

THE REFORMED FAITH AND THE ALTAR CALL METHOD OF EVANGELISM

The purpose of this tract can be briefly stated: it is to examine the altar-call method in the light of the Biblical system of truth. We say 'Biblical system of truth' because it is our conviction that this is what Calvinism really is.

"If anyone should ask me what I mean by a Calvinist," wrote Charles H. Spurgeon over a century ago, "I should reply, 'He is one who says, Salvation is of the Lord.' I cannot find in Scripture any other doctrine than this. This is the essence of the Bible. 'He only is my rock and my salvation.' Tell me anything contrary to this truth, and it will be heresy; tell me a heresy, and I shall find its essence here—that it was departed from this great, this fundamental, this rock-like truth: 'God is my rock and my salvation.'"

Anyone who understands the true genius of Calvinism will therefore realize that there is nothing against which it *"sets its face with more firmness than every form and degree of auto-soterism."* The simple assertion that man—sinful and fallen man—can do at least some thing to save himself, or to help save himself, or at least prepare himself to be saved, is utterly anathema to the Calvinist. And here in lies the reason for a careful evaluation of the modern altar-call method of evangelism. For, as Spurgeon again has expressed it,

"...since we are nothing without the Holy Spirit, we must avoid in our work any thing which is not of Him. We want these dead people raised, and we can not raise them; only the Spirit of God can do that.' Well, then, 'let us take care that there is nothing which would grieve the Spirit or cause Him to go away from us.' 'A head long zeal even for Christ may lead into a ditch. What we think to be very wise may be very unwise; and where we deem that at least a little 'policy' may come in, that little may taint the whole..."

But what do we mean when we speak of the 'altar-call' method? We mean every effort on the part of an evangelist or minister to get an overt and immediate reaction to the gospel in some humanly appointed way. It can be an appeal to 'come forward' to some arbitrarily designated place in front of the pulpit. It can be an invitation to stand, raise the hand, sign a card, or some thing similar. The variations are no doubt legion, but the basic features are these—(1) an immediate response is insisted upon—(2) the response is registered in some visible way—and (3) the manner in which the response is registered is prescribed in the directions that are given.

SCRIPTURE

Let us begin our examination of this practice with a brief consideration of the Calvinistic doctrine of Scripture.

"The whole counsel of God," says the Westminster Confession of Faith, "concerning all things necessary for His own glory, (and) man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added."

The Bible, in other words, is the only rule of faith and practice. And the obvious question is this: does the Bible teach us to use the altar-call method?

Probably no greater season of evangelistic effort can be imagined than that which is infallibly recorded for us in the New Testament book of Acts. What urgency and zeal we find! The word of God was faithfully preached. Sinners were commanded to *"repent...and be converted"* (Acts 3:19). Many turned to the Lord, and daily there were added to the Church such as were saved. But where do we find any direction—by way of precept, example, or even indirect suggestion—that men were to 'come forward,' or 'hold up the hand,' or 'stand,' or 'fill out a card?' Where do we even find a testimony of silence that would leave room for any such method? No, the inspired account informs us, for "when they heard" Peter's sermon "they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men

THE REFORMED FAITH AND THE ALTAR CALL METHOD OF EVANGELISM

and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). The sermon was all that Peter gave them. They had to ask what to do, because no directions had been given. And when they did ask, what did the Peter say? He said, "repent, and be baptized" (2:38)! That is all. And so it is throughout the entire book of Acts, for the fact is that we cannot find a single instance of the use of this present day method.

We realize, of course, that for some people this will hardly seem important. There is a very widespread idea today that so long as we preach the basic truths of the Bible, it isn't very important what method we use. But how can any one really think this way who seriously honors the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and practice? Perhaps you are familiar with the wonderful statement in Chapter XXI of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

"The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture."

Now think of what this means in connection with the altar call. Isn't this usually a part of a worship service? If the "ordinary" elements of "religious worship" are what the Westminster Assembly thought they were—the reading of the Scriptures—the preaching of the gospel—prayer—the singing of the psalms—and so on, then it would certainly be hard to deny that the altar-call is commonly made a part of a worship service. But if true worship is only what God has commanded in His word, then how can we justify the use of this method? How can we justify it unless—and until—some one has demonstrated that it is either expressly set down in Scripture, or that it may be legitimately deduced from Scripture?

MAN'S TOTAL DEPRAVITY

A second great teaching of the Calvinistic system, which I cannot reconcile with the altar-call method, is the total depravity of man. We believe that man is "dead in sin." He is "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good." He has "wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good." And He is "not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." That's why we not only speak of man's total depravity, but also of his consequent total inability.

But isn't it rather obvious that the altar-call method tends to obscure this very important truth? This is certainly plain enough when the evangelist is openly Arminian. How many times have you heard Dr. Billy Graham say—in the plainest possible terms—that every man has the power to repent and believe in order to be saved? The whole Arminian conception of fallen man rests upon this great delusion: that he has the power to make a decision for Christ. If we believed that—if we believed that fallen and sinful man does have this power and ability within himself—then we too would incline to think in terms of his method. We would want a system in which man's autonomy is respected. But what are we to do if we believe no such doctrine? What are we to do if we believe that man, of himself, can do absolutely nothing pertaining to the procurement of life and salvation? Will we not then want to be careful to avoid any method which tends to obscure this truth? Calvinists will sometimes say that we should 'make our appeal to sinners just as though they can respond, even though we know they can not, apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.' But is this really true? Is it not rather rueful that our methods should reflect the message that we preach? We certainly should command men to repent and believe. We should also command men to be perfect even as the Father in heaven is perfect. Man's duty is never limited by his ability. But do we urge men to be perfect just as we would if we knew that they were able to be perfect? Not at all. We urge men to be perfect and at the same time we tell them that there is no possible way in which they—in and of themselves—can ever meet this demand. The very purpose of our preaching these truths is to make them see that that which is impossible with man is nevertheless possible with God! And the same may be said of this command to repent and believe. We want them to see that they must repent and believe, and yet at the same time that this very thing is beyond their natural powers. Herein lies the tremendous difference.

THE REFORMED FAITH AND THE ALTAR CALL METHOD OF EVANGELISM

“What the Arminian wants to do” says C. H. Spurgeon “is to arouse man’s activity: what we want to do is to kill it once for all—to show him that he is lost and ruined, and that his activities are not now at all equal to the work of conversion; that he must look upward. They seek to make the man stand up: we seek to bring him down, and make him feel that there he lies in the hand of God, and that his business is to submit himself to God, and cry aloud, ‘Lord, save, or we perish.’ We hold that man is never so near grace as when he begins to feel he can do nothing at all. When he says, ‘I can pray, I can believe, I can do this, and I can do the other,’ marks of self-sufficiency and arrogance are on his brow.”

We should never act as if men—fallen and sinful men—are something they are not. We should never allow them to think more highly of themselves than they ought. No, we should simply ‘tell it like it is,’ and leave the rest to God.

Some years ago the writer was teaching a group of people the basic doctrines of the Calvinistic system. In that group was a person who had long resisted the overtures of grace. Urging and persuading were to no avail. Invitations were refused. But then came a study of this doctrine of the total depravity of man. We got into this awesome truth that sinful man can do nothing to deliver himself. Now human wisdom would surely say that this was the wrong approach—the surest possible way to turn such a person away, once and for all. But such was not to be. No, but rather was it the sovereign pleasure of God to use this very truth to set her free. Suddenly she stood up—quite literally—and, with out any direction from anyone, said, ‘if this is true, then there is no hope for me!’ But of course there was hope at last because she had come to see that she could not do anything to save herself.

THE SPIRIT’S SOVEREIGNTY

But this leads us on to another of these great Calvinistic principles. For we also believe in the absolute sovereignty of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit—who is the sole author of regeneration—works when, and where, and as, He will.

“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is every one who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Isn’t this also obscured by the use of the invitation system? Oh yes, perhaps the Holy Spirit is mentioned. Perhaps it is even said that no one can be born again except with the help of His power. Yet for all that is said that we can appreciate and approve, the fact remains that the all-important truth is obscured. It is obscured in much the same way that it is in Roman Catholic teaching. Here too we find a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and of grace. No one can be born again without the power of the Holy Spirit. But how does the Spirit work in the Roman Catholic view of things? That is the crucial point. And when we learn that the Church is a kind of store house of grace, and that everything is accomplished by sacramental means, we also see that the one who really performs the decisive act is the sinner. For it is he alone who determines whether or not this tremendous power is released. This is what Professor B.B. Warfield called ‘the powerhouse view of grace.’ And all the talk about the tremendous generator, the transformers and the wires, can not disguise the fact that every thing depends upon the one who throws the switch. But isn’t it really the same conception that is suggested by the altar-call method? Is not the impression created that the power of the Spirit is there—even in an unusual degree—and that it is readily available to all—but that it is man himself who has to turn on this power? Once the meeting is ended, and the invitation has been allowed to pass, the opportunity will be gone! The power will not be there, some how, in the same manner and degree—within reach, as it were. Isn’t this the impression we receive? Isn’t the altar-call itself thought of as the means of releasing this power?

But why should we think of the power of the Spirit this way? It is true, thank God, that the word of God is quick and powerful. God does use the foolishness of preaching to effectually call His people. But how does He accomplish His purpose? Is it not by having Paul plant and Apollos water? Isn’t the word like a seed that is planted in order to grow “we know not how?” And is it not God himself—in His own time and

THE REFORMED FAITH AND THE ALTAR CALL METHOD OF EVANGELISM

way—who gives the increase? If man is dead—and the Spirit quickens whom He will—then what do the surroundings have to do with it? One must indeed hear the true gospel preached. But this of itself is not sufficient.

“If Jesus Christ were to stand on this platform tonight” said Spurgeon, in a great Sermon on God’s Shalls from Isaiah 53:10, *“what would many people do with him? If he were to come and say, ‘Here I am, I love you, will you be saved by me?’ not one of you would consent if you were left to your will. He himself said, ‘No man can come to me except the Father...draw him.’ ‘Ah! we want that: and here we have it. They shall come. They shall come. Christ shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.”*

The writer was brought to repentance and faith while playing in a dance hall. Is there a more unlikely place than that? Or do we not rather err when we think in such terms. Should we not, rather, expect the sovereign Spirit to work in ‘unlikely’ ways? The altar-call system, to say the very least, does not do justice to this Scriptural truth. It does not minister to the forming of a proper conception of the Spirit’s work. It rather ends to inculcate the utterly erroneous notion of the sovereignty of the human will. Yet in actual fact, man’s will is in bond age.

THE ‘ORDO SALUTIS’

This leads us to the Calvinistic view of the ‘ordo salutis,’ the scriptural order of the application of redemption. “Do we be come regenerate, or reborn” asks Iain Murray, “because of our faith and repentance, or is faith the effect and result of regeneration?” This question gets at the root. According to our historic Reformed Confessions, regeneration is logic ally prior to repentance and faith. It is not until after a man has been regenerated that he can see and enter into the Kingdom. And no man who has been thus born from above can fail to respond to the in visitations of grace. Because the very nature of man is radically changed—in an instant of time—by the power of the Holy Spirit, there will be a capacity to understand, and accept, the offer of gospel grace.

But if this be so, then what possible assistance can the altar-call render? If a man is born of the Spirit, he will see and enter into the Kingdom of God. He will do this by repentance toward sin and faith in Jesus Christ. If he is not regenerate, he will not be able to understand or receive the things of the Spirit. The natural man cannot know the things of God. Of what use is the altar-call then? The man who is regenerated has no need that can be supplied by it, and the man who is not regenerated has a need that it cannot supply. The only thing the altar-call can do, then, is to seriously confuse the issue. The one real issue is presented in the divinely authorized call to repent and believe. But here, in the use of the altar-call, this is by no means clear. The sinner is now summoned to do two different things as if they were really one. He is summoned to do some thing that he can never do except he be regenerated by the Spirit. But he is also summoned to do some thing that the natural man too can do. And it is certainly doubtful, to say the least, that the sinner is aware of the difference. It is greatly to be feared that he does not at all realize that there is a vast difference be tween the two—that one is commanded of God, and the other not—that one is essential to salvation—and the other not—and that the one cannot be done by man’s native power at all—and that the other can!

We cannot escape the conviction, therefore, that it is the Arminian view of the ‘ordo salutis’ that underlies this altar-call invention. It certainly is an historic fact that the invitation system was developed by Arminian evangelists. Think of the names of such men as Finney, Moody, Sunday, and Graham. In Billy Graham’s popular book entitled *Peace With God* we have the matter set before us clearly. The chapter on man’s con version comes before the chapter on the new birth. Man is said to repent and believe, in other words, in order that he might be born again. This is the great assumption in his exhortations in these Crusades. It comes to a focus in terms of a universal grace avail able to all men alike. And then man’s autonomous decision—to get up and come for ward—is the final or ultimate thing.

ASSURANCE

THE REFORMED FAITH AND THE ALTAR CALL METHOD OF EVANGELISM

The invitation system also contradicts the Reformed doctrine of assurance? As the Westminster Confession warns us, *“unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and estate of salvation.”* It was for this reason that the Puritans were so careful in their efforts to bring sinners to repentance!

“Years ago,” as Spurgeon put it, *“when people were converted, there used to be such a thing as conviction of sin. The great sub soil plough of soul-anguish was used to tear deep into the soul. Fire also burned in the mind with exceeding heat: as men saw sin, and felt its dreadful results...but now we are dinned with bragging about rapid salvations.”*

“It is to be feared” he cried, in another sermon, *“that some zealous brethren have preached the doctrine of justification by faith not only so boldly and so plainly, but also so badly and so out of all connection with other truth, that they have led men into presumptuous confidences”* even so as *“to stand up and cry, ‘believe, believe, believe, ‘with out explaining what is to be believed—to lay the whole stress of salvation upon faith without explaining what salvation is, and showing that it means deliverance from the power as well as from the guilt of sin—may seem to a fervent revivalist to be the proper thing for the occasion, but those who have watched the result of such teaching have had grave cause to question whether as much hurt may not be done by it as good.”*

What would Spurgeon say today—with such widespread ignorance of Scripture truth—and with an even greater stress being put upon this act of coming forward? What can this possibly do but contribute to hasty action on the part of those who lack an adequate understanding of the Bible? And then, because they have done this thing that is constantly held before them as of decisive importance, they at once fall victim to a false assurance as well! One witness testifies that these very words were spoken by Billy Graham to those who came for ward!

“You have come tonight to Jesus Christ, you have come to receive Him into your heart...He says, ‘Thy sins are forgiven.’ You accept that. The past is forgiven...He cannot even see your sins. Accept by faith that He comes into your heart...you are going to be tempted, but you are His child. . .”

Just contrast this, for a moment, with that soul-searching second question of the Heidelberg Catechism. *“How many things are necessary for you to know, that you...may live and die happily?”* There are three things, answers the instructor: *“first, how great my sins and misery are...second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery... (and) third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance.”* Right away I realize—as I hear this—that I must not be deceived. I realize that I must not lightly assume, on the basis of a single momentary act or experience, that all is well with my soul! But is this not the very evil that the altar-call method of evangelism tends to produce?

GOOD WORKS

Now we realize that there is nothing new or original in what we have been saying. There are, however, some aspects of Reformed doctrine that also bear on this matter which have not always received the attention they deserve. To this we now direct our attention.

What, then, is the act by which a sinner responds to the altar-call? We cannot call it an act of faith, for faith is not a physical act at all. Faith is not the sinner doing something himself. It is rather the sinner relying upon the Son of God to do something for him. “Faith in Jesus Christ” says the Westminster Shorter Catechism *“is a saving grace, where by we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel”* (Q/A 86). But if response to the altar-call is not an act of faith, is it perhaps a good work? No, not according to the Reformed Faith. For *“good works are only such as God hath commanded in his holy word,”* says the Westminster Confession, *“and not such as, with out the warrant thereof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intention.”* It is often argued,

THE REFORMED FAITH AND THE ALTAR CALL METHOD OF EVANGELISM

of course, that the altar-call is a good work. Indeed, one would wonder how it could ever be defended otherwise. For *“good works...are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.”* A Calvinist, realizing that regeneration precedes conversion—and that conversion consists of repentance and faith—would surely have to argue for the altar-call (if he argued for it at all) on the grounds that it is an acceptable example of these *“fruits and evidences”* of faith. But when we remember that things devised by men are not really good works at all, we again see the lack of a Biblical foundation for this method.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

And here we are immediately confronted with the whole question of our liberty of conscience. *“God alone is Lord of the conscience,”* says the Reformed believer, *“and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it (that is, in addition to it), if matters of faith or worship.”* It is commonly argued, against this, that many people have been saved by means of the altar-call method. The inference is that if many have been saved, then surely a few—a very few—cannot have rights that can stand in the way of the many. But it is right here that the true glory of the Reformed Faith is seen. For if God alone is Lord—if He has left the conscience free—so that He alone has the right to say ‘do this,’ or ‘do that’—then no amount of supposed human welfare can have the slightest weight against this sacred consideration. And here again we find the invitation system wanting. If even one person attending a religious service is presented with a crisis of conscience, because he is put under pressure to do something God does not require, then the method is wrong.

PUBLIC PROFESSION

Very close to this is the solemn and conscientious nature of a public profession of faith. No one, says the Westminster Confession, should ever take a solemn religious vow without a clear understanding of *“the weightiness of so solemn an act.”* He should never promise any thing that he is not persuaded, on good ground, that he is able to perform. And here, again, the altar-call method fails. It is argued, of course, that people often professed their faith in the Apostolic Church immediately after they first heard the gospel. And this certainly seems to be the case on the day of Pentecost, for example (Acts 2:41). It would seem equally certain that the Philippian jailer professed his faith very soon after he heard the gospel message (Acts 17:33,34). But even so, there is evidence to support the conclusion that profession of faith was only made—and accepted—with due preparation. After all, these great events that constitute the content of the gospel message did not happen in a corner (Acts 26:26). People were well aware of the identity and claims of the Son of man. They were also aware of what it had cost him to make these claims! Thus the whole situation was such as to discourage any one from rashly professing this unpopular faith. And surely Paul had ample opportunity that night in Philippi, to assure him self that the jailer did comprehend the meaning of professing faith in Christ. But who could possibly argue that the invitation system provides any such thing?

It has always seemed to us that those who use the altar-call ought to be more consistent. If the altar-call method is sound then they ought to baptize those who respond to the invitation right away. This is certainly what the Apostles did. *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized,”* says Luke, *“and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”* (Acts 2:41). It has been said that Charles Finney (whom many consider the father of the altar-call method) originally defended the invitation system as the moral equivalent of baptism. But no one, as far as I know, has ever been willing to baptize, forth with, those who respond to the altar-call. We can only ask: why? Is it because it is really not considered a reliable indication of conversion even by those who use it?

Whatever our views may be as to the proper mode—and subjects—of baptism, no Calvinist will baptize a convert who does not first make a credible profession of faith. A person must be able to show, by word of mouth, that he has an essentially correct conception of the gospel message. He must be willing to tell us that he receives Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel. And furthermore, there must be at least a good report concerning his manner of life as consistent with his profession. Only

THE REFORMED FAITH AND THE ALTAR CALL METHOD OF EVANGELISM

upon the basis of such a credible profession will we baptize this person. But the very arguments that support this view of the sacrament, necessarily argue against the altar-call method.

Imagine, if you will, the furore that would arise if one of our popular evangelists today would simply make baptism the focal point of the gospel invitation. A simple man, reading his Bible, might wonder why no one has done this! But you and I know the reason. It is because these men who use the altar-call method have no Biblical doctrine of the Church. (We are not saying they realize this. We merely say that this is the way it is). Baptism is a sacrament of the Church. But the whole movement that has popularized the altar-call method is outside the Church. The Westminster Confession says “*Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God*” to the Church. He gave these to the instituted Church “*for the gathering and perfecting of the saints.*” Well, then, says John Kennedy (not the President, but the great Scottish preacher back in Dwight L. Moody’s time):

“What right has any individual, not authorized by a Church of Christ to do so—to insist on a public confession on the part of any one? Even the Church can admit to public confession only after trial. And the admission must be in connection with the dispensation of the appointed sealing ordinances. But here is a stranger, who never saw their faces before, hurrying people...to make public profession of faith, thus associating them, with out possibility of trial, with the Christians of (that) locality, and involving the credit of religion in their future conduct before the world. This, surely, is both unwise and pre sumptuous.”

Of course this does not have the same force when the altar-call method is used by the local Church itself. Yet the very fact that this method has been so commonly used against the good order of the Church, seems to us a powerful argument against its use by the Church!

“When a crowd of seemingly anxious souls gathered about” our Lord, says Rev. Kennedy, “in stead of urging them to confession, he tested them by searching doctrine—and the result was, that in stead of crowding an inquiry room, they ‘went away and walked no more with Him.’”

SUMMARY

But perhaps it is time to turn again to the main thrust of our argument. The most common reason given for the use of the altar-call is simply the fact that souls are saved ! No doubt they are, in spite of the method. But even the pragmatic argument should by now begin to wear thin. Forty years ago, when the Rev. Billy Graham suddenly sky-rocketed into prominence, this argument was hard to withstand. Reformed believers were of ten silenced—and humbled—when they were told that Graham’s way of doing it was much better than their way of not doing it. But surely, by now, with all these marvelous crusades—and the multiplied thousands of decisions—the evidence ought to be in. But the in-credible thing is that there has been no improvement. Even Graham himself admits that we are go ing down hill at ‘break-neck speed.’ Why, then, should we be swayed any longer by this discredited argument from results!

We say it is time to turn the pragmatic argument around. It is time to tell the world that this whole business has only been a sorry substitute for the thing we really need. What we really need is just a mighty revival of the Reformed or Calvinistic faith. We need a mighty resurgence of the kind of preaching that refuses to pander in any way to this so-called autonomous man. Too long we have been afraid to ‘tell it like it really is.’ Too long have we been reluctant to tell men that they are dead, and that they can never be saved at all except by the sovereignty of grace! Spurgeon saw it long ago—when many the churches that had been Calvinistic were beginning to depart from their heritage. This is what he said:

“Ah! says somebody, ‘I fear that this kind of preaching will be very discouraging to a great many people.’ Well, how will it discourage them? ‘It will discourage them from trying to save them selves.’ That is the very thing I want to do. I would not only like to discourage them from at tempting the impossible task, but to cast them into despair concerning it. When a man utterly

THE REFORMED FAITH AND THE ALTAR CALL METHOD OF EVANGELISM

despairs of being able to save himself, it is then that he cries to God to save him, so I believe that we can not do a man a better turn than to discourage him from ever resting upon any thing that he can do to wards saving himself."

And Spurgeon practiced what he preached. (Or should I say that his sermons constantly exemplified this principle)? Sinner" cried Spurgeon in a sermon on the new birth "*I warn thee thou canst never cause thyself to be born again, and though the new birth is absolutely necessary, it is absolutely impossible to thee—unless God the Spirit shall do it.*" "You" he says toward the close of an Exeter Hall sermon "*who have not been converted, and have no part or lot in the present salvation—to you I say this much: man, man, you are in the hand of God. Whether you shall live to reach home today or not, de pends absolutely on His will.*"

Does that sound like a man who preached without confidence or hope? Well, it wasn't that way at all. To the contrary. Spurgeon was mighty precisely because he saw the true source of hope.

"I know this," he cried, "if the Lord willed it, there is no man so desperately wicked here this morning that he would not be made now to seek for mercy, how ever infidel he might be; however rooted in his prejudices against the Gospel: Jehovah hath but to will it, and it is done. Into thy dark heart, O thou who hast never seen the light, the light would stream; if he did but say, 'Let there be light,' there would be light. Thou mayest bend thy fist and lift up thy mouth against Jehovah; but he is thy master yet—thy master to destroy thee, if thou goest on in thy wickedness; but thy master to save thee now to change thy heart and turn thy will as he turneth the rivers of water."

Do you see why he abhorred the altar call? It was simply because he knew something better—the Reformed faith.

"There is something in these doctrines" said Spurgeon "that drives right into the soul of man. Other forms of doctrine run off like oil from a slab of marble, but this chisels them, cuts into the very quick. They can not help feeling there is some thing here, which if they kick against, it nevertheless has force, and they must ask them selves, 'Is the thing true or not?'"

Yes, that is the crux of it. If we preach the Biblical system of truth, there will be no need for the altar-call method. It is in truth nothing but a poor humanly invented means of getting people to respond to a powerless gospel. And this is not the gospel that we should want to preach. If our preaching has no power, let us face it. Let us lament it. Let us get down on our knees and cry out to God because of it. And let us stay there until he anoints us with the unction of the Spirit to preach the gospel of the grace and power of our sovereign God. Then—and only then—will we begin to see, again, the kind of results that Ezekiel saw in that amazing vision.

"So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, 'Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." (Ezekiel 37:7-10).

