



Faith Pulpit

Hearing the Call of God

The larger question asks, “Is there a specific and individual will of God for my life?” Equally controversial and debated is the related question which we wish to address: “Is there a specific and individual call by God to serve Him vocationally—a call to the ministry?” True, some have abused an affirmative response to these questions, but we shouldn’t dismiss or disown doctrine because of this. We need to see what God’s Word says.

As we approach the Scriptures to seek an answer to these questions, two issues of major importance surface: First, is the leading of God in my life ever subjective (inward, related to my personal experience) as well as being objective (outward, related to clear instruction from God in Scripture), or is His leading only objective? Second, to what extent may I make application to my own personal life from the example and experiences of those recorded in the Bible? Is it legitimate for me to look at the life of Abraham or that of the Apostle Paul and apply derived principles to my own life? As we look at Scripture regarding the call of God, these two issues assume major importance and will shape our understanding of Scriptural teaching.

The Godly Walk

All believers recognize the truthfulness of the statement that the Holy Spirit leads in the lives of God’s children (Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18), but is that leading only inscripturated revelation? Is there no inward subjective working? What about His bearing witness with our spirit (Romans 8:16), His leading us to certain people to minister to them (as He did for Philip in Acts 8:26 ff.), and His giving of peace to rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15)? To our critics we answer that such subjective experience along with (and consistent with) objective Scriptural truth is not only not bad, but is a normal and necessary part of a healthy and vital walk with God. Let’s not be frightened away to an unbiblical and unbalanced position which sees only the objective and not the subjective also as important ingredients in godly

Christian living.

Gifted Church Leadership

The New Testament churches had leadership called and gifted by God (1 Cor. 12:11, 18, 28; Eph. 4:7–12). Our Lord Himself selected and called the Apostles (see Luke 6:12–16), including Paul (Acts 9:15; 1 Cor. 1:1). And it is God Who calls and equips men for pastoral ministry. Acts 20:28 tells us that it is the Holy Spirit Who had made the Ephesian pastors to be overseers (bishops) over their flock. Yes, there was human willingness (although Paul speaks of the necessity and constraint which the call of God has on that vocational choice—1 Cor. 9:16,17), and, yes, there was congregational recognition and vote, but ultimately it is the Spirit of God Who calls, equips and places men into pastoral oversight.

Pastoral Accountability

In one of the strongest verses on a believer's response to pastoral leadership, the Book of Hebrews says: "Obey them. . .and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they must give account" (13:17). The same truth is illustrated and emphasized in Revelation chapters 1 through 3 where the "seven stars" (understood by this writer as the pastors) of the seven local churches of Asia Minor are held in our Lord's right hand (1:16). These stars/angels are said to be identified with their respective churches (1:20), and in chapters 2 and 3 they are held accountable for the spiritual condition of the local church. Note that each of the letters to the seven churches is addressed to its angel, and solemn words of warning and rebuke (as well as words of commendation) are addressed to him. Such accountability to the risen Lord for pastoral function presupposes His placing them into that office.

Specific Biblical Examples

It seems clear from several Biblical passages that God had called Moses to a special vocational ministry (Exodus 3:10), that He had appointed Solomon to be Israel's king (1 Chron. 29:1), that He had directed Elijah to anoint men as both kings and prophets (1 Kings 19:15–18), and that He had selected a special vocation for John the Baptist (Luke 1:13–17, 67–79). What about during the present age?

In Acts 15:7 we are reminded by Peter that it was God Who had chosen him to be an evangelist to the Gentiles. Our Lord Himself had told Peter that He would give to him "the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). There is no question but that God had called Peter to vocational Christian ministry.

Timothy serves as another example. Paul exhorts him not to neglect "the gift that is in thee" (1 Tim. 4:14); it had been prophesied (a message from God) that he had been set apart by God for Christian

ministry, and the laying on of hands had recognized that divine call.

Certainly the Apostle Paul serves as an example of one called by God for vocational Christian service. It is seen in the Holy Spirit's command to the believers at Antioch: "Separate me, Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). And that same Holy Spirit directed Paul in his places of ministry so that Paul could say: "We endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (Acts 16:6–10).

Paul had no doubts about his call from God for Christian service. He was a "called" apostle (Rom. 1:1) "through the will of God" (1 Cor. 1:1) so "That I might preach Him among the heathen" (Gal. 1:15,16). Paul says that it was our Lord Himself Who had placed him into the ministry (1 Tim. 1:12). And while the circumstances and setting may change, the principle is true also today that God is still in the business of placing people into the ministry.

The early church's leadership also recognized that Paul had been called by God for vocational ministry. They saw that "the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed to him, just as "the gospel of the circumcision was" to Peter, and that it was God Who had so called him (Gal. 2:7–9). Paul uses that calling from God as the basis for speaking boldly to the Roman church concerning their spiritual responsibilities (Rom. 15:15,16).

The problem, then, today is not that God has stopped calling; might the problem be that we have become so preoccupied with other things that we are not listening?

Dr. George Houghton

Former VP of Academic Services at [Faith Baptist Bible College](#) | [Other Articles](#)

George Houghton, former vice president for academic services and college dean at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, is a graduate of Bethel College, Central Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, and holds a Master's and a Doctor of Theology degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. He retired in 2010 after serving for 36 years at the institution.