

RECOGNIZING GOD'S CALL TO PREACH

PRELIMINARY CAUTIONS

*A preacher is not a Christian who decides to preach.*¹

--David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

*None but He who made the world can make a minister of the Gospel.*²

--John Newton

Introduction:³

- A. The Terminology For *The Call* Can Be Confusing.
- B. A Biblical/Logical Approach Could Be To Recognize These Distinctions:
 - 1. The Spirit of God gifts some (not all) to minister the Word.
 - 2. The Spirit of God gifts some (not all) to minister the Word _____.
 - 3. The Spirit of God calls some (not all) gifted men to minister the Word publicly _____.

This introduces two additional factors that qualify the kind of person this lecture is focused upon:

- a. _____: this is an office in the church into which one is ordained.

(Exp: Harold W. Hoehner, in his *Ephesians*, has a good section on the distinctions between gifts and office. He concludes, *It is true that those who have offices will have gifts, because all believers have gifts. However, the opposite is not true, that is, a gifted person may not necessarily have an office since only a handful of people will occupy the offices of elder and/or deacon. Maintaining the distinction of the gifts and offices would help avoid much confusion* (540).)

¹ *Preaching and Preachers*, 103.

² *The Works of John Newton*, V, 62

³ Stephen J. Hankins, Dean of Bob Jones University's Seminary and Graduate School of Religion, presents the scriptural case for God's calling men into preaching ministry in his Ph.D thesis, *A New Testament theology of the call to the Christian ministry: an exegetical analysis of its subjective and objective elements*. He examines the call of OT prophets, the Divine initiative in a NT call, and both its subjective and objective dimensions. To my knowledge, his work is the most thorough handling of the subject that is available. My own thinking has been informed and helpfully nuanced by it at several critical points. I would encourage any man struggling with the call, particularly the question of its validity as an authentic spiritual phenomenon persisting throughout church history right up to the present time, to give a careful reading to Dr. Hankins' presentation of the biblical data.

- b. _____: this office demands more than speech gifts.
(Exp: An elder is an overseer/pastor/shepherd. Not all teachers possess the qualifications (may be divorced or be a woman), the gifts (administration), or maturity and skills. A “call to preach” is generally a call to more than preaching. It is a summons to ministerial office.)
4. The Holy Spirit calls some (not all) gifted men to minister the Word publicly as elders _____.
(Def: *American Heritage Dictionary*: Vocation: 1. A regular occupation, especially one for which a person is particularly suited or qualified. 2. An inclination, as if in response to a summons, to undertake a certain kind of work, especially a religious career; a calling. [Middle English vocacioun, divine call to a religious life. . .])

Confirmation of this Distinction Between Elders (I Timothy 5:17)

This verse differentiates between the functions on which elders concentrate their energies.

- (1) All elders oversee.
(Exp: There may be some whom the church asks to do this vocationally. Administrative staff, church executive, even business manager.)
- (2) A small subset of elders “labor at preaching and teaching.”
(Exp: “Preaching” is translation of “logos.” Taken here as the act of giving voice to the Word, rather than as the content of the Word itself.)
(Exp: These are to be counted worthy of double honor, meaning wages (v 18). These are those to whom I Cor. 9:14 would refer.

C. This Presentation Will Deal With The Call To Be An Elder Who Preaches Vocationally.

To summarize, this assumes that . . .

1. He possesses Spirit-given gifts for ministering the Word.
2. The sphere of his ministry of the Word will be primarily a local church.
3. He will be ministering the Word in the official capacity of an ordained elder.
4. He will be doing the above vocationally (living out of it).
5. The burning question is, *How can a man be certain that he is Divinely called to this ministry?*

Illustration: The struggle of John Newton to determine this.⁴

Illustration: The struggle of David Martyn Lloyd-Jones.⁵

⁴ See the biography written by Josiah Bull, *But Now I See*, chapter IV, “From His First Thoughts Of The Ministry To His Settlement At Olney.”

⁵ For the account, see Iain Murray’s *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years (1899-1939)*, “The Call to the Ministry” (81-110).

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(Exp: Background to these is the fact that the call to the ministry today is not an *extraordinary call* to an *extraordinary authority* in the church that demands *extraordinary gifts* (such as Apostle, Prophet). The call today is an *ordinary call* to an *ordinary authority* in the church that demands *ordinary gifts*. John Owen has a helpful discussion of this distinction in his work on “Pneumatology,” (*The Works of John Owen, D. D., IV, 438f.*). By *ordinary*, he doesn’t mean common to all Christians, but an office that is common to churches everywhere throughout church history, a permanent office rather than temporary, and that doesn’t demand the unique gifts given only to OT prophets and NT apostles. Therefore, no individual can claim for himself some unique sense of calling that would effectively preclude his own careful evaluation and the subjection of himself to the hesitation or confirmation of his local assembly. Paul could insist, *an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father. . .)* Gal. 1:1. This the Twelve could say as well. But no man can claim this today in the same sense in which Paul and the Twelve could claim it.)

I. To Those Aspiring To Be Teachers (James 3:1).

A. The Warning Concerns A _____ Of What We Have Spoken.

II Timothy 4:1 *I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word. . .*

B. The Warning Concerns Further, A _____ For Failing To Speak Accurately.

Illustration: That God takes the way we speak about him especially seriously is evident from His words to Eliphaz, the Temanite,

My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. ⁸ "Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has (Job 42:7-8).

Illustration: Brings to mind the scene in which Balaam is on his way to prophesy for the carnal ambition of a pagan king. Though he cannot see it, the angel of the Lord stands in his way with a drawn sword (Num. 22:23). *Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I tell you (Num. 22:35).*

1. Preachers will be reproved if they _____ to His words.

Proverbs 30:5-6 *Every word of God is tested. . . Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.*

2. Preachers will be dishonored if they _____ from His words.

Matthew 5:19 *Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.*

3. Preachers who do not handle the word of truth accurately will be ashamed.

II Timothy 2:15 *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*

4. Some will destroy themselves by twisting the truth.

II Peter 3:16 *Our beloved brother, Paul. . . his letters. . . which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

II. To A Church's Ordaining Leadership (I Timothy 5:22).

A. There Is A Caution Concerning *laying hands upon* Men.

(Exp: Jesus laid His hands on people to heal them or when he prayed for them. In Acts, Apostles laid their hands on people, and they received the Holy Spirit. But this is an official act of church leadership (though Timothy alone referred to here; verb is 2nd person singular), setting apart someone for the office of elder.)

1. It imparted to Timothy his spiritual gift (4:14; I Tim. 1:6).
2. In other cases it signifies appointment to ministry (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 14:23; I Tim. 5:22).

B. The Possibility Is That The Ordaining Leadership May Share In The Responsibility For The Failures Of A Sinning Elder Who Was Ordained Too Hastily.

(Quot: Chrysostom urges that a decision be made *after frequent and strict examination and circumspection.*⁶)

Illustration: Elias Keach

Illustration: Joseph Parker's choice of R. T. Campbell to replace him.⁷

Conclusion:

So two cautions: one to the person who has the inclination and desire to minister the Word, and one to the church leadership which is entertaining the possibility of appointing him to ministry.

⁶ As quoted by William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 317.

⁷ See Warren Wiersbe, *Walking with the Giants*, 57.