

# RECOGNIZING GOD'S CALL TO PREACH

## GENUINE EVIDENCES

*It is of momentous importance how a man enters the ministry. There is a "door" into this sheepfold, and there is "some other way."*<sup>1</sup>

--John Henry Jowett

*I was appointed a preacher.*<sup>2</sup>

--the Apostle Paul

### Introduction:

#### A. There Are Various Ways Scripture Describes The Call To Preaching Ministry.<sup>3</sup>

*I do not know that I have ever seen an entirely satisfactory statement of what constitutes a call to the ministry. Probably it is one of those things of the spirit which cannot be mathematically defined. The variety of the calls in Scripture warns us against laying down any scheme to which the experience of everyone must conform.*<sup>4</sup>

#### B. The Most Helpful Description For Our Purposes Is Embedded In Ephesians 4:7-11.

(Exp: Here the phenomenon of the "call" is expressed as "Christ's giving" certain gifted truth communicators to His Body, the Church.)

1. V 7 is stating that every believer is spiritually gifted.
2. V 8 is referring to believers as either being "divinely gifted" (as did v 7), or as being themselves Christ's gifts to His church. Either way, the point of the whole argument from v 7 through v 11 is the same.

(Illus: In an ordination sermon preached January 23, 1673, John Owen grounded his entire argument for there being such a thing as a Divine call to the ministry in Ephesians 4:8-10. He especially drew attention to the words, He *gave gifts unto men*. A careful reading of verse 11 in this context reveals that the *gifts* are the ministers themselves, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. Owen preached, *The foundation of the ministry is in the gift of Christ. Let me answer that question which he put once to the Pharisees. "The baptism of John, is it from heaven? or is it of men?" In like manner, I say, The*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Preacher: His Life and Work* (10-11).

<sup>2</sup> I Timothy 2:7

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Hankins finds four: (1) by the term *καλέω*, (2) as a sending by God, (3) as an act of the Holy Spirit, and (4) as God's granting of a gift to the Church (*A New Testament theology of the call to the Christian ministry: an exegetical analysis of its subjective and objective elements*, 101-112).

<sup>4</sup> James Stalker, *The Preacher and His Models* (52).

*ministry, is it from heaven? or is it of men? The answer is in the text, ‘He gave;’—it is the gift of Christ.<sup>5</sup>)*

*Jeremiah 3:15 I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.*

*Acts 20:28 Be on guard for yourselves, and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

### C. The Question Of The Call To Preach Rephrased:

Whom does Christ give to His Church to be its Preachers?

## **I. He Gives Those Who Earnestly This Office.**

*I Timothy 3:1 If any man aspires to the office of overseer. . .*

*I Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.*

### A. A Desire Tempered Appropriately By Awe Or Fear.

William Perkins’ (1558-1602) masterpiece, *The Art of Prophesying*, contains an unusually searching and helpful treatment of Isaiah’s call to preach as it applies to the question of calling into ministry. In the first of three messages, entitled, “The Vision of God,” he makes application of Isaiah’s fear at the sight of God.

*The purpose of God in striking this fear into him was to enable him to be a true prophet, and a suitable messenger for himself. This may seem to be an unusual course for God to take in order to confirm and energize his servant in zeal and courage; to strike him with extreme fear, indeed to astonish and amaze him. Yet it is clear that this is the way the Lord takes. It teaches us that all true ministers, especially those appointed to speak the greatest words in his church, must be first of all marked by a great sense of fear, in the consciousness of their function—even a sense of amazement and astonishment, full of admiration for God’s glory and greatness. . . .*

*The reason for this is clear; man’s nature is always ready to take too much upon itself. God therefore in his wisdom puts a bridle into the corrupt nature of man and stuns him, lest he presume too much and trust himself too much.*

*The ministry is a high and excellent calling. . . A minister is therefore subject to*

<sup>5</sup> “The Ministry the Gift of Christ,” *The Works of John Owen, D. D.*, IX, 431.

*pride and to being puffed up with self-conceit. Consequently Paul warns Timothy, that a minister may not be a young scholar, 'lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil' (I Tim. 3:6), indicating that it is the special danger of ministers to have high opinions of themselves because of the high dignity of their service. To prevent this, God in his mercy has planned that all true ministers will by some means or other be humbled and emptied themselves. They will be driven to such fear and amazement at the sight of their own wickedness, that they will throw themselves down at Christ's feet, and deny themselves wholly, acknowledging that anything they are, they are only in him, and rely and trust only on his grace and help.*

## **II. He Gives Those Who Feel an Undeniable to Preach.**

Jeremiah 20:9 *But if I say, 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,' Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.*<sup>6</sup>

Psalm 39:3 *My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned; Then I spoke with my tongue* (Alexander Maclaren's text).

### A. Where Does This Begin?

*A call generally starts in the form of a consciousness within one's own spirit, an awareness of a kind of pressure being brought to bear upon one's spirit, some disturbance in the realm of the spirit, then that your mind is being directed to the whole question of preaching. . . It is thrust upon you, it is presented to you and almost forced upon you constantly in this way* (David Martyn Lloyd-Jones).<sup>7</sup>

### B. How Strong Is This?

*The call of the Eternal must move through the rooms of his soul. . . . The candidate for the ministry must move like a man in secret bonds. "Necessity is laid" upon him. His choice is not a preference among alternatives. Ultimately he has no alternative* (John Henry Jowett).<sup>8</sup>

Illus: Robert Bruce, the prosperous, young Scottish nobleman whom God intended to be John Knox's successor. *I resisted long my calling to the ministry and during that period I never leaped on horseback or alighted, but with a justly accusing conscience.*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Merton Rice, William Quayle's close friend and biographer wrote of him, *He was a preacher from compulsion. His preaching broke out of his soul* (quoted by Warren Wiersbe, *The Pastor-Preacher*, 10).

<sup>7</sup> *Preaching and Preachers*, 104.

<sup>8</sup> *The Preacher: His Life and Work*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> He told Andrew Melville, *Before I throw myself again into such a torment of conscience, as I have had resisting the call to the ministry, I would rather choose to walk through a fire of brimstone, even though it were half-a-mile in length* (John Howie, *The Scots Worthies*, 143).

*Do not enter the ministry if you can help it, was the deeply sage advice of a divine to one who sought his judgment. If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth let him go his way.<sup>10</sup>*

I Corinthians 9:16 *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.*

### **III. He Gives Those Whose Testimony is Blameless (I Tim. 3:2-7; Tit. 1:5-9).**

#### A. Every Elder (even those not “called to preach”) Is To Be ***Above Reproach***.

1. He must be above being \_\_\_\_\_ (ἀνεπίλημπτον; I Timothy 3:2).  
(Exp: The word is formed from the alpha privative and ἐπιλαμβάνω, “to lay hold of,” or “to seize upon.”)
2. He must be above being \_\_\_\_\_ (ἀνέγκλητος; Titus 1:6).  
(Exp: The word is formed from the alpha privative and ἐγκαλέω, “to call in,” or “to call to account.”)
  - a. Clarification #1: This isn’t a requirement of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Clarification #2: This doesn’t mean that a man who is presently unqualified cannot be qualified in the future.

#### B. But Those Who Preach Must Live Especially Circumspectly In All Things.

II Corinthians 6:3-4 *Giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as the servants of God.*

C. H. Spurgeon cautioned, *We are watched by a thousand eagle eyes; let us so act that we shall never need care if all heaven and earth, and hell, swelled the list of spectators. . . . When we say to you, my dear brethren, take care of your life, we mean be careful of even the minutiae of your character. Avoid little debts, unpunctuality, gossiping, nicknaming, petty quarrels, and all other little vices which fill the ointment with flies. The self-indulgences which have lowered the repute of many must not be tolerated by us. The familiarities which have laid others open to suspicion, we must chastely avoid. The roughnesses which have rendered some obnoxious, and the fopperies which have made others contemptible, we must put away. We cannot afford to run great risks through little things.<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>10</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Lecture to My Students*, 26-27.

<sup>11</sup> *Lectures to My Students*, 20-21. This kind of personal care for testimony often makes one the object of ridicule. 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century English pastors who were particularly careful of their walk with God were derisively called “precisians” “disciplinarians,” and most of all, “puritans.” John Foxe, the martyrologist,

## **IV. He Gives Those Whom His Spirit Has Spiritually for It.**

John Newton suggested, *The main difference between a minister and a private Christian seems to consist in these ministerial gifts. . . . Very wisely, however, he cautions, But then I say, these are not to be expected instantaneously, but gradually, in the use of proper means. They are necessary for the discharge of the ministry; but not necessary as pre-requisites to warrant our desires after it (emphasis mine).<sup>12</sup>*

### A. There Are Two Categories Of Spiritual Gifts (I Peter 4:10-11).

*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (10).*

1. *Whoever speaks . . . (11)*
2. *Whoever serves . . . (12)*

### B. There Are Specific Speech Gifts Needed In Order To Preach:

II Timothy 4:2 *Preach the word. . . reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*

I Timothy 6:2 *Teach and exhort these things.*

1. The ability to **teach.**

G. Campbell Morgan condensed the elements of effective preaching into (1) truth, (2) clarity, and (3) passion.<sup>13</sup> It is the second of these that especially evidences a teaching gift.

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defended them as “the godly preachers.” The pastors themselves explained their earnestness by referring to themselves as “painful” ministers. During their Oxford days the Wesleys, Whitefield, and others of their small company of spiritually minded men were jeered by their classmates as being “the holy club.” Of course, not every strict man is sincere. Closed societies of especially intense believers sometimes also attract those whose motives for narrowness are carnal or whose theology of acceptance with God is flawed. Unquestionably, a combination of both right and wrong motives fueled Oxford’s “holy club.” Nevertheless, the necessity of caring for exactness in one’s walk before both God and men cannot be denied. See Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, “Want of Entire Devotedness of Heart to the Christian Ministry,” 106-112, and “Conformity to the World,” 112-121 for a thorough discussion of how ministers lose their spiritual savor by a socially acceptable kind of worldliness. William Perkins goes so far as to say, *Since the best of men cannot live with the best of people without being contaminated by them, ordinary ministers must learn to differentiate men and meetings, times and places, and not in a widespread and careless way involve themselves in them. Only thus can they keep their calling free from reproach and preserve themselves from pollution, which will otherwise contaminate them* (*The Art of Prophesying*, “The Vision of God,” 143).

<sup>12</sup> *The Works of John Newton*, II, 45.

<sup>13</sup> “The Essentials of a Sermon,” *Preaching*, 9-36. He quotes Luther as having said, *A preacher ought so to preach, that when the sermon is ended, the congregation shall disperse saying, ‘The preacher said this’*” (31).

2. The ability to **exhort**.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones told of reading of Scottish journalist who listened to two speakers on the same subject. *They were both very able and learned men. Then came the devastating phrase, 'The difference between the two speakers was this; the first spoke as an advocate, the second as a witness.'* Lloyd-Jones goes on to explain that a preacher is not just *handling a case*. He cannot be merely clinical. He must have warmth and urgency—what G. Campbell Morgan listed as his third essential for preaching: **passion**. *I feel we are all under condemnation here*, he continues. *I confess freely that I need to be rebuked myself. Where is the passion in preaching that has always characterized great preaching in the past? Why are not modern preachers moved and carried away as the great preachers of the past so often were? The Truth has not changed. Do we believe it, have we been gripped by it, and then exalted until we were 'lost in wonder love and praise?'*<sup>14</sup>

## **V. He Gives Those Whom His Church Comes to Recognize and Call.**

Acts 20:28 . . . *the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*

Charles Bridges explains: **The external call** is a commission received from and recognized by the Church . . . not indeed qualifying the Minister, but accrediting him, whom God had internally and suitably qualified. This call communicates therefore only official authority. **The internal call** is the voice and power of the Holy Ghost, directing the will and the judgment, and conveying personal qualifications. Both calls, however—though essentially distinct in their character and source—are indispensable for the exercise of our commission. Both therefore unite in His government, who “is not the Author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints;” and whose unction, of a rational, holy, and orderly character, harmoniously combines with the constituted appointment of his will.<sup>15</sup>

### A. The Church’s Recognition Becomes Clear When It Provides Opportunities.

#### Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s Initial Attempts to Serve

*I think that, when I was first converted to God, if the Lord had said, 'I have taken you into My house, and I am going to make use of you, and you shall be a door-mat for the saints to wipe their feet on,' I should have said, 'Ah, happy shall I be if I may but take the filth off their blessed feet, for I love God's people, and if I may minister to them in the slightest degree, it shall be my delight!*

<sup>14</sup> *Preaching and Preachers*, 88-90.

<sup>15</sup> *The Christian Ministry*, 91-92.

*The very first service which my youthful heart rendered to Christ was the placing of tracts in envelopes, and then sealing them up, that I might send them, with the hope that, by choosing pertinent tracts, applicable to persons I knew, God would bless them. And I well remember taking other tracts, and distributing them in certain districts . . . going from house to house . . . visiting the poor within my reach . . . the Sabbath-day was devoted to teaching a class, and later on, also to addressing the Sunday-school (C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography, I, 155, 156, 157).*

Illus: The story of Spurgeon's own introduction into preaching.<sup>16</sup>

Illus: Although even other ministers can fail to recognize a true preacher, as in the case of G. Campbell Morgan.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, Spurgeon observed, *Churches are not all wise, neither do they all judge in the power of the Holy Ghost, but many of them judge after the flesh; yet I had sooner accept the opinion of a company of the Lord's people than my own upon so personal a subject as my own gifts and graces. At any rate, whether you value the verdict of the church or no, one thing is certain, that none of you can be pastors without the loving consent of the flock; and therefore this will be to you a practical indicator if not a correct one.*<sup>18</sup>

## B. The Church's External Call Confirms The Man's Internal Sense Of Calling.

*'The will of man' must be in subserviency—not in forwardness—on a point so deeply connected with the interests of the Church, and where the will of God should govern the sole and ultimate decision.*<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup>C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography, I, 182-184.

<sup>17</sup> See Jill Morgan's account of her father-in-law's rejection by the examination board of the Methodist Church in *Man of the Word* (57-60).

<sup>18</sup> *Lectures to My Students* (32-33). Newton also suggests that a genuine call will eventually be obvious from even more than a **general** acceptability to spiritual people. It will be confirmed by the opening of a **specific** door for ministry. I quote him at length. *That which evidences a proper call is a correspondent opening in Providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place, of actually entering upon the work. And till this coincidence arrives, you must not expect to be always clear from hesitation in your own mind. The principle caution on this head is, not to be too hasty in catching at first appearances. If it be the Lord's will to bring you into his ministry, he has already appointed your place and service; and though you know it not at present, you shall at a proper time. If you had the talents of an angel, you could do no good with them till his hour is come, and till he leads you to the people whom he has determined to bless by your means.*

It's worthwhile to include here his caution against impatiently attempting to push open a door ourselves. *It is very difficult to restrain ourselves within the bounds of prudence here, when our zeal is warm, a sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts, and a tender compassion for poor sinners is ready to prompt us to break out too soon;--but he that believeth shall not make haste. I was about five years under this constraint: sometimes I thought I must preach, though it was in the streets. I listened to everything that seemed plausible, and to many things that were not so. But the Lord graciously, and as it were insensibly, hedged up my way with thorns; otherwise, if I had been left to my own spirit, I should have put it quite out of my power to have been brought into such a sphere of usefulness, as he in his good time has been pleased to lead me into. And I can now see clearly, that at the time I would first have gone out, though my intention was, I hope, good in the main, yet I over-rated myself, and had not that spiritual judgment and experience which are requisite for so great a service (Works, II, 45-46).*

<sup>19</sup> Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 93.

Acts 16:2-3 *He was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.  
Paul wanted this man to go with him. . . .*

Illus: The story of John Knox's call by the St. Andrews Church.<sup>20</sup>

Illus: The story of George W. Truett's call by a little Baptist church.<sup>21</sup>

## **Conclusion:**

*And now, go thy way, O thou son greatly beloved; and work in thy lot livelily, and prayerfully, and cheerfully to the end of thy days; and wait and look for what the glorious Lord will do for thee at the end of thy days; in those endless joys, wherein thou shalt shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars forever and ever.*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 47-49.

<sup>21</sup>Powhatan W. James, *George W. Truett, A Biography*, 47-50.

<sup>22</sup>Cotton Mather, *The Angels Preparing to Sound the Trumpets*, 157.