

Fulfilling Your Christian Calling

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Introduction

Do you sense God's calling in your life? If you are uncertain how to answer that question, you're not alone. Many Christians do not have a good grasp of what it means to be called by God. According to R. Paul Stevens, the confusion about vocation is attributable to three causes:

- Secular misunderstanding: Career selection has replaced vocational guidance (97).
- Ecclesiastical misunderstanding: Ministry alone is perceived to be the object of a divine call (98).
- Reformational misunderstanding: One's status in life is too rigidly defined as God's calling (98).

The biblical concept of calling encompasses salvation, sanctification, and service. Geoffrey Bromiley explains:

Perhaps the underlying problem in the historical outworking has been the tendency to separate what God has joined together. It seems to have been assumed too easily that there are two callings, a first to salvation and then another (or two others) to service and sanctification. Exegetical and dogmatic theology, however, have combined to bring the biblical nature of this distinction under suspicion. [. . .] All believers are called to be God's children, disciples, and servants, whether in the state of life in which the calling comes or in new possibilities which God opens up for them. The calling itself does not change, only the form or sphere in which it is exercised. (1: 581)

Fulfilling Your Common Calling

The New Testament concept of calling is to a large extent common to all believers. Not only are we called to be saved, we are called to work out our salvation. Following are some aspects of our common calling:

- Humility: Glorifying God for saving you (1 Cor. 1:26-29)
- Service: Glorifying God through good works (2 Thess. 2:11-12)
- Hope: Learning about the benefits of being in Christ (Eph. 1:18)
- Unity: Seeking harmony in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:1ff)
- Holiness: Living like the saint that you are (2 Tim. 1:9)
- Perseverance: Keeping your eye on the prize (Phil. 3:14; Heb. 3:1)

Fulfilling Your Personal Calling

The New Testament also refers to one's calling as something more unique to each individual believer. This is the case in three senses:

- **Status quo: Accepting your place in life as a platform for service** (1 Cor. 7:17-24; cf. 1:26-29)

God can use you where you are now. Just as God intended the Corinthian believers to serve in their current social conditions, so he is not limited by your education, experience, finances, marital status, or other factors. It is not illegitimate to seek to better your social position (1 Cor. 7:21), but you should not consider yourself ineligible for service in your current situation. Part of your personal calling is simply where God has placed you right now.

Christians are also encouraged to see their daily occupations, however menial, as God's vocation for them in this world. Thus one's career should always be a matter for prayerful consideration of "where does God want *me* to be, and does he want *me* to do?" An ancient prayer of the Western church prays for "all your faithful people; that each in his vocation and ministry may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your Name." (Wheaton 1147)

- **Spiritual gifts: Using your unique abilities to serve the Lord** (Eph. 4:7ff; cf. Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11)

Ephesians 4 correlates one's calling (vv. 1, 4) with one's spiritual gifts (vv. 7ff). Your personal calling is defined in part by the gifts the Holy Spirit gave you when you were saved. Every believer receives such gifts (v. 7). You do not have to know what your gifts are in order to use them. Just volunteer to serve the Lord! God will see to it that you are placed in roles where you can use your gifts. Don't worry if you don't know how to use your gifts. You'll learn that through experience. God reveals your personal calling through the gifts He gives.

- **Ministry appointment: Accepting your divinely designated mission** (Acts 13:1ff; cf. Eph. 3:7-8)

In some instances God sovereignly reveals to a believer that he or she is to perform a certain role in life. This was the case with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13). Their appointment to missionary service came when they were already active in their church and seeking God's direction (v. 2). The Holy Spirit directed their church to commission them as missionaries (vv. 2-3). According to Ephesians 3, there is a correlation between this kind of calling and one's gifts (v. 7). Also, God does not make such appointments on the basis of merit; it is always a work of grace (vv. 7-8).

Works Cited

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