to turn away from God? In other words, once a person has entered the ranks of the “chosen” (or “elect”), can he ever be “disqualified” from that group?

Hebrews 6:4-6 (ESV):

⁴For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (ESV):

²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control, **lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.**

2 Peter 2:20-21 (ESV):

²⁰For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. ²¹For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

I believe that all of the above verses are referring to people who were called by God, and who responded to that call, so that they became “chosen” – but *after* that, those people fell away from God. As a result, it certainly appears that people can decide to turn away from God – even after they have been chosen.

Answer 5: People can decide to turn away from God – even after they have been “chosen”. If “chosen” people do deliberately turn away, then they will not be saved.

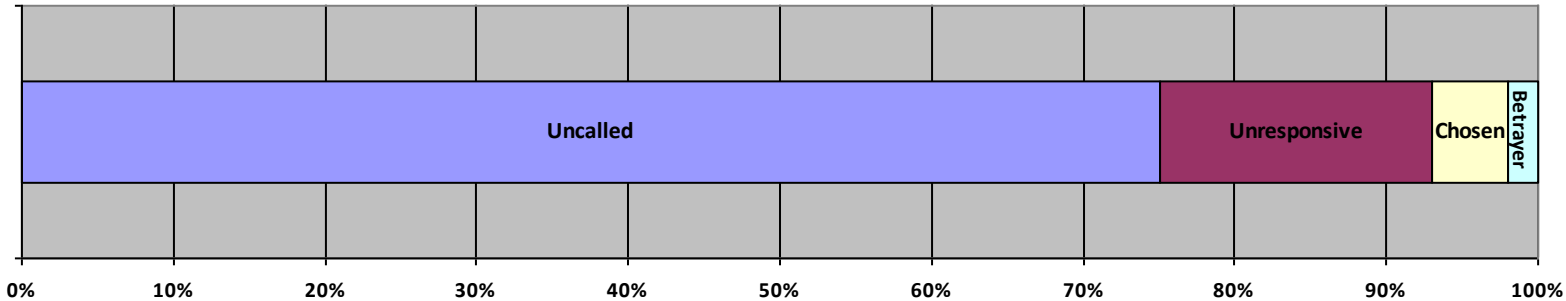
From all of the above information, I would say that there are four basic “groups” of people:

1. The “uncalled” group – the people in this group were *never* called by God at all.
2. The “unresponsive” group – the people in this group *were* called by God, but they did *not* respond to the call wholeheartedly.
3. The “chosen” group – the people in this group were called, and they *did* respond to the call.
4. The “betrayer” group – the people in this group were chosen at one time, but *after* that, they explicitly *turned away* from God.

I would say that those four “groups” can be displayed in a chart, as shown below. The overall bar in the chart represents all of humanity – i.e., *everyone* who has ever lived. The sections in that bar represent the four “groups” of people. **Note:** I certainly do not know what the exact percentages are, of people who are in each of the four groups. However, I think it is very likely that the following items are true:

- The uncalled group is (by far) the largest of the four groups;
- The unresponsive group is much larger than the chosen group;
- The chosen group is larger than the betrayer group.

Here is the chart:



So now, we reach the final question:

Question 6: What is going to happen to the people in those four groups, after Jesus returns?

The following are my beliefs about what will happen to the people in the above four groups:

The “chosen” group – I think it is quite clear from Scripture that people who were chosen – and who never turned away after that – will be granted everlasting life, *immediately* after Jesus returns. Consider the following verses:

John 5:28-29 (ESV):

²⁸Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice
²⁹and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Revelation 20:6 (ESV):

⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Philippians 3:20-21 (ESV):

²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

I think the above verses (plus a number of other ones) tell us that the “chosen” group contains the people who will be resurrected during the “resurrection of life” – and who will rule with Christ, with “glorified” bodies, during the millennium.

The “betrayer” group – It also seems clear to me what will happen to the people in the betrayer group – they are *guaranteed* to be condemned to permanent death, after Jesus returns. Consider the following passage, in which Jesus speaks about Judas. (Judas is definitely in the “betrayer” group – because he *literally* betrayed Jesus, after he was *literally* chosen.)

Matthew 26:24 (ESV):

²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

It certainly seems to me that Judas is *guaranteed* to be destroyed, after Jesus returns – because why else would Jesus use the above language?

The “uncalled” group –Scripture does not provide *explicit* information about what will happen to the people who were *never* called. However, there are a number of passages which appear to *infer* information about that group:

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV):

³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires **all** people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 (ESV):

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that **all** should reach repentance.

The above verses indicate that God wants *everyone* to be saved – i.e., He does not want anyone to be destroyed. Of course, the people in the uncalled group have *never* been called – and therefore, those people never had *any* opportunity to be saved! So, it certainly does not seem correct that God will just destroy all of the people in the uncalled group. In other words, since God wants *everyone* to be saved – and since people in the uncalled group have never had any *chance* to be saved – it seems that God *will give* those people an opportunity to be saved, at some point.

Next, consider these verses:

John 12:32-33 (ESV):

³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, **will draw all people to myself.**" ³³He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

The above verses state that Jesus will draw, or “call”, *everyone* to himself, after his crucifixion. That is consistent with the previous verses, which mention that God wants *everyone* to be saved. The question is, is Jesus calling everyone now – i.e., is he calling everyone during this age? I don’t think so. For one thing, as mentioned in question 2, in order for people to be saved, they need to understand about God, Jesus and the Kingdom. Does *everyone* understand about those things now? Certainly not. On the contrary – there are very, very few people who understand those things – especially the Kingdom – right now.

Also, during this age, millions of people have died as infants (little babies) – and of course, an infant can’t possibly make the decision to follow Jesus; because an infant can’t even *understand* that concept! So, everyone who died as an infant definitely was not called during this age.

So, I think that everyone *will* be called *eventually*, but not everyone will be called during this age. As a result, my basic understanding of what will happen to people in the uncalled group is as follows:

1. Uncalled people will be resurrected, during the “resurrection of judgment” – but they will be resurrected with mortal (i.e., “natural”) bodies. In other words, they will be resurrected with bodies like the ones that we have now.
2. Then, those people will be given a finite amount of time to live, as mortals, in the kingdom of God. That period of time will allow them to learn the truth about God, Jesus and the Kingdom. I refer to that period of time as their “judgment period” – from the “resurrection of judgment”.
3. If those people *choose* to follow Jesus during their judgment period, then they will be granted everlasting life, at the end of that period. If those people *refuse* to follow Jesus during that time, then they will simply die at the end of that time.

In other words, people in the uncalled group will have the opportunity to be saved – but they will *not* have that opportunity until after Jesus returns.

Note: I have written an entire presentation that deals with the resurrection of “uncalled” people. That presentation is located at the following URL:

http://ncbf.homestead.com/The_Resurrection_of_Ignorant_People.pps

The “unresponsive” group – This group presents the greatest challenge; it is quite difficult for me to determine exactly *what* will happen to the people in this group.

On one hand, we might expect that all of the unresponsive people will be destroyed – because those people had a chance to learn the truth, and be saved, during this age. On the other hand, though, conditions are *extremely* difficult during this age – because “the whole world is lying in the power of the evil one”. As a result, we might expect that God would show *mercy* on people who failed to respond “wholeheartedly” to His call, during the present, evil age.

Overall, I believe that people in the unresponsive group will be resurrected, as mortals, during the resurrection of judgment. In other words, I believe that the people in the unresponsive group will have basically the *same* fate as people in the “uncalled” group.

The main difference between the two groups is that after Jesus returns, the people in the unresponsive group will realize that they *could* have been co-rulers with Jesus, *if* they had sincerely responded to God’s call during this age. As a result, those people will *regret* the fact that they did *not* respond to the call. I think this is what is meant by the “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, in the Wedding Banquet parable. Also, I think that the “outer darkness” in that parable refers to the fact that the unresponsive people will be *excluded* from ruling with Jesus. (I do *not* think that it refers to permanent death.)

Summary: Here is a list of the first five “questions” and “answers” contained in this document:

Question 1: Is salvation completely under our control; or does God have at least some control over our salvation? In other words, does God need to *do* anything, *before* people can follow Jesus and be saved?

Answer 1: It appears that salvation is *not* completely under our control. An individual *cannot* be saved, unless God explicitly calls that individual first.

Question 2: Is God calling everyone to salvation? Or is God only calling a subset of people?

Answer 2: God is not calling *everyone* to be saved – He is only calling *certain* people (during this age). We know this for two reasons. First, because over and over again, Scripture uses phrases like “those who are called”, and “God has called you”, which indicates that only a subset of people are being called. Also, Scripture strongly indicates that God is only revealing the *information* necessary to be saved to *certain* people – not to everyone.

Question 3: Why is God only calling certain people? In other words, why doesn’t God just call everyone, so that everyone has the opportunity to be saved?

Answer 3: God is only calling people who have a *sincere* desire to learn the truth about Him. Not everyone has that desire; and therefore, God is not calling everyone.

Question 4: If God calls a person, is that person guaranteed to be saved? Or, does a called person need to “respond” to God’s call, in order to be saved?

Answer 4: If a person has been called by God, then that person needs to actively “respond” to the call, in order to be “chosen”. If a person does not respond to God’s call, then he will not be saved.

Question 5: After a person has been “chosen”, can he ever turn away?

Answer 5: People can decide to turn away from God – even after they have been “chosen”. If “chosen” people do deliberately turn away, then they will not be saved.

I certainly recognize that I could be wrong about the info in this document – I am only an imperfect human, after all! So, I would certainly welcome any feedback that any of you may have. Please feel free to contact me at briankeating@yahoo.com.