

Hearing the Call of God

Introduction:

For some unknown reason there has been an air of mystery surrounding the subject of “**what constitutes a call of God**” to the Christian ministry. And I am not thinking of what we call “full-time service” only, but God’s will for every saved person.

I sense that many of God’s people expect a call to be something mysterious, or God only calls a few, or surely it could not mean them. Or a call would come in some spectacular way.

Every saved person is called. II Timothy 2:9 is very clear about this. And many other Scriptures would make us aware that we are not our own, but being bought with a price we are accountable to yield everything to God, be filled with the Spirit and thus be in God’s control. (I Cor. 6:19-20; Romans 6:13; 14:9; II Corinthians 5:14-15; Acts 1:8)

Since every one of us is called, I would state that there are only three things different from your call than any other saved person who has ever lived. You could compare yourself with many well known servants of the Lord either of present day or ages past and you’d have to admit that these are the only differences. Our service hinges on these:

1. **When** -- for we are not all alive at the same time, or live in the same generation.
2. **Where** -- or we are not all called to serve in the same place even as only one man can have a certain woman as his wife, or we can’t all live in the same house. God does not call 10,000 men to serve the same large church as pastor even though maybe many of them aspired to be there. Only one senior pastor is called of God. Each person must know the where for his life.
3. **How** -- we are not all called to serve in the same way. But we are all called, those who say that God has not called them to be a pastor, or missionary, etc., are still called and they need to know where and how. Even if you are a merchant or business man, a blue collar worker, etc., you are called of God to serve the Lord full time. That is, every bit of your life needs to be under the Spirit’s control as much as the so called full time servants. Your living totally for the Lord, daily where He has placed you, is just as vital as the missionary being where God has placed him.

There shouldn’t be a mystery concerning the call of God or what constitutes a call, for we do have the full revelation of God and the Word of God is very clear about God’s call. Yet if you interviewed Bible School students, even graduates in the pastoral ministry, you would find many who can’t delineate what constitutes the call of God. And every child of God ought to know and recognize God’s call on his or her life.

Since many do not understand this most saved people are not surrendering their lives for service. Many are casualties in the process of preparing for Christian service. The “*fields are white already unto harvest, and laborers are few,*” of this most saved people are aware. One wonders how many others who God is calling can not respond because they haven’t been taught how to hear the voice of God, or to understand what constitutes His call to them.

I am not writing about the fact that all us are called of God to witness which is the responsibility and privilege of every child of God. And consider Romans 1:5-6 “*By whom (ChrIst) we have receive grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name: Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ.*” Surely we do see that we are all called for we are called as the Romans believers were in their day.

The following is offered in the hope that many will be helped to understand God’s call in their lives and will recognize the voice of God. Consider then, the following seven items in the call to the Christian ministry. Don’t be surprised at their simplicity. God truly desires for us to know and do His will. (Eph. 5:17; Col. 4:12; Eph. 6:6) **And consider that God has indeed called YOU.**

I. AN ACTIVE SERVICE: (Acts 13:2)

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

The first phrase is the secret of it all. This speaks volumes in telling us whom God calls unto His special service. These two men were actively serving the Lord when the call came to them. They were already doing God’s will and so they were readily available for what ever God desired of them. And they were worshiping, even fasting and thus were open to the Spirit’s leadership for they were already busy serving the Lord.

Here is a principle seen often in Scripture: Those who have proven themselves faithful in little are given stewardship over much. The lesson to be learned from this example is that the believer desirous of hearing the voice of God for service must be active in the Lord’s work where he is. Leadership is selected from the proving ground of active service. Don’t expect God to give you greater opportunity when you are not faithful, willing, and yielded where you are right now.

II. AN AVAILABILITY:

Without hesitation or objection these men (Barnabas and Saul) left their current work for the new work to which God had called them. The believer who would hear the voice of God must be willing to say, as did Isaiah, “*Here am I, send me.*” (Isa. 6:8) It is not by mere coincidence that Paul begins the last section of the book of Romans, which deals with the believer’s service, with a call to “*present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God.*” (Romans 12:1-2) There must be total surrender, an availability of the believer’s life to God for the service of His choice. Are you willing as a saint of God to be available for whatever God desires? In that willing service He will prepare you for greater things.

III. AN AWARENESS OF THE LEADING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:

Someone might say, “*But the Holy Spirit never spoke to me like He did to them.*” Admittedly, there are times when that would simplify our problems. And yet we are not really at a disadvantage today because we do have His will revealed in His Word. It isn’t so much we don’t know, but are we willing?

There are two principles one should check on in determining the leading of the Holy Spirit for we need to be kept from being led astray.

1. The Holy Spirit always works through His Word, the Bible. Therefore, it is necessary to the hearing of the voice of God for service, that the believer be immersed in the Word of God. It was the Word of God (John 15:16) that He used over and over again in my own life to cause me to leave the farm and prepare for His service back in 1952.

2. The Holy Spirit always leads in accordance with the Word of God. The Spirit will never lead a believer to do something contrary to what the Scriptures teach. And we don't have the right to say, "*Well things are different now, or this is a different culture than in that day.*" (For example: This is some of the reasoning of those who think that God calls women preachers.) What then do you do with the Word of God -- a bishop (pastor) is to be the husband of one wife.

Also there are no special dispensations or any "*supra biblical callings!*" If the Word of God prohibits it, the Spirit of God did not originate it.

IV. AN ARRESTING AFFECTION FOR A CERTAIN WORK OF GOD: (Phil. 2:3)

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

Always with God's call is an affection or a deep love for that whereunto God has called. To have a will to do something is to desire to do that particular thing. Paul tells us that God is at work in the believer's life causing him to desire a certain work. I have seen many a servant in the local church who gave and gave, and gave again because of his or her abiding love for the thing God had laid upon the heart.

My wife and I traveled for many years in a special ministry of *Family Life Crusades* at a great price in many ways, but with a great joy and love for what we were doing as we held close to 500 meetings in many states and in trips to other countries.

If a man has a desire to preach the gospel and upon self-examination in light of Scripture he finds that this desire is out of pure motive and for the Lord's glory, it is likely that God Himself placed that desire in the man's heart.

We could say then, that God calls in the area of the believer's greatest interest and burden or desire. It would be drudgery if a stipulation for service was that it be something in which the believer had little or no interest.

V. AN ASSURING CONFIDENCE AS THE WORK IS CONTEMPLATED: (I Thess. 5:24)

"Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

I look back over 50 years of ministry and could testify that God's gives blessed assurance when it is His calling. This verse builds confidence because it teaches that God's calling is also God's enabling. When God calls the believer to do His service (in whatever it might be), He will do it through the believer. We brought nothing to the Lord but ourselves and we have nothing with which to do God's work, except for that which He gives in gifts, ability, strength, etc. Everything we ever had we received from the Lord, hence we must trust Him for the power, ability, wisdom, etc., for the work unto which He calls.

Our confidence rests on the faithfulness of the One who calls, not in the assumed abilities of the called person. Once this is understood, there is no task which is impossible to complete in His name.

VI. AN AFFIRMING PEACE WITHIN: (Col. 3:15)

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful." This is closely related to the confidence God gives. The word "rule," is a very interesting word for it means let the peace of God umpire in your hearts. If throughout the decision making process there is an underlying peace in the heart, one can confidently know that this is God's perfect will for his life. No one can adequately describe the ruling peace of God in the heart. It is a unique ministry of the Spirit of God to the believer. This does not mean there will be no fears. This means we have an inner abiding peace even in the midst of some fear. Paul went to Corinth with fear and trembling, but the peace of God was ruling in his heart and he knew this was God's will for him.

VII. AN APPROVAL FROM THE CHURCH: (Acts 13:3)

"And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." What God has wrought in the heart and life of the believer must be recognized and approved by the local church. Notice it was the local church that sent out Barnabas and Saul. The commissioning of these two involved both a recognition of God's call and a commission to go as their representatives (they sent them away). And this is the way it ought to be with every missionary that is sent out for God's glory and in His will.

Following the missionary journey they returned to Antioch, gathering the church together and rehearsing all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles (Acts 14:26-27).

The church is God's instrument for world evangelism. Every servant of the Lord should seek to use the gift the Holy Spirit has given within the local church and its ministry. If our gifts and callings are not sanctioned by the church, then we are attempting to serve the Lord outside the biblical guidelines. There are a multiplicity of agencies and workers today who have tried to circumvent the church. In so doing they have neglected the organization or living organism for which Christ died. (Eph. 5:25) He is the head of the Church and all of us need to serve within the ministry of the local church. God communicated with the individual and also with the local church at Antioch.

Do we serve as He desires and do we know His call and fulfill that call?

-- Dr. Edward Watke Jr. --