

CALLED TO THE MINISTRY

by

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Introduction

What is Christ's calling to you? You may be seeking an answer; you may be avoiding the question, but when the Lord calls he will be answered. God's call came suddenly to Elisha; he was plowing a field when Elijah cast the prophet's mantle on him. Levi was in a toll booth, and Peter held a fishing net when Jesus called them.

But how does the Lord call today? You have not been blinded by a heavenly light on the road to Damascus, but you are ready to say with Saul of Tarsus, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" How does the Lord answer that question?

To begin with, it is clear that the answer must come from the Lord himself. Self-esteem and popular acclaim are treacherous indicators. Christ's spoken word no longer sounds by the lake of Galilee, but he has not left his disciples without direction. We have his written Word in the Bible. Through prophets and apostles Christ's Spirit has testified of him. Where the road forks, the Word of God is the lamp for our feet.

What does the Bible say about Christ's calling? We are told that the Lord calls us by name; every Christian has his or her own calling, a calling as a child of God and a servant of God. Our calling by name gives us our identity and our task.

We must first consider the Lord's calling of every Christian, then we should examine what the New Testament says about the calling of the minister of the gospel.

Part One

WHAT IS GOD'S CALLING?



1.

CALLED BY NAME: Calling Is God's Creative Gift

To understand your calling, consider what you are called. What is your name, your real name? That name may not appear on your driver's license. Centuries have passed since English names described men's vocations. George Baker became a plumber without becoming a Plumber, and we have no Charlie Astronauts or even Jack Druggists. A son bears his father's name whether it is Robertson, Johnson, or simply Smith. He also has a "given" name that his father (or mother) chose for him.

What's in a name? The answer depends on whose name you bear, and who does the naming. A son may be proud of his father's name; a new bride may find unusual meaning in "Mrs. Robert Jones." Yet our names have become conventional, having no meaning in themselves. Literary fancy may name a boy "Cassius," or prudence may prefer "Mortimer," in the hope that Uncle Mort may revise his will. But usually our names mean nothing at all.

Not so when God names a man. When God calls by name, that name is his calling. Your real name is the name God has given you. Understand that name, and

WHAT IS GOD'S CALLING?

your vocation is set before you. You have two Christian names, and both of those names are "given." Of these God-given names, the last always comes first, and every Christian bears it. That name marks you as a son of God, for it is God's own name. "Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the end of the earth; every one that is called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed, yea, whom I have made" (Isa. 43:6b, 7).

A. CALLED BY GOD'S NAME

Every Christian has had God's name solemnly given to him. He has been baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Whenever he goes to church, the triune name of God is pronounced upon him again in the blessing of the benediction. In commanding the blessing of his name to be used by the Old Testament priests, God said: "So shall they put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them" (Num. 6:27).

This is the first question of your calling. Do you bear God's name? In the Old Testament temple, the priest wore a golden plate in his turban, carrying the inscription, "Holiness Unto the Lord." In the heavenly Mount Zion of John's vision, the saints of Christ have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1). John sees one grim alternative: the mark of the Satanic beast on the foreheads of small and great, rich and poor, free and bond (Rev. 13:16).

It must come to that. Neutral anonymity is not possible for man, made in God's image. He must worship or blaspheme.

Salvation means that God writes his name on your head, your hand, your heart. He makes his name yours by making you his. His calling comes with power. Ezekiel

CALLED BY NAME

saw the mass grave of the people of God. Dry bones filled death valley all about him. But the prophet was moved to cry, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" — and there was resurrection before his eyes (Ezek. 37). God is not God of the dead but of the living; his name is life.

Christ's call reached Zaccheus curiously perched in a sycamore tree: "Zaccheus, come down." It reached Lazarus hopelessly sealed in a tomb: "Lazarus, come forth."

Has that call reached you? There is no call to the ministry that is not first a call to Christ. You dare not lift your hands to place God's name in blessing on his people until you have first clasped them in penitent petition for his saving grace. Until you have done that the issue you face is not really your call to the ministry. It is your call to Christ.

Don't seek the ministry to save your soul. The Lord commits the gospel to the keeping of those who have committed themselves to his keeping (II Tim. 1:12, 14). A man cannot earn his salvation by preaching that salvation cannot be earned. Claim Christ's promise: "He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." He will receive you, and make his name yours forever.

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9).

Not a lifetime, not even an eternal-lifetime, can measure the span of God's calling. Like a rainbow, it arches from horizon to horizon. God's life-giving call of grace is the source of our salvation; God's life-shaping call to glory is the goal of our salvation. Indeed, the bow of our own calling reflects the uncreated light of God's grace shining from the dawn before all mornings. With