

THE "CALL" TO THE MINISTRY:
EXTERNAL AND VERIFIABLE

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"I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18) echoes from the primary causal domain. In the secondary causal domain God uses people to do it. Yet the problem of the "call" to the ministry is who should do it. Scholars present diametrically opposed solutions. A traditional view says the "call" is internal and mystical while a wisdom view says the "call" is external and verifiable.

Examination of the traditional view reveals no biblical support. "Feelings" are not now and never were any indication of God's will on any topic, including the "call" to the ministry. Supernatural revelations did occur. Yet they were extremely rare, never stated or implied as a prerequisite for the minister and do not occur in this Church Age in any form.

Examination of the wisdom view revealed extensive biblical support. Meeting the required qualifications, as clearly stated in the Scripture, has always been the normative approach to the "call" to the ministry from the Levitical priesthood (Lev. 21:1-23; Num. 4:3) to the selection of the first deacons (Acts 6:3) and those desiring the office of the overseer (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Those who desired to serve God in the ministry had to prove their ability to God's people who ultimately decided who was "called" and who was not.

Therefore, by giving the biblical qualifications for a church leader, the Canon solves the problem of who is "called" to the ministry, both for the individual seeking the office and for the church seeking an officer.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charles R. Smith", is written over a horizontal line.

Adviser

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INTRODUCTION

To prove his "call," one dear brother related the following to Charles Spurgeon. "Sir, I was put into a lawyer's office, but I never could bear the confinement, and I could not feel at home in studying law. Providence clearly stopped up my road for I lost my situation."

"And what did you do then?"

"Why Sir, I was induced to open a grocer's shop."

"And did you prosper?"

"Well, I do not think, Sir, I was ever meant for trade, and the Lord seemed quite to shut my way up there, for I failed and was in great difficulties. Since then I have done a little in life-insurance agency, and tried to get up a school, besides selling tea, but my path is hedged up, and something within me makes me feel that I ought to be a minister."

That type of person and story existed not only in Spurgeon's age but is heard, thought and preached by many even in this age. It will be the purpose of this thesis to present biblical and practical evidence indicating that this represents an erroneous concept of the "call" to the ministry. Men armed with a strong sense of "feeling" and little or nothing else in the way of qualifications for the task perpetuate this erroneous doctrine.

One unfortunate outcome of this misunderstanding of the "call" is that many men who are qualified for the task do not pursue the ministry because they have no mystical "call" to it as proof of the Lord's leading. They are told that they will never make it in the ministry without it. The flip side of this problem is that others plunge into it, leaving a wake of disaster before finally drowning in shame and disappointment. Charles Spurgeon's response to the brother cited above is appropriate today. "Jesus Christ deserves the best men to preach His cross and not the empty-headed and shiftless."¹

The "call" to the ministry is external and verifiable by tangible and observable proofs. What use is it if a man says he has a call but he has no qualifications? Can his "call" sustain him? Even such a "call," if it has no qualifications, is dead, being by itself. But some may well say, "You have a 'call,' and I have qualifications; show me your 'call' without the qualifications, and I will show you my 'call' by my qualifications." This thought from the book of James (with some modifications) is extremely applicable and relates the theme of this study. Misconceptions will be examined and found wanting and the biblical view of the "call" to the ministry will be presented.

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, strove to evade the

¹Charles H. Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954; new ed.), p. 37.

"call" by every means possible; but the people, who already knew him better than he knew himself, and had seen in him great qualities, insisted upon his acceptance.¹ May this emphasis on great qualities become the model of the call to the ministry.

¹James Hoppin, Pastoral Theology (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1909), pp. 98-99.

CHAPTER I

THE "CALL" AND CONFUSION

An interviewer of ministerial candidates and his friend were commenting on the fact that many of the men who came before him were quite unable to adduce any definite proofs of a "call" from above.¹ Yet what did they mean by "definite proofs"?

A man with six children became a Christian and felt he was "called" to the ministry. He quit his job the next week, even though he had no financial reserves and had hardly been able to provide necessities for his wife and children. By scraping together every available penny, the family moved across the state to prepare for the ministry. From the beginning, one disaster followed another. Sick children, work layoffs, academic troubles, physical exhaustion and marital discord accumulated daily until life became intolerable. Finally he quit school and admitted that he had made an enormous mistake.² Did this man have "proof"? According to the interviewer's friend, he did. He felt "called."

¹W. H. Griffith Thomas, Ministerial Life and Work (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), p. 93.

²James Dobson, Emotions: Can You Trust Them? (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1980), pp. 117-18.

In his chapter, "The Divine Call," Dr. Thomas defines the "call" as being an intense desire. It must come from God and not man and must be in some way the immediate appeal of God to the soul and a personal experience with the Holy Spirit. Concerning this inward movement of the Holy Spirit, Dr. Thomas said there should be no doubt in the man's mind. As further evidence he cites the extraordinary "calls" of prophets and apostles as well as testimonies from Church History.¹ Now the father of six is greatly confused.

Referring to the "call," one relates, "This call is one of the blessed mysteries of a Christian minister's life. No one can understand it himself, much less find language in which to explain it adequately to others."² Another states, "What constitutes a call to the ministry varies with the individual."³ So the "call" is a mystery that varies. With this as his presupposition, it is no small wonder that the father of six was confused because he felt "called," and yet he could not perform the necessary tasks. The problem between feeling and performing is not new or only Protestant.

Around the turn of the century, Pope Pius X appointed a commission to study the debate between some

¹Thomas, Ministerial Life, pp. 93-96.

²Ilion T. Jones, The Pastor: The Man and His Ministry (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 42.

³Lucille Lavender, They Cry Too! (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1976), p. 15.

who regarded the God-given "call" as the decisive factor for priesthood and others who maintained that any man could accept the priestly call, if he possessed the necessary spiritual, moral, and intellectual qualifications.¹ In recent years Vatican II raised the question as to how God works through those who accept His "call" to carry out His mission in the world.² The father of six is not alone in his confusion.

Dr. Garry Friesen points out some sad practical consequences stemming from the impact of what he titles the "phantom call."

1. Many Christians are plagued by guilt because they believe that God called them to some ministry, but they chose a secular vocation instead.

2. Many have responded to the supposed "call" only to experience frustration or even rejection because they lacked the revealed biblical qualifications.

3. Many full-time Christian workers have discovered from painful experience that they just are not suited for such a vocation, but will not change because they feel they would be disobeying God's "call."

4. Many of God's men had a sense of failure which was compounded by feelings of guilt because they were forced to leave the ministry to which they were "called."

¹Michael Pfiégler, Pastoral Theology (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1966), p. 15.

²DeWitt L. Miller, "Hush! Somebody's Callin' My Name!" Brethren Life and Thought 20 (Winter 1975):22.

5. How many qualified people have refrained from the ministry because they have not heard the "call"?¹

As if the wound of confusion was not enough, now the salt of guilt is generously applied and rubbed into the mind of the father of six and countless other supposedly "called" servants of God.

Therefore Dr. Thomas and his interviewing friend have correctly concluded that the candidates for the ministry "are without an idea on the subject, hopelessly confused about any such thing."²

¹Garry Friesen with J. Robin Maxson, Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 320.

²Thomas, Ministerial Life, p. 93.

CHAPTER II

THE INTERNAL AND MYSTICAL "CALL" EVALUATED

The hermeneutical principle of explaining an unknown by something that is known was commonly used in the parables of Jesus Christ. Seeking to explain the unknown ("the call") with known theological principles is a valid approach. Yet, if the "known" theological principle is incorrect, then a misconception about the unknown will result. Webster defines a misconception as a "wrong interpretation." This chapter will deal with four common wrong interpretations of the "call." The first two sections, equating the "call" to love in marriage and to the mystical experience of salvation are popular views. The last two sections deal with feelings, impressions, and voices, in one group; and the other group deals with visions, prophecies, and fleeces, which equate the "call" with the extraordinary experiences of biblical characters. These are of a scholarly nature. Whether popular or scholarly, each of the four has a major flaw and cannot be used as a valid explanation of a "call" to the ministry of the church today.

The "Call" is Like Falling in Love

While riding in a car, an elderly pastor comfortably said to a young seminarian, "So you've been called to the

ministry." The student, young, confused on the subject, and boldly honest, asked the senior to explain the "call." A long pause was followed by an unsure voice of the now red-faced pastor saying, "It's like falling in love." Hearing himself say it must have given him more confidence as he elaborated, "Yes, it's kind of like when you find the woman you want to marry. You just know she is the one. You just feel it." The regular use of the second person pronoun was not the only thing that clued the student that the Pastor knew little about the biblical "call" and less about biblical love and marriage.

This approach to the "call" is a popular, as opposed to a scholarly, view. Since it is popular it will be addressed, but no scholarly citations will appear since this writer found no author willing to put such a view under his name.

The biblical definition of love in marriage is that it is a covenanted relationship, not a feeling. Two people who commit themselves to the relationship of marriage have feelings that are the by-product, not the basis of the commitment.

The Oriental custom of arranged marriages bypasses the feelings of those involved in the marriage. Interestingly enough, the divorce rate among such a group is extremely low, as compared to the Occidental custom of choosing one's own mate and letting feelings be a major deciding factor. When the feelings go out of a marriage,

often the marriage dissolves.

No biblical passage commands one to, or suggests that one, love or marry because of a feeling. Women are nowhere told directly to feel for their husbands nor men to feel for their wives. Yet both are told to do loving things, and feelings are not even considered (1 Cor. 13; Eph. 5:22-33). Biblical love is an action, not just a feeling.

Therefore biblical love is a covenanted relationship and an action, not a feeling. Any analogy drawn between marriage and the "call" to the ministry must include the rational commitment to the task and the ability to perform the necessary actions.

The "Call" is Mystical Like the Salvation Experience

The assurance of a "call" lies in the experience itself. Like all other experiences, it is self-validating. Like the new birth, one can not tell how it comes. It can be known only in the experience itself.¹

Proponents of this view are apologetic experientialists, aligning themselves with such men as Kierkegaard, Barth, and Brunner, who cite a direct emotional encounter with God as the ultimate proof of salvation and the "call."

Every epistemological system begins with non-demonstrable assumptions. For the experientialist, the

¹C. E. Colton, The Minister's Mission (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1951), pp. 14-15.

direct emotional encounters with God are assumed to be true. The problem with this view is that there is no way to judge the validity of any truth claim. Therefore, any person can say anything concerning God and truth and no one could deny its validity. The result is that a person can say that he is saved and "called" to the ministry by a mystical experience and no one has the right to question or examine him.

On the other hand, the autopistic apologetic presupposes that the Bible is true and lets it become the canon for judging truth claims on all subjects, including salvation and the "call" to the ministry.

Therefore if assurance of salvation does not lie in the experience itself, then in what does it lie? Assurance of salvation is derived from its fruit (Matt. 7:15-20) and the saint's perseverance in the faith to the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:7-8). For the Christian to regularly examine himself along the way to see if he is in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Cor. 9:27) is entirely in order.

How does this apply to the "call"? It applies in the same way. The one "called" to the ministry must prove it by having fruit in the ministry and by passing the examinations given in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

Assurance of a "call" or of salvation lies not in its incipient experience but in the resulting fruit of its work (Jas. 2:14-26).

The "Call" is by Feelings, Impressions
and "Voices"

Psychologist Dr. James Dobson related the following situation while discussing the problems of feelings and impressions. Although there were four little children in the home, the mother felt she was "called" to leave them and enter full time evangelistic work. She left the children in the care of their father who worked six and seven days a week. The consequences were devastating.¹

Ironically, not only some of those who do respond to this "call" have problems, but also some who do not. "I have lived most of my life in God's second best" is the testimony of another person. He had felt "called" to be a missionary in his youth, but he entered business life as a cashier in a bank. The "call" kept coming and he did not yield. One day his small child toppled over from her high chair and died. This man thought this was a result of God's dealing with him for not answering the "call."²

This misconception of the "call" is distinguished from supernatural guidance in that there is no audible voice or visible sign, but simply a feeling about God's leading. Likewise, this is different from rational thinking in that a conclusion is not reached from logical argument, but from

¹Dobson, Emotions, pp. 123-24.

²G. Christian Weiss, The Perfect Will of God (Chicago: Moody Press, 1950), p. 16.

intuition.¹ This section will present some quotes of those who teach this view, mention its possible origin, look at it psychologically, and finally give the correct biblical perspective.

Some Quotations on the Mystical "Call"

"The call of the Eternal must ring through the rooms of the soul as clearly as the sound of the morningbell rings through the valleys of Switzerland, calling the peasants to early prayers and praise." Referring to "the mystical voice," this author says, "Every genuine call has its own uniqueness, and through the originality of personal circumstances the divine call is mediated to the individual soul. And so we cannot tell how the call will come to us, what will be the manner of its coming." "A man may realize his call to the ministry in the powerful imperative of a dumb grip for which he can offer no adequate reason." "I would affirm . . . that in all genuine callings to the ministry there is a sense of the divine initiative, a solemn communication of the divine will, a mysterious feeling of commission."² Many other preachers have heard the voice of God calling them into the ministry through the expressed impressions of others. For others, when an impression keeps coming back repeatedly and with increasing clarity, they may

¹M. Blaine Smith, Knowing God's Will (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 78.

²J. H. Jowett, The Preacher: His Life and Work (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), pp. 12, 16-19.

interpret it to be a call from the Lord. It will linger on and it will come back.¹ The man who is God-called will know it if he is sincerely yielded to God's will. He will hear the voice of God and know which way to go.² These citations sufficiently illustrate just exactly what some are saying about the "call."

A Possible Origin of the Mystical "Call"

The period of time between creation (I wonder if Eve felt it was God's will to eat the fruit?) and the "Inner Light" movement of the Quakers was not void of such mystical "calls." Yet the current wave of this problem may be somewhat indebted to that movement. There is a tendency to look on intuition as an infallible channel of God's speaking. To question intuition is to question God Himself. This understanding reached its height in the Quaker doctrine of the "Inner Light," which especially among George Fox and some of the early Quakers, was taken to extremes. Among them the possibility of human error in knowing God's will through intuition was simply not entertained. But even among modern Christians we often find this tendency to regard intuition as a foolproof channel of guidance.³

Nomadic, unlettered preachers of yesterday cried

¹Colton, Minister's Mission, p. 18.

²Howard F. Sugden and Warren W. Wiersbe, When Pastors Wonder How (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), p. 11.

³M. B. Smith, Knowing God's Will, p. 79.

out, "The Lord has called me to preach!" We must understand the context in which many of them spoke. Some were slaves, released from physical bondage, and deprived of educational opportunities. Some were poor Southerners, separated from schools and theological opportunities.¹

The "Inner Light" movement in the North and the unique situation in the South in our immediate Church history may help us understand the problems today on this subject of the "call."

The Psychological Phenomenon

Too often young people are seduced by being packed into a youth camp auditorium with other eager adolescents, where a high level of emotionalism is produced with lights and sounds, and the raw and bleeding wounds of mankind are exposed. Then an appeal is made to them for a commitment. "In this fashion many are 'called.' One youth . . . told me that at that point in his life he would have volunteered for anything. He really had no idea of what he was surrendering to."² A popular speaker, named "Sketch" Erickson, in an effort to awaken and alert people in his crusade for morality, travels 60,000 miles per year, crisscrossing the country, to speak in high school assemblies, churches, youth rallies and camps. Yet to what does he owe his

¹Harold A. Carter, Myths that Mire the Ministry (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1980), p. 23.

²Louis McBurney, Every Pastor Needs a Pastor (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977), p. 22.

effectiveness? "His effectiveness centers in the presentation itself--a combination of tapes, visuals and his own comments. A former advertising artist, Erickson uses postertime cartoon drawings shown on a six or nine foot rear projection screen, together with stereo sound with musical effects."¹ This phenomenon is not reserved just for the youth.

There are many men who think that they are called to be teachers, and are divinely inspired, simply because in a meeting they were conscious of a rush of feelings, of an intense action of their own mind and so insist that they are called of the Spirit of God to teach.² "Let us admit that there is loose talk . . . about the 'inner call.' It is often indulged in by men who feel they have a direct wireless connection with heaven. In some of them it is a case of having gone 'haywire.'"³ "I believe more caution and less pressure should be applied in our enlistment efforts" says one author.⁴

Psychologist Dr. James Dobson states that one of the objectives of Satan is to get the Christian to lean totally on his impressions, accepting them uncritically as the

¹"He Fights Moral Filth," Baptist Bulletin (February 1983), p. 17.

²Carter, Myths that Mire, p. 26.

³Walter E. Schuette, The Minister's Personal Guide (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1953), p. 15.

⁴McBurney, Every Pastor, p. 23.

absolute voice of God. When this occurs the devil has achieved all he wants.¹ Yet should all such feelings be viewed as Satanic? Should all be categorically rejected? What are these psychological intuitions?

Dr. M. Blaine Smith says that intuition in many cases is revealing one's deepest feelings and tells what a person really wants to do. "Intuition gives me crucial insight into my subconscious, the seat of my feelings."² While intuition may be an important indication of personal feelings, it is not an infallible gauge of them. "When intuition speaks, my subconscious has processed information more quickly than my conscious mind, and my intuition is telling me what my subconscious has concluded."³ The major problem with this is that the intuition will only be as good as the information to which it has been exposed. Therefore it is not to be taken too seriously.

Concerning these emotions, intuitions and feelings, "we should not forget that unbelievers also experience such 'feelings.'"⁴ Therefore when someone is feeling a strong sense of intuition, rather than saying, "God has spoken to me," it would be better to say, "My subconscious has spoken

¹Dobson, Emotions, p. 122.

²M. B. Smith, Knowing God's Will, p. 81.

³Ibid., p. 82.

⁴Charles R. Smith, Can You Know God's Will for Your Life?, The BMH Discussion Series, 6 (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1977), p. 4.

to me."¹

A Biblical Perspective

The Scripture has no evidence supporting the extreme notion of intuition. "I can find no examples in either the Old or New Testament where it is clear that someone discerned God's will through inward guidance. This may seem surprising, but I would challenge the reader to find such an instance."² There are some places in the book of Acts where reference is made to the Holy Spirit's guiding someone to do something, but a careful analysis of each passage leads to the conclusion that the reference is more likely either to direct supernatural guidance or to a rational decision.³

"There is also no clear statement in the Old or New Testament telling us that we should attempt to discern God's will merely through intuition."⁴

What about "the still small voice"? This phrase comes from 1 Kings 19:12. There is, however, no indication in the passage that the "still small voice" has any reference to inward guidance. It seems that Elijah heard God's audible voice (1 Kgs. 19:13-18). The term is employed in the passage to contrast God's voice with the wind,

¹M. B. Smith, Knowing God's Will, p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 79.

³Acts references to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are: 8:26, 39; 10:19-20; 11:28; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6-7; 19:21; 20:22-23; 21:4, 11-14.

⁴M. B. Smith, Knowing God's Will, p. 80.

earthquake and fire immediately preceding.

Christians have many times said "God showed me that . . . ," or "God told me that" Yet such statements can be dangerously misleading. "Let us be honest. He did not 'speak' to us, 'tell' us, or 'reveal' anything to us. What we mean is that we have become convinced that God has been at work in our lives."¹

What about the "call" to the ministry? There is no heavenly voice, nor angelic messenger sent from God, and nothing miraculous about the "call."² "The 'call' is of God, but this does not mean that it is mystical or magical or miraculous."³ There is no verse in the Bible to suggest that Christians are to wait for a "call" before they make plans to serve God.⁴

"We must conclude that there is no biblical basis for the notion that intuition should be regarded as an infallible indication of the Holy Spirit's leading, [generally, in anything and specifically, concerning the "call"] akin to hearing the audible voice of God."⁵

¹C. Smith, Can You Know God's Will?, p. 4.

²Hoppin, Pastoral Theology, p. 87.

³Charles R. Erdman, The Work of the Pastor (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1924), p. 7.

⁴C. Smith, Can You Know God's Will?, p. 3.

⁵M. B. Smith, Knowing God's Will, p. 81.

The "Call" is by Visions, Prophecies
and Fleeces

These three categories are considered overt supernatural events as opposed to the covert experiences in the last section. Many Christians think that they should be (or they are) the recipients of supernatural guidance. This problem is particularly strong for new Christians; however older Christians as well are often troubled by it. The problem most often comes from realizing the broad extent to which supernatural guidance occurs in the Scripture. "If people of faith in the Bible received guidance in a direct manner, then should we not also expect such guidance from God?" This section will evaluate three kinds of supernatural guidance: visions (including miracles), prophecies, and "fleecing," and then give a biblical perspective.

Visions

Truly real visions and miracles did occur in both covenants of the Bible. It is also true that God actually "called" some people to the ministry by this means. Therefore should every (or any) preacher today receive a supernatural call to the ministry?

When all the instances of such guidance are considered, the sparsity of them in the early Church and the Old Testament is very telling. It seems that in the great majority of decisions there were no experiences of supernatural guidance. Consider, for example, the non-frequency of miracles, or supernatural interventions by God, during

the time between the first Adam and the second Adam. Enoch's translation was the only miracle in over 1,700 years between Adam and the Flood. For centuries (400 years), Israel suffered in Egypt with no special voice from heaven. Only rarely did a miracle occur during the centuries (about 310 years) from Joshua to David. For centuries (about 400 years) before Christ came, God withheld all miracles.¹

In the New Testament the apostle Paul lived to see the passing of miracles. After he arrived in Rome his miracle-working powers were evidently withdrawn by the Lord. Paul's messenger, Epaphroditus, almost died of a sickness (Phlm. 2:25-30). He left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). He also recommended to Timothy to take some wine for his stomach's sake and his frequent ailments (1 Tim. 5:23).

The phrase in the Old Testament, "and the Spirit of the Lord came upon . . ." has a very interesting frequency. In the entire time period of the Old Testament this happened less than a dozen and a half times. It occurred fifteen times to individuals and twice to groups involving artistic skill, military leadership, or prophetic utterances.² There were also some incidents of a person having actual conversation with God. Cain, Noah, and Hagar are a few examples of

¹John C. Whitcomb, Does God Want Christians to Perform Miracles Today?, BMH Discussion Series, 1 (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1973), pp. 5-6.

²John H. Walton, Chronological Charts of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 55.

this. But when considering time lapses between them and dividing the total number of people who lived by the number of those who actually had such an experience, their rarity is overwhelming.

Concerning the "call" to the ministry, Dr. Friesen sees only three such occurrences in the New Testament: God called Paul to be an apostle; God called Barnabas and Paul to be the first missionaries; and God called Paul and his companions to take the Gospel to Macedonia. "In each case the means of communication was some form of supernatural revelation. The apostle Paul did not see his calling as providing a pattern for other ministers."¹

It is a fact that some good men have thought that they received the "call" by a voice speaking to them, or by a vision of Christ, but there are no intimations in Scripture that such immediate revelations are to be expected.² All of God's ministers have had an ordinary "call" of God.³ The ordinary "call" will be explained later.

Prophecies

The preceding section dealt with direct supernatural revelation. This section deals with receiving supernatural revelation indirectly through another person's prophecy, as

¹Friesen, Decision Making, p. 18.

²R. J. George, Lectures in Pastoral Theology (New York: Christian Nation Publishing Co., 1911), p. 18.

³William S. Plumer, Hints and Helps in Pastoral Theology (New York: Harper, 1874), p. 28.

was the practice of prophets in the Old Testament.

Christians, especially those in charismatic circles, though not exclusively, have sometimes been troubled because someone has claimed a revelation of guidance for them which they have never before entertained as God's will. Marriages have been entered into, engagements broken off and vocational decisions resolved, simply because one person claims a prophecy of God's will for another.

What is the best way to evaluate these prophecies? Dr. M. Blaine Smith said, "I believe the answer is simple: we can disregard them completely. There is no instance of a prophecy being regarded as guidance in the New Testament after Pentecost. There is also no statement to the effect that we should look on prophecy as a possible source of guidance."¹

There are plenty of examples of predictions in the New Testament, such as Agabus' prediction of the famine (Acts 11:28) and predictions by some writers concerning God's future acts in history. But with the exception of Acts 21:4 there is no clear instance where someone attempted to connect prophecy with advice for another's complex decision.

What about Acts 21:4? When Paul received this prophetic counsel not to go to Jerusalem from friends who predicted his disaster, he ignored it. There is no

¹M. B. Smith, Knowing God's Will, p. 73.

indication that Paul disobeyed God's will. He did not believe that the counsel stemming from their prophecy was a divine command telling him not to go to Jerusalem. "It was natural that his friends who by the prophetic spirit were able to foretell his tribulation and imprisonment should try to dissuade him from going on."¹

Prophecies which tell other people what they are to do, even telling someone he is "called" to the ministry, are to be regarded with great suspicion. The gift of prophecy was never intended to take the place of common sense or the wisdom which comes from God and which manifests itself through our natural faculties.²

Fleeces

A student driving to class one day asked God to show him whether or not he should go to class by changing the stoplight ahead to either red or green. From the incident in Judges 6 comes the current practice of "fleecing." Yet that is not the only example of this practice. Lot casting is mentioned in Proverbs 16:33. That seems to be the method used which decided that Zechariah was assigned to temple duty (Luke 1:9). The early believers chose the successor for Judas by this method (Acts 1:15-26). And then there was

¹F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of Acts (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 421.

²Michael Harper, Prophecy: A Gift for the Body of Christ (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1970), pp. 26-27.

the use of the Thummim and Urim as prescribed by the Mosaic Law (Deut. 33:8). All of these methods provided a "yes" or a "no" answer to a particular question. Therefore is it valid today for someone considering the ministry to ask for a "yes" or "no" answer relating to whether he is "called" to the ministry?

These approaches, as well as others (1 Sam. 14:6-15; Gen. 24), are not viewed as appropriate for the Church Age. Even the New Testament example (Acts 1:24-26) is correctly noted by commentators as an episode which took place prior to the inception of the Church Age, so it can not be considered normative for the present economy.¹ "With the final revelation in Christ the earlier ways of God revealing his will ceased."² It is most important to note that after the day of Pentecost there is no biblical example of casting lots or anything akin to putting out a fleece. It seems that after this time the practice was no longer necessary.³

The Christian in this Church Age has the completed revelation of the Bible and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which one can make valid judgments. For Christians, fleecing should be seen as an abdication of personal responsibility.

¹Friesen, Decision Making, p. 27.

²Edmund P. Clowney, Called to the Ministry (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1978), p. 69.

³M. B. Smith, Knowing God's Will, p. 75.

Therefore the one who is considering whether or not God has "called" him into the ministry must look for proof elsewhere.

A Biblical Perspective

The problem with getting a correct perspective on visions, prophecies and fleeces is that they did occur in the Bible, although infrequently, and at times it appears that God honored the request for a sign in spite of the motive or manner in which it was asked. Yet He did do them. To compound the problem, God chose to cease doing them in the Church Age with the completion of the Scriptures. Now with a Bible sufficient for faith and practice, one must study it to find answers in general and specifically to discover if one has been "called." Now that is the real problem.

"We must know the Word thoroughly if we are to find the Spirit's guidance. If we do not, we have no right to expect a special extraordinary guidance to fill in for our laziness."¹ Many Christians dislike to make up their minds in the many decisions that confront them. Desiring an easy way to ascertain the will of God, they too often resort to seeking God's guidance through illegitimate ways.²

Today those illegitimate ways are not operable.

¹Edwin H. Palmer, The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 117.

²Ibid., p. 128.

It would appear that God calls men by His Spirit through the written or spoken word. Before there was a written revelation, God spoke directly to men in and through His prophets (Heb. 1:1). While New Testament revelation was being compiled He did the same thing. Since then it appears that God has chosen, at least as far as we know, to use the Bible directly, or the Bible as spoken through the mouths of men to call men into service.¹ "The canon of Scripture is closed, and apart from the Bible we may not speak of an infallible indication of God's will."² We may find guidance of the Spirit through the Bible and not apart from it. There is no biblical evidence that God gives signs to indicate the course of action on a particular question, including the "call." Today God does not give extrabiblical revelation. To ask for a new revelation, a new guide, would be to deny the all-sufficiency of the Spirit-breathed Bible. Thus, there is not an easy, infallible way to find God's will for our lives.

Dr. Palmer said, "We still believe that the Westminster theologians gave Biblical advice when they stated that we may not add revelations to the Bible, and the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for life is either expressly set down or may be deduced from the

¹Herman A. Hoyt, "The Divine Call to the Ministry of Jesus Christ," Grace Journal 14 (1973):9.

²Palmer, Holy Spirit, p. 127.

Scriptures."¹

Summary

In the summertime, newspapers carry a myriad of advertisements for "Garage Sales." Many of these ads close with the phrase "and other items too numerous to mention." So it is with the views of the "call" to the ministry. Some examples are: "You will fight the 'call' at first," "You will never last in the ministry without a 'call,'" "If you can stay out of the ministry, that proves you were not 'called,'" "You must have peace," and other views too numerous to mention.

This chapter dealt with four of the most common internal and mystical views of the "call" and biblically found them all wanting.

¹Palmer, Holy Spirit, p. 128.

CHAPTER III

THE WORD "CALL" IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGES

This chapter will deal specifically with a study of the actual word, "call," and the various original words and derivatives used of it. After a discussion on etymology and theology, a general survey of the words is followed by a specific examination of the Hebrew and then the Greek.

Theology Versus Etymology

One day a student was sitting in a biblical language class listening to the professor support his view of a highly controversial theological issue with some fine aspect of a particular grammatical tense and boldly concluding that we must let the language determine our theology. Some days later, the same student sat in the same class and listened to one of his puzzled colleagues ask the professor why the same fine aspect of the particular grammatical tense mentioned days before to prove his theological position (more correctly, presupposition) would also support the heretical view of a cult if applied to a verse the class was presently studying. The professor, without batting an eye, boldly concluded that we must let our theology interpret the language.

A more consistent Greek professor was asked to state the percentage of his theology that required support from the original languages. His quick response was "five percent" and then he qualified it by saying that the five percent did not involve any major theological issues.

"There appears to be an innate human inclination to attempt to impress people with the hidden secrets which only the truly initiated can rightly understand or explain."¹ These words are from a Greek scholar, not a layman.

The etymology of the word "call" will reveal no hidden secrets to support or deny either side of the controversy surrounding the theological issue of the "call" to the ministry.

A General Survey

Concerning the fifteen Hebrew and twenty-nine Greek words that are translated "call" in the English, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (a five volume set) in totality says, "A summons issued by one in authority, especially God, to perform a particular function, or to occupy a particular status (see Apostle; Prophet). Since Deutero-Isaiah, the religious concept has become almost synonymous with ELECTION."² He saw two general categories: salvation and the offices of apostles and prophets. Since

¹Charles R. Smith, "Errant Aorist Interpreters," Grace Theological Journal 2 (Fall 1981):205.

²The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, s.v. "Call, Calling," by G. E. Mendenhall, 1:490.

one contemplating the "call" to the ministry is presumably already saved, and as Dr. Charles Smith states, "You are not a prophet. You are not an apostle,"¹ then no help is derived from this source concerning the question of how one is "called" to the ministry.

Another general source, The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (a five volume set), did not even mention the Hebrew words or usages. "It is a New Testament expression. The word is used chiefly by Paul. It has a definite, technical sense: the invitation given to men by God to accept salvation in the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. See ELECTION."² This source did not even mention the offices of apostles and prophets. In his mind he has concluded that only salvation is involved in this word.

The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature (a twelve volume set) linked some 3,200 words on "call." Ninety-eight percent of those words discussed salvation with less than two percent in totality saying "a call to the ministry of the Gospel is regarded by Christians generally as proceeding from God; and the Church of England, the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, require of candidates for ordination an express profession that they trust they are so

¹C. Smith, Can You Know God's Will?, p. 2.

²The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, s.v. "Calling," by George Henry Trever, 1:545.

moved of the Holy Ghost. See MINISTRY."¹ Deviating to the word, "Ministry," reveals a discussion on the ministerial "call" from the Practical Theology viewpoint, not an etymological viewpoint.

Therefore, a general survey of the word, "call," revealed that the bulk of its usages referred to salvation with only a few remaining occurrences referring to the "call" to the ministry. And of these usages, no meaning can be derived as to how one is "called" to the ministry.

A Survey of the Hebrew Words

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament cites one root word, קרא "I call, call out, recite (read)," and four derivatives:

1. קרא - "partridge"
2. קריא - "proclaim"
3. מקרא - "convocation"
4. קרא - "called one, summoned."

Concerning the root word it says, "Our verb also connotes calling one to a specific task." Therefore with this definition and the actual Hebrew word involved, there were a grand total of four men "called" into the ministry: Abraham (Isa. 51:2), Moses (Exod. 3:2), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:4, 6, 8), and Isaiah (Isa. 49:1).

Concerning the derivative "Called one" it said,

¹Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, s.v. "Call," 2:33.

"This word is used to designate those among Israel 'called' to the diets [eating requirements] of the congregation (Deut. 18)."¹ The nation of Israel collectively was "called" to be God's nation (Isa. 43:1; 45:3; 45:6). This also was mentioned in Brown, Driver and Briggs' Lexicon under Section 5 E, "Call and commission, appoint by name specifically."² Only two people are mentioned in this section: Isaiah (Isa. 49:1) and the Messiah (Isa. 48:15).

Therefore, a word study based solely on the Hebrew text reveals that only four men and one nation were ever "called" to serve God in a spiritual ministry and all of them by a supernatural revelation.³

¹Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, s.v. "קָרָא," by Leonard J. Coppes, 2:810.

²Francis Brown; S. R. Driver; and C. A. Briggs, editors, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 896 (hereafter cited as BDB).

³Cyrus and Bezalel were also properly "called" and are the only two names mentioned in BDB under section 5 F since their work was not specifically spiritual (Isa. 45:1-4; Exod. 35:30).

A Survey of the Greek Words

In the New Testament these are the main words used to mean "call" which total 228 usages:

καλέω	is found 148 times
ἐπικαλέομαι	is found 30 times
προσκαλέομαι	is found 29 times
κλησις	is found 11 times
κλητός	is found 10 times ¹

The usages of these words may generally be arranged under the four headings listed below.

1. To give a name or address by name. The naming of John the Baptist (Luke 1:59-63) and Jesus' use of the word in Matthew 22:43-44 to refer to David's calling Him Lord are examples of this usage.

2. To invite or legally summon. In John 2:2, Jesus was "invited" to the wedding. At another wedding the servants were to "invite" people to come (Matt. 22:9). Peter and John were "summoned" before the Sanhedrin court in Acts 4:18 as Paul also was "summoned" before the governor for trial (Acts 24:2).

3. To bring to salvation. This category is by far the most common use of the words translated "call."² It involves a general call to the world for salvation. Also

¹The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "Call," by L. Coenen, 1:273 (hereafter cited as NIDNTT).

²See "A General Survey" in this chapter (page 30).

many usages refer to those who actually are saved and to the fact that it was God who did it. "The fact that God is the *καλῶν* and that Christians are the *κεκλημένοι*, with no qualifying addition, makes it clear that in the New Testament *καλεῖν* is a technical term for the process of salvation."¹

4. To a divine commission. None of the three categories mentioned above can accommodate the view of being "called" to the ministry. It is rather this use that is relevant to the discussion of the "call" to a specific function or office.² There are only three instances of this "call."

A. God's call of Paul to be an apostle (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1). In this rare case, Paul uses *κλητός* of a personal commission. In declaring himself to be "called" an apostle he is stressing that he owed his office as an apostle to a special call by God.³

B. God's call to Saul and Barnabas to be the first missionaries (Acts 13:2). "This calling was a supernatural act involving either the Holy Spirit speaking in an audible voice, since the text reads 'the Holy Spirit said,' or by direct revelation

¹Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. "καλέω," by K. J. Schmidt, 3:489.

²Friesen, Decision Making, p. 313.

³NIDNTT, 1:276.

through one of the prophets."¹

C. After seeing the "Macedonian vision" Paul concludes, "God has called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:10).

These last two terms have been classified as a "divine call to a special task or office."² It is interesting to note that these are the only two references in the classification.

In summarizing the section it is very interesting to notice that of the 228 plus occurrences of the word, "call," only three examples actually refer to a divine "call" to an office or special task, and Paul was involved in all three of them.

Summary

An etymological study of the word, "call," yielded no hidden secrets to enlighten the controversy over the "call" to the ministry. A survey of the usages of the word did reveal that salvation is its primary use. In the Old Testament only four men actually had the word "call" used of their supernatural experience with God relating to their "call" to the ministry. In the New Testament only three

¹David Miller, "Were You Really Called into the Ministry?" Spire 10 (1982):7.

²Walter Bauer; William F. Arndt; and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed. revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 715.

examples of a "call" to an office or ministry exist, and all of these were by supernatural revelation.

Combining the quantity (very rare) and the quality (by supernatural revelation) of the word, "call," in this chapter with the theology in Chapter II, namely that in neither Testament is such a "call" promised or required as God's provision for all believers,¹ strongly suggests that the commonly held view of the "call" should be rejected.

To define the "call" of God to the ministry with a meaning and usage not found in Scripture is dangerously confusing.²

¹Friesen, Decision Making, p. 314.

²Miller, "Were You Really Called?" p. 7.

CHAPTER IV

THE "CALL" IS EXTERNAL AND VERIFIABLE

Mr. Wilder, in the chapter "So You Want to Be a Minister," begins with two assumptions. First, it is assumed that one is a child of God. The second assumption is that one has a call to preach the Gospel. Then he says, "How difficult it is to nail down the idea of a call to the ministry."¹ Based on the presupposition that the "call" is internal and mystical (and has the aktionsart of a Greek perfect tense), it is not surprising that he says it is hard to nail down. But is that presupposition correct?

The etymological study showed the rarity of such mystical (supernatural revelational) "calls." Even those mystical "calls" where the actual word "call" does not appear are incredibly rare and never stated as or implied to be a prerequisite to the ministry.

The theological study revealed that internal feelings are never used in the Bible as a direct indication of God's will on anything, much less the "call" to the ministry. Although supernatural revelations did occur spasmodically in both Covenants, they were not the norm

¹John B. Wilder, The Young Minister: His Calling, Career, and Challenge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), pp. 10-11.

then and are not occurring at all in this period of God's calendar. Also they are never given as a requirement for the "call" to the ministry. What then, pray tell, does constitute a "call"?

"The call to ministry comes from an objective source. I am stating this first, because there are those who would like to confine the call to a more subjective reaction on the part of the minister."¹ "Early Christians were not vague in their statements of the personal qualifications of those into whose hands was committed the care of the flock of God. They did not leave this important decision entirely to the sentimental whims of men who aspired to the office."² The writers of the Pastoral Epistles and of 1 Peter felt it necessary to describe in minute detail the qualifications that they themselves sought to incorporate into their own way of life and the high standards that they held for those who became their fellow workers. Another put it this way, "Competence is the prominent evidence of the call and character is the Siamese twin of competence."³ Therefore since competence and character are in fact external and verifiable qualities, it is the purpose of this chapter to present the biblical requirements that constitute

¹Hoyt, "Divine Call," p. 7.

²Wayne E. Oates, The Christian Pastor (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), p. 72.

³W. B. Riley, Pastoral Problems (London: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1936), p. 13.

the "call" to the ministry. Dr. Friesen's personal ordination examination serves well to sum up the paper to this point and lead into the rest of this study, in an entertaining fashion.

Here's what happened. About thirty pastors and church representatives arrived to sit on the examining council. As I prepared to face this questioning, one of the godly pastors of the association offered me these words of encouragement. 'Just remember, son, it's the call of God that matters, the call of God.' That's just what I needed to hear!

The actual examination began well. These men had all sat where I was sitting, and they were very supportive as the questioning started. I enjoyed narrating again the process by which I came to faith in Christ and the blessings of my life with Him.

Then came the inevitable Question Number Two: 'Would you now describe your call to the ministry?' I began by explaining that I had never seen any bright lights nor heard any voices as did the apostle Paul. They assured me that they did not expect me to have such an experience. Then, in a manner that I hoped would reflect a submissive attitude, I asked if they would give me a definition of what they meant by "call." I also observed that it would be helpful if they could cite a specific passage of Scripture where such a call is required of ministers.

What followed was a very interesting discussion. Several descriptions of the inward call were offered. Expressions like 'inward compulsion' and 'strong inner feeling' were tossed around. Two things became clear: A precise definition was hard to nail down and the requirement of the inward call could not be found, but everyone was convinced that a call was needed. After one comment that defined the call as a strong feeling or compulsion, another pastor said, 'If my ministry depended on my feelings, I would probably drop out about every two weeks.' That remark elicited laughter and understanding nods.

Eventually the members of the council remembered who was supposed to be questioning whom. And so the focus came back to me. The questions I had raised made it apparent that I had problems with the concept of a call to the ministry. So the question was rephrased: 'If you don't feel that you have had one of these calls to the ministry, why do you want to be a minister?'

That, I thought, was the right question.¹

¹Friesen, Decision Making, pp. 318-19.

Biblically speaking, that, in fact, is the right question: "Why do you want to be a minister?"

The "Call" is a Preference

"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being [ὀρεγέται] an overseer, he desires [ἐπιθυμεῖ] a noble task" (1 Tim. 3:1, NIV). These two strong verbs can stand parallel and depict the yearning for the office.¹ The first verb means "to reach after" and the middle voice, as employed here, indicates that the subject is reaching after this object for himself. Such a yearning is described by the second verb, "to fix the ardor or passion upon a thing." Here ἐπιθυμεῖ is used in a good sense of a strong desire.² When and how does this desire come?

If the desire arises suddenly, early in life or immediately after conversion, it is questionable in nature and may be anything but Divine.³ Charles Spurgeon, on the topic said, "It should not be a sudden impulse unattended by [serious] consideration."⁴ In the case of the ministry, as in the general process of deciding on a vocation, such a decision is usually made over a long period of time. There are certain crucial points at which a person must make a

¹NIDNTT, s.v. "Desire," by H. Schonweiss, 1:457.

²Homer A. Kent, The Pastoral Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 123.

³J. Oswald Dykes, The Christian Minister and His Duties (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), p. 33.

⁴Spurgeon, Lectures, p. 27.

cognitive decision. The precise time in a person's life at which this happens varies from individual to individual.¹ There is no biblical evidence demanding or suggesting that the desire is a punctiliar action which progresses into the future. The supernatural examples of the "calls" of Apostles and Prophets do not set the pattern as they were extraordinary in nature. Therefore, the desire must come slowly and when the person is old enough to make a rational choice (as opposed to adolescent camp meetings).

The desire must be rational. God has given us reasoning powers for a purpose and He respects them, appeals to them, and all of His leadings are in unison with them.² Like all questions regarding God's will for an individual, it can only be determined with greater or lesser probability after weighing the pros and cons of the consideration. "We have no right to look for such extraordinary and compelling signs as would silence all misgivings or render superfluous the excuse of the reason in the balancing of opposed considerations."³

Weighing the pros and cons of one's personal qualifications, desires and providential circumstances may yield a conviction of duty. "Yet this does not mean that reason is overpowered and the will surrenders to forces from

¹C. Douglass Lewis, "The Role of Seminaries in Recruitment," Theological Education 5 (Summer 1969):321.

²Dobson, Emotions, p. 125.

³Dykes, Christian Minister, p. 33.

without. The decision is perfectly rational."¹ Regeneration does not destroy the intellect and God expects us to use what He has given us. There are no quick and easy answers.²

The decision to devote one's life to some phase of the Christian ministry, vocationally interpreted, is a free choice wherein the person responds willingly to a role he believes God wants him to fulfill. He has identified with this role because of a combination of motivations which are peculiar to him and related to his personal experience and environment.³ Where did these motivations come from? Dr. Clowney suggests, "Most often the presence of such gifts of the Spirit for the ministry creates a desire for their exercise. For this reason a deep and sincere desire to enter the ministry is the commonest evidence of the Lord's calling." Yet a word of caution needs to be stated at this point. "It is no sure criterion, however, for gifts and desire are not always joined."⁴ Another puts it bluntly, "The inclination is not enough."⁵ Then what else is needed?

¹Erdman, Work of the Pastor, p. 9.

²E. H. Palmer, Holy Spirit, p. 129.

³Willis G. Bennett, "Ministry as Profession and Calling," Review and Expositor 70 (1973):7-8.

⁴Clowney, Called, p. 81.

⁵Washington Gladden, The Christian Pastor and the Working Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 68.

The "Call" is a Performance

As mentioned earlier, the Siamese twins of competence and character are the prominent evidence of the "call." The requirements of competence and character are presented in great detail in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and 1 Peter 5:1-4. The entire thrust of this paper is to point to these passages as the ultimate consideration of one desiring to be in the ministry. David Miller has succinctly said, "Why not accept the simple qualifications for church leaders set forth in the Scriptures. Paul goes into great detail in establishing the qualifications for church leadership. Evidently, God wants His church to be sure the leaders meet His qualifications, not some subjective human standard entitled 'a call.' Such talk of a 'call' is totally unbiblical."¹ These passages seem to cover the entire gamut of humanity, and the qualifications may be classified as follows:

Volitional - desire, aspire, not under compulsion,
but voluntarily;

Financial - not fond of sordid gain, free from the
love of money;

Spiritual - above reproach, loving what is good,
not a new convert;

Mental - sensible, devout, self-controlled,
holding fast the word of truth, able to

¹Miller, "Were You Really Called?" p. 7.

teach, eagerness;

- Physical - not accused of dissipation, not addicted to wine, able to exhort and refute (preach), able to teach;
- Emotional - not quick tempered, temperate, prudent
- Social - husband of one wife, having children who believe, keeping his children under control, manages his household well, not accused of rebellion, not self-willed, not pugnacious, hospitable, just, respectable, gentle, uncontentious, good reputation with those outside the church.

These may be arranged differently and a great deal of time could be spent discussing these qualifications. Dr. Friesen sums these qualifications up this way: According to the New Testament, a church leader must be a spiritually mature Christian man who desires a position of leadership in the Church, and is able to lead God's people and teach God's Word.¹

When a candidate is examined for ordination into the ministry, the council usually questions him with respect to three key areas: (1) his experience of conversion; (2) his "call" to the ministry; and (3) his doctrinal positions. The passages of Scripture on qualifications give validity

¹Friesen, Decision Making, p. 317.

for examining a man's experience of conversion (he must be a Christian) and his knowledge of Bible doctrine (he must be able to teach). It is curious, on the other hand, that Scripture emphasizes qualifications that many ordaining councils overlook, while stressing a requirement that is not mentioned by Scripture. "Nearly every person seeking ordination to the ministry is asked to explain his 'call' into the ministry, or at least to verify that he is 'called.' Nowhere in the Bible is a vocational 'call' of God set forth as necessary for the ministry."¹

The "Call" is a Profession

In light of the biblical qualifications required of the church leaders it is interesting to read highly emotive arguments against naming the ministry a profession. Is there any sense in which the Protestant ministry may accurately be considered a profession? James Glasse reminds us that some say no and for totally opposite reasons. Some claim that ministers are holy men and as such stand aloof of the professions and to classify them with the professions would be to disgrace and dishonor their role. Others claim that ministers are amateurs and therefore are not worthy of being classified as professional.² What is a professional? Glasse concludes that a professional is identified by five

¹Miller, "Were You Really Called?" p. 7.

²James D. Glasse, Profession: Minister (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 31.

characteristics:

1. He is an educated man, master of some body of knowledge.
2. He is an expert man, master of some specific cluster of skills.
3. He is an institutional man, relating himself to society and rendering his service through a social institution.
4. He is a responsible man who professes to be able to act competently in situations which require his services.
5. He is a dedicated man. The professional characteristically "professes" something of value for society.¹

In light of the biblical qualifications and by this list, many "ministers" would not qualify. Yet of all vocations, the ministry should require superior people. "The professional is one who is aspiring to excellence. No calling demands that more than the calling to ministry."² Referring to ministry "let it be said also that it is a profession, in the sense at least that special training is necessary to a high degree of success. Irreparable injury has been done by misguided persons who have discouraged young ministers from attending college and theological

¹Ibid., p. 31.

²Ralph H. Elliott, "The Minister as Professional," Foundations 22:2 (1979):124.

school."¹ If the word, "calling" could be, at the least, equated with the word profession, then maybe the Christian world would require a higher level of competence of its pastors. Dr. Charles Smith's solution is probably better yet. "In view of the fact that young people are often confused by this terminology, and led to expect some supernatural revelation regarding their vocation, perhaps it would be wise to drop the term 'call' as a reference to such a conviction regarding our life-work."²

The "Call" Requires a Position

It almost seems too obvious to mention it, but many "called" students have overlooked this fact. The "call" to the ministry does not precede a call to the ministry. Therefore no one can ever say under any circumstances, "I have been 'called' to the ministry" prior to the actual fact of ministry to the church, or in some other capacity. To make such a statement, in and of itself, presumes on the future and the Bible clearly teaches that all such boasting is evil.

Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance: all such boasting is evil (Jas. 4:13-16).

¹James Albert Beebe, The Pastoral Office (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1923), p. 255.

²C. Smith, Can You Know God's Will?, p. 3.

One of the brightest young men ever to graduate from Dr. Dobson's alma mater was deeply devoted to the Lord. He felt "called" to become a medical missionary and he directed every energy toward that objective. After graduating cum laude from college, he enrolled in medical school and finished his first year at the top of his class academically. Then during the spring of that year he began to experience a curious and persistent fatigue. He was examined by a physician who made the diagnosis of leukemia. The promising student was dead a few months later.¹

Changing the word "called" to something else (as previously mentioned) is an excellent idea. But if that can not be done, at the very least the prophetic futuristic tense, "I have been called," should be changed to "I am preparing to be called" or better yet, "I am preparing for the ministry and if the Lord wills I will be called into a full time ministry by a body of believers who ask me to minister to them."

The role of the church is of primary importance in determining the validity of one's "call." "The important thing for the individual minister is that the church shares with him the responsibility of decision as to his fitness, and, consequently, to some extent as to his 'call.' It is one of the best pieces of evidence available that he has not misread the will of God."² Having met the biblical

¹Dobson, Emotions, p. 117.

²Dykes, Christian Minister, p. 38.

qualifications and finally being invited by a church to be its pastor, one may be justified in concluding that by all these means God has been calling him to this office.¹

In the same way the opposite is also true. "So if a man thinks himself called to preach, and can find no one who wishes to hear him preach, he ought to decide that the inward call was misunderstood."² Dr. Hoyt wisely said, "It is probably correct to assert that God never calls a man to a task for which he does not have the ability to discharge."³ Being actually called to a church is a determining factor of God's correct vocational selection for an individual. But it is not the ultimate proof.

Effectiveness in the ministry is one of the proofs of one's call to the ministry.⁴ "The final test of a call is some measure of success in the actual work of the ministry."⁵ Yet even more than effectiveness in a church is required. Many pastors start and leave the ministry within a few years. The ultimate proof is hindsight. "Perseverance to the end will mark the movement of the man of God truly called of Him."⁶ Only the person with a lifetime of

¹Erdman, Work of the Pastor, p. 8.

²Gladden, Christian Pastor, p. 69.

³Hoyt, "Divine Call," pp. 8-9.

⁴Franklin M. Segler, A Theology of Church and Ministry (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1960), p. 51.

⁵Beebe, Pastoral Office, p. 252.

⁶Hoyt, "Divine Call," p. 11.

consistent and fruitful ministry may say confidently that "I have been called into the ministry."

Summary

This chapter has sought to make clear the biblical approach to the ministry. It is proper and good to desire to serve God in full-time Christian ministry. Those who desire the office must examine the high requirements demanded by God for the ministry and see if the life and standards intercept. Because God does require such specific standards, the ministry could very rightly be classified as a profession. If this were done and the phrase, "I've been called" were replaced with "I'm seeking to qualify myself, by God's grace, for a lifetime of ministry" the church would be better off. And while a call to the church is further evidence of God's grace in one's preparation, it is not the ultimate proof. The final proof is hindsight after a life of faithful (1 Cor. 4:2) and fruitful (" . . . that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples," John 15:8) service. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7).

CONCLUSION

The confusion which surrounds the "call" to the ministry is perpetuated by the unbiblical notion that the "call" is internal and mystical in origin. However, theology clearly teaches that no "feeling" and no supernatural revelation validates or is even necessarily involved in the "call." The original languages showed only the rarity and the limited aspect of the supernatural "calls," as they apply mainly to Apostles and Prophets.

The correct view of the "call" is presented in the Pastoral Epistles and 1 Peter as the requirements of the church leaders are presented. Therefore the ministry requires a desire and ability as any profession does. An actual call to a church is a proof of a "call," but the ultimate proof is the hindsight of a life of faithful and fruitful ministry.

On the other hand, "If a man feels called to the work of a pastor but possesses no qualifications for the office, if his secret motives are unworthy, if he has no opportunity for preparation and no church desires his services, then in the name of reason and conscience and common sense he should seriously question the correctness

of his feelings."¹ To be sure, men make mistakes in going into the ministry as they do in going into other professions. If a person discovers that he is not fitted for the ministry, the only honorable and prudent course is to get out of it.²

Getting out of the ministry is a difficult personal task. "I think the first step is to admit the pain and doubt to self. We may have to say, 'Maybe this isn't where God wants me after all.' This is the hardest step, for it seems to threaten a deep and significant aspect of 'self-hood.'" Psychiatrist Dr. McBurney continues, "There are the prospects of rejection by others who have encouraged us, and a sense of failure as we admit we aren't happy. This decision-making and reevaluation process is not painless. On the contrary, it may be the most difficult course of action one ever takes. However, once confession is made to self, it becomes less threatening to share it with someone else."³

Charles Spurgeon said, "The signs and marks of a true bishop are laid down in the Word of God for the guidance of the church. If in following such guidance the brethren see not in us the qualifications, and do not elect us to office, it is plain enough that . . . the office of the pastor is not for us."⁴

¹Erdman, Work of the Pastor, pp. 7-8.

²I. T. Jones, The Pastor, p. 48.

³McBurney, Every Pastor, pp. 32-33.

⁴Spurgeon, Lectures, p. 32.

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